

Sure things

Experience, Human Nature



Gangyi Wu Mark Scamahorn Eng 110, March 15, 2012 Desperate to survival
How can a big brother who loses his parents in a short period of time survive? How is it possible for him to take care of his little brother at the same time? In *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, the author Dave Eggers describes a long dialogue between him and his brother Toph. In fact, the dialogue is not happening in the real world; instead, it is a “me and I” dialogue. Dave talks about his long day in the beginning of this dialogue, while “Toph” extends the conversation to the discussion of Dave’s inner being.

Actually Dave is analyzing his behavior with respect to Toph. From the dialogue, we can tell Dave is desperate and is eager to have a normal life with Toph. Dave’s dialogue with “Toph” shows Dave is aggressive. Dave is trying to escape the past and use moral authority to condemn other for the purpose of building himself up. Dave is trying to run away from the past guilt. The guilty feelings make Dave stay away from the past. “Toph” says, “You’re completely paralyzed with guilt about relating all this in the first place, especially the stuff earlier on.” (115).

The past was horrible for Dave. He suffered a lot, he lost his parents, and more importantly, his family. He is afraid to remember his family, because he is afraid that those painful memories will haunt after him. The guilt, as “Toph” describes, constrains him. Dave feels guilty for his parents’ death. The “family” area in his brain is a forbidden zone. He preserves this area carefully in order to avoid the potential harm coming from the heartrending stories. Otherwise, these areas may drive him ballistic. As a result, Dave tries many ways to escape the guilt.

At the very beginning of the conversation, Dave and “Toph” are talking about their long day. Dave argues that “this is a much pedestrian day than most”, because “this is just a caricature... the skeleton...”(115) Toph says: “you’re.... doing little tricks, out of frustration.”(115). From this conversation, we can see that Dave is trying to make things look fake; he does not want things to get a hold of him, especially the guilty feelings. Instead of manipulating the old memories into “skeleton” and “caricature” he would rather treat them as his own real experience.

He is numbing himself out. By discarding all the old things to jump out of the old memories, Dave also wants to have a brand new life with Toph. “Toph” says, “you can toss away all the old rules... and for all your bluster you end up maintaining most of their customs.”(116). He is attempting to leave away from the rules in his old family; he wants to dominate his own rule and create a new home rule. He blusters and struggles. He is desperate! No matter how hard Dave tries, he fails, and all the failures gradually lead him to the edge of collapse.

Dave becomes an aggressive man, because he is over sensitive about the potential harm may happen to Toph. “Toph” recounts a scene between Dave and a friend, Marny. Dave is irritated about Toph’s ignorance’s to call, after waiting for Toph to return home. Marny exhorts Dave not to be harsh but Dave wraths immediately, “you think you have a say in something like that, just because I am young.”(116) Apparently he is harsh to Toph and now he is mean to his best friend. Marny is showing him kindness whereas Dave attacks her simply because she doubts what he is doing.

In this moment, Dave already becomes extremely sensitive. He regards himself as Toph's mother, " you would never contradict some forty-year-old mother, would you? " (116) He is a forty-year-old " mother" who is old enough to have authority over Toph; Dave believes he has the competence to take care of Toph, and at the mean time he is doing a good parenting job. Therefore, no one can challenge his authority. Consequently Dave overly defends the leadership that he has over the new family. No one can judge an old " mother". He is as bossy as an old " mother" holding the decision making power in his mind.

Dave describes his attitude to those potential enemies from " Toph's" words, " You'll picture all manners of murders in my defense. Your visions will be vivid and horrifically violent..." (117) Dave would like to punish his " enemies" in his own mind with weapons like a baseball bat. Dave values Toph the most in his heart, and anyone who dares to harm Toph should pay a high price. Dave will punish them as fierce as he can. Paragraph indicates that Dave lacks the sense of safety. Inside his imagination, outsiders always want to dig out his family's scars and judge him and Toph.

He desires to beat every enemy down before they appear, so that no one could harm them. He tries to condemn others by using his moral authority in order to gain confidence about life. Toph says, " You finally have the moral authority you've carved...And now your moral authority is doubled, tripled. And you use it any way you need to. " (118) The moral authority is the weapon Dave uses to intimidate others. For him it is a shield that protects him from being humiliated, since he is morally superior to others. This is exactly what Toph infers about his authority, " because it increases your

leverage with other people. (119) As a result, Dave can judge others without getting criticism back. In the incomplete family, Dave and Toph are weak. However with the moral authority, he can rule over others; no one will have a judgment about his family, or Toph. He even judges his twenty-nine years old girl friend, “ you’ll make this poor woman feel like a leper... you want her to feel like a pariah, like a lower form of life... what you feel anyone tethered to any addiction is. ” (118) “ Leper” and “ pariah” are insulting words that a normal person would not use to criticize a smoking woman.

By looking down on others and saying those insulting words, Dave is attempting to gain self-esteem. His behaviors make himself look like a superior. Although the people are living better than Dave, he refuses to accept reality. What Dave wants is to create a favorable family environment for Toph, to give him a new home. In this family he is a father, a mother, a big brother and an orphan without parents. Dave is attempting to pull himself out of the old and painful memories. On the other hand, he is shouldering the responsibilities of Toph.

He talks to the imaginary Toph to cure himself with an “ open heart surgery”. Toph is an illusion of real Toph in his heart. These two brothers are having a counseling session together indirectly. Dave loves Toph. He is playing his role as a protector. He wants to protect Toph from the people outside their house, to keep Toph from other people’s judgments. The only reason Dave becomes a desperate and pretended guardian is to become strong enough to stand up for Toph’s protection. Work Cited Eggers, Dave. *A heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, New York. Vintage Books. 2000. 114-120. Print.