

How many miles to babylon?

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



“ How many miles to Babylon? ” Alec Moore - Narrator Frederick Moore - Father to Alec Mrs. Moore - Mother to Alec Jerry Crowe - Friend to Alec Mrs. Crowe - Mother to Jerry Major Glendinning - Commending Officer to Jerry and Alec in the army. General Points - § Main Theme: Love vs. Hatred § Reflects different stages of Narrator Development - There’s a continuous stream of consciousness, no chapters § Ireland § France § Love - of country - passionless love of duty - of power and wealth - narcissistic love (love of self)

Theme and Issues:

Setting the Scene – § Alec Narrates his tale of a loveless child, leaving him emotionless and scarred cruel mother, manipulative and hateful § He was always goaded by his “ beautiful mother” § Mrs. Moore’s beauty contrasted to her vindictive personality. She’s swift and dismissive (passionless) § Home with no affection “ The dining room in the daytime was unwelcoming” Relationship with his mother – § Described through an experience when he seen his mother feeding the swans, thinking she was another woman for a split second, and felt love for her.

This shows us that he doesn’t know his mother that well, mistaking her for another person but also that he only feels love for her when she is perceived as someone else. Compared to Christy’s love with his mother in “ My left foot” – he has a continuous plutonic love for her. § Mrs. Moore’s human relationships are meaning less and without power. § She feels she is not capable of love as they are never aloud the freedom to experience it themselves. § She has been taught only the proper etiquette of the wealthy at the experience of wealthy needs.

The mother is jealous of Alec's father and their relationship. § She is again jealous of Alec's developing relationships, such with Jerry, but also is worried what other people may think of a higher class boy, being friends with a lower class boy. Therefore, she wants to destroy it. § She removes Alec from school, just so she won't be left alone in the day. This is also a way for her to get to her husband, showing him that her and Alec also have a relationship, although it is fake. Relationship with Father – Alec feels real affection for his father, shown in his willingly attitude to spend time with him by the fire. He loves him within the bounds of duty and sensitivity. § He leaves his father with loosing his only love in the family, when joining the army “ heart rendering” when he leaves. § They don't display their love or intensity of feelings for one another, but it is evident e. g. when he accepts money as a “ gesture of love” § His golden watch is given to Alec – Metaphorically represented as the beating of his heart. It will – “ protect him from danger”

Image of Women as hateful figures – § The mother sees Alec's decision to join the army as a personal triumph. She doesn't have worries about the probable loss of her son's life at war, but instead begins to enjoy the sympathy of her peers that she will receive from having her son at war. § Jerry and Alec ridicule their “ hypocritical mothers” as a display of grief as they go to war § Alec makes fun of his mother for her intensity towards him, showing us that he doesn't take her seriously. War as an image of hatred – § The topic of war, adds a sense of horror The combination depicts a metaphorical journey for these characters from a debased nation of love in Alec to the trenches. § The trenches are described as a physical representation of humankind without the power of love. It depicts the true

meaning of evil and hate in contrast to love. Major Glendinning – § He never shows remorse – he shows precision and dispassion by the murder of “ Gloucester’s Regiment” § This illustrates the breakdown of the inherent moral code in humanity § When Alec requests leave for Jerry he shows compassion Paradoxical Aspect – to Jerry Crowe’s character.

Contrary to loving nature Jerry Crowe – § He abides by his sense of filial duty (wanting to find his father) § His character brings out the true Alec Moore, makes him find himself. § The reunion of Jerry and Alec at the finality of the novel is moving § When Jerry is found, he is put into a detention camp, and declares he loves his country than his King. It is love that is the death of Jerry Crowe. § When Alec pulls the trigger, it is none of murder, but saving his friend from a brutal death. § After the death of Jerry, Alec finds no love in his life. He withdraws from life after his death.

