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**From Social Discrimination to Cultural Integration: Erin  
Gruwell's Endeavour towards the Subversion of the American  
Social Order in *The Freedom Writers Diary***

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## **Dedication**

*To my beloved parents*

*To my family*

*To all my dear friends*

## Acknowledgments

*First of all, the wittiest recognitions go ahead to  
the Munificent Allah*

*This dissertation would never be accomplished  
without the guidance of my supervisor;*

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*I shall acknowledge my sincere gratitude to my  
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*For her support academically and emotionally*

*To all my supportive teachers*

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## **Abstract**

The current social reality in America is so controversial and so paradoxical to the point whereby people have started looking for alternative ways to deal with it. The other intellectual actions is one of the ways along which one goes to meet the challenges of the socio-political system in America, through writing, might be very interesting. Writing enables one to deal with his experience and to understand others' experiences. Therefore writing might be a key tool to set a sort of social criticism. Erin Gruwell, a young teacher, has tried to enhance change among a group of young people who are the image of the actual American society which is characterised by racism among individuals belonging to the same group and towards other members belonging to different categories. These are two facets of racism, which make of America a particular society regardless of its alleged nature (melting pot where different cultures do communicate). Gruwell's endeavour consists in creating a horizontal view among her group of students who are, supposedly, a future model of the American society by means of writing and reading poems.

**Keywords:** Freedom Writers Diary, Diary, Maturity, Discrimination, integration, social order.

إن الوقع الاجتماعي في أمريكا مثير للجدل أو متناقض و هذا ماجعل بعض الناس يبحثون عن طرق بديلة للتعامل معه. إن الأعمال الفكرية هي واحدة من الطرق التي تصطدم بتحديات النظام السياسي الاجتماعي في أمريكا\_ عبر التأليف الكتابي\_و يمكن أن تكون شيء مثير للاهتمام. يمكن التأليف الكتابي الفرد التعامل مع تجاربه و فهم تجارب الآخرين. لهذا يمكن للكتابة أن تكون أداة مفتاحيه للقيام بنوع من الانتقاد الاجتماعي.

حاولت أيرين جرويل ترسيخ التغيير وسط مجموعة من المراهقين الذين يمثلون صورة الواقع الاجتماعي الأمريكي و المتميز بالعنصرية بين الأفراد الذين ينتمون إلى نفس المجموعة و نحو أفراد ينتمون إلى فئات . هناك وجهين للعنصرية التي تجعل المجتمع الأمريكي مجتمع خاص بغض النظر عن طبيعته المزعومة (قدر انصهار الثقافات المختلفة). تصر محاولة جرويل على إنشاء نظرة أفقية من بين مجموعة من الطلبة الذين يمثلون بشكل مفترض نموذج المستقبل للمجتمع الأمريكي من خلال كتابة القصائد و قرئتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية : مذكرات كتاب الحرية تمييز

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*General*

*Introduction*

## General Introduction

To change a human being's situation is almost difficult, yet it is always worth to try. Erin Gruwell, despite her race, has seen it prerequisite to try to permeate some morals and convey some indirect lessons through her being a white lady. Gruwell eager desire is to take 150 teenage students from the state of being fully imbued with the zeal of discriminatory situation into the state of accepting racial, social, cultural and sexual differences. It is an attempt to bring them into the stage of self-awareness. Being integrated into society, it is to grasp the real meaning of tolerance. The question that could be asked is how could a woman teacher succeed in doing so in a time the teenagers show a very strong resistance to change and develop a hermetic mind?

Since reading literature is instructive, Erin Gruwell has started inviting her student to discover the world of literature through different literary genres among which drama was the most widely instructed because it creates special effects and modifies their responses in life. They become collaborators of specific interpretations of the text in front of them. After she realised their readiness to exteriorise, she moved to another specific genre which is the diary.

The students read *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl* and *Zlata's Diary: a Child's Life in Sarajevo*. They were as precious gift for them or for the climax of their lives, because they have seen themselves and their lives through these diaries.

Writing is an art; it enables one to exteriorise his/her feelings; it is an act of freedom which allows the individual to deal with his and with others' experiences. In this perspective, it is important to question Gruwell's students' free actions of reading others' and writing their own dairies and poems. The teacher's initiative and the students'

willingness must have essentially a common ground towards the construction of a new vision of the world. The foregone end is to create a horizontal view of an American vertical society. This is the reason why the following questions are important in the present research.

- In which sense cultural integration is seen as a substitute for the American vertical social order?
- Why does Gruwell deal with her students as if they were members of her family?
- What sort of lessons do teenagers get from their reading and the writing of the diaries and the poems?
- In which sense teenagers have changed their attitudes and become self-conscious and responsible vis-à-vis themselves and vis-à-vis the others?

These questions are required, in a sense, to be more objective in reading the Freedom writers Diaries and to frame my work and contextualize it with reference to the very American reality. In this perspective, I see it necessary to put forward the following statements around which the present work gravitates. The following hypotheses are, therefore, formulated with reference to the already set research questions.

- The individuals share the same fate in a chaotic world where they are supposed to develop a common horizontal view of themselves.
- Gruwell's endeavour consists in creating a horizontal view among her group of students who are, supposedly, a future model of the American society they read the diaries as if they were both social and psychological documents.
- The teenagers find in writing the dairies and poems a way to step out off the maze and a source of answers to the nagging questions they fail to ask overtly.

- To reach transcended horizontal human values, teenagers have started to think in terms of chain of individuals and conciliate with the “other”, and grow to be mature teenagers.

Gruwell’s students belong to different social classes and different ethnic groups. This reality had generated a sort of hatred towards the “other”, as it has developed a sort of idiosyncratic attitude and a sense of indifference in world they judge unworthy. Through Erin Gruwell’s methods of teaching tolerance through literature, it was necessary to deal with this work from a sociological point of view. To study their poems, I found it more pertinent to adopt a linguistic approach which allows me get into the semantic dimension of the texts, and also because the poems develop very important ideas which are semantically and syntactically dealt with. To show all these aspects, I have arranged both my ideas and my discussion under two major headings which are as follows: Chapter one entitled: *The American Social Order in Minority Group Literature and* chapter two entitled: *The Teenagers’ production of literature and the shared ideologies.*

This study is carried out to show that it is always feasible to substitute already dictated social order by other orders inspired of humanity. Furthermore, is to know The extent to which reading and writing literature could be useful to raise a sense of self-awareness, also to know that the common sense goes beyond individual’s conception of “the other”. As well as to know the extent to which the teenagers could reach a certain level of psychological and linguistic maturity.

What really attracted me to do this work is that I read the story of the teenagers, after having a chance to watch the movie based on their story. I started thinking how could a teacher, who was at the very beginning representing a sense of otherness because of her social class, race, and gender; bring a group of rebels out off the darkness using literary

fiction and non-fiction as means to assist her in changing the teenagers. I became eager to understand how reading and writing literature could help people. My reading of the diaries urged me to rethink and question my former conception of the effect of reading literature. I reached the point that reading literature and writing poetry could not only be attributed to particular disciplines in given classes, but to reshape human behaviour.

I am not pretending that the topic is new or that the subject I have chosen is so original, yet, I believe, I found few references related to my topic and to my subject. This may give certain legitimacy to my allegation that the subject is new. I found great difficulties to finish my dissertation because of the different readings, related to the different points I was asked to underline by my supervisor each time.

