

UNCONFORMITY IN RELATIONS IN THE NOVEL "REVOLUTIONARY ROAD"

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ABSTRACT

It is rare to find the most successful work of a writer is his first piece of work. This was the case with Richard Yates and his first novel Revolutionary Road, which he had written in 1955 and took five years to finish it. Critics see that it Yates' masterpiece and that he took a long time to finish it to take care of each word and detail in it. In fact, critics admire the accurate workmanship of the novel despite it is very simple in its style. It is obvious in Yates' works that he usually identifies with his protagonists; in the novel Revolutionary Road, he identifies with Frank Wheeler, the protagonist of the novel, in the matter of his age, as they two were 29 in the year of writing the novel. Moreover, Yates is identified with the female protagonist of the novel in the case of the separation of her parents and to be brought up in several homes. This makes the reader guess that Yates' is identified with his protagonists in the feeling of unconformity in relations that they undergo along the novel. The novel expresses the lives of several families; some members of these families are greatly bothered with the feeling of unconformity in their relations along the novel. Frank Wheeler and April Wheeler are the two protagonists of this novel; they will be the focus of this study. Frank who came as a result of an accidental pregnancy for two old and tired parents feels that his parents did not have time or energy to look for him. He feels unconformity of relation between himself and his parents. Frank felt that he was different among his peers at school, and this is considered another experience of unconformity in his relation with his peers. On the other hand, the reader finds April Wheeler, who is the female protagonist of the novel and the wife of Frank Wheeler. She was brought up in several houses of her aunts because her parents did not want her to live with them and that they were careless and irresponsible parents. She did not feel the warmth of the family and she was brought up as a stranger in the houses of her aunts. These circumstances emphasize the feeling of unconformity she felt in her past life before the start of the novel. April wanted to start a conformed life with the man that she admired and loved, but she could not conform to the role of the mother and the house-wife that lives in the suburbs. This developing feeling of unconformity in the character of April increases along the novel. She feels herself as "trapped" in her roles in life that she sees herself non-conformed to. The idea of unconformity in relations widens when the reader realizes that Frank and April are not conformed also with the suburbs they live in, that they feel themselves superior to the place they live in and that they dream of travelling to Paris to achieve the feeling of conformity. The pace of unconformity rises as the novel continues and the feeling of unconformity in the character of April causes a feeling of despair for her, as she cannot change the conditions of her life until she loses her life in an attempt of abortion. Yates wants to reveal that the unconformity of relations can cause very bad results that may have very bad ends and man can lose his life.

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Yates, the writer of the novel Revolutionary Road is a very famous writer of American fiction. He was born on the 3rd of February

in 1926 and died on the 7th of November in 1992 in Yonkers, New York. The novel Revolutionary Road which was written in the year 1955 was his first novel and it was a finalist in the National Book Award in 1962. His writings were not greatly valued neither by

critics nor by commercial success during his lifetime. Critics' praising concerning the works of Yates started after his death. This late evaluation started with an essay that was written by Stewart O'Nan in 1999 that was published in the *Boston Review*; the essay was called The lost World of Richard Yates: How the Great Writer of the Age of Anxiety Disappeared from Print. The first deep biography of Yates, which was called A Tragic Honesty and that was published by Blake Bailey in 2003 was another good evaluation of Yates that appeared also after his death. The novel Revolutionary Road is turned to a film in 2008; it was directed by Sam Mendes and the its two protagonists were embodied by the two famous stars, Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet who thanked Yates for writing this powerful novel with such a powerful role of a woman, when she was receiving the Award of Golden Globe as being the Best Actress concerning her role in the film of Revolutionary Road.

Yates' personal life and childhood is severally mirrored in the novel Revolutionary Road; the age of Frank Wheeler in the novel Revolutionary Road which was written in 1955, was 29 which was the same age of Yates in the same year; Yates came from a disassembled family as his parents divorced when he was 3, for this reason much of his childhood was spent in many different towns and residences and this is mirrored in the childhood of his protagonist April Wheeler.

