Growing Up – Trials and Experiences

At times, the awfulness of a situation can overwhelm someone. It sometimes takes an outside, wizened voice, as well as time to realize the broader purpose of the events and that have occurred. In reflection, they can often be viewed positively after all. In Bless Me Ultima, a novel by Rudolfo Anaya, this is the case for Tony with all of the trials he weathers. Antonio faces the growing issue of losing his innocence as the story progresses, demonstrated by the events that occur throughout the story. Bless Me Ultima uses common life experiences for a growing Antonio to create a growing amount of experience and knowledge, leading to his ultimate resolution and realization.

Tony grows old mentally as he weathers the deaths of so many he was close to. After returning home from the site of Florence’s death, Ultima advises, “The strengthening of a soul, the growing up of a boy is part of his destiny, but you have seen too much death. It is time for you to rest, to see growing life” (Anaya 235). Ultima, Antonio’s mentor, wishes Antonio to have a break from his trials. As of late in the novel, she has witnessed him grow up and only see death. Consequently, both feel he is losing his innocence and youth too quickly, as heard in Antonio’s thoughts. Though the death is a good reality for Tony to feel, it’s also at an extreme, so that Antonio needs a break – it will soon become a negative and hurt his maturing.

Parental pressures also force Antonio to hasten in his quest to learn and grow up. After his brothers return home, Antonio’s father, Gabriel, creates pressure when he, “increased his pleas that they plan a future with him in California, but they only nodded. They did not hear their father” (Anaya 67). Though this is not completely directed at Tony, it shows to him the examples of children who do not follow the wishes of their parents. In addition, the burden for at least one child to follow those dreams is increased. Both his brothers and parents refer to Tony being the son who could still follow their dreams. Confined to these dreams, Antonio still must choose between the respective desires of each of his parents. However, this pressure also results in Tony’s rapid maturing, as he questions and thinks of that which most children his age would contemplate.

Antonio faces the internal problem of losing his innocence as he continues to mature and question subjects around him. Following the departure of his brothers, Tony dreams, “No! … I cannot enter, I cannot think those thoughts. I am to be a priest” (Anaya 70). Events in his everyday life have led him to think of new subjects. These are topics that Antonio had refused to ignore; now that they are appearing he does not want to admit to their existence. His internal conflict is shown, however, when his brothers say, “Even priests are men.” In the end, however, it is a required aspect for Antonio’s maturing, and will help in the end as he grows up and begins to understand all that is around him. Later in the dream, Antonio shouts, “But innocence is forever!” while his mother responds, “You are innocent when you do not know, but you already know too much about the flesh and blood of the Márez men” (Anaya 71). His internal struggle is again shown with his mother stating this. Despite his efforts, he cannot deny this fact. Additionally, Antonio’s awareness of the Márez blood in him also counteracts his efforts to prevent his loss of innocence. Consequently, Antonio will continue to lose his innocence, though he feels it is not good for him; his continued gain of knowledge will net this for him, which in the end will work out positively, as it is inevitable.

Finally, Tony is faced with religious conflicts as he ages and proceeds through catechism. Prior to one of his classes for communion, he hears old women in church whisper, “Man was not made to know so much. They compete with God, they disturb the seasons” (Anaya 184). This creates conflict in Antonio’s mind; he has been told that knowledge is positive, yet many in religion say otherwise. If he is to be a man of learning, like he’s been told, he may be violating the will of God. The confusion from this doesn’t work well in Tony’s short term, but later it helps him with his religious contemplation. During a dream Antonio also faces conflict between the validity of Ultima’s magic and Christianity, “Everything I believed in was destroyed… ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” (Anaya 234) This continued conflict plagues Antonio’s thoughts. Now he has seen many perspectives, and each seems well supported, yet each conflicts. The golden carp, Ultima’s magic, and Christianity are all being thrust upon him. He begins to question why the well-supported and encouraged ways have failed him. All of these thoughts and criticism contribute to his final contentment and coming to terms with his situation.

Antonio’s years of youth faced him with tough events, however the information and experience he gained resulted in his contentment and understanding. Parental pressures, the pressing issue of losing innocence in youth, life and death experiences, as well as religious conflicts all lead up to Antonio’s conclusion. These trying experiences demonstrate the necessity of perseverance, and the ultimate importance of reflecting on life events. Antonio proves this as he grows up, living through the novel Bless Me Ultima.

Works Cited

Anaya, Rudolfo A. *Bless Me, Ultima*. New York: Warner, 1994. Print.