



# The Generation of Ideas

## A Thematic Reader

观念的生成:主题写作读本

Quentin Miller

THOMSON



北京大学出版社  
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

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A Thematic Reader

ROBERT D. LEE, Editor

Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Suffolk University



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著作权合同登记 图字:01-2006-2945

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

观念的生成:主题写作读本=The Generation of Ideas/米勒(Miller, Q.)著. —影印本.—北京:北京大学出版社,2006.7

(西方文学原版影印系列丛书)

ISBN 7-301-06199-4

I. 观… II. 米… III. 思想史—研究—西方国家—英文 IV. B5

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2006)第039046号

Quentin Miller

*The Generation of Ideas: A Thematic Reader*, 1st ed

EISBN: 1-4130-0012-6

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9789814195225

Thomson Learning (A division of Thomson Asia Pte Ltd)

5 Shenton Way, # 01-01 UIC Building Singapore 068808

书 名: 观念的生成:主题写作读本

*The Generation of Ideas: A Thematic Reader*

著作责任者: Quentin Miller 著

责任编辑: 初艳红

标准书号: ISBN 7-301-06199-4/G·0827

出版发行: 北京大学出版社

地 址: 北京市海淀区成府路205号 100871

网 址: <http://www.pup.cn>

电 话: 邮购部 62752015 发行部 62750672 编辑部 62767347

电子邮箱: [zbing@pup.pku.edu.cn](mailto:zbing@pup.pku.edu.cn)

排 版 者: 北京红金牛数据技术有限公司

印 刷 者: 北京宏伟双华印刷有限公司

经 销 者: 新华书店

787毫米×980毫米 16开本 50.5印张 1230千字

2006年7月第1版 2006年7月第1次印刷

定 价: 65.00元

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## 导 读

陈永国

写作必以观念或思想为先导,这是一条不变的法则。对于批判性思维的培养和高级写作能力的提升就更为如此。

《观念的生成:主题写作读本》就是一本为达此目的而编撰的英美大学一年级写作课教材。所谓“观念的生成”,说的是作文中所要表达的思想,大致要回答下面这些“说来容易写起来难”的问题:思想从哪儿来?是“关于”什么的?该如何表达?怎么去总结和评价?

写作的确是“说来容易写起来难”的一件事。教英文写作的教师,学英文写作的学生,都先要解决“写什么”的问题,然后才是“如何写”的问题。这也就是人们耳熟能详的所谓“问题意识”和“方法意识”。无论什么写作,课堂练习、课后习作、本科毕业论文、硕博毕业论文,甚或科研结项论文或专著,其撰写都离不开这样两个“意识”。前一个指的是内容,后一个指的是方法。内容和方法一旦确定,剩下的问题就不难解决了。

然而,教师和学生所抱怨的往往不是方法,而是内容,即“问题意识”:文中究竟要解决什么问题;问题从哪里来;如何提出问题。能提出问题并不容易。它需要有批判的眼光,有逻辑的思维,有评判的标准。要满足这三个条件,最起码的一步是怀疑:学生要学会用怀疑的眼光看问题,学会用怀疑的眼光去追问课堂上所学的一切,日常生活中所看到的一切,以及在漫长的读书生涯中所读到的一切。知识的更新和思想的创造必以怀疑为基础。

一旦对事物产生了怀疑,那就不能去被动地接受它,而必须主动地溯其源,追其踪,考问其实证性,检验其合理性,评判其价值性。然而,经得起如此推敲的文章并不是凭空产生的,即便是创造性写作,即便是想象的虚构作品,也必然有所依托,必然有其升华的基础,必然离不开真实生活的客体。因此,要写出“有内容”的作文,也必须有思想或观念做依托,即所要讨论的具体问题。这些问题的由来不外乎生活和阅读。

