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Character Development Is the Key in Narrative Essay

A memoir preserves the precious moments in our lives: the first time you showed a girl affection, the instant you conquered a marathon, the moment you graduated from college, and the first time you realized you had grown up. Each part of a memoir contributes to a person’s life, and it is especially enjoyable to read one’s own memoir about youth when the writer is getting older. On the other hand, for a reader who has never met the narrator before, the memoir builds a bridge that links the narrator’s emotions to the reader. By this bridge, the reader can better understand a person or an event. But how does a writer successfully create this bridge? How does a successful memoir stand out and resonate with reader’s feeling? An essential part of the memoir is the clear and thoughtful character development because the narrative demonstrates the growth of character, reveals the conflicts in the story, and conveys the narrator’s feeling about the experience to the reader.

A thoughtful personality transformation helps the reader to see the growth or change of the narrator. In Melissa Martinez’s essay *La Ultima Promessa*, she demonstrates a clear character change in herself about her attitude towards her father:

I admired that about my dad, that he never showed his anger. I think it was because he did not want to scare me. In the middle of all the mayhem, he paid no attention to my mother, grabbed me by the hand, and we left. ... But I have come to realize that I do not have the strength to forgive him just yet. My toys have become books, the fights have come to an end, and my father is not with me; his repeated abandonment has been a test for me, has made me a less vulnerable person, someone who won't believe things just because she is told to.

Because Melissa’s childhood experience limited her understanding of her father as well as the violence in her family, she considers her situation was normal at first and had positive feelings about her father. She was naïve before. Later, after she has grown up, Melissa understands more about her family, and she realizes her father didn’t play a positive role in her psychological growth. She becomes more independent because of the lack of her father’s love, so it is this painful experience that shapes the personality of the writer. Likewise, if the readers experienced family violence before, this story gives them a chance to reevaluate their parents: were their parents similar to Melissa’s parents? What did they feel when they had grown up? By asking these questions to himself, the reader might understand Martinez better and appreciate her growth.

The character development also shows the story’s conflict. In Viliami Moala’s *Revenge of the Fat Kid*, the narrator was a quite shy boy before the incident happened. Usually, he would accept any verbal assault. He didn’t fight back against verbal attack when his uncle laughed at his fatness. Instead, he shrugged it off and tried to forget this incident. However, when the new student in his class laughed at him, he realized the verbal bullying was not right and he fought back:

Then I heard my uncle yell, “Boy, you ‘bouta be so big, we gon’ have to buy you an area code!” My ears were hot like the devil’s house and my heart was pumping like pistons. I clenched my fists and tried to calm down in the face of their obnoxious laughing.…One day, a new student thought it would be cool if he slapped me on the back of my neck as was minding my own business and eating my tater tots. The bottle of anger shattered into pieces, hitting everything around me. A switch turned in my head and I punched him square in the face…

This is a very dramatic characteristic contrast. The narrator describes his reaction as “a switch turned in my head”, and from a reader’s point of view, this is a symbol of breakthrough. The conflict is very clear in terms of the character development: the narrator struggles to resolve bullying he received. Without carefully unfold the significant character development of narrator, the story’s conflict may not be obvious.

The character development could also heighten a story’s emotional impact on the reader, making the story much more memorable. Hyungmok Son’s essay *My Fanged Tooth* uses this concept to portrait the significant characteristics contrast of himself:

I saw two blobs of fluffiness behind the white bars: one, gray with dark black blotches, and another sandy colored, huddled together in the corner with their black marble-like eyes frantically scanning the unfamiliar environment. To me, they were the embodiment of cuteness and innocence…Only half of the circular ears remained and Ham’s face had disappeared completely; it had been ripped apart. Where there should have been the marble black eyes, there were empty sockets…

Before Hyungmok Son went to Thailand, he believed the adorable hamsters were weak and polite “To me, they were the embodiment of cuteness and innocence.” The hamsters were timid, shy, and afraid of the new environment. Clearly, the hamster lacked the ability to fight. Yet, the image when Hyungmok Son returned home really surprised him “Only half of the circular ears remained and Ham’s face had disappeared completely; it had been ripped apart.” This sentence is such a powerful description that illustrates the terrible condition of Ham and let the reader wonder what had happened to the Ham. Eventually, the narrator reveals that it was another “cute and innocent” hamster, Hams, who killed Ham for food. “Hidden deep under Hams’ s cute angelic face, which looked like it could do no harm, a demonic side had burst out after Hams could no longer endure the hunger.” The Hams before and after in the story seems like two exactly opposite characters: one is a cute pet getting along with Ham very well, and another one is a scary monster that murder his “friend” Ham for food. Nevertheless, through all the way, the hamster doesn’t change; they just follow their animal instinct. The only thing that changes is the Hyungmok’s perception of hamster: from the cute harmless pet to the realistic cruel animal. The cruel hamster disguises themselves so well and fools everyone. The character development carries strong emotions in the context, and these overwhelming and memorable emotional impacts make the readers appreciate the story more.

The character development of the character in a personal narrative is crucial. It helps the reader observe the growth of characters, highlights the conflict in the story, and presents the emotional impact. Therefore, a personal narrative with clear character development stands out, making it an extraordinary one.

**Works Cited**

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