UNCONFORMITY IN RELATIONS IN THE NOVEL REVOLUTIONARY ROAD:

The main idea discussed in the novel Revolutionary Road is unconformity of relations, the idea that is widely discussed in the novel by the use of different details by depicting the life of several families. Unconformity of relations spreads between each two spouses and also between some characters and the society, even the conformity may extend between the apparent behavior of the character and his/ her inner feelings. The novel was written to describe life in 1955 which was a fulcrum year, when America was in the halfway between the past of restraints and the future of greater sexual freedom in

relations. This position made many of the American in that time feel unrested and not belonging to the place they lived in; the matter that raised the sense of unconformity in several details in their lives and made them dream of escaping to Europe as Frank and April, the novel's two protagonists, wanted to. Frank Wheeler and April Wheeler are the two main characters whose lives are full of unconformity of relations.

Frank Wheeler is a handsome man of about 29 years old. He is the husband of April Wheeler and the father of two children. Frank came to life as a result of an accidental pregnancy to two aged parents who were very tired to take care of him, so he lived a life of no enough care as if life was not prepared to receive him on earth; this somehow manifests a shadow of unconformity between him and life itself. He lived as a shy boy, but after that when he went to the army and when he was in Colombia College he discovered that he can be articulate so he can win the respect of others. This behavior arose because he did not feel conformity to his acquaintances, so he decided to change his way of dealing with others to gain conformity to the community he lived in.

The feeling of unconformity inside Frank is recurrently emphasized by Yates. Frank was such a man that feels that he is different from the society that he lives in. When he was at school and when he was at war, he was alone. He felt he is different; that is described by Yates, "Loose strands of his character – the very traits that had kept him dreaming and lonely among schoolboys and later among soldiers". Even the talks about Frank reveal that he is different and non-conformed with the society he lives in. People always conclude that "All he would need, it was said, was the time and the freedom to find himself". These words emphasizes the state of non-conformity overwhelming Frank and that he is similar to an imprisoned bird who needs freedom to live a life of conformity. Frank always sees this freedom in travelling to Europe. This emphasis that life of conformity would be through the travel to Europe is a symbol of the demolishing of the American Dream that started in America in those days in the 1950s. Frank always describes Europe as "the only part in the world worth living in". Yates,

describing the thoughts inside Frank's mind, asserts that Frank sees himself as superior to the people living in the suburbs; he really lives a life of unconformity in the suburbs and sees that living there may contaminate the pure person, "Economic circumstances might force you to live in this environment, but the important thing was to keep from being contaminated. The important thing, always, was to remember who you are". These words reflect the deep feeling inside Frank that is described by Yates that Frank sees himself different, better and superior to his neighbors in the suburbs.

Nevertheless, he has a feeling that he had a period of peace when he lived with his old parents, and that period of peace is the thing that makes him more "stable" than his wife April who seems to not to have any periods of peace in her former life. He seems to dislike his job. In fact, he is content with the calm pace of his job as he dislikes fights in life but he seems to pretend disliking his job to not to be despised by his wife. Here the reader can see the problem of unconformity between his real feelings towards his job and his pretense about which. Frank is very habitual of imagining unreal dialogues between him and other characters especially his wife April. He frequently imagines soft and delicate words he can say to his wife or her nice imagined words to him, but in reality they fail to conform to each other and fail to relief each other with kind words. This manifests and increases the unconformity between him and his wife. When April is very angry and sad because the failure of the play in which she is an actress, Frank imagines that he is relieving her with kind words but he fails to do such thing. He imagines to touch her shoulders kindly and say to her, "You were wonderful", but he felt that she did not want anyone to touch her and that saying such words to her may not be the right thing to do. This makes the reader thinks that if he said these words, he might have comforted her and that might have caused a feeling of conformity between each other. As he does not say the words, the actions and dialogue of the novel take another way, and the pace of anger goes higher for trivial reasons. This arises the question of the ordinary reader and some spouses are identified

