

NM Hostetter  
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### Theses in Autobiographies: Examples

1. A. “My whole life ha[s] been a chronology of *changes*”(Malcolm X, Autobiography 346).

B. “Many who today hear me somewhere in person, or on television, or those who read something I said, will think I went to school far beyond the eighth grade. This impression is due entirely to my prison studies”(174).

C. “It was right there in prison that I made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to telling the white man about himself—or die”(188).

2. “One day I wanted to explain myself to myself . . . and it struck me that the first thing I had to say was “I am a woman”” (Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex viii).

3. “Going to confession is hard. Writing a book is hard, because you are ‘giving yourself away.’ But if you love, you want to give yourself. You write as you are impelled to write, about man and his problems, his relation to God and his fellows. You write about yourself because in the long run all man’s problems are the same, his human needs of sustenance and love. . . .

“My life has been divided into two parts. The first twenty-five years were floundering, years of joy and sorrow, it is true, but certainly with a sense of that insecurity one hears so much about these days. I did not know in what I believed, though I tried to serve a cause. Five years after I became a Catholic I met Peter Maurin and his story must play a great part in this work because he was my master and I was his disciple; he gave me ‘a way of life and instruction,’ and to explain what has come to be known as ‘The Catholic Worker Movement’ in the Church throughout the world, I must write of him.

But I will begin with my own story. ‘All my life I have been haunted by God,’ as Kiriloff said in The Possessed” (Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness 10-11).

4. “Most of the women in my family are dead. Cancer. At thirty-four, I became the matriarch of my family. The losses I encountered at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge as Great Salt Lake was rising helped me to face the losses within my family. When most people had given up on the refuge, saying the birds were gone, I was drawn further into its essence. In the same way that when someone is dying many retreat, I chose to stay. . . .

“Perhaps I am telling this story in an attempt to heal myself, to confront what I do not know, to create a path for myself with the idea that ‘memory is the only way home.’

“I have been in retreat. This story is my return” (Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place 3-4).

5. “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass 424).

6. “...I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse....

“I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away.... I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment” (Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl 281)

7. “Who is that girl, the rod still quivering in her hands, rapturously balanced between two worlds? I sometimes think that if I could go back, follow the driveway down, past the woodshed and out into the meadow, I might find what I have lost. Like my brother wandering in the wilderness, I might find home” (Kim Barnes, In the Wilderness: Coming of Age in Unknown Country 8).

8. “My name is Rigoberta Menchu. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only *my* life, it’s also the testimony of my people. . . . The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people” (Rigoberta Menchu, I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala 1).

9.A. “[My father] had lived and died in an intolerable bitterness of spirit and it frightened me, as we drove him to the graveyard...to see how powerful and overflowing this bitterness could be and to realize that this bitterness now was mine. . . . [T]he bitterness which had helped to kill my father could also kill me.”

B. The Negro’s real relation to the white American . . . prohibits, simply, anything as uncomplicated and satisfactory as pure hatred. In order really to hate white people, one has to blot so much out of the mind—and the heart—that this hatred itself becomes an exhausting and self-destructive pose. But this does not mean, on the other hand, that love comes easily: the white world is too powerful, too complacent, too ready with gratuitous humiliation, and, above all, too ignorant and too innocent for that. One is absolutely forced to make perpetual qualifications and one’s own reactions are always canceling each other out. It is this, really, which has driven so many people mad, both white and black. One is always in the position of having to decide between amputation and gangrene. Amputation is swift but time may prove that the amputation was not necessary—or one may delay the amputation too long. Gangrene is slow, but it is impossible to be sure that one is reading one’s symptoms right. The idea of going through life as a cripple is more than one can bear, and equally unbearable is the risk of swelling up slowly, in agony, with poison. And the trouble, finally, is that the risks are real even if the choices do not exist.”

C. “All of my father’s texts and songs, which I had decided were meaningless, were arranged before me at his death like empty bottles waiting to hold the meaning which life would give them for me. This was his legacy: nothing is ever escaped” (James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son” 1715, 1726-27).

