

AGED CHILDREN IN *THE ROCKING HORSE WINNER* BY D. H. LAWRENCE AND
ARABY BY JAMES JOYCE

Condrat Viorica

Rezumat

„*Calul câștigător*” de D.H. Lawrence și „*Araby*” de James Joyce scot în prim plan problema copilului lăsat în voia sorții de către adulți. Problemele pe care trebuie să le înfrunte îl epuizează, făcându-l să uite de bucuriile copilăriei. Articolul de față studiază premisele care au grăbit maturizarea timpurie a copiilor. În urma comparării trăsăturilor de caracter a copiilor din lucrările analizate se evidențiază factorii nocivi care distrug personalitatea copilului sau chiar duc la moartea lui.

The short stories, *The Rocking Horse Winner* by D. H. Lawrence and *Araby* by James Joyce, focus on children and their premature aging after having been thrust into the adults' mean world. The most startling thing is that the awareness of the world's futility is perceived instinctively by them, by means of sensations and perceptions. This fact allows me to assume that D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce made children the main characters of these stories deliberately. By using shocking images, they emphasize how vanity, carelessness, hypocrisy, and lust can destroy a child's life, leaving him alone to cope with the abysmal conditions of the modern society. Thus one cannot help agreeing that D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce “shattered the old ways of telling a story” [8, p.783], making their voice heard by producing scandalous and provocative pictures of the time they lived in.

As a matter of fact, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce are two most outstanding figures in *modernism*¹. Nonconformists and exiles, they can be considered as important literary innovators who sought to depict a human's insight as it is in reality, exploring the depth of their unconscious.

On the whole, the modernists' works capture life as “overwhelmingly confusing and complicated” [6, p.6]. This is where D. H. Lawrence's and James Joyce's points of view converged. However, they disagreed on how this life should be shaped in their fiction. Andrew Sanders points out that D. H. Lawrence “had little time for Richardson's, Joyce's and Proust's narrative experiments” [7, p. 520]. Such experiments were labeled by D. H. Lawrence as “death – rattles” to which the novelists themselves were listening “trying to discover whether the intervals are minor thirds or major fourths” [7, p.520].

¹ It is the term for an international tendency in the arts brought about by a creative renaissance during the last decade of the 19th century and lasting into post – wars years and distinguished by its opposition to traditional forms and to the aesthetic perceptions associated with those forms [8, p.675].

James Joyce, proclaimed by T. S. Eliot “the best living prose writer” [7, p.358], widely used the *stream of consciousness technique*² in his works, creating a very full impression on the mental life of his characters. His fiction is built around *epiphanies*, a term James Joyce coined himself, and denoting “arresting moments of intense experience when things are revealed in their very essence” [1, p. 35]. It should be mentioned here that D. H. Lawrence shaped his works around “epiphanic incidents” [7, p.523] as well.

In the short stories *The Rocking Horse Winner* and *Araby*, both authors disclose the inner world of two children on the verge of adolescence, who are supposed to endure adults’ indifference and neglect. They are, all of a sudden, deprived of their childhood and of all the happiness a child should enjoy. Unable to understand the grown-ups’ sophistry, they perceive things relying on their instincts, which develop into “intuitions of immorality” [5, p.277]. They feel intensely the tension of each moment, suffering from the realization that they cannot change anything. Their powerlessness irritates them; they feel lost.

The titles of the short stories are very significant for the main characters’ development. They determine the course of the children’s lives. D. H. Lawrence speaks about a rocking horse, which reveals that the horseman is a child, and his being a winner implies both competition and danger.

The horse is the symbol of “the son of night and mystery, it is the bearer of both life and death, being closely connected to fire that destroys and triumphs, as well as to water that feeds and drowns” [2, p. 224]. It depends on the person who sits on it which way it will take. Will the child be able to cope with the unstable temper of the horse?

The horse can also stand for the child’s unconscious. Sigmund Freud compared the human mind to a horseman and his horse. “The conscious is the horseman who rides the horse; but the horse that carries him, constitutes the main force, the main factor – being able to cast the horseman when it loses its temper. It stands for the realm of unconscious” [4, p.65]. Taking this fact into account, one can assume that the rocking horse was Paul’s unconscious world, which had done so much harm to him that in the end it killed him. As a child, he could not handle such wilderness.

Concerning *Araby* and its impact on the main character’s life, Wallace Gray notes: “the title holds the key to the meaning of Joyce’s story” [11, p.29]. First, it stands for the boy’s romantic perception of love and of life in general. But, as *Araby* is closely related to a magical, inexistent country, the title heralds the deception the main character is bound to feel at the end.

² A technique used by novelists to represent a character’s thoughts and sense impressions without syntax or logical sequence [8, p.956].