# *Chapter One*

*The American Social Order in Minority Group*

*Literature*

## *Introduction*

*I.1. Unveiling the Actual Social order: the Teacher's and the Student's Testimony*

*I.2. Literature as a Psycho-social Therapy*

*I.3. Towards the Construction of Identity: literature and the sense of Self-awareness*

*I.4. Self-Awareness in Prose Fiction*

*I.5. Self-Awareness in Poetry*

*I.6. Vincent Guilliano's implicit conception of the expected self*

## *Conclusion*

## **Introduction**

Unlike the ethnic groups, the majority groups or “Wealthy White People”, as they are called by the minority groups, are living with the idea that they are the original people of America, while they are using their power to set control over it. Therefore, despite the social mutations, the American people are still living a chaotic discriminatory situation which favours some people at the expense of others; they cannot prevent themselves from being subject to the pre-abolitionist policy. So far, the ethnic groups could not have eschewed any sort of stigmatization for they live a covert declared war animated by gangs and moderated by opportunists. This situation generated violent and premeditated actions of murder, created social plights and inside wars (war between different ethnic groups) as well.

The reality of America is, therefore, more than what could be just heard or read. It is to be experienced and understood. Erin Gruwell must have seen it this way for she has provided us with a real image inspired of the reality she has found herself exposed to in a school full of concrete examples and authentic credible images. All sort of categories are there, all types of prejudice are directly experienced. It seems difficult if not impossible to deal with a heterogeneous group having different ideologies. The heterogeneity of the group might be negative and have essentially a negative repercussion on the transformation of the group, as it may act in favour of one’s initiative towards the construction of new different opinions, and thus the substitutions of that horizontal access of individual relationship.

This is undoubtedly why a reference to the American society as a melting pot as well to Erin Gruwell’s endeavour, her students, their psychological situation, their readiness to



accept the other and their effort to exteriorise seem important and even prerequisite in the present study.

### **I.1. Unveiling the Actual Social order: the Teacher's and the Student's Testimony**

Erin Gruwell in *The Freedom Writers Diary* talking about the reality in Long Beach California saying:

*...Long Beach as the "gangsta-rap capital" with its depiction of guns and graffiti, my friends have a warped perception of the city [...] They think I should wear a bulletproof vest rather than pearls. (1999:01)*

Erin Gruwell telling a story of a bad student in her class claiming that, he hated her from the first few minutes. (Ibid: 02) this student was very naughty, Erin stated in her entry that: "A classmate got tired of Sheraud's antics and drew a racial caricature of him with huge, exaggerated lips." (Ibid)

One of pictures of the American racist white people has been described by Erin Gruwell, in her entry saying:

*I took my students to see Schindler's List in Newport Beach, at a predominately white, upper-class theater. I was shocked to see women grab their pearls and clutch their purses in fear. A local paper ran a front-page article about the incident, describing how poorly my students were treated, after which I received death threats. One of my disgruntled neighbours had the audacity to say, "If you love black people so much, why don't you just marry a monkey?" (Ibid: 04)*

This passage from *The Freedom Writers Diary* shows the real meaning of discrimination.

The way the minorities look at the white people was always like the way the young student's look at his white classmate:

*I don't even think everyone in this class is supposed to be in here, because there's a white boy in the corner looking down at his schedule, hoping that he's in the wrong room. For his entire life he's always been part of the majority, but as soon as he stepped into this room, he became the minority. (Ibid: 07)*

The division of the American society is represented in Long Beach high school. It is presented by a white student in his diary.

*There is a section known as "Beverly Hills" or "Disneyland" where all of the rich white kids hang out. Then there's "China Town" where the Asians hang. The Hispanic section is referred to as either "Tijuana Town" or "Run to the Border." The Black section is known as "Da Ghetto." Then there's the freak show in the middle of the quad that's reserved for the druggies, also called "Tweakers," and the kids who are into the Goth scene. (Ibid: 08)*

The real society portrayed by a student from Wilson High claiming that:

*... schools are just like the city and the city is just like prison. All of them are divided into separate sections, depending on race. On the streets, you kick it in different 'hoods, depending on your race, or where you're from. And at school, we separate ourselves from people who are different from us. That's just the way it is, and we all respect that. (Ibid: 10)*

The situation of the teenagers, who are normally the future generation of the United States of America, within their groups is almost chaotic because of the appalling living conditions. They are living horrendous and atrocious situation regardless of their different origins for one of the students provides a clear picture of the situations they were living; he said in dairy 03 that:

*Latinos killing Asians. Asians killing Latinos. They declared war on the wrong people. Now it all comes down to what you look like. If you look Asian or Latino, you're gonna get blasted on or at least jumped. The war has been declared, now it's a fight for power, money, and territory; we are killing each other over race, pride, and respect. (Ibid)*

The situation was so serious to the point whereby the teenager had started getting easily weapons almost for free.

One of Erin Gruwell's teenage students recounts his story as a just fourteen years old child in the 'hood, and the way how he manages to protect himself against the gangsters by means of buying a gun.

*It's so damn easy to get a gun; it's like getting bubble gum from the corner liquor store. All you need is \$25. All I had to do was ask my parents for money to buy school supplies. It was easy, 'cause in the 'hood, for the price of a backpack, you can get a gun, a couple of rounds, and probably even have some money left over. (Ibid: 12)*

One of the freedom writers sums up in the diary 07 the life in the hectic, messy and the chaotic American society they live in saying:

*The people have to be down, they have to be willing to take a bullet or pull the trigger, but it's worth it. Life is easily given up to protect and respect the homies and the barrio we claim...the same barrio that we were born in, raised in, and hopefully, will be buried in. After we put **los tres puntos** on your wrist, it becomes survival of the fittest, kill or be killed. (Ibid: 17)*

A student describing the routine of the way of living in the 'hood:

*During the day racial tensions rule the streets, at night gunshots are heard from drive-by shootings, and twenty-four hours a day, the gangs and drug dealers control the block, trying to hold down their territory. (Ibid: 21)*

One would rather talk about the other facets of the reality which is not openly declared by the teenagers in the diaries. The teenagers would most likely to express significant in-group bias, where some group members show favouritism toward members of their own group, in regards to both explicit and implicit measures. One here would ask a question why such favouritism which leads to struggle is taking place.

The favouritism which leads to struggle of the ethnic groups against each other and, generally, against the white people is in progress and it is due to some misconceptions related to the myth of their settlement. Each group believes that he is the first to come or to be brought to America and that the latter is his home land. Yet it incites one to reflection that all of these young students are America born children despite their origins.

All the teenagers seem to have something to say, something related to the callousness of the life they were living. This means that they are all the same and they share the same pain. This is what led undoubtedly Erin Gruwell to the state of frustration. In her 2<sup>nd</sup> entry criticising the system, she shows her state of annoyance and frustration:

*Ahh, I'm so frustrated! [...] But I don't know if I'm more frustrated with the students or the system. Although they're a pain, they're just kids. But adults created the system. The system separates them and then they're stereotyped as "basic," but in reality, they're anything but basic. (Ibid: 30)*

The teacher's initiative and the students' willingness must have essentially a common ground towards the construction of a new vision of the world. The foregone end is to create a horizontal view of an already existing vertical American society. Gruwell's desire is legitimate since it is stated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 that:

*Every **child shall have**, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State. (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966: Article 24(1))*

Acquainted with a very disagreeable unpleasant social reality, the teacher decided to enhance change through different actions at different levels of treatments: psychological, sociological, a philosophical and most importantly through reading and writing both fiction

and non-fiction; she decided to assist these young students because as argued by Conservative Charles Sykes, in *Dumbing Down Our Kids*, that:

*America's schools are in deep trouble, not because they lack men and women who care about children, but because they are dominated by an ideology that does not care much about learning.* (Thomas C. Reeves, 2000: 282)

## **I.2. Literature as a Psycho-social Therapy**

In fact a world where man finds himself psychologically disturbed and mentally captivated, writing, sometime, releases him and his mind from all types of captivity. He is in need of writing non-stop thoughts, urges and feelings; he is as well in need of dealing with events he experienced and memories from the past, living the present days and dreaming about the future. Man is normally free to use any variety of language whether formal or informal, vulgar, jargon.

