

True Values versus Superficial Values in “The Snob”

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## True value vs. Superficial Value in “The Snob” 2

Love is the most important emotion for human beings, making it an eternal theme for countless songs, plays, poems, and stories. It is an emotion expressing strong affection for family members, close friends and boyfriend and girlfriend. This precious feeling, however, may at times be not only weakened but also not acknowledged because of some superficial values, such as physical appearance, intelligence, family background and wealth. More specifically, some people place a much greater value on these superficial values than their love for their family. The central character, John Harcourt, in Morley Callaghan’s short story “The Snob” is a typical example. Feeling ashamed of his father’s inappropriate appearance, John is torn between his love for his father and family and his love for the world of privilege and wealth that Grace represents. However, rather than facing and resolving his inner conflict: love for father versus love for social status, John deliberately creates an external conflict with Grace by accusing her of being a snob. John’s internal conflict, his solution to his predicament, and his way of getting along with his girlfriend reveal that he is the real snob.

John’s father represents his past and all the hardship that his family faced in his childhood. As John describes the appearance of his father as “shabby” that made him look like a “workingman”, his past life of destitution is revealed. It is evident that his family had a hard time making ends meet but his parents made for it by giving John unconditional love and affection. . Perhaps that the reason behind whatever little he has achieved in his present academic life. John, however, has not accepted his past as the sight of his father fills him with resentment. It is his own complex that John projects in Grace when he calls her a “snob”. In reality, John is the one who is snobbish and pretentious. He does not only resent the appearance of his father, but he detests everyone

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falling in social class that is below the classy upper class that he wishes to be a part of. John is the one who has no respect for the hardworking people and is always careful about “what the whole world thinks of him”. John is caught between his love for his father and love for the society and what the society might think of him after seeing his family.

All of this, however, does not mean that he does not care for his family. He loves his family but that love has been overshadowed by his superficial values that have taken over his life and has turned him into a **prig**. Deep inside, John too knows that he is wrong to think that way as he is unable to forget the hurtful look that his father had on his face which he will never forget. However, his complex has gotten so severe that he is unable to open up to Grace and tell her his fear which is revealed in the discomfort that he feels even at the thought of having to introduce her to his family. He is not comfortable with the thought and never will be until and unless he accepts his family and past as it is and not as it should have been. John has long been embarrassed of his roots and this is evident when he thinks “I’ve told him a hundred times to he ought to wear his good clothes when he goes out”. This is soon revealed when John turns from a **confident man** to a **self-conscious** person in matter of seconds at the sight of his father. John’s solution to his own predicament is that instead of admitting his shortcomings, he turns the table around projects his hatred for the common man in Grace.

It can also be seen that he has not been true to Grace. The only reason he is ashamed to introduce his family to Grace is that she doesn’t yet know his real background. John has clearly not told Grace about his past because his level of anxiety wouldn’t be this high otherwise. He has developed this **fake** persona in front of Grace, his ideal

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personality, which he has adopted to blend in with the social class he has always admired. Grace represents the ideal life he dreams of living and he sees her as his only chance of living that life. This also reveals that he loves the ideal life which Grace represents more than Grace herself.

There is much incongruence between John’s ideal self and his real self. One does not develop such a strong complex over night. John’s behavior indicates that he has done all he could to portray himself as a graceful person from the upper social class that he desires to become one day while in reality he is this **artificial** and self-conscious man trying to run away from his past. However, he can only do so much to change himself as he has no control over the appearance of his family or their behavior. This internal conflict of John is also affecting his relationship with Grace which is based on pretensions. In short, John is a “snob” in denial and until and unless he comes to terms with his roots, he can never develop a real relationship with Grace.