Cultural Context : - the world in which the novel is set § Set in Ireland and focuses on the political conflict around the time of the nationalist movement and the First World War. § Also conflicts between the upper and lower class in Ireland (classification) § Alec Moore draws the reader into the story of his life by focusing on the rituals of his parents’ lives, his early childhood, education and his friendship with Jerry Crowe – all the ways that he sees his own life. § The main way we see the cultural differences in Jerry and Alec is through their language and colloquialisms. Alec’s wealth is illustrated through his life setting – “.. a high curtained window in which I could see as I went up the reflection of walls, the pictures, the polished banisters, the three altered heads, the crossed pikes, and a pair of beautifully chased silver swords” Alec’s Experience in childhood – § His portrayal of his early

childhood is harrowing. Mrs. Moore's try to destroy the natural instincts of childhood are evident from her refusal to allow Alec to go to school, her interference in his friendship with Jerry and her dismissal of his pianoteacher. Her interference is the source of Alec's shyness and isolation. § His relationship is distorted as his mother uses him as a means of avoiding direct contact with her husband – who neglects the important aspects of his development as he is a moral coward who has been bullied by his wife. § Alec is used like a pawn by his mother to undermines her husband's authority: " You never speak without authority.. you never sound as if you knew what you were talking about. You have always been an ineffective man" pg. 30 Mrs. Moore as an image of upper class – We are shown this through Alec's narrative that she is a cruel and peevish mother § Her maternal instincts are over-shadowed by her selfishness § Her physical beauty is juxtaposed with her deformed nature. § Johnston uses her to reflect the negative aspect of upper class society. § Her desire to be regarded as a woman of culture and breeding is illustrated by her refined eating and drinking, her piano playing and her dress code. Mr. Moore as a Father figure – § He has more of a relationship with Alec than the mother, shown by his scepticism about Jerry and Alec's friendship. The Father is weak, his example of adult behaviour is confusing for his children. § He can not be considered as a role model for Alec because of his flaws. The Friendship of Alec and Jerry – § Alec's childhood salvation comes from Jerry Crowe, he would have been very lonely without him, and wouldn't have experienced his rejuvenation of childhood without him § Ironically, Jerry's childhood was one of a bad experience, similar to Alec's – may have been what makes their friendship so

solid. It is Jerry's boisterous character that carries Alec through his awful home life § His humour and attitude, allows Alec to manifest a reasonable perspective about his own future and society § Their conversations are subtle reflections of the time in which they live “ The German's are going to fix all those eejits in Europe, The British are going to fix the Germans, and we...we are going to fix the British” § The strength of their friendship survives the corrosion of class consciousness § Proven by Alec's constant support of Jerry, especially in the army.

Alec's Education – § He lacks the encouragement needed from his parents, particularly from his mother to spur him to academic success. § His mother is a crucial part in teaching him the piano, since dismissing Mr. Cave, although she does not keep her promise. § She deprives him from going away to school as she cannot bear being left alone with his father. The Irish Nationalist Cause – § Jerry's recruitment to the army, is only for him to learn how to handle ammunition for the nationalist cause in Ireland, not for the desire to protect the English. The illustrates the nature of Irish society in the early part of the twentieth century where a small number of nationalists wanted to recreate a culture which was severely curtailed since the penal period. § The paralleling of the nationalist movement in Ireland with the First World War illustrates two examples of the degeneration of society in violence. Portrayal of Women – § It is unflattering and prejudicial § The author illustrates the lack of maternal nurturing which indicates the dysfunctional nature of society. Mrs Moore and Mrs Crowe deprive their sons of love, care and happiness- making decisions that are contrary to the moral well being of their sons. § They both represent each end of society and class, yet both

have the same role as mothers. Portrayal of Men – § A portrayal of disconcert § Alec's introduction is apathetic and amoral who rejects the solace of religion § Alec and Jerry are most admirable in their childhood, and they earn the readers respect through their loyalty to one another. The ambiguous ending of the novel suspends their credibility as full rounded characters and infers their symbolic function in the story. § The other men are not symbolic as heroic figures (Major Glendinning, Jerry's father, Mr. Moore) Instead, they are portrayed as ineffectual men enwrapped by their social position or as hard hearted, condescending automations. Setting of the Novel – § The setting is varied, begins with Alec's detention in France, and reverts to his childhood in Co.

Wicklow – moves between Dublin, Belfast, England and France. § With each change of setting, the reader is brought deeper into the impending doom with awaits Alec and Jerry. § The move from Ireland to France also propels the protagonist from the domestic, political disharmony of his own country into the European fray so that the scale of the violence and cruelty of Alec's early experiences is magnified beyond himself to thousands of other people.