My Nose is Growing Old

Richard Brautigan

*Sample Super Duper Strong Response*

9th Grade, English

All life must inevitably end. As human beings we are born with a limit, an expiration date. Part of being a human being is accepting that death and aging are natural aspects of life. Richard Brautigan’s poem, *My Nose is Growing Old*, captures the struggle one speaker faces while progressing through adulthood. Through the use of diction and tone, Brautigan illustrates that human beings fear aging because it triggers the loss of physical beauty and consequently societal love.

Brautigan’s speaker begins the poem by straightforwardly announcing, “yup” his/her “nose is growing old.” The speaker’s use of the informal word “yup” suggests an acceptance of his/her aging, signaling at least a partial tolerance of aging. It is as if the speaker is recognizing an obvious and undeniable fact. The tone is light and straightforward suggesting that at least in this stanza, the speaker is fine with growing old. However, in the stanzas that follows the speaker’s tone changes, implying that his/her feelings toward aging are more complicated.

Starting with the fifth stanza, the speaker’s tone changes from light and straightforward to pensive and ultimately irate. For example, when s/he says: “ I wonder if girls/ will want me with an/ old nose” (18-20). The speaker is concerned whether or not women will find him attractive as he grows older. Usually, a human being thinking of growing old would trigger fears of death and the afterlife, but the speaker is concerned with more shallow concerns , such as physical looks. The speaker’s concerns suggest that he is a self-conscious and superficial individual whose ego feeds on the acceptance and adoration of others. As the poem progresses, the speaker grows more indignant, directing his hate on undeserving subjects.

In the last two stanzas, the speaker shifts his tone from pensive to indignant:

I can hear them now  
the heartless bitches!  
  
"He's cute  
but his nose  
is old." ( 21-25)

The speaker grows angry at the women because he has no one else to blame for his aging. Often, when circumstances are out of people’s control, they blame people around them in an effort to cope and find closure. The speaker directs his anger at women who exist only in his imagination. He imagines these women will be disgusted by his old nose and not to want to involve themselves with him. He does not fear aging so much as he fears being rejected by these women who are symbolic of society as whole. Society is ageist, celebrating youth and physical beauty over any other virtues. The speaker recognizes that his value in society is waning and he reverts to a hateful and indignant tone in an effort to feel better about something he has no control over. By blaming the women, the speaker gains some semblance of control.

In the poem *My Nose is Growing Old*, Brautigan explores society’s influence on how people react to the consequences of aging. The speaker’s irrational and indigant tone and diction suggests that humans fear aging because they fear societal rejection and the loss of their own value in society’s eyes.