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English 210

3 March 200X

Point of View in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

Alice Walker is making a statement about the popularization of black culture in "Everyday Use." The story involves characters from both sides of the African American cultural spectrum, conveniently cast as sisters in the story. Dee/Wangero represents the "new black," with her natural hairdo and brightly colored clothing. Maggie remains traditional: the unchanged, unaffected bystander. Nowhere in the dialogue do Walker's characters directly mention their feelings about the Americanization of African tradition. But Walker somehow gets the reader to believe this popularization itself can actually turn into a form of exploitation. By telling the story from the mother's point of view, Walker's representation of Wangero is seeped in irony, and therefore Wangero's love of her African heritage becomes an exploitation of it.

Because the mother is so closely related to the characters in the story, her perception of them is biased. Walker uses this point of view to her advantage, because while the reader is familiar with Wangero's somewhat stereotypical "blacksploitive" personality, this aspect of her personality remains completely foreign to her mother, the narrator, who describes it with an innocent wonder. In the beginning of the story the

mother speaks of Wangero's actions in the past. Even then she displayed an arrogance that isolated her mother and younger sister, but the mother was too busy being proud of her daughter's achievements to notice. She says "At sixteen [Dee] had a style of her own: and knew what style was" (104). "She used to read to us, without pity;... [we sat] trapped and ignorant underneath her voice" (104). The mother admits to her own ignorance in front of Dee, but does not seem bothered by it. Now that Dee/Wangero has come home, the mother describes her with the same naivete. She says Dee wears "[a] dress so loud it hurts my eyes" and Dee's hair "stands straight up like the wool on a sheep" (105). The mother is also surprised that Wangero feels oppressed by her Christian name, "Dee," a white name, possibly a slave-owner's (106).

As far as the narrator is concerned, Dee was named after her aunt Dicie, who was named after Grandma Dee and so on, since before the Civil War. "So why should I try to trace it that far back?" the mother asks Wangero (106). Then, for the reader's sake, the mother adds, "[Asalamalakim] and Wangero sent eye signals over my head" (106). The mother is aware of what's going on. After all, she observes this action. But she may not be aware of the connotations these eye signals carry. Walker does not allow the mother to elaborate, so the couple's optic conversation is left up to the imagination of the reader. The reader knows the look represents Wangero's patient tolerance of what she interprets as her traditional mother's passive ignorance. In both cases the mother just describes what she sees. The reader, on the other hand, immediately knows what kind of character the mother is dealing with.

Wangero is abrasive. She asks to keep items from the house, items Maggie and her mother still use every day. She talks down to her mother and sister. She is a tourist in her own culture. We know this only because of small hints the narrator gives, all dropped without passing harsh judgment on Wangero. This technique is key to the story; it allows the reader, and the reader only, to pass judgment upon Wangero, therefore understanding the theme of the story. "She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her" (107) the narrator says, as neutral as she could possibly be. And when Wangero wants to take a quilt from Maggie to hang on her wall, the narrator speculates, "I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style" (108). The mother is also ashamed of her house, and knows Dee will be embarrassed by it as well. "No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down" (104), she thinks to herself. And while the narrator seems puzzled by Wangero's new style and behavior, the reader knows exactly what's going on and begins to resent Wangero even more. The quilts themselves are symbols in the story, interpreted in different ways by the narrator, the author, the reader, and Wangero. Again Walker uses the narrator's simplicity to her advantage. While Wangero sees the quilts as a symbol of her heritage, the narrator sees them only literally, as blankets to be used, not saved for cultural posterity. When Wangero insists she take the quilts instead of leaving them to Maggie, the narrator admits to confusion. Stumped, she asks, "What would you do with them?" Wangero wants to hang them on the wall, "[a]s if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts," the narrator comments (108). Naturally Wangero's interest in decoration baffles the narrator, and it is this simplified

confusion that helps the reader sympathize with the narrator and Maggie, and loathe Wangero's presence.

