First Class:
A Journal of First-Year Composition
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

By Jerry Stinnett

In the following pages you'll find wonderful examples of many different kinds of writing: argumentative essays, literary and cultural analyses, and studies of problems facing our world today. While their topics and aims differ, they are alike in their excellence. These six essays were produced by students in Duquesne University's First-Year Writing program, and they won top honors in our annual competition. Of the many essays submitted to this competition, these were the finest—and they truly are excellent examples of what motivated, talented, hard-working students can produce.

The faculty and graduate students of the English department teach the first-year writing classes ("Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum" and "Imaginative Literature and Critical Writing"), but the students in the classes come from across the university. This year the prizewinners represent three of the University's nine undergraduate schools: Natural and Environmental Sciences, Nursing and Liberal Arts. Our goal for the first-year writing classes is to provide a space where Duquesne's diverse students come together and have a common intellectual experience. The students here examine everything from the place of cooking in culture and a proposal for healthier school lunch options in the Pittsburgh public school district to an analysis of language in The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao and a comparison of the written text and theatrical production of Death of a Salesman. Our students are engaging with the world, with creative texts, and with the conditions of their own lives. They are doing what students in a first-year writing class are supposed to do, and doing it impressively.

Although excellent, these essays are not perfect; I have declined to line-edit them because I want the Duquesne community to see what its first-year writers are actually doing—and to show our incoming freshmen what they can realistically aspire to produce. These essays show minds struggling with complicated issues; they are a snapshot of a process of thinking.

I'd like to thank all of the graduate students and faculty who undertook the task of judging these essays. This year, our judges were Jim Purdy, Rebecca May, Erin Speese, Anthony Adams, Sue Howard, and Josie Rush. Thanks to all of them for their hard work, and particular thanks to Nora McBurney, Anna Harp, and Will Powell for their admirable administrative work. As ever, I'd also like to thank the Office of the Provost, whose support keeps this contest and journal going; Michelle Boehm and the staff of the Public Affairs office, who design and produce this journal; and of course all of the magnificent instructors in the First-Year Writing program.
Cooking, Creativity, and Culture: An Analysis of the Meaning of Cooking

By Ashley McIlroy, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Justin Kisbaugh

Throughout my childhood, family dinners consisted of take-out or eating at a restaurant. Usually, we chose between Chinese or Mexican. On other days, my brothers and I helped ourselves to whatever was in the pantry. However, some of the best meals I ate were at my friends’ houses because their mothers would cook from scratch! At my neighbor’s house, the aroma of summer filled the backyard; brightly colored barbecue sides of coleslaw and baked beans garnished grilled hamburgers and hotdogs. My best friend’s table groaned under the weight of Sunday night pasta dinners and pot roasts smothered in cheesy marinara sauces. Many different types of food surrounded me, but none were truly my own. Eventually, I taught myself how to cook. I started by looking up different recipes online and shopping for the ingredients. My early experiments were only mediocre. One time, as I boiled spaghetti, flames burst out of the pot. With each failure, I got better at selecting ingredients and preparing the food. Soon, I was creating masterpieces. I learned that cooking is more than blindly following a recipe because it is a creative act that involves combining simple modifications, multicultural experiments, and individual preferences with knowledge and skill.

The history of cooking is mysterious, but there is one unquestionable fact: cooking requires heat. As we learned in history class, cavemen were hunter-gatherers, eating nuts, fruits, and occasionally meats. We also learned that cavemen, or more specifically the homo sapiens branch of our ancestral family, learned how to create and control fire. Although we do not know the exact origins of cooked foods, science writer Elizabeth Pennisi reports that researchers determined that “there seems to be a genuine energetic advantage in cooking food” (Pennisi). Diets that included cooked fruits, vegetables, and meats gave more nutrition and calories to our ancestors. By spending less time and energy searching for food, early humans started to consider how the food they ate affected them. Greater efficiency meant that food began to take on new significance as “eating ‘gradually became a key element of group structure, a mark of identity, and a symbolic means of expressing thought’” (Super 169). As cooking acquired meaning beyond nutrition, it became an important part of daily life and identity for all early cultures. Still, the importance of cooking is a mystery to many people.

Food is more than simply fuel. The choices that individuals make about food define their cultural identities; one thinks of pasta as Italian, curry as Indian, and croissants as French. Food anthropologist Sidney Mintz states that these cultural distinctions occurred because “like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart” (109). Food choice is a shared characteristic among a group because it gives identity. Food and cooking are a mark of identification that both unifies and divides. Essentially, food defines one as a member of a particular cultural group through both the ingredients and methods of cooking. American cooking incorporates many traditional ingredients from other cultures. Cooking transformed America from English colonies into a melting pot of flavors from many cultures.

Every cook develops techniques and preferences based on their background and cultural influences. These preferences affect the decisions they make in the kitchen, defining the steps taken to prepare a
meal and the ingredients used to form a simple dish. For instance, Italian and Mexican restaurants feature different flavors and styles of cooking. Both are popular within the melting pot culture of America. In our country, different cultural foods often become popular because people want to expand their knowledge. According to the Journal of Consumer Science, modern cooking features “The dominance of Asian cuisines... including Asian meals in general, Chinese, Thai, Indian, curries and more (Worsley 258).” Using new cultural sources helps an American cook to push the limits of creativity. Incorporating foreign ideas is more than just a bridge between cultures because it introduces new ingredients, flavors, and methods. Once a new skill is mastered, cooks can combine them with traditional methods in new, creative ways.

Along with combining cultural sources, creativity involves introducing individual flare into a dish. First, a chef develops skills; without basic understanding of how to select, chop, and prepare ingredients, one cannot begin to create new styles. Mark Bittman believes “like any skill, cooking gets easier as you do it more; every time you cook, you advance your level of expertise. Someday you won’t even need recipes (53).” Once cooks develop skills through practice, they then have the ability to attempt to create a masterpiece dish. The chef relies on prior knowledge to reinvigorate old recipes with new combinations of ingredients. French chef Marie-Odile Monchicourt believes “culinary creativity is mainly concerned with achieving a harmonious relationship between [smell, taste, and texture]..., on the one hand, and the shape and color of the ingredients of a dish, on the other (DeBevoise 100).” The relationship between ingredients defines a dish as good or bad. When chefs experiment, they take great risks. Yet, with the combination of skill and knowledge, they achieve harmony with the ingredients. When designing unique and creative dishes, only knowledge and skill limit the chef.

Cooking, like photography, requires both technical skill and creativity to create a finished product. A good photographer first learns how to manipulate the aperture and focus on the camera. These technical elements of photographic composition are like knife skills or mixing in a kitchen: they form the basis of any photograph or recipe. To separate the work from others, a photographer takes this knowledge and fuses it with individual perspective to create new methods. In the same way, the creative cook combines knowledge and experimentation to improve a recipe. Creative French chef Marie-Odile Monchicourt says “the artisanal cook, or craftsman, stands in contrast to what might be called “inspired” cooks, whose ambition is to dream up dishes that don’t exist, to use ingredients to make works of art that will express a sentiment, arouse an emotion (Worsley 264).” Like the photographer, a cook becomes emotive and expressive. Once emotion enters the kitchen, the chef becomes a creator, not just an executor of a recipe. Creativity requires basic knowledge and skill to execute the recipe, but also requires the desire to experiment and a love of creation. Just like taking a picture, creating a meal requires different elements of skills and knowledge that can then be combined in new ways to produce original masterpieces.

