Comparison Of Protagonist In “Araby” And “Cathedral”

Epiphany refers to the point in a literary text when a character has a sudden realization or insight that affects his or her views in some significant way. In both short stories “Araby” by James Joyce and “Cathedral” by Raymond Carver the narrators both go through an epiphany. In “Abary” the narrator and also the main character in the story is a young boy. Throughout the story the boy seems to have an innocent crush on his friend's sister. She asks him about going to the bazaar and says she can not go, the narrator becomes excited to go to the event and bring his crush home a gift, later on in the story the narrator has an epiphany and realizes life is not always fair. In the Cathedral the narrator begins dreading letting his wife's blind friend to come visit. He has many stereotypical assumptions about the blind and is not looking forward to having a blind man stay at his house, especially one who has such a close relationship with his wife. The narrator later has an epiphany as well and becomes more open minded. In both of these stories the narrators have an epiphany and mature from a sudden realization in different ways.

In “Araby” the unnamed narrator has an innocent crush on his friend's sister. Each day he places himself in the front room of his house so he can see her leave her house, and then he rushes out to walk behind her quietly until finally passing her. As the narrator states in the story “When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her” (Joyce 332). The narrator and Mangan’s sister do not talk much, but he always thinks about her. Despite the narrator's lack of understanding his feelings and how to go about them he is very infatuated about this girl who is never given a name throughout the story. His feelings for her is so intense that he fears he will never gather the courage to speak to actually speak to the girl and express his feelings for her. Then one morning, Mangan’s sister asks the narrator if he is planning to go to Araby, a Dublin bazaar. She says she would have loved to go but that she has already committed to attend a retreat with her convent. The narrator was shocked that magnans sister, his dear crush was speaking to him, he is overwhelmed with emotions. He then offers to bring her back something from the bazaar. This small conversation between the two made the narrator extremely excited and anxious to go to the bazaar in hopes of finding the perfect item to bring back to the girl who makes his heart skip a beat. He is eager and restless waiting to go to the bazaar, he can not focus on anything else, he does not want to. He reminds his uncle the morning of the bazaar that he wishes to go but will need some money from him for the train fair when his uncle returns from work. When he came home from school for dinner his uncle had not yet returned home from work, at this point the boy did not worry for it was still early. He eats his dinner, still eagerly waiting but there is no sign of his uncles. He is very restless at this point as he says “I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists” (Joyce 334). Finally at nine pm his uncle returns home, unfazed that the boy has been longing for his return. His uncle did apologize after as he must have gotten caught up at work, the boy finally got his money to go to the bazaar. He hurried to get there before it was closed but he was too late. The majority of the stalls at the bazaar were closed, most of the hallways there were dark and it was very quiet. He looked around but was disappointed in what he was before him. He walked up to a stall where a woman was talking to two men. The stall was still open but he did not buy anything as the woman did not seem very interested in him purchasing anything, the narrator felt unwanted. The boy was crushed, he had planned to go to the bazaar, buy something lovely for his crush in hopes that it would help express his feelings for her. He

then realizes Mangan's sister is just a girl who will probably not care whether he fulfills his promise to buy her something at the bazaar. He thinks back to his conversation with her when he promised he would buy her something and realizes that was really only meaningless small talk and nothing more. That is the epiphany the narrator has, his uncle was late arriving home late from work, which is a normal thing but the boy did not understand why this was happening to him, why all his hopes and expectations slowly deteriorated from there. At this point he begins to realize that life is not always fair and things do not always work out the way one may hope and anticipated for. When he arrived at the bazaar and seen the woman flirting and paying more attention to two men than selling him something at her stall he was let down again. His views on life and love interests were turned upside down. He no longer thinks a small gift from the bazaar will win over his crush and he now thinks a lot less about their small conversation he once was ecstatic over. The narrator matures from this epiphany, he learns life lessons and grows as a young boy as he gets a taste of real life circumstances and how not everything works out in your favour.

