Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez Study Guide

Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez by Richard Rodriguez

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Contents

Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez Study Guide.....1

Contents.....2

Introduction.....4

Author Biography.....5

Plot Summary.....6

Middle Class Pastoral.....10

Aria, Chapter 1.....11

Aria, Chapter 2.....12

Aria, Chapter 3.....13

Aria, Chapter 4.....14

The Achievement of Desire, Prologue.....15

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 1.....16

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 2.....17

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 3.....18

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 4.....19

Credo, Prologue.....20

Credo, Chapter 1.....21

Credo, Chapter 2.....22

Credo, Chapter 3.....23

Complexion, Prologue.....25

Complexion, Chapter 1.....26

Complexion, Chapter 2.....27

Complexion, Chapter 3.....28

Profession, Chapter 1.....29

Profession, Chapter 2.....31

Profession, Chapter 3 32

Profession, Chapter 4 33

Profession, Chapter 5 34

Mr. Secrets, Prologue 35

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 1 36

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 2 37

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 3 38

Characters 39

Themes 42

Style 45

Historical Context 46

Critical Overview 48

Criticism 50

Critical Essay #1 51

Critical Essay #2 55

Critical Essay #3 64

Topics for Further Study 71

Compare and Contrast 72

What Do I Read Next? 74

Further Study 75

Bibliography 76

Copyright Information 77

Introduction

When Richard Rodriguez published his collection of six autobiographical essays, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* in 1981, roars erupted from both ends of the political spectrum. His conservative readers and critics were happy to hold him up as a minority student who had benefited from affirmative action but who in the end had rejected such programs as unfair to the real underprivileged those who were impoverished or had never had the educational opportunities Rodriguez had enjoyed. Others saw in Rodriguez someone alienated from his Mexican-American culture and heritage, having betrayed his fellow Hispanics (a broad term meaning Spanish speakers but used in the United States to denote Americans whose forebears are from a Spanish-speaking country) by his denunciation of bilingual education and affirmative action.

The book follows Rodriguez's early life as it revolves around language and education and portrays how those factors contributed to his transition from childhood to adulthood. In the book's prologue, Rodriguez refers to his work as a "middle-class pastoral" in which he "sings the praises of [his] lower-class past" while reminding himself how education has assisted with the separation from that past. It is his coming-of-age story, he notes, "the story of the scholarship boy who returns home one summer to discover the bewildering silence, facing his parents. This is my story. An American story."

Rodriguez covers his first few confusing months in school, when he didn't speak in class because he didn't feel comfortable with what little English he knew. After a few of the nuns from his school ask his parents to speak English around the house, Rodriguez takes his first steps toward becoming a "public man." Such assimilation into American culture is necessary and valuable, he asserts. As the book progresses, Rodriguez relates the story of his growing up, the power and pain of family ties, the role of the Catholic Church in his life, and his staunch rejection of affirmative action for ethnic and racial minorities in education and in the workplace.

Author Biography

Richard Rodriguez was born on July 31, 1944, in San Francisco, California, to Mexican immigrants Leopoldo and Victoria Moran Rodriguez, the third of their four children. When Rodriguez was still a young child, the family moved to Sacramento, California, to a small house in a comfortable white neighborhood. "Optimism and ambition led them to a house (our home) many blocks from the Mexican side of town. . . . It never occurred to my parents that they couldn't live wherever they chose," writes Rodriguez in *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez,* his well-received 1981 autobiography. This first book placed him in the national spotlight but brought scorn from many supporters of affirmative action and bilingual education.

Rodriguez's family was not well-to-do, but his father□a man with a third-grade education who ended up working as a dental technician after dreaming of a career as an engineer□and his mother somehow found the money to send their children to Catholic schools. Ultimately, Rodriguez, who could barely speak English when he started elementary school, finished his academic efforts as a Fulbright scholar in Renaissance literature with degrees from Stanford University and Columbia University. Perched on the edge of a brilliant career in acade-mia, but uncomfortable with what he viewed as the unwarranted advantage given him by affirmative action, Rodriguez refused a number of teaching jobs at prestigious universities. He felt that receiving preference and assistance based on his classification as a minority was unfair to others. This dramatic decision, along with a number of anti-affirmative action essays published in the early to mid-1970s, made Rodriguez a somewhat notorious national figure.

After leaving academia, Rodriguez spent the next six years writing the essays that comprise *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez,* aided for part of that time by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. Before being compiled into book form, many of the essays appeared in publications such as *Columbia Forum, American Scholar,* and *College English. Hunger of Memory* was a hugely successful book, garnering reviews in approximately fifty publications after its release. Critics generally praised the book for its clear and concise prose and for Rodriguez's honesty in revealing his conflicted feelings about being a "scholarship boy," as he refers to himself in the book. In 1983, the book won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and a Christopher Award.

Since 1981, Rodriguez has continued his writing career, occasionally serving as an essayist for the PBS series *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour* and also working as an editor with the Pacific News Service in California. In 1992, he published *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father,* another collection of previously issued autobiographical essays. The book, which did not receive the same acclaim and admiration as his first book, covers such topics as Rodriguez's Mexican and Indian heritage, his homosexuality, and the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco.

Plot Summary

Prologue: "Middle-Class Pastoral"

In the prologue, Rodriguez introduces himself and his book, referring to it as "essays impersonating an autobiography; six chapters of sad, fuguelike repetition." He makes clear that his purpose in putting together the book was to write about how education moved him from boyhood to manhood.

Chapter One: Aria"

In this essay, Rodriguez focuses on how the use of language has marked the difference between his public life and his private life. When he was a young child, he spoke primarily Spanish. Spanish was the comfortable language of his home life, while English was the language he heard spoken by strangers outside the home.

Soon after Rodriguez starts attending a Catholic elementary school, the family receives a visit from his teachers, concerned about Rodriguez's poor performance and his siblings' academic achievement. The teachers ask his parents to speak only English in the home. This event changes everything, according to Rodriguez, including how he feels at home with his parents. At first he is frustrated with speaking only English, but the day finally comes when he feels comfortable enough with English to answer a question in class. "The belief, the calming assurance that I belonged in public, had at last taken hold," he remembers.

Though Rodriguez feels that he lost something when he and his family became increasingly Americanized, he stresses that there were also things gained. Two of the most critical were "a public identity" and maturity. For this reason, he does not agree with bilingual education proponents who argue that children not taught in their native languages lose their "individuality." He also does not believe that these "bilingualists" understand the necessity and value of assimilation.

Chapter Two: "The Achievement of Desire"

In this essay, Rodriguez reminisces about his education and the impact it has had on his life. He claims that his success in life is based on how education changed him and separated him from the life he had "before becoming a student."

Throughout this essay, Rodriguez refers to Richard Hogart's book *The Uses of Literacy,* in which he discovered one of the few mentions of the "scholarship boy" by educational theorists. Rodriguez sees himself in Hogart's descriptions of the scholarship boy, and this has helped him understand his experiences.

Rodriguez expresses concern that he was the type of student who, while making good grades, simply memorized information and never developed his own opinions. Like the "scholarship boy," Rodriguez worked for academic success and denied his past. And also like the "scholarship boy," Rodriguez experienced nostalgia for his past. But he notes that while education created a gulf between him and his parents, education also made it possible to care about that fact and to write about it.

Paralleling Rodriguez's education were the increasingly contrary feelings he developed toward his parents. While he did not mean to be rude and hurtful toward them, he found himself becoming angry when they did not seem to be as capable as his teachers. More and more as a student, Rodriguez looked toward his teachers, and not his parents, as role models.

Rodriguez remembers his parents' experiences with education and work. His mother received a high school degree even though, he says, her English was poor. She went to night school, worked as a typist, and was very proud of her excellent spelling ability. His father moved to the United States as a young man, seeking a better life as an engineer. That dream never materialized, and his father worked at a series of unsatisfying low-end jobs that, nonetheless, kept the family comfortable.

Chapter Two: "The Achievement of Desire"

In "Credo," Rodriguez discusses his relationship with the Catholic Church. He remembers that Catholicism "shaped my whole day. It framed my experience of eating and sleeping and washing; it named the season and the hour." Before Rodriguez left home to attend Stanford University, he and his family attended Mass every Sunday and on feast days. The first English-speaking guest at their house was their local priest.

Rodriguez remembers how the Church dominated his education. The nuns' teaching through memorization, while discouraging "intellectual challenges to authority," encouraged learning as a rite of passage. He fondly recalls becoming an altar boy and how this role introduced him to the rituals of life and death.

Rodriguez discusses his current views of the Church. He still goes to Mass each Sunday but is not particularly pleased with the changes the Church has made beginning with the reforms of the 1960s.

Chapter Four: 'Complexion"

Rodriguez examines how his dark complexion has defined certain parts of his life. Today he notices, when he walks into a hotel, he is often asked if he has been on vacation. But his mother saw dark skin as a symbol of poverty, and he remembers her admonitions to him to stay out of the sun to keep from tanning, lest he be mistaken for a menial worker.

His mother also worried whether it was appropriate for Rodriguez to mow their neighbors' lawns and was adamant that her daughter not wear a uniform while she worked briefly as a housekeeper for a wealthy woman. But Rodriguez's father was mostly concerned that Rodriguez not get stuck in a factory job that would wear him down and make him a tired middle-aged man like himself.

Rodriguez was never concerned that the darkness of his skin made him subject to racism when he was young but remembers feeling that it made him ugly, especially to women. He tried to distance himself from his body, for example, by never participating in sports as a child.

While Rodriguez was attending Stanford University, a friend hesitantly suggested that he consider a summer construction job. Rodriguez accepted it, in part to show his father that he knew about "real work." Surprisingly, Rodriguez enjoyed the work, but he also realized that his short time in the job prohibited him from completely understanding the nature of physical labor.

Chapter Five: "Profession"

In this essay, Rodriguez questions affirmative action and his role as a "minority student," a term he feels should never have been "foisted" upon him and one he should not have accepted. He believes that black civil rights leaders in the 1960s were correct in their argument that higher education was not accessible to blacks. However, he also believes that they "tragically limited the impact of their movement" when they focused on race as the only factor in lack of educational access. According to Rodriguez, social class, and not race or ethnicity, is the key indicator for oppression.

The very fact that Rodriguez was a well-educated student, he asserts, made him not a minority. "I was not□in a *cultural* sense□a minority, an alien from public life," he writes. In the 1970s, Rodriguez began publishing articles stating his discomfort at being a beneficiary of affirmative action. In response, he received many approving letters from "right-wing politicians" and angry reactions from minority activists. He avoided allying himself with either side.

Rodriguez also addresses the establishment of ethnic studies programs in the 1970s and dismisses these programs as being based on "romantic hopes." He expresses disdain for white students who described themselves as oppressed and complained that minorities were taking their seats in postgraduate professional programs.

Because Rodriguez was uncomfortable with his minority status and the benefits he received through affirmative action, he avoided accepting a permanent teaching position at any of the prestigious schools knocking on his door. He felt he did not deserve the amount of attention he was getting and blamed the situation on the unfair application of affirmative action. Eventually, he refused all of the offers, angering his professors and confusing his parents.

Chapter Six: "Mr. Secrets"

In the final essay, Rodriguez addresses his ambivalent feelings about writing this "intellectual autobiography." When Rodriguez had earlier published a short autobiographical piece, his mother was horrified that he had revealed to the public, specifically to *gringos,* that his education had created divisions between him and his parents.

Rodriguez remembers growing up in an atmosphere where even the smallest bit of family information was considered inappropriate for outsiders' ears. But now, unlike his parents, he believes that there is a place for the "deeply personal in public life."

Middle Class Pastoral

Middle Class Pastoral Summary

Richard Rodriguez introduces himself as a once 'socially disadvantaged child,' who lived a sheltered life under the watchful eyes of his parents during his first years. Now, as he writes his book 30 years later, he describes himself as a middle class American surrounded by rich people, who pronounce his name with a proper tone instead of his native Spanish language. He learned early on that his education caused a separation between him and his parents. He is writing the history of his education in order to praise his lower-class background and understand how he became the man he is today.

Middle Class Pastoral Analysis

As Richard Rodriguez describes what the reader can expect him to talk about in his book, he hints at his contrasting feelings about the consequences of his gaining an education. His description of himself as a classmate of children with rich parents and his random questions, like whether the knowledge he gained would be understood by his parents, leads the reader to believe that his parents and family did not come from nor attain the education he now has.

Aria, Chapter 1

Aria, Chapter 1 Summary

Richard remembers his first day of school in Sacramento, California. He shows up to class with very limited English and no idea what school would be like, since his older brother and sister never talked about their classroom experiences. Although Hispanic Americans tried to promote bilingual education in the late 1960s, Richard does not agree with such an education. He believes that the proper English language belongs in public when talking to Americans, or what his family called *gringos*, and the intimate Spanish language belongs in private, while talking to family and close friends. Richard describes the English language as loud, confident, firm, clear and high sounding. His parents spoke only Spanish at home and broken English in public, when necessary. Richard is troubled by his parents' weak communication skills in public. He thinks that, although his parents broken English had no real consequences, his trust in his parents seems to diminish with each English word they pronounce wrong. Richard considers Spanish his private family language. He has a fear of speaking English, the language of *los gringos*.

Aria, Chapter 1 Analysis

Richard goes back and forth between what he thinks as a child, and what he thinks as an adult. As a child, he holds to the Spanish language and refuses the English language, because of his fear of it. As an adult, he hints that, for him, bilingual education destroys the separation between the two languages. Right now, he is most comfortable speaking Spanish.

Aria, Chapter 2

Aria, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard speaks further about what he thinks of bilingual education as an adult. Although he admits that being taught in a Spanish speaking environment would make him more comfortable, he also admits that it would make him lazy and unwillingly to learn the English language as quickly as his teachers thought he should. He feels the English language is a public language of other people that he was not allowed to speak. After continuing to remain silent in class, Richard's teachers pay a visit to his parents. They ask that the family speak English at home more, for Richard's sake. The Rodriguez's start practicing Spanish every night, making it fun to learn the English language. Richard speaks up in class for the first time.

Richard feels changed the moment that he starts to speak English. At 7 years-old, he believes that he is an American citizen, not a Mexican immigrant separated and different from *los gringos*. As a result, the closeness of his family starts to disappear. Richard and his siblings stay out later and spend time with the kids at school and in the neighborhood. His mother grows more confident speaking English and convinces her husband to buy a telephone. The word *gringo* loses its previous meaning. Now, it only means an American, who is not Hispanic. The family communicates less, because Richard's parents have a hard time understanding the English that he and his siblings speak more fluently. Richard's mother tries to make small talk and communicate more with the children. His father becomes quiet and shy, often allowing Richard's mother to speak for them in public places, because of his embarrassment when speaking the English language. Hearing families speak Spanish saddens him a little. He thinks that, in order to fully embrace the English language and a place in public society, one has to lose something, as well. Richard feels that he lost his family closeness for his place.

Aria, Chapter 2 Analysis

Richard describes his resistance to learning English, his final embrace of it, and establishing a place in public society. Gaining more confidence and skill in speaking English made Richard lose his closeness with his family. This is ironic, because initially, Richard's parents were the ones who encouraged him to embrace the language and the society. Their encouragement pushed their family apart, instead of drawing them closer together.

