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Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

Who would have thought that losing part of one's eyesight would only help a person see more clearly? In her essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dance is the Self" Alice Walker reveals that sometimes our losses can become our biggest gains. Alice Malsenior Walker is a wonderful well-known writer who was born in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. Strong and impactful just like her works, Walker has been a voice for African American literature, a civil rights activist, and a feminist. Her famous novel, *The Color Purple*, has pulled the heartstrings of so many and has won the Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award. Today she continues to inspire many with her captivating stories, commitment to equity and equality for all, and representation for those with no voice. "Beauty: When the Other Dance is the Self" is a compelling essay where author Alice Walker uses imagery, pathos, repetition, and symbolism to represent her transformation of self-love and self-perception while inspiring others.

Throughout Walker's essay, multiple examples of imagery can be found to help form a strong visualization for her writing. Early on in the essay, Walker states, "Whirling happily in my starchy frock, showing off my biscuit-polished patent-leather shoes and lavender socks, tossing my head in a way that makes my ribbons bounce, I stand, hands on hips, before my father." Walker begins with a positive memory of her as a child, her word choices like "Whirling happily" and "showing off" signify a proud moment filled with joy.

Later on, readers see another example of imagery when Walker writes, "One day while I am standing on the top of our makeshift 'garage' — pieces of tin nailed across some poles —

holding my bow and arrows and looking out toward the fields, I feel an incredible blow in my right eye.” Walker describes the moment her accident happens. Her brothers shot her eye with their BB gun when playing together. Her word choices such as “makeshift garage”, “looking out toward the fields”, and “incredible blow” describe the genuine, wholesome moment that quickly turned terrible. Ultimately this was the last moment of happiness our author experienced before her self-perception changed. Along with imagery, the author helps us understand her emotions through the use of pathos.

In her essay, Walker uses the rhetorical device pathos to effectively express her thoughts and emotions to better connect with readers. Walker has just experienced her accident where her brother’s BB gun pellet had hit the scar tissue of her eye causing an unpleasant noticeable scar, Walker who once took pride in her looks now said, “Now when I stare at people— a favorite pastime, up to now— they will stare back. Not at the ‘cute’ little girl, but at her scar.” This moment for Walker was a very intense and emotional experience, she describes the pain and sadness when it arrived and robbed her of happiness. From this point, Walker identifies her scar as her new identity, leading us to believe that our author has changed, her self-love and self-perspective have shifted negatively. By using the rhetorical device of repetition, we continue to understand Walker’s internal thoughts.

Walker uses the powerful rhetorical device, of repetition to emphasize and deepen the feelings and internal emotions she experiences throughout her essay. After the eye accident, the author experiences other tribulations like a change of living environment, bullying, and her mother being ill. Curious and insecure she asks her family if she has changed after the accident, and they reply, no. Walker repeats their response to her question, “You did not change,” they say.” and continues to repeat their words after every personal unfair moment she faces. The appearance of repetition is not because Walker agrees with her family, but because she is longing

to be seen and heard. The truth was she had changed tremendously. The last use of repetition our author uses in her essay is when she uses the words “I remember.” Walker repeats these words when she is 30 years old and no longer a little girl. Although her eye’s noticeable scar still consumes her thoughts, she is reminded by her husband, her life, and her daughter that her eye is beautiful and a gift to see all the good and even all the bad in her life. Walker continues to share her story through the use of symbolism to bring better clarity.

Walker also uses symbolism to help better explain and express her story and feelings. Walker uses the same symbolism twice, in the beginning of her essay she remembers her doctor saying, “Eyes are sympathetic,’ he says. ‘If one is blind, the other will likely become blind too.’” Although her doctor was speaking with scientific logic, Walker engraved these words in her mind. Losing her eyes was more than just losing her vision, now her self-worth and self-love were unstable and jeopardized. At the end of her story, Walker declares these words again, but now they have transformed into words of truth and power, her revelation. She realized with the help of her family that she could see beyond her scar, she could see all her accomplishments, success, and reasons to be happy. She acknowledged the pain and how life can be cruel, but now she has chosen to forgive and embrace the future.

Another piece of symbolism in this essay comes from the words of Walker's daughter, Rebecca. Walker is now an adult with a beautiful family, and she has learned to tolerate her scar. One day when she was putting down her three-year-old daughter for a nap, Rebecca looked up at her mother and said, “Mommy, there’s a world in your eye.” (Walker). Rebecca analyzed her mother's eye with intent and Walker started to feel defensive and worried about the potentially cruel things her daughter could say, but instead, her daughter spoke with words of love. Rebecca compared her mother’s eye to something so beautiful, the world. Taken aback by these words, it was almost instant that Walker felt every negative thought, emotion, and bitterness of the past

melt away. Walker realized that her beauty had always been there ready to embrace her, it had never left her but only changed forms, and it deserved love, she deserved love.

Overall, Alice Walker's essay "Beauty: When the Other Dance is the Self" successfully uses rhetorical devices such as imagery, pathos, repetition, and symbolism to illustrate her negative to the positive transition of self-love and self-belief. With strong word choices, visuals, and emotions Walker's essay is impactful and heart-rendering for all to relate to. Walker teaches us that we can be our own worst critics and deceive ourselves. However, we should not dwell on our imperfections, but instead realize that every part of us inside and out is beautiful and worthy of being loved. Alice Walker's touching story encourages all to find beauty within their imperfections and embrace them.

Works Cited

Walker, Alice. "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self." *Central Arizona College Rhetoric with Readings: English 101-102*, edited by Kolette Draegan, et al, revised edition, Fountainhead P, 2020, *Top Hat*, <https://app.tophat.com/e/107998>