

Looking and seeing in raymond carvers cathedral essay sample

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Raymond Carver's short story " Cathedral" is, on the surface, a reluctant acceptance of an unusual guest into the household of a man whose bitter resentment and petty jealousy define his perception of the world and the subsequent erroneous conclusions about it. Despite the fact that unlike his guest, he is blessed with the privilege of vision, he willingly chooses not to put it to good use and instead of truly probing through the velvety surface of things, he will remain stuck in a perpetual state of psychological blindness, until his guest opens his eyes for him.

Even though the narrator's physical ability of vision is flawless, he still lacks the ability to understand the people around him, their thoughts and desires, anything that lies beneath the initially observed surface. His reactions to the life his guest leads are a shallow mask of pity and petty jealousy, not even realizing that this blind man has a better insight into the secret inner world of his own wife than himself, who has his wife with him every day, looking at her. The narrator also pities Robert and Beulah and their marriage, erroneously upholding the belief that their marriage must have been a forlorn experience lacking in love and affection. For instance, he wonders how any woman would be able to go through life married to a man who does not compliment her looks on a regular basis, simply because he believes that Robert cannot see her and thus, cannot tell her whether or not she is beautiful to him: " And then I found myself thinking what a pitiful life this woman must have led A woman who could go on day after day and never receive the smallest compliment from her beloved. A woman whose husband could never read the expression on her face" (Carver). However, what he fails to comprehend is the fact that though Robert could not see his wife

physically, this lack only enhanced the psychological bond these two experienced, and they connected on a level much deeper and more spiritual than a mere physical union of two bodies.

In the same manner, the narrator fails to comprehend not only his guest, but his own wife. While Robert is a compassionate individual who really cares about the people around him, always having the time to truly listen to them and their emotions, which makes him able to connect with people in a deeper and more significant way, the narrator is all too eager to allow himself to be subdued by petty jealousy and is more than certain in his wife's love, carefully waiting to hear her words: "And then my dear husband came into my life," which unfortunately never come (Carver). Robert and the narrator's wife spend ten years exchanging audio tapes, confiding in each other, leading to the conclusion that their relationship is a much more meaningful one than the marriage the narrator shares with his wife. In his blindness, he refuses to acknowledge the enormous role Robert has in his wife's life, especially his efforts and help offered in the direst time of need: her suicide attempt and divorce. Thus, the narrator's blindness reveals itself throughout the evening and only when the two men are left alone, does the narrator become aware of his flawed ways.

When Robert asks the narrator to describe a cathedral, the narrator realizes that he cannot do this simple task, even if his life depended on it. Then, a strange thing happens. Robert asks them to draw it together, later on even asking the narrator to do it with his eyes closed. This proves to be an enlightening experience for the narrator, an epiphany of true vision, and he manages to see the true, deeper meaning of the cathedral he has drawn. His

unwillingness to open his eyes at the end of the story also signifies his introspective examination and comprehending the world around him as he was originally meant to: “ It was like nothing else in my life up to now But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do” (Carver).

Having vision does not always mean that an individual has the ability to truly perceive things. Sometimes, a brief consumption of the world of darkness is necessary for someone to cure his psychological blindness, as was the case with the narrator. Only when he closed his eyes and let go of his initial inhibitions, was he able not only to look, but truly see.

References:

Carver, Raymond. “ Cathedral.” Web. 19 Feb. 2012. <http://www.nbu.bg/webs/amb/american/6/carver/cathedral.htm>