

**International Baccalaureate  
English Language & Literature HL  
Written Task 1- Part 2**

**Session: May 2013**

### Rationale

This written task covers 'Part 2- Language and mass communication' in the course, and consists of an analysis of a McDonald's advert in the format of an opinion piece in the style of English author Will Self. Having read and analysed Self's column in the New Statesman called Real Meals, where the writer reviews food franchises and tells his humorous experiences at the restaurants, I thought it would be interesting and challenging to try to emulate such a characteristic writing style. I thought it therefore appropriate to talk about a McDonald's advert, which assuredly Self would have seen with much contempt and cynicism. The analysis of the McDonald's video as a media text is integrated throughout the column. I highlighted the themes of the American Dream, family values and tradition, as well as honesty and simplicity, which are all present in the video. The language of the text is also described as contributing to generally clichéd and tasteless phrases. The idea that the advert is carefully constructed to attempt to convince the audience of the truth behind McDonald's, when under the surface it is quite artificial and forced, is also emphasised throughout, and even exaggerated by the attempted imitation of Will Self's writing. Will Self's writing style can be described as having a droll tone, imaginative descriptions, and an inventive use of puns and similes. I have included all of these characteristics within the task, as well as the forced pretentiousness Self demonstrates, and several cultural references. These characteristics of Will Self's style, were challenging in the way that I had to merge it with my analysis of the media text to create a sort of exaggerated opinion, which I believe would match Self's own views. Appended is an example of Will Self's Real Meals, demonstrating the author's writing style.

Word Count: 300

## Real Meals: I'll have a Happy Meal, no toy

BY WILL SELF PUBLISHED 20 DECEMBER 2011



As 2012 is drawing to a close, I have decided to make this week's *Real Meals* something different, something analogous to the very start of the oh-so enriching gastronomical journey that has been this column, I will be talking about McDonald's. Fortunately, I have not returned to dine under the golden arches, but I will be discussing a recent phenomenon of environmental awareness- to put it bluntly, bullshit. The term coined by critics is 'greenwashing', which essentially refers to the campaigns from corporate *colossi* like McDonald's to convince the *populus* their products are actually environmentally friendly, natural and healthy, in the hopes that there'd be a little less *vox*. With regard to McDonald's, there are a series of new television adverts that upon my first viewing, practically made me forget that the restaurant's food is complete and utter crap. No they didn't. What this campaign consists of is different stories of simple, self-made American farmers who share the immeasurable joy of growing the products used by McDonald's. The campaign is like a salad of different ethnicities, genders and backgrounds, coated with a dressing of clichéd fallacy, and tossed with good ol' American Dream utensils. The only predicament is that nobody buys salads from McDonald's.

### Land of the Fries

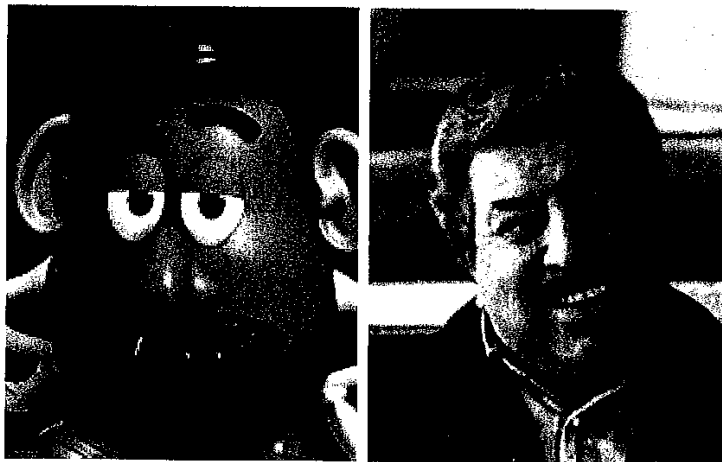
The first advert released depicts the life potato supplier, Frank Martinez, a chubby hispanic character, whose video is entitled "Dream Come True". Within the first seconds, Yankee Frankie is boasting: "this all came about through hard work and dedication". Having moved to the States as a child, I assume the hard work was on the pronunciation when the producer of the video told Frank his accent wasn't Spanish enough. Add a few more cheesy, forgettable lines and cue the laid-back guitar music. The ad switches between a series of Sundance-worthy shots of the Washington countryside; a sunset, a potato field, machinery at work, all in shades of green, yellow and brown. This is juxtaposed with Martinez's cheap phrases, including numerous: "my father told me..." and others like: "when you make something with pride, people can taste it". Clearly pride isn't enough Paco, since all I tasted when I last paid a visit to Old Mac Donald was post-frosted drabness. Rest assured, by calling this hispanic fellow Paco, I was in no way making a racist generalisation- it appears to be his real Uncle-Sam-unadulterated name. The advert is drenched with the idea of the American Dream, playing up the tale of this simpleton from south-of-the-border, an outsider, went from nothing to 1000 acres of potatoes. This overused story is more insipid than McDonald's fries. Then we see Frank as a family man; playing with his grandson and walking along with his dogs, making the viewers sympathise with him even more- more insufferable crap. Tradition and family values are clearly emphasised here, as Frank says someday his son and grandson "will continue to grow

quality potatoes”. The cynical part of me (which is at the same time all of me) hungered for the correction- “or live off the cash pile we made from this film.”

