Death And Resurrection In “The Lives Of The Dead”

Posted on July 27, 2022

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/death-and-resurrection-in-the-lives-of-the-dead/

Tim O’Brien explains in this piece of fiction that the act of remembering stories can help bring the dead back to life (Jaiswal, 2024). O’Brien tells about his experience of war in which he witnesses a dead body in Vietnam. After seeing the body, he is reminded of a girl whom he had encountered in his life, and her name was Linda. O’Brien narrates different stories within the main plot, and he provides the themes of death and resurrection. The present essay aims to provide a detailed analysis of the death and resurrection in the plot of “The Lives of the Dead.”

Storytelling as Resurrection

In “The Lives of the Dead,” O’Brien narrates the story by stating it is true that “stories can save us.” (de Muijnck, 2022). The use of imagery and details helps readers understand that the speaker is preoccupied with death and resurrection. At the start of the plot, O’Brien discourses mockingly about his comrades, who are discussing the death of an old man. O’Brien at first cannot realize their sense, but later on, he realises that his companions are celebrating the life he lives at his funeral; therefore, he calls it a “death without sadness” (74). The comrades were not mocking, but they were imagining and remembering the life that an old man lived before death.

Linda and the Recovery of Memory

O’Brien recalls all the details of Linda, with whom he fell in love after seeing the dead body. He narrates that in 1956, he invited Linda on his first date to watch a movie. The movie was about World War II, and it deeply impressed Linda. Linda used to wear a red cap at school time because she wanted to cover her head and hide her bandages, but her fellows teased her. O’Brien felt bad and helpless for her situation. Nick Veenhof came to know that Linda was suffering from a brain tumour and had passed away. Nick discloses the news of Linda’s death to O’Brien, who leaves school and visits her home. O’Brien reached her home and closed his eyes to remember the healthy and fresh Linda with whom he was head over heels in love. In his imagination, she told him that he should not cry upon her death because it does not matter at all. O’Brien finds that the dead can become alive by remembering their stories (225). The example of resurrection is that at the age of 43, he dreams and remembers the stories of Linda. O’Brien unfolds the story within the story to recollect the memories and present the theme of death and resurrection in the story. The structure and different devices

have provided the writer with the power to present different events of the story in an organized way, which helps him in conveying his idea that death does not matter because memories can bring back the past.

Symbolism of Stories and Survival

O'Brien narrates the story of the dead body; it revitalizes the story of love in his memories (Jang, 2024). O'Brien explicates in the text, "Oh shit, the guy's dead" (13). He uses it symbolically, and according to those memories, stories are for living beings; therefore, they provide a medium to individuals who have lost someone to grieve their loss and bring the person back to life with the help of memorization. The story is presented with nostalgic and sad tones because the writer feels sad and wishes for Linda to be alive. He said, "I want to save Linda's life. Not her body–her life" (236). Despite these wishes, he feels happy because he believes Linda is with him and resurrected through his dreams and memories. He believes that thinking about her helps to keep alive her spirit with him. He discourses about her by saying that "sometimes she says amazing things," as in his imagination, "she said that once you are alive, you can never be dead" (82). The narrator explicates that in this way, stories are created, and the dead are resurrected. With the help of such examples, O'Brien unfolds and reassures the reader that fiction can resurrect the dead ones.

Death Grief and Continuing Bonds

The story unfolds death as a major theme. He explicates the effect of the lover's death on the life of the one who is left behind. For example, O'Brien remembers the time of childhood that he spent with Linda, even in adulthood; years later, he recalls her to consider her alive with him. The deaths of the others around O'Brien bring him back to the past and remind him of Linda. Moreover, he highlights how the actions and words of one can hurt others unknowingly. O'Brien considers death as a horrible thing, but it should be shared because sharing will help in staying positive. Moreover, he optimistically presents death because of the resurrection through stories.

Thematic Conclusion

From the above literary analysis, it is clear that O'Brien uses the theme of death and resurrection throughout the plot (Skipper, 2022). From the very start of the story, he narrates that the dead can be resurrected with the help of stories. He explicates his experience of witnessing a dead body and recalling the memories of the past. The expressions of the story help in understanding the importance of the themes for a writer who wants to tell readers that the dead can be alive with the act of memorizing them. In the story, his perception of death is not horrible because he convinces the reader that the dead can be resurrected.

Work in an Anthology

O’Brien, Tim. “The Lives of the Dead.” (1999).

References

Jaiswal, S. (2024). Language as a medium of trauma: Memory, storytelling, and psychological reconstruction in the select works of Tim O’Brien. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 27*(2). https://ajprui.com/index.php/ajpr/article/view/641

de Muijnck, D. A. (2022). Narrative, memory and PTSD: A case study of autobiographical narration after trauma. *European Journal of Life Writing, 11*, 75–95. https://publications.rwth-aachen.de/record/847308?ln=en

Jang, J. (2024). Laughter as a survival strategy and grotesque realism in *The Things They Carried*. *American Studies, 47*(2), 231–255. https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART003164368

Skipper, C. (2022). Tim O’Brien is still wrestling with the Vietnam War. *GQ*. https://www.gq.com/story/tim-obrien-2022-interview