The teacher Erin Gruwell has invited her students to write their personal stories after providing them with the necessary material; the students were in need of someone to hear their voices, feel their sufferings and soothe their pain. To be read is a first step towards their literary imaginations or fiction.

Since the teenagers found in the writing of their diaries a way to literary creation is therefore important to know about fiction, its function and its relation to the writer's psychological state of mind and the way how it contributes to the development of the sense of self-awareness. It is also necessary to understand the author's effort to represent the real world as well as the latter's impact on the author's inner world for in *The Freedom Writers Diary*, student have discovered the world of literature through different literary genres among which drama such Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, prose fiction such as Alice

Walker's *Color Purple* and poetry like *Moment* by Vincent Guilliano, were the most widely instructed because they have created special effects and modified their responses in life. They become collaborators of specific interpretations of the texts in front of them. The teenagers have become ready, thereafter, to exteriorise their feelings through writing poems and their own stories.

### **I.3. Towards the Construction of Identity: literature and the sense of Self-awareness**

Self-awareness indicates being attentive of different facets of the self including personality, manners and feelings. Though, it is normally a study about little children or infants to know the extent to which the infant is conscious. In an online article entitled *What Is Self-Awareness?*, Kendra Cherry states that:

*Researchers have demonstrated that the awareness of ourselves begins to emerge at around one year of age and becomes much more developed by around 18 months of age. (2016.)*

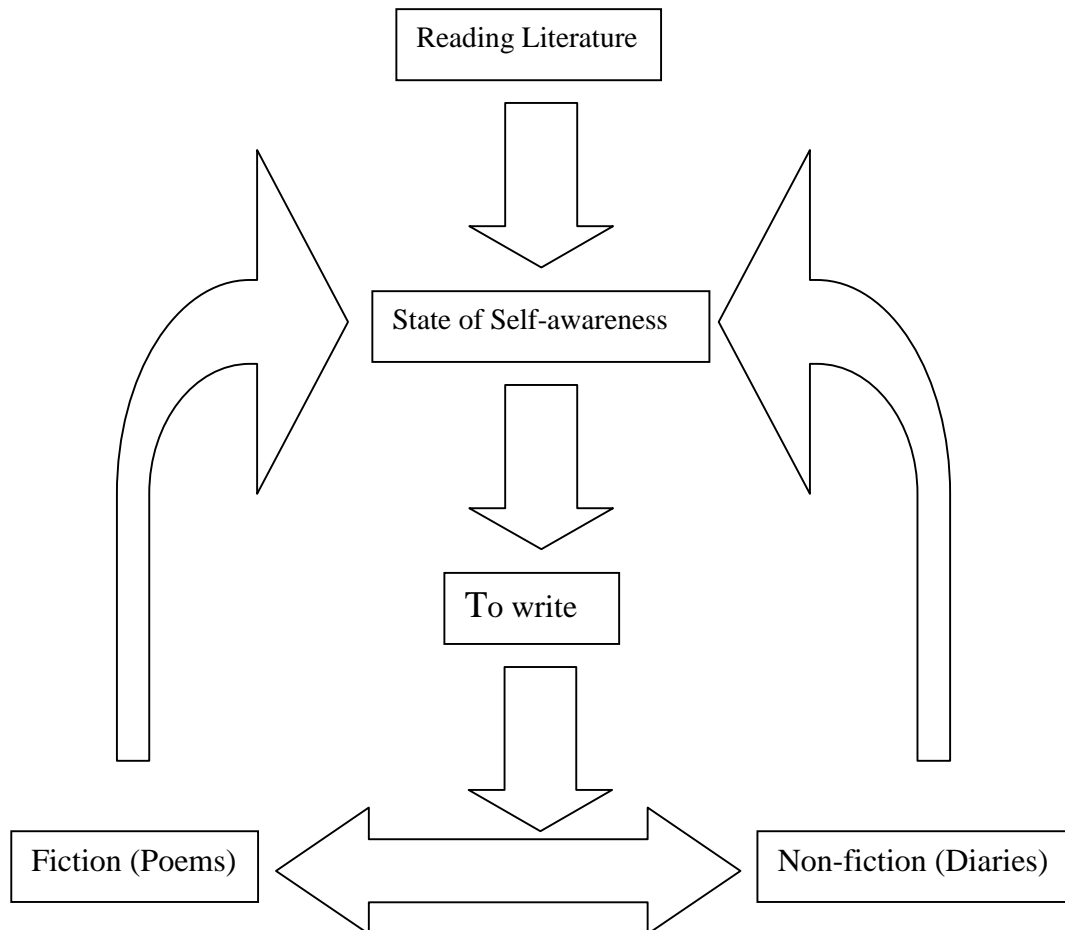
Kendra Cherry did not stop at this ground; she went further showing when the human being starts being aware. She gave as an example the research done by Lewis and Brooks-Gun (1979). This research is about putting a red dot in an infant's nose then facing him to the mirror, after that they observe his reaction whether he touches directly his nose, and that is mean that the infant is conscious that he is on a mirror, or touching the mirror which means that he is not aware of what is going on around him. Of course this research is done on chosen ages of the infants (15-18 months/21-24 months). (Ibid)

The research of Kendra Cherry does not explain when does the human being reach the state of self-awareness and when he does not, but it shows the process through which

human being goes to become self-master; man develops a sort of self esteem owing to the inner developing and growing force which mutates into a human consciousness.

The state of self-awareness means the consciousness of the human being. In other words, the human being should be aware of the world around him, of his rights and of his duties towards the society he lives in and the individuals he lives with.

In fact, there is a relation between self-awareness and literature in general. Many individuals find their way to self-esteem through reading literature and specially poetry and prose fiction. One asks a question about the role literature can play to raise a sense of self-esteem and thus self-consciousness. First of all, it is important to illustrate the functions of both, poetry and fiction. Moreover; what is meant by functions is how the reader reacts when reading literature, though this reaction will externalize certain actions and a sense of change (mental change) by the reader, and self-awareness will certainly appears in those actions.



**Figure 01: The effect of fiction/non-fiction on the freedom writers<sup>1</sup> (My own emphasis)**

The above schema represents Gruwell's and Guilliano's common view on man's essence and existence. The reading of literature as far as their conception of the self is concerned leads to a sense of commonness within an absurd world where man is relegated to prejudice. The young generations who are, hypothetically, seen as the embodiment of the social values and the careers of the thoughts, are supposed to understand the meaning of themselves as being just segments of the universe they are living in.

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<sup>1</sup> The schema is based on my own reading and understanding



#### I.4. Self-Awareness in Prose Fiction

Despite the different personal stories the teenagers do have, every teenager has found in the reading of fiction a sort of asylum and a sense of relief. Fiction allowed them to identify themselves to the characters they see in the stories, to get their way in life and to find ways to the answerless questions they have long been asking.

The Diary 62 is an adequate example. The girl who has written it has become able to think because of her reading of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker that is suggested by Ms. Gruwell. The girl said in her diary: "I began to read, kept reading, read some more, and found myself unable to put it down."(1999: 126)

Explicitly, Alice Walker's novel has caught the girl's attention as if she was reading about herself comparing to the main character of the novel Celie.

*Yet in the midst of it all, Celie seemed strangely familiar. Life wasn't easy for Celie, but she knew how to survive. She needed little to get by. Come to think of it, I do know who Celie is... (Ibid)*

After this passage, the girl wrote a story happened to her with her uncle when he tried to come close to her and harass her sexually and abuse her. After telling the story the girl reacted about Celie saying that she was violated, tormented, humiliated, degraded; but above all she remained innocent. No matter what horror Celie has faced, she ran after courage, laughter, love, and finally, life.

