

Paul's case analysis



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The symbolism Willa Cather incorporated into the story is crucial to understanding the way Paul's character progresses from beginning to end. In the beginning of the story Paul feels anxious about the things he wants and longs for in life, while at the same time feeling distraught towards the way he was currently living. The luxurious lifestyles of musicians and hotels that they stayed symbolized his admiration for their lifestyles. This explains Paul's fancy for hotels later in the story.

As Cather states on page 205, at the end of the first paragraph " He had no desire to become an actor , any more than he had to become a musician. It wasn't about the career that he wanted, it was about the things that he to see and the atmosphere that he wanted to be in, that was the same as these individuals. Being in their presence brought Paul to life and sparked a flame of excitement and happiness into his heart and soul. Cather makes it clear that it is not the individuals that Paul is admiring, but their way of life, and every small detail of it, including the things they did, the things they saw, the places they went, the things they wore, even the food they ate, he idolized every aspect of it.

The musicians and actors were a mere symbol of all the things he desired. Along with the things Paul wanted in life, Cather also symbolized the things he didn't want and disliked about his life. Paul would be in deep delight at the sound of music and orchestras or watching a group of musicians enjoying themselves or entering a hotel, almost in a trance like state and he would snap back to reality and realize that he was from happy where he was.

The way Cather describes his household on page 202 alone, is enough to reveal Paul's deep animosity towards it. Paul can't even stand Cordelia

street, the street where his house is located, and dreads returning home each day, the thoughts of his house and the street its on upset him upon coming to his mind. Paul's father symbolizes his lack courage and self-esteem by showing how much fear and intimidation his father instills in him, that prevents him from being honest and expressing himself to his own father.

On page 202 at the end of the third paragraph Cather reveals how Paul even doubts his father's love for him, when discussing what would happen if Paul were to startle his father during the night and get shot, questioning if his father would even regret shooting him. From this it is easy for one to conclude that Paul and his father don't have a very good relationship, his mothers absence from his life being no compliment to their situation. As well as not being able to express himself to his father he was also unable to do so in school, around other kids that were his age.

His introvert like tendencies posed as a conflict between him and his teachers, giving him a dislike toward school, and hostility toward his teachers. Paul begins to become so encompassed in his own fantasies that he loses sight of reality and what is going on around him. This is evident in the way Paul seems to only exhibit and feel any type of happiness unless he is at a theater or hall listening to music, it becomes his energy source, and without it he doesn't feel himself or any reason to be happy.

Cather illustrates this on page 204 by describing his experience of listening to the orchestra at Carnegie Hall as Paul's " fairy tale", making him feel as if he was a " prisoner set free". Cather herself states that " it would be difficult to put it strongly enough how convincingly the stage entrance was for Paul.

Cather wanted it to almost seem as if Paul was completely leaving the real world he was living in and entering the world that was full of everything that made him happy and brought him to life.

She wanted the reader to know that although most saw Paul with a smile on his face, it was only genuine when he was listening to these performing arts. Cather reiterated more than once that Paul avoided, at any means, being common and exactly alike, as the children that attended Sabbath school. Cather made it seem almost as if Paul feared being like them, implying that he would go to great extents in order not to be. She also made it evident that Paul was different and in a way unable to be like anyone else, and that those around him also knew that he was different and unique, they just couldn't figure out how.

They also couldn't determine whether his uniqueness impacted him negatively or positively. Cather also made it so that Paul was unaware of his individuality and its immensity. Paul knew that he was somewhat different than everyone else but felt that this was only a result of his efforts to be so, illustrating the presence of the need for Paul to discover and find out more about himself. He displayed many naive and immature qualities that were bound to cause problems once he was out in the world on his own. Upon arriving to New York, Paul didn't change at all.

Even when he felt as if he had accomplished the things he wanted and was living the way he had always envisioned, he was still looking for something within himself that he couldn't find. He was happy and was having fun, and felt as if there was nothing else he could ask for. He felt this way but, in reality he was running away from his past, instead of settling

everything, and moving on. He could feel perfect one moment but if a thought from his past crossed his mind, those old feelings of loneliness and discontent, all resurfaced, bringing back every bad memory that upset him, to his attention.

His character grew in the sense of the goals he had set for himself in the beginning of the story, but he was still the same naive and timid person he had always been. For this reason he was never able to reach utter happiness in life, only a simulation. The most significant symbol Cather incorporated into the story was the red carnation resulting in the color red and flowers as a whole being significant pieces of the story. The red carnation symbolized Paul, his feelings, his desires, his individuality, and his independence. These qualities were also embodied in the color red itself, along with his mother.

For example, the description of the framed motto 'feed my Lambs' that had been worked into red worsted by his mother. Also, Cather describe on page 207 a red robe that Paul wears while in New York and on page 208 a red carpet that laid from the door to the street. These all symbolize good, positive things; the love for his mother although he doesn't remember her and the happiness that he found in New York from fulfilling his desires. Even at the end of the story when Paul commits suicide the carnations still symbolize him, which could explain why he covers one in snow before he does so, because he is giving up on himself.

Through the many symbols and verbal illustrations made by Willa Cather, we learn who Paul was, but we may never know who he was to himself. We will never truly know what made him decide to take his own life, we are left with the ability to make our own judgments and opinions, but also many

unanswered questions, which Cather leaves up to you. She includes the use of symbolism in the story for that very reason, in order to allow the reader to interpret the story in their own way, and with her help reveal its true meaning, which could be different than another reader's interpretation.