Death Of A Traveling Salesman Essay, Research Paper

Death Of A Traveling Salesman

In the short story, Death Of A Traveling Salesman, R. J. Bowman is a successful salesman with the intention to get home after being sick and in the hospital. He faces many obstacles along the way. Even though R. J. Bowman knows that there is something missing in his life he has no desire to try and bring it into his life. He realizes he is only a salesman and that is all he will ever be. There are symbols in the story that show a shadow over Bowman s life. Darkness is the most significant that occurs throughout the story, and light is also a significant part of the story. Mr. Bowman likes to cover up his true feelings by ignoring them or literally covering them up. Through the symbolism of darkness and light, Eudora Welty shows the reality of the loveless void in R. J. Bowman s life.

From the beginning of the story the darkness of Bowman s situation reflects the emptiness of his past and the bleakness of his future. Bowman is a salesman who is just getting out of the hospital recovering from an illness. An illness that is causes him to forget the way to Beulah. Driving down the road Bowman stuck his head out of the dusty car to stare up the road (204), this is the first sign of dark symbolism. There is a dusty residue on his car and he is trying to see out of his window, the window of life. There is something in his life that is cloudy, or there is something missing in his life. He is standing at the beginning of his life looking down a dirt path that only has one route, which is striving to be the best salesman he can be, and nothing more.

Bowman s life has two parts to it, half of his life is happy and the other half is full of darkness and sadness. After his car goes into the ditch he goes to a house and knocks on the door. An old woman opens the door holding a lamp and he notices that the lamp she holds is half blackened, half clear… (208). The lamp is a symbol that there is a part of his life that is voided out and not thought about often, or not at all. He is a one-minded person; he has his mind on being a great businessman and selling shoes. The half clean part of the lamp resembles one half of his life; the half of his life that is bright and headed on the right path, for example, him being a successful salesman is the clean part of the lamp. It is his lighted part of his life because he is successful. The blackened part of his life is the empty part of his life, which could in turn be the lack of being loved or the ability to love someone or something else besides selling shoes.

He goes into the house and sits while the woman tells him that her husband, Sonny, will be home to get his car out. While walking in the house the darkness of the house touched him… (210), meaning that the darkness of the house had a presence of emptiness, which was a resemblance of his life. He had no idea why the house touched him, he could only wonder. The woman set the half cleaned lamp on a table in the center of the room (210), which resembles his life that revolves around this dark cloud over his life, where something is missing, something that he has never experienced before. The clean part of the lamp resembles the happy part of his life, like his shoe selling business and being a successful salesman. Being a great and accomplished salesman was an essential part of his life. With the lamp not being lit the sickness has taken over his life for a period of time and he is not able to be happy because there is still that darkness and now a new darkness that is keeping him from selling shoes.

As he is sitting in the house Bowman realizes how lonely he is, and he thinks about how his heart is empty and has no love. He wants to be loved and he wants someone to come into his life and love him, and he wants to love him or her back. He goes to the window with the woman and sees a white speck floated smoothly toward her finger, like a leaf on a river, growing whiter in the dark (216). This is the first symbol of light used in the story. Bowman is finally realizing how lonely he is, by looking at the speck of light outside he is basically seeing the light he is opening his mind to a whole new world of love which is something he has never felt before. The light represents the love that he has been longing for but has been hiding from. Soon after the woman lit the lamp it showed its dark and light (218). With the woman lighting the lamp he realizes the effect of the dark cloud over his life. He knows he has never felt love before and he doesn t know if he can ever love. There is still that void of emptiness in his heart, that may never be filled.

Bowman starts to feel unwanted in the house, because he finds out that Sonny and the woman are married and are going to have a child. As he is walking out to his car, he started to feel terribly sick. He covered his heart with both hands to keep anyone from hearing the noise it made. But nobody heard it (222). He covered his heart so no one could hear the sound of an aching heart. It was the sound of a heart that was empty of no love and would never be loved, and one that would never give love unless it was for business. He covered his heart as he has done all his life, he has covered up the darkness so no one else could see it, and so no one could try and help him. He did not want to be loved he wanted to be a salesman and a salesman only.

Welty uses symbolism such as darkness and light to show R. J. Bowman s struggles of loneliness that he notices while he is sick and lost. He finds that he is a salesman that can never love nor be loved. By covering his heart in the end of the story the reader discovers that he will never be loved, and he dies an unloved salesman. He dies with half of his life in darkness and the other half lighted. He dies a half happy, half sad salesman.

Work Cited

Welty, E. Death Of A Traveling Salesman. Selected Short Stories of Eudora Welty. Ed. Katherine Anne Porter. Random House, Inc ed, 1992. 204-222.