*Celie was violated, tormented, humiliated, degraded; yet through it all, she remained innocent! Out of all this horror, Celie was given courage. Courage to ask for more, to laugh, to love, and finally — to live .... Now I'm certain who Celie is. Celie is and always has been me...and with this in mind, I will survive. (Ibid: 128)*

After the girl's reading of *The Color Purple*, she has decided to take a new path in her life and forget everything happened with her in the past. Here the state of self-awareness had taken a place in teenager's consciousness and thus literature was her reason for change. Furthermore, to prove that the girl has become self-aware, she, frankly, said in the beginning of her diary: "Today marks a turning point in my life." (Ibid: 126)

With reference to literature, the turning point or the climax is the point where the plot of a story changes and goes to the falling actions then the resolution. The girl's resolution was to change and survive in the chaotic society she lives in.

*The Color Purple* does not reflect the girl from diary 62, but almost all the girls in the class. Each one was possessed by her stories and her past, and Celie, the character of the novel, was their inspiration. Like the girl in the diary 63, she had seen herself through Celie, because she was abused by her boyfriend, just like the story of Celie and Mister (one of Alice Walker's characters). The teenage girl said that she wanted to cry when reading the story: "Celie's situation reminds me about an abusive relationship I had with my boyfriend that changed my life." (Ibid: 129)

In another diary, and another girl was touched by *The Color Purple*. Unlike the other girls, this one has remembered the story of her mother when she was always getting beaten up by her alcoholic husband and the girls' stepdad. In the last paragraph of her diary, the girl has interpreted something about the novel which was:

*The color purple was coming from my mother's eye where my stepdad had punched her. That's when I began to understand that the color purple isn't just a color or the name of a book.* (Ibid: 132-133)

Each one of the girls has become aware of what is going on around her, and after reading Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, they made decisions which will change

their lives to a better situation. The rise of self-awareness has been seen through the reaction of a sample of teenage girls who read fiction, thus, they had being altered.

### **I.5. Self-Awareness in Poetry**

To find the relationship between self-awareness and poetry, it is important to know what poetry is and what its functions are. Generally, “Poetry differs in visual form from prose.

Poetry commonly appears as a sequence of lines arranged in stanzas rather than a sequence of sentences within paragraphs.” (Daniel J. Kurland, 2000)

Daniel J. Kurland pointed out that what really matter in poetry, and it is ultimately characterized, is how it communicate rather than what does it communicate i.e. poetry depend on the sound of the spoken language and the figurative language or the language in use.

Another aspect of poetry is that a poem can carry a story, describe an object or situation, or simply, express feelings.

With relation to self-awareness, poetry can provide the individual the required way to self-awareness and that is through the reading of poetry. It makes the reader to exteriorise his deepest feeling out, it may cure one of his problems, the reader also can take the poem’s author as an idol and learn from him the art of writing poetry, and that lead him to write his own, then to express his personal feelings, situation or problems which direct him to self-awareness.

Erin Gruwell has given a poem written by someone who had gone to college with her; named Vincent Guilliano, who died a short time after he wrote it. Ms. Gruwell was

very severe with the student concerning this poem, no one knows why. After they read the poem, Ms. Gruwell and the students have analysed the poem into its simplest form, because she wanted them to understand it very good and she told them that: “She wanted this poem to become our motto in class, and our principle in life.”(1999:88)

Vincent Guilliano was talking in his poem about the people, who live in this world without changing anything around them, who do not care about the feelings of the other people around them.

### **I.6. Vincent Guilliano’s Implicit Conception of the Expected Self**

#### *Moment*

Let him wish his life  
For the sorrows of a stone  
Never knowing the first thread  
Of these  
Never knowing the pain of ice  
As its crystals slowly grow  
Needles pressing in on the heart

To live forever  
And never feel a thing  
To wait a million lifetimes  
Only to erode and become sand  
Wish not for the stone  
But for the fire  
Last only moments  
But change everything

Oh to be lightning  
To exist for less than a moment  
Yet in that moment

To expose the world to every open eye  
Oh to be thunder  
To clap and ring  
To rumble into memories  
Minds and spines

To chill the soul and shake the very ground  
Pounding even the sand  
Into smaller pieces  
Or the mountain  
Brooding, extinct  
Yet gathering for one fatal moment  
The power to blow the top clean off the world  
Oh to last the blink of an eye and leave nothing  
But nothing unmoved behind you

**Vincent Guilliano**

**January 9, 1991 (1999: 87-88)**

Man seldom describes himself as being a very passionate individual in a world susceptible to man authored chaos. He raises many questions about the self, its value, convenience, effectiveness and utility. S/he has to think in terms of the self and the other as being complementary segments within a one constellation. If one is passionate about something, s/he has to live it. S/he has to care about the other. In reality man has to believe in something and has to stand up for it and share it with the other selves.

Vincent Guilliano has tried to invite the readers to know about the expected self, for simply the real self is what he is in fact. The state of being what the individual is in reality remains something constant and stiff, the state which does not accept change for he believes he is what he represents and therefore refuses any transformations regardless

whether what he does represent is correct or wrong. Erin Gruwell must have in mind Guilliano's idea of the self and this is undoubtedly why she has taught her students his poem *Moment*. This piece of literature which captures and extends the meaning of life to reach a certain common thought leads the students to develop a new vision of the self. The lexical items in the following poem do take on one significant meaning in the context. They are put by the poet to serve an objective. Some lexical items do have a connotative meaning and a semantic implication in the context, while with reference to the code they have simply denotative meaning. Items like: stone, fire, thunder and lightning are very significant, and they have a semantic implication.

The teenagers' reading of the poem *Moment* has an impact on their perception of themselves because Vincent Guilliano refers to the errant people in life who never try to enhance a change. He addresses his message to the reader as being one member of the errant human constellations, as he excludes him and puts him in an external position as an observer who can grant help. In the following verses

When the poet starts by *let HIM wish HIS life.....For the sorrows of a stone*, he is excluding the reader. The pronouns HIM and HIS refer to the errant who is supposed to make a choice between two situations: the one of the sorrow and the pain as respectively associated with the stone *to wait a million lifetimes **just** to erode and become sand*, and the ice from which grows crystal stalactites which make a serious pain in case they penetrate the human heart, and the other situation of the fire in *But for the fire which last **just** moments but change everything*; the reader seems to be directly addressed also by the poet for the former is supposed to pave way to the errant to make that choice in life. This is the reason why the poet comes back to confuse both the reader and the errant

throughout the remaining part of the poem, in that he believes the reader is also a human being and can be an errant too:

*To live forever...And never feel a thing...To wait a million life times [...] Oh to last the blink of an eye and leave nothing ...But nothing unmoved behind you (Ibid).*

The reading of the following verses will provide the reader with a certain view which incites to a literary meditation for the poet tries to link the *sand* to the *errant*:

*To live forever  
And never feel a thing  
To wait a million lifetimes  
Only to erode and become sand  
Wish not for the stone  
But for the fire  
Last only moments  
But change everything*

The errant people mutate and transform, through time, from stone into sand due to erosion. Here the poet is associating individuals with both *stone and sand* when they live eternally but uselessly, pointlessly, futilely and most importantly meaninglessly; he associated other individuals who willing to enhance change with fire, lightning and thunder when he said:

*But for the fire [...]  
Oh to be lightning [...]  
Oh to be thunder [...]  
To chill the soul and shake the very ground  
Pounding even the sand [...] (Ibid)*

In the line *Pounding even the sand*, the reader understands the very meaning that sand, even if it were a small piece or a microscopic substance, can be pounded by the thunder. Yet as a reader, I believe, that the poet has referred to sand long before this stance

when he said: “Only to erode and become sand”. Here the poet, I suppose, is allowing room for criticism. The errant people are criticised by the poet and therefore his readers to provide new ways of conduct and pave way to further readings of the situations because what is in the mind of the poet and of his READERS being real or implied, ordinary or professional should have one meaning which is the believe in that the errant teenagers can change their world and thereafter the world of the others surrounding them, just like the fire, lightning and thunder which transform everything surrounding them.

