
A Rhetorical Analysis of the Autobiography of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass's autobiography, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," describes the horrors of the life of a slave. Having a voice as a black slave was difficult, so the popularity of this autobiography was historical. He was going to have to be very convincing in order to be heard as an African American. Therefore, he uses stylistic elements such as metaphors and rhetorical questions in the third paragraph to strengthen his point, which he builds up in the previous paragraphs.

Douglass applies metaphors into his message to create a detailed image of his situation. For instance, when describing the ships moving off into the ocean, he claims, "You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world." (line 44-46). He compares these ships to angels because they are free to travel around the world with the help of their sail. By creating this type of illustration, readers are able to admire this and see how even ships are more free than Douglass, who is a human being. Furthermore, when discussing his circumstances, he says, "I am left in the hottest hell." He calls slavery the "hottest hell" to emphasize its evil and cruel nature and to make readers aware of how horrendous it actually feels like to be trapped and left behind. He summarizes his explanation in the first two paragraphs with this metaphor: slavery is hell. Including these metaphors in his autobiography not only gains sympathy from the readers, but it also gives the readers a more powerful message.

Douglass also turns to rhetorical questions to reestablish his point and make him seem more confident and credible. Moreover, when contemplating about his escape, he asks, "Try it?" and immediately follows with a "Yes." This shows his intense desire for freedom, if it only wasn't for the owners. It also suggests his eagerness for the chance to escape from slavery due to its cruelty. Additionally, when worrying about bearing up slaves, he asks himself, "Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them." He shows the readers how determined and confident he is and that nothing can stop him. It shows his resolution compared to his sufferings described in the first two paragraphs. Because of these rhetorical questions, the author's credibility increases because his tone is confident and assertive.

Ultimately, his techniques using metaphors and rhetorical questions is meant to draw the readers in and help them understand the writer's point of view and how they feel. Being an African American at this time was challenging, so his success was definitely due to his talent and ability to use rhetorical strategies to his advantage. His skill to communicate his story and allow the audience to feel and empathize his pain was enough to initiate a change

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