

Life is Elsewhere a Comparative Study of “Araby” and “How I Met my Husband”

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ABSTRACT. *This paper offers a comparative study of two pieces of short stories: namely, James Joyce’s “Araby” and Alice Munro’s “How I Met my husband” from the perspective of literary genre Bildungsroman. The protagonists’ development from innocence to maturity according to the three distinctive features of Bildungsroman are discussed, and the focus is on the similarities revealed in both stories when the protagonists try to pursue order and value in their growth and struggles. Specifically, two pairs of conflicts will be discussed: the confrontation between the child and adult worlds and the impingement of the reality on the ideal.*

KEYWORDS: *Comparative Study, protagonists’ development, discussed*

1. Introduction

James Joyce is not the pioneer of the Bildungsroman although his masterpiece “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” inherits the essence of the genre and reaches the peak of its perfection. In fact, Bildungsroman originated in Germany in latter part of the 18th century and first known example was “The History of Agathon” written by Christoph Martin Wieland in 1766-1767. It was Johann W. Von Goethe’s “Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship” (1795-1796), that took the form from philosophical to personal development and gave celebrity to the genre. The word “apprenticeship” in its title implies a development from naivety to maturity, revealing the major feature of the genre. Since then, Bildungsroman remained its popularity in Europe until 1860. The examples during this period include “David Copperfield” (1849) and “Great Expectation” (1860) by Charles Dickens. The first half of the 20th century, however, witnessed the demise of its influence because the anti-German sentiment during the world wars, along with emergence of a multitude of modern experiments in modern novel writing (“BookRags Study Guide on Bildungsroman”).

Traditionally, the Bildungsroman includes the following distinctive features. First of all, its principal subject is the moral, psychological, and intellectual development of a usually youthful character. It is a novel of formation and

development in general. Second, this development occurs according a pattern: the sensitive, intelligent protagonist leaves home, undergoes stages of conflicts and growth, is tested by crises and love affairs and confronts foolish mistakes and painful disappointment. Finally, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who finds his own identity or place in the society and a life of usefulness ahead (“Description of the Genre”). At last, this process typically contains conflicts and struggles when the protagonist tries to seek order and value of life.

Modern critics prefer to treat “Araby” and “How I Met my Husband” as documentations of the era and society in which their writers lived: namely the colonized city of Dublin at the beginning of 20th century and the rural area in Canada in the 1970s. Among them, so many have explored the political, religious or moral elements reflected in Joyce’s work; while for the critics who study Alice Munro, they pay too much attention to her feminine point of view, her keen observation of the discrepancy between people from rural and small towns, as well as the ways they impinge on each other’s lives. Since both writers choose the immature child as their central characters, surely they want to tell the readers something about children, about human beings’ growth and development first before they consider putting their characters on the wider stage of social, historical or feminist significance.

This paper aims to analyze the two stories from the angle of Bildungsroman. To be specific, it tries to analyze the protagonists’ development from innocence to maturity according to the three distinctive features of the genre mentioned above. Under the dominate theme of the human development, the conflicts and struggles the young protagonists confront and their journey of escape are discussed in detail.

For the reason mentioned above, the topic of discussion in this paper is restricted to the confrontations during human being’s growth and the focus is on the similarities between the two stories on the chosen topic rather than the differences. Specifically, two pairs of conflicts will be discussed: the confrontation between the child and adult worlds and the impingement of the reality on the ideal.

2. The Confrontation between the Child and Adult World

On what may be called the simplest level, both “Araby” and “How I Met My Husband” are stories of children’s disappointment or frustration caused by the failure of their puppy love. A great part of the stories, however, does not directly concern themselves with the protagonists’ love affairs, but with the world in which they live—the description of North Richmond Street in Dublin and the suburb five miles out of town in Canada, the information about a dead priest and a gossip named Bird woman, as well as the uncle and aunt in “Araby” and the Peebles in “How I Met My Husband”. Such elements serve far more than merely as “setting” or only as atmosphere (Brooks 125). They are not only intergraded naturally into the stories to reveal the central theme such as the development from innocence to experience, but

also function significantly themselves since they play the role of the antagonistic side of the conflicts in the boy and the girl's world.