Fire consumes everything in its path. It spreads and it moves silently. It is something one does not play with. It is something everyone both fears and is mystified by. It has the power and capacity for both creation and destruction. On the other hand, fire is also short lived. Although individuals grow over time, the most vivid things in their memories are often *moments* or brief experiences.

Teacher Erin Gruwell saw it necessary to be just like Vicente Guilliano because she wants to teach her students Guilliano’s conviction. He is convinced that man can change regardless of the circumstances surrounding him and regardless of the type of the social constraints which generates vertical thoughts. Like Guilliano, Gruwell wants to inculcate and permeate the principle of sameness and acceptance. Through Guilliano’s personal experience, both the poet and the teacher Gruwell want the students to live for a reason which is to change their and other’s lives. Logically speaking, Vincent Guilliano, by writing his poem *Moment*, has changed the lives of 150 students who are the freedom writers, and who have contributed to the transformation of the world surrounding them.

It is wise to mention as example the writer of the diary 43 who mentioned *Moment* in his/her diary. The students have been touched by this poem and decided to change from a situation of being like stone, that never change a thing, and of being errant people, that stay



silent and never feel a thing when seeing bad things. Yet it is wise to read someone to understand him, this one who refuses to talk overtly to people.

Guilliano used in his poem three symbolic words; fire, lightning and thunder. Those symbolic expressions exist in life and last only a moment, thus in this moment they change a lot of things in existence. Ms. Gruwell wanted her students to be like fire, lightning and thunder; to change the smallest problem they face, either their own problems or helping the others around them, she did not want them to have a haphazard life and accept it like it is. After reading the poem with her students she asked them a very important question mentioned by the student of the diary 43 which is:

*“If you could live an eternity and not change a thing or exist for the blink of an eye and alter everything, what would you choose?” This was one of Ms. G’s questions after we read this poem. (1999:87)*

The student who wrote the diary 43 tells the story of the day they received the poem and Ms. Gruwell’s lesson, also about his reaction towards his teacher’s request of being like fire, lightning and thunder. His response was like Ms. Gruwell is telling something impossible in comparison to their situation of being marginalized and discriminated in society, as he claimed that:

*We all thought that Ms. Gruwell’s lesson was really powerful and all, but us? Lightning and thunder? Not likely. The below-average sure-to-drop-out kids? Please, ever since I can remember, we’ve been put down and stepped on, and now all of a sudden we have the potential to change the world? Leave it up to Ms. Gruwell to come up with some crazy shit like that. (Ibid)*

Erin Gruwell tried to encourage her students that they are capable of anything they want, but she could not until they have witnessed that during the visit of Miep Gies<sup>2</sup>. Miep is an old lady who helped Anne Frank and her family during the holocaust. She told them about the story of how she risked everything in order to care of Anne and her family. The students know Miep from a book they have read before which is *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Yet, they admired Miep for her courage in facing huge problems only to save a family. “She said that she had only done it because it was the ‘right thing to do.’” (Ibid)

Miep Gies, therefore, has completed what Ms Gruwell wanted to deliver to her students, which is convincing them that they are competent of anything to become something in life. The student of diary 43 finally has understood Vincent Guilliano’s poem and the true meaning of fire, lightning and thunder declaring in his last words of his diary: “At that moment, I became like the fire, and like the lightning and like thunder.” (Ibid)

## **Conclusion**

The social background of the teenagers was very confused, disordered, messy and chaotic. They lived in confused situations which obliged them to care a sort of bad attitude and to be unconscious of their violent and hostile behaviour. Step by step, the students’ attitude started to change, of course, because of their teacher and her guidance through reading literature. The teenagers’ reading of prose fiction and poetry led them to a state of self-awareness. Vincent Guilliano is the model poet to the teenagers because of his concepts

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<sup>2</sup> Miep Gies is the woman who saved Anne Frank and her family during the Holocaust. Her relation with the teenagers is that they have invited her to their school after reading the Diary of Anne Frank. She told them Anne’s story and she taught them many things about humanity.

about life and the idyllic men. Of course Guilliano's poem has carried touching messages that helped in changing the students' situations; they began a journey to be mature people.

# *Chapter Two*

*The Teenagers' production of literature and the  
shared ideologies*

## *Introduction*

*II.1. Towards the Actualisation of the Self: Teenagers' Will of Writing*

*II.2. Between Pessimism and Optimism: The student's ambivalent attitude*

*II.3. Towards Mental and Linguistic Endeavour: Students' Growth and Maturity  
through poetry*

*II.4. Linguistic Maturity*

*II.4.1. The graphological deviation in Stand*

*II.1.1. The Repetition in the Poem Stand*

*II.5. Psycho-Social Maturity*

*II.6. The Shared Identity or the Common Self*

## *Conclusion*

## **Introduction**

To show the different faces of reality of the America social structure, I see it important to put an accent on a mode of writing which transcends largely the frame of exploration of the teenagers' condition, as it is categorized in the Freedom Writer's diary. The "Universal view" the teacher Erin Gruwell wants to reach with her students does not, in any case, incite young people to destroy the already existing system but, simply, to define themselves and to make significant their very identity. The mode of writing is very important because Barthes argues that: writing had a specific relationship of form to content, embodied in the conventions of writing and operating within ethical and political values as a social fact.

Writing as a moral act and as a social Barthes asserted, "is always rooted in something beyond language, but develops like a seed, not like a line, it manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anti communication, it is intimidating." (1977: 14)

### **II.1. Towards the Actualisation of the Self: Teenagers' Will of Writing**

When Arthur Miller commented abundantly on the nature of society in *All my Sons*, through his character Chris Killer, that "there is a universe of people outside, and you're responsible to it" (1949), he is trying to say that the readers are witnessing lives and human relationships in their essential forms. Therefore, one could say that the reader's analysis of the poems written by the students must be significant for both the authors and the readers, for the reader himself can be the second author of the poem as the poet can be an implied reader. One can understand what is particular with the students as s/he can notice their mental evolution, and therefore their acceptance of themselves and of the others.

The production of the students needs essentially a mode of writing which is according to Barthes “an act of historical solidarity [...] a function [...]it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality” (Ibid);

It is very important therefore to account for the teenagers’ writing because, through the language they have made use of, they push the reader to discover the intrinsic eternal value of the poems which is essentially the truth not forcibly the beauty although poems generally express subjectivity more than other texts. Yet, the students’ poems cannot, in fact, be considered as their subjective expression because the students are not assumed identical with the speakers of the poems. This is undoubtedly why they prefer expressing themselves graphically. The form of the poems they write is very significant to know about their past, present and even about the forgone future; they may lay words which carry semantic loads because, as again Ronald Barthes says, “form is considered as a human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History”. (Ibid)

## **II.2. Between Pessimism and Optimism: The student’s ambivalent attitude**

One of the students has written a poem entitled *An Innocent Freedom Writer* to express his unsteady emotions and precarious feeling. This poem is the following

