The House on Mango Street – Sandra Cisneros

The first thing that jumped out to me about this book is Cisneros’ unique and creative tone. Many of her sentences seem to run on without any intention of stopping, with a lack of punctuation that makes the reader frantically try to keep up with all the description. These sentences are interspersed with short, declarative sentences that serve as stopping points, forcing the reader to ruminate on the information they convey. In a sense, this structure, combined with the relatively simple vernacular, implies a child’s tone.

There are many other interesting features of Cisneros’ writing, such as how she very explicitly chooses when and when not to use quotation marks. There is often dialogue in the book that seems as though it is being quoted, but does not have quotation marks encompassing it. I took this to mean that Esperanza is putting her own spin on the words, even though she introduces them with phrases such as, “Mr. Benny says,“ and, “her father says”. Because so much of the dialogue is written in this way, I found it confusing when Cisneros did choose to use formal quotation, especially because many of these phrases were not actually spoken.

My Girl & The City – Sam Selvon

Reading this beautiful piece by Sam Selvon was a somewhat nostalgic experience for me. I could not help but think back to my own personal encounters with the bustling chaos of Piccadilly Circus and the cold rain slowly blowing over Wimbledon. Selvon portrays such a true and almost tragic side of London by commenting on the cold nature of the people. He writes about the many faces people

have, and how, “There is above all a face for travelling, and when you have seen one you have seen them all.” (148). When I recall my own experiences wandering about London, I can picture this face perfectly. It is almost as though there are so many people in this incredible place that no one takes the time to care about anyone else. Everyone wears a face of complacency, and goes about their business without stopping to notice anyone else. Selvon makes London out to be a fairly lonely place, during the dark and empty night as well as the busy and crowded day. Yet, he still writes about loving the city, though he struggles to explain why.

Reflections on Writing – Henry Miller

Attempting to summarize this piece would be futile, and to say I was really able to comprehend everything that Miller discussed would be a blatant lie. He makes writing seem like a mystical and powerful tool for understanding and portraying life, and then goes on to make writing seem unattainable for practically all people other than himself. While I do agree with his notions of writing as a means, “of acquiring a total rather than a partial view of the universe” (19), he also mentions many ideas that I do not agree with. For instance, his utter indifference with the reader’s opinion seems to drastically oversimplify the process of writing. I believe a writer should always keep his or her audience in mind, and do not think that doing this compromises a true and honest voice. I also believe Miller contradicts himself by writing, “I defecate and nourish. There is nothing more to it.” (22) So much of this piece is devoted to commenting on the incredibly complex and beautiful ebb and flow of life and writing, that to reduce his existence to such a sentence makes no sense at all. In all honesty, I was frustrated with this piece of writing. I found it somewhat inaccessible and I am disappointed that I was unable to gleam any sort of concrete message from its “labrinthian” structure; and yet am not surprised, as Miller himself states that, “only one good reader is necessary.” (24)

Writing can be the Right Medicine – Jean Fainz

As a student of psychology, I have been taught to be wary of articles such as this one. While I personally believe the phenomena that Fainz describes is true, I also maintain a much stronger belief that one cannot make psychological claims without reinforcing them with data. Fainz even paraphrases statements from the psychologists she references, (as seen in the 12th paragraph where she pretends to quote Stephen Lepore) making her own writing seem like the words of professionals. Almost every paragraph in the article makes a claim about the benefits of writing without referencing any study or source. Beyond all of this critical analysis of the validity of the article, I do think writing can be very therapeutic on an emotional level. Often times, the thoughts we have are mystical and shrouded in complexity, even though they may seem to be clear as crystal. Writing is a brilliant tool for beginning to demystify and truly comprehend these thoughts, and often their true nature is not revealed until they are explored on paper. I wish Fainz had explored this incredible phenomenon instead of making writing out to be an alternative to Prozac.