

What You Pawn, I Will Redeem by Sherman Alexie

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Introduction

“What You Pawn, I Will Redeem” is an excellent work of literature crafted by Sherman Alexie. The story revolves around the themes of the key character’s struggle to choose between his responsibilities maturely and his desire for adventures. Alexie narrates the culture of Native America through different plots and concepts in his short story, where the beliefs and way of living of the Native American culture are highlighted. The narrator of the story has adopted a humorous tone that creatively sheds light upon the brutal and honest insight of the Native American Indian lifestyle.

The short story is about Jackson’s personality and how he always has to make a decision about gaining back the property of his grandmother or seeking adventure and happiness through spending his income on friends and alcohol (Alexie, S. 2003). With this plot, the writer discusses the importance of cultural property for the Native Americans and how they respect their dying traditions. The main theme revolves around Jackson’s character and his journey of learning about himself and his attempts to fix his mistakes.

Furthermore, the purpose of this novel lies in convincing its reader to think about the injustice done to the Native Americans and how their land, which they value most, was snatched away from them.

The literature piece “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” focuses on multiple themes, which involve the most important concept: two different paths, the path of adulthood that comes with accountability and responsibilities and the spirit of youth which desires to follow adventures and happiness.

Discussion

Jackson is a homeless boy who has either chosen to be homeless, or the situation and circumstances forced him out of his shelter. His homelessness sheds light on the homelessness of the Native Americans, who were forced out of their land and property for no reason at all. They have been cornered by the early explorers and, to date, by the unjust laws and ignorance of the United States. The first two things we learn about Jackson are that he is an Indian and homeless, which he says is very common among ‘his people’ (Alexie, S. 2003).

This shows us that Jackson values his culture and ancestry like most Native Americans who are proud of their backgrounds. At the same time, he emphasizes his equal rights and land, which was snatched

away from his people, but he is not complaining. He appreciates his homelessness and the way he lives, getting free food and building a relationship with the locals of Seattle streets (Fletcher, M.L 2006). The following lines from the book:

"Piece by piece, I disappeared. I've been disappearing ever since."

- 'What You Pawn, I Will Redeem

Reflects upon the lost culture of Native Americans and how they have been killed, kidnapped, robbed, and treated unfairly, which led to their homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and soon-to-be-extinct culture.

Jackson is aware of his audience and their little to no interest in the story of a homeless Native American; this is because they are everywhere, and no one has ever raised a voice against the injustice done to them (Troyer, R.A. 2008).

'What You Pawn, I Will Redeem' has a title that holds a significant place when understanding the purpose and the theme of the short story. Pawn refers to leaving something valuable with the pawn retailer in exchange for a loan. The item is only redeemed when the loan is paid in full. Jackson's grandmother's regalia was never redeemed by the person who left it, which gave Jackson a chance to redeem it for his grandmother who deeply values the item as it is a symbol of their dying culture. For Jackson to redeem the regalia was his redemption from bad deeds or any mistakes he had committed.

Sherman Alexie has crafted a story that not only sheds light on the Native American culture but the struggles they have been through and the fights they fought. From the very beginning, the reader is familiar with the status of most Indians, who are living below the poverty line, homeless, and unemployed. Despite the injustice displayed by the government of the United States, the Native Americans have always adopted a peaceful, happy, and joyful response to their struggles and pain (Troyer, R.A. 2008).

They are shown singing, dancing, and celebrating the little and small moments of happiness, such as a clean bathroom, free food, and kindness shown by the people belonging to other races in America. The characteristics of Jackson are very similar to that of all creative Indian storytellers, who find extraordinary meaning in every insignificant act of everyday life. They talk about their pain and everyday obstacles with a humorous approach and add a mystical theme to it. While they suffer, they consider every second of comfort as a blessing due to the pain they went through for centuries (Fletcher, M.L 2006).

Conclusion

The short story is a beautiful work of literature teaching its audience about multiple subjects, including the Native American culture, the process of redemption, and the decision between

responsibility and desire. While Jackson appreciates his adventurous life of homelessness and new hurdles set up for him every day, he also realizes that he has a task to cater to. The story is a contrast between the burdens of adulthood and the attractions of youth.

References

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