**The Sin of the Apple: A Good Example**

“The Sin of the Apple” is a very short story, just 256 words long. It’s more of a monologue than anything else, which the apple directs at those whose look upon it, up until it falls, ripe and ready to be eaten.

So what does this story piece do right? For one thing, Valenzuela gives the apple clearly-defined traits. That is, she treats the POV-object as a character, not merely as a narrator. Consider the first few sentences: “They scrutinize me with eyes of hunger, those abominable gluttons. I’m beyond your reach, gentlemen, and I don’t intend to budge” (all quotes from p. 77). We can see that the apple is resolute, is perhaps a bit haughty, and has a negative opinion of those who’d seek to eat it. And the direct address, “gentlemen,” grounds the text in a specific situation. No generalities here; someone wants to eat the apple now.

Compare the above to a hypothetical rewriting: “The men below look hungry, but they have a hard time reaching me.” This conveys the same literal scene as Valenzuela’s text, but the apple’s character has vanished. It now relates events without comment, which is not quite as interesting for a protagonist. It also makes the text sound more like a riddle than story, playing it too coy with the identity of the narrator (if the title hadn’t given it away, that is).

Once she has established the apple’s attitude and personality, Valenzuela starts expanding on the apple’s status as an apple. Not for nothing does that narrator refer to itself as “the historical fruit”:

*Remember: I’m a descendant, as you know, of Paris’s apple, of William Tell’s, of those of the Hesperides. I’m even related, in a direct line, to the scientific apple of Newton, the apple that has done so much for the human race. I’m a descendant . . .*

These references serve two purposes. Firstly, they reinforce and even explain the apple’s self-regard. If the apple’s ancestors are so illustrious, able to start wars and inspire scientists, why shouldn’t the apple be proud? Secondly, they force the reader to consider the role of the apple in human society. It’s an object we normally take for granted, yet it figures into so much of our collective culture. Remember how I said that many stories from the POV of an object don’t really benefit from that perspective? This one does, because it takes the time to explain why it matters.

Of course, there’s one hugely important cultural association the apple has neglected to mention so far: Adam and Eve. (Yes, yes, the fruit they would have eaten was likely not an apple, but the association remains.) It’s a telling detail to forget: humanity is brought low in that story, and the apple is riding high on its ego. So it’s only fitting that, at this precise moment, the serpent appears to remind the narrator “of the frailty of [its] species, the great shame of the apple.”

This shame, we quickly see, has a profound effect on the apple: “I feel the shame mounting through the stem, it makes me hot, I feel myself blush. Oh, how red I am!” In literal terms, the apple is ripening, but in terms of the apple’s character, it’s the completion of an arc. The apple’s pride has proven fragile, and a fall, both literal and metaphorical, is sure to follow. Valenzuela has not simply compared ripening to blushing; she has made that comparison emotionally credible.

Then—and I must admit, this is the one decision in the piece that I’m not sure is successful—the POV shifts from the now-fallen apple to a third-person narrator focused on the men who had been eyeing it. We see one of the men bite into the apple, and then justify himself: “‘It’s only natural, it was ripe and it fell.'”

I see the emphasis on the word “natural,” which also appears earlier in the paragraph, as a crucial element here. It casts the apple’s monologue as something like an etiological fable, that is, a fable explaining why something is the way it is. In this case, apples turn red when they’re ripe because they’re ashamed of their role in the fall of man. An interesting fable, yes, but not as interesting as the character study. If nothing else, shifting the POV in a piece this short is bound to be disorienting, no matter how well-executed.

Still, we can learn a lot from following Valenzuela’s example. A POV-object should not be a cipher, a mere lens. It will have similar needs to a POV-person: a defined character, an emotional arc, etc. Crafting those traits and arcs and such requires some serious forethought and reflection, but such is the case for any piece of writing.