

Initiation and maturity in john updike aandp

Life



In John Updike's short story "A&P", the main character, Sammy, is a young man working for a grocery store over the summer. When he is confronted by a trio of young women shopping the store wearing nothing but their bathing suits, Sammy is keenly interested, as any male teenager would be.

He realizes that, in a small town grocery store in the 1960s, such attire is not socially acceptable, yet his hormones dictate that he follow their every move with his eyes and contemplate the adverse reaction of others in the store.

"A&P" is a story about initiation into adulthood because by standing up for the girls against his boss's rudeness, Sammy finds his own voice for the very first time. He realizes he is entitled to his own opinion, and that rebelling against authority figures brings personal satisfaction, but it will also be difficult for him to be complacent in other jobs in the years ahead.

At nineteen, Sammy is old enough to know what society expects from him but he is also young enough to feel a sense of dissatisfaction with the dictates of his elders. As he thinks when Lengel is chastising the girls, "Policy is what the kingpins want. What the others want is juvenile delinquency" (Updike, 35).

In other words Lengel is the kingpin, in control of the policy, while Sammy is part of "the others" who merely want a glimpse of a girl's anatomy not normally revealed. It is Sammy's view that his boss's policy is without merit and he tells Lengel so. This is a defining moment in Sammy's life in that it is the first time he defends his beliefs, which are contrary to authority, by clearly stating his own opinion.

Sammy also finds some satisfaction in rebelling against his boss. He wants his statement, " I quit" (Updike, 35) to be heard by everyone in the store - his co-worker, the girls, the other patrons. In this way, he can make a rather dramatic exit and prove he is in control of his own life. The idea of being a rebel appeals to Sammy. He wants to shout his newfound maturity to the world; he wants to see everyone's reaction to this initiation into adulthood.

Sammy does two things which allow him to grow during the course of the story - he states his opinion and he acts in a rebellious manner. He has a realization regarding " how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter" (Updike, 36) and it is this which best expresses his maturity and signifies the beginning of his initiation into adulthood.

Work Cited

Updike, John. " A & P." Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. Ed. Robert DiYanni. 6th ed. Boston: Mc Graw Hill, 2007. 32-36.