Aria, Chapter 3

Aria, Chapter 3 Summary

Richard's family and relatives start to call him *Pocho*, a Spanish word that means an American who forgets their native language, because he no longer speaks Spanish with confidence. Many family members continue to speak to Richard in Spanish, even if they could speak English. This was because they wanted Richard to speak and know his native language. Richard starts to recognize that he feels guilty speaking English. He blames himself for shattering the close bond his family had previously held. After some time, Richard starts to pick up on the tones and sounds of the English language, details he previously ignored. Richard learns that intimacy does exist in his home, after he realizes that intimacy is not created by language, but by those he is intimate with.

Aria, Chapter 3 Analysis

Richard's family believes in the same separation of the English and Spanish languages that Richard now questions. English is another peoples' language. Spanish is the intimate language Richard should know. Through their playful name calling and stubbornness to speak Spanish with Richard, his family seems to think that Richard knowing his native language is more important than being able to communicate and exist in a society that speaks English.

Aria, Chapter 4

Aria, Chapter 4 Summary

Richard feels that he is becoming a man. He hurries through his days, addressing only those who speak to him. While on a bus ride, he takes notice of the language a group of black teenagers speak. Although their confidence annoys him, he envies the closeness they seem to have. He does not embrace his envious feelings for too long, because he thinks that Black English, just like Spanish, should not be taught in schools because of its underlying lesson of separateness. He thinks that bilingual education teaches that a public person can be a private person at the same time. Richard does not believe this is possible. Private language spoken in public becomes an accepted language that eventually loses its intimate meaning. For his reason, Richard believes that the closeness and intimacy one can feel from language comes from the people talking and not from the words, which lose their meaning in the wrong context. He calls this idea "intimate utterance." He feels that trying to translate Spanish to English, as when he speaks about stories his grandmother has told him, proves this idea that intimacy passes through words and is not held in the word.

Aria, Chapter 4 Analysis

Richard is starting to deal with the guilt of abandoning his native language for a public language. After much thought and careful examination, he realizes where the intimacy in language comes from. Intimacy comes from the person speaking, and not what they are speaking. Richard starts to believe that, although his family does not communicate in the Spanish language, they can still have intimate conversations.

The Achievement of Desire, Prologue

The Achievement of Desire, Prologue Summary

Richard examines the comment that most people say to him after learning of his educational achievements: "How do you manage your success?" Richard responds to this comment by saying that he went to an excellent school and was encouraged by his siblings and parents, but admits that this is not the real reason he has academic success. He describes himself as a scholarship boy, a book worm who spent his time admiring his teachers, reading books and correcting his parents' poor English grammar. After many years, he admits that his success is due to never forgetting his life before education, and the change he experienced after getting an education.

The Achievement of Desire, Prologue Analysis

Richard finds the courage to admit and embrace the change he experienced with his family and close relatives after getting an education.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 1

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 1 Summary

While in graduate school, Richard finds an accurate description of himself in Richard Hoggart's "scholarship boy" definition discussed in his book *The Uses of Literacy. According to Hoggart*. Family encourages intimacy and public alienation, while school encourages him to trust lonely reason. The scholarship boy has to be alone and mentally cut himself off from family, in order to focus on schoolwork. He learns to live in two different worlds. In short, Hoggart says the scholarship boy is a good student but troubled son, constantly moving between academic success and his longing to be close to his family. Richard identifies himself in Hoggart's descriptions. He recognizes that the anger he once felt towards his parents for encouraging him to learn English and get an education has turned to guilt for embracing the encouragement.

For a period of time, Richard also experienced embarrassment of his parents' lack of education and knowledge. He wanted to be like his teachers, people who were not. Richard's mother seemed to try to remain close with him, asking him about schoolwork and showing support when he won awards. Richard's father teases him for having soft hands and holds a negative view of attending college but, at the same time, wants Richard to display all of his awards. When Richard loses his high school diploma, his father, who had not graduated from high school, found it and kept it with his belongings in a safe place without Richard knowing. Richard decides to attend Stanford, after he is accepted there. His parents are proud of him, but also resist his leaving home, saying it would be a big financial burden on them to cover the costs not paid for through his scholarship. In the end, Richard's parents wish him well and send him off to Stanford. When Richard comes home to visit his family during Christmas break, they have less to talk about.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 1 Analysis

Richard is torn between his longing for a good education and his longing to be closer with his family. His conflicting feelings show up in the feelings of anger and guilt. His parents not only encourage him to go to school, but also help fund his education. Richard's thought, that education keeps his family separated, increases when he attends graduate school.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 2

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard's parents read both Spanish and English, but only out of necessity. Richard's teachers persuade him that reading books provides a way to gain knowledge and learn. Hoggart suggests that the scholarship boy reads books that are not introduced in school and unaccepted at home. Fearful of what books will do to him, Richard does not participate in reading and is sent to take a remedial reading class. While in remedial class, Richard admits to himself that he is afraid of books, because he believes they will make him educated. Richard begins to embrace books. He reads every book on the teacher's reading list and checks out 10 books at a time. Richard spends so much time reading, that his mother begins to question him about what he sees in books. His only answer to his mother's question is that reading books is necessary for his academic success.

Richard keeps a notebook and writes down the central theme of each book that he reads. It is these themes that Richard thought gave the book value. Richard enters high school, having read hundreds of books. When Richard's teacher suggests that reading 2,000 or more books granted him the right to have a complicated idea, he read more. In a newspaper article, a man remarked that his list of 100 most important books were the reason he was all that he became. Richard did not take this comment lightly. He proceeded to read all 100 books that the man had named.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 2 Analysis

Richard's interest in reading every book he can reveals his desire to be educated. His mother's curiosity about his fascination with books suggests that she does not read much and does not understand the power of books. Although Richard feels isolated and guilty about getting an education his parents can't understand, he does not stop striving to get more knowledge and academic success.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 3

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 3 Summary

Richard continues to explain the scholarship boy Hoggart writes about. Teachers pride the scholarship boy for learning. Other students think the scholarship boy is a teacher's pet, asking questions and acting interested only to get in the good favor of the teacher. The scholarship boy uses education to change himself. Most people are not open to education changing a person so much. Richard thinks that an educated scholarship boy is stripped of his opinions and made a teacher's puppet. The scholarship boy speaks opinions of others that he has learned, but never his own. The scholarship boy studies works only to repeat them as his own opinions. Richard suggests that education is demeaning to the scholarship boy.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 3 Analysis

Richard learns that education teaches him, like all others, to be less like him. It is ironic that people pursue education in order to learn, but end up only learning to embrace other people's opinions.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 4

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 4 Summary

Richard admits to spending most of his years in a classroom, because of his fear to long for his past. After accomplishing so much in graduate school, he starts to feel a loneliness and sadness. He moves back in with his parents. They hardly talk, although there are intimate gestures at times. Richard describes himself as culturally separated from his parents. He is wrestling with knowing that he is at the end of getting his education.

The Achievement of Desire, Chapter 4 Analysis

In an earlier chapter, Richard mentions that desiring to forget something does not mean you forget something. Now that he has obtained an education, Richard must now deal with the separation his family has been experiencing throughout his academic career.

Credo, Prologue

Credo, Prologue Summary

Richard discusses the role that religion has played in his family's life. Richard and his family were Catholic. As he attended a Catholic school for 12 years, Richard learned very little about non-Catholics, the name given to anyone who was not Catholic. His teachers tried to teach him accurate information without hostility, but Richard only learned about Catholics. He was taught that it was sin to read some other religious beliefs or to marry non-Catholics. In college, Richard starts to question his religion. He views the Catholic religion in a non-Catholic world, instead of in fear of it. His experience of embracing the Catholic religion at a young age was something he had never experienced before.

Credo, Prologue Analysis

When he was young, Richard accepted the Catholic religion as his religion, because it was the religion his parents had chosen for themselves. As he was little, he did not question this. Attending a Catholic school did bring him closer to the Catholic religion and beliefs, but it also isolated him and attempted to make him embrace a narrow-minded view. He was isolated from other religions, ignorant to other existing beliefs, and made to belief that the Catholic religion was the right and only important religion. All beliefs opposing the Catholic beliefs were only seen as non-Catholic. This narrow-minded view and isolated position compromises some of the reasons people wanted Catholic schools.

Credo, Chapter 1

Credo, Chapter 1 Summary

Church has a presence in Richard's life at a young age. He is *un catolico*, which he distinguishes from being Catholic. *Un Catolico* is Mexican Catholicism. He learned his first prayers in Spanish. *Los gringos* Catholicism entered Richard's house through a local priest of an English church. He gave the family a painting of Christ with a punctured heart. This picture hung in an important position, where all visitors could see it, in both Richard's house and school. When Richard could not understand the differences between home and school, the picture of Christ was his link. English Catholicism stressed the importance of knowing that man is a sinner. Richard learned specific sins, rituals like baptism, and how sexual wonderment felt. Talks of marriage and sex made sex more important than what society believed it was. Due to sin, Richard was taught to regularly confess his sins to the priest.

Mexican Catholicism was different to Richard. Mexican Catholicism was concerned with man and his needs. Richard's family turned to God in times of desperation and little hope. The Mexican Virgin was a sort of praised mediator. She honored Mexicans by appearing to them. In English Catholicism, Christ is the mediator. The Mexican Mary's statue was displayed prominently in Mexican Catholicism churches. In the English Catholic church, the Virgin Mary was off to the side. Although Richard's family sometimes complained about how different the two churches were, they joined an English Catholicism church. As Richard got older, he started to explore Catholic beliefs. He learned to memorize answers to his many questions about the religion and trust the words and power of the Catholic church. Questioning the church and thinking for oneself was discouraged. Even reading the bible alone was discouraged. Teachers encouraged Richard to read the bible with them in the classroom.

Credo, Chapter 1 Analysis

As with language and education, Richard makes a distinction between Mexican and English Catholicism. The differences between the two religions that he addresses have more to do with the people embracing the religion than the religion itself. Mexican Catholicism has more to do with Christ supplying needs, which suggests that Richard's family may have been poor and unable to take care of some necessary things. Their acceptance of English Catholicism, despite its differences, shows that they are now trying to embrace the English culture, including the language and education. The English Catholic's school dependence on the church for wisdom and knowledge suggests a danger of non-Catholic religions, and even the human beings desire to question a belief in order to embrace or reject it.

Credo, Chapter 2

Credo, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard notices that the Catholic Church respects his parents as people. Embracing the religion encourages his parents to think on the meaning of their lives. Richard's school days were divided by prayer time. Richard and his classmates were required to pray five times a day. The church considered that Richard could understand reason by the age of seven. According to the church, Richard now knew right from wrong. All of Richard's classes were governed by and in accordance with the Catholic church. For special services, the class would stop in mid-lesson to walk down to the Catholic church and participate in religious services. Richard was not allowed to celebrate the various holidays of Halloween, Christmas and Easter, like other children his age. Weekly mass brought Richard's family together, even as they began to struggle at home between the separation language and education was creating.

During mass, Richard is shocked to learn that he has to pray in public, an act he considers private. Non-Catholics who proclaimed how they were converted and physically celebrated the change Christ performed on them equally shock Richard. Richard does not do such things within his religion, which he notes is the true religion. Richard becomes an altar boy and learns Latin religious phrases. Catholic has taught him to think in terms of right and wrong.

Credo, Chapter 2 Analysis

The rituals of routine are taught, when Richard is very young in age. This is a time when most students do not know enough to question what they are being told to believe. As Richard learns Catholicism, he also learns that beliefs not similar to his are not apart of the true religion. Public acts of worship were not acceptable. Anything different from what the Catholic church taught him was not acceptable or right.

Credo, Chapter 3

Credo, Chapter 3 Summary

When Richard is older, he attends a mass with a few different rituals. The modernized service now includes a strong emphasis on words, and a more meaningful recitation of mass by both the priest and the congregation. The priests sit facing the congregation with his back to the tabernacle. Richard thinks that all of these little changes make mass seem less like a prayer to God, and more like a community celebration. Ceremonies like the Kiss of Peace remind Richard of how different the mass services are from past services. Although many of Richard's friends no longer continue to attend mass, Richard still attends, because of the effect Catholic attitudes have had on him. Richard describes himself as a materialist, because he had to carry heavy gold crosses in church. He still carries a trust for people in authority and carries a pessimism that grew from learning about sin at a young age. Although the church has changed, he continues to believe in its principles. Richard had more or an opportunity to examine the Catholic faith in high school, when he went to a normal high school that offered a more non-Catholic education.

Suddenly, the religion that his parents believed seemed too simple. Richard's parents relied on rosaries, while he studied theology. In college, Richard exposes himself to more non-Catholic beliefs and people. This exposure causes him to view himself as a "new Catholic." As a new Catholic, Richard was more liberal in his beliefs and rituals. He even stopped going to regular confession and instead asked friends for advice. Richard says that, although he had changed, he still longed for the Catholicism of his younger years. The Credo recitations that Richard hears from visiting Catholic churches throughout the years, now speaks a different message to him. Instead of repeating personal recitations, as the translation of the Spanish word Credo suggests, recitations are translated in English to mean a community or group. Instead of saying "I believe," Richard says "we believe" with others in the congregation. Richard misses the high ceremony of old rituals practiced in the Catholic church, but feels that accepting him as a part of English society caused him to embrace the English mass and rituals. Richard's friends are all non-Catholic. He no longer prays during the day. He allows his conscience to rule him, instead of the authority of the priests. All of the changes made it necessary for Richard to find a more liberal Catholicism. Richard is not satisfied with the liberal Catholicism he has chosen to embrace, but continues to accept it, because he cannot experience God anywhere else. Richard comes to no longer consider himself Catholic. He considers himself Christian.

Credo, Chapter 3 Analysis

Richard has abandoned the Catholicism he was taught, for a religion more personal and fitting of his life. After years of existing and learning only the Catholic religion, everything he comes to embrace as he gets older moves away from these earlier teachings.

Richard's friends are non-Catholic. Richard learns and studies different religions.
Richard later embraces a religion that strengthens his faith.

Complexion, Prologue

Complexion, Prologue Summary

Richard notices how the complexion of his skin is viewed differently now than it has been in the past. Richard had a dark complexion. When he was younger, even his parents teased him that he looked like a black boy or poor Mexican man, working with his arms. When Richard gets older, people start to ask him questions about his complexion that suggest he is wealthy and living a life of luxury. The complexion of his skin is something desired by people, who spend days in the sun to tan.

Complexion, Prologue Analysis

Richard is conscious of his complexion. He lives in a world that recognizes complexion and places a value on it.

