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Reflections on Teaching Classics and Multiculturalism: *The case of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictee*

I will discuss how teachers of classics, at both the secondary and college level, can use Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's text *Dictee* to integrate the teaching of classics with multicultural topics. I will make particular reference to my own experiences teaching and speaking on *Dictee* to various audiences (at Williams College, Washington University, and the University of St. Thomas, as well as elsewhere) during the past several years, and offer specific suggestions for this unusual book's inclusion in the classics curriculum.

Cha's *Dictee* is a postmodern, apparently autobiographical, assemblage of poetry, prose, maps, and photographs in French, English and Korean. Through her unhesitating combination of Greek literature and mythology, the traditions of Roman Catholicism, and Korean culture and history, Cha stages the Asian American woman's labor to gain her own voice. Cha represents the displaced person's experience by remaking Western culture into her own creation. *Dictee* is structured into sections named after each of the nine Muses and makes multiple references to the myth of Demeter and Persephone; the book begins with a "quote" from Sappho that the author has actually written and "forged" herself. In addition to drawing on Greek mythology, Cha also quotes extensively from *L'histoire d'une âme*, the autobiography of St. Theresa of Lisieux, and includes photographs of Yu Guan Soon (a young Korean patriot executed at the age of 18), of Cha's own mother, and of Korean patriots being executed by the Japanese.

Reading Cha's *Dictee* while studying classical mythology and literature not only clarifies a highly enigmatic text, but also casts "familiar" Western themes and narratives into a new light. In the section named for Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, Persephone appears as a young Korean woman exiled from Korea by the Japanese, then sent off to Mongolia as a teacher. She becomes ill and, in a feverish dream, is visited by three women who offer her fruit in a scene recalling Persephone's eating of the pomegranate seeds. The "tragedy" described in the section "Melpomene" is a riot in Korea against the occupying Japanese. All this is told from the perspective of a young girl who watches as her older brother, a student, is shot. I will outline other sections of *Dictee* that make explicit or implicit reference to classical mythology and literature, to provide teachers with a guide for using the text in courses on mythology or the classical tradition. I will also describe my experiences teaching *Dictee* in conjunction with such classical texts as the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, the mysteries of Eleusis and of Dionysius, Sappho's poetry, and various Greek tragedies (including Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Antigone*).

How can we draw on multicultural texts to revitalize the study of the classics? *Dictee* reconfigures our familiarity with the classical tradition by making it strange as we read through a different perspective not yet imagined before. In conclusion, I will review some of the issues I have encountered in teaching *Dictee* to outline the discoveries and challenges that can arise in our work to make classics multicultural.