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ENG 110: English Composition

29 November 2018

My Understanding of Beauty



This photo was taken by me in North Conway, New Hampshire on May 12, 2018.

When faced with the question of, “What does beauty mean to you?,” one must first determine what they associate as being beautiful. It is important to recognize first, what is beautiful, and second, how this changes or alters an existing feeling or perspective that one might have. This requires some reflection on what is beauty, which can be a difficult process. In order

to reflect on beauty, one must evaluate themselves, specifically, their current emotions and situations. One must be in a state where he or she can self-reflect and fully interpret the messages and images from this beautiful object. In order to receive beauty's message, I have found that one must be open and willing to receive it. Beauty can offer a new perspective or realization that one may have not felt or seen before towards something, so it is important to be able to receive and accept these new ideas. I find beauty within the outdoors, specifically the pieces of nature that captivate our attention like vast forests, gardens, or anything that has not been significantly impacted by nature. When I am faced with a beautiful piece of nature, I am able to fully experience this incredible object in a single moment, striking me with awe. John Armstrong mentions this idea of experiencing beauty and why we usually have such a significant response to it in his essay, "La bella vita." There are many definitions of beauty within my community, which I determine as my society, but I believe my view is widely considered. Although there are many possible definitions, beauty to many members of society and to me is the nature around us and the emotions and realizations we receive from it.

Beauty can be found and experienced through nature and the process of being outdoors. I believe nature represents a feeling of sacredness and appears almost "untouched," something I feel people look for in such a human-altered world. Nature is all around us, however, very few people can appreciate this idea of nature as beautiful because of this fact. This idea of recognizing simple beauty around us is seen in [Jonathan's podcast](#), as he interviewed a student named Will Wood, who described a simple encounter he had one day with nature. He described that, "Even on this sort of gray, cold day, it was stunning to be able to sort of take that time outside all of our midterms, out of all the homework I have to do, the exams I have to take, and

appreciate that moment or that span of time in which I was just able to enjoy what that tree was showing me” (Wood). Wood defines this scene as beautiful, but he also explains the emotions he felt after being able to examine this tree in a new way, a way that he may have not seen if he had not reflected on this. Armstrong describes this reflection and understanding of beauty as a way of balancing us through what Friedrich Schiller, a German dramatist and poet, describes as the “sense” and “form” drive. Schiller, like myself and other members of society, not only focuses on this object of beauty, but why and how it causes us to feel these intense emotions from beauty. The sense and the form drives are meant to tell us why we feel the way we do when we see something beautiful. Armstrong references Schiller’s ideas when he states, “When we find something *beautiful*, we are called towards a vision of *harmonious* perfection. This is not only a quality in the object, but a *longing* in ourselves” (3). We are driven by these elements of balance that come from beautiful objects and ourselves because they allow us to experience new feelings and perspectives. This is why a vast, green forest or an open field with the sound of wildlife existing within is beautiful to myself and many people in my community.

It is almost refreshing in today’s society to experience nature’s beauty. Nature, and all of these untouched elements of our society, can be so easily overlooked and forgotten. However, when we, as individuals, take the time to fully experience and dive into what this nature is showing us, we realize something about ourselves and the emotions or feelings we may have been suppressing. As a fast-paced society, it is difficult for people to devote some of their busy lives to interpret this beauty, but it is so beautiful for individuals to be able to discover something about themselves through this process. I believe exposure to beauty can give you a new outlook