Complexion, Chapter 1

Complexion, Chapter 1 Summary

Richard's family is a mix of different colored complexions. He notes that the lighter complexions are more acceptable. Both Richard and his older sister have as dark a complexion as black people. Richard's sister was teased for her dark complexion. After growing up and having children, she found it a relief that her children had light complexions. Richard was also teased because of his complexion. He would overhear women call dark skinned children ugly and unwanted. Many homemade remedies were made to keep a child from looking so dark. Richard receives racial slurs that are few in number, but impact him even into adulthood. Dark skin often meant that someone was poor. Poor people worked in the sun and got dark from doing work in the heat. Richard was surprised to meet a black friend of his sisters, who was not poor. Civil rights demonstrations started in the South, which brought more attention to complexion. Richard's parents were afraid that he and his sister would take labor as work because of the darkness of their skin. Richard's parents did not want him to accept the hard labor jobs they had accepted, when they were younger. Richard made friends with many rich children, when he was young. He would go to their houses for dinner. Unlike everyone else, Richard noticed the black maids and Mexican gardeners they had.

Complexion, Chapter 1 Analysis

Although Richard's parents and other adults stressed the importance of complexion in society, Richard often noticed incidents where complexion wasn't the only factor in defining the person. Richard says he did not think his sister's friend was black, even after meeting her, only because she was not poor. When Richard spent time at his rich friends' houses, he could not help but notice that, although he was almost the same complexion as the maid and the gardener, he was treated with more respect than them. Richard's parents were afraid that he would take hard labor jobs and follow, ironically, in their footsteps.

Complexion, Chapter 2

Complexion, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard remembers feeling ashamed of his dark complexion. While at a public swimming pool, he saw how his mother looked at his father, as he took a dive into the pool. When Richard gets up to go swim, his mother's face changes. She tells him to cover up. With so many adults discussing the horror of having dark skin, Richard grew up thinking he was ugly and unattractive to women because of his skin color. One day, Richard locked himself in the bathroom and shaved his arms. Richard wanted to see if shaving would make his complexion any lighter. He was disappointed to find out that he could do nothing about his skin color. Richard became ashamed of his body and hid. Richard never took off his shirt in public and never ran barefoot with only shorts on around the yard. He secretly envies the construction workers his parents did not want him to become. He envies them, because they do not care what people think of them. They work with no shirts and few clothes, despite their dark skin.

Richard doesn't date, even in high school, because of the opinion he holds about his complexion. Richard learns about women and men from watching his parents with his relatives and their friends. According to Richard's mother, men were to be feo, fuerte and formal, or ruggedly handsome, strong in character and responsible. Men were not to be talkative and gossipy. Women should do the long talking with girlfriends and publicly worry when in a crisis. Richard pays attention to these things, because he is the opposite of what his parents tell him a man should be. Richard has soft hands, which implies he has done no hard labor and talks for hours, when he is outside of his house.

Complexion, Chapter 2 Analysis

Society can affect self-esteem. The society Richard lived in placed a negative label on dark complexion. As a result of this label, Richard carried around the guilt, embarrassment and shame of being what other people considered ugly. This attitude affected his childhood and deprived him of the things most people involve themselves in when they are young. Richard has no proms, first dates, or tag football games with the guys to remember. As Richard's complexion, soft hands and talkative nature were not accepted by his family and relatives, Richard feels more comfortable in school, where students and teachers encourage him to be who he is. They don't place importance on things like complexion, even if they think about it.

Complexion, Chapter 3

Complexion, Chapter 3 Summary

During his senior year at Stanford University, a friend tells Richard of a construction job. His friend talks to him about the job, because Richard says he is looking for summer work and needs money. Richard accepts the job, as his friend is trying to explain that he does not mean to offend him by telling him about the job. Richard decides not to tell his mom and to tell his father only after summer is gone, just so his father would know he could do "real work." Richard admits that he likes the work, because he can stand for hours in the sun with his shirt off. Other construction workers nearby tease him for the incorrect way he holds the shovel. Richard realizes he could not learn what his father considered "real work" in only three months. Richard decides to keep the company of hard labor workers. He finds out that some of the workers have college degrees, and other workers have intelligent hobbies. The workers are not the poor men his mother thought they were. Richard tries to talk to Mexican workers, who arrive from Mexico. They do not respond to him. They continue to work and do as the contractor tells them.

After Richard's job ends, and in the midst of black Americans shouting that black is beautiful, his shame of his complexion disappears. Richard is no longer embarrassed about his complexion. He takes up long distance running and exposes himself whenever he wants too. He is darker than what he was as a child. Richard lives a richer lifestyle than he did in the past. Due to this, the people he encounters do not look down on him because of his complexion. Richard does not feel disadvantaged because of his complexion. He feels that his education allows him to have a voice. He remembers the Mexican workers from Mexico who ignored him and followed only the contractor's orders. He is sad that they have no voice.

Complexion, Chapter 3 Analysis

Through working a construction job one summer, Richard learns many things. Richard lets go of his shame about his complexion. After working days with little clothes on and plenty of his dark skin exposed, Richard no longer denies himself the pleasure of feeling the wind against his skin in public. Richard also learns that stereotypes can be wrong. His mother told him of the construction workers who were poor and forced to work hard labor because of their circumstances. The workers he meets while working construction are quite the opposite. None of them are poor, and most of them do not have to work in hard labor. The last thing Richard learns is that a lack of education or basic knowledge can muffle a person's ability to speak up for themselves and their rights. The Mexican workers show him that their quietness holds them hostage to following the orders of another person.

Profession, Chapter 1

Profession, Chapter 1 Summary

Richard uses the label "minority student" to his advantage in an effort to go far in his academic career, without having to spend much money. He wins many scholarships and awards. He later regrets using the label to his advantage, because of what it means. Richard thinks that the phrase has no positive message. After reading the note a teacher scribbled on his essay, he becomes more disgusted with the phrase. The teacher said that his opinion may be tied to him being a minority student.

Around this time, black Americans were fighting for the right to be admitted into universities in order to obtain degrees. Richard feels that, although this is a good idea, it will only help those black Americans who are able to take advantage of the opportunity. These black Americans, Richard says, are not the ones most exposed to slavery. Richard feels that people used his academic success to prove that giving minorities an education can work. After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Richard starts to receive more special treatment. He is immediately sent opportunities to teach at community colleges and given more awards. Richard wrestles more with the "minority student label." He feels that, although he uses his complexion to his advantage, he is really no more socially disadvantaged than the next person.

Richard does not completely agree with affirmative action for this very reason. Richard credits the civil rights movement for opening the door for other races to obtain the same rights black Americans fought for. Richard does not completely agree that affirmative action solves the problem of uneducated black Americans without academic opportunities. He suggests that help should not start at the college level, but at the youngest level possible. Young children who grow up in broken homes without decent meals and proper schooling will never make it out of high school with the grades necessary for a university to accept them as a "minority student." In this way, affirmative action, although a good concept, admits those black Americans who have already had prior advantages.

Profession, Chapter 1 Analysis

Richard credits the black American's civil rights movement for helping all minorities, but finds disadvantages with the accepted solutions. Programs like affirmative action only help those black Americans and other minorities who are already at an advantage. Richard speaks many times about how the term "minority student" and the affirmative action program lack what people may have intended the terms to be when they were created. This disappointment does not stop Richard from using the system to his advantage. He puts minority student on his applications. As Richard has excelled academically throughout his entire academic career, identifying himself as a minority

student may have helped him very little. His education and skill played a significant role in helping him obtain awards and scholarships, not the fact that he was a minority.

Profession, Chapter 2

Profession, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard discusses his views on affirmative action in more detail. He admits that he saw affirmative action have a negative effect on the very students it was supposed to help. Many black Americans, who were admitted to college, because they were minorities, lacked the skills and education to continue and excel in college. The minority students struggled. Richard saw the teachers who eagerly rushed them into the classroom either abandon them and turn their backs when they failed, or pushed them through to the next class out of pity. Some students were in graduate school with Richard and had never written a paper. Richard asks if these consequences really help the minority student move forward.

Profession, Chapter 2 Analysis

Richard indirectly states his opinion about affirmative action. The program will not work to the minority student's advantage, unless the program is set up at the beginning of the academic career, and not in the last years at a university. Although Richard is considered a minority because he is Mexican, he received an excellent education. This education is what made him excel in school, not the fact that he got special treatment because of his minority status.

Profession, Chapter 3

Profession, Chapter 3 Summary

Affirmative action ushers in the Third World Student Movement. Minority students, who now had the opportunity to attend college, did not agree to sacrifice their culture for it. Richard observes students on campus who continue to speak in their native tongues and embrace their culture through physical appearance. Black American students began to point out the differences in their culture and the white culture. They requested ethnic studies departments, where they could learn about themselves. Richard is on campus with his parents one day, when they spot a group of Hispanic students wearing serapes. Richard says that he needs to laugh at their attempts to maintain their culture in public, but he does not.

Richard is happy when he learns he is receiving a fellowship to study in London. He was away from the minority students, but felt lonely and ready to come home. He lived quietly with his parents that summer, and then took a teaching assignment at Berkeley. Richard is shy around other minority students, although they are comfortable around him. He is afraid of what they could discover about him. Ten Hispanic students come to Richard's office one day, asking if he can teach a minority literature course at a community center. Richard tells them that there is no such thing as minority culture and proceeds to give them examples of literature that portray a lower class, but are not understood by that same class. After turning down the opportunity, Richard is teased for being Mexican but acting "white."

Profession, Chapter 3 Analysis

Minority student reaction to attending universities exposes Richard's fear. Richard sees students who obtain an education and, at the same time, maintain their native culture. Richard abandoned his native culture for his education. The fact that he didn't have to scares him and also makes him feel ashamed, especially when he is around other minority students. Richard is afraid that they will discover he abandoned his culture. In order to justify his reasons for abandoning his culture, Richard does not hang around minority students and denies the fact that he can go to a local Mexican neighborhood and teach literature. Richard does not want to acknowledge that he may have been wrong about there being an uncompromising separation between culture and education.

Profession, Chapter 4

Profession, Chapter 4 Summary

When Richard taught at Berkeley in the 1960s, student riots and protests would constantly take place. Strong opinions were made about the Vietnam War. According to Richard, students played the role of victims. Students of all races claimed oppression and unfair treatment. The 1970s brought a different type of student. Richard thinks students were more consumed with what grade they made in a class than gaining an appreciation of their advantages. White people started to complain that affirmative action kept them from getting into schools. Although Richard was against affirmative action, he was disturbed by the selfishness of the white students. Richard heard no white student talk about helping to advance education for their race, including the lower class. They only spoke of needing help to advance education for themselves. Richard supported the claims of a student, who claimed he was struggling for success. His case goes to court, and he is then admitted into law school.

Profession, Chapter 4 Analysis

The juxtaposition between the riots and protests of the 1960s, which promoted equal rights for others like them, contrasts the selfish motivations of the white students against affirmative action.

Profession, Chapter 5

Profession, Chapter 5 Summary

Richard's teacher yells at him for delaying applications for teaching positions. The teacher asks Richard if he is waiting, because he thinks being a minority will bring the jobs to him. Richard starts applying to schools, and by the beginning of the year, he starts to receive job opportunities from prestigious universities that pay well. He delays accepting any of these positions, because he is wrestling with what decision to make. Another graduate student tells him that he is accepting a teaching position in another state, because it is one of the few he's been offered. Taking this job will separate him from his daughter. When he questions Richard about what positions he has been offered, and Richard tells him, he becomes angry. He tells Richard that they both make decent grades and have excellent academic skills. Affirmative action is not fair for him, because it keeps him from jobs while giving them all to Richard and other minorities. He deserves to have a good paying position, just like the ones Richard has been offered. Richard makes a spontaneous decision to decline to accept any of the teaching positions. He says the guilt he feels from knowing affirmative action had something to do with his job offers can no longer be denied.

Profession, Chapter 5 Analysis

Richard comes to accept what he has been previously denying. He has gotten ahead with affirmative action, a program he openly states he is against. It takes Richard a while to come to the decision that he would not feel right accepting any of the teaching positions he has been offered.

Mr. Secrets, Prologue

Mr. Secrets, Prologue Summary

Richard's mother requests that he stop talking about how disconnected he feels from his family because of pursuing an education. Richard's Editor warns him that deciding to write a book about himself and his past will be a lonely experience. In the end, Richard decides to write the book. He takes odd jobs, when money is scarce. He disconnects himself from the world. He focuses on his past and writes the truth about his life down on paper. He is starting to realize that writing this book means he is making his opinions and life public.

Mr. Secrets, Prologue Analysis

Richard has found the courage to examine his past and embrace his flaws, in order to move forward and become a better person in the present and future.

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 1

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 1 Summary

Richard's parents still see a separation between Americans and Hispanics, and public and private life. Richard's mother has learned to speak English and fit in with the public crowd, but she still considers this different from the way she should address her family in private. Richard comments that his mother's voice is high pitched, when she is speaking to a stranger. Richard and his siblings have learned to expect her voice, when they are out in public or meeting a stranger. His mother uses this voice, even when addressing her children's friends and spouses. It is from this separation that Richard's mother begs him to not write about his family anymore. Richard's mother just does not think that Americans should know the kind of effect education has had on him and his family life.

His mother also doesn't blame Richard for what has happened. She feels that Richard's education may have been worth all of the changes they went through, simply because he got the opportunity she and his father never had. When Richard was young, he suppressed his family life from the public eye. When asked to write essays about his family life, Richard makes up elaborate and false stories. Richard notices that when he visits friends, the families are warm and inviting. They make Richard feel like he is a part of the family. Richard is embarrassed, when his parents don't show his friends the same welcome when they come over. Richard's mother starts to use her high-pitched voice. This tells Richard that she will not let them into her private family world. Richard admits that, prior to his book, he has struggled with writing about his family. He has never liked writing in general, but writing about his family seems impossible to do. After graduate school, Richard has found the courage to write.

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 1 Analysis

Richard's mother has grasped American society as much as her son. She still feels the need to keep the private life of her family out of the reach of Americans. She continues to refer to Americans as *gringos*. As his mother has begged him not to write about the family, and he admits that he does not like writing, Richard's effort to complete a biography about himself suggests something profound. There is a necessity for Richard to tell the story of his family life and education. Richard has not acknowledged this necessity or admitted why the necessity is there.

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 2

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 2 Summary

Richard's mother asks him what psychiatry is. As Richard tries to explain, he sees his mother will never understand what he is saying. Her lack of understanding is not because of the language barrier, but because of her mental barrier. Richard's mother and father do not understand why a person would tell a complete stranger about their most intimate problems. Richard eventually admits to his mother that there are some things so intimate that they can only be discussed with a complete stranger. These things are too personal to be shared with someone who a person is intimately close to. Richard's mother has no reaction to this comment. Due to his parents' views about public and private life, Richard has not yet told them that he is writing a book, more specifically an autobiography, about his life and education. Richard says his mother calls him "Mr. Secrets," because he is secretive about what he is doing. Richard suggests that his mother might know he is writing a book.

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 2 Analysis

Perhaps Richard's mother asks about psychiatry, because she has overheard something about it already. She may be hinting to Richard that, although she is asking and pretending not know what it is, she knows exactly what it means. She communicates that a person should not share information with strangers, just to see Richard's reaction.