To further illustrate the gap between mother and daughter, and to paint Wangero as an intruder with unrealistic expectations of her traditional African American family, Walker allows the mother to describe a dream she once had about "Dee." The dream exemplifies the distinction between what the mother actually is, and how she would like to appear in front of Wangero. Though the mother is possibly closer to her African heritage than Wangero, she still feels ashamed in her daughter's presence. "In real life," she says, "I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands" (103). In the dream, however, where the mother appears on a television show with Wangero, she is "the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake" (103). Looking carefully at this statement, the reader realizes that while Wangero tries to glean more of her African heritage from her mother, she is slowly making her mother more ashamed of her dark skin, her culture. The mother describes her ideal skin shade as the color of an uncooked barley pancake, a food that is perhaps tan at best. Once again, the mother continues on about the dream without realizing the weight of what she is saying. It is the reader's -- and Walker's -- responsibility to understand the real theme imbedded in the story.

In the same way that the reader dislikes Wangero in "Everyday Use," so Alice Walker seems to dislike the type of black American who uses his or her cultural identity as a status symbol. It is not a hatred that Walker displays in her story, but rather a playful poking-fun-of, which wouldn't have been possible had "Everyday Use" not been told

from the perspective of the mother. This is exactly how the point of view affected the theme of "Everyday Use."

Work Cited

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Juli Grace

Professor Martin

English 102

19 April 200X

The Tides of "We Real Cool"

For such a seemingly spare and sinewy poem, "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks does not want for the ornaments of critical and artistic insight offered by competing and often conflicting academic suitors. From how it should be read aloud to whether or not it proposes judgment on its subjects -- even thoughts of the way it might dabble in sexual innuendo -- the essence of "We Real Cool" labors under interpretive baubles aimed at fleshing out its hidden complexities.

Is this a poem akin to what Hortense Spillers describes as a drunken "revelry song"? (qtd in Barnet et al. 225). Is it a foray into the disturbed and disillusioned minds of youth, a pungent reduction of *Catcher in the Rye* poured into verse? Does Brooks imbue her own self-righteous piety into the "We" of her lines, or does she summon the unadulterated celebration and lyricism of the "Seven at the Golden Shovel"? (685). Do the players suddenly become enlightened to their impending doom in the last line and a half, realizing the bad end to truancy and mischief, or is it a statement without motive or conclusion, a vessel of thought for an audience who will all really "[d]ie soon" (8) too?

This "[l]ess than lean poem" (Hortens Spillers qtd. in Barnet et al. 225) probably has enough sustenance for its many interpretations to feed on. Poetry is, after all, so often equal parts writer and reader.

And if there is a communal agreement, it is that "We Real Cool" is deceptively small in appearances only.

Perhaps one of the most compelling (and least cumbersome) ways of reading and exploring this poem is by digging through and past the words, beyond the typical intellectual ways of "knowing" verse. By diving in and experiencing "how" the message is being delivered rather than focusing on "what" the message might be -- by immersing into the movement of the poem -- the real beauty of Brooks' eight short lines becomes clear. What seemed to sit there on paper with the tough and tiny reticence of frozen shrubbery, lets loose in the mind's eye, dancing with all the grandeur and fluidity of the ocean.

The poem begins as the first wave comes in, with three slow, steady beats ("We real cool"), and starts to recede with the second "We" in the first line. The first line folds back on and into the second line, continuing to recede, as it folds in on itself again and starts to advance once more with the third "We" of the second line. It continues this rhythmic undulation through the last three beats of the poem where it retreats into the final statement "We / Die soon" (8). As much as Brooks' poem appears to be harshly broken sentence fragments on a page, the natural rhythm of "We Real Cool" is ultimately smooth and flowing, an interconnected series of movements woven together to form a singular mood. By understanding that the powerful and present rhythms of Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool" greatly impacts interpretation, new possibilities for delving into the words and meaning become clear.

