Cathedral by Raymond Carver

Introduction

Raymond Carver is identified as one of the famous minimalism writers in the school of fiction. The minimalist writer are characterized by their use of simple language and attention on accurate statements without providing details in their plot development. This leaves the readers of such literature to make their own interpretation of what the story is driving at. Cathedral is a story that depicts the narrator and his wife having differences and this leaves the audience guessing whether the couple will divorce. Carver unveils several themes and motifs in his piece of literature. The motif of vision is central to the theme of Cathedral among other themes such as the distinction between seeing and looking and the motif of drinking.

The narrator gives much emphasis on the motif of vision in the themes of the story. One of the themes where this motif is central is the theme of seeing and looking distinctions. The narrator relates the act of looking to physical vision, but he points out that the act of seeing needs a profound level of engagement. The narrator through his interaction with Robert and his wife tries to prove that he has both the ability of seeing and looking(Carver 122). Robert is a blind man and the narrator assumes that without physical vision Robert cannot be able to give a woman happiness.He believes in the looking and does not give effort to understand the vision beyond what the eyes can see. This belief is what makes the narrator less aware of the feelings of her wife beyond his physical vision. On the other hand, Robert is able to see beyond physical visionyet he is blind. He is not able to see the storyteller’s wife physically, but he deeply understands her more than her husband because he pays attention to her. The narrator’s wife finds solace in Robert who is able to listen to her inner emotions. She shares a lot with him and they communicate through audiotapes. The husband does not have a good relationship with his wife due to his insensitiveness to the inner vision. At this point, the story aims at making the audience to clearly distinguish between seeing and looking and the motif of vision is central

The vision motif is also demonstrated in the theme called the art of insight. Robert, the narrator, and his wife define insight according to their own experiences through storytelling, drawing, and poetry. The narrator’s wife gains more insight of life events through the poems she writes.Over the years, she put all kinds of stuff on tapes and sent the tapes off lickety-split. Next to writing a poem every year, I think it was her chief means of recreation(Carver 125). Her husbanddoes not like these poems, though he accepts that he may not comprehend them. On his side, the narrator gets vision of issues through drawing. He makes a drawing of a Cathedral and Robert which makes him realize the importance of inner vision for the first time. Even though Robert is blind, he is able to find meaning and internal insight from the narrator’s drawing.

The narrator and Robert have diverse views about themselves and the world. They clearly see themselves and the world through their life experiences such as storytelling and drawing. Even though the narrator has physical visual, he seems at first to be blind than Robert who lacks it. His view of the world is based only on the ability to see the physical. The narrator is not having a deeper insight of issues beyond the physical vision. He can see people but he has a problem of understanding the inner feelings and thoughts of people. He also sympathizes with Robert because he cannot see the Beulah before she died. He fails to understand that Robert could relate with Beulah emotionally beyond the physical vision. However, the narrator gets a clear vision of himself when he makes a drawing of Robert and the Cathedral. He realizes that there is more meaning to issues beyond what the eyes can see. The picture gives him an inward understanding of himself and finds knowledge in seeing beyond the physical look. On the other hand, Robert is a visionary man beyond his inability to physically see. He listens and gets deeper meaning to issues which gives him an insight of the world. The drawing by narrator also gives Robert a clear vision of the world and himself. He is a blind person and he cannot see the picture, but he acknowledges the narrator’s development in terms of how he looks at things. The narrator reveals his discovery and the new look at things by retelling the story of his conduct(Carver 131).

Carver demonstrates the rewards of clearly seeing when the cathedral is drawn. The narrator is able to understand the meaning of seeing beyond what the naked eyes sees on the surface. One the rewards is that seeing the inside gives one an in-depth understanding of issues. At first the narrator’s world is not complicated because he believed only in what his eyes could see. He says, I stared hard at the shot of the cathedral on the TV. How could I even begin to describe it? But say my life depended on it(Carver 127).However, this changes when he takes a pen and paper to draw the cathedral. While drawing it, he realizes there is more to what his eyes could see and he even draws while his eyes are closed. Carve illustrates this revelation as a reward for taking a deep analysis of issues.

References

Carver, Raymond. Writing Fiction: The Practical Guide from New York's Acclaimed Creative Writing School (Cathedral). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.