The Life Progression Of Charles Ryder (Brideshead Revisited) Essay, Research Paper

The Life Progression of Charles Ryder

Young men and women become adults through experience. As people age, they lose their innocence by living and encountering new aspects of life. Charles Ryder, from the novel Brideshead Revisited, by Evelyn Waugh, displays this archetypal loss of innocence. Throughout the story, Charles undergoes the classic cycle of separation, transformation, and return, which leads him into becoming a mature adult.

Early in the novel, Charles seems sure of himself, but he does not know what he is or what he wishes to become. He has had little experience in life and does not hold the wisdom to make knowledgeable decisions about his beliefs and goals. Charles first starts to move away from this innocent way of life when he meets Sebastian Flyte. Charles was drawn into Sebastian’s “different” way of life. He states, “I date my Oxford life from my first meeting with Sebastian” (24). Sebastian is a socialite who holds great charm, which he uses as protection from the outside world. Sebastian acts as a guide for Charles showing him a new side of Oxford, and a side of life that Charles has not known. The two party together, spend money lavishly, living a way of life that Charles hasn’t lived before; one that he can use to look back upon later in life. Even while still at Oxford Charles uses his life with Sebastian to help affect his thoughts. Charles admits, “I felt at heart that this was not all Oxford had to offer” (28). Charles gains experience in life, which helps him come to this conclusion. In his early days at Oxford, Charles is able to separate from his past way of innocent life through Sebastian, and he begins to analyze the world around him more thoroughly.

Following Charles Ryder’s separation, he begins to transform into a mature insightful adult. He has gained wisdom by living life knowing Sebastian, the Marchmaim family, and others around him. Charles acquires the ability to see deeper meanings of events occurring in his life. For example, after knowing Sebastian for several terms Charles expresses, “I began to realize that Sebastian was a drunkard in quite a different sense from myself. I got drunk often, but through an excess of high spirits, in the love of the moment Sebastian Drunk to escape”(129). Mr. Ryder is able to deduce this because he has known his friend and his friend’s family for a substantial amount of time and has gained the necessary knowledge to see past the obvious and make a conclusion. Also, merely by living through life, Charles gains the maturity needed to know his own aim in life. He proclaims, “I intend to be a painter” (147). Charles Ryder has had the proper life experience and knows what he wants to do with his life. Lastly, Charles experiences many religiously related issues, which he is eventually able to comprehend because of his transformation into an adult. When the Marchmaims enter Charles’s life he is confused about religion and is not sure what he wishes to believe. By experiencing many religious events he is able to come to a decision on what his own beliefs should be. He if forced to face religion during the death of Lord Marchmaim and with his relationship with Julia. Mr. Ryder is compelled into converting to Catholicism, because he has lived life with the Catholic Marchmaims, who have transformed him into an adult able to take information and process it in a way that fits his life.

Charles concludes his process of maturation when he returns to Brideshead while working as a captain in the military. After going through so much with the Marchmaims, his wife, painting, and the war Charles has gained much wisdom in life. Charles Ryder feels as if he has gone through it all and seen all he needs to see to know who he is. In his own words he states, “Here at the ago of thirty-nine I began to be old” (5). Charles is finding himself in a slightly depressed state because he has no more loves in life. Living has become a routine. At this point when he needs it most, fate brings him back to Brideshead. This return is substantial because Mr. Ryder is returning to a place that played a huge role in shaping who he is today. The majority of the novel is of Charles’s memories of time when Brideshead was an important part of his life. Much of his transformation occurred at Brideshead, and Charles realizes the significance of this return. His life was shaped by events relating to Brideshead and the revisiting it brings back memories and keeps Charles remembering the past. Soon after his return to Brideshead a fellow officer noted to Charles, “You’re looking unusually cheerful to-day” (351). Charles is remembering the times he spent at Brideshead, and is returning to a place he will never forget. The return to Brideshead finishes the process of transformation for Charles, because he now knows who he is and how he became that way.

As Charles progresses through life, he endures the model process of separation, initiation and return. He tackles much in life and learns from times gone by, enabling him to better understand himself and others. The more Charles travels through life, the more wisdom he gains, but he never leaves the past behind him. The archetypal transformation includes a return. Charles’s return is symbolic and literal when he returns to Brideshead and reflects upon his yesteryear. Finally, at the age of 39, he completes his journey to understanding his life and the lives of people close to him. Charles has reached his point of self-satisfaction, just as we all hope to do someday in life.