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 3

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 3 Summary

Richard writes his mother a letter in response to her letter begging him to stop talking about the family. He writes this letter, because he does not have the courage to talk with her about this on the phone or in person. Richard thinks that his mother sees a different Richard, separate from his work. Richard's family gets together three times a year, on holidays. Richard's mother seems nervous, as she serves food and addresses those who are not her immediate family in a high-pitched voice. Richard tells his sister he is planning to write a book. Richard sees his mother pay attention to what he has told his sister. Richard thinks he sees himself in his nephew. His nephew enjoys reading books. He is an American and speaks English, but Richard still thinks that someone who reads books may cause trouble. Richard observes his parents behavior throughout the holiday evenings the family spends together. Richard and his siblings are all successful, and now splurge to buy his parents gifts they could never afford in the past. Richard's mother does not seem happy or sad. As everyone starts to leave at the close of the night, Richard thinks he sees sadness in his mother's eyes. Richard's father is equally silent. The only thing Richard's father has said to him all night is his question, "Are you going home now?"

Mr. Secrets, Chapter 3 Analysis

The interaction between Richard's family is awkward. Richard and his siblings are now grown adults, who have families of their own. Richard's mother claims to be proud that all four of her children are successful. Her eyes tell Richard a different story. Richard eludes to a deep sadness his parents experience in the midst of a holiday evening with the entire family. The comment Richard's dad makes to him about going home could suggest that their sadness stems from this fact. Maybe Richard's parents are saddened that their children are grown and have families of their own. Maybe they wonder what their lives would have been like had they not encouraged their children to pursue an education at any cost. Maybe for the first time, they realize that the family Richard writes about is in fact separated. Richard's examination of his life and his examination and their effects on his family frees him. Richard is able to acknowledge his past and move forward. As Richard's parents still believe in separation, *gringos,* and other ideas Richard has since let go of, they are still trying to find the courage to acknowledge what Richard speaks about. Perhaps their lack of courage is what inspires them to plead with their son to keep their personal life private.

Characters

Father

Rodriguez's father was orphaned at age eight and went to work as an apprentice for an uncle. He had a third-grade education, but when he was twenty, he left Mexico for the United States with the idea of becoming an engineer. He thought a priest would help him get the money for his education, but this didn't happen, and he ended up taking a "dark succession of warehouse, factory, and cannery jobs."

Rodriguez's father went to night school with his wife, but after a year or two he quit and waited for her outside on the school steps. When the children were born, he was working at a "clean job," first as a janitor for a department store, then as a dental technician, but Rodriguez remembers that his father was always consumed by fatigue. He laughed whenever his son complained about being tired from reading and studying; he could not understand how one could become tired from reading and often mocked his son's soft hands. Rodriguez's father never verbally encouraged the children to do well in school.

His father was able to provide for his family a house in a comfortable, middle-class neighborhood "many blocks from the Mexican south side of town." But the family still felt estranged from the white community that surrounded them in Sacramento of the 1950s. Rodriguez remembers that his father was shy only when he spoke English; when he spoke Spanish with family and friends, he was animated and outgoing.

Grandmother

Rodriguez's grandmother spoke Spanish to him when he was a small child. However, he found it more difficult to understand Spanish once he started school and spoke English at home and in class. And while he often did not understand her after his English skills improved, Rodriguez is quick to note this did not lessen the love they felt for each other. She called Rodriguez Pocho□a Spanish word for something that is colorless or bland□to tease him about not being able to speak Spanish very well. He took it as a name for someone who has forgotten his native society while becoming an American.

The last time Rodriguez saw his grandmother, she told him about her life in Mexico with her husband Narciso and how they lived on a farm. She recalled working as a seamstress and that she had to leave Rodriguez's mother and her brother and sisters to travel to Guadalajara for work. She died a few days later, when Rodriguez was nine years old.

Mother

Rodriguez's mother was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States as a young girl. She and her husband lived a comfortable, middle-class life in Sacramento, California, and succeeded in buying a house in what Rodriguez refers to as a *gringo* neighborhood. Rodriguez describes his parents as full of optimism and hope for their family's future. Rodriguez's mother had better English skills than did his father. She served as the primary communicator with the *gringo* world beyond the family. After Rodriguez's parents became more confident of their language skills, his mother learned the names of everyone living on their block and purchased a phone for the house.

As a girl, Rodriguez's mother had been given a high school degree by teachers "too careless or busy" to notice that she could not speak English, according to her son. She worked as a typist after high school and was proud that she did not have to put on a uniform to go to work and could spell well without a college degree. After Rodriguez began high school, his mother started back to work again in a typing position. She felt strongly that her children should get all the education possible.

Rodriguez's mother was upset by many of the choices her children made. She complained when her children got older that they were not close, "more in the Mexican style," like other families. When Rodriguez left for Stanford University, one hundred miles from Sacramento, his mother could not understand why the colleges in their town weren't "good enough." When Rodriguez published articles in which he mentioned the family, she was uncomfortable about her private life being exposed, and she wrote to him to ask that he stop writing about the family. She called him Mr. Secrets while he wrote this book because he did not share much about his activities.

Rodriguez sees his parents as having great dignity and aristocratic reserve, and he also portrays their devotion to Catholicism. Both parents wanted their children to be aware that they "are Mexicans" and never to try to pass themselves off as being from Spain.

The Priest

When Rodriguez was about four years old, a white priest from Sacred Heart Church came to the Rodriguez house for dinner. This was a special occasion, as Rodriguez remembers it, because the priest was the first English-speaking dinner guest ever invited to the Rodriguez household. The picture left by the priest was of Christ with a "punctured heart"; it still survives, Rodriguez writes, and has hung on the wall of every house his parents have lived in since.

Richard (Ricardo) Rodriguez

Richard Rodriguez is the son of working-class Mexican immigrants to the United States, raised and educated in Sacramento, California, and the third of four children. Spanish was the language spoken inside his home, and when he came home each day from

school, he looked forward to hearing a language that was special because it was spoken only among his family and never with *gringos*. Language made the line between public and private life very discernable for Rodriguez. He always felt like a foreigner outside of the house when he was young, able to speak only a few words of English.

Themes

Childhood

A great portion of *Hunger of Memory* covers Rodriguez's childhood and his transformation into an adult. He is the third child of two middle-class Mexican immigrants in Sacramento and has two sisters and one brother.

Rodriguez describes his childhood as "awkward, " primarily because of the tension between his private family life and his more public life outside the household. Before Rodriguez was seven, Spanish was the primary language used in his home. He felt clumsy answering questions in English during class and feared any conversation that went beyond a few basic words. But after a trio of nuns from his school asked his parents to speak only English with their children, his world began to expand. Soon Rodriguez was less shy in school, and he became "increasingly confident" of his public identity.

While Rodriguez credits learning English with helping him become an adult, he also bemoans the fact that his family life, conducted in English, did not have the same, intimate feeling it once had. He and his brother and sisters spoke less with their parents, and the house became quieter. Eventually, Rodriguez began looking more toward his teachers as examples of what he aspired to. While feeling proud of his increasing abilities in school, Rodriguez also began to feel guilty for moving away from his parents. In addition, he occasionally felt ashamed of his parents' halting English, and these feelings filled him with guilt.

Education

Rodriguez also believes that becoming a student helped him become an adult. However, he is very cognizant that this same education placed a gulf between his beginnings and who he is now. He no longer finds it as easy to speak with his parents as freely as he used to, but he also credits his education with making it possible for him to understand and voice this struggle. "If, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact," notes Rodriguez.

Rodriguez writes with pride about his academic achievements, including his four years at Stanford University, a graduate degree from Columbia University, post-graduate work at the University of California at Berkeley, and a Fulbright Fellowship that allowed him to research John Milton at the British Museum in London.

However, Rodriguez devalues his achievements as a student by characterizing his efforts as mere memorization. "I had been submissive, willing to mimic my teachers, willing to re-form myself in order to become 'educated,'" he admits. As a "scholarship boy" Rodriguez admits that much of his success is attributable to his ability to memorize

information, not to his broader intellectual strengths. But he defends this teaching methodology pursued by the nuns at the Catholic schools he attended, arguing that students must learn what is already known before they can embark on original thinking and creativity.

Race and Ethnicity

Even as a child, Rodriguez was keenly aware of his skin color and that he looked different from the other children in his mostly white neighborhood. Of his entire family, Rodriguez claims to have the darkest skin tone. When he was very young, his aunts would try various concoctions on his face to lighten his skin color, and his mother warned him against spending too much time out in the sun, lest his skin become even darker. She expressed concern that he would become like *los pobres,* the poor and powerless, or *los braceros,* men who labored outside all day.

Rodriguez claims to have heard very few racial slurs directed toward him as a child, and when he did hear one, he remembers being so stunned that he could not answer. But now he marvels at the response that his skin color gets when he is at a nice hotel or a fancy cocktail party. People assume that he has been on vacation or ask him if he has thought about doing any "high fashion modeling."

Catholicism

Rodriguez addresses being Catholic in the essay entitled "Credo." Catholicism marked the passage of time in his early life as well as when he was a student at the neighborhood parochial schools. He remembers taking a break during class to march down the street to the church for prayers, the pictures of Jesus in every classroom, and dedicating his homework to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. His service as an altar boy during weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage taught him about the full spectrum of life. "Experienced in public and private, Catholicism shaped my whole day," he writes, noting that it saturated his every waking moment until he left home to attend Stanford University.

As an adult, Rodriguez is still a practicing Catholic, but with some reservations. The changes to the liturgy resulting from the Second Vatican Conference in the 1960s have made him feel less close to the church. In an interview with Paul Crowley in *America* in 1995, Rodriguez complained about the "theatrical hand-shaking and the fake translations that characterize the vernacular Mass." In the book, he remarks that these changes stem from the fact that the credo, the part of the Mass where the profession of faith is made, is no longer spoken by the priest but by the entire congregation. This has created a false sense of community, he argues, "no longer reminding the listener that he is alone. "But while he mourns the Catholic Church of his youth, he still clings to it. "Though it leaves me unsatisfied, I fear giving it up, falling through space."

Assimilation and Alienation

Rodriguez is a strong supporter of the idea that those who come to the United States should become assimilated into American society. He believes that those who would encourage non-native Americans to avoid becoming part of public society do them a disservice, not realizing that people do not lose their individuality by becoming part of public society. "While one suffers a diminished sense of *private* individuality by becoming assimilated into public society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of *public* individuality," argues Rodriguez. And it is from this position that Rodriguez argues against bilingual education, the concept that children should be taught using their first language for a period after they enter school.

The Role of Language

Spanish was the language spoken inside the Rodriguez household; English was the language spoken with the *gringos*. Rodriguez writes that, before the age of seven, when English was imposed upon him, coming home was a relief. "It became the language of joyful return," he says of Spanish.

Once English became the household language and his skills in English improved, Rodriguez's life changed dramatically. For the first time, he felt empowered to raise his hand in class and answer questions. He also began to feel connected to the world outside his house, the world of Americans. But, at the same time, Rodriguez noticed that he and his parents and siblings "remained a loving family, but one greatly changed." Much of the old ease was missing, and there were fewer conversations between children and parents.

Rodriguez's Spanish began to falter after he focused on speaking English, much to the concern of his many aunts and uncles. Even though this loss upset Rodriguez as well, he insists that his relatives were mistaken to assume that Spanish was the only thing holding them together as a family. This is the mistake, he says in the book, that proponents of bilingual education make. "Dangerously, they romanticize public separateness and they trivialize the dilemma of the socially disadvantaged," Rodriguez writes. Only after learning to speak English comfortably did Rodriguez consider himself an American, finally able to acquire the rights due to him as an individual member of society.

Style

Structure

Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez is a compilation of six essays, some of which were published separately before being included in the book. Each one addresses a critical issue in Rodriguez's life. "Aria" looks at the impact trading Spanish for English had on his life at home and at school. "The Achievement of Desire" covers Rodriguez's love affair with education and studying but also addresses how being a "scholarship boy" created a huge divide between him and his parents. "Credo" addresses being a Catholic, and "Complexion" looks at Rodriguez's awareness of himself as a Mexican American with dark skin. "Profession" deals with the decisions he has made about his academic career. The book winds up with "Mr. Secrets," in which Rodriguez speaks to the struggle his parents have had with the autobiographical essays he has published.

Because these essays are self-contained, they do not necessarily fit together neatly and create a smooth time line of Rodriguez's life and experiences. His writing moves between the periods of his life in each of the essays. In keeping with his assertion that the work is an "intellectual autobiography, " Rodriguez structures the book less in terms of passing events and more in terms of his emotional growth and maturity as a citizen and a man.

Point of View and Tone

Rodriguez writes these essays in the first person, and his is the dominant voice throughout. This offers readers direct access to his thoughts and feelings, but readers of any autobiographical writings should be aware that everything the author reveals is colored by personal opinions and beliefs. In *Hunger of Memory,* Rodriguez does not (and should not be expected to) give equal space to those who may disagree with his interpretations of events.

Rodriguez's tone is usually one of pride in what he has accomplished, but he also belittles himself and reveals a few less-than-stellar personal qualities. Often, authors use this technique to make a character appear more human and likeable. Rodriguez's pride in his own academic achievement is mitigated by his argument that what made him a good student was not intelligence but his willingness to memorize whatever he was asked to memorize. When he writes about selecting Stanford University for his undergraduate work, he admits that he did so not only because of its excellent academic reputation but also because "it was a school rich people went to," and he wanted to be around them.

Historical Context

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to a series of federal programs set up to address past discrimination against minority groups and women by protecting these groups against bias and by increasing their representation in the workplace and in educational institutions. These programs emerged from a complicated and hotly debated series of federal laws, presidential directives, and judicial decisions, beginning with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This act also created the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1968, the U. S. Department of Labor decided that employers should hire and promote women and minorities in proportions roughly equal to their availability in qualified applicant pools. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled that the 1964 Civil Rights Act banned not only employment practices in which discrimination against women and minorities was a motive, but those practices that, while not adopted with the intent to discriminate, have a discriminatory impact.

Between 1971 and 1989, several Supreme Court rulings established precedents that restricted some aspects of affirmative action. One of the more famous was the 1978 decision *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California,* in which the court rejected the use of numerical quotas designed to increase university minority enrollment but permitted programs in which race was only one factor of several considered.

Rodriguez's book, which received widespread national attention because of his unexpected stand against affirmative action, was written and published during a period of American history when the issue of affirmative action was contested. Generally, Rodriguez sides with those who argue that affirmative action psychologically harms the individuals it claims to help, creating a caste of people who are never truly assimilated into the mainstream of American public life. Others assert that such programs intensify hostilities toward minorities. Rodriguez also condemns affirmative action programs in education for considering only ethnicity and gender and for failing to recognize that a greater handicap to advancement is years of poor pre-college schooling.

Bilingual Education

The issue of bilingual education in the United States began during the colonial period, and teachers struggled to educate students who spoke only German, Dutch, French, or Swedish. More recently, though, the federal push for bilingual education occurred in 1967, when a bill was introduced in the U. S. Senate amending the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act to help local jurisdictions establish bilingual education programs. The primary goal of this program was to assist the children of new immigrants by providing school lessons taught in their native languages at the beginning of their American educational experience. The first Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1968 and renewed in 1974.

