Polarized Personalities: Orson and Hub

In "The Christian Roommates" by John Updike (1963) there are two Harvard freshman roommates named Orson and Hub. Orson is nervous and materialistic. He believes in modern science. Hub is calm and philosophical. He thinks science is foolish. These two roommates have a challenge to live together because they have opposite personalities.

Orson seems to worry about everything. He worries about his grades. He worries about his girlfriend back home. He is bothered by the way that Hub prays. Orson has a nervous skin problem too. Updike describes Orson's face as "eczematous" (p 461) which means itchy, red skin. On the other hand, Hub does not worry about his future. He likes to study, but he does not care about his grades. Hub is calm.

Orson has a fixed plan for his life. He wants to graduate from a prestigious college, go to a top medical school, and go back to his home town. Material things like money and social position are very important to Orson. However, Hub values ideas more than money. Hub wants to think, travel, and explore new possibilities in life. He is a vegetarian and a conscientious objector. Updike describes Hub as "introspective" (p xxx) which means "inward looking". Hub is philosophical.

Orson wants to be a doctor, like his father. Orson believes that science has saved many lives. However, Hub thinks science is silly. Hub refused to fulfill his university Science Requirement. Hub says that science is "phantasmal" which means that it like a ghost or an illusion (p xxx).

Orson and Hub are polarized characters because they have many extremely opposite qualities. Orson is nervous while Hub does not worry about his future. Orson wants to be rich and respected but Hub wants to be a simple man. Orson wants to be a medical doctor and he believes science is real, however Hub thinks that science changes like a ghost. These two roommates have a very stressful relationship.