"We Real Cool" is not such a tough and morbid poem. Yes, the players have made decisions not embraced as model by society as a whole. But they know where they've been and what they're doing and where they're going. They have made choices and understand that those choices will have consequences. These are not students who dropped out of school yesterday, boasting in a menacing manner about how admirable it is to be a high-school drop-out engaging in crime. These are youth that have already been enlightened about the realities of their choices and the perceptions others have of them. This is clear in their choice of words like "lurk" and "sin." The players are owning and manipulating descriptors that others use to describe them. They do this, they do that, they do this, they do that. It is a rhythmic relay of how things are, like waves bringing in information and then gently sweeping it all back to where it came from.

They make no excuse for themselves and apparently invite no one else to do so. The poem is their situation as they see it. In eight (could be nonstop) lines, here is their total destiny.

What "We Real Cool" does boast about is action. Every line in the poem begins with a capitalized verb. Consciously and with feeling, but somehow simply and in a matter of fact way, the rhythm and the actions of the poem complement the perspective that this poem is about clarity rather than judgment. Even the "death" at the end seems less than final. "Die" is a verb weighted like all the other verbs in the poem, in the beginning of the line and in capital letters. And because of the strong rhythm the poem catalyzes, the poem seems to continue its

undercurrent even after the last line. It's an attitude of youth that is part of a larger collective. The continued "We" of youth doesn't die; it gets passed on.

The striking impact of "We Real Cool" reverberates by embracing a rhythm that is at once beautiful and dangerous, quiet and powerful, thought provoking and simple. This dualism of feelings provides the perfect medium for an equally dualistic message about life and death. What Gwendolyn Brooks wraps in the advancing and retreating lines of her poem is the rhythm of an ocean undulating in the consciousness of youth. Not good. Not bad. Just in flux.

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Student Name

ENGL 112-02

October 18, 2009

Example Evaluation Essay

Comment [jgw1]: This essay represents an above average response for Essay #2. The marginal comments below are intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of this essay and the instructor's expectations for Essay #2.

Experience: The Answer to Life's Questions?

The philosopher Aristotle writes that any literary or non-literary work must contain certain persuasive appeals to be effective in its persuasion of belief. Aristotle's primary persuasive appeals persuade the audience to change their beliefs or the way in which they think (Burton). Two of Aristotle's primary appeals are the logos appeal and the pathos appeal. The logos appeal uses logic, and the pathos appeal uses emotion to persuade the audience's point of view. Through examining the persuasive appeals of logos and pathos, this essay will discuss a literary work and non-literary work and judge whether the works are effective in communicating their respective statements of belief.

The poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" by Walt Whitman and the song "Blowin' in the Wind" by Bob Dylan have similar statements of belief. Both of these works effectively communicate that only through experience can the lessons to life actually be learned. Not a single person can capably teach these life lessons because life's truths can only be found through life's experiences. Using Aristotle's primary appeals, they attempt to change the reader or listener's beliefs. When using logos and pathos as the criteria against which to evaluate these works, both of these works adequately communicate that the important answers in this world cannot be taught and can only be learned through actual life experiences.

Comment [jgw2]: Clear introduction (by title) of the literary text and non-literary text (the primary texts) to be analyzed in the paper.

Comment [jgw3]: The writer presents a concise summary of the statements of belief found in both primary texts.

Comment [jgw4]: The criteria by which the works will be judged are clearly communicated. These two criteria (logos and pathos) are focused and concise, which allows for a complete discussion of these criteria in a 4-page essay. The previous paragraph defines these terms briefly, which is necessary to make sure your readers understand what you mean by these terms.

Comment [jgw5]: The thesis claim makes a judgment (an evaluation) on whether the works meet the criteria established above. However, the essay would be more interesting if it argued that one work is more effective than the other.

