

Good example of essay on what changes a person

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress, a book by Dai Sijie, is about two protagonists, Luo and the Narrator whose name we never know. The story is set in Communist China during the Chinese Communist Revolution and follows them through their journey of re-education. Having been sent to a small village at the foot of a mountain Luo and the Narrator must adapt to their new living standards. Luo has always been a storyteller and the Narrator has always been the listener. But as the Narrator begins to read on his own and also starts telling stories as part of their way of surviving the Narrator changes. During this process he learns what emotions are and how to express them. As well, as a storyteller, someone who sometimes must tell lies, he learns how to lie as a way to fit in with society and survive.

Stories and storytelling have an impact on the Narrator because they alter his perception of himself, the things around him and also makes him less of a spectator in his own life. As he reads books, the Narrator begins to formulate his own opinions and ideas and expand his individuality. Previously he let Luo, the other protagonist, formulate ideas for him, but the Narrator begins to think for himself becoming a more independent person. When they are first introduced to the Little Seamstress, Luo comes to the conclusion that she is “not civilized” (27) and the Narrator is influenced by this. Therefore, the Narrator is not given the chance to form his own opinion about her. He carries the perception of her being uncivilized throughout the book altering his perception of her.

When he starts reading books, specifically Jean Christophe by Romain Rolland he states that he now knows the “splendor of taking free and independent action as an individual” (110) and this portrays how he is

starting to think for himself. After being exposed to books, he says “ for the first time in my life, I wanted something to be my very own rather than a possession I shared with Luo” (111) demonstrating how the Narrator is beginning to separate himself from Luo’s shadow. As a result of the Chinese Communist Revolution [CCR], the Narrator had no way to be an individual and books help him escape the repeated information he had been told all his life. In communism, the focus is on the greater good and independent action is seen as a malicious act, therefore, if he hadn't been introduced to books, the narrator wouldn't have had the chance to be an individual.

When the narrator states that without the intervention of Romain Rolland his “ poor educated and re-educated brains had been incapable of grasping the notion of one man standing up against the whole world” (110). In the beginning of the book he tells the reader about the CCR and re-education saying “ a few words about re-education: towards. this unprecedented idea inspired another revolutionary leader in Asia, Cambodian this time, to undertake an even more ambitious and radical plan” (6). Like words in a dictionary this was just another fact that he’d been hearing since the Cultural Revolution started and it was now just another definition that had been drummed into him in a form similar to brainwashing. Furthermore, the use of formal language expresses how the Narrator was not given the chance to express his own individuality or interpretation of the CCR. He just recast what he had heard or been told. However, later on in the book, the Narrator’s true personality comes to light, especially when he is telling the Tailor the story of *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

As he tells the story, “ the words poured out of [him]” (125) and this

contrasts from an earlier telling where he says, " I was overcome by stage fright and was reduced to a mechanical recitation of the setting of each scene." (Chapter 2). As the Narrator becomes more exposed to Western literature, his ability to express himself expands and he starts developing his own opinions which help him develop as an individual.

Through the reading of stories, especially *Ursule Mirouët* by Honoré de Balzac, the Narrator is made more aware of his feelings, unlike what he has ever felt before. When the Narrator speaks about Luo's father being persecuted "[he] realized how fond [he] was of the dentist" (10), this after seeing the dentist being harassed and publicly persecuted. The use of fond is tepid and shows how the narrator has not yet been exposed to a variety of feelings. However, when Luo goes to visit the Little Seamstress, he feels " a stab of jealousy, a bitter wrenching emotion [he] had never felt before" (58). The amount of emotion felt here is something deeper and he is only able to experience this after his introduction to stories. In addition, as he flashes back to the first and only time Luo hit him, all the Narrator says is that "[he] was so taken aback that [he] lost his balance" (10), by doing this, he shows the reader that he had no reaction on an emotional level and by ending his statement so abruptly it hints that he isn't affected by this.

Later, when fixing the headman's tooth, he slows down to punish the headman and tries to " disguise the hatred smoldering in [his] eyes" (134), this demonstrates how the Narrator has evolved as a character who feels emotions more deeply. The details of his story progress much like the stories in the books through his emotional experiences. The Narrator has new emotions that he has never felt before which change him from a shallow

person to one who feels more powerful than before. This comes to light in the scene where he is trying to help the Little Seamstress get an abortion (???) exposing him as one who is more disposed to acts of romanticism and heroism.

After Luo leaves for a month he romanticizes the task Luo gives him, which was to take care of the Little Seamstress. He sees himself as the, “ head of a routed army, charged with escorting the young wife of [his] bosom friend, the commander in chief, across a vast, bleak desert. Armed with pistol and machine gun [he’d] stand guard every night over the tent in which the gracious lady slept, and [he’d] ward off the horrible savages lusting after her flesh, while their eyes, burning with desire, flashed in the dark” (148).

The books the narrator had read introduced him to elements of romance and martyrdom changing the Narrator by making him hope to become someone like the characters in the books he has read.

He turns the task of keeping an eye over the Little Seamstress into something grander than it is and this is shown by the way he compares himself to the head of an army. The character he creates in his image is someone who is honorable, brave and a hero who is there for his friend; this is who the Narrator hopes to become. Books change the Narrator in two important ways, as he not only begins to experience deeper emotions, but also because he starts to embody those feelings and emotions in a more imaginative way; something he would never have been able to do without books.

Storytelling also changes the Narrator as it increases his comfort and

capability to lie. When one tells a story, they weave a web of lies and storytelling makes the Narrator a better liar. When they are first introduced to the headman, Luo lies about what the song is called when the Narrator wasn't able to:

“Mozart’ I muttered

‘Mozart what?’

‘Mozart Is Thinking of Chairman Mao’ Luo broke in.” (5)

At the beginning of their journey towards re-education, the Narrator isn't as comfortable with deceit as Luo is. He is reluctant to tell even the smallest of lies. However, when he meets Four Eye's mother and she inquires what his name is, he doesn't hesitate to impersonate Luo. He tells her, “my name is Luo” (85) and although he feels remorse after telling the lie, it came to him easier than in the beginning. This is because he is becoming more accustomed to telling lies and the power that it holds. As a result of storytelling, the Narrator begins to switch more easily between reality and the story world.

He narrates what happens to him in third person when he isn't willing to acknowledge events. The Narrator has a dream about the Little Seamstress and during his description he switches to third person, “licking and probing it's way to the seat of my manhood, where the blood boiled leaving the secret agent lying face down on his bed, where he abandoned himself in the dark to a betrayal that left his pants sticky” (156-7). Here the Narrator is in denial about his betrayal to Luo and therefore changes to third person. By changing the perspective of the story, he deludes himself into believing that it's a character in a story doing these things, not him. Storytelling reveals the

evolution of the Narrator because it shows the characteristics he develops, characteristics that everyone already has, but the Narrator didn't possess such as the ability to tell a white lie or the ability to be in denial about ones actions.

The Narrator's path through his own story reveals the path of changes that took over him as he made discoveries about himself through the stories in the books. While some of the experiences he has are also real-life experiences, without the scenes and explanations in the books he wouldn't have been able to identify with them and, at times, to use them for his own needs.

Works Cited