

Olivia Cigna

Professor Emerson

ENG 110: English Composition

15 November 2018

My Understanding of Beauty

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. I find beauty within the outdoors, specifically the pieces of nature that captivate our attention. To me, when I am faced with some element of nature that I consider beautiful, I notice how this makes me feel and the meaning behind the experience I am having. I believe beauty means fully experiencing something incredible in a single moment that strikes you with awe, and reflecting on that beauty in a way that causes one to feel a strong emotion or realize something that they had not been able to before. Beauty plays a significant role in my life in that I remember the new insight I have after experiencing something like this. I use the messages I received from these encounters in my daily life. John Armstrong, author of “La bella vita,” mentions this idea of experiencing beauty and why we usually have such a significant response to it. Within his essay, he states, “...beauty lies in the eye of the beholder” (Armstrong), which reinforces the idea that every single individual has a different understanding of what they consider beautiful. My community, who I define as the members of University of New England, would most likely agree with my meaning of beauty. My peers at UNE seem to value being outdoors and immersed in nature, and the attitude of the school seems to reflect this. The people

at UNE realize the deeper message behind experiencing nature and can take the moment out of their day to feel a strong emotion. Although beauty is truly defined by oneself, creating infinite definitions of beauty, beauty to me means elements of nature, the emotions one feels from these elements, and the overall message received from this.

Beauty can be found and experienced through nature and the process of being outdoors. This is something that I associate as beautiful. In Jonathan's podcast, he interviewed a student named Will Wood, who described a simple encounter he had one day that caused him to associate this with beauty. He described a bright orange oak tree that stood out to him on a gloomy day, and he remembers taking the time out of his busy day to "appreciate that moment or that span of time in which [he] was just able to enjoy what that tree was showing [him]." This is just one example of the capturing the beauty of the outdoors and being able to fully interpret and experience it to one's benefit. I believe that nature can provide infinite possibilities for the discovery of beauty. Armstrong argues that beauty should "elevate the soul" in a way that enhances some aspect of your life. For Jonathan's interviewee, this happened because of an encounter he had with a piece of nature. 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. She described the experience of being outside as being able to "simply have fun with it," something that her days can severely lack. My community, being the people I surround myself with here at UNE, is located in Maine, the location that this article focuses on. I believe that the members of my community would also see beauty, specifically in Maine, as it relates to the nature within it. I

believe that these encounters with beauty are essential to all humans; as Armstrong mentions, everyone will be faced with beauty at some point because “people are delighted by wildly variant things.” However, this process of facing something beautiful is not only about the object itself, it is about the emotion it causes one to feel.

An important part of something that is considered beautiful are the emotions that it causes one to experience. I believe that nature can cause these significant, strong emotions that take over your current state. Feeling these emotions is natural and can actually enhance the overall experience. In Taylor Fowler’s podcast, she interviewed Maeghan Fortier, who described the beautiful encounter she had with a forest “coming to life” at night when she was hunting. She described this emotion of “new beginnings,” as it was the first time she noticed her surroundings so attentively and differently. This was the first time she had been hunting before, so she was proud of herself for being able to accomplish this. I believe that this encounter caused her to experience an emotion of serenity and content with herself. Being able to fully experience beauty in a way where it causes you to feel something about the situation or yourself is so valuable. Armstrong agrees with this idea of accepting the emotions that one can be overcome with when he states, “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.” In other words, when we recognize something beautiful, like nature, we are looking beneath the surface or outside the box 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. In my community, we value these

emotions as an essential part of this process of beauty and I see the members of my community having an overall greater attitude because of these emotions.

I believe the most important element of understanding beauty is recognizing the deeper meaning that is being conveyed when one is in this moment of exposure. The first part of encountering something beautiful is to recognize the object itself and allow yourself to experience any necessary emotions, similarly, the second part of this is to reflect on what you have gained or learned in terms of insight. 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. In the article by Shenk, Krystle Wright explains this idea of “slowing down” in her busy, fast-paced world, “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 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. Armstrong stresses that understanding beauty means that we cannot just reference all of the objects we find beautiful, “We have to talk about our lives.” This means that one should reflect on why this beautiful thing is causing them to feel this way and how one can translate this new perspective into different aspects of their lives and teach them “how they should be” (Armstrong). 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, both my community and societally, 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 Friedrich Schiller, a dramatist and poet, 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" (Armstrong). 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. 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 a 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. In my community at UNE, I feel that a lot of other students relate to and share my understanding of beauty. This community is centered around appreciating and being grateful for our surroundings. I recognize the many definitions of beauty and that one must develop their own understanding through experience, however, I believe beauty can be seen through pieces of nature, emotions felt from this, and the overall meaning grasped from it. I see beauty as serving a purpose for both the individual and the community. When I look at myself and UNE, 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. When I think about behavior in my community and even in my society, I notice the value that this experience can have on someone. The values of my society and community do overlap the thoughts I have about behavior. 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.

Olivia is off to an amazing start on her paper. Her argument is clearly presented and represented in her paper. Her claim sentences are strong and help further her argument. I think she just needs to look at the flow and maybe move somethings around possibly. Her conclusion and introduction paragraphs are really strong. Overall, her paper is off the a great start and only needs a few additions and revisions.

Peer review note (Reni)- This free draft is amazing! You used to many great examples and quotes from the essay as well as the podcasts. You also expanded on them well in the analysis making sure you supported it which I found great and helpful. I honestly don't have much to criticize about I think it is really good, well thought out and flows together great. I think the final wi

How should I incorporate the sense and form drive?

I think that you can invite the sense and form drive into your logic right away! Schiller's forms can be a fun way to explore why you find nature so stunning.

Do I include enough of my community?

I think that your conversation about community could be better built into the logic of your thesis.

Does my essay flow well in terms of topic sentences/transitional sentences?

You are on the right track, although I made some suggestions for better organizing your paragraphs. I think that your paper would benefit from a slightly narrowed focus.

Do I answer the prompt fully?

You do, but your paper could be better organized if you narrowed your thesis.

Remember that this prompt is specifically broad in order to give students the room to attack the subject of beauty from many different angles. It seems like you are interested in exploring nature and beauty. My advice is that you embrace this and make this a specific part of your thesis.

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- 1) What do you think people get out of nature?
 - 2) How do people tend to “appreciate” nature’s beauty? What does that look like?
 - 3) What is the result of your community’s appreciation for nature’s beauty?
 - 4) How are you defining nature? Gardens? Untamed forests?