



Comparison of Stories Narrated by Minority in Anglo Cultures Migration

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The United States of America had been known as a land of opportunity for a long time. Many people of different nationalities are coming here every year to find a better job, get education and work towards a better life. While some of them do find an American dream, others face problems of getting accustomed to the new conditions, different surrounding and host culture. Maya Angelou and Amy Tan write about similar problems in their stories. In particular, they concentrate on the problem of isolation that ethnical minorities feel in an Anglo culture. Maya Angelou opposes her heroine to the dominant culture in her *Champion of the World*. However, this heroine is accepted by the people of her own culture. That acceptance is lacking in the *Fish Cheeks* by Amy Tan, where the protagonist feels lonely and isolated from both host and home cultures. Hence, Amy Tan is using narration for depicting the feeling of being left out from the dominant culture more effectively.

In *Champion of the World*, the author tells the story from the perspective of a little black girl. This girl is talking about her life to make readers understand that she is not alone. The story describes the episode from a life of the black community in the United States, which the girl is a part of. When people get together in the store, one gets to know about the relatives of the protagonist. It appears that she has a brother, an uncle and a grandmother, who all support her. She is proud to be a member of the black community. One can notice her pride when she strongly desires a black boxer to get the victory, “We didn’t breathe. We didn’t hope. We waited” (Angelou 96). That is a chance to prove that blacks are better than whites. As the author voices girls’ thoughts, “This might be the end of the world. If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true; the accusations that we were lower types of human beings. Only a little higher than apes” (Angelou 96). Narrating about inequality, Maya Angelou highlights the separation of these

two cultures by drawing a line between the places where black people can and cannot be present. This separation reflects the discrimination of the black people in the dominant white world, and the experience of inequality.

In *Fish Cheeks*, the readers meet the representative of the Chinese culture. The protagonist lives with her parents, who also support and accept her. Nevertheless, the girl feels very isolated. She is not proud to be Chinese; on the contrary, she is ashamed of her culture. Her origin is a burden to her, as she is confident that Chinese are inferior to the white people. She even tries to imitate Americans for that reason. As a result, she feels lonely within her community. Amy Tan shows the separation further using the example of the relationship between the girl and her beloved person, “What would Robert think of our shabby Chinese Christmas? What would he think of our noisy Chinese relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food?” (Tan 1) Though this Chinese girl falls in love with a white minister’s son named Robert, she is sure that she has no chance with him, since she does not deserve him. While her parents are proud to be Chinese, she regrets of it. Her mother tells her, “... inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame” (Tan 2). Their daughter cannot accept her origin, herself and her culture.

Amy Tan uses narration and description better to illustrate a sense of isolation from the dominant culture. She is more skilled in using the setting of time and place. Though both authors describe the events of the evening time to highlight the sense of isolation, Amy Tan uses place description more effectively than Maya Angelou does. The author of *Champion of the World* shows the black community gathered at the Uncle Willie’s store (Bird 43). The store is quite small, but it does not reflect peculiarities of the African American culture. There could be many stores of a kind at that time. Though the author mentions that it was a special place for the black community, one gets no idea

about the features that distinguished that store from exactly the same places of the white people. At the same time, Amy Tan takes another approach to the setting of the place. The author does not mention any details of interior of the Chinese house; nevertheless, the guests experience the culture by noticing the traditional Chinese dishes. Amy Tan writes, “On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu... The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes... Tofu... A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life” (Tan 1). The contrast between the traditional Christmas menu in the houses of white people and the Chinese highlights the isolation and the distance between the two cultures. It shows that Chinese do not want to assimilate and adjust to the surrounding environment. The cultural differences are obvious, and are even more noticeable through the fact that two completely different cultures cannot replace each other. In both *Champion of the World* and *Fish Cheeks*, settings of the time and place create certain atmosphere. There is an anxious mood in the story by Maya Angelou, since people are intense waiting for the fight. Besides, that event is something that is hidden from the public eye (Angelou 93). That secrecy and anxiety reflect the tension between a black minority culture and a white dominant culture. Amy Tan in her story intensifies the tension even more. White guests feel the awkwardness while being at the event, as the protagonist feels it. The girl is frustrated with the way her family celebrates Christmas, “Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced” (Tan 2). However, her parents do not share that feeling. That is why the girl experiences double isolation, one from her parents and her culture, as well as from dominant culture.

These stories are both autobiographical and written based on the personal experience of each author. Though both Maya Angelou and Amy Tan write

about being a young representative of minority in an Anglo culture, Amy Tan does it better. Double isolation is much worse than isolation from a dominant culture only. *Fish Cheeks* thus becomes a story about disconnection from the native culture, but inability to connect to the dominate culture, creating complete isolation from two sides. This phenomenon increases the feeling of the author's loneliness. Luckily, this personal experience together with writing skills of Amy Tan has one positive moment. It perfectly depicts the sense of isolation from the host culture and makes it a very true-to-life story.

Works Cited

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