with Frank at this position. The novel makes them ask of their words that they may think that they are not so important. Some spouses may think that the simple words of love of comforting may be useless or unimportant, but really they may be the easiest and simplest way to solve many and great problems. Really, Yates raises the questioning conscious inside his readers that simple words may change their marital life. Many spouses that suffer from unconformity in relations with each other may feel that if they change their words, unconformity may change into conformity. It is obvious that Frank Wheeler endeavors to manifest and prove his masculinity in the novel. He feels a lack of self-confidence. He feels the gap between himself and his wife but he does not know how to mend their relation. He feels the unconformity of their relation, so he always resorts to imaginary dialogues in which he rests his conflicts and proves to himself that he is a full and successful man. He imagines himself relieving his wife after the disastrous play she was a part in, but he really fails to make any relief to her in reality, and tension arises between them and a bitter taste of unconformity is greatly felt between them. Yates describes the state of Frank when he was walking to April saying that he went towards her "in a look that he hoped would be full of love and humor and compassion". Unconformity of the relation between Frank and April is not manifested through the character of Frank only, it is greatly and severely felt through the portrayal of the character of April Wheeler too.

April Wheeler, the female protagonist in the novel, represents unconformity in several parts of her character. She is a tired house-wife that have two children. This tiredness is frequently described by her "thin body" and "pale shape". She was brought up setting with aunts because her hard-partying parents would not want her. So, she lived a life of unconformity with the places she lived at, because it was not her genuine home with her parents. Moreover, she tried to taste the life of a family with Frank and to give up her dreams about being an actress to marry him, but she did not feel conformity neither in her life

as a mother living in the suburbs nor in her relation with Frank himself.

The novel starts with the play that April, the protagonist of the novel is taking part in. The first scene and the first words that are said about April that are accompanied with her first appearance in the novel reveal the sense of unconformity that is spread all over the novel. Although the novel is built on showing the continuous conflicts between April and her husband Frank, the first words describing April are "She is good". The story teller adds in describing her that she moves with a "shyly sensual grace of maidenhood", that is despite she is a mother of two children; these contrasting words reflect the shadow of unconformity in the character of April. This unconformity is echoed in her own words when she struggles with her husband Frank and says that she is "in a trap". Yates reveals the inner feelings of unconformity of April and her wish to escape from her real living status in the words she says in the play that she acts in; and it is great cleverness of Yates to bring these words as the first words that the reader hears from April. The real April is identified in some way with the character of Gabrielle who wants "to go out and do something that's absolutely crazy, and marvelous". Despite the play has failed, this failure was not because of April. April started as a good actor and got the likeness of all, but the other members of the play did not do their roles well; the matter that affected her performance and started to do bad as they did. This reflects a fact that happens in real life; when someone feels unconformity with the environment he lives in and somehow he feels he is superior to and better than his surroundings, he lives a sad life. He tries to get rid of the society he lives in; he wants to flee or fly away; but if he cannot get out of the place of unconformity, he tends to do as bad as his peers and sometimes he can do worse; ironically he is superior in the two opposite directions. This exactly what happens with April in her real life; she feels superior to the women living in the suburbs; she wants to flee from this life that she feels non-conformed to. She sees that travelling to Paris can be a way of escape for her and the family. Because of this feeling of unconformity, she sometimes acts worse

than her reality with her husband who himself feels unconformity with her.

The unconformity of relation between Frank and April is frequently described in the novel; for example, when they are leaving after the disastrous play that she was an actress in, Yates describes that they walked "without touching each other and without speaking". In this situation, the reader expects that Frank would put his hands around her shoulder or that she would give a tight hold of his hands in order to support her and calm her broken dreams, but neither of these happens. So, the shadow of unconformity raises apparently in this situation. Along the novel, April expects certain things from Frank but Frank always fails to meet her needs for these things; actually, she needs special feelings that he does not give to her; it is greatly noticed that he always feeds his conscious that he is unable to do such things. When she is so miserable after the unsuccessful play, he imagines himself saying some nice words for relieving her, but he says to himself that these words "might be exactly the wrong thing to say"; moreover, when they are coming out of the theatre he wants to manifest his affection and care for her, but he says to himself, "I always knew nobody cared about me and I always let everybody know I knew it". The reader may feel that he is stupid or may be too coward and failure to manage the relation between himself and April, insisting to impose the feeling of unconformity of their relation along the novel. April when she is in the make-up of the play, all the audience, including Frank, see her as "lovely". Frank is astonished that she is the same creature that he always wants to deny her existence in his life. He is not conformed with her real character but sees her different in her unreal role in the play and that she is "lovely" and "good". After the end of the failed play, she was in her room removing the make-up and returning to her miserable life. She looks at his eyes as if she is waiting for him to do the role she expects from him. She wants to feel his support and affection, but he fails, as usual, as he does in each exam in which life puts him in front of her; she lowers her eyes to look at the button of his shirt, as a symbol of the defeat of her hopes. The feeling of the unconformity of their relation is manifested. The