Food scientists, however, often remove creative elements from cooking, thereby transforming the process into a mathematical puzzle. Baking certain delicate desserts requires high levels of precision. A chef must measure the ingredients and prepare the food exactly as prescribed to achieve the perfect outcome. Angel food cake, for instance, has a precise preparation. First, egg whites must be chilled and no yolk at all can be present in the egg mixture. No oils or fatty residues can be on the surface of bowls and beaters. Even the amount of time spent beating the mixture that includes a perfect measurement of cream of tartar and sugar cannot be modified. The texture of an angel food cake is wholly dependent on blindly following the recipe (Rombauer 626). However, the presentation of the finished cake leaves room for creativity. Perhaps one includes strawberry compote or fresh raspberries. The cake might be decorated with chocolate frosting or inscribed with “Happy Birthday!” Despite the necessity of adhering to this recipe, the chef’s individual preferences allow the final presentation of the dish to be creative. In the same way, many complicated baked goods such as soufflé or meringue must be prepared precisely, and then creatively modified.
Critics might argue that too much of a good thing, or in this case a creative thing, becomes mundane. Famous chefs across the world strive to achieve Michelin star status; it takes every ounce of knowledge, skill, and especially creativity to earn this honor. Even more difficult is earning two or three stars from the Michelin critics. Therefore, once a chef achieves this exalted status, he might continue to reproduce his successful dishes over and over. The repetition leads to dating of the dish and a once creative entrée suddenly becomes commonplace. Thornton’s, a famous Dublin-based restaurant, earned two Michelin stars, but in 2006, the guide downgraded the restaurant to a single star (Humphreys). The Michelin judges are notoriously secretive, but made clear that Thornton’s lost the star because “Obviously the food is still good because it got one star, but it was not as good as before” (Humphreys). This alludes to the importance of creativity as an essential element in cooking. Had the chefs at Thornton’s continued to experiment and pioneer new recipes at the same high level, they might have maintained their star. Thus, creativity constantly shift and changes; failure to be fresh and new makes a cook commonplace.

My own kitchen was home to experimentation and creativity. The shift from charred cookie lumps on stained baking sheets to perfectly torched ramekins of crème brûlée showcased my developing skills and exposed my love of creating a meal. For my family’s annual holiday party, I prepared an assortment of treats: German gingerbread with blue cheese, American Santa shaped sugar cookies laced with cinnamon, brittle English peppermint bark, and anise-flavored Italian pizzelles. Proud of my creations, I was now certain that the creation of any dish means far more than simply executing a recipe. In order to be creative, a chef relies on individualistic flare to combine common ingredients, international techniques, and scientific understanding of recipes. This creativity in cooking moves beyond the kitchen. For some, cooking in this way allows them to expand their knowledge through experimentation. For others, it allows them to simply become individuals, exploring the world through food much like a photographer does through image. For still others, the creativity might show one’s care or concern for a friend or family member, by incorporating a favorite staple into a newly designed dish. Pushing the limits of creativity showcases a chef’s abilities and individualism and allows a simple dish to become a masterpiece. Learning to experiment, and thus to create, transforms an average cook into a confident chef whose risks in the kitchen reflect life experiences.
Works Cited


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Predictably, and understandably, when famous books become movie adaptations they must first undergo drastic reductive cuts to fit hundreds of pages of content into two hours of video. Unfortunately during this process, it is not uncommon for the overarching message of the book to be diluted, whether due to time constraints, media censorship, or differences in artistic vision between author and director. In the adaptation of The Big Sleep, Marlowe’s most potent conflicts with morality are masked by a thick layer of romance and hardboiled hypermasculinity, warping his self-doubting personality into that of a confident, in-control hero. The deeper meaning behind his struggle with morality is excised, replaced instead with scenes that will perpetuate his role as a male power fantasy. As a result, the audience’s perception of Marlowe’s character is drastically skewed from that of a relatable human being into no more than heroic archetype.

Some of the more conspicuous changes made in the film involve the addition of extraneous women into various scenes, none of whom seem to have any real significance of presence. For Marlowe’s purposes, they are disposable single-scene extras who are employed as plot devices, information dispensers, or vehicles for affirming his evidently irresistible sex appeal. Most women seem to be positioned strategically to interact with Marlowe in ways that will bolster his reputation of masculinity to the audience, framing him as an attractive object of feminine desire. The women are simply ornamental tools are treated accordingly; movie Marlowe shares a drink with a librarian to get information on Geiger—pointedly calling her ‘pal’ afterwards, to her visible disappointment—, chats with a coquettish cab driver who eagerly gives him her number, and has a flippant discussion with a waitress at a café consisting of “Hey sugar, you got a match?” and the instant reply “Sure thing”. The nameless women are not recurring and are never given further mention or acknowledgment in the film. In each of these instances, Marlowe interacts with the female characters only until they have exhausted their use, before immediately and purposefully moving on to continue his heroic mission. They serve no purpose except to affirm Marlowe’s charm and resourcefulness, falling at his feet to help sell his male power fantasy persona.

Even lead female characters who do in fact have concrete roles in the novel are not immune to changes that further reinforce Marlowe’s masculinity. He is presented as a classic movie hero who has every woman desperate for his attentions, and ends up running away with Vivian by the end of the film. She has a disproportionately large role as a romance interest in the movie—how could Marlowe fit the role of a leading man without a leading lady at his side? By falling into yet another trope of cinema, Marlowe’s chivalric tendencies are all but ignored. It is worthy to note that one of the only points in the movie during which Marlowe shows any sign of weakness occurs when he is with Vivian. “I’m scared, Angel”, he admits, raking in sympathy points from the audience. The only time it is suitable for a hero to express uncertainty, posits the movie, is when confiding in a woman who is in love with him. This is an interesting directive choice because it stands in stark contrast to the countless instances in the book when the reader is privy to Marlowe’s wavering confidence and internal moral tribulations, and it also contrasts movie Marlowe’s projection of absolute control seen in nearly every other interaction he has with Vivian. Aside from this singular moment of vulnerability, he is always one step ahead of the Sternwood daughter, reassuring the audience that he is wholly in control of himself and the women around him. He proves that she is incapable of taking advantage of him by calling her out for trying to “sugar [him] off the case”, and also when accusing her of staging an act with Eddie to fool him. “Open up that bag and I’ll take back what I’ve said, I’ll eat...
every word of it,” he asserts confidently, knowing that he has caught her in a lie. He is self-assured and unswerving, and his hardboiled masculinity is juxtaposed against her feminine wiles. His line “No, let me do the talking” at the end of the film is a fairly accurate manifestation of their relationship. Although they are romantically involved in the film, it is made explicitly clear who is in control of the couple; this imbalance exists as further evidence that women are being employed only to highlight move Marlowe’s dominance.

Marlowe’s exertion of complete control over characters and situations persists throughout the movie, and is seen in slight alterations made to parallel events of the book. Many happy accidents and acts of pure luck may occur in the novel, but in order to uphold the air of unwavering confidence, every action taken by movie Marlowe is premeditated and deliberate. There is a scene after Marlowe leaves Eddie Mars’s Casino where he pointedly retrieves his gun from his car, returning to hide in wait to bravely intervene and stop Vivienne’s staged hijacking. Here, his heroic cunning and forethought are emphasized, and he immediately seizes control of the situation by taking the “thief’s” pistol. Guns, for movie Marlowe, can be seen as a metaphors for control and power. In this and other scenes, he frequently snatches them away from other characters—as when he takes Brody’s, Agnes’s, and Carmen’s near simultaneously—in order to reclaim control over a situation. In this scene of the novel, by direct contrast, Marlowe is on a meandering walk when he stumbles upon the masked man by pure accident, using his pipe to fool the man into thinking he has a gun (141-143). Later in the movie, this concept is again mirrored when Marlowe lets out the air of his tires deliberately as an excuse to get to Canino; contrastingly, book Marlowe runs over a galvanized tack on the road and wholly admit that “Fate stage-managed the whole thing” (182). This evidence of fallibility—of humanity—is what allows the reader to relate to book Marlowe, giving them the chance to understand and empathize with his struggle to overcome his failings and achieve his goal. Movie Marlowe, however, does not make mistakes; he is more hero than human. The overall message is warped from a story about the corruption of morality into a thrilling action film, teaching that as long as a man is tough, witty, and charming, he can play by his own rules with no moral consequences.

