

Literature review on a comparison and contrast of cathedral and what we talk about...

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The short story cathedral revolves around two men, Robert and the narrator. The narrator's wife and Robert have not met for the past ten years but have maintained a close contact. The actual context of the story is in the narrator's house, where Robert is coming to visit after losing his wife. Robert is visiting his wife's parents when he thinks of visiting the narrator's wife. The narrator is not enthusiastic about the visit but has to contend with it anyway. The narrator gives a background of his wife, how he had met the blind man and how his wife was to marry an officer who was her childhood friend who she later married after leaving the blind man (Carver, Cathedral). It is when the blind man Robert finally arrives when the real characters of the individuals in this short story sprout out. Robert is portrayed as a patient and loving man and who cares about the feelings and the emotions of other people. The narrator on the hand is a close minded person who only lives within his thoughts. He has the physical capability of sight but is portrayed as the blind person in the story. The wife of the narrator is also portrayed as a caring and emotional person in nature.

The other short story what we talk about when we talk about love is a short story about four friends Mel, Teresa, Laura and Nick. The development of the story takes place in Mel and Terri's house. The four friends are discussing about love centering their discussion around Terri's former abusive relationship with Ed. Terri maintains that Ed abused her because he loved her so much. She tries to support her argument with the fact that Ed tried to commit suicide after Terry had left him by taking rat poison. Ed used to really beat Terri and even drag her by her heels hitting her on to house furniture. Terri maintains that this was Ed's way of showing love to her a

proposition which her current husband Mel disagrees to the totality.

According to Mel, Ed was a threat to their lives, a believe that even led Mel to buy a gun and wrote to his brother who lived in California telling him that just in case anything happened to him then the person to be asked would be Ed. The discussion spans around this topic with each character giving his or her view about love. The four later begin to discuss about the elderly couple who were hit by a drunken young driver a topic introduced by Mel (Carver, What we talk about). Basically, all they talk about while drinking is about love and relationships.

The main theme of the two stories is love. Carver tries to bring the two sides of the same coin. That is he portrays this theme in two different aspects. In the short story ' Cathedral' Carver tells the story of the blind man Robert and the Narrator's wife. The narrator's wife seems to be torn on who she really loved. She was at first married to an army officer but left the officer since she did not like the constant travelling she had to endure as her husband moved from one place to another " where one night she got to feeling lonely and cut off from people she kept losing in that moving-around life. She got the feeling she couldn't go it another step (Carver, Cathedral)." She ended up divorcing the officer after which she married the narrator. This shows that she actually did not love her former husband as such. Another scenario of love is portrayed between the narrator's wife and Robert. Despite them being only friends, one gets the feeling that the two actually loved one another, only that situation did not allow them to be together. They had been exchanging recorded messages for ten years while they were both married to different people. This theme of love in the cathedral is similar to that in

the short story ' what we talk about when we talk about love'. Terri is married to Mel, but still has not given up her emotions for Ed, despite how Ed was treating her. She firmly believes that Ed's brutal behavior was his way of showing love to her. These two scenarios are similar in that, the two women Terri and the narrator's wife are married to husbands whom they are not emotionally attached. Terri's emotional attachment to Ed is so strong that when Ed commits suicide, she convinces her husband that she should be by Ed's side as he dies. Mel though is also not emotionally attached to Terri as he keeps on talking about his ex wife and his children (Carver, What we talk about).

There is an element of divorce in the two short stories. The divorce in the two stories is brought about by love. Terri though she still loved Ed, divorces him for Mel who also had divorced Marjorie of whom they had two children with. There is an element of irony about this relationship. Mel criticizes Ed's violence yet he also harbors the thoughts of killing he ex-wife with a swarm of bees. The aspect of divorce is also evident in ' Cathedral'. The narrator's wife had divorced the army officer, who apparently was her childhood love for the narrator " Anyway, this man who'd first enjoyed her favors, this officer-to-be, he'd been her childhood sweetheart (Carver, Cathedral)." This is a very intriguing similarity in that, in ' What we talk about when we talk about love', Terri divorces Ed not because she does not love him, but because of his violent nature. On the other hand in ' Cathedral' the narrator's wife divorces her husband because she does not really love him but cites his travelling from one place to another " she didn't like it that he was a part of the military-industrial thing (Carver, Cathedral)." It would be

expected that if she really loved him, then she would have loved his trade to since she knew very well that her husband to be would join the military sooner or later.

Suicide caused by feelings of love and despair is common in the two stories. The narrator's wife in 'Cathedral' tried to commit suicide when she could no longer bear the shifting from one place to another. She however was unsuccessful in her attempt to do so. Her officer husband found her unconscious in the hot bath tub and took her to hospital. She was apparently pushed to do so by her lonely life which is evident in majority of the characters in the two stories. In 'what we talk when we talk about love' Ed tries to commit suicide two times, failing in the first attempt but succeeding in the second due to loneliness and the feelings of love to her ex-wife. The two characters it seems were both in way very emotional thus their actions. The two stories in general try to seek the answer to what really is love but none seem to come to a conclusive answer. Non verbal communication is also portrayed in the two stories to try and show what really love is but is not conclusive. In the whole, the two are a touch of literary classics whose ideas have been aptly expressed.

Works cited

Carver, Raymond. Cathedral. New York: Random House, 2009. (224)

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