Many think it is hard to find logical appeals in works of poetry and artistic songs, but both of these works use the logos appeal to try to persuade their particular audience. Each of these works has a unique structure that appeals to the logos. The writers of these works actually use the logos or logical appeal to discount the importance of logic as a means of discovering truth. Through their structure, these works appeal logically to the audience and bring about their key belief that answers cannot be found using logic at all. The structure of “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” is written as a free verse poem, without the uses of rhyme, rhythm, or meter. The speaker deliberately chooses to use few poetic devices to bring about the theme that real answers are not found in structure but in freedom. The free verse of this poem enhances this theme of freedom, because the speaker chooses to speak in an unconventional style for poetry. The speaker is sticking it to those scholars by choosing to write the poem in the way he speaks in real life. The speaker is making the point that the learned scholarly ways make no difference, but true knowledge is found in experiencing life.

Comment [jgw6]: The essay anticipates a possible point of disagreement with its audience. By addressing possible disagreement, the essay is able to deflate opposing arguments.

Comment [jgw7]: The writer considers the structure of the poem in order to evaluate its logical appeal.

Comment [jgw8]: The argument in this paragraph is developed well and culminates with a final argumentative claim about the paragraph’s topic.

Comment [jgw9]: The essay’s paragraphs have effective topic sentences that focus the paragraph on a single idea.

Even though the poem contains no rhyme, no meter, or no rhythm, it does contain some structure. The first four lines begin with “When,” and this prepares us for the revealing of the theme in the last four. The speaker experiences the scholarly “learn’d” world in the first four lines, but this transitions into the speaker choosing to experience the world by going out and marveling at its glory. Also, the poem’s first four lines continue to get longer, and then the last four lines are short and make the point of the whole piece. The long winded professor can be seen in the structure of the first four lines of the poem, and the glory of the universe can be seen by the simplicity of the last few lines.

Comment [jgw10]: The final sentence of the paragraph serves as a closing argument to the idea presented in the paragraph’s topic sentence.

The structure of the song “Blowin in the Wind” is similar to the poem’s structure, and this similar structure appeals to the logos criteria in a similar way. Each verse of the song begins

Comment [jgw11]: The essay now addresses the structure of the song, which is what readers might expect after reading discussion of the poem’s structure.

with a few lines of questions that begin with the word “how” and is then answered by the last two lines of each verse. Similarly to the poem, the questions are long and complicated but are answered so simply by the answers of the last two lines. The speaker in the song asks these questions rhetorically, and the conclusion is summed up simply at the end of each verse, as the speaker claims, “The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind/ the answer is blowin’ in the wind” (7-8). This is also similar to “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” as the first four lines of the poem begin with the word “When,” and then the question is answered in the last four lines. Both of these work’s unique and simple structures almost make each work seem like daily talking conversation. The language in each of the works are simple but effective as they simply make the belief statement that real life cannot be understood by some higher thinker but made alive through the experiences that life holds. The poem and song have logical appeal through their limited but simple structure, but in the end the theme of each work is that logically we cannot understand or answer any of life’s questions.

Comment [jgw12]: Quotes are properly introduced and skillfully incorporated into sentences, rather than allowing them to stand alone as separate sentences.

The pathos or emotional appeal can be clearly seen in each of these works, as each makes their similar specific claim. Through the speaker’s choice word use, the pathos appeal is made evident. In “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” the long winded first four lines contain the line “the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me” (2). The third line goes on to talk about “the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them” (3). These lines appeal to the reader in a negative way, as the reader seems to be bored by these long drawn out lines about math and science. A feeling of boredom can be felt by the reader as the professor goes on and on about the complex organization of all this data. The last four lines of the poem contain the words, “Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself/ in the mystical moist night-air” (6-7). These words appeal to the pathos as readers can almost feel themselves “rising and gliding” to

Comment [jgw13]: Rather than simply stating a claim and moving on, this paragraph effectively develops the argument by adding more explanation, leaving readers with an exact assessment of what the essay is trying to argue.

