Split Cherry Tree by Jesse Stuart

Introduction

"Split Cherry Tree" is about a boy named Dave who has to stay after school for a few days to pay off a debt for climbing, and subsequently breaking, a cherry tree. He is concerned that his father will not understand and will be quite upset considering that Dave has to work on his father's farm after school and will be late to do his chores. Dave's assumptions are correct, and his father marches off to the school to straighten things out. At the surface, there's a message about teachers, and parents needing a better understanding of one another, but I do not think Stuart delved too deeply under the surface and the quick changes of hearts seem simplistic at best. At least the contrast in characters was interesting.Thesis StatementOpen communication can explain differences and mediate resolutions.Analysis

“The Split Cherry Tree” by Jesse Stuart revolves around a split cherry tree. Dave, a high-school student who lives in the hills, broke a tree with his friends and now must work after school to pay for it. This causes him to be late for his farm work and incites his father to pay a visit to school, with his gun. The story introduces conflicts between the rich and the poor as well as the educated and uneducated as Dave's father confront the schoolteacher. The eventual lesson of the story is not one that asserts the supremacy of any of these groups, nor Dave, the boy who is trying to navigate between them. Rather, “The Split Cherry Tree” shows how open communication can explain differences and mediate resolutions (Stuart, 1-10).

The central conflict of the story arises, because Dave does not have the money to pay for the tree that he and his friends broke while trying to catch a lizard for class. His father, Luster, work all day, and he cannot do the evening work all on his own. Mr. Herbert, the schoolteacher, did not know about life in the hills, where Dave and his family lived. He did not know the way the hill boys had to work so that they could go to school, and Luster determined to make Herbert understand; with the gun that has always been a friend to him when he goes to settle disputes (Stuart, 11-15).

The presence of Luster's gun adds tension to the scene as he enters into an argument with Professor Herbert over the nature of education.

<http://www.researchomatic.com/Split-Cherry-Tree-By-Jesse-Stuart-82149.html>

Close Reading

The story of   “Split Cherry Tree” is an American short story written by Jesse Stuart.  In this story  the narrator, a young boy still in grade school, begs his teacher to just give him a beating instead of staying after school to be punished for what he did.  The narrator earlier in the day was on a field trip with his class, when him and some of his friends saw a lizard in a tree they all climbed the tree hoping to catch it, but winded up splitting the tree.  This was not just any ordinary tree, this was a cherry tree that belonged to Eif Crabtree who saw the whole thing.  Mr. Crabtree was furious and demanded that the boys pay six dollars for his tree.  All of the other boys chipped in their dollar but the narrator, Dave, did not have the money.  Since he did not have the money  Dave’s teacher Professor Herbert had to put in the money, in return he would make Dave stay after for two days in a row for two hours to do chores around the school house to pay off the money.  Dave begged and pleaded for his professor to let him leave and to just give him a beating because if he went home late to help his father on the farm then his father was just going to beat him anyway.  The professor refused the offer and after the two hours was up Dave rushed home as quick as he could. When Dave arrived at his house his father was infuriated, Dave explained to his father why he was late and Dave’s dad  told him that he does not think they are teaching him the right things down at that school so he would have to go down tomorrow and have a talk with the teacher.  So the next morning Dave and his father headed down to the school house to talk to Dave’s teacher.  After a few minutes of Dave’s father and teacher arguing, Dave’s father agreed to stick around for the day to find out what they were really learning, since he was so skeptical.  By the end of the day Dave’s dad was so impressed he told Dave “You must go on to school. I am as strong a man as ever come out’n th’ hills fer my years and th’ hard work I’ve done. But I’m behind, Dave. I’m a little man. Your hands will be softer than mine. Your clothes will be better. You’ll allus look cleaner than your old Pap. Jist remember, Dave, to pay your debts and be honest.”

    This story is told in first person point of view.  The narrator Dave is a young boy  who had gotten into a little bit of trouble and had to deal with the consequences of his teacher but also his father.   The reason this story is told in first person point of view is because  it gives the reader a good look at how Dave deals with his teacher and how he deals with his father.  The child is very mature for his age.  He comes home everyday straight from school and gets right to work by helping his dad out on the farm. His maturity is also shown, when instead of lying to his father about why he came home late he decided it would just be the best thing to come out and tell his father the truth.   By havingDave be the narrator it is easy to sympathize with him when dealing with these authoritative figures in his life.  It is interesting to see  how he acts when he is at school and when he is at home.

