

Destructors and the rocking horse winner



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This essay is a comparison essay between two short stories, 'The destructors', by Graham Greene and 'The rocking horse winner', by D. H. Lawrence. The theme, the mood, the settings, the characters and other features of these stories are analyzed and compared. The similarities and the contrasts are described in details. It attempts to illustrate how short stories can become a learning source of moral lessons, which will save man from falling into the trap of immoral, irresponsible, and often destructive behavior. Short stories are perhaps the best source of moral lessons.

'The destructors' is a story in which a gang of young boys, who have taken to streets, destroy the house of an old man. This house being old, had its own antique and architectural value, and the owner, one Mr. Thomas, who is nicknamed as 'old miserly'. This gang, known as 'Wormsley common' has no reason to destroy the house, nor has Mr. Thomas given them any excuse which may warrant such a reaction. The gang not only destroys the house, but when Mr. Thomas arrives unexpectedly, he is locked up for the whole night. 'The rocking horse winner' is a story of a middle class family, which has enough money for basic necessities, but is highly ambitious.

Their ambitions are not fulfilled because they feel they are unlucky. Paul, the only son in the family, turns to gambling in horse race at a very early age, to make money, fast. He does succeed, and calls himself lucky. He gave away the money he earned from his initial victory to his mother, who always had a irrepressible desire to be wealthy, and live in a grand style. She used to suffer from a permanent mental attitude that the expenses of their household were always greater than their income, and they needed more money.

When more money came in, she still wanted more. Ultimately when money rained in their house, Paul was not alive to enjoy the fruits of that money. The plots of both these stories are contrasting to each other. In 'The destructors', the gang does not have any reason, or any motive behind their actions. Nor are they clear about what they will do after destroying the house. Destroying the house did not require any special skills. Whereas in 'The rocking horse winner', the actions of the main character, Paul, the young boy, were objective oriented. This objective was to multiply money, as fast as he could.

His actions demanded acute and skillful judgment of which horse to invest money on. The basic conflict in 'the destructors' appears to be that the younger generation is not ready to accept the precedence set by the elders. On the other hand, the elders also do feel that they are unnecessarily punished by the younger generation and that their energies are misused in vandalism and immoral behavior. This story is an example of widening generation gap. In 'the rocking-horse winner', there is no conflict as such, but considerable amount of emotion and care reflected within the relationship of mother and son. Paul; goes to derby, just to satisfy her mother's instincts and desires.

His love for her mother is reflected in his gesture of giving a fixed amount to her mother on her birthday, for five consecutive years, so that she does not feel she is unlucky, at least on that day. This story is an example of reducing generation gap, where the younger generation takes care of their elders. The complicated issue in 'the destructors' is that Mr. Thomas is a target of

vandalism, even though he is innocent. The climax of this story is reached when he is locked up by the boys of the gang.

In 'The rocking-horse winner', the most complicated issue is the human thirst for wealth. These two issues, namely the punishment of innocent and the human thirst for wealth have been a permanent feature of human history, and will remain so for all times in future. Social reformation may bring an end to one form, but then it takes birth in another form. Millions of totally innocent Africans lost their precious lives during the slavery era, to quench the European thirst for wealth. If social reformation brought an end to this form, another form of oppressing the people of poor countries erupted in the name of globalization.

The issues of victimization of the innocent and the never quenching thirst for wealth, are the issues which, perhaps have no solution. Each story has two main characters. Mr. Thomas and 'T'. the leader of the gang in 'The destructors', and Paul and his mother in the other. Roughness and innocent pleading are the outstanding qualities of T and Mr. Thomas respectively, while hunger for more money and being highly ambitious are the qualities of Paul's mother. Paul himself, is the hero, who demonstrates high sense of commitment and emotions towards his mother, and succeeds in his endeavor. The themes of both the stories differ widely.

'The destructors' concentrates on the attitude of younger generation which wants to erase everything that is old and a priceless gift from the elder people. It concentrates on punishment of totally innocent people. Whereas the theme of 'The Rocking-horse winner' rotates around the endeavor of a

young boy, to amass fast wealth, to satisfy his mother's thirst for money.

Both the themes, however, are similar in demonstrating that means do not matter, so far as the objective is achieved.

The question of ethics does not other the younger generation. The narrative style of the authors is also widely different. Graham is mostly descriptive in his style involving less one to one dialogues, whereas Lawrence relies more on communication through dialogues, especially between Paul and his mother and Paul and his Derby colleagues. Both the authors are very subtle in raising the issues. They never pinpoint any issue, they raise it through description of events.

The flow of 'The destructors' is more direct as it is set at one location only, whereas that of 'The Rocking-horse winner', is full of changing settings, and hence disrupts the attention. Starting from home, the reader is taken to the derby grounds, then to the involvement of a lawyer and back home. The sole aim of both the stories appears to be to pass on moral messages. Graham tries to derive that when an innocent is victimized, it hurts him. This is amply evident when he emphatically states 'It was my house'. Moreover, the younger generation should never take their elders for granted, because what ever they have to pass to youngsters is filled with rich experiences of their lives. Lawrence, tries to harp on two moral messages.

One, that the infinite thirst for wealth is not a right virtue, because it is never going to be satisfied. He also dwells upon a message that means do matter a lot, when it comes to earning wealth. Gambling may bring money, but when it takes money away, it may be totally devastating. The result of immoral,

unethical means is always negative. Conclusively, it can be said that short stories play the very important role of teaching moral values. Well written and narrated short stories like these, appeal to the hearts and minds of the reader.