Comment [jgw14]: Sticking to the plan outlined in the introduction, this evaluation now moves on to a discussion of pathos.

Comment [jgw15]: Quotes are properly cited, referring to line numbers of poems.

Page numbers would be cited for essays, short stories, and other works in prose.

experience new things as they wander on to experience life in each moment. The “mystical moist night-air” describes the feeling of freedom as the reader enters the mystery that is the unknown. The last four lines of the poem contain all of the action and description. Until this point in the poem, no action verbs were even used in the poem. These last four lines use pathos to appeal to the reader’s desire to be truly alive living in each moment. Until the fifth line of the poem, the speaker had been boringly listening, but now he is actually experiencing life in action.

Comment [jgw16]: Since a quote was used in this sentence, the line number should be cited.

Comment [jgw17]: Numerous insightful claims like this one are presented throughout the essay.

Comment [jgw18]: Still focusing on the primary purpose of this section – to evaluate the emotional appeal of the poem.

In the song “Blowing in the Wind,” the writer uses pathos similarly to appeal to the feelings of the listener. This song was released on April 16, 1962 in the midst of the civil rights movement and soon before the Vietnam War began. Bob Dylan, the writer of the song, uses a series of questions to appeal to the listener’s emotions. In the first stanza of the song, the writer asks, “how many times must the cannonballs fly/ Before they’re forever banned” (5-6). The songwriter also asks later in the song, “how many deaths will it take till he knows/ That too many people have died” (21-22). These questions refer to the violence and war that has been going on since the beginning of time. In the early 1960’s, the listener of this song would be emotionally involved in these questions as they were living in the midst of the violence of civil rights and the rising conflict in Vietnam (Dylan). Listeners of the song are emotionally on the edges of their seats, as they want to know the answers to these lifelong questions. When all the questions about life are finally laid on the table, the most powerful aspect of the song is that the writer never directly answers any of his questions. The answer to all of the writer’s questions is that the answer is “blowin in the wind” (8). This word choice is extremely important, as it explains to the listener that the answers are out there somewhere in that chasm called space, if only it could be reached with limited human knowledge. Through the experiences of life, maybe it can be learned what is blowing in the wind. The song “Blowin in the Wind” uses the

Comment [jgw19]: After ending the discussion of the poem’s emotional appeal, the essay now logically proceeds to a discussion of the song’s emotional appeal.

Comment [jgw20]: The evaluation develops by using the language of emotion to advance the argument.

persuasive appeal of pathos through its particular word choice in the midst of the cultural inhumanities of the time period.

Comment [jgw21]: Nice concluding claim to the discussion of pathos in the song.

The poem “When I heard the Learn’d Astronomer” and the song “Blowin’ in the Wind” both effectively communicate that the answers to life can never be learned, but these answers can make some sense through experience. Each one of these works communicates in its own unique way their particular belief statement. The non-literary work “Blowin’ in the Wind” is very effective in its pathos and logos appeal because in the midst of these cultural evils and inhumanities, one man chooses to sing a song in which he states that he does not know all the answers. The poem is effective through the pathos and logos appeal because a famous poet chooses to write in a unique style that goes against institution of literary academia. These unique works are both effective in their own way and touch different types of people. The song “Blowing in the Wind” effectively touches millions of lives, as a unique singer states the truth when a world needed answers. Walt Whitman effectively sticks it to his scholarly peers by choosing to write in such a unique style and bringing to light a serious truth. In their own unique way, each of these works effectively communicates their statements of belief to their particular audience based on Aristotle’s logos and pathos persuasive appeals.

Comment [jgw22]: The conclusion has a concise summary of the claims developed in the body, and a restatement of the central (evaluative) thesis. The focus in this entire essay has been on evaluating the rhetorical (persuasive) effectiveness of two works of art. It meets all the requirements of the assignment (including the length requirement of 1,250 words) and presents an insightful evaluation of two interesting works.