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## Final Examination Review

### TERMS

Dorothy Day (1897-1980)	the long loneliness
<i>The Long Loneliness</i> , 1952	Catholic Worker Movement
Peter Maurin	the world's tragedy
Catholic Left	Catholic Worker:
Corporal works of mercy:	distributist
1. Give drink to the thirsty	anarchist
2. Feed the hungry	pacifist
3. Clothe the naked	stock market crash of 1929
4. Visit the sick	Great Depression of 1930s
5. Harbor the harborless	1907 San Francisco earthquake
6. Ransom the captive	hunger strike/ jail with
7. Bury the dead	suffragists
Spiritual works of mercy:	radical
1. Rebuke the sinner	Forster Batterham
2. Console the afflicted	Tamar Teresa
3. Bear wrongs patiently	class conflict
4. Enlighten the ignorant	1933 <i>The Catholic Worker</i> paper
5. Counsel the doubtful	personalism
6. Forgive offenses willingly	"Work, not wages."
philosophy of work	community
Peter Maurin's program:	voluntary poverty
Roundtable discussions	essentialism
Agronomic universities (communal farms)	flesh and spirit conflict
Houses of hospitality	voluntary apostolate
Apostles	disciple-master relationship
"permanent revolution"	community vs. individualism
"Eat what you raise, and raise what you eat."	Cult, culture, and cultivation
"We need to make the kind of society in which it is easier for people to be good."	Malcolm Little
"God gives us our temperaments."	Malcolm Little
"Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves,	but to do away with slavery?"
<i>Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> , 1964	Malcolm X (1925-965)
"It's a case of the chickens coming home to roost."	Detroit Red
Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975)	Hajj to Mecca 1964
Wallace D. Fard; 1931 met E. M.	<i>Muhammad Speaks</i> paper
Prophet	Allah
Islam ("surrender")	"The white man is the devil." justice

Righteousness	human rights, not civil rights
Norfolk, MA, Prison Colony	Black Muslims
Qur'an	Aristotelian appeals
Rhetoric	ethos
Rhetorical appeals	pathos
Black nationalism	logos
Marcus Garvey (1887-1940)	Ku Klux Klan
Garveyites	separatism
Segregation	Muslim Mosque
"Anger can blind human vision" (382).	Orthodox Islam
Nation of Islam	hajj to Mecca
racism	Terry Tempest Williams
<i>Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place</i> , 1991	ornithology
Great Salt Lake	Mormon
Joseph Smith	Utah
Salt Lake City	refuge
Apologetics	Bear River Bird Refuge
General revelation	<i>memento mori</i>
Special revelation	mortality
Mysticism	grief
Mystic	mourning
Nature mystic	creative illness
Henri Ellenberger	depression
Midwife	Trinity
Quaternity	Godhead
Motherbody	genealogy
Radiation	downwinders
Radioactive	fallout
Amazons	matriarch
Patriarchal	pictograph
Sacred space	Clan of One-Breasted Women

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Dorothy Day writes in *The Long Loneliness*, "Going to confession is hard. Writing a book is hard, because you are 'giving yourself away.'" Discuss the several things she means by this statement. Do you find her account revealing, an intimate account of faith and life?
2. Discuss the ways in which Day uses the term "the long loneliness." What does she mean by it? What is the remedy she sees?
3. What did Day mean by saying, "It is a permanent revolution, this Catholic Worker movement?"

4. Day says community is the answer to the long loneliness. Why isn't her book about the joys of community life? Or is it?
5. What did Peter Maurin mean by his statement, "We need to make the kind of society in which it is easier for people to be good"?
6. Compare Day's ideas about community with Williams's ideas about refuge.
7. Day is preoccupied with finding better treatment for the poor; she finds holiness in seeing Christ in the common person. Williams praises God through delight in nature; she finds holiness in birds and Great Salt Lake. Where does Malcolm X find holiness?
8. Compare Dorothy Day's conversion to Malcolm X's. What were the precipitating circumstances?
9. Malcolm X and Dorothy Day both went through a period of floundering before reforming. Describe the arc of both of their lives. What comparisons and contrasts do you see?
10. For a time, Day opposes her radical politics to religion. Why? How does she eventually combine them? (42)
11. Day converts in order to
  - a. bring order to her child's life
  - b. find a community to worship with
  - c. express gratitude to God
  - d. associate herself with the religion of the masses
  - e. all of the above
12. Explain Peter Maurin's philosophy of work and personalism.
13. Explain Day's conviction that one must live with the poor and suffer with them (214, 222).
14. Compare Day's and Williams's views of family.
15. Discuss Day's tone in the autobiography as it relates to her beliefs (256).
16. Abraham Heschel writes that the prophets' preoccupation with justice and righteousness has its roots in a powerful awareness of injustice. Discuss how two or three of our autobiographers are motivated by a sense of the monstrosity of injustice. Who are their opponents? What are their resources?
17. Argue either that Malcolm X's autobiography is or is not racist. Support your thesis with several pieces of evidence.
18. Chart the turning points of Malcolm X's life. Which one or two are the most important, and why?

