Drown Essay, Research Paper

The story of immigrant struggles is the major theme in "Drown" by

Junot Diaz. Every immigrant has a personal story, pains and joys, fears and

victories, and D?az portrays much of his own story of immigrant life in Drown,

a collection of 10 short stories. This book captures the fury and alienation of

the Dominican immigrant experience very well. Other immigrants’ grief’s also

come up in D?az’s short stories. My argument for this paper delves with the

question of is this book merely storytelling or is it autobiographical? Also, it

seemed to me as if he uses some symbols and specific words (mostly verbs) to

express himself in a manner which the reader can almost feel the story as if it

were real. The book tells of the barrios of the Dominican Republic and the

struggling urban communities of New Jersey. This book is very strong and these

stories tell of a sense of discovery from a young man’s perspective. It seems as

though for the immigrants, even when things are at their best, a high

probability of calamity looms just around the corner. Uncertainty is the only

certainty for these outsiders, who live in communities that, are "separated

from all the other communities by a six-lane highway and the dump." It

tells of a world in which fathers are gone; mothers fight with determination for

their families and themselves. Drown brings out the conflicts, yearnings, and

frustrations that have been a part of immigrant life for centuries. Diaz himself

lived in such a world. In each of his stories Diaz uses a first-person narrator

who is observing others. Boys and young drug dealers narrate eight of these

tales. Their struggles shift from life in the barrios of the Dominican Republic

to grim existence in the slums of New Jersey. These young boys could be the

voice of Junot Diaz himself. If so, why would the book be a fiction? The

characters in these stories wrestle with recognizable traumas. Yunior and Rafa

in "Ysrael" and "Fiesta 1990" confront the pain of growing

up, the loss of innocence, and how misfortune just happens to fall upon them. In

"Drown", "Edison, New Jersey", "Aurora," we

glimpse into anger stemming from unearned suffering, the embarrassment of

poverty, the confusion of loving a Crackhead, and shock of reality.

"Drown" tells of an impoverished, fatherless youth in the Dominican

Republic and his struggle with immigrant life in New Jersey. It shows pain and

suffering very accurately. The last and longest of the stories, "Negocios,"

reconstructs the adventures of Ramon, the father who left his wife and children

behind to try to make it in the States. It is told from the point of Yunior, the

youngest son. "Negocios," points up this collection’s one weakness. It

is a chronicle of his father’s immigration, remarriage and, finally, the

rescuing of his children and first wife from their bleak life in the Dominican

Republic. In this book, words used show lots of meaning (strong use of verbs).

By doing this Diaz has managed to physically imprint the reality of his

characters so as to make them seen. The characters step out of the plots so

vibrantly real. What I enjoyed about this book is that there was no use of

Italics or any other editorial assistance for the reader. This showed me that he

is taking a stand against the use of Italics. It’s almost as though Diaz is

writing in a diary and there is no need for such things. Also, these stories are

not read like stories, they are more like a sociological study. The feelings and

the observations jump off the page so much so that the stories appear very much

autobiographical. Again bringing up the point of whether it should be classified

fiction or non-fiction. D?az never loses sight of the telling details of

immigrant life stateside. He describes food from the perspective of a Dominican

boy who eats only boiled yucca and platano. The yucca and platano is a symbol of

his poverty and hunger in "Aguantando." Then he writes about everyone

getting obese in America; even the immigrants themselves. This simple abundance

of food gets to the imagination of immigrants, enduring for many years as the

newcomer’s fascination with the United States. The picture inside the plastic

bag of the father in "Aguantando" is one of the symbols. This is a

symbol of an absentee father; present in more that one story. The government

cheese, was also a symbol of hunger and poverty. It was both treasured and

hated. He was amazed at the generosity of Americans but at the same time he was

ashamed by it. "Clear the government cheese from the refrigerator"

(Diaz 143) What I do like about Drown is D?az’s ability to dramatize the

tragedies of immigrants without making everything seem over dramatic or fake. As

an immigrant who shared several of these experiences, as a young stranger in a

strange land, I find this narrative very accurate. Drown offers a dignified

portrayal of immigrant life because of the reality behind it.