Morality is yet again ignored in the final scene of the movie, which features a climactic showdown between Eddie Mars—framed as the central antagonist—and our hero. Though it is ultimately not a bullet fired from Marlowe’s gun that kills him, the detective still effectively murders Mars at the end of the film by outsmarting him handily. Movie Marlowe betrays no hesitance in this final scene, ruthlessly forcing Mars to walk out to greet his death without a hint of observable moral apprehension on his own part. The fact that Marlowe doesn’t shoot Mars himself by no means alleviates his guilt; it simply offers another opportunity to feature his strategic thinking skills as he tricks the villain and the police, escaping unscathed. Once again he proves his ability to act concisely and deliberately; the film implies here that only the cunning and heroism of actions matter, not the questionable morality inherent in committing them. As further support, in both versions of the story Marlowe has already killed once. In the book, however, he admits to the regret he feels about the messy business, expressing his guilt that he couldn’t kill Canino “like a gentleman of the old school”, an dhad no choice but to trick the man before shooting him quickly (202). The movie makes no attempts to address the complexity of Marlowe’s conscience, oversimplifying his main goal of solving the case without acknowledging his constant fight to remain noble while doing so. By deliberately choosing not to mention any potential moral questioning on Marlowe’s part as a result of taking these extreme deadly measures, the movie ignores a perfect opportunity to reflect upon Marlowe’s moral corruption as he becomes “part of the nastiness” as is so thoroughly extrapolated upon in the novel (230). Rather, the finale of the film is climactic and satisfying, as the hero detective defeats the villain and gets the girl. Angst over the corruption of knighthood has no place in The Big Sleep film, and the message is reduced to a one-dimensional story of a manly, brave hero.
One of the novel’s most critical themes is developed through the elucidation of Marlowe’s inner turmoil over knighthood and integrity, but the movie’s depiction of this character is thoroughly overwhelmed by romantic clichés and archetypes of masculinity. In addition to the lack of consequences for misogyny or murder, the hollow characterization of both the main protagonist and the female characters of the film prevent it from appealing to the humanity of its watchers. The movie’s message has no weight and is nowhere near as powerfully stirring as Marlowe’s struggle in the book; by comparison, movie Marlowe is nothing more than a one-dimensional action hero solving a case and beating up bad guys.

Works Cited

The Big Sleep. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner Bros., 1946. Film.
The F-Word in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

By Kaitlin Andres, School of Nursing
Instructor: Cheryl Read

Heads turn when someone hears it. It can be said casually mentioned or used in a heated argument. Yes, the F-word. No, not that F-word; the other one: Feminism. A new wave of feminism is here and is an important topic more than ever. Between fighting for women’s rights and bringing down sexism, feminism seems to be a hot topic for all types of literature. The 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction book, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz is one example of such literature. Narrated by a womanizer named Yonior, Oscar Wao follows the life of the fat Dominican loser, Oscar de Leon, and at the same time tells the story of the rise and fall of Yonior’s love life. Although the book explores Oscar’s life, it also maintains a focus on the oppressed voice and struggles of an immigrant family living under an oppressive Dominican Republic regime. Even though women in the book are subjected to violence and objectification, Díaz’s book pulls a double agent and uses this to exploit the problems of sexism. Through feminist literary criticism, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao can be argued to be a piece of feminist literature because Díaz cleverly uses the irony of Dominican culture to show the dangers of hypermasculinity, shows how following gender roles led to the downfall of characters, and puts an emphasis of using strong female character to shape the story of Oscar’s life as oppose to male characters.

It is crucial to understand feminism in order to determine how The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar should be viewed. Why do so many people think of ‘feminist’ as a dirty word? Many girls nowadays try to steer away from being identified as one. Despite what many say, feminism is not about bra burning, hating men, and destroying the traditional nuclear family. Feminism throughout the different waves have changed but have maintained the same goal. It focuses on gender equality, not just the advancement of a particular gender. In the article The Next Generation: Young Women on Feminism from Sage Journal, four young women are interviewed to see their views on feminism. All of them seemed to believe that feminism has become more of an umbrella term to encompass a wider range of problems and different movements including sexuality, cultural differences, sex education, the sex industry, civil rights, and reproduction rights (Winston 1). Even though the feminism and the Women’s Rights Movement was made to help women have the same the rights as men, it has expanded to much more than that. A common word seen in feminism is the ‘patriarchy’. The patriarchy is a society that is “male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains” (Abrams 89). Patriarchal society have been around since biblical times starting with Abraham, the father of all nations. Men are seen as the head of the family unit and the source of power while women are usually submissive to them. Because of this, the patriarchy is responsible for the implementation of the societal values and gender roles that are seen today. As seen later in this paper, the Dominican Republic with be referred to as a patriarchal society because of its male headed society.

In addition to feminism, it is also important to understand feminist literature. Feminist literature, or feminist criticism, involves “reconstitute[ing] the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values” (Abrams 90). Feminist criticism analyzes pieces of literary by questioning women’s role in society and application of the patriarchy. Feminist critics aim to make readers look at pieces of literature differently to bring to light of the sexual biases written about women by
male writers. Many famous works of literature someone will think of will most likely have a male protagonist: The Odyssey, MacBeth, Hamlet, Great Expectations, Beowulf, Lolita, The Great Gatsby and so on. Many of the male protagonists embody strong masculine traits. Female characters – if any are even mentioned – are subordinate and marginalized usually in a sexual way – by their male counterparts. Feminist literary criticism is important in The Brief Life of Oscar Wao because there are countless parts throughout the book where women are marginalized and subjugated. Many critics argue about the subjectivity and violence the female characters endure throughout the book that make it a very non-feminist book. In an interview with Elle magazine, Díaz provides a daunting rationale for this. Díaz explains “representing a subjectivity doesn’t equate with approving the subjectivity. So the questions we have to ask are...What does our interaction with this subjectivity do for us?” (Vitzthum). By shedding light on the epidemic of violence against women in the Dominican Republic, Díaz makes the reader make several questions: Why is this a problem? How did it arise? What does this mean for me? Just because he writes about objectifying women does not mean he supports it. Diaz’s first point to explain violence on women is to explain male behavior first.

Through feminist criticism, Díaz uses irony to expose the dangers of hypermasculinity in Dominican culture and how it hurts Oscar and the other male characters around him. Contrary to popular belief, feminism also seeks to empower men – not necessarily in the same way as women empowerment, but to bring to light on the stereotypes men face that hurt them. A problem in the Dominican culture as found in other patriarchal societies is hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity is the “inflation of stereotypic masculine attitudes and behaviors involving callous attitudes toward women, the belief that violence is manly and danger is exciting...the valuation of status, self-reliance, aggressive activities, dominance over others, and devaluation of emotion and cooperation” (Corprew 1). Hypermasculinity hurts men because it devalues them. The only acceptable attitude and behavior accepted from a man is an emotionless, macho, womanizing sex god. Compassion, intimacy, empathy, and emotional openness are deemed as feminine qualities and seen as weak and unintelligible. Hypermasculinity will avoid these qualities as all cost. Any man that falls outside of the norm is seen as a loser and is usually alienated from the group. In the Dominican culture, there is a heavy emphasis on stereotypical male behavior. Writer for the Undercurrent journal, Courtney Vaughan, describes her experience as a women doing volunteer abroad work in the Dominican Republic: “[hypermasculinity was] more obvious because it expressed itself in a way that was less covert than the patriarchy that exists in Euroamerican societies” (Vaughan 67). In The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, Oscar struggles with fulfilling the hypermasculine Dominican identity. The only time Oscar felt like a true dominicano was when he was young. He was a cute chubby boy who would always holler at all the ladies. He even had two girlfriends at the same time. Ever since he lost both girls, he lost his macho-ness and Dominican identity. As he grew up, he became a complete loser. Instead of sleeping with multiple girls, Oscar spent his time obsessing over nerdy science fiction comics and movies. While all the other “real” Dominican boys were a bunch of suave good-looking motherfuckers, Oscar was an ugly 245-pound boy who could barely acknowledge a girl. His Tio Rudolfo kept telling him “Grab a muchcha, y metéselo. That will take care of everything. Start with a fea. Coje that fea y metéselo” (Díaz 24) (This roughly translates to “Grab an ugly girl and put it in her”). The only way Oscar can gain respect and his Dominican identity back is by losing his virginity. By imposing hypermasculinity on Oscar, he feels like he is worth nothing until he has sex. This is the main source of his low self-esteem and crappy life. While women are oppressed through the patriarchy, men are no exception. Oscar feels trapped and unable to succeed in life because he cannot get girls. According to Dominican culture, this means Oscar is a loser. Even though he has other talents such as writing, it does not matter because it is not important for men to like writing. Through this feminist criticism, Díaz exposes the problem of patriarchal values in
men by showing the dangers of hypermasculinity.