D. H. Lawrence introduces Paul in *The Rocking Horse Winner* as a child in the quest of maternal love, touching upon the problem of the *Oedipus complex*³ once again. His way of portraying the misery of a child rejected by his mother is closely connected with the principles of *psychoanalysis*⁴. He contested the conventional character presentation in which the writer draws the personage from outside. Instead he preferred to explore the child's unconscious world compelled to face serious problems. He tried to reveal the true essence of a child's suffering, and to show how neglect and lack of love can kill him. D. H. Lawrence strongly believed that only the unconscious can disclose a man's fundamental nature.

James Joyce allows the characters to speak in the first person in order to grasp every side of the character's inner self. He also rejects the outside character representation. The boy in *Araby* enterprises a trying quest as well. He wants to win a young girl's heart. If at the beginning he appears as an idealistic, thoughtless child, he ends up by being disappointed. An epiphanic incident turns his whole perception of the surrounding world upside down, leaving him with the realization how meaningless life is.

Both stories render characters too weak to resist the cruelty of a vain society, yet, they are forced to do it. The clash between their expectations and reality is so big that they have to grow up over night. Being different from other people, they feel lonely, and an immediate consequence of loneliness is alienation. It is unbearable for a child to see no point in life. That is why, in my opinion, such children can be referred to as aged children. It is remarkable how D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce saw the root of the children's problems basically in the same way. It is obvious that the failure of the relationship between adults and children results from the grown-ups' indifference and carelessness.

The premature aging of the characters in *The Rocking Horse Winner* and *Araby* is caused by several external factors. The first factor is to be founded in the houses the main characters lived. Paul and his two younger sisters, for instance, lived in a house that "came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!*" [9, p. 784]. What astonishes the most is that "the children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud" [9, p.784]. The children did not understand what was going on. They felt scared, lonely, unprotected. They were aware of the fact that there was no one in the world they could rely on. It is horrifying that the children were afraid even to play as the voice "came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden champing head, heard, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and

³ The childhood desire to sleep with the mother and to kill the father [10, p1].

⁴ Freud coined the term "psychoanalysis" in 1896 to describe a therapeutic technique used to uncover unconscious repressions of childhood emotions. [...] The unconscious often expresses itself in dreams, jokes and ambiguous uses of language, and especially in figurative language [8, p. 807].

seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: There must be more money!" [9, p. 784 – 785]. Although it was a bright house, it was literally a dark prison for the children. In order to render the insupportable stress the children had to endure, D. H. Lawrence repeats this phrase several times throughout the story.

Surrounded by lifelessness, the boy in *Araby* was not luckier. The location of the house itself was not a favourable one for the growth of a happy child. It was situated on a "blind" [11, p. 29] street, while "the other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces" [11, p.29]. A child would feel lonely surrounded by such "unfriendly" houses, whereas the boy had to live in such a house. Its inside was not brighter, the rooms were "high, cold, empty, gloomy" [11, p. 33], while the "air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers" [11, p. 29].

James Joyce puts a special emphasis on darkness by repeating the word *dark* a number of times. Thus, the children were playing on "the dark muddy lanes behind the houses", "the dark dripping gardens" and in "the dark odorous stables" [11, p. 30]. Children, by their nature, promote the idea of light; probably for this reason during their games they paid no attention to the oppressive atmosphere around them. However, the boy had an intuitive understanding of how the things really were. Actually, his grasp of reality happened also in darkness.

Houses are made homes by people who inhabit them. One can draw the conclusion that the dwellers in Paul's and the boy's houses were very stern, but above all indifferent people. Paul's mother, for example, had no maternal instinct. All her nature rejected her children, therefore why "when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard" [9, p.784]. Regardless of how hard she tried to hide her disgust, the children "read" the truth in her eyes. So the children came to feel guilty for the fact of having been born. Shunned by his mother, Paul began his quest to get his mother's affection. He childishly thought that money could solve all the problems existing in the house, which "had been "whispering" worse than ever" [9, p. 790]. What he believed would make the whispering disappear, made "the voices suddenly" go "mad", which "frightened Paul terribly" [9, p.790]. On seeing how "overwrought" her boy was, she made an attempt to send him to the seaside. In fact, it was a way of getting rid of the burden she felt in her heart because of him. It is horrible to see how a child becomes "overwrought" in his unsuccessful attempt to gain his mother's affection.

As for Paul's father, he is mentioned only at the beginning: "The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never would be able to do anything

worth doing” [9, p. 784]. He was unable to satisfy his wife; moreover, he had completely forgotten that he had three children. He showed no interest in them.

The boy in *Araby* had seemingly no parents, as he lived with his aunt and uncle. So, he was deprived of parental love as well. His relatives seemed not to see his problems. His uncle, for instance, forgot about the promise he had made to his nephew. He thought that the entire bazaar thing was a trifle, that was why he came home drunk failing to keep his promise. So his short reply “The people are in bed and after their first sleep now” [11, p. 34] made the boy feel angry and powerless.