生活所提供的是琐碎的素材,是有待内化的原始材料,因此也是有待组装成整体的部件。对于纯创造性写作而言,它们是最好的客体。经过内化的过程、想象的过程、重新组装的过程,这些粗糙的原始材料可以转变成传世的艺术作品和人类思想的精华。用普鲁斯特的比喻来说,人的眼睛好比照相机的视窗,它



每天摄入无数的印象,但并非所有这些印象都能变成照片。对于不善思考的人而言,大部分印象都进入了无意识,就好比被放在暗室里的底片永远不得冲洗一样。而对于善思考的人、善用怀疑的眼光看世界的人,这些底片就会被冲洗出来,经过内化和升华,最后变成展示风景秀美的照片。

但这里所说的“内化”和“升华”也同样是“说来容易做起来难”的一件事。时下文人的写作常常是鹦鹉学舌,把别人讲过的重说一遍,把别人写过的重写一遍,即重新编排已有的陈述和叙事。这种重写和编排虽然有失面子,但却不失为初学者的有效步骤。柏拉图在两千多年前就提出了“模仿说”,他的学生亚里士多德发展了这一思想,认为“模仿”中也有创造。到了文艺复兴时期,这种模仿说演变成了对外在事物加以改造,从而使其成为一个全新的“文本”。此后,模仿便以“再现”、“反映”、“成仿”、“重写”等多种形式出现,但归根结底都离不开一个“蓝本”——现实生活。因此,无论对于创造性写作还是课堂习作,对日常生活的密切观察和体验都是必不可少的。体验就是“内化”的过程。

但生活体验严格说来是粗糙的。思想的生成是自发的、直觉的,不是很容易就能捕捉得到的。因此,思想的火花一旦出现,就必须首先(以任何方法)抓住它,然后加以质疑、澄清、交流。这是批判性思维的过程。批判或批评不是否定,不是仇恨,不是教条;恰恰相反,批判性思维是获得知识的最好途径之一。它要求思想者要灵活对待已经产生的“观点”,从多个角度进行观照、理解和评价,将其放在一个大的语境之内,与其他相关的“观点”形成参照,经过理性的考察和阐释之后,提出一个摆脱作者偏见的、有说服力的、具有权威性的思想。这是在体验的基础上升华的过程,也就是批判性思维的过程。

在《对话性想象》一书中,米歇尔·巴赫金精辟地描述了批判性思维或语境化的过程:“语言中的词有一半是别人的。只有当说话者用自己的意图、自己的声音来规定它的时候,只有当他挪用这个词,将其用于自己的语义和表达意图时,它才是自己的。在这个挪用的时刻之前,词并不以中性的、非个人化的语言形式存在(说话者毕竟不能拿着字典说话!),而存在于别人的口中,存在于别人的语境中,服务于别人的意图:你必须从那里拿过这个词,将其变成自己的。”(第293~294页)这可以从两个方面来看:一是要使用活的语言,活的语言就是别人在自己的语境中表达思想(意图)的语言;二是不能简单地、不加改造地挪用别人的语言(思想),而要创造性地把别人的语言变成自己的语言。这实际上就是写作的过程。

《观念的生成:主题写作读本》就是这样一本书。它通过理解、生成、扩展和应用思想这四个步骤来提高学生的批判性思维能力和写作能力。理解就是理解所读文本的特殊观点;生成就是通过这种理解性阅读让学生提出自己的

观点;扩展就是扩展文本的语境,使其与其他相关文本联系起来,扩大思考的幅度;应用就是在这三个步骤之后让学生将理解、生成和扩展的思想用于自己的写作实践。全书共分八章,除第一章总序外,其他七章汇集的文章中都就大学生所敏感的问题进行了热烈的讨论:年轻人的反叛精神,成长的烦恼,个人主义、孤独和异化,大学生的身份,金钱、社会阶级和自我,个人的权利以及梦想或理想等。所有文本不但思想性强,而且语言精湛,都是名家名篇。学生既能在无垠的思想海洋里畅游,又能在增进思考能力的同时学到隽美的语言。这也许就是编著者的目的。是为序。