*A young black boy filled with innocence and care,  
Looking for someone, but no one is there.  
His first day of school, the father’s not around,  
To comfort his son when he’s sad and down.  
Looks up to his brother who knows money and power,  
Watching his back every single hour.  
An innocent boy is now twelve years of age,  
And finds him-self locked up in a human-sized cage.  
An innocent young man is now a criminal mind,  
Having nightmares of murders every single time.  
But this time you’ll think this fool should see the light,  
But he’s jumped in a gang and they nickname him “Snipe.”*

*Kicked out of the house and left in the cold.  
 Have you been through this at eleven years old?  
 He says to himself “no one cares for me,”  
 Then makes his bed in an old park tree.  
 The next time a park bench, how long can it last?  
 Will he forget this dreadful, dreadful past!  
 He goes to Wilson High with a messed-up trail,  
 And meets a guardian angel named Erin Gruwell.  
 He learns about the Holocaust, Anne Frank and the Jews.  
 Now the time comes that he should choose.  
 He meets Anna, Terri, Tommy, and others.  
 These are the innocent boy’s new sisters and brothers.  
 A 0.5 now a 2.8—  
 Change is good, for those that wait.  
 He’s back to innocence, but still has fear,  
 That death is upon him and drawing near.  
 But people say it’s hard to see,  
 This life of emotions is all about me.  
 All this is true, because I’m not a liar  
 Just a broken hearted male with a label—Freedom Writer! (1999:159-160)*

After being conscious of the self, the author of *An Innocent Freedom Writer* has decided to write about his story because he believes that the best way to show the right path is to show one’s wrong path. The author of the above text finds in his experience sort of answers to people’s questions over their behaviours and attitudes vis-à-vis others. The written story was about his resistance as a young black man towards the chaotic society he lives in. In fact this very situation shows his state of man who has never known his father, and who used to live with his brother that taught him to live as an OG (Original Gangster).

He keeps on explaining how was his life as a gang member exposed to violent actions leading to crimes in a very young age. As a black teenager, his dream was haunted by money, power and fame, but alas, this dream fades the more he gets close to the reality he lives; a reality which is more than being just a young black man for he sees nightmares



about death and murders, and finds himself trapped in a box or”... finds him-self locked up in a human-sized cage.”(Ibid)

The author shows a reality which could not be denied; therefore, his intention is to show the way how man should behave. He talks on behalf of all those who feel lost and identifies, he sees himself through the others as he sees the others through himself. In a certain moment in the poem he said: “He goes to Wilson High with a messed-up trail, And meets a guardian angel named Erin Gruwell.” (Ibid)

He met Erin Gruwell who changed everything in his life. She has inspired him to learn, think and become conscious of his situation. He, also, knew new friends with whom he shares the same fate. Despite their personal stories, idiosyncratic experiences, distinctive problems and their unique struggles, they have learned, through literature which was their salvation, many things that helped them think beyond their personal circle. Erin Gruwell gave them the inspiration to study literature and its genres; she has initiated them to the study of diaries, novels and poems. She was very decisive in her choice of the literary works. She has selected works which are likely to treat situations similar to her students’, and which were likely to lead to the state of self-awareness.

The poem illustrates very little hope for the reader; that is to say, the writer shows the hope and in the same time, he shows fear, as if he is stuck in his past and still afraid from the gangsters’ life and especially from death.

Following the steps of Vincent Guillianio, this freedom writer has started his poem as if he is asking himself questions about human values, notions, and usefulness. The young poet thinks in terms of being alone in his messy life, and there is no one to show him the right path. He has never known what the good thing is and what the bad one is, and the

absence of the father has played the biggest role in his life. The feeling of being unconscious is exposed in his poem by the repetition of the expression "*innocent*". The poet found himself following his brother's steps; who is a gang member, because he is the one who stands always next to him, unfortunately, in a negative way. The freedom writer has joined to the gangsters' lives knowing that he is doing the wrong thing, and again, no one is there for him. He hated this life, he felt that his life was nothing more than a small cage, as he claimed in his poem: "...and finds himself locked up in human-sized cage."(Ibid)

His life became related to crimes and murders till he started seeing nightmares every time. The poet has started rethinking his life and how long could he live like that, also he was mystified about the ability to forget this miserable life or not. Unexpectedly, he met this teacher after going to Wilson high school, who called her "*a guardian angel*". Semantically speaking, the guardian angel has many interpretations in literature, yet, generally, it is derived from the sacred texts and scriptural ideologies. For example, referring to an antique Jewish belief, each person had his/her guardian angel, and a spirit could assume the features of some observable being. Others refer to the pure hearted people as angels.

Another way to see the holy guardian angels is as "the future magical self". It's like meeting yourself after you become a realized being who transcends space and time.

For the poet, Erin Gruwell is a protector, a guide or a pure hearted guide that lightened his path back to innocence. Although the boy was still afraid of his past and of death which threatens him every day, he confesses that he learnt, from the teacher, many things that are related to his story and social situation.

*An Innocent Freedom Writer* is a poem which is full of mixed emotions. The poet expresses a sense of pessimism in his poem as it is shown in the following:

*A young black boy filled with innocence and care,  
Looking for someone, but no one is there.  
His first day of school, the father's not around,  
To comfort his son when he's sad and down. (Ibid)*

The pessimistic view appears at the e level of language. The choice of some lexicon items by the students is significant because the student was nicknamed **snipe**. This nick name has essentially an adjectival connotation. The word snipe has a literal meaning; it is a kind of bird with a long thin mouth that lives in damp areas. But as slang, Paul Dickson in his book *War Slang: American Fighting Words & Phrases since the Civil War, Third Edition* (2011: 97) claims that in every black gang there is a member who called snipe. Also, it is mentioned that an earlier meaning of snipe is a contemptible and despicable person. The poet meant to mention that the gang had nicknamed him like that to make the reader feel about his situation, about how was he and to what he became.

The student shifts from this pessimistic position to another which seems more optimistic thanks to his teacher Gruwell, when he said:

*He goes to Wilson High with a messed-up trail,  
And meets a guardian angel named Erin Gruwell.  
He learns about the Holocaust, Anne Frank and the Jews.  
Now the time comes that he should choose.  
He meets Anna, Terri, Tommy, and others.  
These are the innocent boy's new sisters and brothers. (Ibid)*

The word which appears in the second line is very important. David Van Biema, about the **guardian angel**, in an Article entitled *Guardian Angels are Here, Say Most Americans*,

**says that** “More than half of all Americans believe they have been helped by a guardian angel in the course of their lives...” (2008)

According to the poet, Erin Gruwell was the angel who helped him to get away from his dreadful situation. A guardian angel was more than enough for him as a description to the woman who rescues him from gangsters’ lives.

But, astonishingly, the student comes back to re-express pessimism as appears in the following verses:

*He’s back to innocence, but still has fear,  
That death is upon him and drawing near.  
But people say it’s hard to see,  
This life of emotions is all about me.  
All this is true, because I’m not a liar  
Just a broken hearted male with a label—Freedom Writer! (Ibid)*

What is inciting to reflection is this line: *back to **innocence**, but still has **fear***. **Innocence** and **fear** are syntactically linked within the same semantic field, and as attributes to the KID. To mean that it is legitimate to get fear or to be afraid since one is an innocent in such a cruel chaotic society. Yet, this human being never loses hope albeit the expressed fear. There is always hope because one believes that positive change is something static because a man should, normally, keep on the right path after behaving himself no matter what would be the threats. In this perspective, one would focus more on the sense of maturity that could be read in the students’ poems. This state of being pushed them to a stage of consciousness and responsibility. It is a very challenging stage in that one would ask a question about the very possibility of keeping on the same path; this question seems appropriate in this stance because in one of the poems the student found himself dangling between optimism and pessimism.

### **II.3. Towards Mental and Linguistic Endeavour: Students' Growth and Maturity through poetry**

To read the poem stand is certainly to understand why Gruwell's students have changed their mind; the critical reading would show many elements which are occulted, and that would show the extent to which these students are mature.

