

# Raymond carver's what we talk



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## Raymond Carver's What We Talk About When We Talk About Love BY ss4530

Love is undoubtedly one of the most frequently explored subjects in the literary world. Whether the focus is a confession of love, criticism of love, tale of love, or simply a tale about what love is, such literary pieces force readers to question the true meaning and value of love. Raymond Carver accomplishes this in his short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love." As the unadorned setting and the personality of each character unfold, the reader realizes that Carver is making a rave comment on the existence of love. Carver utilizes strong contrast, imagery, and diction to ultimately suggest that love cannot be defined concretely and therefore cannot be defined in words, and because of this, it is better off unexplored. As the story opens, the reader is introduced to two couples. Nick and Laura epitomize the stereotypical "newlywed" relationship, meaning that they are still too fresh in love to realize each other's shortcomings and question their love.

Mel and Terri, on the other hand, have been together for five years, and though they still claim to love one another, a mutual underlying resentment for the other becomes evident as the story progresses. Knowing this, Nick and Laura are characterized as the young "fools in love", and therefore, their opinions of love are not realistic. Despite Nick being the narrator, he only speaks up a few times to suggest that love is absolute. With such an outspoken narrator, Carver creates a unique situation in which Nick is overpowered in the conversation.

This suggests that Nick is inexperienced with love and that his belief in his perfect loving relationship with Laura is just an illusion. Ironically enough,

Mel dominates the dialogue of the story, yet he seems to be the most confused about the definition of love. His wife, Terri, speaks about her abusive ex-husband, Ed, and Mel claims that that relationship was not built on love. Several times, Mel scoffs, " If you call that love, you can have it" (174). However, it is eventually made clear that Mel knows more of what love isn't than what love truly is. On page 178, Mel states, "...

And it ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we're talking about when we talk about love. " In short, Mel is suggesting that one of the characters understand love, and those who think they do (Nick and Laura) are temporarily disillusioned. Additionally, Carver invalidates Nick and Laura's comments on love by categorizing them as new fools in love, meaning that Nicks comment about love being absolute is far from true. The contrast of the two couples relationships suggests that there are many forms and stages of love, which further disproves its absoluteness.

In conclusion, the contrast of all four characters' views questions both the existence and the verbal definition of true love. As the story unfolds further, Mel continues to lead the group's conversation. Carver incorporates significant imagery through this drunken character. First of all, Mel speaks of his wishes to be a knight so that he could have a suit of armor, which is a form of protection. However, on page 181 Nick states, " I read somewhere that theyd fall off their horses and not be able to get up because they were too tired to stand with all that armor on them.

They got trampled by their own horses people put up to protect and separate themselves from others. The horse represents he creature in which the man

confides the most trust, which could also represent a person's romantic partner. Therefore this image means that people who build "walls" (represented by the armor) around them actually hurt themselves in the end. In other words, even the animal that is most cared for in the man's life may end up killing him, which is the ultimate act of hatred.

The horse killing the knight can also be interpreted as Carver explaining that love, whether it be between a knight and his horse or a married couple, is imperfect and does not last. This idea is suggested once more on the final pages of the story when Mel is hatefully talking about his ex-wife, Marjorie. On page 176, Mel admits, "But sometimes I have a hard time accounting for the fact that I must have loved my first wife too. But I did, I know I did." However, Mel maliciously speaks of wishing to unleash a swarm of bees on her on pages 184 and 185.

Mel's hateful attitude toward Marjorie, the woman that he once loved, further proves that love is neither absolute nor eternal, and its' beginning and end cannot be logically explained. In addition to Carver's use of contrast and imagery, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" is written strategically with simplicity in both the diction and plot. As most of the action in the story revolves around drinking and replenishing the gin, a mental image of four characters drowning their sorrows and confusion concerning love is formed (yet this is never admitted).

Nick, the narrator, limits his comments to physical movement and appearance of the characters, which at first glance suggests a skin-deep story about two couples; yet with a deeper analysis, it actually adds mood

and overall importance to the meaning of Carver's story. The setting is described at the beginning of the story very plainly. On page 170, Nick describes the scene as, " The four of us were sitting around his kitchen table drinking gin. " The simplicity found in Nick's descriptions is reflected in all aspects of the story, as the setting remains still and static throughout.

The lack of movement or excitement among the characters suggests that their love is also stagnant, or will soon be lifeless in Nick and Laura's case. The combination of the lack of movement and the continuous intake of alcohol create a melancholy and creepy mood at the conclusion of the story. By the time the gin is polished off, the upbeat conversation in the first few pages has died down to an awkward, lonely silence. On page 185, Nick says, " Eat or not eat. Or keep drinking. I could head right on out into the sunset. This line illustrates a sudden loss of motivation and want- not only for food, but also for love itself. After hearing Mel and Terri's gloomy stories about love, it seems that Nick and Laura silently realize that their destiny as a couple is doomed and that their infatuating love will not and cannot last. Mel and Terri are also immersed in this silent, drunken, and dispirited mindset, as if realizing that they are stuck in this rut of " love" that, at its core, is lacking passion.

Also, on page 185, Nick narrates, " I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone's heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark. " Carver's powerful use of diction in this closing line creates an idea for the whole story. Ironically, Nick mentions the heart of each one of them. Since the heart is

the body part most associated with love, Nick hearing the characters' hearts in the dark is a reflection of definition of love cannot be seen or understood.

The diction in this line also ends the story ironically in that the characters are more confused and hopeless about love than they were in the beginning.

With this understanding, Carver is implying that love is not absolute, and it should not be defined or analyzed. In conclusion, Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" insinuates that the individual is better off embracing love with his/her heart rather than mind, as the mind will only spoil any potential true beauty that love may offer.