Feminism is also tied to Oscar Wao by showing how following gender roles and stereotypes instituted by the patriarchy are harmful to people because it only leads to the downfall of the characters. The first problem with gender roles is the dichotomy of male and female. Specific actions, emotions, and behavior are assigned to each gender. Characteristics of male and female are black and white with little to no grey space. In addition to her article in the Undercurrent, Courtney Vaughan explains that having a limited spectrum of characteristics is harmful because it “suppress[es] one from fully expressing themselves for fear of acting outside of her or his own gender norm” (Vaughan 66). In Oscar Wao, there are specific gender roles seen throughout the story. A prominent stereotype seen in Oscar Wao is sexuality. In Dominican culture, the men are supposed to be hooking up with multiple girls whether or not if they have a partner. Girls on the other hand are supposed to be pure and wait until marriage for sex. Y unior, the narrator of the story and a prime Dominican boy, becomes one of Lola’s flings, but nothing eventually comes of it. Deep inside, Y unior knows he has fallen in love with Lola but does not admit it because he is conditioned to only understand fucking girls will make him a real man. Y unior does not understand how to be in love so he continually sleeps with other girls in hopes of fulfilling the emptiness he has for Lola. In the end when Lola has her own child and her own life, Y unior still yearns to be with her but still refuses to admit his feelings. He dreams “we would be in bed together like old times…and I’d finally try to say words that could have saved us. ______ ______ ______” (Díaz 327). It is obvious the three blanks would be ‘I love you’. Diaz puts these blanks in the text on purpose to show despite how much Y unior still wants to be with Lola, he still dismisses his feelings in fear of it being out of the norm and the fact that he does not understand how to truly love another person. Feelings are for the weak and makes a person vulnerable. Y unior insists on keeping his macho dominicano façade. On the other hand when Oscar’s mother, Beli, was caught having premarital sex with Jack Pujols, La Inca gave her a “tongue-lasing...excoriating her poor judgment, her poor morals, her poor everything” (Díaz 102). If it wasn’t for La Inca kind spirit, Beli would have probably been beaten until she was in the hospital and then beaten again when she got out. Díaz sheds light on this double standard, and it makes the reader realize how these standards make a stalemate in society. No one can win without criticism.

Another example of the downfall of a character due to harmful stereotypes and gender roles is male aggression and the concept of love. There is a correlation between violence and love as the reader sees all these girls in the story in abusive relationships: Maritza and her twice-her-age boyfriend, Ybón and El Capitan, Beli and the Gangster, and Trujillo and literally every female he sees. The stereotypical male should not show any type of touch-y feel-y emotions. Thus, there is a prominent showcase of aggression in men. On the other end of the spectrum, the stereotypical female should be the opposite and come off as serene, fragile, and compassionate. Commitment is risky because men will succumb to female desires and lose their manliness. In an analysis of gender and politics in Oscar Wao, Óscar Montero discusses the paradox of Dominican love by saying “a traditional society as the Dominican love stands for male weakness because women’s access to power is predicated upon love” (Montero 59-60). As women strive for love in order to be powerful or become relevant in society, men will push away resulting in aggression. When Beli became pregnant with the Gangster’s baby, she claimed this was “the magic she’d been waiting for [as] she placed her hand on her flat stomach and heard the wedding bells...saw in her mind’s eye the house that had been promised” (Díaz 136). By having the Gangster’s baby, Beli thought they would be together, and she would be able to move up in society. She will be finally be able to do great things by being married to the Gangster. This turns out to be obviously false as two of the Gangster’s men are sent to beat her to death. The Gangster torments Beli to a point where she is forced to flee the country and go to New York in America. By exploiting gender roles in the Dominican culture as seen in Oscar Wao, Díaz expresses
feminist ideals because he shows how these assigned roles by the patriarchy are harmful to everyone.

The last way Oscar Wao should be considered feminist literature is Díaz’s focus on using strong female character to shape Oscar’s life. In Fremio Sepulveda’s analysis on Oscar Wao in his paper Coding the Immigrant Experience, he explains that “third-world wom[en] as a body within both patriarchy and imperialism has no room from which to speak and be heard” (Sepulveda 28). Living in an oppressive government especially with violence against women make it difficult for women to strive for greater things. Strong, independent women are the opposite image of the Dominican culture’s view and is frowned upon if they do not conform to the proper roles of a women. Díaz uses strong women to fight the timid image of Dominican image. Instead of using males to shape Oscar’s life – which is traditional to many patriarchal societies – Díaz uses the females present in Oscar’s life to dictate how the story goes. Unlike how the men in the story are portrayed as weak and corrupted, the females in the story overcome the traumatic events that happened in their life – which are usually caused by other men. Díaz’s feminist tone is clearly seen when the reader is first introduced to the story of Beli, Oscar’s mother: “Before there was an American Story...before Oscar and Lola...there was their mother, Hypatía Belicia Cabral” (Díaz 77). The whole book of Oscar Wao is completely dependent on one woman: his mother. Without Beli, there would be no Oscar, no Lola, no story to tell. Oscar’s dad is nonexistent and is given no mark of importance. Beli grew up knowing only cruel things about the world. She was raised during the dictatorship of Trujillo – a regime so oppressive you could be sent to jail for mispronouncing his mother’s name wrong (Díaz 214). Her whole family was killed by Trujillo (or as they say “suspicious circumstances”) and she was tossed around from family to family where she was abused until meeting La Inca. She had her share of shitty relationships but was able to overcome come them even when death seemed imminent. When she moved to America and had Lola and Oscar, she raised them by herself and work three jobs until she could buy a house. Even though Beli turned out to be a horrible mother, she still showed great strength in order to survive. Lola, Oscar’s sister, took care of Oscar while their mother’s health slowly deteriorated and started to become clinically insane. Oscar was the one of the only people that Lola truly loved. She watched out for Oscar up until the day he died. Lola rejected to conform to be the perfect Dominican daughter or “just a nice way of saying a perfect Dominican slave” (Díaz 56). She did not want to conform to what her mother wanted her to be. La Inca, the matriarch to this triad of women, is another strong women present in Oscar’s life. Widowed after a few months of marriage, La Inca never remarried, but continued to make a life for herself. She opened a very successful bakery on her own without any assistance from a man. She was credited with saving Beli’s life when Beli was taken to the sugar cane fields to die through an intense prayer circle with the other women in the village. Without any of these women, the story of Oscar would seek to exist. By writing about strong women, Díaz is able to use feminist criticism to defy the roles and beliefs of the patriarchy.

It may be hard to see, but Oscar Wao is a feminist piece of literature. Díaz does not explicitly say “Empower Women! Support feminism!” or anything of that sort in the book. Instead, his writing makes the reader question the wrongdoing against women and the stereotypes of men and women found in the book. It makes the reader wonder why an author would write these vulgar things. Diaz exposes the dangers of the patriarchy for men through hypermasculinity, explains why gender roles are bad, and finally brings to light the strong women that are written in the book. This is the genius of Junot Díaz. He sheds light on the issues of sexism in an unorthodox way through irony. Díaz writes about problems such as sexism and writes characters that exemplifies these sexist characteristics. From there, it is up to the reader to realize the deeper problem in society and decide what they should do in order to fix this problem. It is important to be informed to be aware of these issues. The next step is to be proactive to combat sexism and spread feminism to all.
Works Cited


While living a day in the life of a young nutrition-lacking teenager in Brooklyn, the author of The American Way of Eating, Tracie McMillan, writes:

“at home [the teenager’s grandmother] refused to cave in to her granddaughter’s taste for junk food. Instead, she fed Vanessa [the teenager] traditional Latin-Caribbean fare: pots of rice and beans, platters of plátanos, sticky and sweet. ‘It’s kind of hard to eat healthy around here’ said Vanessa, and we went for a walk to Burger King, where she got a Whopper” (pg. 4).

