Using ‘Epiphany’ As A Strategy To Teach The Short Story “QUALITY” By John Galsworthy

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Abstract
The benefit of reading is manifold. It expects the reader to understand the message first. If it is a novel, the narration need not be in chronological order. It may start with ‘once upon a time...’ or with a flashback and jump-cuts. The meaning of continuous piece of writing is identified in sum total of a particular paragraph which gives the crux of it. This individual paragraph could give the glimpse of what happened earlier and what will be the end. This paragraph, which gives the identification of the central theme, main ideas, additional details, and vivid technique, is epiphany. This paper elucidates the epiphany paragraph and gives the meaning of the short story ‘Quality’ by Galsworthy

Keywords: Implications, factory system, compromise of quality, narratology, point of view

Introduction
Literature works through the senses and represents and explores the way in which the world is viewed and experienced by people. These experiences sometimes come with sudden flashes of perception and insight. Bernard Richards in his article The English Review calls these sudden flashes as ‘epiphanies’. Epiphany means a ‘manifestation; or ‘showing forth’ and by Christian thinkers it was used to signify a manifestation of God’s presence within the created world. It is derived from a Greek word, epiphainien, meaning 'to manifest'. The principal writer to extend the meaning of the word epiphany as a secular term was James Joyce, who was interested in sudden, dramatic and startling moments which seemed to have heightened significance and to be surrounded with a kind of magical aura. Joyce’s short stories and novels include a number of epiphanies and he expounded on its meaning in his fragment work Stephen Hero and in his novel Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916).

The short story taken up for study is “Quality” by John Galsworthy. This story pictures the woes of Industrial Revolution, where mass production had compromised quality and had led to the slow tortuous death of cottage industries.

The following paragraphs were selected as an epiphany and the students were asked to peruse them a few times. These paragraphs were then subjected to intense scrutiny and the students were encouraged to search for answers to questions what, who, when, where, why and how? They were then guided to draw out various implications regarding themes, characters, time, place and purpose by answering these wh- questions to enable them to know about the short story.

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm’s. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

‘Dose are nod my boods’.

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, and not even of contempt, but here was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

‘Id’ urds you dere’, he said. ‘Dose big virms’ ave not self-respect. Drash!’ And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

‘Dey get id all’ he said, ‘dey get id by advertisement, nod by work. Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods .Id gomes to this – bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less – you will see’. And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle – and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

What? Theme
The central themes inherent in this short story can be glimpsed at through these few passages. The spirit of the working class slowly waning away in the spurt of the industrial revolution is apparent, when the boot maker evinces the difficulty he faces in his trade by saying “Id gomes to this – bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less – you will see”. The central theme of the short story is the fall of the cottage industries which were swiped clean by the factories turning out mass production.

The lines “The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, and not even of contempt, but here was in it something quiet that froze the blood” show the resignation of the working class who perceive their doom very clearly and could do nothing but endure it silently.
‘Dey get id all’ he said, ‘dey get id by advertisement, nod by work’. It is clear that the factories were attracting the people like locusts through advertisements, which compromise quality production, and the craftsmen making hand made goods were unable to survive in the onslaught of the changing times.

The words “Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods,” prove the love the craftsmen had towards their profession. The quality of identifying the difference in the uncomfortable, ill-fitting boots made by the machines proves the devotion of the workers towards their craft.

The chosen passage also highlights the compassion the author had for the boot maker’s plight when he ponders over what the boot maker says. “And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle – and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!”

These passages also highlight the stubbornness of the working class who were pathetically obstinate in not going along with the tide by adopting new methods of sales and advertisements. This actually had led to their downfall.

**Who? – Characters And Relationships**

In these few paragraphs, we are introduced to the central characters of this short story, namely the author and the boot maker. We can deduce that the author is a regular customer to the boot shop who has only once entered the shop wearing the boots bought from a large firm in an emergency. It also shows that the author is rather in awe of the boot maker’s expertise where he silently accepts the reprimand of the boot maker. He is also shown as a man who is sensitive to the woes of the boot maker.

The boot maker is the next central character whose way of working is very different from the present showroom system where he shows the leather he is going to work on to his customers. He is also a connoisseur in boot making, where just by looking at a boot, identifies them to be factory turned out and ill-fitting. “He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.”

His language indicates that he is not an Englishman but a foreigner settled in the hometown of the author. He is also shown as a harassed man who suddenly bursts out with pain and suffering after long years of endurance. He is also a man who watches helplessly the factory system scrapping away his business but does not take the initiative to adopt the modern method of advertising to improve his business.

The third character apparent in these passages is the invincible factory system which has encroached upon the cottage industries and grabbed the livelihood of the artisans and led to the death of quality in production.

**When? – Time**

The selected passages do not indicate the physical time of the year but it denotes the period when Industrial Revolution had diffused through the country and reached its peak. It denotes the time when the quality of products had diminished because of mass production and also the attitude of the people who had compromised fashion for quality.

The lines “And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle – and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!” also indicate that the author had known the boot maker for some years now since his youth. We can also surmise that the boot maker had once had a thriving business which has now been swapped by the factories through their advertisements.

**Where? – Place**

The setting of the scene is the boot maker’s shop into which the author walks wearing the shoes he had bought from a fashionable shop.

**Why? - Purpose**

The relevance of the passage to the entire short story is emphasized where the author makes the boot maker talk about the hardships in his trade initiated by the factory system. It highlights the industries lack of concern for quality and also shows how the people were attracted to fashion and quick service rather than quality service. The readers can also anticipate that the boot maker’s condition would deteriorate further if he does not take up the new way of business.

**Point of View:**

As the novel deals with the sensitive issue of the negative aspects of the industrial revolution, the first person narrative is the best medium where the actual encounter with the artisan helps the author to give a realistic picture of the struggles faced by the cottage industries.

**Conclusion**

After scanning these paragraphs, the students were able to comprehend that the boot maker who is already in the throes of agony over his trade might be afflicted with even more suffering and meet a dead end in his business. Thus, this close study was able to bring out the relevance of identifying and understanding the various aspects of this short story. This makes the vague impressions, formed through skimming, to culminate into a definite understanding. Thus, epiphany can be successfully
adopted as a narratological strategy to understand short stories.

References