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Essay 2

Namwali Serpell is an Zambian writer who wrote the short story “Triptych: Texas Pool Party” which is a political fiction and retelling of a 2015 incident at a pool party between a police officer and many teens of color, including a 15 year old girl, Tatyanna who was tackled and forcibly restrained. Serpell creatively narrated the political fiction through three different parts using a different narrator in each. The first narration called “Summertime” is told through the voice of a teenager who is attending the pool party. “Perseus” is narrated by the police officer involved in the incident. And finally “What was said”, similarly to the first narrative uses the point of view of what was going on, what the teens and police were doing, the orders made and what was said. Serpell uniquely retells the incident in a way that gets the audience to understand exactly what happened. She uses specific word choice and style to construct the main idea of the story. But she also structures the retelling in a clever and natural way that just makes sense.

Serpell begins “Summertime” with a teen girl who is attending the pool party who is very observant of what is around her. “Bright T-shirts, jeans dark and crisp, sneaks so white they squeak on your eyes. Dudes standing around, still as ice. Girls shaking all over, moving to the music, tossing their braids, talking all coy over their shoulders” (Triptych: Texas Pool Party). This descriptive narrative also ties into Serpell’s word choice and style as imagery is used to create a clear visual representation of what the teen is seeing and exactly how peaceful the day started. While the use of imagery and allusions allows the reader to build a visualization of the day, Serpell also decided to use images from the video of the actual incident. As the narration

into “Perseus”, the officer’s point of view begins and Serpell uniquely humanizes the officer, in a way. During the officer’s narration it is ironically stated “I have received eight hours of cultural diversity training and have taken racial-profiling courses” (Triptych: Texas Pool Party). This stands out to me because it is clear irony that an officer would emphasize his vulture diversity training and racial profiling courses of only eight hours and still be involved in a case involved with police brutality against people of color and racial profiling. Serpell continues to use a wide range of literary devices.

Not only is imagery noted but metaphors such as when he said “through solitudes, remote and trackless, over smooth roads in fine neighborhoods, I reach the land where the dread beast has erupted...I see them everywhere—in the grass, by the road—all the moving shapes, a criminal chaos, a disorder of conduct” (Triptych: Texas Pool Party). The officer clearly refers to the black teenagers as “beasts” and through his narrative acts as if he is a knight in shining armour on the way to slay such ‘beasts’. The reader can now see that Serpell shapes the officer’s narrative to highlight his obscurity to his own racism and thoughts. In the end of his narrative it states “In the end, there will be no award pinned to my breast or hung from my neck, no ceremonious recounting of this tale at a banquet or bar” (Triptych: Texas Pool Party). I also find this unique as the way this officer narrates and discusses people of color highlights his racial bias and how he truly thought his actions were justified. It becomes humorous almost.

The “Perseus” section of the re-telling raises many questions about the police officer for me. It makes me wonder if this is how officers in cases like this really think. Do they really see us as beasts? Why did he feel the need to tackle her? My questions mostly come regarding the incident itself. Like was the officer arrested? This incident occurred in 2015 and we are still seeing hundreds of similar scenarios nearly 6 years later. Using research I was able to find the answers to some of my wonderings and I was also able to find many new things about the case.

The officer on the case, Eric Casebolt resigned from the force as his actions were considered “indefensible” according to McKinney’s Police chief. Meanwhile, researching Serpell’s article I saw a lot of feedback and praise on her retelling of the story and how light was shined on the incident.

I believe Namwali Serpell’s “Triptych: Texas Pool Party ” was beautifully written and narrated solely based on Serpell’s writing techniques and her idea to narrate three separate points of views about one day. This technique is also seen in Queneau’s “Exercises in Style” where Queneau uses “exercises” to retell the same story in different styles. He uses many different writing styles to tell the story from a different perspective each time. His technique utilizes each style in a very unique and clever way. Similarly to Serpell, Queneau uses imagery in one of his ‘exercises’ to give the reader a chance to clearly visualize what is being narrated. The use of literary devices such as metaphors, imagery, style, tone etc. can make a story unique and that is exactly what Serpell and Queneau use to add creativity in their texts. Namwali Serpell naturally and uniquely retells the 2015 incident by using these strategies. It almost seems as if it is actually what happened and not a political fiction, which is what makes her re-telling unique.