Cathedral Essay, Research Paper

Raymond Carver’s Cathedral

The Husband?s Enlightenment

Raymond Carver?s "Cathedral" is narrated from the point of view of a hostile and ignorant husband, whose wife has invited a blind friend to spend the night. The narrator is, through his forthcoming descriptions of his wife and the blind man, viewed as extremely bitter. However, as the story progresses, the narrator?s tone and demeanor change from caustic to warm and enlightened.

The story opens as the narrator explains that "the blind man" is on his way from Connecticut, where "he was visiting the dead wife?s relatives," and that the narrator?s wife has invited the blind man to spend the night. The narrator goes on to explain how his wife?s relationship started, beginning "that summer in Seattle she [when] she had needed a job." The husband seems suspicious of their relationship, and his tone is jealous and demeaning. He describes the blind man?s situation with short, terse sentences; "He didn?t have any money, either. But she was in love with the guy, and he was in love with her, etc." He almost seems to balk at their relationship as his use of "etc." depicts. However, the narrator?s ignorance and his perception of the blind man?s life is obvious. Because the narrator cannot understand life without vision, he assumes that the blind man cannot either, and that anyone that is affected by blindness is unsatisfied.

Shortly after the narrator sets the initial tone, he cites an example that plays an important role in the rest of the story. He talks about how, "on her last day in the office," the blind man "asked if he could touch her face." As he continues his description of how the blind man touched her, he speaks about "her face, her nose" and how he "even [touched] her neck!" The way the blind man touched her neck suggests that it was sexual and intimate. It is not the physical contact, rather the husband?s focus on the alleged sexual implications of it. He views this incident as being suggestive, however the wife, who is not disturbed, writes a poem about it. The husband comments, "She even tried to write a poem about it. She was always trying to write a poem," and further explains that "[he] didn?t think much of the poem." The contrasting views of this incident are very important in the story. The husband, an unenlightened, sexually focused and superficial man, cannot understand the blind man or his connection with his wife. The beauty and the meaning of the relationship however, impress the wife.

These two opposing views of the wife?s relationship with the blind man play an important role in the story. They help to justify, how the husband and the wife act toward the blind man upon his arrival. When the blind man first arrives, the husband goes to the window and watches his wife and the blind man get out of the car. When they come in through the door, the husband hides his true feelings about the blind man and greets him cordially, although he probably wishes he were never there. From this point on, the husband?s actions toward the blind man and his thoughts illustrate that he does not feel comfortable with the blind man in his home.

The wife and the blind man share a bond that the husband cannot relate to, and form a clique that the husband is not welcome into. They reminisce about old times and talk to each other in a caring way that the husband does not understand. However, the time eventually comes when the wife departs from the scene and the husband and the blind man are left alone. At first, the situation is awkward, as both the blind man and the husband do nothing but listen to the sports roundup. However, after being around the blind man a little longer, and after smoking some "dope," the husband seems to warm up to the blind man. The husband offers to get the blind man some strawberry pie and they watch more TV together. As the program begins, the husband explains to the blind man what he is watching. This act seems awkward, as before he was averse to the thought of a relationship with a blind man, and now he is helping him understand what he is watching. When a cathedral appears on the TV the husband anxiously asks if the blind man knows what a cathedral is. When the blind man responds that he knows not much of them, the husband tries to explain, but to no avail.

The discussion about the cathedral continues, and upon failing to verbally explain a cathedral to the blind man, the blind man suggests that he draw the cathedral for him. It is at this point where we see Robert, the once bitter and ignorant husband, warming up to the blind man. Their conversation now is friendlier than it was before. As they begin to draw the cathedral, the diction and tone of the narrator changes. For the first time, we see Robert and the blind man together like we had previously seen Robert and the wife. When the wife asks what they are doing, with surprise, Robert responds, "we?re drawing. Me and him are working on it." Throughout this scene, the husband becomes more and more comfortable with Robert and does what he says. When Robert suggests that he press harder, the husband does so, but more importantly, when Robert tells him to close his eyes, he does so. This is very important as the husband, without knowing so, is experiencing what being blind is like. Once the husband closes his eyes and continues, he explains that "it was like nothing else in [his] life up to now."

The importance of the cathedral incident is twofold: for one, the husband has finally become comfortable with the blind man, but more importantly, he has allowed himself to experience something that he previously did not previously understand. Before, the husband was ignorant in a sense, unable to see the meaning of a relationship with a man who couldn?t see. To him, it was pointless, and the barrier to the truth for him is built on his ignorance toward the matter. His ignorance at the beginning of the story put him on the outside of the situation: he is not part of the relationship between Robert and his wife?s life because he cannot be. However, later when the wife is not as active in the story, and Robert and the husband begin to draw, the husband become enlightened. His is finally able to understand what his wife was feeling and finally able to open up to a new set of ideas that before were unable to flow through his mind.