In this chapter, the focus will be the confrontation between child and adult world illustrated in these two stories. James Joyce and Alice Munro both choose anti-heroes as the major characters in these two stories: an orphan living with his aunt and uncle and a hired girl residing at her masters' house respectively. Obviously, life is harder to the narrators since neither of them can enjoy the parental love when the stories happen. This doesn't indicate that the adults mentioned above are not kind to the boy and the girl; on the contrary, they are quite decent in a sense. In "Araby", the aunt and uncle send the boy to school, provide financial support and family atmosphere to him; in "How I Met My Husband", the girl lives a more comfortable life in her masters' house than at her own home: much lighter labor with the help of automatic washer and dryer, the privilege to eat meals with her masters and use their bathroom...The girl repeatedly expresses her gratitude "I don't mean they weren't kind to me, because they are..."(Munro 7).

However, the children's spiritual or psychological requirement and material need are carefully distinguished in this point here. As the important component of the world in which the boy and girl live, "a world inimical to the ideals and dreams" ("The Setting and Atmosphere in Araby"), the adults' neglectfulness of their need and lack of sympathy aggravate the protagonists' sense of isolation, alienation and loneliness.

2.1 The Insurmountable Gap in Araby

In James Joyce's work "Araby", there exists an insurmountable gap between the child and adult worlds. Since two generations are involved here, the readers will easily consider it as the generation gap, a frequently mentioned word since 1960s. However, what Joyce is trying to reveal in this short story is not a generation gap, a word defined as "a difference in values and attitudes between one generation and another, especially between young people and their parents" by "Dictionary of English language", but a gap in spirit, in sympathy and conscious care caused by ineffectiveness of communication and understanding. The gap exists between the boy and his uncle and aunt, his master in school and the vendors he confront in the bazaar.

When the boy in "Araby" first reminds his uncle of his intention to go to the bazaar, "he was fussing at hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answer [him] curtly: 'Yes, boy, I know.'" To his disappointment, his uncle seems negligent of his eagerness: when he came home to dinner his uncle had not been home, which drives the boy into anxiety and impatience, he "sat staring at the clock" till "its ticking" begins to "irritate" him and "went from room to room singing" (Joyce 21). His aunt is apparently oblivious of his feeling too. When it turns late and the uncle still doesn't come back, she says to the boy: "I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of our Lord." His uncle doesn't come back until nine o'clock. From the signs such as "talking to himself" (Joyce 22), we may infer that he has been to the

local pub and got drunk—totally forgot the boy's requirement. He asks the second time where the boy is going and wastes more time while talking about things such as "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" and "The Arab's Farewell to his Steed" to the boy without noticing the boy's anguish. Obviously, the uncle considers himself considerate and liberal enough to offer the boy pocket money since he takes it for granted that the boy only needs it for fun and play.

Obviously, it is not a generation gap but a gap in the spirit, in sympathy and conscious caring, that results in the uncle's failure to arrive at home in time for the boy to go to the bazaar while it is still open.

Another noticeable example in "Araby" is the master's attitude and comment on the boy while he is haunted by the solemn idea to finish the mission to the Eastern bazaar Araby, which is idealized as the "symbolic temple of love" ("Setting and Atmosphere in Araby") in order to get a gift for Mangan's sister, the enchanted Goddess in his mind. There is only one sentence describing the master here: simply "[the boy] watched his face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped [he] was not beginning to idle" (Joyce 21). Although we do not get much information about the boy's school performance directly in this story, we may still refer to this and conclude that he is quite industrious and enthusiastic towards study before according to the word "amiability". Facing the fact that his once favoured student now turns to "idle", what is the master's reaction? He only changes his facial expression before the "corrupted angle" into "sternness", hoping that he "was not beginning to idle". The story doesn't describe the boy's feeling then, while it undoubtedly intensifies his sense of isolation and desire of escape since his master's sternness and hostility is part of the inimical world in which he lives.

In this story, Joyce uses a few paragraphs by dealing a few events out of very short period of time to draw a miniature of the adult world—the bazaar Araby. The little boy's request to go to the bazaar stands for his curiosity at and yearning for the unfamiliar adult world; his disappointment and frustration after his arrival at the bazaar actually is the consequence of the impingement between the child world and adult world; his failure and fruitlessness of the trip verifies his inability to penetrate into the adult world.

We can discover the emblematic meaning of the bazaar only if we collect all the scenes the boy witnesses and the conversation he overhears together to form a whole picture: the first person he mentions is the "weary-looking man" who asks for money at a turnstile. When he walks timidly into the centre, he sees "two men counting money" on a salver in a café. Money functions as the passport and people's focus here. Then the boy overhears a young lady flirting with two young gentlemen. The content and the tone of their talk indicate that love is cheap here. Finally, there is someone who could pay attention to him. The young lady comes over and asks him whether he wishes to buy anything while "the tone of her voice [is] not encouraging" and she utters the sentence "out of a sense of duty (Joyce 23)". Here the woman stands for the image of snobbish and money-oriented vendor to the timid boy. What's worse, she then glances at him "once or twice" over her shoulder while keeping on flirting with the two men.