# The Generation of Ideas

2006年6月于荷清苑

A THEMATIC READER

Quentin Miller

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## Preface

*The Generation of Ideas* is a new composition reader that selects both classic and contemporary readings about generational and individual identity. These readings are drawn from a variety of academic disciplines and from a range of essayists familiar to composition teachers (Rose, hooks, Walker, Emerson, to name a few) as well as writers who are less familiar in the composition classroom, such as Hell's Angel ringleader "Sonny" Barger, documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, punk singer Johnny Rotten, and an anonymous case study known as "Melanie." The readings are challenging, energetic, and varied and are sure to produce original and passionate student writing.

Many thematic composition readers are excellent in both their content and their conception, but I've discovered that virtually all of them lead to a practical problem in this crucial semester: the themes are so disparate that the course feels like four or five mini-courses. In *The Generation of Ideas* I've selected themes that are interrelated in the hope that a first-year composition course can be more coherent and meaningful than it often is. Each chapter of the traditional thematic composition reader is something brand new: a student who has finished her paper on death might find it a little difficult to shift gears into the next chapter on westward expansion. Each paper a student writes in English 101 may present a new challenge, but when that dizzying semester is over students seldom have the opportunity to reflect on the development of their ideas even if they have the opportunity to reflect on the development of their writing. They may think, "First-year composition was about gender, and family, and history, and so on . . ." but they aren't likely to think, "That course was about my development as a thinker." I hope that this book can change that.

The prominent theme of *The Generation of Ideas* is the transformation of the self and the formation of identity in our complex society. I have found that students write most passionately when the subject matter touches their experience in apparent ways. Chapters 2 to 4 are engaged with what is sure to be familiar ground for *all* students. These chapters are about various facets of growing up, and whether students' experience with the transformation into adulthood is in the recent past or the distant past, they are likely to recognize within the readings much that touches their own experience. The subject of Chapter 2 is rebellion, the process of one individual resisting the control of authority, and also of younger generations resisting the control of older generations. Chapter 3 encourages student writers to define and analyze specific rituals associated with the passage from

adolescence into adulthood. Chapter 4 is concerned with various responses an individual might have to a crowd, such as withdrawal, isolation, or alienation. The central chapter of the text (5) is a pivotal point in the structure of the text because its subject is the college experience, the immediate, present context for identity formation that surrounds all of the students enrolled in the course. The final three chapters (6–8) engage with various aspects of contemporary American society that complicate developing notions of selfhood. Chapter 6 is about money and social class; Chapter 7 is about the pressure to assimilate, and the final chapter is about work and its ability to define the self or its capacity to limit self-definition.

It is unlikely that an instructor would make use of all of these chapters equally, which is another reason I have tried to select readings that can be chosen and recombined as the instructor sees fit. I have sought a balance of structure and freedom by selecting these texts and organizing them in this way. There is plenty of variety in each chapter, yet each contains the following:

- A specialized analytical piece from disciplines across the curriculum that can be “applied” to the personal narratives and standard essays and that can provide a specific vocabulary for thinking through these issues
- At least one short story
- A classic thinker such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Randolph Bourne, or Benjamin Franklin whose work is historical, yet still immediately relevant

## Prereading, Postreading, and Writing Questions

The readings should largely provide their own contexts, but I have included headnotes that provide enough information for students to situate the writer and to prepare themselves in some small way to understand their own ideas about a certain subject before they begin to read. The chapter introductions have slightly more ambitious prereading exercises built in under the heading **Bringing Up Ideas**. Students may be asked to freewrite or to conduct some informal or ethnographical research prior to taking on the readings. Here is an opportunity for students to understand their own perspective before bringing it into contact with the perspective of a writer included in the text.