The essay has a disciplined style (without unnecessary or redundant words) and crafts its argument purposefully throughout the entire piece. The essay is essentially free from mechanical errors and has been carefully proofread. Details and quotes from the works are properly cited, and the Works Cited page complies with MLA style.

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Student's Name

English 112.11

04/30/09

Unveiling Identity's Masked Chiseler

What determines a person's identity? Is it how we view ourselves, is it what society tells us we are, or is it something more than that? There have been billions of people who have lived and died, but only a handful of them make it into the history books. Perhaps those select few became great solely because they sweated longer, worked harder, and showed more courage than everyone else. Although, I bet if all of the sweat, blood, and tears of the billions of people whose names have gone unremembered were combined, there would be enough to overflow the Pacific Ocean. It appears as though it does not matter how much effort a person puts into life. People who become great are the one's born with a golden spoon in their mouth. The identity that nature bestows upon a person at birth seemingly determines his or her ultimate destiny. William Shakespeare's play *King Lear* is saturated with the cultural concept of identity. Perhaps the most prevalent issue concerning identity in *King Lear* is the intentional and unintentional attempts of the characters to change their identities. Two characters whose identities are entangled with vines of hatred, love, and betrayal are Edgar and Edmund. Their morals and actions may seem to set them apart, but the unforgiving beast controlling them is the same. That beast is nature and it uses their identities to carry out their destinies. Likewise, the 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle, is impregnated with the concept of identity. The film follows two orphan boys, Jamal and Salim, as they grow up in the streets of Mumbai. Determined to go from rags to riches the boys live an extreme lifestyle filled with

danger, risk, wealth, and sacrifice. Just like Edmund and Edgar, Jamal and Salim's actions appear to be controlled by their birth given identity.

“Edmund the base shall top th' legitimate” Nature's Unchangeable Destiny

Looking at Edgar and Edmund in *King Lear* will be beneficial in understanding if a person's identity determines their destiny, because the brothers represent both positive and negative birth identities. The first two letters of their name symbolize the close similarities between them “my dimensions are as well compact, / My mind as generous, and my shape as true” (I.ii.7-8), but the drastic contrast between the end of their names mirrors their identity. Edgar, nature's chosen one, was born on a silver platter with the destiny of becoming king flowing through his veins. Edmund, whose birth was “Compounded under the dragon's tail” (I.ii.139-140), was branded with the permanent, degrading scar of illegitimacy. Entitled to nothing, Edmund became consumed with an unappeasable thirst for power. The identity that birth bestowed upon Edmund controlled his unfortunate destiny, even though he was “no less in blood” (V.iii.169) than Edgar. Both brothers were steered towards their ultimate fate despite drastic efforts made to alter their identities.

Due to Edmund's unfortunate circumstances society labeled him as worthless. Even his own father, the one responsible for his birth, was ashamed of Edmund: “His breeding, sir, hath been at my / charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge / him that now I am brazed to't” (I.i.9-11). For Gloucester to be embarrassed at his very existence makes it easy to see why Edmund had developed a deep, burning lust for power. Waldo McNeir suggests that Edmund's “belief in survival of the fittest is one of the reasons why he was so quick to

betray his father: 'The younger rises when the old doth fall' (III.iii.27) (McNeir 191). It is interesting that Edmund believed in survival of the fittest, yet he still attempted to overthrow his more powerful brother Edgar. Edmund's belief in that power based theology foreshadowed his very own down fall and death.

Edmund's diabolical efforts to strip away his brother's ordained identity served as the catalyst for nature's overall plan: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound" (I.ii.1-2). Edmund thought he was being led by nature to elevate himself "Edmund the base / Shall top the legitimate. I grow, I prosper. / Now, gods, stand up for bastards" (I.ii.20-22), but in all actuality he was hammering the nails into his very own coffin. Despite the unfortunate disposition of Edmund's birth, nature did bless him with the gift of deception and manipulation. Melvin Seiden highlights the fact that "Edmund was truly a superb specimen" created by nature. "His illegitimacy was symbolic of who he was and biologically symbolic of what he was" (Seiden 205). The entire time Edmund thought he was the one doing the manipulating when in reality he was nothing more than a puppet carefully crafted by nature.

