

One agenda of the
modern world. like
any



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

One of the most important conflicts that have ever been raised throughout the history is the problem of personal development.

Even now it is still on the agenda of the modern world. Like any other person, the character of the memoir by McBride is changing together with the world around him. In the midst of finding his racial identity, James realized that in order to reach his identity as jazz musician and a writer, he had to ignore his racial issues. It is clear from the very beginning that there is certain link between James and his mother, but it is obviously different from the one that intertwines a child and his mother. As the story unwinds, it becomes evident that James and his mother are interrelated in much more subtle way. They both possess certain secret within them, the secret of their origin and their life.

It is quite peculiar though that, in contrast to his mother, who is trying to keep her secret deep inside, James is eagerly trying to find the answer to his secret: “ Sometimes it seemed like the truth was a bandy-legged soul who dashed from one side of the world to the other and I could never find him” (McBride 145). What is peculiar about James as a child is that he wanted to know the truth, no matter what it might turn for him. Such attitude is strikingly contrasting to the adult James, a confident and self-assured man with few or no doubts. His eager attempt to unveil the mystery of their family is dominating over him, possessing his entire self and calling back to his ancestors. Perhaps, this is the “ call of the wild” that has been spoken so much of. Anyway, the novel starts with a story of quite happy family. Growing increasingly interested in his origin and his real story, James is

slowly becoming aware of the fact that he is different from the some of the people in the city.

It must be admitted that the process is not harsh and quick – on the contrary, it takes James much time to realize that certain people take him wrong and have the wrong ideas about James and his family. Consequently, the character of the book starts searching for the truth that he has been protected from for such long time: I felt like a Tinkertoy kid building my own self out of one of those toy building sets; for as she laid her life before me, I reassembled the tableau of her words like a picture puzzle, and as I did, so my own life was rebuilt. (McBride 211) Can his mother's attempt to conceal the truth be considered as a wise decision? On the one hand, James would have suffered from the idea that he is considered an outcast by the adults. Such knowledge can be quiet dangerous, which his mother, Ruth, understood well enough. Also, shielding her beloved child from the harsh reality, she proved that she can be considered a real mother. However, James's personal development does not stop at this point. Together with the realization of the fact that there is " something wrong" with people's attitude towards him, he understands that the relations within his family will never be the same.

Such turn in his personal development means that James has grown enough to overcome another stage of his life and become an adult – a person who takes full account of his actions and deeds. " There's such a big difference between being dead and alive, I told myself" (178), McBride confessed, and it seems that the author has decided to live the full life despite all that happened to him. It is quite logical that this results in his split with the family. Unless James had started to search fro the truth on his own, he would

have stayed under the shield of illusions forever. This means that he would have never gained an opportunity to live his own life – what he would have to take would have been the life of an average man, but not the journey of James, the adult person, “ a bird who flies” (165). It is also quite peculiar that James denies the belief of his family: “ It’s a real workout, which is maybe why I’m not a Jew now. There were too many rules to follow, too many forbidden and “ you cant’s” and “ you musnt’s,” but does anybody say they love you?” Despite the controversy of this statement, it cannot be considered as an attempt to betray the faith – this is rather a step of a grown-up man who is certain about his wishes and needs. Compared to him, his mother could be depicted as the person with rather weak will and the one tending to bow to the others’ judgement.

However, such judgement seems rather half-baked as one takes a closer look at the woman’s biography. Considered a “ great woman” by her son’s new friend, she is a specimen of the people who are able to endure numerous problems only to grow stronger. Though her and her son’s characters are strikingly different, a certain trait brings them together. Each of them a rebel in their own way, these people lead the lives that could be described as a rebellion – the one that has to struggles themselves for a way out of misery. That is why these characters are quite close to each other.

Mommy’s tears seemed to come from somewhere else, a place far away, a place inside her that she never let any of us children visit, and even as a boy I felt there was pain behind them (McBride 39). Strong, reserved and yet loving and devoted, Ruth McBride was depicted like a woman warrior. She would never let her children suffer. She would never give up.

This influenced James's temper, making him more vulnerable and unable to handle sudden sorrow or pain. It must be admitted though that the mother and her son's ideas of what a comfortable life is did not match. In contrast to Ruth, who was trying to forget the haunting memories of the past, James was trying to find out as much about his own descent as he could. This brought certain conflict into the family and led to the discord between the mother and her child. It is only several years after the conflict that James realizes what an extraordinary person his mother was. However, in McBride's story, it is his friend who helps him to pay the tribute to the mother, because by comparing her to the friend's mother, the author realizes Ruth's strength and her sufferings: Only then I revealed to him that my mother was the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi did his Jewish background emerge, because he understood the true depth of mother's experience immediately. "What a woman," he said (McBride 172).

However, these are rather James's own words. Although they have been spoken by another man, they belong to James. The time has come for him to pay tribute to his mother, and James knows it well. It must be mentioned though that James started realizing that his origin is a secret despite his mother's attempts to conceal the truth. Even with his friends' loyal attitude and their innocent childhood when James was sure that he was just like the rest of children, he finally started feeling that there was something wrong. Looking at his white-skinned mother and comparing himself to her and the other people, the author came to the conclusion that there was something that Ruth did not want to tell him. It is also quite important that, as James

grows into a man, he still had the loyalty of his friends and the possibility of rebuilding the relationships with his family.

As the author himself confessed, his friends created the atmosphere where the origin, of skin color, or anything else of that kind had any significance. Since the environment that the boy from the story was growing in was rather friendly towards him, he grew into the self-respecting, mature adult. With help of his little friends, James managed to forget about the problems that his skin color triggered and the gossips that it caused. “ My black friends never asked me how much money I made, or what school my children went to, or anything like that. They just said, “ Come as you are,”” (McBride 110) the author recollected. These were the first and the most important lessons of tolerance and peace making that played such important part in the author’s personal development and his ideas concerning the issues of racial discrimination. What is the most tragic about the lead character’s fate is that he learned to fear not only the power of the white people, but also the power of the Black: But there was a part of me that feared black power very deeply for the obvious reason.

I thought black power would be the end of my mother. I had swallowed the white man’s fear of the Negro, as we were called back then, whole. (McBride 15) It is obvious that, despised by the white peers and afraid of the Black, James cannot reconcile with his own feelings. That is why James comes to conflicting with the entire world – he merely cannot find the place where he belongs. It is peculiar that the change that brought him to the deplorable state was caused by the social rejection, whereas his spiritual renaissance was the result of his family’s support. It must have been a shock for James to

find out that what he had been searching for was within his reach all the time.