

Roger Cronin

Professor AK White

ENGL 312-016

16 September 2014

An Analysis of “My Body Is a Cage of My Own Making”

Roxane Gay’s “My Body Is a Cage of My Own Making” is an abridged excerpt from her book *Hunger: a Memoir of (My) Body*. It recounts her life as an obese woman: how her condition came to be, personal thoughts on living in her body, and several key experiences. Most importantly, it challenges the reader’s opinion of obesity and assumptions made about people afflicted with it. To accomplish this, “My Body” has extensive use of pathos throughout, and implicit use of both logos and ethos during her anecdotes.

A central theme throughout the article is the constant dehumanization of fat people in society, something she has a very personal connection with. This is made through the retelling of a case of sexual assault occurring in her childhood. A boy and several of his friends raped Gay away from other people, triggering her eating disorder. She began “eating and eating and eating so I could forget, so my body could become so big it would never be broken again.” Sharing this experience lends dramatic credibility to telling her story about obesity. This story and the four other experiences are examples of logos—these are real anecdotes describing a broader picture of her life—as well as ethos; this is an excerpt from a memoir, after all, so any personal experience lends credibility to the description of her life. There are many emotion-fueled quotes in this section, but I think the most important is “I pretended to be the daughter my parents knew, the straight-A student.” The reader is empathetic to such a horrible, life-ruining experience. Her eating disorder can be traced back to this particular moment in time, and describing how she

changed because of it brings a sensitivity to her condition that many readers would not have known.

Gay then describes some of the difficulties that come with inhabiting a body as large as hers. Another central theme is the feeling of hopelessness, of being trapped in “a cage of my own making.” Gay acknowledges that despite the horrific impetus of her eating disorder, she is the one in control of her body and how fat she gets. During this section, common experiences are described with the context of her body: “[My friends] suggest we do impossible things like go to an amusement park or walk a mile up a hill to a stadium.” Writing like this is a big source of pathos in the article; the reader wouldn’t consider tasks like these under this context, perhaps ever. It creates a palpable tension between being the literal “largest thing in the room” with a sense of invisibility, nobody understanding what life is truly like for you.

One of the anecdotes later in the article aligns with this theme of being trapped. During an event while on tour for her book *Bad Feminist*, she had to climb onto a stage “two or three feet off the ground, and no staircase leading to it.” It took several minutes to get onto stage, where she then sat on the provided chair and broke it, forcing her to squat for the entire duration of the event, all in front of an audience of fans. Bringing up an event from her book tour subtly acknowledges her credibility as writer, being an accomplished author and all. However, this wasn’t the intent of this section. Rather, it serves as another example of the ironic invisibility of being fat. She expresses satisfaction at being able to squat for that long: “My body is a cage, but this is my cage and there are moments when I take pride in it.” Yet she still cried in her hotel room, alone, at the careless event organizers, but also herself for being in a body whose world cannot accommodate it. Raw emotions like embarrassment, humiliation, desolation, and fear are present all throughout this section, aiding an empathetic response within the reader. They see the

event organizer in themselves; would I make a mistake like that? How do I react to obese people in public?

The final section of “My Body” describes Gay’s broken ankle and how it helped her face her eating disorder. Obesity puts heavy stress on the lower extremities of the body. About ten years ago, this was realized when Gay suffered a fall from a sudden ankle injury. After being admitted, she told her siblings to not tell her parents; she doesn’t want to burden them with news of her health condition. After a blood transfusion and surgery, she came back to her parents and many more of her family in the hospital room, anxiously awaiting her return. Gay writes, “I was reminded, once again, that I am loved.” This is in sharp contrast to the themes of dehumanization and invisibility iterated before: “It was an overwhelming thing to realise.” In the final two paragraphs, Gay describes how that event changed her. She is slowly overcoming the pain of her sexual assault and the consequent eating disorder that has controlled her life since grade school. “And I am not yet healed, but I have started believing I will be.” The reader at this point has a completely different understanding of what it means to be fat in society. The first two paragraphs of the story explains she weighed 577 pounds at her heaviest, but now weighs 150 less than that. This is what the uninformed reader sees. The final two paragraphs, now with context, explain that those 150 pounds are much more than a number: it represents her healing from the pain of her childhood.

“My Body Is a Cage of My Own Making” is a very emotionally-charged piece. Pathos is used liberally throughout to build a rapport with the reader. Gay uses descriptions of her life and experiences to make the reader reconsider their ideas of what obesity means to them. The scattered anecdotes are the article’s only source of logos and ethos. It would be much less effective without the author’s personal experiences; the reader couldn’t understand what Gay

goes through on a day-to-day basis without examples. Furthermore, they wouldn't acknowledge her as a credible source, as there's nothing to back up the text's big "ask". Using pathos to paint broad strokes of logical and ethical life experiences, Gay makes effective commentary on how fat people are viewed in society and what comes from being educated about just one person's life with obesity.