Vanessa and her well-intentioned grandmother prove that, indeed, you can lead a horse to water, but you can not force it to drink.

However, Vanessa’s case is not rare. Although unfortunate, many children have at least some form of access to healthy food, but choose the unhealthy alternative instead. This is the case in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, where issues of nutrition and sustainability collide. Nutritious food is in many ways foreign to the people in this food desert, meaning that a systemic issue has occurred in the Hill District: there is generation after generation failing to choose nutrition over junk. With this in mind, it is clear that to fix this issue of food and sustainability in the Hill District, change must occur with the children of the community. This change would also be most effective if addressed, largely, in a community school. Therefore, in an effort to develop healthier eating habits in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, specifically among the younger generations of the neighborhood, the Board of Directors of Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) should allocate the resources necessary to provide Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 with school lunches consisting primarily of local foods, because it is not only healthier, but also more affordable and sustainable.

The issues of the Hill District began approximately thirty years ago, when the Mellon Arena effectively cut the Hill District off from Downtown Pittsburgh. This, coupled with the closure of the Penn Incline (serving to transport people to and from the Hill District and the Strip District), resulted in a thirty-year period where residents of the Hill District had no access to a full service neighborhood grocer and great difficulty in finding transportation to other neighborhoods to fulfill this need. These two events mark a thirty-year period of time in which the residents of the Hill District became generationally dependent upon cheap, unhealthy, and processed foods. While suburban residents shopped in ever-growing super markets, Hill District residents turned to limited-service convenience stores to feed themselves and their families.

Although the Hill District is no longer considered a food desert, it still seems like one. By definition, the lack of access to full service grocery stores classified the Hill District as a food desert, but in 2013, a single Shop n’ Save opened up in the Hill District. Accordingly, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Services no longer classifies the neighborhood as a food desert. Nonetheless, the effects of the thirty-year food desert continue to be felt. In deed, the Hill District is still extraordinarily unhealthy – which means it probably shares the same problems of other low-income areas. Jerry Shannon, author of Food Deserts: Governing Obesity in the Neoliberal City, notes that the “obesity epidemic” especially affects low-income areas (par 4). Shannon adds: “the consumption of
sugar-laden drinks, highly processed snacks, and fast food has been most closely linked to this trend” (par 4). Sugar-laden drinks, highly processed snacks, and fast food are exactly the kinds of foods being served at convenience stores. Although a full-service grocer now serves the community, the convenience stores that once took the place of the grocer still compose a large part of the Hill District diet. This habit of purchasing unhealthy food clearly has outlasted the food desert years, as Diana Nelson reports for the Pittsburgh Post Gazette “the [Hill District Shop n’ Save] is doing about a third of the business expected” (par 8). While it is possible that Hill District shoppers are searching for lower prices elsewhere, it is much more likely that the community still frequents limited-service convenience stores to sustain themselves. This, no doubt, contributes to the obesity epidemic that Shannon associates with low-income areas. Thus, because of the Hill District’s troubled history with food, it is clear that lack of nutrition is systemic. However, it is no longer lack of access that negatively impacts the health of the Hill District.

In fact, many recent studies argue that food deserts and their ubiquitous lack of access to healthy foods have no correlation to obesity in communities. Soumya Karlamangla puts it best in her article “Food Deserts may Play Little Role in Obesity, Rand Study Says” for the Los Angeles Times, when she writes “conventional wisdom suggests that if you live in an area devoid of fresh, healthy food, you won’t eat well. These so-called food deserts, the logic goes, are a root cause of the obesity epidemic” (par 1). It does seem logical to assume, that, if low-income areas are more prone to obesity because of the higher prices of healthy foods, then a lack of access to these foods might also make large contributions to obesity rates. However, this is not the case. Karlamangla reports that the Rand Corp. published a study “that found virtually no link between the type of food and drinks that Los Angeles County adults consume and the proximity of fast-food outlets, grocery stores and convenience stores to their homes” (par 4). Quite simply, access is not the solution to solving the health issues of low-income neighborhoods. Instead, I argue that lack of access was the original cause of the obesity epidemic that Jerry Shannon notes took place in the 1980s. However, while local governments and the “neoliberal city” have tried to improve access to healthy food outlets, obesity and other health issues have not yet improved. Whereas a lack of access was the root of the problem, increased access cannot be the solution. In fact, habits and lifestyles have revolved around unhealthy food, so access alone will not be the problems solution. Instead, solution must involve lifestyle and attitude changes. For a significant improvement in health to occur in the Hill District, it will have to begin in a community school.

Providing school children with healthier meals always will be and always has been a noble goal. However, these goals rarely come to fruition. Still, in 2012 First Lady Michelle Obama sponsored legislation that was actually passed and drastically changed school lunches across the nation. This change was controversial, and many argue that it does not actually improve the health of American children, as Elizabeth Harrington of the Washington Times notes that a Government Accountability Office (GAO)
audit of the National School Lunch Program found “a total of 1,086,000 students stopped buying school lunch, after participation had increased steadily for nearly a decade” in her article “1M Kids Stop School Lunch Due to Michelle Obama’s Standards”. Although the new standards had attempted to provide children with more nutritious school lunch items, some reports have found that the new standards have actually pushed students away from school lunches. Regardless, these new changes are the regulations by which PPS must abide. In a USDA Food and Nutrition Services press conference highlighting the changes the new school meal standards would make, the USDA notes that the changes mainly include:

- Ensuring students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week;
- Substantially increasing offerings of whole grain-rich foods;
- Offering only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties;
- Limiting calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size; and
- Increasing the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium (par 4).

The USDA has sought to eliminate eliminate fats, sugars, and processed foods from school lunches on a national scale. With these goals in mind, supplying children with local and seasonal foods, which is most often fresh produce, seems like a logical advancement for children’s health. This advancement would be particularly remarkable for a low-income area that is plagued by issues regarding nutrition. Since the aforementioned legislation was passed in 2012, PPS is currently operating under these guidelines. However, I argue that purchasing local and unprocessed foods would greatly improve the nutritional value of Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5, given that even with the new standards students do not eat nutritiously.

Even while operating under the new standards, Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 does not make students familiar with healthy foods, which is the most reasonable solution to the lack of nutrition that faces the Hill District. According to figure 1, PPS considers one lunch to be a hot entrée, two vegetable servings, milk, and a serving of fruit. Indeed, PPS does encourage students to eat fruit and vegetables, however students are free to continue eating unhealthy entrees and can very easily throw out the fruit and vegetable servings. PPS has not incorporated vegetables or fruit into their “hot entrées,” which speaks to my earlier argument that access to fruit and vegetables is simply not enough. Figure 1 also displays that on sample meals. For example, on December 15th, the main lunch for students will be mozzarella sticks with marinara sauce, and a day later, students will eat boneless chicken wings and garlic bread. These meals do not reflect the nutrition that the USDA hopes to provide all children with. Perhaps some kids will choose to eat their fruits and vegetables, but the fruit and vegetables are very clearly easy to avoid since the main entrée does not incorporate them. Figure 1, however, reveals something disturbing as well. The current menu that Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 uses reflects the current situation in the Hill District: although fruit and vegetables are available, they are always coupled with unhealthy counterparts. In fact, mozzarella sticks are exactly the kind of food you can get at gas station convenience stores. Even the meals provided to Hill District students at school are headlined by cheap junk, and the vegetables can be too easily pushed away. With this lunch menu, students are asked to pick between what is familiar to them, and produce that has only recently become accessible to their community. Much like the adult residents of the Hill District, the students have very few reasons to actually eat the fruit and vegetables they are encouraged to eat. To better achieve the goals set forth by the USDA, and to improve the health of the Hill District at large, local foods must be incorporated into the main entrée of the lunches provided by Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5.

