
The Significance And Issues Of Family In Bless Me Ultima

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya presents a powerful story of this young boy reaching his coming of age and demonstrates the distress caused by the split of two families. Antonio is on a journey of self-discovery and the war between the Márez's and Lunas only adds additional conflict. His childhood is revolved around choosing who to become and this takes a major toll on his life. Through Anaya's use of the symbolism of the moon and the sea, he portrays the clashing sources of Antonio's search for identity as the protagonist approaches his coming of age, the internal conflict Antonio must face that accompanies his issues, and the protagonists conflicting family values.

The moon and the sea are two major symbols that affect Antonio's life. The moon represents his mother's side of the family, the Lunas. The direct translation of the name means moon and they are presented through this because the family revolves around farming. This activity involves being tied down to the earth and staying in a singular location. The quote, "I learned that the phases of the moon ruled not only the planting but almost every part of their lives. That is why they were the Lunas! [. . .] And the moon was kind to them (249)." shows how the moon affects their life drastically. The Lunas concentrate more on working than free will, completely opposite of the Márez family beliefs. Márez also translates to the word "sea" in the Spanish language. The sea represents the Márez's as it is always in constant motion and the water can never stay in one place for too long. The family depicts this perfectly as they are known for being restless and constantly wandering, as shown in the quote, "These were the people of my father, the vaqueros of the llano. They were an exuberant, restless people, wandering across the ocean of the plain (6)." The two families have collided together through Antonio's parents, María Luna-Márez and Gabriel Márez, and despite their contrasting views, they have managed to make it work. Antonio has three older brothers who have leaned more towards the father's side of the family as they are restless and want the freedom to wander, as seen in the quote, "They were three dark figures driven to wander by the wild sea-blood in their veins. Shrouded in a sea-mist they walked the streets of a foreign city (235)." Antonio's two sisters are more similar to their mother as they have a better connection and are more attached to her. Antonio is on a search in discovering his identity as he progressively gets older and his decision must be made. Disappointing his family and letting one of his parents down is something Antonio tries his best to avoid but in the end, someone is going to get hurt. The clash of the families creates this detriment on Antonio that he learns to abide with.

With these clashing families, an internal conflict develops within Antonio that he must overcome. There are multiple events that affect Antonio, including his perspective of religion, but his view of his identity is a crucial part of his character development. His mother wants him to grow up and become a priest, the first in the Luna family. Since her other three sons could not fulfill this dream of hers, she relies on Antonio to do the job, never taking into account what Antonio truly wants. The quote, "'In that one there is hope,' I heard my uncle Juan say to my mother. I knew he talked about me. 'Ay, Juan,' my mother whispered, 'I pray that he will take the vows, that a priest will return to guide the Lunas--(235),'" reveals that not just Antonio's mother, but his whole family depends on him as they can see the hope he contains and want him to establish their future for them. This only adds pressure on Antonio's life as now he must satisfy others, including his parents. His father does not want Antonio to be a farmer or a priest and be tied

down forever. Gabriel has a dream of moving to California, the vaquero side of him, to travel and explore freedom, but María and his three sons stop him from doing so. This can be shown in the quote, “My father’s dream was to gather his sons around him and move westward to the land of the setting sun, to the vineyards of California. But the war had taken his three sons and it had made him bitter (14).” There is an important element that comes with deciding who to be as this is Antonio’s life and the one decision will determine his future.

Both of Antonio’s families, the Márez’s and the Lunas, have different values in life that drastically differ. The Lunas believe in a peaceful and quiet life that involves being one with the earth and have similarities that relate them to the moon. They are more down to earth while the Márez’s like to be wild and loud, as it is in their nature. They usually have no worries and compare to the sea because the ocean is known for being restless. This can be demonstrated with the quote, “It is the blood of the Lunas to be quiet, for only a quiet man can learn the secrets of the earth that are necessary for planting-They are quiet like the moon-And it is the blood of the Marez to be wild, like the ocean from which they take their name, and the spaces of the llano that have become their home (41).” The Lunas want Antonio to become a farmer as that means he is doing something with his life and not wasting it away wandering aimlessly. The vaqueros see it differently and believe giving Antonio the freedom to explore will help him fulfill his dreams of determining his true identity. Both families fail to realize that they both depend on one another and Antonio has to be both in order to be himself. The quote, “You both know, she spoke to my father and my mother, that the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans (121),” demonstrates Ultima explaining to Gabriel and María that there would be no oceans if the moon did not give it the water it needs to be an ocean. This reveals that if the Lunas did not aid the Márez’s and vice-versa, neither would exist. They depend on one another and this thought has been neglected. At the end of the novel, Antonio realizes this truth and how he does not have to pick between the two, revealed in the quote, “Then maybe I do not have to be just Marez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both-’ I said (247).” He chooses his own destiny that is distinct from the one his parents had decided for him but he also learned that accepting both families as his identity is a part of growing up.