Araby, the romantic and exotic place with eastern enchantment once in his mind, now startles the little boy with its components: a group of money-oriented, frivolous, snobbish, and suspicious adults.

Here by now, we have already established an impression upon the adult world that the boy confronts in his life, and its inability and inadequacy to notice the subtle changes experienced by the boy, to offer help, care or just sympathy.

2.2 Edie's Vulnerability before the Adult world

In Alice Munro's "How I Met My Husband", the strategy the writer adopts to embody the confrontation between child and adult world differs from Araby because it illustrates the antagonistic relation between the two by describing their different features, values and concepts in dealing with life, through a detailed and vivid description of a variety of adult characters in the story. In "Araby", what we mainly read is about the boy's spiritual world and impact of the objective world on him while we can find complete and rich knowledge on two different worlds in "How I Met My Husband": a fifteen-year-old girl's world and the world composed of the adults around her. The former is the narrator's own story while the latter is revealed in the story the narrator tells.

Obviously, Alice Munro makes full use of the advantage of first-person narrator here to illustrate the adult world in a teenage girl's eyes. Edie's contact with Dr. and Mrs. Peebles, Loretta Bird, Alice Kelling and Chris Wattas represents the confrontation between a teenager's naivety and innocence and the hypocrisy, vanity and hostility of the adult world. Of course, this confrontation not only exists between children and adults but gets complicated with the addition of the elements such as the conflicts between different social classes and between different sexes. This is also another significant difference from "Araby".

Edie seldom directly comments on these people mentioned above in her life, but a careful reading between lines may well bring readers a vivid picture of her impression upon them. We'd better make a detailed analysis of the two worlds if we intend to grasp the difference and conflicts between them. Considering the length of this paper, it is impossible to analyze all the characters in the adult world, so discussion is mainly made about Mrs. Peebles, the female master of Edie's, with a general conclusion on others.

Mrs. Peebles is the first individual, except the narrator, who appears in our vision in this story and her first behavior is "screamed" on seeing the descent of a plane. Later we find the word "snappy" (Munro 1) indicating her character. And she utters the sentence "Let's not stand here like a set of farmers" (Munro 2) before Edie, a farmers' daughter. Naturally, we wonder whether she says it intentionally to hurt a hired girl while the answer quickly appears: "it never accrued to her" (Munro 2). This sentence actually is ambiguous and we will not get the narrator's real meaning in saying that till we read further to know Mrs. Peebles better.

But we do have already got some hints about this woman by now: she is very conscious about her own identity as someone coming from town, and is contemptuous to people from rural areas. Many signs taken from her daily talk and behaviors later in the novel can verify this point. For example, she doesn't allow her own kids to play with the "countrywoman's (Munro 2) children. Also she mentions "she wasn't brought up to living in the country" (Munro 10) when she has a conversation with the pilot.

Another obvious feature of Mrs. Peebles is that she looks down upon labor and almost doesn't do anything herself, which amazes Edie most and forms a sharp contrast with Edie and most of women she knows in her fifteen years. She can't make "pie crust" ("the most amazing thing [Edie] ever heard a woman admit"). She denies the biscuit and cakes Edie can cook simply because she needs watching figure; she has clothes she has never put on in the closet and she "felt tied down" with "only two children and no barn work", which greatly surprises Edie's farmer-mother (Munro 3)...

She has weaknesses which are commonly found among women like vanity and meanness: she likes to go out with her hair freshly done and shows her dissatisfaction when her husband asks others to stay; however, we should admit that this in fact finally saves Edie in a great sense from Alice Kelling's insulting and further trouble since Mrs. Peebles also feels undignified and offended when the situation gets worse.

Last we come to her attitude towards Edie. Although the girl is fifteen years old, she only treats her as the one to serve her. It is a fact that she and Dr. Peebles provide food, drink, bed and other material comfort to Edie while she is always neglectful of and indifferent to the girl's other needs. It explains why she is astounded about Edie's acquaintance with the pilot and simply concludes that she has overestimated Edie's family education. Edie can hardly get any care, love and attention from her, which surely serves part of the deep reason for her blind and imaginary love towards the pilot as a failure.

If there is anyone in the story, to whom the narrator holds a preference from the very beginning to the end, then it surely is Dr. Peebles with "a calming way of talking" (Munro 1), warm heart to offer stay to stranger, kindness to praise a girl getting 37 percent in school with the word "smart", he appears as a respectable adult in Edie's world.

