

An interpretation of raymond carver's "cathedral" essay sample

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Raymond Carver's " Cathedral" tells the story in first person narration, of a man that at first when confronted with the notion of his wife's blind friend Robert visiting them at their home, is hung up on the fact that he is blind and cannot really relate to that concept. The narrator's wife became acquainted with Robert prior to her first marriage, which failed due to her then husband's military career that constantly uprooted her. She had answered an ad Robert had placed in a newspaper seeking someone that would read for him. Prior to moving away Robert made a request that deeply moved her, which was to be able to touch her face with his hands so he could I assume truly " see" her. This experience she would try to tell her husband in the form of a poem, which she would often write when something significant happened to her. Over the course of the story, which focuses on the events that happen when Robert visits the couple at their home in Connecticut after the passing of his wife, we see the narrator change from a man who seems able to only look at things and pass judgment to truly being able to " see" by experiencing first hand with Robert a similar event that had so deeply impacted his wife years earlier when he touched her face.

There are three characters found in this story, but only one we learn the name of and that is the blind man Robert. The narrator seems to be a man who is very myopic and frankly quite shallow emotionally. His tone immediately is harsh, referring to his wife's dear friend initially as " this blind man" who he was bothered by because of his blindness (Carver 473). He

states openly that he does not look forward to him visiting, and that all he really knows about blind people is from movies, which is that they move slowly, are unable to laugh, and that on occasion are led by seeing-eye dogs (Carver 473). When he speaks to his wife about Robert's wife, a woman named Beulah, he makes the statement " was his wife a Negro?" (Carver 475) and wonders curiously how the whole idea of a marriage could even work between them in the first place for many reasons, and he feels sorry for Robert and took pity on Beulah for she could not be seen by her husband and what would it matter if she were to " wear green eye shadow around one eye, a straight pin in her nostril, yellow slacks, and purple shoes." (Carver 475).

The narrator is somewhat of an alcoholic as well it seems from the constant pouring of drinks over the course of the evening and his wife questioning him as to whether he was drunk when he assumed Beulah had to be a black woman (Carver 475). There are so many instances in the story where the narrator just comes off as a narrow-minded jerk, whereas his wife seems to be a genuinely good-hearted woman in contrast. The connection she made with Robert through sending audio tapes back and forth during difficult times in her first marriage, to include her failed suicide attempt and the constant moving around the country was something very important and special to her. Robert is a gracious man who genuinely impacts people with his presence. He kindly accepts the narrator's overture of smoking some weed with him for the very first time in his life (Carver 478). He seemed to not be put off by the narrator's offer and just sort of goes with the flow. Robert also is very deep

and offers the narrator these words when the matter of watching the TV program about cathedrals came up, “ Bub, it’s all right, it’s fine with me.

Whatever you want to watch is okay. I’m always learning something.

Learning never ends. It won’t hurt me to learn something tonight. I got ears”(Carver 480). In this statement it seems that he sent a message to the narrow minded narrator who has been questioning constantly the matter of Robert’s blindness both implicitly and explicitly all night. Robert finally seems to make a breakthrough to the narrator with his cool and calm personality by getting the narrator involved in a hands on drawing of the cathedral together after the narrator struggled mightily to articulate what the hell a cathedral looked like in the first place. The theme that I saw in this story is that one should tread lightly with assumptions when those assumptions are founded in ignorance. This man with eyesight, who was unable to articulate what a cathedral was from what he saw on television, had prejudged a blind man based off what he knew about that subject from what knew from movies. It really came down to a blind man showing the sighted man how to go beyond simply looking at something, to being able to actually see.

Works Cited

Carver, Raymond. “ A Worn Path.” *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. Kirszner, Laurie G., Boston: Wadsworth, 2013. 473-483. Print.