Frank, sitting in front of his massive pile of spuds, is the perfect example of a simple, honest, but powerful man, supplying potatoes for a simple, but powerful corporation. I believe McDonald’s really manages to get this point across- they may be the fast food guys but they’re still prioritising natural products, clean and healthy food, and most of all, they’re looking after people like Frank, they’re helping the small guys get to the top. In this advert, McDonald’s is synonym of the American Dream. The people who aren’t bumbling baboons of course, don’t buy into this- people like me. Now I haven’t seen the other adverts, but one of these is as filling as an effortless Big Mac.

We then see Martinez on his fields slicing a potato- “Good potato,” he remarks. We can’t see the quality of the potato, but we can see how Frank is awfully similar to the earthy spud he’s picked up. In fact, from the tedious hours spent watching Toy Story with my eleven-year-old, I discerned Martinez amusingly resembles Mr. Potato-Head. This comparison isn’t just because of Frank’s sunburnt podgy face and dark moustache. No, Frankie Potato-Head, like the oafs in the other adverts, can swap parts accordingly, be pulled apart and manipulated by a bigger power-- he’s a fucking toy.

Aside from all the negativity about this whole façade, the films are quite intelligently put together (for a campaign directed at an audience of negative intelligence quotient). The juxtaposition of hard and family values visually, the ‘meaningful’ and wise words of Martinez, and the automated guitar music that would touch any *schmo*’s heart result in a truly effective campaign. Not that any viewer would be able to express that or react to the video in any way other than going out to buy fast food. Nevertheless, if McDonald’s invested in hollywood films, hiring actor/puppets as good as Frankie, maybe they could make enough to stop selling such shitty food.



Word Count: 854

References:

1. McDonaldUS, 'McDonald's Potato Supplier, Frank Martinez: "Dream Come True"'. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xxlEkstcwM>. YouTube Video
2. Photograph of Will Self. <http://www.newstatesman.com/food/2009/10/fast-food-mcdonald-real-eat>
3. Picture of Mr. Potato Head. [http://pixar.wikia.com/Mr. Potato Head](http://pixar.wikia.com/Mr._Potato_Head)

An example of a New Statesman Real Meals article by Will Self is appended on the following pages, found at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/food/2009/10/fast-food-mcdonald-real-eat>

## Appendix

## Real Meals: I'm leavin' it

Walking into the McDonald's on Oxford Street made me feel like Rip Van Winkle

BY WILL SELF PUBLISHED 01 OCTOBER 2009

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When, in 1996, I hung up my bib as the restaurant critic of the *Observer*, I went out with a grande bouffe by eating at McDonald's and La Tante Claire in a single lunchtime. It seemed to me that yoking a Michelin three-star temple of cuisine to a fast-food joint where the keener staff wore three plastic stars perfectly expressed the taste of the nation. If only I could have foreseen what was to come.

I never really wanted to review food anyway. What interested me was fancy restaurants as a theatrical experience - the bourgeoisie ogling itself in mirrored booths. Perhaps now, at last, the time is ripe for a little deflation, and maybe we should all start paying attention to what's on the end of our plastic forks, not Nigella, Marco Pierre, F\*\*\*ing Gordon and all the other celebrity egg-flippers. It's in this, more grounded, spirit that I undertake to survey the establishments where we actually eat, and the real meals they serve. Only a fraction of the population will ever nosh in La Tante Claire, whereas, at current sales levels, the 1,115 McDonald's in Britain could serve a meal to every man, woman and child in the country given a mere 35 days.

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The chain may no longer be the largest in the fast-food world - that's Yum! Brands, parent company of KFC - but it remains the foodies' biggest McBogeyman. Proper people don't eat there - only the chavs; besides, for the left, McDonald's, with its global reach and aggressive uniformity, isn't so much a food outlet as the fourth arm of American military power. They may serve McRice in Indonesia but, barring a few regional variations, when you enter a McDonald's - whether in Seoul or Scunthorpe - you're making a contract: place your lips here to suck on the tailpipe of globalisation.

I - consciously - hadn't eaten in a McDonald's for at least five years before visiting one for this piece, since one afternoon when my then three-year-old had a full-blown hyperglycaemic fit after taking a couple of slurps on a McFlurry. So, walking into the McDonald's on Oxford Street, through a funnelled passage with a floor-length VDU screen on one side, along which ran the continuous thread "I'm lovin' it", made me feel like Rip Van Winkle. Three years ago, the chain underwent the first major corporate redesign in aeons. All that yellow and orange has been infused with terracotta. Then there are the "linger", the "grab & go" and the "family" zones - all of them differently detailed.

I noted that ethnic delicacies such as an oriental snack wrap and a chorizo melt were on the menu, but I wanted to remain within the cave of the Platonic burger, so I ordered the upmarket equivalent, something called an "M", which, at £3.49, was basically a square burger on "Italian" bread. Naturally, I had to have a small fries (99p), and a small Coke (89p), and also a garden salad (99p) that turned out to be a tiny nest of lettuce, grated carrot and radicchio, in which lay a clutch of cherry tomatoes. It came with a sachet of sweet dressing, ostentatiously labelled "2.2% FAT", which was the size of a mobile phone. Once I'd spurted it into the waxed paper pot, the leaves were drowning in this gloop.

Upstairs in the "grab & go" zone, on moulded barstools, a svelte-looking and multiracial gaggle of narcissists watched themselves eat in mirrors, while glancing occasionally at a monitor on which African-American men and women toyed with each other's underwear to musical accompaniment. What a triumph for the Blairite social revolutionaries! There was even someone reading a book - albeit one written by Bill Bryson.