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The Power of Transformation

In the essay, “Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self,” the author, Alice Walker, ushers the audience towards a place of self-discovery and self-acceptance. She does this by employing the use of ethos, building trust and empathy through the authoritative and chilling re-telling of a first hand account. Walker has the power of coming across as someone trustworthy and full of integrity, having the experience of both trauma and rebirth to add value to what she is proclaiming - that beauty can come from (or be found in) brokenness. The author strongly engages the power of pathos by laying the backstory of the person she was before her childhood accident and sharing the emotional tale of the person she was in the wake of it. In this manner, we see the author make her case excellently.

It appears certain in Walker’s story that she believes in the power of trauma and tragedy to transform. In fact, the author tells the readers that there is a moment in their pain and injustice where they can come to appreciate it for all it’s taught them about themselves and the ways which it’s contributed to the person they are today (230). Not only does she believe in the power of trauma and tragedy to transform, she expresses it in a way that almost suggests an air of thankfulness for it. However, this revelation comes only after many battles of the self. During one of these battles it’s been 30 years since her eye-damaging incident and she’s been asked to pose for the cover of a magazine. This looms over her and she is confronted once again with the hatred of her appearance. She lies awake at night, worrying that her eye will betray her at her

photoshoot - that it will not behave the way it is supposed to (227). Because of this she begins to come up with reasons why she shouldn't do the photoshoot. This self-consciousness is a perfect appeal to pathos.

What made this piece convey so much power is that it is clear that the author is writing it for herself. She is writing it for herself and to anyone else who can identify with her and the sentiments she expresses in her story. I believe the author's intent in using herself as the primary subject matter, was to make peace of the trauma that she experienced in her life. In making peace with pain herself, she also purposes to help her broader audience make peace with trauma(s) or injustice that they've experienced in their lives.

The author wants her audience to feel validated, that they were hurt and experienced great change because of it. She wants her audience to be able to see their own beauty. The author connects on an emotional level many times throughout the essay, again employing the use of pathos - appealing to her audiences need to feel validated. The first connection happens earlier on with the author insinuating that when someone has a physical handicap or obvious blemish of some sort, they are made the target not only abuse by their peers, but of neglect by what once felt like loving and preferential parents. This not only elicits a sense of sadness and fear (pathos), but one of betrayal and distrust of the people in her life who were supposed to be her greatest protectors and caregivers - these feelings are what enrapture her audience. She shares a story about being the one selected by her father to join him on all of his outings (one of them being a trip to the fair), but after her accident she is left with a physical blemish and her father is no longer willing to have her parade around with him. She ceases to be the proud trophy that he'd carried around before. This recounted experience from Walker lends

well to her audience, employing again the use of pathos - conveying feelings of great shame and indignation.

Midway through the essay we are given another grave picture of the impact the incident has had on the author. Going from someone popular and not bothered, after the accident she suddenly becomes the subject of bullying by her peers. After experiencing the torment and torture of her peers, who mock her for the appearance of her eye, there is a big change that takes place in the way that she sees herself. She goes from a confident, self-assured, self-loving young woman, to adopting the criticism and taunting of the typical schoolyard bully. In a sort of morbid almost nightly tradition, she begins beating herself down with glares of hatred and words of disgust. She very vulnerably shares with her audience, "That night, as I do almost every night, I abuse my eye. I rant and rave at it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty" (227). Walker longs to be looked upon as she was before, a person of beauty rather than someone whom people stare at because of a physical imperfection.

The author presents her case as one very compelling. Though she clearly struggles with coming to terms and reaching a place of healing throughout the essay, in the end she lands herself and the reader right where they'd want to be - in a place of great resolve. The struggle is presented in the essay in a structural way that makes the reader go back and forth with the author between adulthood and childhood. I found this effective, primarily because it shows clearly the author did still struggle and suffer from what she endured in her youth.

Walker greatly opposes her family, who believes she did not experience great change after being involved in her accident. She resentfully remembers and repeats her mother and her siblings insisting phrase, "You did not change" they say (227). It is clear that Walker despises

them for this and this is perhaps the crux of her pain. Throughout the essay she aggressively and compellingly proves their theory wrong by presenting (through the telling of her experiences), evidence of the changes and trauma she went through as a result of the eye-blinding incident. The author's sought after validation comes essentially from not being validated by her family. This is what constantly seems to lead her down memory lane and into the retelling of her story - and further, to a place of great resolve.

The dream in which her healing is made apparent takes place after a beautiful and unexpected moment shared between the writer and her three-year-old daughter. In this moment her daughter makes a remark to her that is built of such pure kindness and gentle curiosity that it seems to startle Walker into a new place of self-discovery. She is putting her daughter to sleep and notices that she begins to stare at her eye. Walker begins to experience a bit of panic, worrying that her daughter will be just as cruel about her marble-like eye as all the other kids she's encountered in the past. Instead her daughter breaks the uneasy silence by inquiring, "Mommy, where did you get that world in your eye?" (229).

"For the most part, the pain left then" the author writes (229). After years of being the loveliest, to being the one most neglected and most teased. After years of often hanging her head low, not being able to look at herself with pride and love, she is finally brought into a new place. Through this moment of gentleness shared between her and her daughter she is given access to a different portal into herself. That very night she has the dream. In this dream she is dancing with a character who she comes to discover is actually herself. The imagery is as though she is looking in a mirror at her reflection and for once, not cursing her reflection, but rather in full approval of herself. In her reflection she sees, for the first time in her adult life – not someone broken and damaged, but someone beautiful, strong and full of value. Walker writes, "Yes

indeed, I realized, looking into the mirror. There was a world in my eye. And I saw that it was possible to love it..." (230). In her reflection, she can finally see herself whole. The essay ends in a tone that expresses to the author and the audience that they are beautiful who they are, and that they are going to be okay.

Works Cited

Walker, Alice. "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self." *Reader English 101-102 Central Arizona College*, Fountainhead Press, 2017, pages 227-230.