Student

Course

Instructor

Date

‘There There’ by Tommy Orange

‘There There’ is a prolonged essay that entails various themes such as genocide, violence, cultural destruction and arrogation, and the experiences of dehumanization Native Americans have been enduring since the colonization in North America in the 1400s. The author of the novel Tommy Orange himself is the narrator of the story and he has mentioned the cruelties the way they had massacred by beheading, slicing and scalping the victims after their deaths. Orange has narrated the different themes in this traumatic story such as generational trauma, storytelling, chance and interconnectedness, violence, individual versus collective identity and urbanity (Orange). Orange has shared all that native had been suffering through, the emotional trauma, resilience and redemption, like he said;

“The wound that was made when white people came and took all that they took has never healed. An unattended wound gets infected. Becomes a new kind of wound like the history of what actually happened became a new kind history. All these stories that we haven’t been telling all this time, that we haven’t been listening to, are just part of what we need to heal.”

In the novel, with the legacy of generational trauma, Orange has suggested that he modern day native communities have turned into substance abusers and suicides. They kept struggling with the inherited pain, trauma, agony, revenge and isolation. Through his narration, he has highlighted the bleak reckoning by including the intense history of colonization, annihilation, and assimilation that Native American had been enduring until now. They have been imprisoned in the vicious cycle of suffering and violence. In Orange’s words;

“Some of us got this feeling stuck inside, all the time, like we’ve done something wrong. Like we ourselves are something wrong.”

Some of the characters in the novel even tried to run away from their culture like Opal, and some other characters like Blue, Edwin and Orvil had been trying to desperately connect with their ancestral rituals and culture. Harvey and Thomas started substance abuse in order to escape from their pains.

Throughout the novel, different stories are described as remedies to the sufferings of the generational trauma and many other issues that influence the novel characters. Storytelling is a central idea of Native Americans’ culture and tradition. It has been stated in the story that the reminiscences and tales of the families, communities and cultures should be shared and it is essential to maintain a definitive memoir of traditions in life. For Opal, the storytelling tradition holds greater significance as she recalls her mother telling them that they should never stop telling their stories. As she recalls;

“She told me the world was made of stories, nothing else, just stories, and stories about stories.”

The unspoken, unheard, forgotten and distorted stories possess a power that brings about beauty out of the darkest periods for the storytellers. This novel itself is a part of that struggle to tell the stories of natives in the Oakland who contradict the widespread stereotype of Indian life that is persistent on the reservations. Dene took up the storytelling through a project that carries the legacy of his uncle where he realizes he must tell the stories of urban native life.

Another significant theme conversed in this story is the individual versus cultural identity. As the characters possess different experiences, dreams, sufferings yet they all share a common connection with each other in regards to their individual and cultural identities. Exclusively, characters such as Black, Blue, and Orvil have their own identity concerns about being Native Americans. Opal believes that his family lacks knowledge about heritage. Opal helps Orvil in enduring the complications of traversing a cultural tradition with heavy heart, trauma, pain, and excommunication. However, he gets knowledge about Native culture over the internet and learns to dance like that of the Natives. Black struggles to search for his personal identity. Orange represents the notion that an individual’s identity is invigorated along with his cultural identity as it brings new meaning to his life. The spiders in the story also be seen and represent the ignorance, memory and addiction. The incident of spider’s leg signifies the legacy Orvil had been denying all his life, he has finally accepted to embrace it.

“Opal and Jacquie’s mom never let them kill a spider if they found one in the house, or anywhere for that matter. Her mom said spiders carry miles of web in their bodies, miles of story, miles of potential home and trap. She said that’s what we are. Home and trap.”

Orange has also shown that different characters find different means of escapism such as use of alcohol, drugs or even internet. Orange, rather than labelling a Native American as a substance abuser, drives all the characters to their individual choices and obsessions and not a collective identity of a group of people.

In the start of the story, it seems like it plotline goes around different perspectives of the Native Americans of the Oakland; they like to be called Urban Indian. It represents the isolation and desperation. However, as the story extends, it is discovered that the characters show coincidence, chance and interconnectedness. They are one way or another related to each other by means of blood, profession or a mere chance. Jacquie and Harvey give up their child, Blue for adoption and Jacquie never sees Harvey after that. Blue is taken up by a white family and lives a luxurious life in Oakland. Years later she goes in search for employment and meets Black. He himself was searching for his father and just connected with him Facebook, his name was Harvey. Edwin and Blue turn out to be unlikely siblings, who have significant differences in appearances and age, nonetheless, they do feel a bizarre sense of relatedness and familiarity among each other.

“When you hear stories from people like you, you feel less alone. When you feel less alone, and like you have a community of people behind you, alongside you, I believe you can live a better life.”

Another important and intricate theme of importance of home is narrated in the story. Orange reminds his readers about tragic incidents of colonialism and their influence on the real home of the Natives. The characters displayed by Orange in this story are seen embracing this historical reality and trauma and yet they claim of their homes in Oakland. However they still had to fight for their home as Orange said;

“Getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new, and we made it ours. We didn’t get lost amid the sprawl of tall buildings, the stream of anonymous masses, the ceaseless din of traffic. We found one another, started up Indian Centers, brought out our families and powwows, our dances, our songs, our beadwork.

Daniel’s example in this story shows that he hesitantly joins in a robbery heist in the powwow to get some cash in order to protect his and mother’s home. Characters like Opal and Jacquie could not find a stable place and they had to keep on moving about different places. Their connection has so strong that they both are home to each other. When Jacquie returns to Oakland, she doesn’t only visits the place she used to live, but also to Opal’s place. The illustration of historical loss and generational trauma has taught us the importance of home. By representation of all these themes and comparing the ideologies of the Native Americans in the past with their current situation, Orange has highlighted the current Native American dilemma and their ways of dealing with the trauma.

**Works Cited**

Orange, Tommy. *There There*. 1st ed., Knopf Doubleplay Publishing Group, 2018, <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=oNY0DwAAQBAJ.>