By the mid to late 1970s, serious concerns arose about the effectiveness of bilingual education, especially for Spanish-speaking students. The annual cost of the program grew from $7.5 million in its first year to $150 million in 1979.

Opponents of bilingual education assert that English is the new international language and is required to secure a good job in the United States and also that preserving multiculturalism through language threatens the "melting pot" function of the public schools and creates national disunity. Rodriguez sides in his book with the opponents of bilingual education, arguing that success in the United States relies on English skills. "The bilingualists simplistically scorn the value and the necessity of assimilation," he writes. Rodriguez attributes his success, in fact, to learning English early in his education, despite the gulf it created between his Mexican culture and himself.

However, advocates for bilingual education argue that unless non-English-speaking children are taught in their own languages at the start of their schooling, their education will suffer. As well, they believe that the education establishment in the United States should take advantage of the many languages spoken by the new immigrants to give students exposure to a world and a nation that is increasingly diverse.

Critical Overview

Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* was published in 1981 to a great fanfare of publicity. Here was a young Mexican American who resisted being called a minority and condemned affirmative action programs even though he had benefited from them. He accepted the gulf that lay between his parents and himself as the price immigrants must pay to become assimilated into American culture. And he admitted that when he saw other Hispanic students and teachers on campus striving to maintain their ethnicity and culture by demanding such things as Chicano studies departments and minority literature classes, he was confused. Many critics denounced him as a traitor to his heritage, while others saw him as a clear-headed voice against the political excesses of the 1960s and 1970s.

Paul Zweig, reviewing *Hunger of Memory* in *The New York Times Book Review,* acknowledges that Rodriguez's "superb autobiographical essay" will be "a source of controversy." But he chooses, instead, to focus on the book's literary qualities, calling it "an example of a peculiarly modern sort of book, standing in an honorable tradition that includes Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past."* Rodriguez's story of growing up and moving away from his family is a universal one, argues Zweig, which Rodriguez relates with great success.

In fact, Ilan Stavens in *Commonweal* calls *Hunger of Memory* "a Whitmanesque 'song of myself,' a celebration of individuality and valor in which, against all stereotypes, a Mexican-American becomes a winner." Rodriguez's book is a highly personal meditation, and "his voice is alienated, anti-Romantic, often profoundly sad," according to Stavens. Stavens also praises Rodriguez's literary skills, referring to him as "an extraordinary writer."

Other critics, however, are not as charmed by Rodriguez's language and story of "making it" in middle-class America. Carlos R. Hortas, in an article for *Harvard Educational Review,* asserts that Rodriguez is ashamed that he has "cast aside his Hispanic self, and for this he seeks forgiveness." *Hunger of Memory* is, in Hortas' eyes, Rodriguez's apology for his life and an admission of guilt. "To be an 'American,'" argues Hortas, "one should not have to divorce oneself from one's ethnic culture and heritage." As well, he accuses Rodriguez of not understanding the "aims of bilingual education."

G. Thomas Couser, in the book *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography,* agrees that Rodriguez's arguments against bilingual education are flawed and that he is at his best when his writing is more personal. "His views on bilingualism do not cohere or convince. His narrative is certainly better at describing the pain that attended his progressive alienation from the intimacy of his Hispanic family."

Hortas also makes a similar observation about Rodriguez's writing strengths. When Rodriguez covers his childhood and the Catholic Church, according to Hortas, his writing is "powerful and compelling ... and almost lyrically narrated." It is when

Rodriguez expresses the reasoning for his political beliefs and actions that his writing is less successful, adds Hortas.

Writing in *Diacritics,* Ramón Saldívar agrees with many critics that Rodriguez has abandoned his culture, writing that *Hunger of Memory* was for Rodriguez a way to seek "redemption." Additionally, Rodriguez's rejection of his culture has caused him to feel "existential anguish," according to Saldívar, and prompted him to address the book to "the most receptive audience imaginable: the right-wing establishment and the liberal academic intelligentsia."

Critics differ on the value of *Hunger of Memory* and disagree on whether it is a book that can be enjoyed as a story of growing up or a book that tells a sad tale of one Hispanic's unwillingness to come to terms with his background. But, however controversial the book may be, Richard D. Woods, writing in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* asserts that it belongs to "the mainstream of American autobiography." Woods comments that the book's universality is achieved through Rodriguez's "sensitive examination of the complexities of language" and that this is "arguably the most notable accomplishment of the book."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, she looks at the universality of Rodriguez's experiences growing up.

Many critics have long considered Rodriguez's memoir *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* a confession and apology for his apparent rejection of his Mexican-American roots. For example, Carlos Hortas writes in *Harvard Educational Review* that Rodriguez wrote his autobiography as "an act of contrition, a confession through which he seeks the forgiveness of Chicanos and other members of 'minority' groups."

Some of these commentators, Hortas included, base their "apology" argument on the perception that Rodriguez seems happiest when he is a very young child, at home, speaking Spanish before the nuns have the talk with his parents that sets his life firmly on the English-speaking road. In a sense, these critics see Rodriguez as a sort of contemporary, Californian Adam: before he is introduced to English (the apple of a certain kind of knowledge), Rodriguez lives in a warm, supportive paradise, wanting for nothing. But after he is forced to abandon that which sustains him and is introduced to the world and to worldliness through English, "paradise" isn't good enough for him anymore, and this makes him unhappy. Certainly, after a superficial examination of the text, this seems to be the case.

In one scene, for example, Rodriguez admits to rarely leaving the house as a small child and writes that, when he did, he felt uncomfortable. Neighborhood children, primarily white, silently stared as he walked by. The passage in which he returns to his house is written with an almost audible sigh of relief: "I'd hear my mother call out, saying in Spanish ... 'Is that you Richard?' All the while her sounds would assure me: *You are home now; come closer; inside. With us*."

This home he returned to was, for Rodriguez, a special place. He remembers being "an extremely happy child at home," a home where he felt "embraced " by the sounds of his parents' voices. His family's use of Spanish, the language spoken almost exclusively inside their home, whispered to Rodriguez, "I recognize you as someone special, close, like no one outside. You belong with us." And later, when Rodriguez is older, he hears someone speaking Spanish and remembers "the golden age of my youth." Indeed, Rodriguez writes of his pre-school youth as an almost intoxicating time that no one would want to leave behind.

But after Rodriguez becomes educated and leaves his family's house, his returns are not written of with the same warm glow. Rodriguez remembers the first time he came home from Stanford University for Christmas holiday, and paints the scene in anxious tones.

The first hours home were the hardest.... [L]acking the same words to develop our sentences and to shape our interests, what was there to say? ... One was almost grateful for a family crisis.

And in the final scene of the book, Rodriguez, as a grown man with a national reputation as an essayist, is home again for another Christmas. The careful mood has not changed much from the first college Christmas. As the holiday festivities break up for the day, Rodriguez's father asks him if he is leaving now for home. "It is, I realize, the only thing he has said to me all evening," notes Rodriguez.

So, yes, Rodriguez's book is filled with sad moments after he begins school and learns English. But is the pain expressed in the book due to Rodriguez' s ambiguity about the value and power of his Hispanic heritage, or simply the result of a natural and inevitable growing up and away from his very close-knit family?

Certainly an argument can be made that, contrary to many critics' contentions that the English language sent Rodriguez down the slippery slope of lost identity, English provided him with a way to be more confident about his place in the world outside of his family's house. This is a confidence that every child must find by one means or another.

When Rodriguez attended class before his English improved—before the nuns asked his parents to speak English at home—he was anxious, fearful, and couldn't imagine participating like all of the other children. He felt like the classic outcast, unable to break the code of meaning in this special new place. Each time one of Rodriguez's elementary school teachers asked him a question in class, he would "look up in surprise and see a nun's face frowning. .. . Silent, waiting for the bell to sound, I remained dazed, diffident, afraid."

But once Rodriguez was forced to speak English with his parents and his siblings, things changed for the better for him at school. After a few weeks of anger and resentment at his parents for demanding English of him, Rodriguez suddenly experienced an epiphany after volunteering to answer a question in class. "I spoke out in a loud voice. And I did not think it remarkable when the entire class understood," he remembers. That day, for Rodriguez, marked a turning point, he writes, a moment when he understood the power of language and his own power as an individual away from his family. He remembers: "That day I moved very far from the disadvantaged child I had been only days earlier. The belief, the calming assurance that I belonged in public, had at last taken hold."

Granted, the weeks before this triumphant classroom moment were marked with frustration and anger on Rodriguez's part. At one point, Rodriguez walked in on his parents speaking to each other in Spanish, but when they saw their son, they immediately changed to English. This was a painful moment of alienation within the family—something Rodriguez had only previously experienced outside of his home. He was being denied entrance into that special place where he used to dwell, that garden of warmth and familiarity. "Those *gringo* sounds they uttered startled me. Pushed me

BOOKRAGS

away. In that moment of trivial misunderstanding and profound insight, I felt my throat twisted by unsounded grief," Rodriguez recalls.

As Rodriguez grew up, left for college, and became a man, he experienced other similar moments with his parents□although not all were as strongly colored with anger and rejection□moments when the line between his life as a child and his life as an adult was deeply drawn. For example, Rodriguez's realization in elementary school that he wished to emulate his teachers and not his parents is still strongly etched in his psyche. "I came to idolize my grammar school teachers. I began by imitating their accents, using their diction, trusting their every direction," he says. His parents could not give him what his teachers could: extra help with school work or lists of "important" books to read. Though Rodriguez did not want to admit it as a child, he became embarrassed at his parents' lack of education. He maintains that he never thought them stupid, just that"they were not like my teachers."

There is no denying that *Hunger of Memory* is a sad and moving book. In fact, what may be the book's most poignant moment occurs when Rodriguez returns to California after conducting research on Renaissance literature in London on a Fulbright scholarship. He was "relieved" at how easy it was at first to be around his parents in their house, his old house. "It no longer seemed important to me that we had little to say," Rodriguez remembers. But soon he realized that he had been sidestepping the issue of how much he had changed because of his education. Finally he realized that it was precisely that education that had made it possible for him to think clearly about the ways in which he had changed. "If, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact," he notes.

Rodriguez makes clear in the very beginning of the book what he is most concerned about. Look, he seems to be saying, *I am much less interested at this point in my life in my cultural heritage than I am in figuring out how I grew up and what it cost in terms of my relationship with my parents*. He writes:

Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me. I do not search Mexican graveyards for ties to unnamable ancestors.... What preoccupies me is immediate: the separation I endure with my parents.... This is what matters to me: the story of the scholarship boy who returns home one summer to discover bewildering silence, facing his parents.

Therefore, the critics' insistence that Rodriguez's angst and sorrow come from his rejection of his culture is not so easily accepted. Rodriguez's concern is more universal. It is about family and individuality and maturity, not about a particular culture and heritage.

The universality of the experiences outlined in *Hunger of Memory* is stressed by many critics, including Paul Zweig in *The New York Times Book Review*. Rodriguez's experiences growing up and moving away from his parents may not be so different from the experiences of many other American youths. And this is what has saved the book

from becoming simply a two-hundred-page argument against affirmative action and bilingualism.

As far as rejecting his culture, Rodriguez is adamant that this has not happened and cannot happen. In a 1994 interview with *Reason,* Rodriguez claims that most people see their culture as an unchanging, static thing, while he believes that it is "fluid and experiential." He contends that he belongs to many cultures and has had many different cultural experiences.

The notion that I've lost my culture is ludicrous, because you can't lose a culture.... I'm not my father. I didn't grow up in the state of Colima in western Mexico. I grew up in California in the 1950s.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Pérez Firmat explores Rodriguez's non-confessional background, its influence on his undertaking an autobiography, and its impact on the details of his story.

Perhaps because the testimonial impulse is especially strong in emergent literatures, the flowering of imaginative writing by U. S. Hispanics over the last fifteen or twenty years has included many notable memoirs and autobiographies. Indeed, it is hardly an overstatement to say that, up to now, the dominant genre of latino literature has been one or another mode of self-writing—either straightforward memoirs like Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* (1971) or Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puertorican* (1993); fictional autobiographies like Edward Rivera's *Family Installments* (1982) or Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1989); or hybrid combinations of prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction, like Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983) or Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Latin Deli* (1993).

But without a doubt the best-known and most controversial of all latino autobiographies is Richard Rodríguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1982). In the decade and a half since its publication, this small volume has become a fixture in course syllabi and ethnic anthologies. The object of many scathing attacks as well as much fulsome praise, Rodríguez's book has been considered both a paralyzing exercise in self-hatred and an eloquent meditation on the risks and rewards of assimilation. And the author himself has been called everything from a chicano Uncle Tom to a hip William Wordsworth. When I teach this book, which I often do, I'm always struck by the vehemence of some reactions. A few years ago, the final paper of one student took the form of an extended letter, in Spanish, to Rodríguez. After upbraiding him for his abandonment of his mother tongue and his opposition to affirmative action, she ended with the following admonition: "Señor Rodríguez, quiero darle un consejo: *get a life!"*

What my student's comment overlooks, of course, is that autobiography *is* a way of getting a life, an instrument for self-invention. As Paul de Man pointed out years ago, in autobiographical discourse the figure determines the referent as much as the referent determines the figure. Whatever we may think of Rodríguez's views on bilingual education or affirmative action, they are not what his book, as autobiography, is primarily about. The real drama of *Hunger of Memory* lies elsewhere, in the intricate and vexed compositional stance that underlies the book's cultural politics. I would argue, moreover, that even if we are interested in Rodríguez's views on topical issues, we still need to address the tacit conflicts and convictions from which they arise. Before we can fully understand his opposition to bilingual education, for example, we need to grasp the inner dynamic of his relationship with the Spanish language. What I should like to do, therefore, is take a step back from Rodríguez's provocative opinions in order to focus on aspects of the text that are less visible but ultimately more determining.

Let me start with the following proposition: *Hunger of Memory* is the public confession of a man who does not believe in public confessions. Two of the enabling assumptions of

autobiography are, first, that there is a gap between the inner and the outer self, between private experience and public expression; and, second, that it is not only possible but desirable to bridge that gap. Although Rodríguez buys into the first of these assumptions, he has grave reservations about the second. Early in the book he reminds us that from the time he was a child, he was taught otherwise□that it is wrong to give public expression to private experience. From the Baltimore catechism that he memorized in parochial school he learned that confession was a sacrament involving a secretive, oral transaction between priest and sinner. As the nuns in parochial school said, it's only the Protestants who bare their souls in public. Catholics do otherwise. Add to this his own parents' disapproval of the smallest acts of public disclosure, and the result is young Richard's deeply-held belief that even the most innocuous bit of personal information is a secret. It is not surprising, thus, that when he is asked to write about his family by a fourth-grade teacher, he produces what he calls a "contrivance," a "fictionalized account" that bears little resemblance to his actual life. Nor is it surprising that, once again contravening a teacher's instructions, he refuses to keep a diary.

But disclosures like these□disclosures about the author's reluctance to disclose□do indicate how precarious an enterprise this autobiography really is. As Rodríguez repeatedly mentions, the lack of precedent for acts of revelation in his earlier life makes him a most unlikely candidate for autobiographer. No wonder, then, his life story paradoxically culminates in a chapter entitled "Mr. Secrets," a nickname that he earns by refusing to talk to his mother about the memoir he is writing. Richard is secretive even about his intention to go public.