Edmund's actions were not the only ones to spur on the fulfillment of identities. After Edmund betrayed his brother it was Edgar who became nature's vesicle. Edgar's birth given identity was to take over his father's position. When Edgar was disguised as Poor Tom he protected his father and served as his guide. Edgar's extreme kindness and love for his father seemed harmless, but his actions proved deadly. Edgar speaks of Gloucester's death:

Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
 Led him, begged for him, saved him from despair...
 Told him our pilgrimage. But his flawed heart
 Too weak the conflict to support
 Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
 Burst smilingly. (V.iii.191-193, 198-201)

Gloucester literally died from a broken heart when he found out that Poor Tom was actually his beloved son Edgar. Although Edgar had no conscious intentions of killing Gloucester he is still to blame for the old man's broken heart. Nature had ordained Edgar's birth so that one day he would become king. Edgar's kindness was nothing more than a birth given characteristic that served as major role in fulfilling his identity. Meredith Skura explains "while Edmund had wanted to kill Gloucester for selfish reasons, Edgar is the one who succeeded in killing him with his love" alluding to the idea that Edgar "had darker purposes that he did not suspect (Skura 127). Those "darker purposes" were nature's way of fulfilling Edgar's identity. Shakespeare suggests that any characteristic, no matter how admirable, can be used to implement nature's will.

In Edmund's attempts to appease his lustful desire for power he tried to steal Edgar's identity. Shakespeare expresses to the audience that everyone has been given a unique identity that no one can permanently take from them. Millicent Bell notes that Edmund temporarily obtained his brother's identity, "They look alike in their armor, reminding us that one must displace the other." Edgar admitted to the fact the Edmund had stolen his identity, "My name is lost; / By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit" (V.iii.21-22). Edgar felt as though he could not admit to being Edgar, heir to the king, until he had conquered his brother (Bell 62). Edmund fell slain to Edgar sending a powerful message to the audience that no one can rob you of your birth given identity. When

considering that nature was Edmund's "goddess" he never really had any chance of defeating his brother. From the time Edgar and Edmund were born it was obvious that nature was on Edgar's side.

At the end of the play nature's brutal destiny became fulfilled. Edgar, blessed from birth as heir to the throne, became King and also took over his father's position in a Noble fashion. Edmund, cursed from birth, died the undignified death that was destined for him. The identities of Edgar and Edmund were bestowed upon them at birth. It did not matter how smart or cunning Edmund was, in fact, those characteristics only aided in his defeat. Shakespeare alludes to the idea that our identities are set in stone. No matter what a person's birth identity may be nature will use and manipulate him or her and other people to make sure it is carried out. A person's identity and fate are out of his or her control, because there are greater forces at work.

"This was our slum...now I am at the centre of the centre" - Identities Twist

Now that we have examined identity in *King Lear*, let's take that cultural concept and hold a candle to the modernistic text *Slumdog Millionaire*. When comparing these two texts, their messages concerning identity are almost identical, especially when contrasting Edmund to Salim. Despite their similarities there is one pivotal difference between them. This simple aberration, which will be revealed at the end of the essay, changes everything.

Looking at the relationship of identity between *King Lear* and *Slumdog Millionaire* the writers appear to be in agreement. In *King Lear*, the emphasis of identity is placed on birth. Considering that *King Lear* was written in the early 1600's it makes sense for Shakespeare to place a substantial importance on birth. Shakespeare was born in England

and grew up during the times when royalty ruled all. Edgar's ordained birth destined him to become a noble king, Where as Edmund's disgraceful birth doomed him to die a shameful death. The identities that were given to them at birth were permanent and foreshadowed what they would become. For instance, Edgar's identity caused him to be virtuous and victorious over his brother. Edmund's Identity caused him to live a life saturated with the lust for power. He did everything that he could to overcome that identity, but his efforts were futile. They merely served as a catalyst to fulfill his cursed identity.