    Most of Jesse Stuart’s writings relate to teaching in some way.  It seems to be a major theme in all of his stories. He had such a passion for improving the education for all students.  In this particular story  Dave’s dad learns a lesson about the education system.  At first he was very judgemental but as soon as he went to the school and the teacher got a chance to interact with him and show him what the students have been learning then he felt more comfortable.  Dave’s dad was never properly educated, that  is why I feel as if  not having a proper education made him very skeptical of the school systems.  In some ways I would say he feared education, since he was so not used to it.

    The story of ” Split Cherry Tree” was a very valuable life lesson, and Jesse was a very tremendous inspiration to everyone who has read his work.   There is still foundations today that honor Jesse and his passion for higher education.   He set an example for  a lot of people in that the people who teach your children are some of the most important people in their lives.  They shape how they will grow up and live, and influence them to succeed in life.

<http://ashley2121.wordpress.com/close-reading/>

[Outsider Narratives](http://outsidernarratives.blogspot.co.il/)

This blog features entries about American outsider narratives from a variety of media. All entries are written by participants in an ENGL 1102 course at Georgia Tech. This blog will explore questions about the prominence and significance of outsider figures in American fictional narratives.

Friday, April 29, 2011

**"The Split Cherry Tree" by Jesse Stuart**

The Split Cherry Tree is one of Jesse Stuart’s narrative texts about the life of isolated farmers. In this story, Dave is the first in his family to go to go to high school. For his biology class, Dave goes on a field trip to search for creatures to dissect and study. Dave and his friends spot a lizard on a cherry tree, climb the tree to get it, and break the tree. The owner of the tree charges the boys six dollars but Dave could not pay the dollar. Dave’s teacher, Mr. Hubert, pays for Dave but then asks Dave to pay him back by doing some chores after school. Dave cannot afford to stay after school because he has to help his strict dad, Luster, on the farm and asked to be whipped instead but Mr. Hubert does not agree.

            When Dave finally arrives home, his dad is mad that he had to do the farm chores alone. Dave explains what happened at school but Luster is not completely convinced about Dave’s biology excuse and decides to go to the school in the morning with his gun; “I aim to see about bug larnin' and this runnin' all over God's creation huntin' snakes, lizards, and frogs.” Mr. Hubert is frightened of Luster’s overall presence with a gun and Luster is ignorant of all school related subjects. Throughout the day, Luster “shadows” Mr. Hubert and learns about school in the present time. When the day is over, Mr. Hubert tells Dave to forget the debt but Luster tells Dave to pay it back; they both stay to payback the debt. In the end, Luster apologizes to his son for his ignorance about school and tells him to always pay his debts.

            Stuart’s story shares with the readers how farmers have worked all their lives and are ignorant of school related material. In this story, both Luster and Dave are outsiders in the “school-world.” Luster is a farmer whose only experience has been revolved around hard farm work and is unaware of school’s teaching material, as it is seen when Dave justifies his tardiness to help his dad with the farm. When he tries to complain to Mr. Hubert about his biology teaching, Luster makes a fool out of himself because he is ignorant. Dave, however, is an outsider because he is the first in his family to go to high school but also because he has to work on the farm immediately after school.

            This story is particularly interesting, however, because Luster accepts his position as an outsider and “backs off” of Dave. This happens when Luster shadows Mr.Hubert and learns about germs and biology. He becomes aware of the changes that schools have taken from when he went to school years ago. He realizes that he has been isolated from society by maintaining a farm out in the country.

            Stuart’s use of an outsider character is obvious as soon as Luster is introduced into the story. But this story is blog worthy because the outsider accepts his status and lets things be and in the process he becomes a better person. He also accepts that his son and himself are part of two different generations in which things are done and taught differently. This acceptance is more or less identifying the "split" in outside-insider status and thus, represents the split in the cherry tree; the father and son may have been part of the same family but are also a different part of time.

<http://outsidernarratives.blogspot.co.il/2011/04/split-cherry-tree-by-jesse-stuart.html>