19. What was Malcolm X's attitude to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad at the time of his death?
20. What motivates Malcolm X's prison studies?
21. What did Malcolm X mean by his statement "The white man is the devil"? Use concrete evidence from the book (181, 271, 340).
22. Explain Malcolm X's defection from the Nation of Islam. Explain his statement "I believed in Elijah Muhammad more firmly than he believed in himself" (214).
23. What is the most important thing you learned from one of our autobiographies, and explain.
24. How did Malcolm X alter his outlook on white people? Explain his attitude at the end of his life (340, 369, 374).
25. Discuss the heroic roles Malcolm X, Dorothy Day and Terry Tempest Williams see themselves as inhabiting and performing. Compare them.
26. Discuss fully Williams's role in her mother's death.
27. What are the themes you saw in the Mabou Mines production of Henrik Ibsen's *Doll House*? Relate them to one or more of our texts.
28. Describe Williams as a nature mystic, a priest, a hero, a warrior, and a midwife. Is this convincing? Affecting? Which role is the most important and believable?
29. Mimi, Williams's grandmother, makes a connection between women's giving up their own authority, their accepting religious and political orthodoxy, and bodily illness (246). Explain and discuss this connection.
30. Explain and discuss the final two paragraphs, p. 64, of *Refuge*. Does the equation between the illness of nature and illness of her mother work?
31. Discuss Williams's account of how to correspond with and empathize with the earth, top of p.85.
32. Explain Williams's idea of expanding the Godhead to include the Motherbody (240-41). What do you think of her idea?
33. Discuss Williams's changing idea of what "refuge" means (178, 254, 267, 273, 280).
34. Explain *Refuge*'s structure. How is it organized, and why?
35. Williams recounts several dreams. Choose one; recount it, and interpret how it expresses the themes of the autobiography.

36. Williams presents civil engineering to combat the flooding of Great Salt Lake and medical technology to combat her mother's cancer as analogous. Are they? Does the parallel between the earth's body and the human body work? Are the various approaches to technology gendered?
37. Williams connects her spirituality closely to nature, and proclaims herself a spiritual adept. Is this a religious practice available to everyone? What is the place of special revelation in *Refuge*?
38. Explain Williams's statement that she is "a woman rewriting [her] genealogy" (241). Why is this significant?
39. Explain Williams's statement, "The price of obedience has become too high."
40. Explain fully Williams's membership in the Clan of One-Breasted Women.
41. Discuss the role of retreat, grief, and mourning in *Refuge*. What is Williams's "return"?
42. Identify the theme(s) of *Refuge*. What is the most important one?
43. Whom do you consider the most exemplary autobiographer we have studied this semester, and why?
44. Compare Williams, Malcolm X, and Dorothy Day as prophets to their cultures. What are their tools?
45. Describe the importance of nature
- a. to Day
  - b. to Williams

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## **Drafting and Revising**

Answer on a separate sheet of paper.

### I. Barnet 17-18

1. Does the draft present an idea? Does it have a focus or make a unified point?
2. Is the idea or are the ideas clearly supported? Is there convincing evidence? Are there sufficient specific details?
3. Is the material effectively organized?

### II. Barnet 23: Questions for Peer Review

1. What is the essay's topic? Is it one of the assigned topics, or a variation on it? Does the draft show promise of fulfilling the assignment?
2. Looking at the essay as a whole, what thesis (main idea) is stated or implied? If stated, where is it stated? If implied, try to state it in your own words.
3. Looking at each paragraph separately:
  - What is the basic point (the topic sentence or idea)? How does the paragraph relate to the essay's main idea or to the previous paragraph?
  - Is each sentence clearly related to the previous sentence?
  - Is the paragraph adequately developed? Are there sufficient specific details or examples?
  - Is the transition from one paragraph to the next clear?
4. Look again at the introductory paragraph. Does it focus your attention on the main point of the essay? If not, does it effectively serve some other purpose? Does the opening sentence interest you in the essay? Do you want to keep reading?
5. Is the conclusion clear? Is the last sentence satisfying?
6. Does the essay have a title? Is it interesting? Informative?
7. What is the greatest strength of the essay? What is its main weakness?
8. What is the most important piece of advice you would offer on this essay?

### **Checklist for Revising Comparisons**

1. Is the point of the comparison—your reason for making it—clear? (Barnet 135)
2. Do you cover all significant similarities and differences? (138)
3. Is the comparison readable—that is, clear and yet not tediously mechanical? (138)
4. Is lumping or splitting the best way to make this comparison? (136-41)
5. If you are offering a value judgment, is it fair? Have you overlooked weaknesses in your preferred subject, and strengths in your less preferred subject?

### **Checklist for Revising Drafts of Persuasive Essays**

1. Are the terms clearly defined? (157-59)
2. Is the thesis stated promptly and clearly? (169)
3. Are the assumptions likely to be shared by your readers? If not, are they reasonably argued rather than merely stated? (163-65)
4. Are the facts verifiable? Is the evidence reliable? (No out-of-date statistics, no generalizations from insufficient evidence?) (154-57)
5. Is the reasoning sound? (161-65)
6. Are the authorities really authorities on this matter? (161-62)
7. Are all of the substantial counterarguments recognized and effectively responded to? (162)
8. Does the essay make use, where appropriate, of concrete examples? (154-55)
9. Is the organization effective? Does the essay begin in a compelling way, keep the thesis in view, and end interestingly? (168-70)
10. Is the tone appropriate? (Avoid sarcasm. Present yourself as fair-minded, and assume that those who hold a view opposed to yours are also fair-minded.) (166-67)