

From man to boy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Lemons. The author makes his first stand at the very opening of the work with this hard peeled, soft-fleshed visual. The sour fruit, which is cut into by the narrator at the beginning of John R. Coleman's, essay *From Man to Boy*, stands as a metaphor for the life circumstances in which he continues to find himself and others. The choice allows for a much shorter opening to the essay by utilizing the well-known allegory of the lemon as an acerbic, broken object or happenstance from which the owner has no means of escape.

In the beginning lines Coleman produces the appearance of a setting in which the weight of an entire world the reader does not have to see to believe in, is resting on the shoulders of the narrator. He does this by coupling the lemon with a position of employment that is both low on the wage scale, and limited in skill requirements. Even the waitress, a position most readers will equate with being lesser in station, looks down on the work, therefore the worth, of the narrator. This immediately sets up the main character as a victim of his surroundings and appeals to the reader for compassionate understanding and perhaps even pity.

This appeal is sustained by the dialogue between the co-workers when Dana tells Jack "It's no use" (LaRocco, 128) trying to change the attitude and belief of the waitress who called him a boy. The writer tells the audience, in the same paragraph, that Dana was working this job even as he, the narrator, was reading the billboards' insidious warnings. In doing so, the narrator is offering up tangible evidence for the argument of an irredeemable quality of ignorance in the world.

The argument of ignorance is juxtaposed against the theme of education. The billboards, a metaphor for society's spoken standards versus their actual behaviors, promise the worthy and dedicated student a life free of discrimination, bias, and general condemnation. What the writer declares to be the truth of the matter however, is that reality falls far short of the pledge. Life is a lemon. Education does not prevent the action from happening; the waitress still calls him a boy. What education provided him with was a means to recognize the insult and therefore be injured by it. This injury is noted in the sad look on Dana's face.

The exposure of the treatment of the housekeepers by the students at the college serves to call further attention to the wide spread plight of the working class. At the same time, it presents an argument that educated people are as likely to fall into the pattern of abuse, yet more likely to change their behavior once it is questioned. The narrator seems to convince the students to cease the use of the term " wombats (128)," however he also makes clear that it does not erase the ramifications of the actions for those who were abused by them.

Naming them as " the cleaning women (129)" continues a convention from the beginning that says much about society by not saying anything at all. Coleman maintains Dana and himself as the only individuals worthy of names, therefore individual identities, in the short piece. Doing this preserves the notion of a singular hero with only nominal support attacking the great beast of society without actually coming forward and declaring himself a hero.

Rather than failing to define himself as the hero of the episode, Coleman comes closer to refusing it. This leaves him on the same playing field as his audience, which acts in tandem with his stylistic choices in the text. By using the quick, almost darting motions of his statements, and the clipped pacing of short paragraphs and a barely over one page essay, he keeps the reader not only involved but in step with the narrative voice.

In order to make points with the intended audience of blue collar working class America, Coleman does all he can to avoid triggering the alienation he is so adamantly set out to battle. Simplicity is the key to the peace. Coleman gets in, makes his point in clear, concise terms, and gets out.

This appeal to the working class reader for whom this particular piece is written is continued with a lack of satire in the essay. The simple vocabulary, short sentence construction, and lack of word play beyond the lemon all feed into the assembly of a connection between the writer and blue collar America. He never feels the need to address the existence of those high paying white collar positions directly, while they are inferred by the PhD, the collegiate tack of the students, and the billboards with their empty promises.

Reference to the Quaker tradition further exposes the intention of the author to connect with a wholesome and righteous way of life. This is the assumed role many hard working laborers aspire to. The association of Godliness with the Quaker traditions works on another metaphorical level with the housekeepers when the saying is considered; Cleanliness is next to Godliness.

Throughout the entire essay, Coleman does his best to solidify his roots in this working class in order to achieve a single goal. The final remark returns to the scene of the first crime in the work, a seemingly flippant remark about being a boy who cuts lemons. By returning to this line the narrator takes a stand for all of the young men who have had to defend their honor as men simply because they were not making money in the right tax bracket.

Coleman combines this with an appeal to the student from working class family to be aware of the results of their choices in treating others before the damage is done. Overall, he produces a very effective essay that is driven on the backs of metaphors and unspoken pieces of the puzzle, which are alluded to behind sweeping statements designed to stir the primal instinct of honor and self preservation in the face of societal imposed duress.

Work Cited

LaRocco, C (Ed.). (1995). *The Art Of Work : An Anthology of Workplace Literature*. McGraw-Hill.