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A comparison of literary writing styles: A journey into the personal narrative

Introduction

Literary writing styles have evolved over the ages. Beginning with mostly works of fiction in the 18th century, writing has now transformed into fabulous works, both glaringly striking in their honesty, but also more related to personal experience and honest perception (McLeod and Soven). This essay describes the work of two female writers; Judith Ortiz Cofer and her narrative, the myth of the Latin woman: Just met a girl named Maria (Cofer); and Judy Brady's famous "I want a wife" (Brady). Following rather different forms of writing, the authors have a common theme, feminism in its element. Both essays show the societal mores that shape perceptions towards women. However, the writing styles, language, rhetorical strategies and reader appeal differ markedly between the two authors. This essay strives to elucidate the different methods of writing employed by these authors and compare and contrast their approaches to the broader topic of feminism.

Type of Essay and Purpose

Cofer's essay is a personal narrative that describes her experiences growing up as a Latina. She describes common perception of her being colorful, vibrant, even sexually loose, and fit to do menial tasks shaping the behavior of those around her. In her spell-binding narrative, she

describes personal experience in a vivid, yet profound monologue which casts the reader into her mind, and shapes the picture of a woman constantly challenged by society. The purpose of this essay is to enlighten the reader about the challenges faced by a woman from a culture different than the one she is in.

Brady's essay, however, is more of a thought, a fleeting glimpse into the heart of a woman. This essay deals with the male perception of what an ideal wife would be. Though sometimes harsh and biting, it bridges effectively the link between myth and reality. It is common knowledge that most marriages fail because the male refuses to take on important roles in the household and thrusts the bulk of responsibility on the female. In sharp, sarcastic overtones, Brady's essay is a narrative on the perceived role of the female in running the household. The purpose of this essay is to bring into focus the plight of the wife.

Both essays are narrative monologues, and give stark examples of how women are treated in society.

Use of language

Imagery, symbolism and metaphors abound in both the essays. Especially, in Brady's work, the male protagonist speaks aloud about the qualities he thinks are desirable in a wife. Some striking examples are: ".I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it." It shows that the male has virtually no appreciation for his wife. It shows a painful, yet stark lack of concern for a woman's needs. However, in Cofer's essay, she describes an example of a man who sang a rather insulting song for her: "He began to shout-sing a ditty to the tune of "La Bamba"—except the lyrics were about a girl named Maria whose exploits all rhymed with her name and gonorrhoea." Imagery in the form of gonorrhoea is used well by Cofer to strikingly illustrate the man's intentions. In both the cases, women are portrayed

by men as mere sexual objects, either to be used at will, or to be described as unfortunate loose characters.

Use of facts

Both essays display cold, hard facts and while Cofer's essay is purely based on experience, Brady's essay is more in the realm of what's possible. Facts are used more strikingly in Cofer's narrative. She describes, in vivid detail, events that have happened to her. What makes her story relatable is the fact that such events can happen to any one of us, if we find ourselves in an alien culture, and especially if we are women. This work is a wonderful example of nonfiction. While Brady's work does not fall within the strict purview of nonfiction, it describes the situation most women face themselves in every day. In flowing dialogue with herself, Brady describes essentially, the minds of certain men. While most of it is a product of her own imagination, it could be called fact as it holds true in a lot of real world examples.

Use of personal experience of the author

While the use of personal experience can only be assumed for Brady's work, Cofer's work is based on her own experiences. Cofer paints a vivid picture of misunderstandings, false perceptions, societal mores towards her gender and race and human behavior. The entire essay is a description of the situations she finds herself in. Some of the best descriptions of those situations that I find extremely vivid are: "It was, and is, cultural, yet I often felt humiliated when I appeared at an American friend's party wearing a dress more suitable to a semiformal than to a playroom birthday celebration" or "based on this aspect of the myth happened when the boy who took me to my first formal dance leaned over to plant a sloppy overeager kiss painfully on my mouth, and when I didn't respond with sufficient passion said in a resentful tone: 'I thought you Latin girls were supposed to mature early'". Such use of direct, cutting words describes the

author's personal experience so well, I could find myself in that situation, seeing her feel those emotions. Brady's work could have benefited from more personal experience. Since all she writes is a dialogue with her, she could have interspersed it with examples from her own life. Maybe, that would have been too personal.

Type of Audience

While the common audience for both essays is indeed, the modern female, there are subtle differences in the subsets of audiences that would find the writings appealing, or more importantly, pertinent. Cofer's work, like Brady's is extremely feminist. Both essays display elements of feminism and portray the situations faced by everyday women. It can generate a synergy of thought that best describes the predicament most women find themselves in every day. So to say these essays would tug at a woman's heart is an understatement. However, the Cofer's essay is not as generalist as Brady's essay. It is a known fact that a lot of married women, across culture and race face the same abuse in a marriage. Thus, it is written with a more global context in mind. Cofer's work however focuses on a more race oriented feminist ideal. This is the most important difference between both the essays.

Conclusion

This essay is an effort to compare and contrast the works of two phenomenal female authors, with emphasis on feminism and writing style. Both essays were written in flowing, honest phrase and display elements of excellent writing. However, they differ in the form of narrative. While Cofer's essay is descriptive and based on personal experience, Brady's work is based on, probably personal experience, but mostly on a generalized theme of the situations most women face, and the mental process of most men. Through a man's perspective, Brady explains the plight of a woman. This round-about approach is striking in its feministic overtones, as it

leaves the reader to judge for himself or herself whether any woman should be treated like that.

The same feelings of anger surface when reading Cofer's work too. While educating us all in the feelings and emotions women have, they show us how society can better itself in its treatment of women.

Works Cited

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