

A gathering of father and son in john cheever's story the reunion

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"The Reunion" by John Cheever is an emotionally effective story. The story was short, but fit Poe's expectations for a short story well. The narrator, Charlie, begins the story by explaining that he is meeting his father, who he has not seen in three years, in New York City for lunch. He has a nervous and excited feeling about him and the father and is not sure what to expect. Because his father has not been around since his parents separation, he is formal towards Charlie at the beginning. As the story evolves, Charlie sees his father's true colors. They go from restaurant to restaurant, and his father is rude and becomes more and more intoxicated, as he drinks along the way. After multiple restaurants, Charlie finally announces he is out of time and must catch his train. His father offers to buy him a newspaper, and treats the man at the newsstand poorly as well. Charlie, disappointed with his father's actions, finally leaves, seeing his dad for the last time. The narrator's disappointment is obvious at the end of the short story.

Charlie clearly comes into the city with high hopes. When he discovers how his father truly is, he is disappointed. At first, not sure who his father is anymore, he is unsure how to react: "He was a stranger to me... he was a big, good-looking man, and I was terribly happy to see him again" (201). Even though he does not know the man well, he accepts his father regardless. As soon as his father puts his arm around him, Charlie immediately smells alcohol, the first time that the alcohol is apparent. He takes in his father's scent and does not think much about the faint smell of whiskey, believing it is part of his "mature male" (201) scent. A few times throughout the story, Charlie's father seems as if he is trying to impress him, or brag to him, which is another key point in Charlie's disappointment

towards his father. He says to his son, “ I’d like to take you up to my club, but it’s in the Sixties” (201), insinuating that he has a upscale, fancy club, and it is just too bad that it is too far for Charlie to have time. Throughout the story, he does brag about his club multiple times, leading the reader to believe he wants to impress Charlie and show off how well he is doing.

The pair first goes to an empty restaurant and sits. As soon as they are seated, Charlie’s father yells obnoxiously for a waiter. He claps his hands at the waiter. The waiter naturally is not happy with this, but Charlie’s father continues to rudely try and order food. Charlie’s father is also attempting to order in different languages, and this is seen as another attempt, like talking about his club, to impress Charlie. The waiter, exasperated, finally suggests they eat elsewhere. The two venture on, and at the next restaurant, his father is slightly less boisterous. They get served drinks, and with Charlie being underage, he is questioned by the server. “ That, is none of your Goddamned business.” (202). When the server calmly replies and says he will not serve Charlie another drink, his father pays the bill and says they will take their business someplace else. At this point, Charlie’s father is belligerently drunk and continues to disappoint his son. The two try another restaurant, and as soon as they sit, his father begins shouting yet again. When trying to order, his father slurs his words and mispronounces the order wrong, leading the server to question him. When questioned, the father is awfully rude and forces Charlie out of yet another restaurant.

While it seems that Charlie’s father just wants to enjoy a drink with his son, the theme of alcoholism is apparent. Although during this time, the three

martini-lunch was very normal for businessmen- it seems more excessive with Charlie's father. Often in society, people catch up with one another by having a drink together, which seems to connect people. However, in this story, the alcohol is disconnecting the two people. Alcohol proves to be one of the great dividers of Charlie and his father. The final restaurant they try is an Italian restaurant. In another failed attempt to impress Charlie, his father tries to order in Italian. But the waiter does not understand Italian and tells Charlie's father so. He then goes on to tell him the table he chose, and all the other tables, are reserved. When his father insists they can find somewhere else, Charlie claims that he has to catch his train.

In his last attempt to satisfy his son, he offers to buy Charlie a newspaper, but is rude to the newspaper salesman, asking for one of his "no-good, ten-cent afternoon papers" (203). Charlie finally has to part, and is crushed. He bids his goodbye, and takes off down the stairs. It is clear that Charlie's father is trying to prove something to his son. He has this new life without Charlie and his mother, and he is trying to prove that he is powerful and successful. He is showing that he believes he is better than them and is doing well in New York City. Charlie does not buy into his father's act, but is merely an observer. Charlie and his father are unable to connect.

The story is never clear on why Charlie's father is an alcoholic, but the story hints that Charlie's mother divorced him, and maybe his alcoholism was a long-term issue as well as the cause of the separation. The alcohol is one of the reasons he acted the way he did- obnoxious, mean, and downright unpleasant. Charlie struggles with his disappointment because he never truly

gets to know or understand his father during the time they are together. His father's need for alcohol or impressing Charlie is more important than getting to know his own son. At a last attempt to connect with his father, Charlie seems desperate, and with a child-like anticipation, calling his father Daddy before departing. His dad calls him sonny, but still is not connecting with him. Charlie came to the city with a small bit of hope left, and when leaving, comes to the realization that he will never be close with his father.

Comparing "The Reunion" to Poe's standards for a short story will not disappoint. It is short enough to be read in a sitting, began with a strong sentence, and kept the same mood throughout. It truly seems Cheever aimed for a unity of effect, and succeeded. Poe believed that a short story should focus mainly on one single incident, which this story did. Cheever also did a stand up job of keeping one mood flowing through the poem-disappointment. "The Reunion" is up to par as far as short stories go.

The main three things Charlie's father tends to do throughout his visit is ignore people (particularly Charlie), act rudely towards others, and focus mainly on himself. This correlates with the issue that his alcoholism is his main problem, and is the separation between himself and his son, which finally leads to Charlie's disappointment. Charlie will never truly get to experience what it is like to have a fatherly figure around, which is unfortunate. The short story portrays the issues that alcoholism cause, and although alcohol can sometimes connect people in a positive way, it can also lead to separation between people when it comes to a certain point, which eventually leads to disappointment. The Reunion displayed perfectly what it

is like to have a revolving-door parent, or a parent who is hardly ever around, which is hard, especially when one is young. By the end of the story, it seems their roles have reversed. At first, Charlie was just “ the kid,” but towards the end, his father has become the childish one, and he is quite mature. He finally decides that he will never get the relationship he desired with his father, and knows it is better to just leave. He is not bitter, but just becomes more understanding of the situation, and seems to almost pity his father. Altogether, the story, while simple, was powerful.