Justin Richerson

Dr. Despain

Transdisciplinary Comm-CODES 121

22 October 2024

Reflection 5: A Mother’s Love

In CODES, we often have to do readings that are directly related to the topic at hand, but in this reflection, we were tasked with making a reflection based on a literary text, like a story slash poem. This is the first time we have done this in class, and this is my attempt.

I am using the literary text called “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me,” by Sherman Alexie, which describes his childhood, especially his complex relationship with his mother, and how his relationship with his mother’s native tongue, coincides with how he and his mother interacted and how his opinion of her shifted after she died.

One thing I felt stood out to me was the Eulogy he spoke at his mother’s funeral. The line “My Mother was a dictionary” I feel really stood out to me as a symbol. I feel that her being referred to as a dictionary almost directly implies that she was a detailed encyclopedia of words and sayings in her native tribal language that only four people knew at the time, but what really got me was that even though she could have carried on its legacy through her children but withheld that information from them. I feel as though this symbolized a sense of self-hatred of herself that then manifested itself outwardly in the form of keeping her ancestral language exclusive to an old cassette tape; this self-hatred could also stem from the fact that she was conceived through sexual assault and the fact that it’s implied in the story that the author at least mildly resembles his maternal grandfather, she could also feel a sense of animosity towards her son for looking like him, and therefore, withholding information from him.

One other symbol I found in this story was the constant mention of salmon, the saying, “It rained salmon-On the day my mother was buried,” stuck out to me, as it revealed what the salmon symbolized in this story. In the story, we learn that the Interior Salish, the author’s people, worshiped and revered the salmon as it was their primary source of food and spirituality. The story symbolizes the presence of salmon being the presence of spirituality and the absence of salmon being the absence of spirituality. When a massive dam was built that blocked off the streams of salmon, it had almost seemed that all good and hope had vanished along with them, when his mother was buried, it felt as though salmon was raining from the sky, but it was dying and he symbolically brought it to the water, because the salmon needed it to survive, and so did the author.

In conclusion, this story follows the bittersweet tale of a man of native roots being denied any source of his history in a positive light; instead, he's shown the dark and wicked underbelly of his race’s history, and all this coincided with his relationship with his roots and most importantly, his relationship with his mother.