Each reading is followed by three sets of questions: Understanding Ideas, Generating Ideas, and Expanding Ideas. The first set, **Understanding Ideas**, calls attention to the unique features of the text students have just read with the hope that they will revisit that text to sharpen their understanding. The second set of questions, **Generating Ideas**, engages students with some question the text has raised. These questions encourage students to get in touch with their own thinking based on their reading and thus to begin to draft something substantial that can be developed into a piece of formal writing. **Expanding Ideas**, the third set of questions following each reading, connects the text to another text, generally within the same chapter, as a way of broadening the scope of the idea at hand. At the end of each chapter there is a fourth set of questions: **Applying Ideas**. These questions can be adapted or used as assignments for longer papers, if the instructor wishes. They are designed to cover themes that run throughout each chapter and across chapters.

## Thinking Through Ideas

A unique feature of *The Generation of Ideas* is a section of readings at the end of each chapter called **Thinking Through Ideas**. These readings are focused sub-topics of an idea that is present in the chapter. They are generally shorter than the readings in the chapter and they can be used either individually or as a group. They might be put to use as warm-up assignments for the chapter or even as the subject of writing assignments by themselves. They are meant to be topical and they provide a specific way for students to think through ideas that might otherwise be abstract. If the instructor requires formal library or Internet research, the **Thinking Through Ideas** sections provide excellent opportunities for students to conduct that research. These sections are also unified by genre and/or discipline; for instance, the **Thinking Through Ideas** section of Chapter 2 on rebellion is about the Beat Generation, and the entries in that section are all characteristic of the inventive nonfiction prose associated with the Beats. The section on Binge Drinking in Chapter 5 on identity in college were all published as editorials. The section on Talking the Talk in Chapter 7 on assimilation contains examples of personal narrative.

## Rhetorical Challenges and Writing Instruction

With regard to formal instruction, the intent of *The Generation of Ideas* is to demystify the processes of writing and critical thinking by acknowledging that everyone struggles with them, but that they can be a source of tremendous power. The real student examples in the introduction as well as the hypothetical examples provided there demonstrate how difficult writing can be and how rewarding its results are. Many of the questions that follow the readings in the text ask students to examine closely the text in order to determine why writers make the choices they make.

Yet the intent of *The Generation of Ideas* is not to render the processes of writing and critical thinking overly formal or mechanical. I define a number of **rhetorical challenges** in the book's introduction and in the chapter introductions. These terms are somewhat flexible, and many of them (such as *defining*) recur throughout the book: they are not meant to be limiting in terms of instruction or intimidating to student writers, but rather to provide clues for thinking about the ways writing works.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking all of my students—past, present, and future—for helping to make teaching such a worthwhile endeavor. The idea for this textbook began in a series of courses I taught on youth rebellion to first-year composition students, and their enthusiasm and spirit of inquiry made me want to develop the course's themes.

Special thanks to three mentors in the field of composition: to Thomas Recchio of the University of Connecticut who introduced me to Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline and who taught me (and many others) about entering the composition classroom with confidence and with a sense of purpose; to Gretchen Flesher-Moon of Willamette University for developing the program at Gustavus Adolphus College that enabled me to conceive of the theme that led to this book, and for her friendship and support; and finally to Mike Rose of UCLA for instilling in me the confidence to write my own textbook one day as I assisted him with research on his.

For her work on the development of this textbook, I am deeply indebted to Margaret Toth, a PhD candidate at Tufts University whose patience, diligence, insight, and intelligence helped to make the book what it is. I am also indebted to student writers Nathan Gamache and Kara Langone, undergraduates at Suffolk University, for their thoughtful contributions to the introductory chapter.

