

The use of epiphany in the works of james joyce essay



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The use of Epiphany through Isolation In the stories, Eveline, Araby, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, by James Joyce, Joyce concludes these three stories in his trademark literary style of epiphany; this is achieved through the protagonist's direct isolation from his/her own bleak reality. Joyce interprets an epiphany as a moment of realization: " By epiphany, Joyce meant a sudden revelation, a moment when an ordinary object is perceived in a way that reveals its deeper significance" (Bookmarks Magazine). The main characters in each of these stories undergo a moment of revelation due to their constant seclusion from their actuality. They choose to inhabit a world of personal thought and fantasy, to escape the trials and tribulations of their reality, leading them and the reader to that moment of clarity and realization of that desperately sought after, elusive truth. These character's paths to revelation in each story, greatly differs, yet they all occur due to a physical and mental separation from society, as well as a deep study of one's self. In the novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the boy Stephen lives in a fantasy world of his own creation, due to lack of personal relationships and his financial and family strives.

His lack of human contact cuts him off from society, physically and mentally, forcing him to focus on his identity. This segregation from reality leads him on a desperate quest to find himself and his place in the world. Throughout the story Stephen relies on the ideas and beliefs of others to shape his character, yet as he grows and leaves the university he finally comes into his own. After the novel has shifted point-of-view to a first person personal journal narrative, Stephen experiences a great epiphany when he is on a visit to the beach where he falls asleep, when he wakes up he immediately sees a

beautiful girl standing several yards away, gazing at some distant object over the water. He proceeds to develop a somewhat obsession with beauty and his theories of art. He realizes that as an artist there are no guidelines, restrictions, or boundaries, art is left to self-interpretation.

This idea frees Stephen from society's suffocating constraints and outside criticism and influence. The journal narrative portrays that Stephen is actually living his life, instead of fantasizing an imaginary world of his own; this is due to his epiphany: " Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race"(275). As Stephen finally faces himself, he can finally face reality. This is also a some-what moment of clarity for the reader, as Stephen's true veiled person is finally revealed. This epiphany of Stephen's artistic lifestyle also signals an end to his isolation as he finally contacts the revered " Emma", whom Stephen obsessed about from afar.

Throughout the novel significant events subconsciously alert Stephen that he will not accept the life of his father; his epiphany occurs when he finally realizes this. The short story " Araby" is the story with the most direct and greatest epiphany. The young boy in Araby obsesses over his friend's sister from afar (much like Stephen does), this obsession cuts him off from humanity: " From the window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived"(25).

In this isolation, the young boy's obsession begins to really take hold of him, this is portrayed through his ardent promise to buy the girl a token from the bazaar: "the young man in "Araby" racing to a carnival to fulfill a pledge, only to find it closed"(BookMarks Magazine). It is only after the boy cannot complete this quest that he realizes the vanity of his love for the girl, whom he places on such a pedestal. His revelation occurs at the Araby, a sort of foreign place of make-believe. In an exotic escape from the banality of his life he can finally realize the discrepancy between reality and the ideal; he senses the falsity of his love for this girl, and finally grasps that it will never be returned. In this inevitable conclusion the boy's single sensation of life disengages: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger"(28).

The foolish narrator finally comes to terms with his obsession; he only reaches this realization through an isolated venture outside his world. In "Eveline" Joyce provides a feminine perspective to middle class Irish life, yet this story mirrors the other two in the manner of Eveline's final epiphany. Eveline as the only daughter of her widowed father feels a deep obligation to him, yet she loathes her predictable isolated life of dreary housework. Eveline's isolation differs from the self-made separation of the latter two, in that hers is forced upon her by outside forces, duty and family.

As the story progresses, Eveline develops a relationship with Frank, a sailor, who offers her a means of escape to a new life. Left to herself Eveline constantly faces an internal struggle between the stability of her present life and the promise of happiness in her new life. Her epiphany occurs when she finally reaches her decision. She reaches this heightened moment of
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revelation after hearing the Gaelic gibberish spoken of her dead mother: “ Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun! ”(33). Eveline realizes she must escape the fate of her mother: “ She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must Escape! Frank would save her.

He would give her life, perhaps love too”(33). She then undergoes an additional epiphany when she plans to board the ship to the unknown and escape her predictable life. Yet she is struck with such a forceful revelation, she physically and mentally detaches herself from Frank upon realizing her paralysis and need for stability. These stories all provide a deep insight into the internal and mental struggles of Eveline, Stephen, and the young boy of “ Araby”. Throughout the stories the characters become fixated on these struggles leading them to: “ become obsessed with their own theories, ideas, and choices, which separate them from society rather than uniting them with it”(Novelguide.

om). Through this detachment the characters introvert themselves, in which they finally come to terms with themselves in a moment of evasive clarity. This sudden flash of understanding alters each character’s lives in a profound manner. Stephen finally discovers himself as an artist, Eveline realizes her desire in contrast to her inability to escape her unhappy life, and the narrator of “ Araby” realizes the romanticism of his love. These characters only grasp these truths through removing themselves from the outside influences of society, in order to best face themselves and their tribulations.