Alice Munro devotes much of her efforts to describe a gossip named Loretta Bird in this story. In contrast with Dr. Peebles, she is the one to whom the narrator repeatedly criticizes with a direct and sharp tone. "I bet she never put down fruit in her life" (Munro 2), "I was relieved to see nobody invited her", she is "swollen up with pleasure" on seeing "I" am insulted by Alice Kelling and she "would pass remarks about the Peebles in their own house"... To sum up, Loretta Bird is that kind of gossip people can usually confront in their neighborhood that always noses into others' business and gets fun and excitement through this. Besides this, Edie's strong dislike towards her also contributes to her identity: a woman living in rural area with seven children and notorious husband. She is considered as "a

countrywoman” because of her poverty and poor education and is even looked down upon by real farmers like Edie for she doesn’t farm.

We cannot forget Chris Watters as an important role who greatly enlightens Edie’s view towards the world in which she lives, especially towards the opposite sexes. Their confrontation is rather the one between child and adult, than between woman and man. Through the story, he seems gentle, polite and a bit of mysterious before Edie and all of these together brings the respect, warmth and care the girl rarely acquires from the adults in her life, even from her parents until the end of the story it turns out that he habitually lies to another woman, actually a little girl he “treats like a woman” or a playmate. The failure of Edie’s love for him is the defeat of a child’s innocence when she is faced with the hypocrisy of an experienced adult.

Finally let’s have a close look at the girl Edie and the world of a fifteen-year-old she represents. Different from the little boy in “Araby”, who lives alone in his imagine and illusion both spiritually and physically, Edie’s identity as a hired girl decides her complexity established in getting along frequently with the adults’ world; her age means a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, bringing more changes, struggle and also the inevitable pain through this process. A detailed description of people’s reaction towards going for a ride by the plane, which means a combination of possible excitement and risk, at the beginning part of the story can be used here to verify this point. Different from nine-year-old Joey and seven-year-old Hether, who can not help expressing their willingness to go for such a ride without any hesitation, Edie offers the answer “I don’t know”. The fact is that she is too scared to run such a risk but has to deny it in case that she would lose face “in front of children”. In her mind, she is not a child anymore and it causes vanity grow.

As readers, we know the naivety and innocence still dominates her mind since she doesn’t know the sense of “being intimate” and is not “even old enough” to know “how out of common” for a man to utter the word “beautiful” before a woman. Her purity and innocence out of nature make her venerable when facing an adult world in which there are lies, harm, vanity and hypocrisy.

3. The Impingement of Reality upon Ideal

The impingement of the reality upon the ideal is the major conflict, dominating through both “Araby” and “How I Met my Husband”. The plots of the two stories are developed with the evolution of their confrontation. The confrontation between child and adult world discussed in Chapter 2 actually is also the component of the harsh reality of the young protagonists’ life. In this Chapter, the focus will be their adolescence love, which brings their awareness of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal and enlightens their self-reevaluation. Moreover, the discussion will follow the course of their spiritual change. The hostility of reality breeds their sense of isolation; the fantasy of love stimulates their quest for escape to the ideal land, the temple of love in their mind; the inimical reality they confront during their journey, however, makes their quest for the puppy love doomed to be a failure and most importantly, pushes them back to the actual world, reevaluating their identity.

According to the “pyramid” proposed by German critic Gustav Freytag in his book “Techniques of the Drama” (1863), the structure of plays usually can be divided into five parts as the diagram shows below:

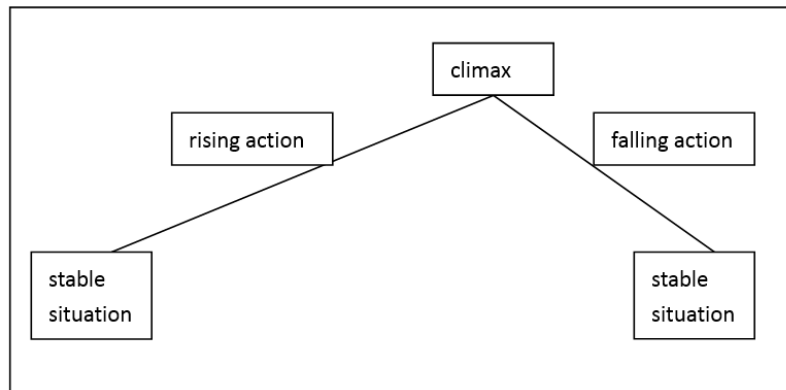


Figure. 1 The Structure of Plays

His conception of the “pyramid” was later applied to the analysis of some fictions, too. The structures of the two stories under discussion can be analyzed in this way (Barnet 67).