A whole host of colleagues at many levels contributed their insight to *The Generation of Ideas* as it was being developed. My colleagues at Suffolk University, especially writing director Rich Miller, have been invaluable throughout the process. For their feedback during the review process I would also like to acknowledge the valuable insight of the following reviewers: Christine Abbott, La Roche College; Valerie Becker, San Francisco State University; Greg Bowe, Florida International University; Jim Browning, Western Kentucky University; Derick Burleson, University of Alaska at Fairbanks; Rita Malenczyk, Eastern Connecticut State University; Robert Murray, St. Thomas Aquinas College; Mary Jo Reiff, University of Tennessee at Knoxville; Jan Schmidt, State University of New York at New Paltz. Thanks, too, to the reviewers who preferred to remain anonymous.

Aron Keesbury at Wadsworth deserves much praise for his belief in my work, for his patience and encouragement, and for his extraordinary insight. I would also like to thank Karen Judd, Joe Piazza, Carrie Brandon, Dickson Musslewhite, Karyn Morrison, and Dawn Giovanniello for their professional diligence as we turned these ideas into a book.

This book is dedicated to Julie Nash of the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, my wife and lifelong companion, who listens patiently to all of my ideas and fulfills every role a writer needs: critic, audience, and inspiration.

*Quentin Miller*

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*A group of readings that considers changing definitions of adolescence and youth throughout history.*

C. Dallett Hemphill, "Youth Rising"

John and Virginia Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective"

Joseph F. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America"

Victoria Getis, "Experts and Juvenile Delinquency, 1900–1935"

David Plotz, "The American Teen-ager"

## ■ Applying Ideas 223

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## I Am a Rock: Individualism, Isolation, and Alienation 225

*The tension between being yourself, being alone, and being lonely*

## ■ Bringing Up Ideas 228

### Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" 229

*A pretty young girl is disfigured by a childhood accident and meditates about the ways the event changed her.*

### "Melanie," "Courting Danger" 236

*The anonymous 19-year-old author of this work wonders why she stripped naked in front of her class at 13, or dangled precariously from the top of a stairwell.*

### Joan Didion, "On Self-Respect" 253

*The quest to define self-respect in her own life and in general leads the author to recall some strange behavior, such as placing her head in a paper bag to keep from crying.*

### Benjamin Franklin, from The Autobiography 258

*One of our founding fathers, arguably the most famous American public figure of the eighteenth century, describes how he frequently retreated from society as a youth.*

### Alfons Marcoen and Luc Goossens, "Loneliness: Attitude Towards Aloneness, and Solitude: Age Differences and Developmental Significance During Adolescence" 267

*Two researchers attempt to define and categorize the differences between aloneness, loneliness, and solitude.*

**Willa Cather, "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament"****[short story] 278**

*An artistic teenager reinvents himself in New York after being expelled from his Pittsburgh high school in this classic story published a century ago.*

**Marcel Danesi, "The Emergence of Coolness" 294**

*"Cool" is a term that has been around a long time, but we know that what was cool yesterday might not be cool today based on a complex set of signs.*

**Gerard Jones, "Violent Media Is Good for Kids" 309**

*A comic-book author makes the case that the violence that parents are so afraid of in children's entertainment might be harmless, or even beneficial.*

**Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth" 313**

*The director of an alternative high school in the late 1960s tries to come to terms with the aspects of adolescence that sometimes terrify adults.*

**Natalie Kusz, "Ring Leader" 328**

*Does your professor have a nose piercing? This one does, and she speculates about the reasoning behind it in this essay.*

**■ Thinking Through Ideas: Aloneness in Poetry and Song Lyrics 333**

*A collection of poems and song lyrics that speak to and from the experience of adolescent isolation.*

Paul Simon, "I Am a Rock"

Janis Ian, "At Seventeen"

Emily Dickinson, "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?"

William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis"

Pink Floyd, "Hey You"

Korn, "No One's There"

Skid Row, "Youth Gone Wild"

**■ Applying Ideas 343****5****From Minor to (What's Your) Major:  
Identity in College 345**

*Do colleges and universities inspire rebellion and individual development or do they, like many other institutions, seek to squelch them?*

**■ Bringing Up Ideas 348**