

The art of travel rhetorical analysis essay sample



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“ There was only one way to possess beauty properly, and that was by understanding it, by making oneself conscious of the factors (psychological and visual) responsible for it” (de Botton 216). In *The Art of Travel*, Alain de Botton encourages the reader to view the world through an artistic eye, one which is attuned to detail. By doing so, one can comprehend beauty by becoming ardently interested in the minutiae of life. In the literal sense, beauty is an adjective attributed to the aesthetically pleasing, however de Botton alludes to a more complex sense of beauty by using it as a metaphor for happiness. Although it seems as if de Botton’s overarching theme is to recognize beauty through detail, it becomes more apparent that he feels seeing beauty requires not only attention to detail, but also delving even deeper into our consciousness and recognizing that beauty is heavily dependent on darkness. De Botton says, “ The twin purposes of art: to make sense of pain and fathom the sources of beauty” (de Botton 233), suggesting that one must see the dark in order to see the light.

De Botton includes a painting by Edward Hopper called *Gas* in the book to highlight the relationship between shadows and brightness. This painting depicts a solitary scene of a gas station attendant checking the level on a pump. In the original color painting, the gas station pumps are fire engine red and the light around the station makes it look like high noon. However, in the background there is a heavy forest and the road running by disappears into darkness alongside the forest. De Botton’s inclusion of this particular Hopper painting is a suggestion that light and dark are often juxtaposed to create dimensional depiction; in this case to highlight the ominous characteristic of darkness encroaching on light. Hopper uses hard lines and

shadows in many of his paintings, perhaps suggesting that, while light and dark live side by side, there is a boundary between them. De Botton's description of the painting expresses its polarity: " But in Hopper's hands, the isolation is once again made poignant and enticing.

The darkness that spreads like a fog from the right of the canvas, a harbinger of fear, contrasts with the serenity of the station itself" (de Botton 52). De Botton uses the Hopper painting to join light and dark and create an aesthetically pleasing scene. The painting suggests that only in collaboration do dark and light bring depth and appeal to the landscape. The seemingly sinister shadows of the forest help illuminate the tranquility of the station to create a beautiful panorama. Furthermore, de Botton's reference to van Gogh's depiction of the cypress trees lends to this theme that the less attractive portions of life must be scrutinized in order to render them beautiful. De Botton notices the cypress trees outside of his hotel after reading about van Gogh the night before. He quotes van Gogh as saying: They are constantly occupying my thoughts . . . It astonishes me that they have not yet been done as I see them. The cypress is as beautiful in line and proportion as an Egyptian obelisk. And the green has a quality of such distinction. It is a splash of black in a sunny landscape, but it is one of the most interesting black notes, and the most difficult to get exactly right (de Botton 189).

De Botton includes this passage from van Gogh to stress the duality of light and dark and how they're directly related to one another. This particular examination from van Gogh captures the essence of the dichotomy of dark and light, pain and happiness. The two stand side by side and in the case of <https://assignbuster.com/the-art-of-travel-rhetorical-analysis-essay-sample/>

the cypress tree, the black in the sunny landscape may seem to be out of place, but it allows the distinctive green to become more apparent. For van Gogh, the two opposing colors collectively, along with the shape and movement of the tree, force him to accurately perceive this ordinary object as something noteworthy. For de Botton, this radiant dichotomy lays at the foundation of his argument; inspecting the dark and painful parts of life allows them to become a meaningful and essential part of the whole picture. Van Gogh took the time to look closely and get the interesting black notes exactly right, allowing the darkness to bring dimension to the light; when we spend time understanding the anguish in life we can begin to see the beauty entwined with it.

Lastly, de Botton discusses the sublime in terms of its ability to call attention to the duality of pain and happiness. He includes several pictures in this chapter of vast landscapes that express the contrast of light and dark far more evidently than in other pictures throughout the book. The inclusion of these pictures serves to prompt the reader to recognize the stark contrast yet intimate relationship between light and dark. Likewise, De Botton's description of the sublime is often in opposition to itself; he describes the sublime as "to do with feelings of weakness", "threatening", "can provoke anger and resentment" and "a defiance to man's will" (de Botton 164).

However, he also describes it as something that "may also arouse awe and respect", and as something to "delight in" (de Botton 165). This inspires the idea that to truly be moved by the beautiful vastness, we must concurrently recognize the pain of our own insignificance. De Botton speaks of pretty landscapes but he feels that they lack the threatening nature that makes a

sublime landscape, suggesting that only when the darker, more ominous aspects of life coexist with the light, do we truly comprehend awe inspiring beauty and happiness.

All in all, de Botton subtly reminds the reader to observe the shadows of the world because they bring depth and life to our surroundings. He persuades the reader to become the agent of their life and make the choice to welcome the darkness alongside the light. He suggests that life is not without suffering as art is not without shading. De Botton offers up a journey in which one first begins to notice the darkness encroaching on the light, no matter how illuminated the foremost surroundings are, then a connection is made between the opposing ends of the spectrum, and lastly a recognition that light and dark exist in their entirety because they align with one another. Only through recognizing and appreciating darkness and affliction are we drawn to find our way into happiness through a profound understanding of the union between suffering and well-being.

Works Cited

1) De Botton, Alain. *The Art of Travel*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002. Print