“Araby”:

1. Stable situation: the boy lives a dull life full of daily routines in North Richmond Street of Dublin, a city of “paralysis” (Phelps 313).

2. Rising action: the boy’s adoration for Mangan’s sister is intensified in his perception and imagination; he decides to go to the bazaar to buy a present for her.

3. Climax: he confronts the darkened, money grubbing fair and the banal expression of the sexual attraction among the young woman and the gentlemen.

4. Falling action: he turns away slowly from the young woman’s stall and leaves the darkened bazaar.

5. Stable situation: under the sudden darkness of the mundane bazaar, the boy sees himself as “a creature driven and derided by vanity”, while his eyes burn with “anguish and anger”. His escape turns to be a failure and he remains a prison of the city.

“How I Met my Husband”:

1. Stable situation: the girl Edie works for Dr. and Mrs. Peebles, enjoying her solitude in spirit.

2. Rising action: she meets the pilot by chance and then is immersed in fancy of love.

3. Climax: she persists in waiting for her letter promised by the pilot after his departure while no letter has ever come; the idea “no letter [is] ever going to come strikes her one day”(Munro 20).

4. Falling action: she keeps on going to meet the mail while her heart is “heavy like a lump”.

5. Stable situation: the girl meets the mailman while she is waiting for her letter. She finally awakens to the false dawn of the first love and marries the mailman.

From the analysis above, we can easily find how the developments of the plots are governed by the evaluation of the confrontation between the ideal and reality in the two stories. At the very beginning of the stories, the writers unfold the stable situations with descriptions of the actual world in which the protagonists live and are full of daily routines. However, the rising actions soon begin winding up to the climax when something extraordinary happens. In these two stories, of course, that is their love for different sex and its growth, which stimulate their fantasy and illusion toward the temple of love, an idealized appealing world in their mind and also their hidden dissatisfaction and disappointment with the inimical real world. Then the climaxes come when they have to confront the harsh reality.

It is very interesting to notice that James Joyce and Alice Munro coincidentally use many similar strategies in revealing the discrepancy between the ideal and real scarcely existing for the children. They both unfold the children’s growing sense of isolation from the inimical world in which they live and their request for escape from the reality; furthermore, they both arrange the protagonists’ awareness of the difference between the ideal and real to happen unexpectedly. The impingement of reality upon their ideal will be discussed from these two aspects

3.1 Isolation and Escape

Joyce and Munro illustrate the inner worlds of the boy unnamed and the girl Edie respectively in these two stories. Careful readers will easily sense their loneliness and alienations through the descriptions of the setting in “Araby” and the Edie’s spiritual language in “How I Met my Husband”. Like the protagonists in other Bildungsromans, they also initiate their journeys to their ideals as a way escaping from the reality but only to find their foolishness in doing so at last.

In “Araby”, James Joyce offers a detailed description of a dead priest’s belongings in the second paragraph of the story; moreover, he further indicates the young protagonist’s interest and fondness in the used books of this dead person, which seems unusual for a child in readers’ eyes. As the story continues, we find more and more trivial matters such as this in the boy’s life: the fact that he hides behind the blind to watch Mangan’s sister; that he prays alone in the dark drawing-room where the priest has died in a rainy evening; that he stands apart talking to the girl while his friends are quarreling over the cap, the gossip over the tea table, the uncle’s lateness, and so on. One thing that is immediately suggested by the mention

of these things in his surroundings is the boy's growing sense of isolation, the gap in the spirit and sympathy between him and his friends, teachers, and family in reality.

The boy is isolated from a world that seems ignorant of, and even hostile to his love. He is younger than Mangan's sister; she doesn't even show any interest in him even at their meetings; for a time, he does not have money to go to the bazaar; he gets to the bazaar too late; even if the bazaar were to remain open, it is debatable whether he would have enough money to purchase a gift for the girl. There are too many obstacles for him to complete his quest. He says, "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes" (Joyce 19). At school, his ordinary occupation begins to seem "ugly monotonous child's play." He has once found satisfaction in the society of his companions and in his schoolwork, but he has become impatient with both and lost interest in them. He stands before the window alone and watches his companions playing below in the street then.

But this sense of isolation also has moments that are almost triumphed. In a sense, he accepts his isolation and even is proud of it. The porters at the station wave the crowds back, "saying that it was a special train for the bazaar" (Joyce 22) and not for them. The boy is left alone in the bare carriage, but he is going to "Araby", moving triumphantly toward some romantic and exotic fulfillment in his imaginary world.