Local foods will greatly improve the nutritional value of school lunches, while also familiarizing Hill District students with healthy produce. It is imperative that Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 begins to serve local produce for lunch and in its hot entrées, as opposed to healthy produce that requires distant transportation for both nutritional reasons as well as environmental reasons. In her publication for North Carolina State University, Research-Based Support and Extension Outreach for Local Food Systems,
Rebecca Dunning notes that many studies have recognized that local foods have more nutritional value than transported foods because of the shorter period of time between harvest and sale (par 42). Without having to be prepared for long travel, or having to sit in distribution centers, local food boasts more nutrients than its imported counterpart. Furthermore, a shorter period of time between harvest and sale also means greater flavor. This is important when trying to persuade the future generations of the Hill District to make healthy produce a part of their diets. Vegetables, in children’s pop culture, have a particularly poor reputation; when trying to get children who are largely unfamiliar with produce to eat vegetables, it is important that these vegetables are actually fresh and flavorful. Of course, this is but one aspect of the benefits of Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 placing a heavy emphasis on local foods.

Ultimately, Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 adopting a model for school lunches that centers on local foods is more sustainable than non-local foods, in addition to being more nutritious. Local foods do travel less in transportation, which is the most important reason for utilizing local foods. Dunning adds “locally sourced food by definition, travels fewer miles from source to destination than non-local foods” (par 51). Local foods travelling less than its counterparts is not shocking, in fact it is logical. Still, it is important. Not only can serving local foods help reduce emissions from transportation, but eliminating transportation is also less costly.

Eliminating transportation is the obvious environmental benefit, however food waste is the less obvious benefit of local foods. By familiarizing students with local food as a part of a main entrée, students are less likely to contribute to food waste. Earlier in this proposal, I noted that children may have to take fruits and vegetables, but this does not mean that they will eat them. This is little more than a probable guess and a possibility, as there is no statistic to cite specifically what Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5 are eating and throwing away. However, soon enough there will be. In fact, even PPS is suspicious of what their students are really eating. On the Pittsburgh School Lunch blog, PPS food services announced that a graduate student at Chatham University has began a study on what students are leaving on their plates after lunch – a term dubbed plate waste (par 3). Students can easily avoid their required fruits and vegetables, when it is only used as a side. Yet, if local produce was to be used in the main entrée for lunches, students would have but little choice to eat the vegetables and ultimately familiarize themselves with them. In doing this, PPS can also help the environment in eliminating food waste – and eliminating food waste is important in creating a more sustainable future. In “Cultivating a Better Food System: The Ingredients and Recipe for a Sustainable Future”, the author, TC Topp, notes “food produces methane gas when it decomposes in landfills and is 25% more potent than carbon monoxide in its effects on climate change” (par 6). In other words, aside from food waste being wasteful, it is also harmful to the environment. Conventional logic would also argue that even if local-food goes to waste, at least it did not travel a thousand miles only to be wasted. Only through utilizing local foods in the main entrée of school lunches can PPS benefit both the environment and the nutrition of Hill District students.

Familiarizing Hill District children with local foods has both nutritional and environmental benefits, but even by making local foods a larger part of school lunches, the health and sustainability issues in the Hill District are not totally solved. After all, what power do the children in the Hill District really have over what is served after school hours while at home? Not all children have providers like Vanessa’s grandmother who will make an effort to ensure their children or grandchildren will eat well. Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5, and other community organizations, should also hold educational meetings for Hill District parents about the importance and the benefits of eating healthy and locally. Hopefully this will give community members an impetus for purchasing healthy produce from the Shop n’ Save and also accessing resources like the MLK Jr. Community Garden. This familiarity, however, must begin with the future of the Hill District. The greater access of produce to the Hill District is positive, however the next step in advancing the health of the community is familiarity.
Since access is not enough to combat obesity and nutrition, the Hill District should be provided with a community school, preferably Pittsburgh Weil PreK-5, that focuses on local and unprocessed foods to benefit the community's health and its environment. This more advanced lunch program will help circumvent the health issues evident in today's Hill District. It is necessary to help raise the next generation of Hill District residents in a food environment that is conducive to healthy habits, since it is not enough to only add access to healthy foods. While the health of the Hill District would definitely improve by adopting a more local-food friendly lunch menu, the environment would also improve because of the elimination of travel and food waste. However, it is important to include Hill District parents in the efforts of changing the health habits of the future Hill District generations, as to ensure this added effort does not go to waste. Yes, PPS feeds its students, but it also has a duty to help students develop healthy lifestyle habits. Clearly, the Hill District has been the victim of a toxic food environment, and since PPS has the opportunity to help foster a culture of healthy foods for the neighborhood, this proposal should be taken seriously.

Works Cited


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**Child Nutrition**
All weekly menus meet the following guidelines based on the USDA nutrition standards for 2015:
- Acceptable calorie range for the age group
- All grains served are whole grains
- <10% of calories from saturated fat
- National sodium guidelines
- Five sub-groups of vegetables offered
- Choices of fruits and vegetables offered daily

**Special Diets**
Does your child have an allergy, religious restriction, or medical condition that requires a special diet consideration? Contact the district's Registered Dietitian, Elizabeth Henry, for more information and accommodations.

**Make a Complete Meal**
Kids that eat at school can take the following items at lunch:
- Hot entrée
- 2 vegetable servings
- 1 fruit serving
- Milk choice

**Weekly Lunch Alternates**
Don’t like what’s for lunch? Try these instead. Vegetarian option offered daily. Just ask!

**Menu Items are subject to change without notification**

**PPS is an equal opportunity employer and provider.**

**The Pittsburgh Public Schools Food Service Department participates in the National School Lunch Program and serves approximately 19,000 free lunches every single day to students across the district.**

School breakfast is free, too!
“People experience many different kinds of conflict in life.”

By Ashley McIlroy, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Rachel Luckenbill

People experience many different kinds of conflict in life. One of the most personal conflicts, however, is the “person vs. self” conflict. Here, tension exists between one’s internal self, or thoughts, and the external self, or the person who encounters and interacts with the world. How one relates to herself and how one relates to the outside world can often be very different, and one of the “selves” might be overwhelmed or overlooked by the other. In Lucille Clifton’s “it was a dream”, for instance, the speaker’s internal self is frustrated in a dream, and is seemingly resentful of the self presented to the outside world. In Diane Glancy’s Flutie, Flutie herself struggles to speak and express her internal thoughts; this struggle is a constant source of shame and discontent in Flutie’s life as she disappoints her teachers and family. Silence and expression allow Clifton and Glancy, as the authors, to explore the conflict between the external and internal self through different mediums: Clifton’s speaker through her dreams and Flutie through her stories.

Clifton paints a picture of the internal conflict the speaker faces by punctuating and organizing her sentences almost wildly. The poem’s overall structure is broken by the question “what” (line 7) in the middle of the poem. The isolation of this word emphasizes the question, and also separates the external and internal selves. Such separation shows a contrast between the possibly contrite external self, ashamed of how she interacts with the world, and the accusatory internal self in order to make the reader feel the frustration that exists between the two selves. The organization of the poem emphasizes the conflict between the two. Furthermore, the repetition of the word “wild” (lines 10 - 11) paints a clear picture of how the speaker feels internally. Perhaps the internal self is frustrated because the external self of the speaker is reserved, silent, or overlooked, like Glancy’s voiceless Flutie. The begging of the external self and the word wild creates a clear image of the depth of the conflict within the speaker - one self contrite and confused, the other wild and full of rage. Finally, Clifton punctuates the final line of the poem with three capitalized words: “This. This. This.” (line 14). The external self is seeking to control the internal self here by asking it to ask before acting, to think before speaking, to reflect. This demand for self-reflection and questioning seem to emphasize that the speaker’s internal self values self-awareness, which the external self may be ignoring.

