

A Comparison of Cathedral by Raymond Carver and A&P by John Updike

Posted on September 12, 2018

Introduction

Cathedral, written by Raymond Carver, and John Updike's A&P are two short stories written in the 1950s, the same era of contemporary literature. Both writers were American novelists living through the 20th century, and it is evident from these two works that they observed the transformations in society very keenly. The present essay is a compare-and-contrast review of the two famous works of Raymond Carver and John Updike.

Discussion

An article, "Cathedral And A & P," published by Researchomatic in 2012, suggested that the characters' representation in both stories is reflective of the influences on individuals coming from the social, cultural, and economic changes occurring in the society underpinned by modernism and mass-mediated communication. The influences of contemporary society transitions on individuals' social lives and sexual orientation are highlighted through the characters of the stories.

Stearns and his co-researchers wrote about the lead character of A&P, "Sammy," that he is sexually inclined towards his female colleagues in the store and the shopper at the store named A&P. He thinks that people are dressed ordinarily and similarly every day, but when the three girls enter the store, he is attracted towards them as they are dressed boldly in swimsuits. He keenly observes the girls coming to the store in their swimsuits, *"It was bright green, and the seams on the bra were still sharp, and her belly was still pretty pale, so I guessed she just got it."* Watching them, Sammy makes a mistake in his work on the register; other men are also looking at them, and the whole store is distracted by them. A quite big portion of the story is comprised of the narrator's physical description of the girls. Sammy and Stoksie, his colleagues, exchange views about the bodily beauty of the girls, but suddenly, Stoksie goes back into his married social status mode (Stearns et al.).

Saldivar and Tony, in their work "The Art of John Updike's 'A&P'" in 1997, analyzed the characters of the girls that they are confident and think themselves decent enough, and Sammy is amused by this. They are characters different from the crowd in society and portray the influence of modernism on the personal lifestyle of women of the 1950s and 1960s. They refuse the conventional way of living and moving in the community by shopping in swimsuits, contrasting the "house slaves in pin curlers." Sammy, however, is impressed by their boldness and highly likes it. Queenie, out of the three girls, is a beauty with brains character of the story, portrayed as innocent carrying precocity. She frequently

visits the grocery store, enjoys people staring at her, and feels her self-esteem is high in her sexual orientation. She walks around the store in a proud way as she thinks she is elegant and sexually attractive in grasping the attention of the men in town. She has a high opinion of herself (Saldivar & Tony, 1997)

Blodgett and Harriet, in 2003, analyzed the character of Sammy, who was portrayed as lusty for the girls' bodies and judgmental towards the social and personal lives they were living. He likes their way of doing things so much that when Queenie walks to the counter with a jar of "Kingfish Fancy Herring Snacks in Pure Sour Cream," Sammy finds it a choice different from the choices of other people. He also thinks it quite cute when the girl pulls out money from her top to pay at the counter and falls the jar, which gets heavier in his hands. Sexually hungry Sammy in A&P goes in search of sexually explicit people and resigns from the store. He does not want a common grocery man whole his life, to him men working at the store are not living a happy life as he perceives about his male coworkers. He quits the store not only because he wants to explore the charms of the modern world more but also because he dislikes his boss's way of judging people coming to the store by stereotypes. He just finds it bad to treat people differently in terms of their outlooks. This shows the change in people's perceptions of other people and their lifestyles coming through the modernism of that era (Blodgett and Harriet.)

Brown, in his work on "The Cathedral" in 1990, looked at the plots and scenes of the story in a house where there is a husband and wife living, and the wife's boyfriend in the past visits. At the same time, A&P is plotted mainly in a grocery store with a static character of a manager, three girls, and Sammy (Brown, 1990). The researcher says that a certain wave of tension flows through the story in Raymond's Cathedral, threatening the characters' bankruptcy. A girl tries drawing the old Cathedral with her ex-boyfriend, who is visually impaired, visiting her in her house. Her husband is not very happy internally to have the visitor in the house; he has such a stereotypical perception about blind people that when Robert (the blind man) smokes and fixes drinks, he gets surprised. However, he gets acquainted with Robert, which is also surprising to him (Brown).

Nesset and Kirk, in 1995, studied the scenes of acquaintance between the husband and Robert in "The Cathedral analytically." They said that after the wife sleeps in the "Cathedral," the husband and Robert switch the channels on the Television, and one single decent program they could find was something about the church and the Middle Ages. The program shows a Cathedral, and the husband typically thinks that Robert, being blind, will not have an idea what it looks like and tries to describe it for him. Robert asks about the paintings of the Cathedral, and the husband can hardly describe them effectively. Robert comes up with an idea and asks his husband to bring a pen and paper and draw a cathedral with him. Not very interested the husband brings the things and start trying drawing with Robert's hand close over his own. He started drawing a *"box that looked like a house"* and *"it could have been the house he lives in."* He continued drawing. Slowly, he gets interested in the drawing, adding things up to it, "I couldn't stop even as the TV show goes off-air." Robert tells him to draw with his eyes closed, and he does so and experiences it as a great thing to do "like nothing else in his life up to now." After Robert tells him to stop, as he thinks it's done, the husband does not open his eyes

and has a certain feeling about keeping them closed. When Robert asks how it was, the narrator replies, "It's something" (Nesset and Kirk).

