The Boy Comes Home by A. A. Milne

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Summary

The play “The Boy Comes Home” is a light comedy. It throws light on the generation gap. The old generation thinks that the young generation is immature just like a schoolboy. It should obey the old generation. In fact, the young generation is mature and it can take the right decision.

Philip is a young man of 23. He lives with Uncle James who is his patron. He has returned after four years of war. On the very first morning, he comes for breakfast at ten. Uncle James keeps a strict discipline in the house. According to his orders, breakfast is served at eight.

Philip has row with Mrs. Higgins because of this. She threatens to leave the job if she is asked to prepare breakfast at ten. Philip handles her very cleverly.

Uncle James comes to see Philip. He wants to ask him to join his jam business; however, just before Philip’s entry into the room, he goes to sleep. In his dream, he meets with Philip. He orders him to join jam business. However, Philip wants to learn some profession. Uncle James thinks that Philip is just like a schoolboy and he cannot choose a career for himself.

To prove that he is mature, Philip relates his experience at Somme. However, Uncle James still insists on his own decision. He threatens to use the power of the purse. At this, Philip takes out a revolver and a bomb out of his pocket and frightens Uncle James to death. He agrees to do what Philip wants.

In the meanwhile, Uncle James wakes up. He is now a changed man. When Philip actually comes to talk to him, he is rather confused and repeats the same things what Philip has said in his dream. Philip at once agrees to join the jam business. Uncle James is not sure about his dream.

1. **What are the conflicts between Philip and Uncle James?**

The first conflict between Philip and Uncle James is that Philip does not like his Uncle’s authoritative attitude and his strict discipline in the house. Philip says to Uncle James, “Well, we don’t get on too well together…”

When we read the play “The Boy Comes Home” carefully, we find the authoritative attitude of Uncle James. He treats Philip as an inexperienced schoolboy. He thinks that he will decide everything for Philip. He says to Emily, “I have decided that the best thing he can do is to come into the business at once. He further says, “He’ll fall in with my wishes.”

He is ready to use his authority as a patron. Aunt Emily asks him to let Philip decide his career. However, he says, “He may, but I don’t see how he proposes to do it so long as I hold the purse strings.” This is what he has in his mind when he calls Philip. He just wants to tell Philip about his decision. Secondly, Philip wants the money left by his father to learn some profession. However, Uncle James does not want to give him the money until he is 25.  Philip does not like it and says, “Look here, Uncle James do you really think that you can treat me like a boy who’s just left school?” Uncle James tells Philip that he will use the power of purse if he does not submit to his orders. Then Philip uses the power of revolver and bomb. He frightens Uncle James to death and Uncle James is ready to do what Philip wants.

Therefore, these are the conflicts between Philip and Uncle James. (277)

1. **What is the importance of dream in the play “The Boy Comes Home”?**

The dreams sequence has great importance in the play “The Boy Comes Home” for a number of reasons. The first and the most important reason is that it looks very awkward and immoral for a nephew to aim a revolver at his uncle and to make him kneel down and beg for his life. That is why the writer has used the dream sequence to relate this awkward and immoral situation. He makes the reader believe that all this has happened in a dream and he should not take it seriously.

Secondly, we see that dream sequence ends the conflict between Philip and Uncle James. Philip does not like Uncle James’s authoritative attitude and strict discipline. He wants to live somewhere else. He wants his money and wants to learn some profession. While Uncle James does not want to give him the money until he is 25. We see that after his dream Uncle James is a new man. Now there exists no conflict between them. He is now a reasonable man. Now he understands the problems of the young generation.

Thirdly, dream sequence is a source of comedy. After the dream, Uncle James repeats the same words as Philip has spoken in his dream. In the dream sequence, Philip say, “If I’m four years behind, so is everybody else.” After the dream sequence, Uncle James speaks the same words. He says, “Well, if you’re four years behind, so is everybody else.” These kinds of sentences create comedy and the reader laughs when he reads these sentences.

Therefore, with the help of the dream sequence, the writer has related a very awkward and immoral incident. It resolves the conflict between Philip and Uncle James and provides comedy to the play. (290)

1. **How has the war affected Philip’s personality?**

The war has greatly affected Philip’s personality. The words spoken by Aunt Emily are very important and meaningful. She says to Uncle James, “Well, I think that Philip’s four years out there have made him more of a man, he doesn’t seem somehow like a boy who can be told what to do. I’m sure they have taught him something.” She further says, “You’ll find him different.”

