

Reverse sear: a rhetorical analysis of "consider the lobster"

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



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Introduction

Gourmet magazine had originally intended for David Foster Wallace to write a harmless review of the annual Maine Lobster Festival (MLF). As the essay continues, the reader notices the transition of a review of the festival into a topic on to the ethics of food consumption, specifically that of the lobster. The rhetorical aim of this essay is not to convince the culinary foodies to abandon their current eating habits, but to tell them that they need to reflect on the culture and ethics of food consumption and how people generally have little sympathy for what they eat. Wallace is able to create a thought-provoking debate, while remaining fairly neutral, through his use of diction, irony, imagery, and persuasive appeals, with an authentic, informative tone throughout the essay.

Diction

The diction that Wallace uses begins with rather simplistic word choice. References to the lobster are often negative, calling them " eaters of dead stuff" and " chewable food" (Wallace 2). The purpose of this word choice is to initially give the readers little to no opinion on lobsters. Over time, Wallace's diction evolves to become more sophisticated and uses scientific and anatomical words associated with lobsters. He does this because his diction is very much like his readers. It becomes far more articulate and knowledgeable, all in a bid to assimilate with the audience. They may not have an opinion of lobsters in the beginning of the text, but Wallace is slowly able to inject himself into their environment with his word choice, and allow him to change their views on this crustacean. Wallace then uses grotesque diction in the hopes that it will spur some sort of emotion. A " home-lobotomy" (Wallace 6) or a " medieval torture-fest" (Wallace 7), this graphic diction will now be more powerful to the audience now that have adopted Wallace. He proves himself capable of being just as interested in the ethics of lobster as they are with food, and hopefully this diction may have achieved Wallace's goal, to question the culture and morals of food.

Wallace possesses an authentic, informative tone. Throughout the entirety of the essay, Wallace does not pick a side. The essay composes language that is impartial, and his tone distinguishes him as a moderate. The reader is capable of seeing that he is not like the typical food critic who usually fill up their reviews with pretentious, bloated language. On page 7, Wallace admits that he sees animals as a lesser in comparison to a person. Considering this

is a food magazine, many authors would probably put animals on a pedestal. The readers are able to see that he is incredibly truthful in his writings; they can trust that he is not trying to pull any tricks on him. Anything that he is saying here is genuine and has some information to back it. Wallace is now able to get them to realize the deeper meaning to this article and will most likely get them to think critically about the topic, much like how he has exhibited through his writing.

Persuasive Appeals

Wallace's use of persuasive appeals is prevalent throughout the entirety of the essay. He utilizes a series of emotion appeals to get the reader to sympathize with the animal. The main point of conflict in this article is that there is no clear answer as to whether these lobsters would experience the same pain as a human would. Piled together, huddled in a corner, running away from incoming people, these are some of the observations of the lobsters stuck in the glass tanks at the festival (Wallace 7). This paints a vivid picture in the mind of the reader. The actions of the lobsters in the tank are like that of many animals, including humans. Wallace is able to show to the audience that these animals are distressed, they are suffering, and that their struggles need notice. Prior to this, most would not care for a lobster in a tank, but they are now questioning the possibility of lobsters experiencing the same emotions humans do. Some lobsters cook in a microwave after having been poked with "several extra vent holes in the carapace" (Wallace 6). What Wallace is trying to do here is to provide the audience with horrifying details of the cooking process. While some may still not be moved,

Wallace's main goal is to get the pot simmering; he wants people to think about what they eat. He admits that even he will most likely not change his eating habits, but he certainly has a new view of food now.

Irony

Wallace employs irony as a way to get the reader to further question the culture of how people eat food. The MLF claims that lobsters are both a healthy food choice and creatures incapable of feeling pain. Wallace refutes these claims by stating that the festival sells lobsters with ounces of butter and unhealthy sides (Wallace 3), and that lobsters contain body parts that may allow them to experience pain (Wallace 6). Doing this allows Wallace to show the readers that the festival is presenting a false imagination for the visitors. Some may even interpret this as a blatant lie in trying to reel in more attendees. Wallace provides them with the possibility that this is a cash grab, and humans have little to no morals of the animals that they consume.

Imagery

Wallace's use of imagery allows him to provide the audience a new perspective of the food festivals that they hold very near and dear to their hearts. Considering that these foodies have most likely frequented these events in the past, they typically have a generally positive opinion of them. Wallace ruins this by meticulously describing some pitfalls of the MLF such as "aisle-blocking coolers" or the death match for "NyQuil-cup size samples" (Wallace 3). The readers are able to recount all the events that they have attended themselves. It is not shocking when they see that most of the

festivals have some aspects to it that spoil the entirety of it. Wallace then presents the readers with a hypothetical cow festival, similar to the MLF, where he refers to it as the " World's Largest Killing Floor" (Wallace 5). He utilizes this to get the reader to question why they even bother to go to these festivals. They all seem to have some sort of negative connotation with them, yet they still go. Switching the type of animal being killed makes these festivals appear as a glorification of slaughter. All of these negatives enable the readers to have second thoughts on the purpose of these events.

Conclusion

Wallace wants the audience to take a look at the ethics of food and the culture associated with it. Through his excellent use of emotional appeals and style, he is able to give the readers with a rather profound effect that causes them to think critically of how low people hold the food they consume. The effect of the article will vary among the readers, but it certainly has affected Wallace, and he hopes that carries on to them. The readers all have new perspectives on food consumption thanks to Wallace, regardless of whether they change their eating habits.

Works Cited

- Wallace, David Foster. " Consider the Lobster." Consider the Lobster, Aug. 2004.