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10th December 2015

A Wall of Reflection

       Imagine a large red brick wall, standing tall against the light azure sky, much like the inky black letters standing tall against the stark white page they are printed on. The strong, sturdy blocks of crimson and carmine colored clay. The rough bumpy grooves on the surface of the bricks where pieces of shale protrude out. Between each brick lies paths of grey, the cement laid to hold these bricks together. Carefully aligned so that no brick stands alone. Now picture that wall old and crumbling, the grey paths stained scarlet from blood of nicked fingers on its now rough edges. Deep emerald vines of ivy climbing down from the top of the wall, cascading down in a whirl of leaves woven into and out of the wall. Leaving larger holes as the currant colored bricks begin to crumble and fade away. This is an essay before revision. Though some student may view revision and peer review as a positive thing I have a more murky view on it, you could say I am in the troubled middle. There are two sides to every story, just like there are two sides to every wall.

        As a student writer I found Sommers’ writing to be almost insulting. She makes brash, bold, and generalized statements on how student writers think and write.  Saying things such as “Students understand the revision process as a rewording activity” and “what they lack, however, is a set of strategies that help them identify the something larger that they sensed was wrong and work from there”. If the brick wall outside your house was crumbling you would notice. You would not look at it and think “I do not have the strategies to tell what is wrong here”. You would be able to plainly see that the wall was crumbling and needed to be fixed. An example from my final paper is I said at the end “I need to find a lot of research and case law still to write the majority of this paper but the ideas are all here”. Sommers’ argument is that student writers lack the experience and strategies to coherently revise their work. “They are sometimes merely restating the same idea with different words”, typically in writing using the same idea throughout a piece of writing is called a motif and is commonly used to remind the reader of the main point of what they are reading, by using different words and phrases it keeps the reading from being repetitive. Sommers phrases it as one brick being taken out of the wall, turned around, and placed back in. When in reality the brick is removed from the wall and instead of a crimson brick a berry colored one is placed in instead, altering the pattern of the wall but still maintaining its structure.

        Furthermore she makes comparisons between student writers and experienced writers who have “mastered” the art of revisions. The comparison is uncalled for and in general is a lazy technique used in a quick paced attempt to prove her point. “The student writers constantly struggle to bring their essays into a congruence with a predefined meaning. The experienced writers do the opposite: they seek to discover (to create) meaning in the engagement with their writing”. This is saying that a foundation for a wall is given to the student they’d have no clue what to do in order to build a wall. Whereas with the experienced writers they have the instructions on how to build a wall.

        In my own view I think that many students know how to revise their own papers. Their rough drafts are just that rough. They know what ideas need more developing and where they need to strengthen their argument. Granted having a new set of eyes on the paper is good for things like grammar, spelling, and punctuation. My ideas oppose many of those that Sommers presents in her piece. People can have others help to fill in the tiny cracks in the wall, but if the wall needs to be torn down and started again that is up for the writer themselves to see.

        The brick wall of revision is a good strong and necessary thing, but only when done by the writer’s own mind. The brick wall has begun to crumble and it is only with the proper revisions can it be fixed. Is revision a positive thing? It can be, if done properly, if done incorrectly or by the wrong person it can cause the wall to come crumbling down.