

Discussion forum

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English 13 June Book Review. Irony in A&P by John Updike In the short story describing the life-changing encounter between a young boy working in a store and beautiful girls, who came shopping in bathing suits, the author makes use of irony. The type of irony that is of particular interest in the story is the irony of the situation. This type of irony dwells on the difference between the expected result and the actual result.

Irony is evident in Sammy's failed attempt to impress the girls. When the girls stop at Sammy's slot and are told off by the store's manager the boy sees the incident as his opportunity to impress the girls. Sammy decides to chivalrously 'protect' them against the unjust system of the A&P store. Being aware of the differences in their social status, since the girls are upper middle class, the only means Sammy can think of is showing his support for the girls by quitting his job. Sammy hopes to get the girls' attention and impress them: "The girls, and who'd blame them, are in a hurry to get out, so I say "I quit" to Lengel quick enough for them to hear, hoping they'll stop and watch me, their unsuspected hero" (Updike 750). However, the girls do not pay any attention to Sammy's words and the boy is left to face the consequences of his action, which are embodied in the figure of 'boring' manager Lengel: "They keep right on going, into the electric eye; the door flies open and they flicker across the lot to their car, Queenie and Plaid and Big Tall Goony-Goony (not that as raw material she was so bad), leaving me with Lengel and a kink in his eyebrow" (Updike 750). Even when Sammy takes off his apron, the symbol of his employment, he still hopes to take advantage of the situation and find the girls waiting for him outside. The boy believes that he has committed a heroic deed and the admirers would be

waiting for him around the corner. Thus, he is leaving the store to claim the prize for his courage. However, the reality is different from Sammy's expectations: " I look around for my girls, but they're gone, of course. There wasn't anybody but some young married screaming with her children" (Updike 750). The irony of the situation is accentuated because earlier in the story Sammy mocked the customers of the store calling them " women with six children and varicose veins mapping their legs and nobody, including them, could care less" (Updike 748). Yet, at the end Sammy is left in the company of similar women and their noisy children. All Sammy's hopes and dreams of joining the wonderful world of beautiful girls are shattered. At this point the reader understands the author's irony because Sammy was left precisely where he had been standing previously, but this time he had no job.

Works Cited

Updike, John " A&P." *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. Ed. Michael Meyer: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013. 746-750. Print.