Facknitz and Mark talked about the central novelty of Cathedral that it is ironic that the character of the husband disdains the visual impairment but later realizes that there is something more than being a just physical thing. The husband is socially disconnected and spends much of his time at home watching Television programs. His views of the world are largely based on what he sees in media, especially television and movies. In the short story "Cathedral," the hero is a hitched man who experiences issues making associations with individuals and even his better half, and he appears to have issues perhaps somewhat desirous of the association his significant other can make with other individuals (Facknitz and Mark)

Maimon and his co-researchers did a comparative analysis of "A&P" and "The Cathedral" They analysed that in both, the stories protagonists go through an experience that makes them change their way of thinking about the world. In Updike's A7P, Sammy experiences such epiphany when he decides to resign from the job at the store, and Raymond Carver's narrator in Cathedral shows how the husband experiences an epiphany of drawing with closed eyes and feels it amazing about the things beyond physical existence. Sammy comes to dislike the stereotypical view of his boss towards the dressing of people, and the husband has compelling notions of changing his stereotypical perception about handicapped people. The number of characters involved in the two stories is different, and both are told in different settings. The two stories don't express a similar generalization esteems, the spouse in "Cathedral" is being generalization against the blinds, and he appears to have his mind made about how all visually impaired individuals are, so in the short story "Cathedral" the blinds speak to the generalization (Maimon et al.).

Kellner and Bruce in 2014 overviewed "A&P". They are of the view that in "A&P," for Sammy, it is the young ladies. The impetus change in the two stories is unforeseen, and it is an unsettling influence on the character's ordinary schedule. At the point when the young ladies in swimming outfits entered the store, Sammy was extremely amazed at the young ladies' thoughtless dress code or conduct: "You know, it's one thing to have a young lady in a swimsuit down on the shoreline . . . in any case, something else in the cool of the A&P" (John Updike 14). Sammy, at that point, depicts the standard benefactors of the A&P as "ladies with six kids and varicose veins mapping their legs" (John Updike 14). Sammy has turned out to be somewhat used to the same "regular," not too bad, business-dressed benefactors who enter the store. This attracts the parallel to the spouse in "Cathedral," which is additionally detracted from his day-to-day routine when Robert, the visually impaired man, comes to visit. He makes a big deal about the out-of-towner coming since he is just comfortable with satisfying himself, and the way that Robert is visually impaired will, in all probability, entangle his regular day-to-day existence.

In the story "A&P," Sammy is promptly fascinated by the three females who enter the market. His advantage is perhaps incited by the normal inclination of being a young teen and there being three young ladies wearing swimsuits. Once the three young ladies advance through the supermarket,

Sammy instantly starts making his judgment of their character, given the way they walk and the way they look. Sammy, while watching the three young ladies, names the center young lady "Queenie," just given her appearance and the way she strolls. He depicts Queenie condescendingly, "*She didn't glance around, not this ruler and she just strolled straight on gradually, on these long white diva legs. She descended somewhat harder on her foot rear areas...*" (Updike 259) After viewing the young ladies stroll through the supermarket to discover their thing he affronts their insight without having addressed them, "... *do you truly believe it's a brain in there or only a little buzz*"... (Kellner and Bruce).

Conclusion

Both short stories are written in the same era, an early contemporary era, and both have characters depicting the stereotypes and prejudice of society. However, both have shown the transformation of characters into the new age. A&P is a coming-of-age story in which Sammy, as a teenager, turns into an adult and highly depicts changed perceptions of modern society in the 1950s and 1960s. The husband in the Cathedral is a static character, and the manager at a grocery store in A&P also appears to be a static character to the readers as nothing is much special about him, but he is there in the story throughout the events. The character of the husband in Cathedral is a person who socially does not connect much with the people. In a comparative overview, John Updike's A&P and Raymond Carver's Cathedral are different in terms of the atmosphere of plotting in the narration and the number of characters involved. A cathedral is a household story within the four walls of a house with a family environment, whereas A&P is about the interactions of people in a grocery store in a commercial environment. Both the stories have seen the transformation dimensions of individuals caused by contemporary society and mass media.

References

Cathedral And A & P'. Researchomatic. 2, 2012. 2, 2012

<<https://www.researchomatic.com/Cathedral-And-A-And-P-113619.html> >.

Stearns, Jennie, Jennifer A. Sandlin, and Jake Burdick. "Resistance on Aisle Three?: Exploring the Big Curriculum of Consumption and the (I'm) Possibility of Resistance in John Updike's "A&P." Curriculum Inquiry 41.3 (2011): 394-415.

Saldivar, Toni. "The art of John Updike's" A&P." Studies in Short Fiction 34.2 (1997): 215.d starts working again.

Brown, Arthur A. "Raymond Carver and postmodern humanism." Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction 31.2 (1990): 125-136.

Facknitz, Mark AR. "The Calm," A Small, Good Thing," and" Cathedral": Raymond Carver and the Rediscovery of Human Worth." *Studies in Short Fiction* 23.3 (1986): 287.

Maimon, B., P. Elaine, and Janice H. Peritz. "Instructor: April Elam-Dierks Course: English 112 Home Phone:(731) 632-5327 Time: M 6: 00-8: 45 pm E-mail: adierks@ utm. edu Office Hours: MW 8: 30-9: 00 am Office: Room 216 W 10: 30 am-12: 00 pm." (2013).

Hendrickson, Joel William. <https://www.lonestar.edu/13775.htm>. n.d. Document. 16 March 2014.

Kellner, Bruce. "A&P: Overview." *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*. Ed. Noelle Watson. Detroit: St. James Press, 1994. Literature Resource Center. Web. 30 Mar. 2014

Blodgett, Harriet. "Updike's A&P." *The Explicator* 61.4 (2003): 236-237.