

On turning ten by billy collins and the lighthouse by arturo vivante

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How many times have you heard the sentences “ You’re just a child, you have nothing to worry about!” or “ You’re young, you need to enjoy life”? Those sentences emphasize the idea that life is beautiful when you’re young, but not so beautiful when you grow up. Usually, growing up connects to maturity, since naturally people tend to be mature when they age up. However, people can mature even at a very young age, often by being exposed to significant events which affect their perspective on life. In the poem On Turning Ten by Billy Collins and in passage II from The Lighthouse by Arturo Vivante, the narrators express negative feelings about growing up. There are some differences in the content of these passages, but they both convey the idea of losing the innocence and the light that is inside us when we are young. This essay will focus on comparing and contrasting the narrators, the setting and important objects in the narrators’ lives.

Both passages are told by young boys, who actually share the experiences of the authors in their childhood. In Collins’ poem, the young boy expresses a very mature perspective on life although he not yet turned ten:

...there was nothing under my skin but light
If you cut me I would shine
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life
I skin my knees. I bleed (29-32)

It is way similar to the young boy in the passage of The Lighthouse, who also has an adult understanding of the ravages of time.

Vivante concludes, “ I felt I never could—never could possibly—be as nice as I had been a year before” (93-94).

These two narrators radically emphasize the difference between being young and being adult, that they nearly consider their new selves to be different (and less magical) people than their younger selves.

The poem is set differently from the prose piece. The poem is set entirely in a single location, which is the narrator's house, with no specific time indication. The narrator expresses a magical reality that he experiences in this place, but everything comes to an end when he is about to turn ten. In his poem, *On Turning Ten*, Collins writes:

At four I was an Arabian wizard I could make myself invisible by drinking a glass of milk a certain way At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince (13-16).

This child could be everyone he wanted, and actually believed it was possible. But, from the point of view of a mature person that he is now, he considers it as metaphors to his childhood dreams. Considering the different setting of the prose piece, it is set in Italy and Britain, before and after World War II. The lighthouse that the boy used to come to is a metaphor to his inner light and his innocence, which disappeared after the war. In addition, a lighthouse symbolizes knowledge of where the danger is and guidance away from hazard, therefore it also symbolizes the clearer understanding of adult reality that the boy gained after he got matured.

Each narrator uses different objects, which were significant for them in the early childhood. They are part of the imagery which reminds the readers of their own childhood. The narrator of the poem uses words like 'blue bike' and 'tree house', which make a joyful childhood image where a kid rides his

bike and playing in a tree house. But, when he is about to turn ten he sees those objects as negative ones. In his poem, Collins writes:

...and my bicycle never leaned against the garage as it does today all the dark blue speed drained out of it (21-23).

The way his bicycle leans against the garage with all of its speed pizzazz gone is similar to the narrator's feeling. Also, the choice of blue is intentional here, since it shows the feeling of sadness that progressively gains throughout the poem. At the same time, the prose uses words like ' seagulls', ' kites', ' roller skating', ' lighthouse', ' sea', ' fruitcake' that give the reader an image of a very fun childhood. The fruitcake that he sent to the lighthouse keeper symbolizes happiness and celebration. The fact that the lighthouse keeper doesn't remember the boy, but mentions the cake as a memory from him, means that the boy has changed. He is no longer a happy innocent child, but a mature sad adolescent.

To conclude, On Turning Ten and The Lighthouse have a tone of melancholy and thoughtfulness. The narrators reflect thoughtfully on their sadness about growing up. In his poem, Collins writes:

...time to turn the first big number (27)

According to the passage of Vivante, The boy says he " couldn't see this change, this awkward period in (hi)myself, of course, but, standing before him" (92-93).

The narrators also reminisce about the happiness and playfulness of their early ages by using images, metaphors and symbols. Although they feel painful about growing up, they accept the fact that they have changed and this is where they reached true realization of life.