

# The whaler



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The Whaler Essay by Lene S. Gronne 28th January 2011  
The Irish short story The Whaler by Joe Sheerin is about losing things we cherish and about growing up. Everybody has had someone to look up to in their lives, maybe a parent, sister or another person, but most of us have also tried losing the role model(s) again.

A role model possesses qualities we would like to acquire, and in our childhood they are perfect. In this period of our lives we do not understand that being perfect is impossible, but while growing up we begin to understand the real aspects of life – that no one is perfect. The process from believing that everyone is perfect, to realizing that the complete opposite is reality, is a process full of disappointments. This short story is an example of this process. The story takes place on a hill in Ireland with hills, meadows and fields in the surroundings. It might be in a small town where everybody knows each other since the narrator knows so much about the Whaler and recognizes him straight away even though he has only spoken to him once.

It must be spring, summer or early autumn since the Whaler wipes himself with a lush of grass after defecating on the hill and because of the presence of wasps: ??? He pulled some lush grass expertly and reached under his cloak. He made brushing motions upwards, threw the grass from him, stood tall in the meadow and pulled his trousers around his waist???[1] and ??? A fresh white loaf sat on the top of the week??™s groceries. A wasp looked interested???[2]. The narrator is a schoolboy and must be quite clever since his teacher tells the Whaler that he is an imaginative and clever boy. While the Whaler is defecating the boy is embarrassed of the situation and when he is told that the Whaler rides his teacher he gets goose bumps. A religion

teacher should be a good example and follow religious standards ??” not riding a whaler and cheating on her husband.

Furthermore he sees a nearby mountain beside them as a whale while the Whaler sees it as: ??? a woman??™s tit???[3]. All of these examples show the narrator??™s innocence and how the Whaler leads him into manhood.

Therefore the narrator might be between eleven and thirteen years old. The boy??™s meeting with the Whaler opens his eyes to a new world or a new way to look at the world.

??? The first shock had aged my body. I felt very tired.???[4] He feels tired because this new world is not like he thought it would be – it is tougher. The narrator??™s meeting with the Whaler has an extreme significance for his way of thinking. When he first rounds the corner he is an innocent boy, who is out shopping for his mother. He probably knows some of the bad sides of life, but there are some situations he still has to experience. He has always been fascinated by the Whaler and he sees him as his hero.

But when the boy meets him on the hill he is defecating: ??? As I reached a point within some yards of him I realized to my extreme embarrassment that he was defecating???[5]. A hero is not like everybody else. They do not have any mistakes or a less perfect side of their personality, and they are definitely not defecating on a hill. The Whaler tells him that he has never seen a whale in his life, which destroys the illusion of the Whaler being a hero. The narrator is fascinated by the frozen north and whaling and that was the reason he looked up to the Whaler. But when the Whaler has never even seen a whale, he is not a whaler and the boy loses his hero. Everybody

needs someone to look up to, but now the boy has to face reality and depend on himself, which is definitely part of growing up. Therefore the meeting has caused the beginning of his puberty ??“ his development towards becoming an adult.

We only get to know very little about how the Whaler looks. He has great arms and wide shoulders. He seems very wise even though he lies about his life as a whaler. But he knows an important thing about life: ??? But they want heroes here.

It??™s not enough to travel. You must see a unicorn as well. But you??™re a young man of the new generation. You don??™t need this.???[6].

He knows that the narrator does not have to lie to other people??“ he has to trust himself and to have faith in the things he does which is a very important part of growing up and to become independent. The Whaler always chooses the insecure way of living because he never tells anyone about his lie except the narrator and about having sex with a married woman. The fact that he is living his life on a lie tells us that he must be very insecure about himself ??“ actually since his childhood: ??? He left our town-land as a boy. Too small. Too myopic. Too trivial.

???[7] It is the narrator who mentions this quotation which might mean that it is how people saw the Whaler while he was a boy and this lays the foundation to his insecurity. In the ending we are told that ??? A month later he hanged himself.???[8] After the whaler confesses his sins to the narrator he tells him that he cannot tell anyone else about his secret – this is the

thing the Whaler needs to do before he can leave this world. It is a kind of an absolution and the Whaler shows that he is not a completely bad person.

He admits his mistakes which is a big part of growing up. You can compare this to confessing to a priest because it cleanses your conscience and a priest has duty of confidentiality. Throughout this story the narrator loses ??? the idol of my young imagination???[9]. It suddenly turns out that everything he believes in and looks up to is not real. This change in his life shows that he is developing to become an adult and his thoughts through the extreme demanding process of adolescence.

The proverb ??? learning by burning??? describes this story quite well because he loses his innocence and experiences some weird situations which he has to handle by himself. The narrator has to see things differently, he has to see that there is more than one aspect to a story - realize that things are not always like they seem and he shall find the hero inside himself.

—————[1] Quotation from page 2, line 36-39[2] Quotaion from page 2, line 42-43[3]Quotation from page 3, line 102[4] Quotation from page 4, line 145[5] Quotation from page 1, line 31-32[6] Quotation from page 3, line 81 ??? 83[7] Quotation from page 1, line 8 ??? 9[8] Quotation from page 4, line 153[9] Quotation from page 1, line 6