

Analysis and interpretation of short fiction essay



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Toni Cade Bambara and Joyce Carol Oates, the authors of the allegorical stories *The Lesson* and *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been* respectively describe the epiphanies of the principal characters.

Through her interaction with Miss Moore, Sylvia is able to awake to the reality of the socioeconomic class that exists in her community. Initially, Sylvia seems to be happy with her lifestyle but when she realizes her level of poverty, she becomes angry. Miss Moore is a figure that represents the fight for minority like blacks against racism and discrimination especially in America.

On the other hand, Connie's personal experience with a stranger Arnold who forced her to lose her sexual innocence awakens her into the reality of oppression, abuse, and discrimination of women in the society. Besides, the epiphanies that occur in the lives of the main characters like Sylvia and Connie opening them up to the bleak future in a discriminatory or oppressive society, have comparison and contradictory elements.

Sylvia's exposure and observations about the other side of the town puts her in somber mood while Connie's personal experience with Arnold puts a permanent mark in her life. Sylvia is a tough, witty, or distrustful Harlemite girl. She is also bright and her trip to Manhattan exposes her to the injustices and discrepancies or inequality in her society.

Her hometown is filthy, dirty and only occupied by uneducated blacks who live in abject poverty. Their playground is not safe because it is not only a waste disposal ground but also acts as urinal thus producing a bad odour. Although she is an American, discrimination has divided the society in two

diverse worlds. On their way to Manhattan, Sylvia and her friends gape at the dressing and the lifestyle of the whites.

Due to cultural differences, she is unable to comprehend why the white people wear stockings or fur coats during summer. At the toy store, Sylvia and her friends become perplexed at the elegant but expensive toys, which cost more than they can afford. Only the children of the white people can afford such expensive toys, which may not live forever. The white community lives in a lavish lifestyle while the black anguish in poverty.

Finally, reality dawns on Sylvia that she can neither touch nor buy the toys at the store. Instantly, she becomes mad not because that she hates anybody around her but because of the poverty, discrimination, and oppression in her society.

She feels that due to racial discrimination and that she is unable to afford or live the same lifestyle as the majority in the society. Her observation, wittiness and intelligent compels her to hate the discriminatory nature in the society. Her anger is symbolizes that she is ready to fight for her rights and that of the minority people in the society.

Furthermore, her moment of epiphany gives her the urge to come out of the prison she lives. For instance, her happiness mood changes to sadness and she tells her friends “ let’s go” (Bambara par. 12). This means that she does not want to continue being a prisoner or see the inequality that exists in her society. Thus, Sylvia’s brightness opens her to a future that is full of obstacles but her anger is a symbol of determination that she is ready to fight on.

On the other hand, Connie is a beautiful but disobedient girl in her adolescent stage. She listens neither to her mother nor to her aunties who want her to change her mannerisms and attitude towards life. Her dressing, walking and laughing styles are ways to seek attention from members of the opposite sex (Oates 2).

Regrettably, one of the male figures she attracts turns out to be violent, which leads to a conflict and eventually to rape. Connie is unable to resist Arnold's advances due to his threats and leaves with him to unknown destination (Kurkowski par. 2). Nevertheless, the conflict, rape, and forceful eviction from her home open her to the reality of oppression, sexual or physical abuse and disrespect women undergo in the society.

If Connie had listened to her parents and accompanied them to the barbecue party, she would not have had the awful experience. Therefore, Connie's moment of epiphany comes in a form of a fight and personal experience that leaves her distressful while Sylvia's moment of epiphany is through an observation that indirectly touches her life compelling her to fight for her rights.

Sylvia's moment of epiphany has both a social and political orientation. All the leaders in either public or private institutions are from the majority group or race. Miss Moore symbolically represents the black people in the society who have risen above all odds to fight for their rights. She mainly speaks for the author when she enlightens Sylvia and her friends about the division of the world into social classes (Brandon par. 1).

She is both educated and has relevant information about the social, political and economic state of her country thus volunteering to give lessons to poor black children. Through Miss Moore, the moment of epiphany in Sylvia's comes through a learning process that makes her envy the white people or the majority group in the society. Moreover, Sylvia is able to realize the political, social, and economic status of her society through Miss Moore, which was the aim of the author.

On the contrary, the epiphany moment in Connie's life is only socially oriented. Connie's transition from adolescent stage to adulthood seems to have thrown her into confusion leading to frequent fights with her mother. Arnold appearance puts her into fear and when he forces himself into her, he not only makes her frightened but also enables her to understand the level of inhumanity in her society or in the world.

Although the author does not give the fate of Connie, the rape and harassment from Arnold are a premonition of the bleak future that lay ahead of her. Therefore, through Connie, the author is able to highlight the social discrimination and traumas women or poor people undergo in hands of men while through Sylvia the author mainly focuses on racial discrimination in the society.

The moments of epiphanies in the main characters are similar because they not only occur to young girls but also change the course of their lives. Additionally, their social nature makes them to interact with strangers who give their lives a different direction. Although Connie resists the advances or

the oppressive nature of Arnold, eventually she has no choice but to follow his footsteps.

Therefore, Connie succumbs to Arnold when she realizes her feminine nature and the society's perception of women as inferior cannot save her. In addition, she realizes the world is full of evil people because she is unhappy and Arnold forces her to smile when he says "let's see a smile try it" (Oates 9). Similarly, Sylvia's poor living conditions and lack of adequate education gives her the urge to fight the oppressiveness, discrimination or inequality that prevails in the society.

Moreover, Sylvia asserts, "ain't nobody is gonna to beat me at nuthin", which means she is ready to fight for the rights of the minority in the society (Bambara par. 12). Therefore, the moment of epiphanies in the two principal characters reveals to them about the unfairness that is in the world they live in. Therefore, the authors of the two books use the youth to enlighten the society about feminine rights.

In summary, through the description of the way of life of the main characters, the authors are able to describe their epiphany moments, which reveals to them the inhumanity, oppression and discrimination that exists in their world. When Sylvia realizes about the discriminatory nature of the black people in her society, she decides to fight for equality. On the contrary, although Connie is able to learn about the poor perception of women and the poor people in her society, she is unable to fight for her rights.

Sylvia's moment of epiphany has political, social, and economic orientation while Connie's epiphany is mainly socially oriented especially on the aspect

of poverty and women. The similarity in the epiphany moments in the two cases is that it not only occurs to youths but also transforms the daily lives of the young girls. Finally, Bambara uses Miss Moore to highlight explicitly the political, social, and economic situation in her country.

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