While the poem's structure gives clues about the internal - external self conflict, the word choices show that emotion drives how the speaker defines herself in Clifton’s “it was a dream”. For instance, the “whirling gyre of rage” (line 5) makes the internal self seem infected with a chaotic, almost flammable anger. Later, the external self “screamed” (line 14) at the internal self, clearly in anger. The imagery created by these word choices emphasize anger, as well as accusation. The external self’s “extra finger” “accuses” (lines 3 - 4) the speaker; accusing oneself of some fault highlights the conflict between the selves. Because the internal self seems so angry and unafraid of outbursts, the speaker might be soft and quiet on the outside, but again, like Glancy’s Flutie, her internal self wants her to speak out. Or, perhaps, the “greater self” (line 1) is simply the conscience of the speaker. This idea is made more plausible because the external self is begging or “pleading” (line 8) for answers from the internal self. The pleading shows distress
and sadness. There is a direct contrast in emotions between the sad external and the angry internal self. Ultimately, the speaker’s emotions and the contrast between the inner wild woman that wants to be heard and the distressed external self that pleads “Oh what could I have done?” (line 9) define her internal conflict.

While Clifton’s speaker’s conflict is clear in word choice and emotional language, Glancy’s Flutie expresses who she is and interacts with her world by telling stories. Flutie’s story begins when she discovers the story of Philomela and appropriates it to make the story her own. Philomela’s tongue was cut out, by her sister’s husband who raped her; the sister sees Philomela’s tapestry, created to tell the story, and ultimately escapes with Philomela; as they escape the husband, they turn into birds who are free as they fly away (p. 36 - 38). Although Philomela could not speak, she weaves her story into a tapestry much like Flutie, deathly afraid to speak in class, creates stories in her head. Through the story of Philomela, Flutie discovers that stories can reveal a person’s inner thoughts. Not only does Flutie create her own internal stories, but she also attempts to get her parents to tell her stories, too. Unfortunately, Flutie discovers that “Nothing else could be counted on. Except poverty and her father’s distance when she wanted to know about him. When she wanted him to tell his stories” (Glancy 17). Her father hides himself away and refuses to tell stories. Flutie feels as though she did not know who her father was, and with so little information about her heritage, Flutie struggles to understand who she was, too.

Just as a story can give information, the same story is limited unless the self completes it. For instance, Flutie tells stories to herself in order to define herself. She eventually learns that stories are limited, when told by others: “That’s what’s wrong with stories. They only told part. She had to listen, and later think about the story, and fill in the rest. She had to interpret. To decide where the story went” (Glancy 128). Just as Flutie creates stories to define herself, she also uses stories to connect with others, so that she can understand them in relation to her and who she is. As she fills in the holes in stories about others, Flutie transforms those same stories to project her own thoughts and ideas to the world.

Though she defines herself by creating stories, through symbolism, Flutie paints a clearer picture of who she is and who she wants to be. She also identifies her challenges in this way. Flutie’s symbolism is closely tied to nature and the world beyond her own self, because of her Native American heritage. This is a stark contrast to Clifton’s speaker, whose symbolism exists almost in isolation, in a void where the internal-external conflict takes place. For instance, the deer image repeats in Glancy’s work frequently because Flutie identifies herself as the deer - quiet, graceful, and scared. She writes stories that begin with “A deer came from the woods. It had a mouth, but couldn’t talk” (Glancy 37) or “A deer came from the water. She was brown. She had no tongue” (Glancy 98). Flutie’s deer is silent because deer do not speak, therefore representing the idea that Flutie herself cannot talk to others, even though she and the deer both have mouths.

In addition to representing herself as a deer, Flutie represents the force that keeps her from speaking as water. Whether this force is something internal, like in the Clifton poem, or something external that terrifies Flutie, the water is a powerful and stifling force. The water seems to stifle Flutie’s mouth, such as when “I open my mouth. I am a deer. My deer in the water swims for the air” (Glancy 101). Here, rather than exploring how she, herself, is stifled like Clifton’s speaker did, Flutie expresses her challenge through the deer’s struggle in the water. To Flutie, just like the deer struggles in the water to breathe, she struggles to speak in the classroom. Flutie’s fear is so overpowering that the water controls her constantly: “She was in class and something needed to be said. But she knew if she spoke, she would feel the water” (Glancy 86). The water overpowers Flutie, it threatens who she is. But, as part of the natural world, and because of her connection to the natural world, the water is also part of herself. In the same way, Clifton’s speaker’s conflict is clearly one of internal vs. external, with the internal self angry, threatening the
external self like the water threatens Flutie. Even the anger of the water and the internal voice are similar. Though Flutie calls her fear an “underwater volcano erupting after building up for years” (Glancy 86), and Clifton did not use natural imagery, the anger of the “gyre of rage” and the “underwater volcano” seem to be similar in how they represent the internal challenges of Flutie and the speaker.

Flutie and Clifton’s speaker are plagued by powerful internal voices, desperate to be expressed. For Flutie, her silence tells a story that was louder than her voice; even crying plays a role in her tale because silence “was what she spoke. Not words. But tears. Melted words. She was a sweat-lodge rock in the morn. And under the tears was her anger in knowing that she couldn’t talk when it counted” (Glancy 25). Flutie’s inability to speak angers her because without a voice she cannot express who she is. In the same way, the internal voice of Clifton’s speaker is angry as well. That self is wild and savage, angry at how the external self acted - or, like Flutie, did not act. Furthermore, Flutie is desperate to talk because she knew who she is and she feels that by speaking she would be able to share herself and connect with the world. Flutie knew that “not speaking was a wall before her. She couldn’t climb it. She knew her failure. She would be locked in it forever. The thought burned her head” (Glancy 97). Just as Flutie’s head burns in shame at her inability to talk, the internal voice of Clifton’s speaker is angry because of the lack of self-awareness of the external voice. The external voice “pleaded with her, could i do, oh what could i have done?” (Line 8) because the external self is still desperate for her internal world to be shared. In the same way, Flutie sees herself as stuck between two worlds, as never moving forward. Her silence traps her, even though her story exists in the same way that the speaker’s internal voice is trapped by the external self’s actions or beliefs.

Conflict between the internal and external self in Clifton’s “it was a dream” and Glancy’s Flutie is expressed through silence, word choice, and emotion. Clifton’s dialogue between the internal and external selves highlights the conflict between hidden emotions and the argument surrounding self-awareness. Diane Glancy’s character Flutie struggles to speak, and is only able to express who she is through stories; these same stories both express her internal self and connect her to the wider world. This “person vs. self” conflict is universal, yet when the reader sees the frustration between the internal and external selves, she is reminded to review her own life. These stories provide different examples of struggles that result from this conflict; though expressed in different ways, Flutie through stories and the speaker through a dream, ultimately, this human experience of conflict connects the works of literature and the reader.

Work Cited


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Lost in Translation: A Comparative Analysis

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In his introduction to Arthur Miller’s, Death of a Salesman, Christopher Bigsby describes the intrinsic hope and the stereotypically high aspirations of the American people, even and especially on the heels of the stock market crash of 1929: “The Depression of the 1930s seemed to break promises America had made to its citizens...The American dream faded. And yet, not so” (vii). According to Bigsby, this is the central theme of Miller’s tragic play; the play emphasizes the death of the reality of achieving the Dream, and the tension that arose in the following decades as a national belief in the plausibility of the Dream lived on. Despite a knowledge of the unlikely probability of achieving the social mobility that characterizes the American Dream, the characters Miller crafts in Death of a Salesman continue in the pursuit of their unattainable goals to the point where it becomes a detriment to their wellbeing. Commenting on this pursuit, Bigsby explains, “faith in the future is not a matter of choice” (vii). Miller purposefully crafts characters who embody this resiliency and hope; however, the Red Masquers’ interpretation neglects to recreate the degree of steadfastness inherent in the original characters, and in doing so, creates characters that seem ignorant of their fate, rather than submissive to it.

