

CAROLINE SHRODES • HARRY FINSTONE
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Preface

. . . the unexamined life is not worth living.
—Plato, *The Apology*

The academic turmoil of the early 1970s—which may seem remote today—provided the background for the first edition of *The Conscious Reader*. The editors, predisposed to support change, wanted to create a reader that would reflect a multidisciplinary approach to the teaching of writing and would recognize cultural diversity. For the former, we included selections to represent a wide range of academic disciplines and interests from psychology to biology and computer science. For the latter, we chose authors who represent the spectrum of American ethnic cultures and the contribution of minorities and women.

We also wanted to stress our belief in the rational mind, in an era in which university faculties were often inclined to measure relevance by spontaneous response. Unhappy with such a superficial concept of relevance, we compiled a book intended to make readers think, to go beyond reading unconsciously. It occurred to one of us (probably to Tony English, our remarkable editor) that we could reinforce our belief by giving the book the name it has since held for twenty years. Today the academic world calls our objective critical reading, but we have never regretted being a little ahead of our time.

Still believing that the development of writing skills depends on the heightening of consciousness, the editors of *The Conscious Reader* invite students to examine and to respond to the basic questions that writers since Plato have posed. The selections included engage our interests by their style and by their focus on issues of universal concern. They reflect the continuity between past and present, serve as a catalyst to self-expression, sharpen our perceptions, and widen our sympathies. Consciousness heightened through reading develops effective writing, and the act of writing fosters self-definition. As we extend awareness by reading, we become increasingly conscious of the reservoir of memories and experiences from which to draw and the variety of forms and techniques that give shape to our writing.

Over two-thirds of the readings in this book are nonfiction prose, primarily exposition or argument. Some of the essays are personal and readily comprehensible and provide models for early writing assignments. Others, more complex, should help students develop the ability to reason abstractly. Although most of the authors included are accomplished literary stylists, others are primarily distinguished for their contributions to popular culture, science, philosophy, or psychology.

We have also included thirty-one stories and thirty-nine poems. The inclusion of imaginative literature in a composition course needs no special justification. It serves a number of important goals: to enhance the pleasure of reading, to educate the emotions as well as the mind, to stimulate original creative efforts, and to provide vicarious experience with which to test the ideas expressed in essays. The dramatic situations, vivid character portrayals, and verbal compression of fiction and poetry also suggest techniques to enliven student writing. We are convinced more than ever that the most stimulating as well as most economical means of helping students to develop

conceptual literacy is to expose them to literate essays and imaginative literature, both of which will arrest their interest and challenge their thinking.

This sixth edition of *The Conscious Reader* contains Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, which strikes us as a timely reflection on issues facing society in the 1990s. We have also replaced a number of paintings in the section on art and composition. We believe these changes and the increase in the number of selections by women, minority, and Third World writers add to the book's versatility and its capacity to engage the reader deeply.

Each selection has a head note and suggestions for discussion and writing to help students explore multiple levels of understanding. The suggestions invite students to pay careful attention to thought and structure and to compare their experience with the vision of life expressed in the selections. Exploring cultural patterns both similar and alien to one's own should encourage a continuing dialectic in classroom discussion as well as in writing.

The thematic groupings represent a convenient division of the book. The readings begin with the search for self and move to consideration of the self in relation to others—parents, friends, and lovers. The next section focuses on culture, including discussions of both popular culture and art and society. The next section explores many facets of the world of science and technology. The readings continue with a variety of statements about our aspirations and failures to ensure a sense of freedom and human dignity for all. The book concludes with several sections on the examined life. The selections mediate between problems of education and human concerns and then return full cycle to the individual's search for meaning and value.

If there is a dominant theme in these readings, it is that neither understanding of the past nor projections of the future can eliminate conflict from our lives and that opposing forces in the self and society are a part of the human condition. Indeed, it is vital that these forces contend. For it is primarily through conscious recognition and expression of these conflicting forces that we may find our way to a tolerance of ambiguity and to an increased freedom of choice.

Acknowledgments

To Diane Engber, for sharing her knowledge of the women's literature of Africa and the Caribbean; to Karis Towe, for swift and careful research work; to my colleagues at the Union Institute, for their commitment to interdisciplinary and multicultural research; and to the late Caroline Shrodes, for initiating me into the richness of her vision of *The Conscious Reader*.—F. M. B.

To Eve Finestone, who has made the art and composition section possible, and to Anne M. Finestone. —H. F.

To Robert E. Jackson and to Harry and Mary Miller for their support and encouragement. —M. S.

For extraordinary assistance and patience, we wish to thank our editors, D. Anthony English and Eben Ludlow. We are grateful, too, for the editorial help offered by Anthony Ven Graitis, Wendy Polhemus-Annibel, and Tara Padykula. We are finally grateful to the reviewers for this sixth edition.

