Bryn Loftness

Journal Entry 3

In Rod Serlings episode of “The Eye of the Beholder” from the TV series, *The Twilight Zone* he depicts a different sort of society, a kind of place “where ugliness is the norm, and beauty the deviation from that norm” (Serling). In this new world, traditional beauty standards are reversed and also turned criminal.

Towards the end of the film the message of beauty being in the eye of the beholder was reiterated several times in several different ways. This note is significant to the plot and the overall underlying metaphor that is this episode bares. What Serling is trying to demonstrate is that just because beauty, right now, is seen as this, that, and whatever, it doesn’t really matter because it is not fully encompassing, temporary, and absolutely ever-fleeting. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” (Serling), the “beholder” mentioned in this statement defines what beauty is and for that time, can enforce those beauty standards. However, as soon as the beholder, or the definer of beauty in this circumstance, changes, there can be a new standard enforced. What once we viewed as beautiful is no longer the muse— as soon as it no longer accepted and supported universally it is seen a different, even possibly opposite.

Now, if we expand the metaphor of beauty with the accepted, defined, and enforced social, political, and cultural standards in general for 1950s society we can correlate it to the conflict of conformity vs. dissent. There was a lot of concern and distress caused by unease with specific people or groups that were seen as “different” during this time, it really fueled the political, social, and cultural on-the-wire climate. Examples of this were people of color and their beginning rise on the social ladder, unclear teenage roles/culture in society and amongst each other, and the fear of communism. This scared people—truly haunted them. However, the moral of this depiction was just because, during this time, it wasn’t widely accepted and popular to be different or act different, it was just stemming from the lack of clarity and moreover, evolution of these new views on how people should or shouldn’t dress/act/be, that weren’t widely accepted yet. Repeatedly addressed is the message that one day, they could/will be accepted and the tables could turn. This can cause discomfort for those that are currently “the beholder” of the “beauty” of the time. Everything that is and has been known for those in charge, the superior, now has the possibility of being turned. Janet speaks to this newfound uncertainty the public was having, “Who are you people anyway? What is this State? Who makes up all the rules and the statues and the traditions? The people who are different have to stay away from other people who are normal. The State isn’t God, doctor.” (Serling) The fear of the unknown was imbedded so deeply into the societal mindset that it stared us in the face in the form of Janet in her wraps.

Citations:

  Serling, Rod. “The Eye of the Beholder.” Season 2, episode 6.