Guidelines: The Theme Synthesis Essay

A. Planning

- Think and list prominent ideas and stylistic elements in the novel.
- Make connections to other essays from *Globalization*: refer to the chart of thematic connections we brainstormed together in class.
- The result: A fully annotated list of ideas

Note: *The process of writing a successful synthesis almost never begins with a claim; the claim is discovered in exploring the possibilities.*

B. Forming Ideas

- Think of your paper as a controlled conversation among the readings in which you are the facilitator.
- Bring together the authors because you realize that they have some common interest and would probably enjoy the opportunity to compare views.

As with paper 2, some of the possible relationships could be the following:

- Comparison: *One author agrees with another.*
- Contrast: *One author disagrees with another.*
- Example: *Material in one source illustrates a statement or an experience in another.*
- Definition: *Material from the texts, considered together, may help you define or redefine a term.*
- Elements of style can also provide the basis for an interesting discussion.

Here are some ways to bring the authors together in a focused conversation (fill in the blanks):

1. *Angelos and Boroditsky can compare notes with Lahiri about how culture and language influence and shape human behavior.*
2. *Lahiri could speak with Leonard and (??) about social isolation.*
3. *Lahiri, Larsen and (??) can exchange ideas about gender stereotypes.*

C. Organization

Careful organization is essential to clarity and coherence in a synthesis essay.

- **Introduction**
  - Introduce the three texts: author, title, and brief orientation about each are needed before you state your claim.

- **Body**
  - Can be organized like a comparison:
    - Point by point
    - Subject by Subject
    - Lens: One text is seen through another

- **Conclusion** – summarizes your findings and highlights their implications
Some helpful tips:

**Argument Structure**

**Introduction:** You must introduce the longer work and two the essays you are using. Your claim will involve all three, even if the starting point is the novel.

**Body Paragraphs:** In your body paragraphs, create an active dialogue between your texts. This does not mean that you absolutely must address all three texts in every body paragraph (or even at least two texts in all body paragraphs). But it does mean that there should be some body paragraphs where you cite ideas from the longer work and at least one of the other essays.

**A New Kind of Comparison:** As was the case with Paper 2, you need to make sure that you are comparing texts to support a claim and to avoid making your claim the comparison itself. Unlike Paper 2 in which you compared two texts of a similar genre, this paper involves one fictional text and two non-fiction essays. This difference means that the essays can offer facts, terminology, or theoretical frameworks through which you can analyze the novel AND that the novel offers something that none of the essays provide – a complex representation of human psychological responses. This contrast is significant and cannot be a claim in itself, but might help you think about how to structure a claim.

**Moving from Questions to Claims**

Once you have a connection between texts in mind, you may start to brainstorm and generate a cluster of ideas, or one or more questions. Creating a central question does not mean you have a claim since a claim must be a statement (that’s why another term for it is “thesis statement”). However, questions (or problems or tensions etc.) almost always lead you to claims. In some sense, your claim will be your answer to the central question that you ask.

**Narrowing Your Focus**

Since you are dealing in some way with three texts in a fairly short paper, it will be important to keep your focus specific. For example, in many of the examples above I refer to “characters.” By doing this, I don’t mean to suggest that you need to address all the major characters in the novel. It is likely that if you tried to address multiple main characters all in detail you would need to address a very, very specific aspect of their experiences. This approach can work, but focusing only on one of the characters can also be a productive strategy.