reader can understand and feel her emotions and what she may really look forward and how Frank is not able to give her. Her trial to be an actress is shown as if she cannot live her real life and tries to live another temporary lives in her roles as an actress but she also fails to do that; it is like a trial from her part to save her life but she fails to do. In another scene, when he hits the car four times in rage, the astonishment that April feels, as well as the reader does, confirm his inability to manage their relation and that unconformity is the inherent element in their relation. It is honestly to say that Frank sometimes receives some negative energy emitted from April, as when he intends to lean towards her and kiss her saying that she was "wonderful" in the play, "an almost imperceptible recoil of her shoulders told him that she did not want to be touched". In another situation, when they are in the car, Yates describes Frank's feelings, that he "He had hoped she would sit close to him in the car—he wanted to hold her shoulders while he drove—but she made herself very small and pressed against the passenger's door, turning away to watch the passing lights and shadows of the road. This caused his eyes to grow round and his mouth solemn as he steered and shifted gears, until finally, licking his lips, he thought of something to say". In the same scene after a while he tries to take her into his arms but she shocks him saying, "'No, Frank, please don't do that. Just leave me alone, okay?'" and insists in such a hysterical way. It is obvious that she always needed his support and feelings of love and understanding, but also it is felt that she does not succeed to let the door open for him to do so. Yates does not show if it is a complete failure from Frank's part to manage his relation with his wife or if it is also a mistake from the part of April to encourage and help him to bridge the gap between them. April always tries to find a passage to flee from her situation and reality in life with which it is not conformed. One of her trials is to be an actress and to be a successful woman or at least to live other lives through her roles in the dramatic works, but her dreams are broken because that disastrous play. Once more, when she is with Frank in the car and refuses to be touched or calmed by him, while he is endeavoring to make her more comfortable, she gets out of the car

and runs and Frank runs after her, "he thought she meant to kill herself" but she stopped at a sign saying to her "No Passing". This sign is a symbolic one that she has no way to flee from her un-conforming life except death. But it is really proved that the result is too horrible as April misses her life after failing to conform with her actual life with Frank. The continuity of this scene, may create a feeling of sympathy not only with April, but also with Frank. The reader sees Frank trying to comfort her; he does not say or do such wonderful deeds, but at least he does not hurt her. She treats him indifferently and does not appreciate his bad situation of not knowing what to do to comfort her; she bursts with anger at him to leave her, then when he is normally angry because of her strange reactions, she runs out of the car, then she says to him, "'How terribly, terribly kind of you.'" She describes him as "disgusting", so he and the reader feel that Frank really as he announces does not "deserve" that. The reader gets perplexed of the real reason behind her unjustified intensive anger, and the reader sees the gap of unconformity of their relation wide and clear in this situation and starts to question about the reason of this unconformity. Then April tries to deliver to Frank and the reader the secret behind her strange behavior saying that she is "trapped" and "fooled" by Frank, putting her nails on her "collarbone" to show that she is like a throttled person. Here, April intensifies the feeling of under-estimated masculinity inside Frank when she asks him if he really call himself "a man". This really destroys all his self-confidence and widens the gap of unconformity between them. She may mean that he is not that sort of man that fits her but she destroys all his masculinity by using such offensive words. The problem between them is revealed clearer in this part; their inherent problem is unconformity and all other reasons of conflicts may appear more trivial than unconformity. In a later scene, April appears "stolidly pushing and hauling the old machine, wearing a man's shirt and a pair of loose, flapping slacks". She is cutting the grass in the garden, a task that he describes that he promised to do the week before. Here, the reader may realize that April does not see Frank really as her man as she wears a man's shirt and does the work that Frank once