Now it is certainly true that Rodríguez intends this moniker ironically. He tells us about his habits of privacy in order to impress upon us the vast differences between the taciturn boy that he was□"I kept so much, so often to myself"□and the self-disclosing man that he has become. By publishing his autobiography, Mr. Secrets has become a tattletale□a metamorphosis with important personal and cultural implications, for it not only breaks with his family's code of secrecy, but also transgresses the Mexican ethic of reserve or *formalidad:* "Writing these pages," he says, "I have not been able to forget that I am not being *formal*." In a book full of memories, one of the most irrepressible ones seems to be the author's lingering awareness that the act of recollection constitutes a betrayal of sorts. He cannot remember his childhood without at the same time remembering that he is violating his family's trust. This guilt-ridden admission of *in formalidad* seems to confirm that he is indeed engaged in revealing "what is most personal." The fact that he was raised not to be *informal* only makes his public confession all the more impressive. As he puts it, "There was a time in my life when it would never have occurred to me to make a confession like this one."

If we now turn to the book's opening sentences, they do sound like a confession: "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books." But this admission of having broken the seventh commandment is somewhat equivocal: the fact is that Richard doesn't steal books, he borrows them from the Sacramento public library. That is to say, once we pause to reflect on these sentences, it becomes difficult to understand exactly what sin Rodríguez is confessing to. Not only is the admission of book theft suspect, but the invocation of Caliban in the very first sentence as if he were the author's brutish muse

does not square with the book's tone and content. After all, Rodríguez does not feel enslaved but liberated by his assimilation into North American culture. Whereas Caliban curses Prospero, Rodríguez offers benedictions to the American way, and his finely-wrought and highly self-conscious prose is anything but calibanesque□an example not of *mal-decir* but of *bien-decir*. In addition, a few pages into the prologue Rodríguez himself will forsake Caliban by labelling his text "Ariel's song," an identification subtly reinforced in the title of the first chapter, "Aria."

These equivocations tend to complicate the author's confessional gestures, for they turn *Hunger of Memory* into something other than an informal act of self-disclosure. In actuality, this is an extraordinarily reticent autobiography□a book of revelations that often reads like a mystery story. Even at his most personal, even at his most confessional, even at his most repentant, Rodríguez is nothing if not *formal,* and it is no accident that variations of this word appear throughout the book. He asserts, for example, that the purpose of autobiography is "to form new versions of oneself," and that the end of education is "radical self-reformation." Form, formality, formation, reformation□these notions lie at the heart of *Hunger of Memory*.

Monstrous Caliban□the "freckled whelp" of Shakespeare's play□could never be Rodríguez's muse, for there is little here that could be termed misshapen or unformed. As Ramón Saldívar has pointed out, each of the six chapters is a set piece, a carefully-crafted tableau that organizes the different facets of the author's life around a central theme. Thus, the chapter on his mixed race is called "Complexion "; the one on his faith is entitled "Credo"; and the one on his education, "Profession." Rather than simply narrating his life experiences, Rodríguez distills them, defines them, reduces them to abstractions. This generalizing impulse extends even to the people in his life, not one of whom is identified by a proper name; instead, they are referred to according to their relationship with the author□"my brother," "my sister," "my editor," "the person who knows me best." Even his parents do not escape anonymity□not once does Rodríguez provide their given names. In fact, the only proper name in the whole book is the author's□a situation that, if not unique in autobiographical writing, is certainly extraordinary.

Hunger of Memory moves relentlessly from the individual to the general, from the concrete to the abstract□as the metaphorical hunger of the title already makes evident. Rather than giving narrative shape to his life, as is the case in most autobiographies, Rodríguez opts for a coherence based on the subordination of incident to theme, of content to concept. Instead of telling stories, he offers illustrations; and instead of dwelling on details, hejumps to conclusions. His overriding criterion is intelligibility, a thinker's virtue, rather than narrative interest, the storyteller's goal.

Rodríguez's rationale for this approach is that since he is writing an account of his education, of his "self-reformation," the book should reflect the outcome of this process. And in his eyes, the primary benefit of education is the ability to abstract from experience.

My need to think so much and so abstractly about my parents and our relationship was in itself an indication of my long education. My father and mother did not pass their time thinking about the cultural meanings of their experience. It was I who described their daily lives with airy ideas. And yet, *positively:* The ability to consider experience so abstractly allowed me to shape into desire what would otherwise have remained indefinite, meaningless longing.

As I read this passage, the first thing that occurs to me is to ask what it means "to shape into desire." Desire can be expressed, repressed, sublimated; it can attach to specific objects or float free. But how does one shape, that is, mold *or form* something into desire? Common twentieth-century wisdom has it the other way around: we don't shape our desires; our desires shape us—and mostly in ways that we don't even realize. The notion of shaping desire verges on the solecistic, but not any more so than the title of the chapter where this passage occurs, "The Achievement of Desire." It seems that when Rodríguez conjugates desire, the real-life grounding of the phenomenon gets lost in abstraction. He treats desire much as he treats hunger—as a figure, as a spiritual or intellectual entity only. Although he asserts at one point that he is engaged in "writing graffiti," the coarse, elemental scribblings that one finds in subways and on bathroom walls have little to do with *Hunger of Memory*'s genteel formulations. Perhaps Caliban could write graffiti, but I doubt that he would know how to shape or achieve desire. In fact, by describing his abstractions as "airy ideas," Rodríguez once again allies himself with Ariel—a connection that in turn suggests that the distinction between shaped desires and indefinite longings recovers the opposition between tame Ariel and unruly Caliban.

In a fine recent essay, Paul John Eakin has called attention to the presence of two voices in this book, one narrative and the other expository. For Eakin, these two voices dramatize the split in Rodríguez's authorial persona between the essayist and the storyteller, and he rightly calls attention to the fact that most of the chapters in the book were written originally as opinion pieces for mainstream publications. What I would add to Eakin's insight is that the two voices are not just distinct but, to some extent, dissonant. Although Rodríguez's deftness makes their mingling seem harmonious, the truth of the matter may be that the expository voice acts to silence or mute the narrative voice. Rather than two voices merging in harmony, the book offers us an active and a passive voice—the active voice of the essayist, and the passive voice of the autobiographer. Rodríguez perhaps admits as much when he describes his book as "essays impersonating an autobiography." Although I will have something to say later about the issue of impersonation, for now I want to highlight Rodríguez's opposition of essay and autobiography. Like the other features we have discussed so far, the primacy of discursive over narrative prose in *Hunger of Memory* makes this book a rather unusual exemplar of modern autobiography.

I would also suggest that the two voices that Eakin hears could well be, at bottom, the shaped voice of desire and the indefinite voice of longing— Ariel's song and Caliban's gabble. And what may be happening here is what often happens elsewhere— desires displace longings; that is, conscious feelings and experiences take the place of recalcitrant or repressed material. It is telling that Rodríguez never relates an incident

whose meaning he doesn't understand. He assures us that he is revealing "what is most personal"□and yet we all know that what is most personal is often what is most puzzling. But there is little room for doubt or puzzlement in *Hunger of Memory*. Every fragment of narrative, every anecdote or story is firmly embedded within an expository context that determines its significance. Rodríguez gives his readers less a life than a vita□a conspectus of emblematic incidents and achievements carefully arranged by heading. As a result, we come to the end of the book without knowing very much about large areas of his life. Particularly in the later chapters, he devotes as much time to thinking about autobiography as he does to actually writing one. Rather than an emperor without clothes, Rodríguez is a well-dressed striptease artist, but one who insists on his nakedness so often that after a while we actually begin to believe him.

Having come this far, I would like now to pursue the issue of impersonation by turning my attention to a seemingly minor item in the book□a screen door that appears several times□but one that may open the way to a fuller understanding of Rodríguez's vexed autobiographical stance.

Since Rodríguez offers his life as a "parable" about the consequences□good and bad□of leaving home, references to the house where he grew up frame his story. If the first chapter opens by evoking the day he first left his home to go to elementary school, the last chapter concludes by showing the grown-up Rodríguez leaving the house again after a Christmas dinner. Between these two scenes, the house is evoked several times, and almost every time the screen door is also mentioned. Discussing the separation between his home and society, Rodríguez states: "Outside the house was public society; inside the house was private. Just opening or closing the screen door behind me was an important experience." This is how he describes beginning elementary school: "Until I was six years old I remained in a magical realm of sound. I didn't need to remember that realm because it was present to me. But then the screen door shut behind me as I left home for school." The memory of the door accompanies him even into the British Museum, where he finds himself many years later doing research for his dissertation on Renaissance English literature. Hearing some Spanish academics whispering to each other, he has a flashback: "Their sounds seemed ghostly voices recalling my life. Yearning became preoccupation then. Boyhood memories beckoned, flooded my mind. (Laughing intimate voices. Bounding up the front steps of the porch. A sudden embrace inside the door.)"

Whatever this door may have looked like in reality, in his recollections Rodríguez imagines it as a protective barrier□opaque rather than transparent, occlusive rather than permeable. If his childhood home is a world apart, a Spanish-language fortress, that door is the bulwark that keeps intruders at bay. These symbolic associations become all the more evident once we note the contrast with one other door in the book. Referring to his boyhood friendships with non-Mexican kids on his block, Rodríguez writes. "In those years I was exposed to the sliding-glass-door informality of middle-class California family life. Ringing the doorbell of a friend's house, I would hear someone inside yell out, 'Come on in, Richie; door's not locked.'" Unlike the screen door, which isolates, this door connects. If the screen door is a buffer, the sliding glass door is a bridge. If one keeps out, the other welcomes in; if one encloses, the other

BOOKRAGS

exposes (note how the passage begins: "In those years I was *exposed*..."). Clearly the idea is that in the typical middle-class household□and let's not forget that Rodríguez thinks of his life as a "middle-class pastoral"□the transition from inside to outside, from private to public, from the family circle to the social sphere, is gradual rather than abrupt. Instead of two separate worlds, there is one continuous, uniform space.

For this reason, the unexpected recurrence in this passage of the key notion of informality is entirely apt. If we take Rodríguez at his word, the story of his education can be summarized as the evolution from working-class Mexican formality to middle-class American informality, an evolution that he images as the replacement of a screen door with a sliding glass door. Moreover, since Catholic confession takes place behind a screen□often a screen with a sliding cover□the image of the sliding glass door also implies a departure from the confessional model. Speaking to a non-Hispanic audience a couple of years after the publication of *Hunger of Memory,* Rodríguez depicted his life as a move "out of my own house and over to yours." The architectural imagery in the book certainly bears out this assertion.

The stumbling block here, however, is that this implicit identification of *Hunger of Memory* with glass rather than screen, with openness rather than enclosure, once again runs counter to our experience of the book. It is hard to see how this autobiography could be read as a literary manifestation of "sliding-glass-door informality"□even the language of this phrase, with its string of modifiers linked together by hyphens, clashes with the book's usual diction. Every writer has his or her favorite punctuation marks, and Rodríguez's is clearly the period. Cobbling together short, clipped phrases, he composes by placing bits of text next to each other and cordoning them off with periods. This is the description of his grandmother: "Eccentric woman. Soft. Hard." Much like the chapters of the book, each of these sentence fragments gives the impression of being a discrete, free-standing unit□a cameo or miniature whose connection to the material that precedes or follows remains unstated.

Since Rodríguez has asserted that "autobiography is the genre of the discontinuous life," it is not surprising that he should write discontinuous, paratactic prose. The style is the man□or at least the mannerism. And there is much in this book that speaks of discontinuity□between past and present, between Spanish and English, between parents and children, between the culture of the hearth and the culture of the city. My point, however, is that the book's dominant idiom is far removed from the agglutinative impetus of a phrase like "sliding-glass-door informality," where everything connects, semantically and typographically. This is true also of the second half of the sentence, with its reference to "middle-class California family life," another agglutinative phrase. But constructions like these are actually quite rare in *Hunger of Memory*. Instead of a life on the hyphen, Rodríguez offers us a portrait in pieces, a mosaic of self-contained, fragmentary poses.

In the end, therefore, his autobiography is more screen than glass. Ironically perhaps, the book is composed in the image and likeness of the house and the family and the culture that the author has supposedly outgrown. In this sense, Rodríguez never leaves his parents' house. As Tomás Rivera once suggested, there are moments when this

BOOKRAGS

book reads like an extended postscript to Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). What Paz did for the *pachuco,* the zoot-suited teenager of the *barrio,* Rodríguez does for the *pocho,* the assimilated teenager from the suburbs. In spite of the author's claims to the contrary, I find *Hunger of Memory* a profoundly Mexican performance, at least according to the portrayal of *mexicanidad* in Paz's classic book. It is in the context of *El laberinto de la soledad* that Rodríguez's characterization of his book as "essays impersonating an autobiography" becomes especially meaningful, as does his self-description as a "great mimic." *Hunger of Memory* may well be an elegant impersonation, an example of mimicry or *simulación,* one more *máscara mexicana,* to allude to one of the best-known chapters in *El laberinto de la soledad*. Paz writes, "el mexicano se me aparece como un ser que se encierra y se preserva: máscara el rostro y máscara la sonrisa... Entre la realidad y su persona establece una muralla, no por invisible menos infranqueable" ["the Mexican seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile ... He builds a wall of indifference and remoteness, a wall that is no less impenetrable for being invisible."] These sentences might also describe the author of *Hunger of Memory,* who may be much less of a *pocho* than he thinks. One man's *muralla* is another man's screen door.

Of course, the question now is: if *Hunger of Memory* turns out to be a wall of words, an artfully reticulated screen, what is it that lies behind it? The short answer to the question is that we don't know, but it is probable that one half of the answer has to do with sexuality, and the other half has to do with language. Although I don't intend to enter here into a discussion of *Hunger of Memory*'s treatment of sexuality, it is worth remarking that Rodríguez's near-total silence about any romantic or sexual involvements in his life cannot be without significance. Limiting himself to a couple of brief, ambiguous references to his "sexual anxieties," Rodríguez writes as if issues of sex or gender had played no part in making him the man he has become. Yet one suspects that his reticence on this score may reflect not that there is little to be said, but that perhaps there is too much. Indeed, part of the problem with *Hunger of Memory,* one of the reasons why it is such a disconcerting book, may be that Rodríguez attributes to culture conflicts and insecurities that have rather□or also□to do with gender.

On the role of language in his life, Rodríguez seems rather more forthcoming, to the point of asserting that "language has been the great subject of my life." But here again the abstractness of the formulation tends to divert attention from the material facts. When Rodríguez makes this assertion, the singular subject masks the plural reality of his experience, and particularly the fact that, until he was six years old, he spoke only Spanish. It is perhaps more accurate to say that the great subject of his life is not language in the abstract but the clash or interference between specific languages□Spanish and English. Nonetheless, the mask is the message: what lies behind the screen door is what always did lie behind the screen door□the Spanish language, those "ghostly voices" that he hears even in so improbable a setting as the reading room of the British Museum (the paradox of hearing voices in a "reading" room was probably not lost on Rodríguez). Although the number of actual Spanish words in *Hunger of Memory* is very small, the book as a whole is haunted by Spanish□not by

BOOKRAGS

words exactly, not by a language in the usual sense of the term, but by something less studied and more amorphous, something like a far cry.