On the surface, Araby is only a bazaar where the boy intends to find a present for the girl he admires; however, it serves as an adventure and escape from the hostile world, the cruel reality, to his ideal and illusionary world, a temple of love. First, the title of Araby itself suggests escape. To the nineteenth-century Europeans minds, the Islamic land of North Africa, the Near East, and the Middle East symbolized decadence, exotic delights, escapism, and a luxurious sensuality ("Summary and Analysis of Araby"). The boy's erotic desire for the girl becomes joined with his fantasies about the wonders that will be offered in the oriental bazaar. He dreams of buying her a suitably romantic gift. Second, to such a soul long being oppressed and endangered by the dark and gloomy life in North Richmond Street, he is undoubtedly yearning for hope and lightness which only exist in his imagination before. Now he suddenly sees a ray of light in the dark world which is brought by his affectionate love toward Mangan's sister. Careful readers will notice that the girl's image in this story often goes with the rare descriptions of lightness. "...her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door" (Joyce 19) while other things are in shadow. "The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck..." (Joyce 20). Here, darkness represents the real world the boy lives in while lightness his ideal. Therefore, Araby also unfolds his yearning to escape from a shadow land to a fairyland covered with light.

In "How I Met My Husband", Alice Munro mentions an identical scene with what can be also found in James Joyce's "Araby": the protagonist hides behind the blind, watching the one she or he secretly adores. After her first meeting with the pilot named Chris Watters, Edie "stood behind the Venetian blinds in dining room, watching him". Edie again watches Chris Watters and his fiancée through the slats of her blind later in the story. Blind, here as it in "Araby", is used as something to

help establish the young protagonist's personal world, which is isolated from the reality outside, mainly the adults' world. Behind the blind, stands a lonely soul, who yearns for love and maturity.

Besides this behavior of hers, many other hints can be found to indicate Edie's isolation from the majority. Most of the children at her age are still in school but she simply quits school. Her shyness in nature and lack of communication in school makes her interest in study vanish. Her father neglects her feeling and says "that's enough" facing her average in school with 37 percent. Obviously she can't gain sense of satisfaction in school with her peer's company. She harbors hatred towards the gossip, Bird woman and says the female master "had never been very friendly" (Munro 19). She loves being left in the house alone and put on Mrs. Peebles' clothes and makeup secretly.

Edie undoubtedly belongs to the inferior group of the society: a farmer's daughter, semi-illiterate and the hired girl for a couple moving from town. Her identity determines others' attitude toward her and lack of love and care in her life. When mentioning about people's attitude concerning her identity she says, "Some people change when they find that out, their whole way of looking at you and speaking to you changes..." (Munro 6). She surely is well aware of it herself. In most of the times, she enjoys her loneliness and isolation. When she is left alone, Edie gets out her own clothes, puts on Mrs. Peebles' long dress, pins up her hair and puts on makeup. This can be simply regarded as a child's game which is quite familiar to readers, revealing children's curiosity, naivety and little vanity. However, it also unfolds a fifteen-year-old girl's yearning for the adult world. Her disappointment and dissatisfaction with her inferior identity are released through the change of her appearance to a mature lady and her fancy of beauty, elegance and maturity can be contemporarily fulfilled in this way. In another word, this is a way for her to escape from reality, though only within a very short time.

Her yearning for escape is extensively illustrated after she honestly discloses her affair with the pilot. She puts out all the unfriendliness, indignity and indifference from the surrounding out of her mind and concentrates on waiting for her letter from the pilot she loves.

I forgot all about Alice Kelling and her misery and awful talk and Mrs. Peebles and her chilliness and the embarrassment of whether she had told Dr. Peebles and the fact of Lorretta Bird, getting her fill of other people's troubles (Munro 19).

At this moment, she thinks the Goddess of love has already come to her and she only needs a letter from her Mr. Right to verify the realization of her dream. She is drowned in her sweet fancy of love and oblivious of anything else.

3.2 Epiphany

The progress of one's growth is like a journey, full of pitfalls. In his book "Literature: The Human Experience", Richard Abcarian comments on this growth from innocence to experience:

Human strives to give order and meanings to their lives, to reduce the mystery and unpredictability that constantly threaten them. Life is infinitely more complex and surprising than we imagine, and the categories to establish and give it order and meaning are, for the most part, momentary stays against confusion.

He further explains that the equilibrium of our lives, the familiar image of ourselves, and the world we live, may be disturbed unexpectedly by something new, forcing us into painful reevaluation. "These disruptions create pain, anxiety and terror but also wisdom and awareness."