promised to do but he does not do. This arises an understanding that April has felt despair about Frank in this task so she does herself. This arises a feeling that April starts to despair about changing the traits of Frank that she sees them as unbearable, while he sees them as normal and do not need all these conflicts between them. The feeling of despair reaches its utmost point after the last quarrel between Frank and April, as in the next day, April looks as if she is totally conformed with her life and acts as the best dutiful mother and wife, but really it is the quietness that precedes the storm and she is about to end her life by a trial of abortion.

There is a very important symbol that is mentioned in the novel, which is Frank' working on "his stone path". Frank in reality wants to " lay a long, curving walk from the front door to the road, to divert visitors from coming in through the kitchen." He wants to mend his path which consists of stone as a symbol that it is a hard path to work on. Symbolically, after all his conflicts with April, he wants to mend their relation. Yates also says, " It had seemed simple enough last weekend, when he'd started it, but now as the ground sloped off more sharply he found that flat stones wouldn't work." This symbolizes that the trial of mending their relation seemed easy in the eyes of Frank, but when he started working on it, it was very difficult to get a good result of it. It is very hard and it may not produce a good result, and even if there would be a good result, it really needs a lot of time to do so. It is exactly the way to mend his unconformity of relation with April. He tries to mend the relation but it is very hard to work on the stone. This symbolically describes the hard and tough way by which April deals with him. He also sees that mending their relation would take all the summer period as a symbol that they may lose their youth or life before they achieve this amendment. But courageously, Frank likes the hardness of the work and thinks it is " a man's work" and he does that " because he was a man". In fact, the Wheelers' feeling of unconformity is not limited to their relation only, but it extends that they feel unconformity in the suburbs in which they dwell.

The Wheelers feel unconformity in the suburbs they live in. They feel that this is not the

adequate place that fits them to live in. This feeling of non-belonging to the place is discovered by Mrs. Giving, the real estate broker, in earlier actions when they came in the first days to have a house in the "Revolutionary Hill" when she said, "they wanted something out of the ordinary". They feel that they are superior to the place, and their feeling is realized by their neighbors that some of them see April as arrogant. Their close neighbors see them as immature because they want to immigrate to Europe to start their life there.

It is obvious that the theme of unconformity in relations is the main theme in the novel Revolutionary Road. It is guessed that this feeling was a great problem in the childhood of Yates himself and he tries in this novel to reveal the sharp dimensions of this feeling that causes unhappiness of the person who suffers from it and it may lead him to a fatal destiny and cause him to lose his life as it happens with April or to lose his taste of life as it happens with Frank.

CONCLUSION:

None of Yates' characters in the novel Revolutionary Road is equal to the role he/ she has chosen for himself/ herself. Each of them seems inadequate to his real role in life. Starting the novel with an unsuccessful play may reflect Yates' point of view that people in life seem to be acting in an unsuccessful life play. Each of the characters feels unconformed in all his/ her relations. The feeling of conformity derives the feeling of happiness, and this is the feeling that none of the characters may feel in most of his/ her life. They all are unsuccessful and inadequate actors and actresses. Yates portrays the gap between the reality of each character, namely how his/ her life really is, and what he/ she wants to be.

Frank Wheeler and April Wheeler are precisely portrayed to reveal the impact of unconformity of relations on human life. Frank lives a life of no taste but he does not make great efforts to change it, but his wife April struggles to escape from these conditions of unconformity; she appears struggling with Frank with whom she feels great

unconformity in their relation. She wants to be a successful actress but she fails. She wants her husband to act in the way she wants but she even does not give him real chances to do so. Frank wants to bridge the gap between himself and his wife but he feels that it may be a very hard and tiresome work, so he gives up and this is symbolized by his trial to mend the "stone path" between their house and the road. Unconformity of relations does not bring happiness to any of them and results in the death of April and a hollow life for Frank.

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