

Analysis of paul's case

Business



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Analysis of Paul's Case " Paul's Case," by Willa Cather tells the story of a young boy who is disillusioned by his suburban lifestyle. A constant nuisance to his teacher's, Paul belittles the world around him with a sort of arrogance. He sees his life as gray and unbearably plain; he only takes comfort in the luxuries of the world as is evident when he is dressing for his job ushering at the theatre; he was " always considerably excited while he dressed". There, Paul is no longer the suburban boy from a lackluster life; there he is at ease, at home.

This work exemplifies short fiction in that the elements work well together, Paul's situation or, for the sake of the story, his case is plausible and the story bears new insight at each read. By using these elements, Cather evokes the disillusionment with sameness that any reader has undoubtedly felt. Cather uses setting irony as a dominant element in this story. The story is introduced with a meeting with Paul and his teacher's, who have a certain contempt for his arrogant nature. It becomes evident that Paul has a similar contempt for his teacher's and repeatedly belittles and condescends them. He wants everyone to see him as superior, he appears " suave" and is always smiling, but his tattered clothes and nervous habits tell a different story.

It becomes clear that his teacher's take a sort of pity on him, and instead of seeing him as the respectful man Paul sees himself, one teacher comments, " The boy is not strong, for one thing. I happen to know that he was born in Colorado, only a few months before his mother died out there of a long illness. There is something wrong about the fellow. " The irony of Paul's situation is further emphasized in his view of Cordelia Street, the street on

which his home resides. The author comments is " perfectly respectable", but Paul sees it as wretched. His only solace is in the velvet carpets and the " cracked orchestra" of the theatre, " It was very much as though these were a great reception and Paul was the host".

Here, he experiences the rich life he was meant to live, but there is further irony in that he is simply a servant. To further convey the irony of Paul's case, Cather uses symbolism in the form of flowers. Paul's connection to flowers is interesting in that flowers are not often used as symbols of luxury, a similar affixation on something such as gold, or silver, or diamonds may have been more fitting. The flowers are, however, most fitting in Paul's case in that they represent the idea that luxury is not sustainable and ultimately, Paul's fate. The extravagant and brilliant colors of flowers are symbolic of Paul's desire for luxury, his attempt to find something beautiful in the world he sees as dismal. His wardrobe and his hotel suite are not complete without the presence of flowers.

In the climax of the story, Paul commits suicide after " he took one of the blossoms carefully from his coat and scooped a little hole in the snow, where he covered it up. This mirrors Paul's days of brilliance and luxury, and his wilting away when the money ran out. He is symbolically burying himself in the snow as his life no longer possesses any brilliance because he has realized " money is everything". Though most of us experience dull monotony as some point or another, it is hard to imagine to be so taken with luxury, and so distraught at our inability to attain it that it leads to suicide. Clearly, as his teacher noted, something is not right about Paul.

It is clear that Paul is insane. He sees the world through different eyes than most of us; to him, something is either magnificently beautiful or wretchedly plain, there is no in-between. Though Paul's situation is not typical, it is extremely plausible. Cather illustrates this in her title of the story; it is not called Paul's Story or Paul's Demise, but Paul's Case. The case is clearly some sort of insanity, likely schizophrenia.

We all create fantasies in our minds, many of us dream of a life much different than our own, but Paul takes it further, he dreams until he sinks so far into his fantasy, death becomes a better option than reality. By the stark contrast of his Pittsburg suburb with the elegance of the New York hotel, one is almost drawn to the unreality of Paul's fantasy. Cather's imagery and language used in her description of Cordelia Street illustrates the painful sameness of the suburbs: It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where businessmen of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath school and learned the shorter catechism, and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were s exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived. Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing. We all have this " case", but Paul, as noticed by his father, teachers and neighbors, is " bad" one. We see this everyday in pop culture and our surroundings; many of us live in a certain unreality, so much that we cannot come to terms with reality itself.

Paul's Case, even though written in the 1930's, still resonates to a modern reader. If anything, the gap between unreality and reality has become even smaller in the last decades, with the birth of reality TV and our culture's

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fascination with material things. Upon the first read, the story is engaging but seems a rather simple account of a peculiar boy. As one contemplates and rereads the story, it is a chilling account of the empty allure of extravagance. The story comments on society's growing materialism, which we have seen manifest since the story was written almost seventy years ago. Cather's portrayal of the case of vanity and greed in society comments on the consequences of fantasy.

The story is tragic for the heroin and tragic for society, and her elegant description throughout the story, even the elegance of Paul's impact with the train, mirrors the elegance of the life Paul wanted so badly. All of the elements work beautifully together, the story is believable, plausible and very real, and the reader is able to gain new insight with each read. All of these combined create a haunting tale and an unsettlingly accurate insight into the future of materialism.