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English 314

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**Envy in “Beauty”**

            “I wanted to be beautiful, but I didn’t want to be you” (Martin 926). It is the fate of man to suffer from envy, but man rarely sees the consequences of their envy. Human beings see the good-paying job or the beauty of another, but humans hardly ever see the problems that lurk beneath that which they envy.  Jane Martin, in her play “Beauty,” uses characterization and contrast to demonstrate envy and how it blinds a person to real challenges.

            Carla’s characterization as the ideal beauty introduces the theme of envy. Her physical description is represented by her occupation. Carla says, “Bethany, I’m missing Ralph Lauren now. Very possibly my one chance to go from catalogue model to the very, very big time” (Martin 924).  When Carla gets three modeling calls from Ralph Lauren, this distinguishes her physical beauty as a model, the ideal job of a beautiful woman. By having a famous company that hires only the most beautiful models contacting Carla, Martin brings out Carla’s physical appearance.

            Martin’s characterization of Carla’s physical beauty is compounded when Carla brings up her intelligence. This characterization fits Carla into possessing physical beauty but little intelligence, fitting Carla into the stereotypical dumb blond beauty category. Carla confesses, “I have never read a whole book. Page 6, I can’t remember page 4.The last thing I read was ‘The Complete Idiot’s Guide to WordPerfect.’… You know the dumb blond joke about on the application where it says, ‘Sign here,’ she put Sagittarius? I’ve done that” (Martin 925-6). This confession fits Carla into the stereotypical beauty: all beauty, no brains.

            Martin takes Carla’s physical beauty a step further by displaying Carla’s reaction to relationships with men. Carla shows the typical signs of a woman seen merely for her beauty. “You’ve had three long-term relationships and you’re only twenty-three.  I haven’t had *one*,” Carla explains to Bethany (Emphasis added; Martin 925). Carla’s lack of a long-term relationship reveals that Carla’s physical attractiveness gets in the way of her relationships while Bethany’s lack of beauty has brought her three meaningful relationships.

            Carla’s friend, Bethany, is characterized as the internal beauty. Much like Carla is, Bethany is described first by her occupation. Her occupation as a public accountant (Martin 926) reveals her internalized beauty, the beauty of mind. Carla tells Bethany, “You’re the one with the $40,000 job straight out of school. You’re the one who has published short stories” (Martin 925). Bethany’s beauty is internalized by her job as an accountant. Her job does not ride on her looks, but it instead requires a strong mind. Being a public accountant deemphasizes her physical beauty while emphasizing her mental, or internal, beauty.

            Bethany’s relationship with men characterizes her lack of physical beauty. Bethany is seen in a different light from her friend Carla; she is seen more for an inner beauty. Carla tells Bethany, “You have personality.… Smart guys like you” (Martin 925). Bethany’s personality characterizes her internal nature. Bethany later says, “Men have to know me” (Martin 925). Martin uses this to demonstrate that, while Carla’s relationships are mainly appearance based, Bethany’s relationships with men are based on personality and time.

            Carla’s aversion to sexual intercourse also distinguishes her physical loveliness by creating a contrast with Bethany. Carla replies, “Bethany, I don’t like sex. I can’t have a conversation without men coming onto me. I have no privacy. I get hassled on the street. They start pressuring me from the beginning. … I’m surrounded by male bimbos who think a proposition is when you go to school away from home” Martin 925). Carla is seen only for her physical beauty and her sex appeal. Carla has an outward beauty that is all men see in her.

            Bethany on the other hand has a craving for sexual intercourse which brings out her side to the theme of envy. “You can have sex anytime you want it,” Bethany tells Carla. “Men have to know me. That takes up to a year. I’m continually horny” (Martin 925).  This craving contrasts with Carla’s aversion to sex and creates a jealousy within Bethany, supporting the theme of envy.

            Bethany’s description of beauty is another way that Martin characterizes her. Her definition of beauty gives a unique perspective into Bethany’s lack of physical beauty.

            “[Beauty] is what everybody wants. It’s the nasty secret at large in the world. It’s the unspoken tidal desire in every room and on every street. It’s unspoken, the soundless whisper…millions upon millions of people longing hopelessly and forever to stop being whatever they are and be beautiful, but the difference between those ardent multitudes and me is that I have a goddamn genie and one more wish!” (Martin 925).

This comment demonstrates her physical beauty by demonstrating her lack of contentment of her own physical beauty. She projects her unhappiness upon the world to justify her desire for physical beauty.

While Carla’s relationships are described as shallow, sexual encounters and Bethany’s relationships are regarded as more meaningful and longer lasting, the theme of envy is drawn out. Carla is envious of Bethany’s successful career, her long standing relationships that are not based on her appearance, and her intelligence. Bethany supports the theme of envy by craving Carla’s physical beauty and her sexually oriented relationships. Both women envy each other’s life.

However, when the smoke clears after Bethany makes her final wish, they come face-to-face with the one thing that they were missing. Having exchanged bodies, Bethany says, “We both have the one thing, the one and only thing everybody wants….It’s better than beauty for me; it’s better than brains for you [Carla]….*Different problems*” (Emphasis added; Martin 926-7). By using characterization and contrast to draw out the theme of envy, Martin deepened the meaning and created a way to show that, when humans envy others, they forget that others have problems too.

**Works Cited**

Martin, Jane. ”Beauty” *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, Backpack Edition.* Comp. Edgar V. Roberts and Robert Zweig. Pearson College Div, 2011. Print.