In both "Araby" and "How I Met My Husband", the protagonists' awareness and realization of the difference between the ideal worlds he or she images and the injurious real world serves as an important theme. In the concluding parts of the stories, the authors record how their imagination or illusion is finally disturbed and its impact on their sudden realization or comprehension of the difference. "Epiphany", a term defined by James Joyce himself as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" in his work "Stephen Hero", pulls the boy and the girl back to reality miraculously. It also signifies the ending of their quest for love, a journey to the ideal.

There are two places towards the end of "Araby" that critics have usually cited as being the epiphanic moments. The conversation that the boy overhears when he arrives at bazaar is the first.

---O, I never said such a thing!
---O, but you did!
---O, but I didn't!
---Didn't she say that?
---Yes. I heard her.
---O, there's a...fib! (Joyce 23)

In his article "Araby and the writings of James Joyce", which represents the now standard reading of this story, critic Harry Stone notes that to understand what actually happens here, we have to refer to the religious language used earlier to describe Mangan's sister: "For what the boy now sees, and what we now know he sees, is that his worshiped Madonna is only a girl, like the ordinary girl who stands before him". Although some other critics, such as Kevin J.H. Dettmar disagrees with this traditional reading of Stone's because of the lack of any elated spiritual language on the part of the narrator. It is proposed that this conversation does serve as a "sudden spiritual manifestation" for the boy. As we mentioned earlier, the bazaar Araby symbolizes the holy temple of love in the boy's mind and his trip to Araby is idealized as a mission to win his "Goddess" with a sense of triumph; however, what he truly witnesses here forms a sharp contrast with his illusion: there is the "improvised wooden platform" in contrast with the "magical name" displayed above the building. Inside, most stalls are closed. "Two men were counting money on a slaver." Now the most ironical scene is here: a young woman is flirting with two gentlemen. This is Araby, the temple of love in his mind, the syllables of which "were called to [him] through the silence in which [his] soul luxuriated and cast an

Eastern enchantment over [him]”, where money is counted and love is cheapened. The young woman and her admirers are on terms of easy intimacy---an intimacy in contrast to his relation to Mangan’s sister. The world not only neglects his fancy but would cheapen and contaminate it. The last word “fib” here, according to Stone, indicates mainly the lie of life in Dublin, a city “the most hostile to romance”. “Araby” thus becomes an indication story in which the protagonist learns the hard lesson of life. Since I prefer to classify the story to a typical documentation of human being’s development from innocence to experience, I would like to add the “fib” is also the boy’s own self-delusion in this “spiritual” manifestation.

The next epiphanic point in the story can further illustrate my understanding. It is indicated by the final one-sentence paragraph; “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger”. There are two ways to understand the boy’s mind at this point. One is the straight--forward reading. The hostile reality is going against his hope: his lack of money; the bazaar is closing. When the boy says that he is “driven and derided by vanity”, he is referring only to the “vanity” of his life in Dublin. And his “eyes burned with anguish and anger” only because of his inability to fulfill his desires and to realize his dream of love. As Ronald Brenton McNeely mentions in his dissertation “Double Reading of Early James Joyce”, in this “non-sympathetic reading” of the epiphany, the boy is unaware of his own “vanity”. “He is simply still a victim of his own foolishness.”

Though I do believe this experience actually plays a more important role rather than only serve as an obstacle in the way in the evolution of the boy’s spiritual world. The frustration is due to a sudden deflation of the boy’s ego, his sense of self, as he recognizes his own delusions about the nature of love and the relationship between men, women, heroism, God and money. This is named a “sympathetic reading” by McNeely. The boy’s reevaluation of these things definitely would pull him from his original perception and imagination to the imperfect but real world. That is the way how human beings grow.

Obviously, Alice Munro also excels in using “epiphany” to bring the protagonist back from her illusion to the reality of life and most importantly, to force her into painful reevaluation. There are also two epiphanic moments in the story. The first time occurs when the girl realizes in a sudden that it is impossible for to receive a letter promised by the pilot.

One day walking back with the hydro bill stuck in my hand, that was all, looking across at the fairgrounds with the full-blown milkweed and dark teasels, so much like fall, it just struck me. No letter was ever going to come (Munro 20).

