

A lust for rebellion: sexual attraction and non-conformity in john updikes a and ...

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



of the English of the Concerned 6 July A Lust for Rebellion: Sexual Attraction and Non-Conformity in John Updike's A&P

Simply speaking, human civilization is nothing, but, a sequential interplay of conformity and rebellion. Conformity allows a civilization the space and time to grow and flourish, while rebellion helps a civilization shed the weight of superfluous norms, patterns and habits accumulated over a period of time. The short story A&P by John Updike lucidly delineates as to how a teenager, stimulated by the sexual vigor unleashed by a group of girls in bathing suits, turns rebellious towards the prevailing social norms, to search for an identity that is more personal and original.

Right from the very start of the narrative, Sammy, the actual narrator of the story, a checkout clerk at some A&P superstore is distinctly aware that he is not one other brick in the wall. Sammy well knows that neither is he a spent force like Stokesie, who simply aspires to climb up the corporate ladder, nor is he a loser like Lengel, who is comfortable haggling over a lot of cabbages or hiding behind the confines of his office door. Yet, even a cursory perusal of the story makes the readers see that there is some force that is making Sammy docilely stand behind the counter, irrespective of the cynicism, sarcasm and rebellion boiling within his self.

However, the advent of the three girls in the bathing suits gives way to an innate catechism in Sammy's consciousness that finally allows him to tap the wild and untamed force within himself, so as to break out into an act of abject rebellion. The girls make Sammy come in touch with his essential savageness and bestiality, which is ironically also the source of much creativity and originality. When Queenie, whom Sammy marks as the leader

of the group, approaches Sammy to pay for her purchase, Sammy inadvertently, resorts into fantasizing liberties like an urge to touch her breasts or to caress her face. In his mind Sammy resorts to a stark sexualization of that girl, referring to her breasts as “ two perfect scoops of icecream (Updike 313)”.

The sexual consciousness livened in Sammy by the boldness and naivety of those girls makes Sammy more than ever conscious of the mundane aspects of the things around him (Greiner 118). It is this very sexual consciousness that makes Sammy revolt against the paternalistic influences surrounding him, whether it be his puritanical manager, or the hopes and expectations of his parents (Greiner 118). No wonder, it will be easier for a teenager to relate with and get into Sammy’s shoes. Although, throughout the story, Sammy’s attention seems to be riveted on the sexual make of the objects of his attention, the casual defiance of the small town social standards by those girls ultimately affect Sammy into making a new beginning.

There is no denying the fact that in the short story A&P, John Updike has masterfully depicted the interplay of conformity and rebellion through the medium of an unsuspecting teenager.

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