In fact, Rodríguez treats Spanish less as a language than a euphoric, logoclastic phonation. He remembers: "Family language: my family's sounds. Voices singing and sighing, rising, straining, then surging, teeming with pleasure that burst syllables into fragments of laughter." For Rodríguez, Spanish is both more and less than a language. It is more than a language because it serves as the channel for deep emotional bonding; but it is less than a language because this channel cannot be used for routine verbal communication. This is why Rodríguez takes the rather bizarre position that Spanish cannot be the language of public discourse□the reason is not because it's Spanish, but because in his mind Spanish is not really a language. This is also why, when he recalls childhood conversations, he generally lapses into a musical vocabulary. Speaking of his banter with his siblings, he says, "A word like *sí* would become, in several notes, able to convey added measures of feelings." The fact that in Spanish *si* is the name of a note on the musical scale only underscores the collapse or "bursting" of words into sounds, of language into music. This is how Rodríguez describes his father's arrival from work in the evenings: "I remember many nights when my father would come back from work, and I'd hear him call out to my mother in Spanish, sounding relieved. In Spanish he'd sound light and free notes he could never manage in English." Typically, Richard's father doesn't speak words, he sounds notes. Indeed, in this resonant home even the lock on the screen door has a "clicking tongue." Later in the book, when Rodríguez describes the Latin liturgy as "blank envelopes of sound," this phrase could also be applied to his conception of Spanish.

Since the opposite of wordless sounds is soundless words, and since the paradigm of a silent language is writing, Rodríguez's view of language cannot be divorced from the primacy he gives the written over the spoken word. The distinction between Spanish and English folds into the contrast between speech and writing: words first, English only. But by setting things up in this manner Rodríguez snares himself in contradiction. Like a man who tries to hear by making himself deaf, he chooses a medium for recollection that ensures that he will not be able to capture some of his most indispensable memories. But maybe the truth is that he cultivates deafness because he knows that he cannot hear. When he confesses that learning English was his "original sin," the acknowledged guilt may mask unacknowledged embarrassment. Behind or beneath the learned references to Shakespeare and Wordsworth, behind or beneath the poise and polish of the self-conscious stylist, someone babbles, *balbucea*□could it be that Richard is really Caliban after all?

If writing is always a way of dressing wounds, the hurt that Rodríguez dresses and redresses is a wound of language. His English prose is a silent screen, a strategy of *simulación* that works to keep the inside in, as it were, to mute the pangs of a certain kind of inarticulateness, of what we might call the *¡ay!* inside the aria. One of the most crucial components of our self-image is the idea we have of ourselves as language users. Thus, one of the most disabling forms of self-doubt arises from our knowledge or belief that we cannot speak our native language well enough. When Rodríguez gets a summer job that requires him to speak in Spanish with some Mexican coworkers, he

confesses: "As I started to speak, I was afraid with my old fear that I would be unable to pronounce the Spanish words." I have witnessed this fear many times in students of Hispanic background. I have seen how they squirm and look away when they think you expect them to speak as if Spanish were their native language. I have often squirmed and looked away myself, feeling that no matter how good my Spanish may be, that it is just not good enough, not what it should be. For people like us, every single one of our English sentences takes the place of the Spanish sentence that we weren't able to write. And if we handle English more or less well, it is because we want to write such clean, clear English prose that no one will miss the Spanish that it replaces.

This is another way of saying that one of the largest appetites in *Hunger of Memory* is a craving for Spanish□one of those "indefinite and meaningless longings" that Rodríguez tries to transcend. And the longing is indefinite and meaningless because it is not a desire for definitions or meanings□ those one can have in any language□but a nostalgia for sounds, for bursting syllables, for the untranslatable notes that he heard and uttered as a child. While discussing his passion for music, Rodríguez states: "At one moment the song simply 'says' something. At another moment the voice stretches out the words□the heart cannot contain!□and the voice moves toward pure sound." Like a song, *Hunger of Memory* says a lot of things, but it also contains□and fails to contain□the far cry of Spanish vocables, the *¡ay!*inside the aria. Rodríguez responds to the loss of Spanish sounds by taking refuge in English words□which is why the original title of the book was simply "Toward Words." And yet I find his autobiography valuable and moving not only because of his way with words but also because of the muffled music that one hears in the silences between periods□an unsatisfied and perhaps insatiable hunger that his heart cannot quite contain.

Source: Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "Richard Rodriguez and the Art of Abstraction," in *Colby Quarterly,* Vol. XXXII, No. 4, December 1996, pp. 255-66.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Rivera discovers in Hunger of Memory *"a negation of what is fundamentally the central element of the human being the cultural root, the native tongue*."

(Editor's Note: Shortly before his untimely death, Tomás Rivera sent me the following essay. Except for minor typographical corrections, I have left the work, described by Chancellor Rivera as written from a "loose personal perspective,"as he wrote it. I wish to thank Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera's literary executor, for advice and permission to publish this essay here. M.P.)

Although I was born in Texas, had lived in many states in the Midwest and had not lived in any Spanish-speaking country, until then, my public voice as well as my private voice was Spanish through my first eleven years. It was in the fifth grade, that *eureka!* to my surprise, I started speaking English without translating. I suppose that at that time I had two public voices as well as two private ones.

Hunger of Memory is an exceptionally well written book. It is a profound book, a personal expression which one learns to respect for its sensibility. To respect this type of sensibility is something I learned in the Spanish-taught "escuelita," which I attended before entering public school at age 7. What Richard Rodriguez has written has great value. However, I have difficulties with concepts in the book which I consider anti-humanistic. For several reasons I consider *Hunger of Memory* as a humanistic antithesis. This book has been controversial for the Hispanic in general and in particular to the Mexican-American or Chicano. This has been the case much more so, I think, because it seems to be so well accepted by the North American public as a key to understanding the Mexican-American and debates related to bilingual education and affirmative action. Thus, it is important to define and perceive the book from different vantage points. Hispanics, Chicanos, and Latinos are not a homogenous group. They are as heterogeneous a kindred group as any that exists in our present society. They are at different levels of development, perception, understanding and as complex and therefore as complete as other human beings. Richard Rodriguez' book is a personal expression, an autobiography, and it must be understood as that in its singularity. It should not be used as a single way or method of understanding the bilingual, bicultural phenomenon of the Hispanic group. I do not know Richard Rodriguez. I have seen him on television. I have read *Hunger of Memory* three times. I intend to read it again for it has much to offer. The work becomes more with each reading.

Richard Rodriguez' essays have a style and tone which complement and establish his concepts. *Hunger of Memory* establishes its tone through patterns based on the ideas of silence and the centrality of language□silence versus non-silence, silence and active language, silence and culture, silence and intelligence. The aggregation of silence seems to indicate that if a person does not speak, he/ she lacks intelligence. This is a view generally held by many teachers in the classroom: how can one judge silence? If a child's hand does not go up, if a question is not asked, the teacher's perception is

usually that there is a lack of intelligence. Richard Rodriguez insists on the presence of his signal-silence and the public voice. If a person does not speak he/she does not have a public voice. How can one have a personal voice only in silence as the only true aggregate? The author indicates that Spanish was and is his personal voice. But it is an inactive passive voice that became neutered, sterile, and finally silent□dead.

I find underlined throughout the text a negation of what is fundamentally the central element of the human being□the cultural root, the native tongue. As one reads each essay, one progressively recognizes that what is most surprising for Richard Rodriguez is that silence and his basic culture are negative elements, regressive ones. This pattern of negation is softened somewhat when he thinks of his parents and his love for his parents, but he ultimately comes to the thesis that this silence and the consequent inactive community is something regressive or negative. This dealing with silence reminds me of my efforts in struggling with this phenomenon of silence when I studied in Mexico and lived with Mexican families; especially in the rural communities, where I tried to write about what I considered the impenetrable face/masks and their silence. But I never thought for a moment that their masks did not conceal an imagination or thought processes, not that they were not developing and inventing constantly their own world view and perceptions. And that, although they were not speaking to me and hardly to each other, they were not actively thinking. Richard Rodriguez delves into silence, and writes from silence as he himself tells us, "I am here alone, writing, and what most moves me is the silence." Truly this is an active task for him. Yet, with regard to his own family, he sees this silence as a non-force. He finally concludes simplistically, unfortunately, that his personal voice is Spanish and that his active voice is English. Surely, this is a humanistic antithesis.

It is necessary at this point to call attention to his development as a writer. He grew up and was taught in the humanities. The humanities have a clear base□at a minimum the explaining or aiding in the elaboration of a philosophy of life. Surely by the time one is twelve years old or so one has a philosophy of life. By then one has formulated and asked all the great philosophical questions and has even provided some answers. Whether one asks and answers in English or Spanish or in any other tongue is not important. The humanities, and certainly the study of literature, recognize this. As an educated scholar in literature, certainly, and much more so as a Renaissance scholar, Richard Rodriguez should know this. But his thoughts do not recognize this fundamental philosophical base. Clearly as a youngster of twelve or thirteen years of age he could not have, but certainly as an academic he could have reflected on the realities of his life, on the sensibility, and on the importance of what he did not know then and what he must now know. The humanities are also, to put it simply, a search for life, a search for form, but most significantly a search for wisdom. In this regard Richard Rodriguez starts out well. His search for life and form in the literary form of autobiography has as a premise the basic core of family life. But then Richard Rodriguez struggles with the sense of disassociation from that basic culture. Clearly, he opts to disassociate, and, as a scholar, attempts to rationalize that only through disassociation from a native culture was he to gain and thus has gained the "other," that is, the "public" world. Without wisdom he almost forgets the original passions of human life. Is he well educated in literature? For literature above all gives and inculcates in the student and scholar the

fundamental original elements of humanistic endeavor without regard to race or language, much less with regards to a public voice. The most important ideas that the study of the humanities relate are the fundamental elements and values of human beings, regardless of race and nationality. Ultimately, the study of the humanities teaches the idea that life is a relationship with the totality of people within its circumstance.

Then we come to the question of place and being. In Spanish there are two verbs meaning "to be," *Ser* and *Estar*. This is quite important to *Hunger of Memory*. Being born into a family is equal to being, *Ser*. Education and instruction teaches us to be, *Estar*. Both are fundamental verbs. *Ser* is an interior stage, and *Estar* is an exterior one. To leave the *Ser* only for the *Estar* is a grievous error. Richard Rodriguez implies, at times explicitly, that the authentic being is and can only be in the *Estar* (public voice) and only there is he/she complete. And further, he states that authenticity can only come by being an exterior being in English in the English speaking world. In the Hispanic world, the interior world of *Ser* is ultimately more important than the world of *Estar. Honra,* honesty, emanates from and is important to the Ser. Richard Rodriguez opts for the *Estar* world as the more important and does not give due importance to the world of *Ser*. He has problems, in short, with the world from which he came. Surely this is an antithesis to a humanistic development.

As with memory, the centrality of language is a constant pattern in the book. For the Hispanic reader the struggle quickly becomes English versus Spanish. His parents do not know the grand development of the Spanish language and its importance beyond their immediate family. However, Richard Rodriguez should, as an educated person, recognize this grand development. Surely, he could have given credit to the development of a language that has existed over six hundred years, which has elaborated a world literature, which has mixed with the many languages of the American continents, which is perhaps the most analytical of the romance languages, and which will be of such importance in the twenty-first century. Instead Richard Rodriguez flees, as a young man, from this previous human achievement. This fleeing is understandable as a symbol of the pressures of the Americanization process. Yet, as a formally educated scholar, reflecting upon that flight, he does not dare to signal the importance that the language has. Instead he sees it as an activity that has no redeeming value. He gives no value to the Hispanic language, its culture, its arts. It is difficult to believe that as an educated humanist he doesn't recognize the most important element of Hispanic culture□the context of the development of the distinct religions in the Spanish peninsula□the Judaic, the Christian, and the Moorish. These distinct cultures reached their apogees and clearly influenced Spanish. As a humanist, surely he must know this. The Hispanic world has elaborated and developed much in the history of ideas. Richard Rodriguez seems to indicate that the personal Spanish voice lacks the intelligence and ability to communicate beyond the sensibilities of the personal interactions of personal family life. This is intolerable. Hispanic culture has a historical tradition of great intellectual development. He does not recognize the so-called "original sin" of the American continents. What is this *pecado original* that Hector Murena wrote about so eloquently? It is simply the act of transplanting the European cultures to the American continents. The conquest by the Europeans of what is today Hispanic America is one of

the most fundamental struggles for justice. The Laws of Burgos, established in Spain before the conquest of Mexico, held above all that the Indian was a man of the world. This was a fundamental axiom. The evolved mestizo nations struggled through a racist colonial empire, but there was a mixture of races. This was less evident in the English-speaking world. I mention this because it appears to me that one of the greatest preoccupations of Richard Rodriguez is that he "looks" Indian. He speaks of his father as looking and being white. He speaks of his mother as looking Portuguese. It surprises me that as an educated humanist in 1982 he would still have that type of complex, colonized mind. He feels out of place in Bel Aire in L.A. because he looks Indian. He worries about what or how he will be perceived by the "Anglo." These are honest and sincere perceptions. I respect his feelings. He does, however, remind me of students I had in the 50s and 60s who were struggling with their brownness.

The Hispanic colonial period evolved a racism based mainly on color and, of course, class. The colonial mind was preoccupied with color. When a child born to a couple was darker than the parents, he/she was called a "*salto a tras*," a jump backwards, but if the child was lighter, he/she was considered a "*salto adelante*," a jump forward; and if the child was the same color as the parents, a *"tente en el aire,'* ' suspended. At times Richard Rodriguez clearly illustrates a colonized mind. His reactions as a young child are understandable. As a writer, however, while interpreting these sensibilities well, he fails to analyze those pressures that force conformity and simply attributes negative values to the language and culture of his parents, who have, as he states "no-public-voice."

It is well to recall briefly the formation of the Mexican nation and its history as it went from a political to an intellectual emancipation from 1811 to 1917. It took the Mexican nation over 100 years and 50 civil wars to evolve an independent, clear, and creative character. It is a unique nation. By 1930 the Mexican character was distinct□its art, music, literature, and culture were unique. It had developed a unique identity and character; it had accepted the mestizo. Surely, Richard Rodriguez must recognize, now that he is educated, that his parents came from a culture that was distinctly Mexican, and non-imitative, that his parents represent a culture with a singular identity. He offers, however, no recognition of the cultural uniqueness of his parents. Mexican culture had gone through its colonial and imitative period, its struggle for intellectual emancipation, and had arrived as an authentic, unique nation. His parents, therefore, recognize much better than Richard Rodriquez who the "gringos" are. This is a constant motif in the book. His parents know who they are themselves. They are no puzzle unto themselves. Richard Rodriguez says that change is a constant and should be constant and he argues that in order to change or to have the dynamics of change it is necessary to leave behind his Mexicanness, represented by the silence of the personal voice, the non-public voice, and his distinct cultural attributes. By gaining the other public voice, he asserts, he will become more authentic. Truly, this is antithetical to a humanistic education.

