

The similarities between what we talk about when we talk about love and cathedral...

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Raymond Carver uses a literary style that enriches the portrayal of the themes of each short story he writes. Yet his style of work often gets criticized which demonstrates a common crucial problem; the misinterpretation of the message his theory attempts to portray to this audience (Lehman, 2006). This misinterpretation stems from Carver's minimalist writing technique that is simple yet effective in his work. He uses this technique to provide the reader with little information, along with a preview of the desperate characters tackling their unstable relationships and profound emotions. As a result, this encourages the reader to search for the meaning behind the story. Carver creates this style where a character's silence is as significant as the gaps crowded with words (Oliveira, 2017). There are major similarities that outweigh the differences between the two short stories. These similarities include both the use of isolation in the two stories and the failure of language between the stories. Although Carver's writing style demonstrates a rather interesting approach, the themes enhance his work towards his minimalist approach.

First, isolation is commonly found in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, when relationships between the characters are menaced by the use of alcohol. The couple isolates themselves from how they feel and do not allow themselves to feel the stress of their pasts. This is part of the reason why Carver introduced "gin" in the story, which is interpreted as alcohol. Having an alcohol beverage often is used as a social lubricant to allow emotions to quickly emerge and overcome their inhibition. Evidently shown they need to "feel" each other in order to confirm they are really in love. The couple also finds it difficult to express this love in words, specifically

when they reached the end of the alcohol bottle. The alcohol runs out, just as the thoughts and on-going conversation follow. At this point, everyone seems to be isolated in his or her own world. This is shown when everyone stops speaking to one another. The character Nick comments, “ I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone’s heart” (Carver, “ WWTA” 257).

This is important because this quote shows the element of irony at the end of the story. It ends by hearing the heart beating, incapable of expressing words to the people they love, yet still alive and truly in love with each other.

In addition to alcohol, smoking is used as a device that encourages isolation between the narrator and Robert, the “ blind man” in Cathedral. The narrator is the most isolated character He hides his loneliness behind a shield of drugs and alcohol. Isolation is also present when the narrator feels that his wife is not including nor bringing his name up in conversations. The narrator points out, “ I waited in vain to hear my name on my wife’s sweet lips [...] But I heard nothing of that sort more talk of Robert” (Carver, Cathedral 54). Consequently, the narrator feels no connection at the beginning towards Robert, which also creates some jealousy. The narrator becomes attached to Robert when cannabis is introduced. This is shown when he begins to appreciate the company of Robert, the narrator starts to realize how isolated he is when he points out, “ every night I smoked dope and stayed up as long as I could before I fell asleep. My wife and I hardly ever went to bed at the same time” (Carver, Cathedral 222). The narrator’s relationship with the “ blind man” grew and allowed the narrator to face his identity and his loneliness.

Isolation continuously emerges with the theme of the failure of language. In *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, the characters continuously try to define what the term love is. None of the characters are able to pin the idea down and end up failing. The use of physical intimacy is also added to replace the weak exchange of expressive language. The character Nick displays his love for Laura, his wife, rather than talking. Nick comments “ I took Laura’s hand and raised it to my lips” (Carver, “ WWTA” 246). Although the couple is still in their ‘ honeymoon phase’ (247), Nick and Laura’s nonverbal gestures show a weak performance of language throughout the story. On the other hand, Mel is the character that fails the most with communicating with others. Mel’s inability to communicate is proven when he gets irritated when he is unable to pronounce properly. Mel argues ‘ Vassals, vessels [...] what the fuck’s the difference? You knew what I meant anyway [...] So I’m not educated’ (Carver, “ WWTA” 149). Mel is also unable to communicate even when he shouts or gets frustrated proves that he’s not capable of cooperating with others. He is emotionally isolated since he is unable to connect to the sort of affection Nick and Laura share with each other.

In *Cathedral*, with the use of physical intimacy in place of words, language also fails. The narrator when asked by the blind man, what a cathedral looks like, the narrator responds, “ I reached for my glass, but it was empty. I tried to remember what I could remember” (Carver, *Cathedral* 94). This symbolizes the end of the alcohol in *Cathedral*. The narrator essentially has a hard time to remember expressing without sipping his liquor. Essentially the

narrator fails with outlining the cathedral to him verbally, instead Robert and the narrator touch hands in order to draw and describe what a cathedral looks like. The narrator would have never had such bravery with getting close with Robert if he were not intoxicated.

Carver uses similar techniques in both short stories to create his message to the audience. His effective use of minimalism is crucial for the audience to understand that there is more to the story than meets the eyes. The combined display of irony and symbolism between the stories enriches the hidden meaning even more. Although critics underestimated his work, Carver's use of minimalism is proven to still get his point through. The reader is led to understand this when comparing the two stories. The stories denote the failure of language and the idea of isolation within one's self. The mysterious power of alcohol also appears as a social lubricant within Carver's complicated characters. Furthermore intoxications menaces society and social interactions in today's era, its unfortunate people rely on a substance to encourage social interactions in our daily lives. This builds fake connections with people and destroys true identities. These themes justify Carver's astonishing literature style of minimalism and allow the approach of Carver's underlying theory to prosper within both stories.