

Alexie and Cullen Comparison

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My 20th century poetry class essay..the question is compare Sherman Alexie and Countee Cullen who is angrier about social injustices and prejudices in their poems use his writing as "proof"...I don't remember the question verbatim but its something like that

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In reading the two poems, "Incident", by Countee Cullen and "The Powwow at the End of the World", by Sherman Alexie, the reader comes across the social injustices and prejudism from living in the 20th century as not only a black man but a black poet, experiencing racism for the first time at the age of eight and a Native American with his tribe and land being destroyed. Which poet harbors the most anger about social injustices and prejudism in their poetry? This essay will explore and explain the reasons why some readers believe Sherman Alexie is the angrier poet.

Countee Cullen was a young black poet from New York, his poem "Incident" is a narrative quatrain sonnet with a theme of racism. Each stanza has a different stress pattern, each stanza also has a different syllable pattern with a rhythm pattern of A,B,C,B,D,E,F,E,G,H,I,H. "Incident" is about an eight year old Cullen experiencing racism for the first time, stealing part of his innocence. For example, "And so I smiled, but he poked out/ His tongue and called me, "Nigger." (l.7-8). Both children are of young age which is important because children are a symbol of innocence and this event in Cullen's early life stole part of his innocence by exposing him to discrimination. These two lines from the poem are important for the theme because without them the poem would not have the same impact. The reader understands the speaker's shift in mood, from being young, careless and happy to sadness and having a negative lasting impression of Baltimore.

"Incident" does reveal social injustices and prejudism, Cullen does not however seem to project anger or to be aggressive. For instance, "of all things that happened there/ That's all that I remember." (l.11-12). Cullen's poem has a few shifts in mood from being happy about being in a new environment in the first stanza to sadness from a negative encounter with a Baltimore native leaving an impression on his life in the second and last stanzas. There does not seem to be anger compared to the aggressive tone the readers see in Sherman Alexie's poetry.

Sherman Alexie is from the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington, his poem "The Powwow at the End of the World" is a narrative poem with much resentment. The conflict is forgiving the Europeans for four centuries of destruction of his people's tribes and land with their modern civilization. With a theme of imagery and symbolism. The structure of the poem is very different from the "Incident", there is no rhyme pattern, there is repetition throughout the poem. The meter could symbolize the beat of a drum and music from a tribal ceremony and his words are the chant.

In "The Powwow at the End of the World" Alexie blames the Europeans for the destruction of his people and land, he feels like he is the last of his tribe and he will only forgive when nature is restored and industrialization is destroyed, which is never going to happen, both the speaker and the reader know this and that is what makes it symbolism. For example, "I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall/ after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam" (l. 1-2). These two lines show symbolism, as well as the want to destroy everything the Europeans created. The first two lines of the poem tell the reader what to expect and the tone from the beginning.

This poem does reveal social injustices and prejudism that his tribe has endured. "The Powwow at the End of the World" harbors a lot of anger compared to Cullen, for example, "of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing/ with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world." (l. 26-27). These lines are important in defining who is the angrier poet, because his anger and aggression is out there for the readers to see, he does not attempt to hide or sugarcoat his anger in any way.

The poet Sherman Alexie shows more anger over the injustices and prejudism his people have gone through more than Countee Cullen. Cullen shows the reader his loss of innocence and the impression of Baltimore he

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was left with, where he experienced his first encounter with racism. There is no projection of anger in "Incident". Alexie is very straight forward with his anger from the first line his poem. He implies that he won't forgive, because it is impossible to undo all the terrible things done to his people over the centuries, he also implies that he and his tribe will gather in celebration at the end of the world. In conclusion, Sherman Alexie's poems show more anger about the social injustices and prejudism he has endured.

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