Yet, unlike Paul, the boy in *Araby* was not in quest of his mother’s love, instead he started his journey in order to conquer a young girl’s heart. He also thinks that money can help him become her lover. Thus, buying her a present from the bazaar became his only aim. The changes going on within him were not perceived by his relatives; it proves that they were indifferent to his problems.

Longing for love, both children fail to obtain it. Paul died without having the chance to feel maternal love, while the boy in *Araby* ended up by being disappointed by the world he lived in. Even his romantic love appeared to be vain, while he saw himself as “as a creature driven and derided by vanity” [11, p. 35].

At moments of extreme tension, both children resemble a lot, especially their eyes which express either madness or anger. It is known “the eye is the symbol of intellectual **perception**” [underlined by CV] [3, p.362]. Their entire unconscious world was revealed through their eyes.

Paul’s eyes, after his “furious rides” [9, p. 786], were “blue fire” [9, p.788]. His glare made his mother uneasy, probably its wilderness frightened her. It expressed all the unsubdued depth of his unconscious, ready to explode any minute. Even Paul’s uncle would rather avoid to look into the child’s eyes: “The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily” [9, p. 787]. Paul’s stare becomes so frightening that the uncle does not dare to contradict him: “The boy watched him with big blue eyes that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word” [9, p. 789]. Definitely, these were not the eyes of a happy child; they were the ones of an overwrought, aged child.

The same fury can be found in the boy’s eyes in *Araby*. He is so disappointed by the world’s frailty that his eyes “burned with anguish and anger” [11, p. 35]. His glare expressed all the changes that had happened within him, as well as their consequences. His anguish proves that he was not ready for these changes, while the anger suggests his powerlessness in the big, vain world.

The children’s eyes also stand for their rich, unexplored unconscious world. This world can scare the adults, for it is dangerous to deal with people relying primarily on their instincts. In the confused turbulence of their feelings, they do not respond for their actions.

The impact of the material world on the children's minds is another factor which contributed to their sudden aging. Both boys were aware that money was very important. They felt it was a very powerful drug for grown-ups. Thus, Paul drew the conclusion that to have luck meant to have money. As a lucky person, he felt his duty to gain it for his mother in order to stop the "whispering", which appeared because the house was "always short of money" [9, p. 789]. The more money the boy got, the more he was overwrought. Yet, he did not stop his quest until his death.

Money plays an important part in *Araby* as well. The boy unconsciously realized how mercenary the world was. In fact, his journey depended on the money his uncle had promised to give to him: "I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar" [11, p. 33]. Then, his holding "a florin tightly" [11, p. 34] proves how much faith he put in the power of money. At the bazaar he heard how "two men were counting money on a salver", he even "listened to the fall of the coins" [11, p.35]. Unaware, he felt how money can spoil everything: friendship, love, human lives. His final conclusion was too cruel for a child: money does nothing but deceive.

The religious aspect added also to the children's torments. They heard about the existence of an all-mighty God, however, they were unable to understand its connection with reality. The notion of this powerful deity was very vague. They tried to realize how God, money and love combine together. Once more, they were guided by their unconscious.

The boy in *Araby* lived in a house that belonged to a priest, who "had died in the back drawing-room" [11, p. 29]. Mangan's sister, his beloved, appears as Virgin Mary with "her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door" [11, p. 30]. His love was sacred to him, which was why he confessed "her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand" [11, p.31]. The author uses the parenthesis "(I could not tell why)" [11, p31] to highlight that all these notions were very vague to the boy. Somewhere deep inside, he felt an uneasiness concerning religion.

As for Paul, he perceived God as the one who distributed luck. His mother was surprised to hear him claim that he was a lucky person. When she asked him how he could be so sure, "God told me," he asserted, brazing it out" [9, p. 785]. He was also unable to explain where this certainty came from, but he was sure God talked to him.

All these matters troubled the children's young minds. Somehow they felt people's love, religion and lust were very artificial. They perceived the nature of things in a childishly mature way. They were not grown-ups, yet, they had long ago ceased to be children.

References

1. Bădulescu, D. *Early 20th Century British Fiction. Modernism*. Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2005; Part I.
2. Chevalier, J. and Gheerbrant, A. *Dicționar de simboluri*. București: Artemis, 1995; Vol. I.
3. Chevalier, J. and Gheerbrant, A. *Dicționar de simboluri*. București: Artemis, 1995; Vol. II.
4. Cosmovici, A. *Psihologie generală*. Iași: Polirom, 1996.
5. Cuddon, J. A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin Books, 1998.
6. Peck, J., Coyle, M. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1993.
7. Sanders, A. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
8. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. Ed. Ousby, I. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
9. *English Literature. A Chronological Approach*. Ed. Carlsen, G., Carlsen, R. New York / St. Louis / San Francisco / Dallas / Atlanta: McGraw – Hill Book Company, 1985.
10. <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/definitions/oedipus.html>.
11. <http://www.mendele.com/WWD/WWDaraby.html>.