One of the students has written a poem entitled stand in which he breaks the structure which keeps him defining himself with reference to his race and origin. He broke the structure by means of pride because the essence of human pride is more than to be attributed to a given individual belonging to a given group; it is in fact a human notion as it is shown in the following lines.

Stay Black—  
Stay Proud  
Stay White—  
Stay Proud  
Stay Br own—  
Stay Proud  
Stay Yellow  
Stay Proud...

The student keeps on talking about pride in deed as a human notion and convincing not only himself but the others to be proud of what they are, to be proud of their very nature and to accept themselves as it is shown in the following lines:

Don't be afraid to be what you are,  
'cause all you can be, is you!  
You'll never be anything else but you,  
So be the best you, you can be.  
Keep it *real*—  
by all means  
at all times.

Erin Gruwell's student seems to have learnt a lot from his teacher for the latter did not show any sort of negative pride (argons) but taught them a sense of pride which enhances equality, complimentarily and human essence definition. In the eyes of the student although different people do exist for a certain reason; they exist to make of themselves valuable human real selves means of accepting the self. This is what could be noticed in the following lines:

Whether a lawyer, a doctor, a football player,  
a toilet cleaner, a garbage handler, a panhandler —  
keep it *real*  
and still—  
be the *best* you can be.

Have pride, have dignity, *stand!*  
Stand proud, talk proud, act proud, be proud!

Don't lay down,  
back down,  
bow down,  
run away,  
sell out yourself,  
sell into criticism.

Be *real* and *realize* that the ones who criticize,  
Best recognize that you are you—  
take it or leave it.

“MMM HMM!”  
I knew you'd get it.  
Get what?  
The stuff—  
the stuff called pride, that attitude, that aura,  
your identity, yourself, your pride, peace of mind,  
worry free.

See, *I can't be you*, but I'm a damn good *ME!*

Righteous (1999: 174-175)

In the poem, the student pointed out to all races, black, white, brown and yellow and asking them not to be afraid of society, system, and the others in general. This freedom writer had experienced the feeling of being discriminated in society and of being criticized owing to his color, body or actions. The student seems to be really mature psychologically, socially and even linguistically, and having a sense of responsibility vis-à-vis the others who share him the same fate. This maturity is translated by his talent and style of writing. The language he used that grammar finds difficulties to generate explains his capacity of handling the language and of being mature.

#### **II.4.Linguistic Maturity**

The poem contains many literary deviations and devices which the writer has used to express his feelings, and strengthen up the meaning of his message for the reader. The poet as a freedom writer has not written a free verse poem haphazardly, this reflects his thoughts, way of thinking and life style. From experiencing the sufferance of being a minority, to changing to a better person and integrating with others, the poet has changed his way of thinking, straight, to think free, act free and be free. S/he wanted to deliver this experience to the readers of the diary and to the people who are suffering from the same problems the poet had been through.

##### **II.4.1. The Graphological Deviation in *Stand***

The graphological deviation is any bizarre use of punctuation that creates a sort of strong meaning in the poem. (Leech: 47)

In this poem, it is noticed the over use of punctuation, spacing and capitalization. Nevertheless, Leech has claimed that for E.E Cummings the use of punctuations, capitalization and spacing are expressive devices and not symbols to be used, i.e. the graphological deviation is used abnormally to decipher a certain implicit message. (Ibid)

The message coded message in *Stand* is that everything the poet had been through is real, and s/he wants the reader to believe of the self and to be self-aware, yet not to be guided by the others or as s/he said in the poem:

“Be *real* and *realize* that the ones who criticize,  
best recognize that you are you—” (1999:175)

Semantically, means that “the ones who criticize” are the other persons who guide the individuals’ action by criticizing him that is to say that a non-aware individual will loss personality by coping what the others say. The dash in this verse is put to make the reader to stop and second thought about the previous idea, however to decipher the coded message and get the accurate interpretation.

The use of capitalization is shown in this poem, where there are some expressions capitalized on purpose for the same goal of the dashes that is mentioned by Leech.

It is noticed in the poem the use of italicization, which signifies the importance of the italicized words and expressions, thus the poet wanted to draw the attention of the readers for words written in italics and tell them, implicitly, to focus on them and there is a reason behind italicizing those terms.

The following example sums-up the graphological deviation in the poem:

“‘MMM HMM!’  
I knew you’d get it.  
Get what?”



The stuff—  
the stuff called pride, that attitude, that aura,  
your identity, yourself, your pride, peace of mind,  
worry free.  
See, *I can't be you*, but I'm a damn good *ME!*  
Righteous.”

The first verse is a kind of a sound that make the reader comfortable in reading the poem, and feeling as if the poet is addressing him. Thus, the poet's message is to show the reader that each individual has its own personality.

Capitalization, italicization and punctuation also appear in the example, and their significance is what is mentioned above.

#### **II.4.2. The Repetition in the Poem *Stand***

Repetition is a device used in literature to draw the reader attention to a certain idea or to an important term, in order to help to memorise it or take it into consideration. Tynea Lewis in her online article, she defined the repetition in poetry and gave an example to simplify her idea claiming that:

*Repetition is a technique used to draw a person's attention to a certain idea. Think about school. If a teacher wants to get her point across, is she going to say it once? No. She is going to repeat it multiple times so it begins to sink in. The same works with poetry. (Tynea Lewis, 2014)*

She took the example of a teacher when trying to put an idea in the students' minds; the teacher will repeat the idea during the class till it, unconsciously, enters to their minds.

This is the intention of the poet behind using the repetition in his poem, he wanted to catch the readers' attention to some expressions that represent his feelings, maybe, or a hidden message that the readers need to understand and interpret.

This technique can be used in a various ways, such as the repetition of a word or words during the poem, phrasal repetition or the repetition of an entire line. (Ibid)

In the case of the poem *Stand*, there are many repeated words and expressions and they are represented in the table below:

Word/expression	Times repeated
Stay	8
Stay proud	4
Be	11
You	10
Proud	8
Stand	3
Down	3
Real	2
You can be	3

**Table 01: the repeated words/expressions in the poem *Stand***

The poet has started his poem with the word *stay which is* repeated eight frequent times. And the clause *stay proud* is repeated four times. The poet wants to draw the reader's attention to these words and clauses because they are the heart of this poem, i.e. his whole poem is about having dignity and being proud of the individual's self. He is calling for the self-awareness through these words for the people who are in a discriminatory situation.

It is observed in the poem the repetition of the verb *to be*. The poet's intention behind this repetition is to tell the reader that nothing is impossible and he can be whatever he wants, he can be himself, he can be the best. The word *be*, is almost spread in all over the poem, as if the poet wanted to stress the power ability inside the reader or to tell him that he is capable.

Generally, the personal pronoun used in a text to avoid repetition of the proper nouns, but in this case the repeated personal pronoun *you* has the significance to address all the readers at ones since there is no proper noun or the purpose of the poem to address all the readers as *you*. Nevertheless, it makes each reader thinks that the poet is addressing him in personal.

*Proud*, is a word repeated eight times and that is to make an emphasis to it throughout the poem. The poet wished for the reader to stand for this word, to put it in mind and heart and to live with it.

The word *stand* in the poem is the main word in the poem, yet it is its title. To be sure that the word has a big implication, the first time mentioned in the poem is italicized i.e. italic writing is a graphological deviation, and its purpose is to catch the reader's attention to the word. And to make it more important, the poet has used the repetition literary device to reinforce his message to the reader.

Don't lay down, back down, bow down... (1999:174)

The negation came before the first *down* has changed the meaning of the word from a negative one into a word that gives hope and an expression of giving advice.