Art and Composition

Discussion of art presents certain problems. It is difficult, sometimes impossible, to discover the thought processes of the visual artist or the “argument” of the painting; moreover, students may be unaware of how much the content of the painting derives from traditions of the form. The contemporary artist George Baselitz argues that painting projects no ideas and does not communicate or express publicly any statements, information, or opinions. A number of contemporary artists even find explication of their work repugnant. Nevertheless, the editors believe that painting can communicate and inspire not only emotions but ideas as well. They further believe that ideas relating to the themes of this text, while accounting for only a part of the total meaning or impact of these paintings, will provoke students to think and to write. Therefore, we offer these paintings in the expectation that students and instructors will find them exciting and will see even more in them for discussion or writing than we have suggested.

Paul Gauguin

Self-Portrait with Halo (1889)

It was the substantial number of Impressionist paintings that French painter Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) had collected when he was a successful Parisian stockbroker that financed his escape from marriage, fatherhood, and bourgeois respectability while in his mid-thirties. Although he had previously exhibited with the Impressionists, it wasn't until this later age that he devoted himself fully to painting.



National Gallery of Art, Washington; Chester Dale Collection.

At the same time as he threw himself into the life of the starving bohemian artist in his garret, he began to develop his own theories of painting. He abandoned the Impressionists' careful scientific study of natural light and the ever-changing fragmentation of color it caused. He sought instead to exercise his own intelligence and to express his own response to a subject by creating new forms and assigning his private meaning to colors. His forms became abstract, stylized, and slightly distorted; he applied colors heavily, without modulation, and outlined them with a thick dark brush. He advised a friend,

A meter of green is greener than a centimeter. . . . How does that tree look to you? Green? All right, then use green, the greenest on your palette. And that shadow, a little bluish? Don't be afraid. Paint it as blue as you can.

In Gauguin's personal vocabulary, a Christ became yellow, the soil red, and a pond white.

His flight from the city led him to the provinces of Provence and Brittany, but eventually, like Europeans for centuries, he followed the call of the exotic, the primitive, the untamed, and the foreign; he sailed for Tahiti and the Marquesas. There Gauguin found the strong bright colors, the simple forms, the decorative patterns of nature and human figures that confirmed the aesthetic he had already established in France. He also found poverty, malnutrition, and syphilis. With the exception of one visit to France, he spent his last twelve years there, creating his great Tahitian masterpieces.

Suggestions for Discussion

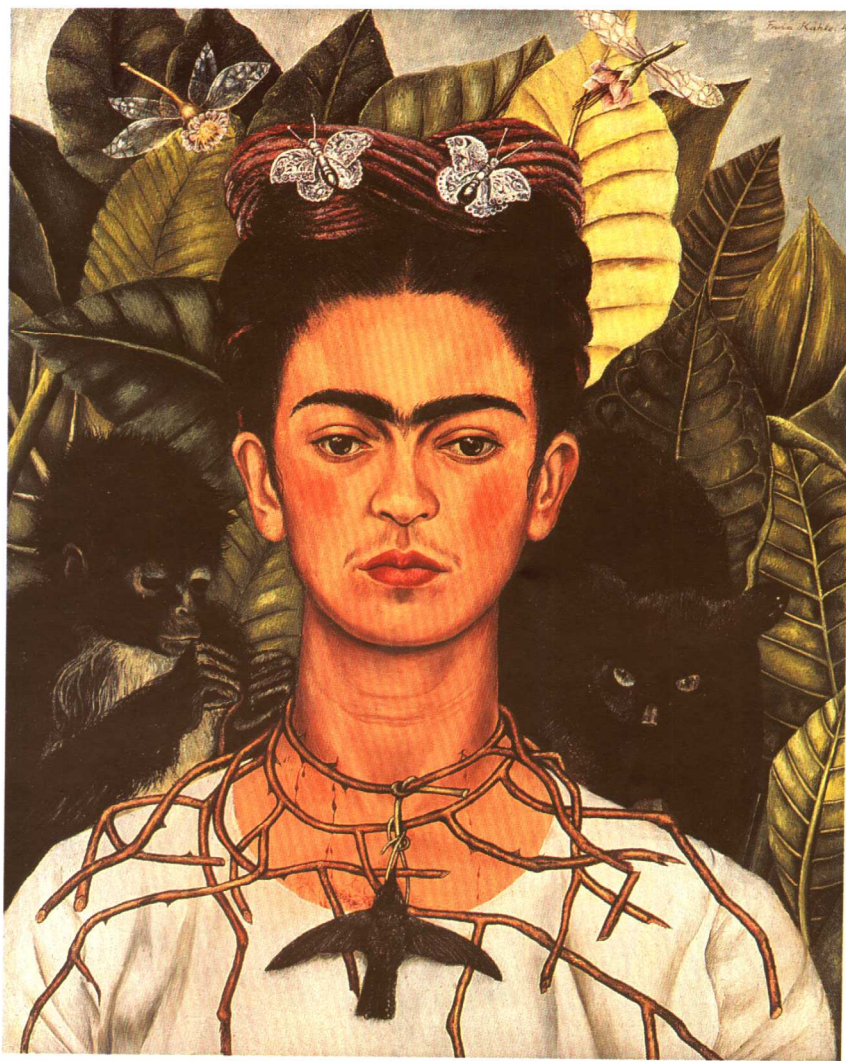
1. Why does the painting seem to divide in half? Which half seems to dominate? Examine the forms and lines of Gauguin's face.
2. Describe the multiple symbols. What do they represent? Can you explain the choice of colors? What is the meaning of the halo? Is Gauguin suggesting he should be wearing it? What is suggested by the fact that one apple is red, one green? (Red and green are complementary colors.)
3. What is Gauguin looking at? What is the relationship between the flowers and the snake? What does the direction of his glance tell you about the artist's sense of self?
4. "Art is an abstraction," said Gauguin. How can a self-portrait be an abstraction? What evidence is there that the portrait reflects an introspective person?
5. Compare and contrast this self-portrait with the following one by Frida Kahlo.

