

Sample research paper on name

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



‘ Instructor’s Name’

What We Talk about When We Talk about Love’

‘ What We Talk about When We Talk about Love’, is a short story written by Raymond Carver in the year 1981. When this story was released, Carver was not well known in literary circles, and few would have guessed then that he would turn out to be the father of Literary Minimalism. As Monti opines, this story and the other sixteen stories in this collection, revived the realistic trend in short fiction, and their terse yet distinctive portrait of small town America, has come to be known as Carver’s trademark. (Monti, 2007) The strength of Carver’s stories are not their grand epiphany, suspense filled twists and turns in plots, or an unexpected ending. His genius lies in the way he simply presents real life characters, with all their faults, and portrays humanity in its bare form unflinchingly but not unkindly. A reader can empathize with Carver’s characters and can see himself and his life, reflected in the story. In this story Carver’s characters embark on an attempt to define love, and through this have a relook into their own relationships and life.

The story revolves around four friends, who argue about the meaning of love in a light hearted discussion over drinks. Mel McGinnis, is a cardiologist, and does most of the talking in this story, along with his wife Terri. They are entertaining the narrator (Nick) and his wife Laura in their house at Albuquerque, and while they are having gin in their coffee table, the subject somehow turns into love, with Mel conveying that real love is equal to spiritual love. He recollects the time he spent in a seminary, and conveys that those were the best years in his life. On hearing this Terri talks about

Ed, her ex boyfriend, who was so obsessed with her that he tried to kill her and later he killed himself. Mel and Terri, reveal that they spent a period whereby they were stalked by Ed and feared for their life. They both get into an argument whether Ed's love was true love or not, with Terri insisting that though his means of expressing his love was wrong, Ed truly loved her, to which Mel disagrees.

Mel after a while expresses how he is confused about the non-permanency of love, because now he loves Terri, but when he was married to his first wife, Marjorie, he loved her too whole heartedly and now he hates her with equal vigor. These contrasting emotions confuse him and he seeks explanation. While Nick and Laura, talk about their perfect love and how their marriage was going steadfast in its eighteenth month, Mel points out that both of them were married before to others and would have proclaimed the same intense love to their ex-partners. He also wonders what will happen to their so called ' eternal love', if Terri or he die in the coming days. If so happens, according to him, both of them will mourn for a while and move on and find other partners.

This cynical view shocks the others. In the end Mel describes a moving story of love, whereby two elderly couple, who suffer a terrible accident, somehow miraculously escape but with heavy bodily damage. Mel then describes how the husband who was not able to see his wife's face because of the bandages, told him that what dampened his spirit more was not that he had just touched death and come back, but the fact that he could not look into his wife's face.

“ Can you imagine? The man's heart was breaking because he couldn't turn

his goddamn head and see his goddamn wife.” (Carver, 1981)

After narrating this story, Mel observes that the gin is gone and after that the four friends settle into a compassionate silence for a while.

As Gordon Burn observes, Carver’s stories derives their power as much from what is left out as from what is put in. (Bethea, 2001) In this story too, the silence surrounding the characters’ debate is equally insightful to the readers in forming their opinion. This story is one of the most elliptical texts of Carver and omissions play an important role in conveying the theme of the story. When Terri talks about her abusive lover and Laura opines that

“ I don’t know anything about Ed, or about the situation. But who can judge anyone else’s situation?” (Carver, 1981)

As carver himself states, this story collection was the most ‘ self-conscious collection’ he has ever written. (Carver et al, 1990) His characters too reveal this self awareness and the whole story is more about introspecting one’s own self and an individual’s quest to understand love, the most noblest of the human emotions. Mel, who seems to think he understands love better than anyone else and seems very self-assured about his judgments of others, is the one who makes most of the opinions, and his is the character that forms the linchpin of the story. He is the most opinionated of the lot and Terri acts as his foil, producing counter arguments when needed to his claims. Laura is not cynical like Mel and she believes in love which is seen by her physical interactions with Nick. Hers is the sort of love which Mel questions and tries to define. Nick, the narrator, though does not talk much, his observations such as the amount of alcohol consumed, the sunlight filtering in etc, give the story its flow and the setting. His observations help

the reader to put the characters' opinion into perspective.

This laconic story though is brief covers almost all aspects of love, like violence, infatuation and devotion. And these two couples are trying to find the meaning for the most elusive concept in the world – love. As Carver opines his stories are about people trying to gauge meaning of complex situation in the world. They do not always have the answers, but their attempt at finding the answers is worth scrutiny. By validating two kinds of love, one passionate and violent one of Ed and the other subtle and romantic kind of the elderly couple, the four friends try to arrive at a definition for love, an emotion on basis of which all the relationships among them is forged.

Particularly Mel's obsession with finding a definition is evident from the fact that he has so many relations forged and broken in the name of love, that he finds a compelling need to understand this emotion. He has an ex wife whom he loved and now he hates with all his heart, so much so that he wishes her a horrible death by bees. He has two children out of that relationship and he has a wife now whom he loves. There is also Ed, the ex boyfriend of his wife who stalked her in the name of love. So his urgency to derive meaning out of these relationships, manifests itself in his drunken state, and draws the other three into the discussion too. There is no clear definition for love given in the end of the story but as Carver says,

“ I think they (characters) are trying. But trying and succeeding are two different matters. In some lives, people don't succeed at what they are trying to do. These lives are, of course, valid to write about, the lives of the people who don't succeed.” - Raymond Carver (Dota, 2003)

Works Cited

Bethea, Arthur F. *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver*. New York: Psychology, 2001. Print.

Carver, Raymond, Marshall Bruce Gentry, and William L. Stull. *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Mississippi: Univ. of Mississippi, 1990. Print.

Dota, Kristin. "Raymond Carver: Life & Works." Center for Working Class Studies. Youngstown State University. N. p., fall, 2003. Web. 30 Dec. 2013. .

Monti, Enrico. "Miglior Fabbro? On Gordon Lish's Editing of Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*." University of Bologna, Italy. N. p., spring, 2007. Web. 30 Dec. 2013. .