The word *real* and the expression *you can be* are both repeated twice and three times in a row.

*Real*, shows that the reader should live the reality and he has to believe that. Like the word *stand*, *real* has an importance to the poet, because it came italicized in both times it has appeared in the poem.

*You can be*, is an expression has the same significance of the word *be*, which is to make the reader believe that he is capable of change.

## **II.5.Psycho-Social Maturity**

Students sometimes talk about themselves, but they ignore that they are talking on behalf of the others. The long lasting poem, *They say, I say*, is a good example of that. The two personal pronouns which appear in the title show that. Although the pronoun *they* which shows the external position, comes at the first position in the title, the poet remains always a spokesman. When the teenage Latina girl wrote the poem, she was talking about herself and her experience within society, maybe, without knowing that her poem will be published and read by other people from her own race. The personal pronoun ‘*I*’ will not be about her anymore, it will be rather a “collective I” about every reader who has the same pessimistic view of himself.

### **They Say, I Say**

*They say I am brown*

*I say*

*I am proud.*

*They say I only know how to cook*

*I say*

*I know how to write a book*

*So*

*don't judge me by the way I look*

*They say I am brown*

*I say*

*I am proud*

*They say I'm not the future of this nation  
I say  
Stop giving me discrimination  
Instead  
I'm gonna use my education  
to help build the human nation (1999:203-204)*

This poem is a short free verse. It is written by a student of the freedom writers, who was hopeless and full of negative thoughts about her life and her future. Thus, she thought that her path in being a grown up girl is either to quit the school or getting pregnant. Erin Gruwell was talking to her student about going to college, and this little poet did not accept this idea in the beginning claiming: "...all the girls my age are already knocked up by some cholo. Like they say, if you're born in the 'hood, you're bound to die in it." (1999:202)

In the girl's mind, there were other false concepts about the people who go to college. The poet thought that the college was made only for rich white people (Ibid)

Erin Gruwell has gave the girl a book untitled *Growing Up Chicano* which is a book about Latino people who were negative thinkers like the girl, but they got out from the ghetto and became something in society. (Ibid)

After reading the book and sharing a moment in the class with her classmates, the girl has decided to write the poem *They Say, I Say* to read it in the class and to share it in *The Freedom Writers Diary* to be a model for all the ethnic groups who are suffering from life in the ghetto and have pessimistic thinking about their lives.

This poem is kind of free verse poem. The poet has written *They Say, I Say* as a message addressing the others and people from her own kind. Through her words, it is noticed that she has got criticism about her life being a Latina, thus, she said in her poem: "They say I only know how to cook" (Ibid), yet through these few words, she talked about a

whole Latin history, i.e. historically speaking, in the United States of America, it is popular that Latin women works as house maids and servants to rich white people. In a research done by Molly Keefe entitled *A Woman's Work is Never Done; An Analysis of Domestic work, Race, Class and Gender*, she talked about Latina women and their activities as housework in the United States. Furthermore, Molly stated that women workers in USA used by patriarchal regime, i.e. controlled by men. (Keefe, 2002)

It can be extracted from the up next quote by Keefe that Latin women are the most used as maids and house servants in USA, and what the poet meant in her line “They say I only know how to cook.” (1999:202)

*Some of the literature I have used focuses mainly on Mexican or Chicana women, but I would like to use a slightly broader population encompassing women who fit into the category of Latina, which I understand as meaning those who either emigrated from Latin America, or were born in the United States but are of Latin American descent.(Ibid)*

Latin people took a place in the American population, thus the author's poem and the message delivered through it could reach the majority of Hispanic people in USA specially the teenagers. Since the story of the freedom writers began in 1995, and the poem has been written in 1997, Thomas C. Reeves in his book *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History* claims that:

*In 1998, the Census Bureau reported that there were 29.7 million Hispanics in America, about 11 percent of the population. Los Angeles and its environs contained nearly six million Hispanic residents, a number greater than the population of most individual states. (Thomas C. Reeves, 2000:286)*

Thomas C. Reeves has mentioned that: "Los Angeles and its environs contained nearly six million Hispanic residents..." (Ibid), considering that the story of the Freedom Writers happened at Wilson High School, Los Angeles, California.

The upcoming line, the poet, as if she is angry, telling the other: "don't judge me by the way I look." (Ibid) Here, she is claiming that she has got some criticism about her color or race from the other.

## **II.6. The Shared Identity or the Common Self**

The girl's use of different pronouns in the poem refers certainly a she shared matter, and thus a share identity. That is to say that the poet as a Latin teenage girl represents all the minority groups.

The author has embodied her own race since she is a Latina or Chicana. She had decided to use her education (she means "collective I") to make a better America.

*They say I'm not the future of this nation  
I say  
Stop giving me discrimination  
Instead  
I'm gonna use my education  
to help build the human nation. (Ibid)*

What is more is that she has represented the girls or women from the time when they are living under the circumstances of being, either controlled by MEN or else patriarchal regime in addition to the sexual abuse, or facing the intolerance educational system. The author started her diary nagging, reflexively, men and the educational system saying: "Growing up, I always assumed I would either drop out of school or get pregnant." (Ibid)

Moreover, this young author has symbolized the other races, i.e., the Blacks, Asians, and the Cambodians, because all of them are living the same situation, of being discriminated, marginalized and alienated. They have lived the sufferance on the chaotic society mutually; in addition to that they have changed together from their depressed situation to the improved, enhanced and the better situation they become.

### **Conclusion**

The teenagers' production of poetry proves that there is in fact a change of behavior and attitude. This change has been proved through this chapter, yet the teenagers have created a sort criticism that allowed them to write their own fiction. Through their writings, the students have shown a sense of maturity in both levels linguistic and psychological. Gruwell's students have grown up linguistically, because they became able to write poetry using deviations and devices in their works, as well as psychologically when they have shown acceptance towards the other, yet this acceptance is revealed within the poems they have written.



*General*

*Conclusion*

## General Conclusion

The freedom writer diary is a guide to show its readers a journey of young teenagers who were at a very low level of education and. Erin Gruwell, when she has started teaching the teenagers; she has found that they are careless errant teenagers who come to school because they are obliged to. Their intention was never to study or become a well educated people, but they see school as a gang centre.

Gruwell wanted to change this situation; she used diaries as means to see and to know their problems, but from the other hand the teenagers started seeing the diaries as their escape from reality. They have found a sense of release when writing the diaries. Nevertheless, their level of writing was very stumpy, from the choice of words to the level of formality. Gruwell has not criticised them or complained from their writings, however, she knew that the diary is about writing about anything in a personal style.

The teacher has taken her students to the world of literature, in the moment where they are writing their diaries.

When reading *The Freedom Writers Diary*, the first thing the reader notice is the naive language in use specially in the beginning of the diary; the naivety is felt in their words and stories when they tell anything happened to them in an amplified use of informality and vulgarity.

The students, with the help of Erin Gruwell, have gone through an unconscious process of evolution at several levels; by the reading of literature and the writing of the diaries, they have developed linguistically, thematically and psychologically. The students' linguistic level has urbanized and changed from top to bottom, moreover, some of them had created their own style of writing and became able to write poems. They became able

to think realistically, build ideologies in life that turn into a life slogan. The teenagers became a future men and women with perspectives; they are not aggressive and unteachable students anymore. Erin Gruwell, through the reading of literature and the writing of diaries, has skilled her students the acceptance of themselves and the acceptance of the others' criticism. Psychologically, they have created from themselves the future model for the next generation of the minority groups. Supposing that the next generations of the minority groups will walk on the same horizontal path of the freedom writer, the term or the expression of MINORITY GROUP will be archaic and it will be vanished and thus the American society will be horizontally transcended.

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