Before going to the war, Philip was just like an inexperienced boy. Now he is like a grown up man. Before going to the war, he used to do what he was asked to do. Now he makes his own decisions and nobody can dictate him. Army has taught him something. He is different now.

Now he has learned how to handle people. He handles Mrs. Higgins so successfully that she is taken aback. She tells a lie to save her job. When she leaves, she is speechless. At the end of the Philip says that he does not know if he will be any good. At this, Uncle James says, “It’s your experience in managing and…er…handling men which I hope will be of value.”

He has also learned to use power against power. Uncle James threatens to use the power of purse, but suddenly Philip takes out a revolver and levels at him. Uncle James tells Philip that it is not good to settle arguments by force. At this, Philip tells him about war and says, “We used force to put down force. That is what I’m doing now.”

Therefore, we can conclude that war has greatly affected Philip’s personality. He is now like a grown up man. He has learned to handle people and to use force against force. (288)

1. **How does Philip prove himself a mature and responsible man?**

Philip proves himself a mature and responsible man to Aunt Emily by handling Mrs. Higgins and to Uncle James by relating the incident of Somme.

Philip handles Mrs. Higgins, the cook, so successfully that when she leaves she is speechless. Aunt Emily is very much impressed and tells Uncle James, “Well, I think that Philip’s four years out there have made him more of a man.” This shows that is quite convinced that Philip is mature and responsible.

Uncle James is not ready to give Philip the money left by his father until he is 25. He thinks that Philip is just like a schoolboy. To prove that he is mature enough Philip relates the event that took place at Somme during the war.

It happened that Philip’s company was in a trench. The German knew about them. The Germans killed the company commander. After his death, now Philip was the company commander. They had lost about half the company by that time. It was a very difficult situation and he had great responsibility on his shoulders. Lives of many soldiers depended on him. He took a very mature and responsible decision. He moved the company to the other trench. Then he went back to the C.O. and told him that he had moved.

Uncle James appreciated him and said, “I’m glad that you did well out there and I’m sure your colonel would speak kindly of you….” The words spoken by Uncle James show that Philip has proved himself mature and responsible very successfully. (255)

1. **Relate the incident of Somme in your words.**

It happened at Somme, the front, which Philip’s company was to attack next day. They were in a trench. The Germans knew about them. Therefore, they were firing at them. The company commander wanted to move from that place. He asked his C.O. about that. The C.O. ordered them to stay there and wait until the next day.

Later, the Germans killed the company commander. After his death, now Philip was the company commander. He knew something about scouting too. Therefore, he found another trench. That was better than the first trench. He sent two men one after the other to ask if he could move that trench. However, they did not come back.

They had lost about half the company by that time. Now Philip had three options. Firstly, he might stay there and wait until the next day. Secondly, he might move to that other trench against orders. Thirdly, he might go back himself and explain the situation to the C.O.

It was a very difficult situation. He had great responsibility on his shoulders at that time. Lives of many soldiers depended on him. He took a very mature and responsible decision. He moved the company to the other trench. Then he went back to the C.O. and told him that he had moved. After that, he went back to the company again. (225)

1. **Discuss the comic elements in the play “The Boy Comes Home”.**

The play “The Boy Comes Home” is a light comedy.

Firstly, we find comic element at the start of the play. Philip comes down for breakfast at 10 o’clock, whereas the breakfast is served at 8. Philip asks Marry, the parlor-maid, to bring breakfast. Marry tries to frighten him and says, “I’m sure I don’t know what Mrs. Higgins will say?” She starts repeating this sentence. This sentence creates a lot of humor.

Mrs. Higgins comes and shows her anger. However, Philip handles her so artfully that she has to tell a lie to save her job. She says, “Who said anything about going?” There is a great difference between how she comes and goes. This situation is very funny and makes us laugh.

Secondly, Uncle James tells about his sacrifices in a very funny way. He says that he has done his part for the country by giving his nephew to the country, by suffering the shortage of potatoes and by paying the excess profits tax. His claims are very funny.

Thirdly, in the dream sequence, Philip talks about choosing a career. He says, “If I’m four years behind, so is everybody else.” After the dream, Uncle James repeats the same words. He says, “Well, if you’re four years behind, so is everybody else.” This is funny.

At the end of the play, Uncle James’s condition creates a lot of comedy when he laughs with a forced heartiness. Philip says about the strict manager, “Perhaps I’d better bring my revolver….” At this Uncle James says, “Ha, ha! A good joke that! Ha, ha, ha! A good joke – but only a joke, of course.”

Therefore, the play is full of comic elements.