Similarly to the narrator in “Araby” the narrator in the “Cathedral” also experiences an epiphany that matures him. Despite the fact that the narrator in this story is a married adult he still learns a valuable life lesson and matures throughout the story when he has an epiphany and his views on a topic completely change. In this short story the narrator begins the story by explaining that his wife’s blind friend, whose wife has just died, is going to spend the night at their house. He is not happy about this and does not look forward the the bland man, Robert visiting. He says the man’s blindness unsettles him and goes on to explain that his wife met the blind man ten years ago when she worked for him as a reader to the blind in Seattle. His wife and Robert have a very close relationship which makes the narrator uneasy and intimidated. The wife and the blindman have not seen each other in sometime but they stay in touch by sending tapes back and forth to one another. The narrator says that his wife once asked him to listen to one of the blind man’s tapes. They started to listen and the blind man was about the say what he had concluded about his dear friends husband but they were interrupted before the narrator could hear anything about himself. The narrator was briefly relieved that he did not have hear Roberts thoughts on him as he says “ Maybe it was just as well. I’d heard all I wanted to” (Carver 35). Throughout the story, it was clear the narrator was not in touch with his wife and did not seem to understand her desirer to have Robert come and visit. The narrator was rude to his wife when they discussed Roberts visit as he mocked blind people when he joked to his wife about taking Robert bowling when he comes to visit. Overall the narrator seems fairly arrogant. Finally when Robert arrives at first the narrator is uneasy, he does not not what to say to Robert or how to act around him. He goes on to explain what Robert looks and what he is wearing and states that he finds it strange that Robert does not wear dark glasses as he expected him to. After the narrator spends some time with Robert over dinner and watching television with him his view on Robert and his stereotypical expectations of the blind change. He is forced to get to know Robert when his wife gets ready for bed and falls asleep on the couch with him and Robert. The narrator and Robert talk and the narrator becomes more open minded slowly. The narrator's epiphany happens towards the end of the story when him and Robert are watching a show about a cathedral and he works up enough courage to ask Robert a couple questions all based around his curiosity about whether or not Robert knows what a cathedral looks like. Roberts asks the narrator to get some paper and draw a cathedral while Robert places his hand on his to get an idea of the structure. Its at this point the narrator comes to the realization that everything he assumed about Robert and blind people in general is false as he has now formed an unanticipated friendship with Robert.

Both protagonists in these short stories are the narrators and are never given a name. They both have assumptions about things in their life but towards the end of each story their views change as they both have epiphanies. The young boy in “Araby” is let down by his uncle and is unable to get to the bazaar on time to get his crush a gift. He realizes life is not always fair and his views on his love interest and their relationship change when he sees an english women having a similar meaningless talk with two men like the one he had with Magnans sister. The narrator in “Cathedral” has assumptions about the blind and at first is uncomfortable with his wife's blind friend coming to visit. Once Robert arrives and the narrator gets to know and understand him his views changed and he begins to like Robert as he helps him draw and picture what a cathedral looks like. He becomes more open minded and less arrogant as he spends time with Robert. Both of these protagonists mature in their own way which seems odd when one is a young boy and the other is an adult. They learn lessons and their views change on a topic that theirs minds were once set on. The young boy grows up and learns about life and how it is often unfair. The adult realizes that he was closed minded before when he judge a person based on stereotypical things when in fact he really had no idea what Robert was like.

In conclusion both protagonists in “Araby” and “Cathedral” go through similar situations and both have epiphanies that in the end help them grow and mature. They learn different life lessons on about two very different topics. Overall the outcome of each story benefits the narrator as they both now have a better understanding. The young boy in “Araby” learns about life, his crush and his idea on these two things change and he becomes more mature. The man in “Cathedral” changes his stubborn and jealous views of his wife's blind friend as he too becomes friends with Robert and opens his mind up. Both Joyce and Carver write about valuable lessons in their stories as their protagonist both go through an epiphany that makes them grow and mature.

Works Cited

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