In the Red Masquers’ production of Death of a Salesman, Miller’s tragic hero, Willy Lohman, seems more like a man degraded by the years, on the brink of senility, rather than regretful and mentally ill. This representation of Willy as simply an old man creates a character that, instead of representing the resiliency of the human spirit in achieving the unachievable against all odds, seems beaten by them. In the opening scene, Willy walks on stage, “carrying two large sample cases” (Miller 2), and “his exhaustion is apparent” (Miller 2). These first few stage notes set an almost desperate tone, crafting a man that is obviously exhausted as well as defeated and “has been defeated his entire life” (Palmer 127). Despite his exhaustion, Willy continues to pursue salesmanship, the perfect example career of the American Dream. Although Willy loves being “well-liked”, the written play does not explicitly suggest that Willy loves being a salesman. Rather, he remains faithful to his career because of the illustrious promise of being “known” (Miller 100). As critic David Palmer notes, “Willy’s inability to engage with the opportunity he feels America promises is the source of the confusion at the center of his life” (127). This confusion propels him to persevere. Willy is determined to achieve what he perceives he has been promised. When Willy walked on stage in the Genesius Theater, he not only seemed tired, but decrepit, hunched over and appearing to be well beyond his purported age of sixty-three. The Red Masquers’ casting and interpretation of Willy’s character seems to suggest that Willy remained with his company out of pride, rather than genuine hope for the future. The Red Masquers created a Willy that pities himself, rather than one who resents his transgressions and continues to work to ameliorate them. The Red Masquers’ representation of Willy sets an apathetic tone for the play. The weariness of Willy’s character on the Genesius Theater stage made the once tragic hero seem only tragic.

The weariness of Willy’s character in the Red Masquers’ performance also serves to characterize Willy as a man who pities himself; the written play makes Willy seemed determined to a fault to preserve in his career, yet the stage performance crafted a man who sees himself in need of retirement. Wherein the written text, the exasperated “Oh boy!” (Miller 2) is the utterance of a man tired from a long day
and even longer career, actor Mark Yochum, practically whimpered the line as he sat down at the kitchen table (Lane Act I). In the written play, Miller purposefully crafted a version of Willy that defines resilience to a fault; in the original drama, Willy overworks himself to the point of absolute fatigue and yet continues, only being persuaded, and even then not completely, to take a step back from his job at the begging of his wife, Linda (Miller 4). In The Red Masquers’ production, however, Willy seems like a man who has worked very hard, and considers himself ready to relent, but is prevented by a certain pride. He does not want to quit or be forced out of his job by his boss, explaining his protestation in Howard’s office despite an apparent need for retirement (Miller 60-62). Yet the degree of passivity with which he agrees to Linda’s suggestion that he tell Howard “[he] simply has to work in New York” (Miller 4) reveals how eager he is to get off the road. In the written play, Willy does not seem to notice the severity of his condition (he seems to be afflicted with a serious depression and is prone to psychotic episodes), contributing to the overall ability of the play to convey the idea that the individual pursuing the American Dream believes it cannot have adverse effects; any strides made in the name of achieving the Dream must be good and the result of such strides even better. The pursuit of the Dream in many cases is the reward. However, Willy never realizes this, finally serving to justify his suicide. In “The Painful Collapse of Empire: How the ‘American Dream’ and American Exceptionalism Wreck Havoc on the World”, Robert Jensen calls attention to the detriment of this blind faith: “Is the American Dream so much a part of the fabric of American society that we fail to question it?” (Jensen qtd. in Bush and Bush 91). The characters in Miller’s original work do not, like so many Americans of the era and today (Bush and Bush 91-92), question the morals of the Dream, aiding Miller’s commentary on the submissiveness of the American to the Dream. But when Willy was brought to life on The Red Masquers’ stage, he seemed unwilling to commit to this blind faith. In the stage production, he moves away from the purpose of his original invention, and instead of representing both a fundamental belief and fundamental crisis of a nation, begins to represent its reciprocal, as someone who recognizes the futility of the Dream and ultimately longs to abandon it. The Red Masquers’ portrayal of Willy therefore changes the nature of the drama itself, emphasizing how integral Willy’s pursuit of salesmanship even in the face of suffering is to the commentary the play offers on the American Dream. Willy’s perseverance, despite his suffering, is important for Miller’s criticism of the American Dream; with his suffering the play forces the audience to consider whether or not the dream is worth pursuing, whether or not to pursue it is a choice, or if, as Americans, the choice is made for us. When in the stage performance Willy no longer blindly follows the Dream, the audience is given the illusion that there is a choice, ultimately changing Miller’s original commentary on the duality of how the Dream both supplies Americans with meaning and ultimately leads them to meaningless, mundane lives.

Although Biff seems to represent the antithesis of Willy, and consequently the antithesis of the typical American, by appearing to reject the American Dream altogether, both the written play and the stage performance of Death of a Salesman reiterate that Willy’s eldest son cannot escape the Dream either. However, while in the written text Biff displays an ambivalence toward the corporate life his father wants for him, Curt Wootton portrayed a man furious at the Dream itself, convinced, as the play unfolds, that he will live apart from it, again portraying a character ignorant of the inevitability of the American Dream. In the final confrontation he has with his father, Biff recognizes the futility in pursuing an office career, knowing that what he truly wants is to be out in the open, embracing the freedom of making a living off of the land (Miller 105). This scene in the written play represents a revolutionary moment for Biff, when he rejects the pursuit of a corporate career, and embraces an attainable future for himself for the first time. Biff, trying to leave, begs his father, “will you let me out of it, will you just let me out of it?” (Miller 85). Where this can be read as an exhausted plea for the freedom to make his own choices,
Wootten's Biff instead seemed to be yelling at his father, an expression of the spite Willy accuses Biff of having throughout the drama. The anger emulated in the stage performance acts as an accusation; Biff blames his father for him being tied to the American Dream, rather than recognizing the inevitability of pursuing it. While he might seem to reject the Dream, Biff only recognizes a different version of it—being able to live off the land is still a subset of achievement based on personal merit and skill—reiterating Bigsby’s idea that “faith in the future is not a matter of choice” (vii) no matter how badly an individual wants to reject the Dream.

In the text, Biff’s exhausted tone and surrender to his father (Miller 106) suggest that he recognizes that he still must chase at least some version of the Dream, while his angered and accusatory tone employed in the stage production portray a Biff that believes by moving away he can escape the Dream. However, this is not the case; it is only the ambiguity of the what the Dream is that supplies the audience with this sentiment: “Whether celebrated or condemned, the American Dream endures, though always ambiguously...and with each attempt to clarify, the idea of an American Dream grows more incoherent yet entrenched” (Hanson and White 91). Despite Biff’s efforts to escape the Dream by choosing a different lifestyle for himself, he ultimately is only successful in redefining what the Dream is for him. In the text, he notes this, and willingly submits himself to it, perceiving that he will at least be happier in a different setting: “And suddenly I stopped in the middle of that building and I saw – the sky. I saw the things I love in this world...and said to myself...What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there” (Miller 105). In the play, Biff seems ignorant of the fact that his new life is still rooted in the pursuit of the Dream. This evokes pity from the audience rather than reverence. Where Willy's suffering is integral to the overall message of the play, so is Biff’s acceptance of his future. By noting that he cannot escape the Dream and willingly submitting himself to it, Biff supplies the other end of the aforementioned duality of the play: although the pursuit of the Dream has, until his revelation, caused Biff to live a meaningless and mundane life, it also ultimately leads him to a life of meaning.

The interplay of the characters of Willy and Biff in the written text of Death of a Salesman serve to supply the reader with the sense that one has choice in where he plays out the American Dream, although the capitalist society ultimately makes the choice that he must pursue it, while the performance gave the audience the illusion of choice in both matters. In the written play, the characters are aware of their fate, rendering it more effective in criticizing the American Dream than in the stage performance, where characters’ ignorance of their fate presents the possibility of choice in a matter that has already been predetermined for Americans. The inevitability of the American Dream persists today. The ambiguity of what Willy sells allows the reader to impose his own industry onto the play; for members of the modern capitalist society, the Dream continues to be inescapable. Although deprived of the choice to pursue the Dream or not to, the definition of personal success continues to belong to the individual, as long as he recognizes that the avenue to such success is inevitably aligned with the path of the American Dream. Willy Lohman, having never truly achieved that which he perceives the Dream enabled him to, grasps to the Dream as a medium for leaving his mark on the world, mimicking the plight of the man who has always chased the glorified, unattainable dream associated with America’s endless possibilities.
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