You Qiaorong, the professor from Central China University, proposes his understanding about “epiphany” in his research paper “On the Epiphany Used in James Joyce’s Novels” that it refers to a sudden exposure of the essence of a person, an object or something; moreover, the essence or reality is discovered by the observer “in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself”. The idea “No letter was ever going to come” suddenly occurs to the girl when she is alone and on her way back home. And since then, she begins the

reevaluation of the case itself. There is adequate spiritual language provided by the narrator, which can help us to understand her mind at this point better. She lists two images flashing in her mind: one is Christ's face, and the other is the actual and empty tin mailbox. The former has already vanished from her real life and only remains in her memory while it serves as the support of her persistent pursuit of love; the latter exists now as the only thing she can put her expectation on though it always brings disappointment. One presents her fancy of love and the other symbolizes the cold but actual reality. When she becomes to be aware of the discrepancy between the two, she is on her way to be realistic, sensible and mature like an adult. It is inevitably admitted that it's only the very beginning point of her awareness and insight since she still keeps on "going to meet the mail". Her awareness only stops at on a superficial level, concerning about the case itself then; her complete "spiritual manifestation" begins with insight of her ego, her sense of self when the second epiphanic moment comes.

Till it came to me one day there were women doing this with their lives, all over... If there were women all through life waiting, and women busy and not waiting, I knew which I had to be. Even though there might be things the second kind of women have to pass up and never know about, it still is better (Munro 20).

Eddie finally awakens from her blind love. Instead, she begins to perceive and think about life with her reason and circumspection, rather than with imagination and illusion. Like most of Alice Munro's other central characters, Eddie is so intelligent that she can discover such essence of life, of love, and of the relationship between men and women at such an early age for some women, as the narrator concludes, wait all their lives till their hair goes gray and all their effort turns to be in vain. Here, she just doubts the real value of one women's persistence in waiting for an irresponsible man and unrealistically expecting for the love from him. Undoubtedly, this process of her enlightenment brings pains, anxiety and disappointment since her heart "was like a lump of lead" once but also wisdom and awareness, which illumine all her later life.

According to the facts readers acquire as the story continues, "the spiritual manifestation", which strikes the girl when she is 15 years old, determines the track of her life later. Her choice between to be a woman "all through life waiting" and to be one of the second type "busy and not waiting" actually stands for an eternal question for every woman: to be independent or not. Hence, to wait or not to wait, this is a question. The last sentence of the paragraph provides the best evidence: "Even though there might be things the second kind of women have to pass up and never know about, it still is better." The teenage girl, though not wealthy and well-educated, makes the decision to put down the dependence upon men and the illusion of love; furthermore, she chooses to face the possible hardships in real life as an independent individual.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, two pairs of conflicts are discussed: namely, the confrontation between child and adult world, as well as the impingement of reality upon ideal. Every human being can not escape from the state of confrontation in life; while the majority would never give up the quest of trying to find the order and equilibrium. This is especially true for the young people since it always takes time for them to know the truth of life; before that moment comes, they usually need experience some unexpected disruptions. No other thing is more powerful than the first fancy and quest of love do could disturb a soul, who only comes to know the world. James Joyce and Alice Munro, with their extraordinary wit and keen observation, tell us their young protagonists' first confrontation with this problem—that is, about the children's growing up and the momentum against confusion.

Children get their first image of themselves and the world around them from the adults in their lives. Adults comprise a mysterious and appealing world to them while they always feel it is hard to penetrate into it since seldom dose an adult treats the children, even the teenagers as the creatures equal in spirit to them. That explains why they often fail to offer adequate care or pay necessary attention to children's inner world and also why children can hardly get instructions or just sympathy when they first confront the confusions and challenges in life, as well as how the state of confrontation is formed between them.

“The discrepancy between the reality and ideal scarcely for the child, but it is a constant problem, in all sorts of terms, for the adult.” (Brooks 127) The two stories are about the teenagers' first confrontation with the impingement of the inimical but actual world upon their fantasy, about their growth from innocence to experience after that. Readers certainly know the stories are actually the adults' recall of their youth. The sense of isolation and the request of escape sprung from the boy and the girl's experiences are usually unfolded in other forms in adult experience. Human beings are doomed to struggle in the sharp conflicts between their ideal and the real worlds. Therefore, the stories are not merely accounts of a stage in children's growing up; they present human's growth and development facing this eternal topic of life.

The pursuit of happiness and beauty decides human's dissatisfaction towards the actual life around and eternal fancy for the ideal. People always lay their expectation upon poetry, literature, music and other forms of arts since the real life they hope to grasp exist in them. For a young person, however, to find the meaning and order of life through quest of love is often inevitable before they are aware of the difference between the real and the ideal; this first quest or journey, though often ends with a failure, breeds his or her adaptation for the society.

“Life is Elsewhere”, the simple statement expressed by the young protagonists in these two stories not only reveals the state of confrontation that remains in human existence, but also presents the common psychology that propels the human development in a sense.

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