Likewise, *Slumdog millionaire* communicates a similar message. The film is centered a round the main character Jamal, but this paper will focus on Salim. Salim's birth identity was a lot like Edmund's. He never knew his father and his mother died at a very young age. He lived on the streets and society looked down on him. Salim realized that people without power were worthless. As a boy he saw the slumlords rule the city and he wanted to become just like them. The slumlords struck fear into everyone and Salim understood that in order to obtain power he had to do the same. Salim became comfortable pointing the barrel of his gun at anyone, and he was never hesitant to pull the trigger: "The man with the Colt 45 says shut up." Those words hold much more meaning than a simple threat. Those words reflect Salim's identity. Just like Edmund, Salim thought he was the one in control, but nature had already pulled the trigger on his identity. He acted out of hatred and selfishness just like a scared boy off the streets. Salim's birth identity fueled his power hungry journey and practically turned him into a machine. He even risked the wellbeing of his brother, the only human that he loved, to fulfill his insatiable greed.

Despite Edmund and Salim's correlations, their identical path comes to a "T" and the writers veer off opposite directions. In *King Lear*, even though Edmund fought viciously to disprove his birth given identity he was unable to. For instance, when Edmund was stabbed by Edgar, he made a feeble attempt to undo the evil that he had authored "I pant for life: some good I mean to do, / Despite of mine own nature" (V.iii.245-246), but his confession was too late for atonement. Cordelia died and Lear's last breath came from a broken heart. For Edmund, there was no silver lining to be found at the end of his life. He was born into shameful circumstances and in the same way his body rotted into the earth.

Salim's story ends slightly different from Edmunds, but the impact of this discrete alteration is magnificent. Salim's birth identity left a pungent taste in his mouth, and he was determined to prove nature and society wrong. In his attempts to satisfy his gluttonous appetite for power, he hurt everyone around him. He was born into the world as a filthy, hungry child and that reflected the very person he had become. Salim and Edmund's stories seem to be the same, but there is a twist. Salim realized that the wealth and power that he had so vigorously yearned for were empty. He had all the money he could ever want yet he was miserable. His life lacked happiness with no friends or loved ones. Upon recognizing his faults Salim decided to finally act out of love, rather than listening to nature. He went against his birth given identity, as a selfish, power-thirsty crook, and did the most selfless thing possible. He sacrificed his life to protect his brother, which completely contradicted the identity that nature had bestowed upon him. Salim broke free from nature's puppet strings and created his own destiny. Salim stands as a symbol of hope for people who have been born into unfortunate circumstances. He redeemed himself and truly satisfied his unquenchable desire to overcome his birth identity.

Edmund and Salim's stories are similar but their endings completely contradict each other. Shakespeare suggests that a person's identity, at birth, influences their thoughts and actions. In the same way, Danny Boyle expresses a congruent belief, but there is a critical difference. In *King Lear*, Edmund is simply a tool used by nature to fulfill birth given identities. Edmund was doomed from the start. There was nothing that he could do to change the destiny that nature had unfairly given to him. Edmund could have acted like a saint but it would have made no difference. His destiny was etched in stone and only nature possessed the chisel. On the other hand, *Slumdog Millionaire* proposes an entirely different belief. The film expresses the idea that a person's birth given identity can be changed. Salim noticed his faults and was able to redeem his self-image. He died an honorable death, which totally opposed nature's will. From the moment you were born you too were also given an identity. It is your choice whether or not you try to become the person that you desire to be. Your identity may already be etched in nature's stone, but there is a possibility that you could be holding the chisel.

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