on life in general and the idea of learning to live in the moment and appreciate what surrounds you. Emily Shenk wrote an article for the National Geographic detailing the experience that the photographer, Krystle Wright, had with Maine's coast and rural roads. Krystle Wright described the hidden beauties of Maine being the bright fall foliage, the active wildlife, and the salty breeze while kayaking the coast. Wright explains this idea of "slowing down" in her busy, fast-paced world and Shenk quotes, "There are some days when I wake up, see an email, and the next thing you know I've spent the entire day working inside...It was nice to be reminded of the simple things - that it brings a lot of joy just to be outside." This idea is so important in today's society. This realization of the "simple things" is what I view as the value of beauty and the need to reinforce that anyone and everyone should experience beauty. In [Taylor Fowler's podcast](#), she interviewed Maeghan Fortier, who described the beautiful encounter she had while hunting in a local forest at night. She described this emotion, "So for me, I associate new beginnings. It was a new beginning for me. It was the first time I had ever looked at the surroundings around me that way. It was a place I always walked a lot, and to see it in that perspective really hit me hard that day" (Fortier). Fortier mentions this idea of viewing this forest with a new perspective and feeling a new range of emotions from this. I consider this to be a neglected or betrayed aspect that she is discovering. Armstrong agrees with this mix of emotions that emerges from experiencing overlooked aspects of yourself or something around you when he states, "This explains why beauty can be so moving – why it can make us weep. When we recognise beauty in a piece of music, or the graciousness of someone's conduct, we see things that we know we have neglected or betrayed, and we feel an astonishing combination of **ANGUISH** and

DELIGHT” (5). In other words, when we recognize something beautiful, like nature, we are looking beneath the surface and discovering something new about the object and ourselves. In this process, we feel both “anguish and delight,” two opposite emotions that can produce a significant reaction.

Beauty can be an important part of one’s life because of these external messages that it can cause someone to realize. In my life, beauty has taught me that it is necessary to take a moment out of my day to notice and appreciate what is around me, in terms of nature and other elements, and be able to fully put myself in that moment. In the larger population, in my community, beauty can enhance one’s life not only through its captivating elements, but through the emotions it can allow someone to release, and the insight it can provide into one’s life in terms of the way they should act in our world. In Armstrong’s essay, he mentions an idea from Schiller that presents an “unnerving...conviction that ambitious social reform [will] always be frustrated until a much larger number of people [have] reached a higher level of inner development of the sort enabled by beauty” (6). In other words, until we can all experience beauty that causes us to develop in a way that promotes social reform and unity, we will never be able to agree on certain aspects of our society. For example, when thinking about all of the environmental issues that exist within our society, it is necessary for one to experience the elements of beauty that exist within nature. If one can appreciate this beauty, they may be more likely to agree with other members of society on certain environmental issues. This, once again, enforces the power of beauty and the message that it includes.

I recognize the many ways people can experience something beautiful and understand that there is not one single definition of beauty. My understanding of beauty focuses mostly on

the meaning that one can pull from an encounter with something beautiful. There are infinite definitions of beauty, allowing everyone to find something that is beautiful. I believe that one of the most beautiful parts of this world is nature and our everyday surroundings, however, I recognize that some may disagree and have their own objects of beauty. In my podcast with an English Language Learner teacher, Bethany Magdziarz found her object of beauty to be an exercise she had her students do where they shared deep, personal stories from their past. She found the confidence and emotion they had while presenting these to be something beautiful. This is just one example of a different object of beauty. Bethany Magdziarz felt strong emotions during this encounter and realized the same message of appreciating the “little things” in this world from her experience with beauty.

If one can understand beauty and develop their own definition, the experience will truly be rewarding. As a society, I feel that many people agree with my definition of beauty and that many people in this world appreciate nature. However, other people in society may not take the time to recognize nature or even view it as “beautiful.” I recognize the many definitions of beauty and that one must develop their own understanding through experience, however, I believe beauty means the natural aspects of the world around us and the emotions and realizations received about yourself, your community, and your surroundings. I see beauty as serving a purpose for both the individual and the community. When I look at myself and society, I notice the value of any encounter with beauty. Communities and individuals can make the most out of beauty by fully placing themselves in the moment when they are facing something beautiful. Only through experiencing the emotions that come with this and understanding the deeper meaning behind it can one fully absorb this element. There is so much value in

experiencing beauty and it is important for every individual to have an encounter with something like this in their lifetime.

Works Cited

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