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Literary Analysis Essay

There is a strange charm associated with the idea of innocence. The art of being unaware is blissful in its own way. However, as soon as reality sets in, we learn that innocence is not all that it is cracked up to be. As much as we could wish that life came with a manual attached, it can never be the case. We have to learn just about everything in the world, right from scratch. We have to learn to walk, talk and develop our very own thought process. We have to form opinions based on our experiences and we have to catch ourselves before we fall. In the event that we do fall, we alone are responsible for generating the courage that we need to dust ourselves off and lift our spirits. We have to learn to take chances since life can be risky and unpredictable at the very same time. During this time, we also have to work around the fact that we need to live a happy, fulfilling life, the sort where all our needs are met and we are happy just the way we are supposed to be. We have to live a life worth living, a life that is meaningful and yet at the same time more than enough to remain content. While there is no one that takes our hand and guides us through all the phases of life, teach us of the things that we need to do, we can always learn from the experiences and the mistakes of the ones that came before us.

Keeping that view in mind, the literary work I have chosen to analyze, compare and contrast for the purpose of this essay is *Advice to My Son* by Peter Meinke and *Mother to Son* by Langston Hudges. As the title suggests, both poems deal with the way to live life through the experience of others. These individuals use the perspective held by a parent as an example to teach meaningful lessons to the generations that follow them. Since this advice is being given by a father or a mother to a son, it carried the weight of a lifetime worth of experience. The person here is not speaking out of pure conjecture, they have experienced the downside of their own advice and doesn’t want their son to suffer the same fate. However, the perspective used by the poets, the style of communication they used and the perspective held by them, both vary in their own way.

With the first poem, “Advice to My Son” (Meinke), the author is trying to emphasize how the words he has penned can be applied to life. It talks about the choices that we make in life and how these choices impact and change our perspective in life. It further elaborates how the options we are given in life often come with strings attached and this can impact life in a multitude of manners. It helps give life meaning, while creates the sort of atmosphere where the choices we make and the consequences they hold and exhibited simultaneously. The author begins the poem by telling his son to live his life to the fullest. He tells his son in the kindest of ways that life is short. That it will come to an end eventually come to an end. However, it will feel short to those that live a life of excitement, or to those whose life has been cut short by a tragedy. On the other hand, while living life, he also advises him to be cautious and plan for the future, since no one can predict the future and what it may hold. Thus, he is essentially telling him not to let life pass him by for the fear of the future, but to live a full life with a pinch of caution for the rainy day. That it will feel long to those who haven’t been careful.

He follows his advice up with telling him to plant some squash, turnip, and tomatoes between the peonies and the squash in his garden. This part serves a dual purpose Firstly, it makes the reader feel the texture, the flavor and the smell of the above-mentioned flowers, fruits, and vegetables. The human brain has a strong affinity to textures and smells (Mayes). With the flowers, the author is trying to convey the importance of the simpler things in life. It follows into the idea of living life to the fullest as discussed earlier. However, at this point, the author is more concerned with making sure that the pure pleasure of simple things in life isn’t overlooked. Following the simplicity of smelling the flowers, the author tries to convey the importance of having turnips, spinach, and tomatoes in the garden. This is the author’s way of telling his son to always stay on his toes. Life is unpredictable, according to the author. He compares life to a desert, where simple things bring pleasure and make life bearable. On the other hand, these pleasures hold no value if an individual’s basic needs, such as sustenance, aren’t met. The vegetables used here inspire a sense of hunger in the reader (Mayes). The author does not refer to being physically hungry per se, but he also refers to an emotional hunger of sorts. This hunger is more of a craving to reach one’s goals and satisfy themselves. Thus, the author implores his son to keep his eyes on the prize and work towards what he wants, while being happy and experiencing joy.

Having explained the purpose of life, the author moves on towards the idea of living a quality life. Here, the father asks his son to definitely marry the woman he desires, but, he asks him to do so once he had met this woman’s mother. The idea here is not to discourage his son, but to explain to him that the environment where the woman he loves was raised has shaped her perspective of life. This environment was not only affected but also shaped by her mother, thus she is going to behave exactly like her mother when push comes to shove and life gets hard. Indirectly, he tells his son to be wise in terms of choosing a life partner. Finally, the author tells his son, in a covert manner, to never get into business with a friend. A friend has seen his soul, he knows him inside out and even knows his vulnerabilities like the back of his hand. In such a situation, he is not going to hold back and even choose to exploit him if he needs to. The author chooses to end the poem by reinforcing all the advice the father has given his son by using the example of bread and wine (Widdowson). The bread here shows tough choices that need to be made. However, on the other hand, wine is used as a metaphor for pleasure. Thus the father here is advising his son to be cautious in his approach with life, but not to forget it.

The second poem “Mother to Son” (Hughes) is simpler and straight forward in its approach. It uses a staircase as a metaphor for life, where the mother is giving her son a lesson on the best way to live life. The author begins the poem with the mother telling her son that her life has been difficult and hard at times. This is illumined by the fact that the mother says that her staircase of life is filled with splinters and cracks. This shows that her life has in no way been perfect and that she has faced no shortage of challenges along the way. It may be because she was born into poverty, which is elaborated by the use of terms like “I'se been a-climbin' on”. This is not a proper English phrase was mostly used by individuals that aren’t as well educated (Dillard). Furthermore, the mother’s staircase is not only torn up, but its boards are also torn up. There are places with no carpet, which shows that her life has not only been full of frustrating tribulations, but she has had to go through places where cautious people would not dare go, for the fear of their life. However, the mother had to go through it all. No matter how hard, how dark or how dangerous life got for the mother, she did not give up through it all. She tells her son that the challenges life presents you with may leave you wanting to turn back. It may make it hard for you to keep going forward, and sitting down and surrendering to fate may seem like the easier, kinder choice. However, that is not the choice that the son should make. Thus, throughout the poem, message she is trying to depart to her son, and to the reader, to keep on going, to keep on trying and to never surrender. In the end, she reminds her son once again that her life has not been a crystal stair, however, she persevered through it all and is she could, so can her son.

While both poems, as mentioned, use parental figures as narrators to explain to the children the way to live life. However, the two poems starkly differ in their approach. Meinke used a formal diction to get the meaning of the poem across, while Hughes is more concerned with making sure that the reader knows that the mother is exhausted. Her informal diction, as well the use of old English conveys the idea amply. It also shows that the cultural implications of the language used, that shows that the mother belongs to a lower socioeconomic class and has lived a life of poverty. On the other hand, the father tells his son to plant vegetables along with flowers, something that an individual with a better socioeconomic standing would do. Both the poems are short, albeit brilliant in the own way in conveying the meaning of life, in their own illustrious ways.

Works Cited

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