Richard Rodriguez' views remind me of two excellent books. The first one was published in 1930 by Samuel Ramos, *Elperfil del hombre en la historia de Mexico* (The Profile of Man in the History of Mexico), and the other was published in 1950 by Octavio

Paz, *El laberinto de soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude). *Elperfil* discusses the inferiority complex of the Mexican. *El laberinto* reflects on the silence and the bursting out from that silence of the Mexican psyche. They are books eloquent in their perceptions of silence and the negativistic attitudes about the Mexican psyche. Samuel Ramos writes about *elpelado;* Octavio Paz has a marvelous chapter on *elpachuco* and now with Richard Rodriguez there is a total book on *el pocho* or what he considers to be *el pocho. Elpelado, elpachuco* and *el pocho* can be considered alienated persons at the margins of culture. They do not represent the totality of the Hispanic culture in general, nor, in particular, the Mexican or Mexican-American culture. These are books about extreme people. What the *pelado,* the *pachuco,* and what Richard Rodriguez symbolize is a type of graffitti. By saying this, I do not seek to demean Richard Rodriguez' endeavor at all, but simply to point out that the most important element of graffitti is that it is an expression. Done in silence. Powerful. Exact. It calls out attention to itself as it saying "I want to understand myself," "I want you, the passerby, to understand me. I am at the (extreme) margin. I want to be; I hunger to be part of your memory." Graffitti beckons us. It calls to tell us that they *are* us□in an extreme way, that they exist between cultures, but outside a culture.

In spite of its humanistic antithesis, *Hunger of Memory* has an authentic dimension. Perhaps the most important element here is that Richard Rodriguez is a reflection of a North American education. Is he a reflection of the English professor or the place of preparation which doesn't really give him perceptions other than those of the English-speaking world? There is, ultimately, I believe, a lack of understanding of world culture; especially lacking is an understanding of the Hispanic world. It is a reflection of a North American education. He calls himself Caliban in "Mr. Secrets." Who is Caliban? He is a slave, a monster, a character in Shakespeare' s last play. Caliban represents the puppet, the person who is controlled. Caliban in *The Tempest* was driven by material instincts only. "Mr. Secrets," the last chapter, is especially clear on this concept. Is Caliban a reflection of a North American education? Is it an indication of an education which refuses to acknowledge as important only that which is tied to the northern European cultures? Is it an attitude of non-inquiry in the teaching of humanities? Aren't racist impositions, Adamic and nativistic concepts and attitudes quite prevalent?

The great surprise of many of our students who study abroad is that of finding out that not everything is originated (truly) in the United States, and that in reality our cultural history is quite short and in many instances limited. Richard Rodriguez is saying that he now has a public voice, an authentic one. Before he did not. He now believes that he is more real, and this is absurd. The dimension that Richard Rodriguez gives the North American public in his book fits well within North American intellectual circles because he has ironically justified his context by "being" not one of "them," but rather by having become one of "us." The North American public accepts Richard Rodriguez quite well and much in the same manner that it accepted Oscar Lewis' studies of the poor in Puerto Rico and Mexico. In this manner, knowledge of the unknown is accepted, simplified, and categorized. One has to ask if Richard Rodriguez has a community now? Did he have a community in the past? Does he think that now because he has published and has been accepted as a good writer that he now has community? Richard Rodriguez exists between two cultures, but he believes it more important to

participate in one world than the other. But it is possible to participate in many worlds profoundly and, without losing, but rather gaining perception and appreciation from all.

I want to place in opposition to Richard Rodriguez' s work a body of Chicano literature which has precepts as profound and as well written. This body of expression has not had the same acceptance. Some of it is written in Spanish, some in English, and some in a mixture of both languages. It is not recognized well, basically because the works have not been published nor merchandized by major American publishing companies. In these Chicano works there is little hunger of memory, and much hunger for community. If Richard Rodriguez has hunger of memory, Chicano literature hungers for community. Those who labored, in the 1960s and 1970s and into the 1980s to establish a literature, accepted the task to develop a literature in the United States and that it was to be in languages understandable primarily to the Mexican-American community. The endeavor was a basic challenge to North American literary dominance. In 1965, there were few works written by writers of Mexican extraction in the United States. There were no courses being taught in Chicano literature. Today there are courses taught in Chicano literature in a total of 135 universities at the undergraduate and graduate level. It is recognized as a body of literature either as part of Mexican literature, as part of American literature, or as an offshoot of Hispanic-American literature. It has several intellectual bases, but this literature does not interest Richard Rodriguez even as a curiosity□even though, paradoxically, he is now inextricably part of that contribution.

The Chicano writers I have in mind were hungry for community. The manner of establishing that community was through remembrance and rediscovery of commonalities of the culture plus the need to accept the community in all its heterogeneity□ that is, with all its virtues, with all its flaws, With all its energy, with all its apathy. It was important to recognize and to develop the basic elements of our community. Martin Buber's idea that "Community is the aspiration of all human history" was clearly before us. The Mexican-American as part of human history had to develop that community, to be part of it, or leave it. Rebecca West says that "Community is conversation," and the Mexican-American community has not been silent since then. What the Chicano writer did was establish a community where there was a definite place, where dialogues could develop, and where the values of the community could be elaborated. There was little concern regarding acceptance by the larger/majority population. There is a more visible Chicano/Mexican-American community today because Chicano writers aided in underlining the realities that made up the community. Clearly Richard Rodriguez regards that community as living in silence. Actually that is why he is very alone. What one senses in *Hunger of Memory* is that his parents no longer speak. Ironically his parents speak louder than he. The sensibility of his writing effort, I dare say, does not come only from his training in the English language, but from those early day experiences when he was taught, I am sure, the way to invent himself in the world by his parents.

I said earlier that Richard Rodriguez reminds me of students I had in college in the 1960s who were embarrassed to organize themselves, who did not want to bring their parents to college to participate in college activities because their parents wouldn't know how to dress, and students who hardly respected the few Chicano professors who were

BOOKRAGS

then around. Truly, these students had the same type of colonized mind dramatized by Richard Rodriguez□honest, authentic, and naïve, particularly at this later date.

What *Hunger of Memory* therefore reveals is one more step in the intellectual emancipation of the Mexican-American. It represents a significant intellectual step because such views are so clearly articulated. His parents know who they are, who they were, and who the gringos were. They didn't stop talking to him because they didn't understand him, but because he no longer saw the significance of their life. Richard Rodriguez lost the memory of all the philosophical questions they had helped him face and answer long before he walked into the English-speaking world. A writer is lonely only if he has lost the sense of his community's aspirations and the integrative values. His parents are the thesis of his statement. Sometimes, he feels frustrated because they have not read Garcia-Marquez, Ruben Dario, but then he never read these writers to them. He hungers for a memory that could be so close, yet he doesn't seem to realize that satisfying this appetite is within reach.

Hunger of Memory is thus a humanistic antithesis for several reasons. First, because its breadth and dimension is so narrow, unaware as it is of the traditions that should inform it. Second, it is ultimately an aggregation of cultural negations. Richard Rodriguez prizes as authentic only that which he learns in the classrooms. Third, he underlines the silence of culture as negative. Finally, Richard Rodriguez believes that it is only through English that he thinks he can elaborate what is correct and not correct for the community as a whole.

In his last chapter, "Mr. Secrets," as the family is leaving, and everyone is standing outside, his mother asks him to take a sweater to his father because it is getting cold. The last words of the book are "I take it [the sweater] and place it on him. In that instant I feel the thinness of his arms. He turns. He asks if I am going home now, too. It is, I realize, the only thing he has said to me all evening."

Here Richard Rodriguez tells us that his father has been silent all evening. What he doesn' t tell us is that he (Richard Rodriguez) has also been silent. He does not tell us about *his* own type of silence. If he has a hunger of memory it is mainly because he does not choose to communicate his more intimate memories. Can anything be that painful? Where is the real *honra,* the real *Ser?* The only positive cultural attributes which he signals throughout his book are those relative to the English-speaking world. Richard Rodriguez understands the needs for memory, but does not dare recover it totally. Why? The title is the thesis, but the content is the antithesis of the very title. This is a classic work, 1930 Mexican vintage, clearly seeking approbation of an inferiority complex. As Samuel Ramos stated in *El perfil del hombre,* it is not that the Mexican is inferior: it's that he thinks he is inferior. This was the legacy of Spanish colonization. Richard Rodriguez apparently decolonizes himself by seeking to free himself from a personal voice, but in so trying he will likely enter another colony of despair.

Source: Tomás Rivera, "Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory* as Humanistic Antithesis," in *Melus,* Volume 11, No. 4, Winter 1984, pp. 5-13.

Topics for Further Study

Rodriguez has structured his autobiography less as a timeline of his life and more around six different but important issues in his life. Choose an issue in your life—education, language, family—and write a few pages on this topic as they might appear in your own autobiography.

Research affirmative action. From your research, come up with a position on the issue and write a one-page essay aimed at persuading readers to adopt your position. Be sure to include reasons for your stance on affirmative action.

Pick one scene from Rodriguez's book and write a short, one-act play based on it.

Rodriguez received a Fulbright Fellowship to study in London. Research this scholarship program and create a presentation explaining the program. What subjects can Fulbright scholars study? Where can they study? Are there any famous people who have received Fulbright Fellowships?

Have you ever lived in or visited a country whose language is different from your own? If so, what was this like? Did you take language classes or try to pick up the language by talking with people? What things did you find difficult because of your language difference? Write a short essay about this experience.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Five million new homes are built between 1945 and 1950; as a result, more than 50 percent of Americans own their own homes. Between 1950 and 1960, 75 percent of metropolitan growth occurs in suburban areas.

1970s: By 1970, about 40 percent of Americans are living in suburbs; both urban and rural areas are experiencing declines in population. During this decade, about 65 percent of Americans own their own homes.

Today: The so-called post-suburban age is seeing the rise of "edge cities," areas of planned development on the peripheries of major cities but physically, economically, and culturally independent of the cities. In 2000, about 67 percent of Americans own their own homes, but the home ownership rate is only about 46 percent for Hispanics.

1950s: A weekly comedy show starring Lucille Ball, *I Love Lucy,* is one of the most successful television shows in the history of American broadcasting. First broadcast in 1951, the CBS show develops a loyal following of viewers entertained by its comic depiction of the married life of Lucy and Ricky Ricardo, played by her real-life Cuban husband, Desi Arnaz.

1970s: NBC has a huge hit from 1974 to 1978 with the situation comedy *Chico and the Man* about two men from very different cultural backgrounds living in East Los Angeles. Freddie Prinze stars as Chico, an ambitious young Chi-cano (an American of Mexican descent) who is a partner in a garage with the older and cranky Ed Brown, a white man played by Jack Albertson.

Today: According to many Hispanic groups, fewer and fewer network television roles are going to Hispanics. They point out that one of the few Hispanics in a leading television role is Martin Sheen, who plays the U. S. president on the NBC drama *West Wing*. His real name is Ramon Estevez.

1950s: The issue of government aid to parochial schools is fiercely contested. The Catholic Church opposes all legislation that specifically prohibits public money from going to church-run schools. In 1950, more than three million American students attend parochial elementary and secondary schools, such as the ones Rodriguez and his siblings attend in Sacramento.

1970s: Controversies about public support of parochial schools continue. In 1973, the Supreme Court declares unconstitutional a New York State tax provision that grants a tuition tax credit benefit to parents of non-public school students.

Today: The issue of government vouchers for private schools□payments made by the government to parents or to educational institutions for students' education expenses□is a volatile one. Many parents believe that they should have a choice in

where their children are schooled and that the government should foster such choice through tax relief and vouchers.

1950s: The most contested issue in education is the desegregation of the country's public schools. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decides the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education ofTopeka, Kansas*. In its decision, the Court declares that the segregation of races in schools is unconstitutional.

1970s: With desegregation largely accomplished, the nation's attention turns to affirmative action. After a decade of strengthening affirmative action in education, the United States Supreme Court limits some of its aspects in the 1978 decision *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*. In this decision, the high court rejects the use of numerical quotas designed to increase university minority enrollment but permits programs in which race is only one of the factors considered.

Today: Supporters of the goal of a colorblind society continue to challenge advocates of race-conscious solutions to discrimination. The United States Supreme Court has upheld key affirmative action measures in the past, but a series of recent rulings cast doubt on the future of affirmative action.

What Do I Read Next?

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo is a mix of autobiography and novel written by Chicano lawyer and activist Oscar Zeta Acosta. In this 1972 coming-of-age book, Acosta tells the story of his life: his birth in El Paso, growing up in Los Angeles in the 1960s, and becoming a lawyer with the reputation for taking on impossible cases and challenging the status quo.

Jesus Colon's 1961 collection of essays and other short pieces, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches,* reflects his concern for the working class. Some of the pieces are autobiographical.

Ernesto Galarza's fictionalized autobiography, *Barrio Boy,* tells of the author's birth in Mexico and his years-long migration to California during the Mexican Revolution. In the 1971 book, the author is orphaned but manages to graduate from high school and, like Rodriguez, to attend Stanford University.

Written in 1950, Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude* explores the Mexican psyche through an examination of political power in post-conquest Mexico. Paz, who eventually won the Nobel Prize for Literature, argues for democracy in this book, a stance that placed him at odds with Mexican leaders at the time it was written but won him kudos for his social criticism.

Richard Rodriguez followed *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* with another collection of autobiographical essays entitled *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*. This 1992 book was not as well-received as his first work, but Rodriguez expands his subject matter to include the AIDS epidemic, his homosexuality, and the history of California and Mexico.

Further Study

Beckwith, Frances J., and Todd E. Jones, eds., *Affirmative Action: Social Justice or Reverse Discrimination?,* Prometheus Books, 1997.

Frances Beckwith is an opponent of affirmative action, while Todd Jones supports these programs. They have edited a collection of articles and essays addressing this issue and provided readers with a cool-headed approach to understanding it.

Kingston, Maxine Hong, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts,* Vintage Books, 1989.

Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir of growing up Chinese in Stockton, California, is the story of a young girl living in two worlds. She hears from her mother amazing stories of China, filled with the supernatural, but she lives among the non-Chinese, the American "ghosts," in California.

Stavens, Ilan, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America,* HarperPerennial Library, 1996.

Ilan Stavens brings his own experiences to this examination of the history and attitudes of Hispanics in the Americas. Stavens's experiences include his childhood as a middle-class Jew living in Mexico City and as a white Mexican student moving into a diverse Latino community in New York City.

Suro, Roberto, *Strangers among Us: Latinos' Lives in a Changing America,* Vintage Books, 1999.

Journalist Roberto Suro considers the issues critical to understanding Latino immigration to the United States. He covers topics such as poverty, bilingual education, and the relationship of Latinos to other ethnic groups.

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,p>Woods, Richard D., "Richard Rodriguez," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Vol. 82: *Chicano Writers, First Series,* edited by Francisco A. Lomeli and Carl R. Shirley, Gale Research, 1989, pp. 214-16.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board memberseducational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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