Suggestions for Writing

1. Assume you know nothing about Gauguin's life. Write an essay in which you discuss his sense of self, his age, his health, and his values based only on the clues from this self-portrait.
2. How might Gauguin deal with his autobiography in writing rather than in painting? Discuss some differences between the two genres in presenting a self-portrait. What are some of the difficulties and shortcuts of each?

Frida Kahlo

Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird (1940)



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Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) created her autobiography in her scenes of her own life cycle—from conception and birth to marriage, surgeries, miscarriages, and dreams of her death. These basic subjects are informed, however, by a personal vocabulary. For example, in *My Grandparents, My Parents and I* she includes herself both as a naked child and as a fetus carefully painted on her mother's white wedding dress; the formal portraits of her parents and grandparents are set against a desert background of the rocky mountains and cacti of Mexico where she was born of mestizo origin. *My Birth* shows most graphically the emergence of the fetus; only the mother's head is covered by a white sheet and over her hangs a retablo (a traditional Mexican painting on tin of a miraculous event usually showing figures against an empty background) of the Virgin as Mother of Sorrows pierced with daggers. She painted her own miscarriage on a blood-stained hospital bed surrounded by free-floating objects, such as a fetus, a pelvis, an orchid, and tubes resembling umbilical cords. In short, Kahlo's subject matter was dictated by her own life.

She was born to a religious Catholic mother of Indian and Spanish parentage and to an agnostic father, a German Jew of Hungarian origin. She vowed as a teenager to bear a child to the famous Mexican painter Diego Rivera, twenty years her senior, before she had even met him. She did indeed marry him at age twenty-two, after she had been left with a limp from polio and had almost died in a horrifying accident that destroyed much of her body and forced her to abandon her medical studies. As a result she suffered many miscarriages, many operations and hospitalizations, and much pain throughout the remainder of her life. She never did have a child.

Kahlo and Rivera shared a commitment to political action (both joined the Communist party along with other leading Mexican artists) as well as a devotion to "Mexicanidad," a rekindling of pride in indigenous Mexican art and culture that had long been eclipsed by imported colonial values. He was a womanizer, and she eventually took male and female lovers. During 1940, the year of this self-portrait, they were divorced and remarried; they later divorced again. They traveled to the United States for Rivera's commissions, but it was not until 1938 that Kahlo gained recognition, selling four paintings and showing in an exhibition of "Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives" at the Museum of Modern Art. At this time she began a friendship with André Breton, a poet and the leader of the French Surrealist movement, who hailed Kahlo as one of them. Although she had seen little of the Surrealists' work, Kahlo shared their interest in dreams, the unconscious, eroticism, pain, and death, and she too floated seemingly unrelated objects in her paintings.

Both in narrative paintings and in a large number of self-portraits, Kahlo presents herself by a rather frank rendering of her face with its slight moustache, almond-shaped eyes, and heavy brows, as well as by her choice of costume, accompanying images, and background. Take into account that she had a large collection of native costumes (particularly from Tehauntepec, an ancient matriarchal society), of pre-Columbian jewelry, and of retablos and folk art; that she honored the Aztec belief in the animal alter ego; that the dead bird and butterflies signify dead warriors; and that she once took the Nahuatl name *Xochitl* or "flower," which is the sign for artisans.