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Comparison of Short Stories by Carver and Hemingway

Short stories have a unique way of conveying concise but compelling messages to readers. An analysis of four short stories by Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway portrays the characteristics of these literal texts. They explore five features of short stories, namely simple settings, minimalism, abrupt ending, few characters, and a brief period in plotting. Firstly, Raymond Carver describes the story of a visit to a young couple by a blind widower in *The Cathedral* and the quest for closure by a couple who lose their child in a road accident in *A Small Good Thing*. Secondly, Ernest Hemingway undertones the demise of a man through the work of his spouse, as illustrated in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. Hemingway also displays the regrets of a dying man in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. Apart from their interpretive display of characteristics of short stories, the texts explore the themes of marriage, alienation, and death in various ways. Hemingway writes about couples that separate after the death of the spouse after drifting apart in marriage. Carver shows a couple who grew together in life and strived to work through disagreements. Strangely enough, these themes play a role in exploring and exemplifying the unique structure of a short story. As a result, the assessment of the four stories asserts that various themes and general structures of narratives aid in depicting the short story form.

All the short stories seem to have a simple setting as per the structure of the narration. The simplicity of the setting is among the many primary characteristics of a short story. The

Cathedral by Carver describes the story of a visit to a young married couple by a blind widower; the background of the story takes place in an urban home in the 1980s (Carver, *Cathedral* 1). The characters have a dinner and share a conversation afterwards. The movements and other elements revolve around the confines of the house. *A Small Good Thing* by Carver also has a simple setting of a home, hospital, and bakery. For example, Scotty is seen around his family walking to school, “On Monday morning, the birthday was walking to school with another boy” (Carver, *A Small, Good Thing* 6). These three areas present a sequence of events in the story. The second plot develops within these three areas until its conclusion. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* Ernest Hemingway describes the experience of a young couple in Africa. The introductory page describes the setting as, “Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa” (Hemingway, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* 1). The setting is that of the wilderness with the man grieving over his poor physical and psychological health. Similarly, *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* by Hemingway has a similar wilderness setting and a young couple hunting and enjoying their wealth. The woman appears to be in a problematic marriage as she feels that her husband is weak. Wilson describes the woman as “a woman who discovers her husband is a bloody coward” (E. Hemingway 4-5). All these settings are not complicated, and readers can see that the story is brief and understandable.

The two authors describe their plot in a minimalistic manner. Carver describes the characters in the *Cathedral* in such a way that he only offers relevant information to the plot. He describes the visitor as an old friend of the wife and provides a conflict by showing how the husband is uncomfortable with the visit (Carver, *Cathedral* 1). These few details set the stage of whether the evening will be pleasant or not. When it comes to *A Small Good Thing*, Carver gives the details of the couple and small detail about the phone call from the bakery. They describe

Ann like this, “She was a mother and thirty-three years old...” (Carver, *A Small, Good Thing* 5). Everything else about the characters is left for the readers to imagine. The plot progresses with considerable suspension because the readers keep guessing and wondering if the boy survives or the couple hurt the baker. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* depicts a small portion of the background of the couple, then the rest of the plot focuses on how the man is miserable. Readers receive inadequate information and keep wondering why the man remains married or why he needs to go to a safari to enjoy his life. Moreover, they start to wonder how the character wounded his leg. Lastly, the *Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* provides little information on the lives of the American couple and their guide (E. Hemingway 1). These readers need to analyze the plot to understand the behavior and perhaps speculate on past history. All these four texts provide share a common feature of minimalism. The author gives the bare minimum data and allows open ground for meditation on facts.

Another hallmark indicator of a short story is an abrupt ending; all the four stories possess this ending. The *Cathedral* has an odd end where the husband refuses to open his eyes after the drawing of the cathedral is finished; nothing important comes after this, and the readers start to second guess what it all means. The narrator states, “But I had my eyes closed. I’d keep them that wat for a little longer” (Carver, *Cathedral* 13). *A Small Good Thing* follows suit with a strange ending of how the two grieving couples continue chatting with the baker until morning without wanting to leave (Carver, *A Small, Good Thing* 29). The suspense is evident, and the readers hit a sudden wall of thought and an incomplete ending. For *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, the end takes a metaphorical turn with the wife finding the lifeless body without giving the direct words; the narrator states, “There was no answer, and she could not hear him breathing” (Hemingway, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* 15). Moreover, the stream of thoughts from Harry

shows that he lands at the top of the Kilimanjaro in his vision. The plot ends suddenly and without the necessary preparation needed for the readers. *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* provides the sudden death of Macomber as an ending (E. Hemingway 18); the critical question is whether the wife killed him intentionally. All these endings from the readings are less satisfying and quick; short stories seem to have a conclusion that is unexpected and leaves many still curious.

Additionally, the four stories have few characters and operate in a brief period. The characters in the *Cathedral* are primarily three, the narrator, his wife, and the blind visitor. All other mentioned characters play no severe role in the plot. The moves are linear as the evening comes, and the two men start to converse (Carver, Cathedral 11). It also takes less than 24 hours to depict all the scenarios. *A Small Good Thing* captures the lives of three main characters, the two parents and the baker, with few instances of the doctor and the Black family who lost their son in the hospital. The characterization is direct and only focuses on the death of the boy and the grief of the parents. It explores events which took place during three days from the time of the accident to the late-night conversation with the baker. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* also has a small characterization with the tourist couple and their servant interact (Hemingway, The Snows of Kilimanjaro 15). The plot focuses on the man and woman, and their conversation most of the time. The whole story describes the thoughts and events of the last days of the man. *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* illustrates the lives of three people, Francis, his wife, and their guide assistant. The whole plot covers the events of two days to the point where Francis and the wife struggle to explain that the murder was accidental. All these narratives provide a great example of how the short story form uses a few personalities and describes short periods.

The structure takes on a simple three-part form of introduction, confrontation, and resolution. All these stories provide a small introduction of characters, which is insufficient and goes on to avail of the confrontation. The short stories by Carver describe a couple who stick together and support each other irrespective of the challenge ahead. For example, we have one couple which welcomes a visitor, and the estranged husband ends up bonding with the visitor (Carver, Cathedral 4). The second story depicts a couple that loses a son and gains a friend from experience. All these stories showcase a confrontation right before a solution develops. The Hemingway stories depict couples who fail to connect, and the man loses his life in the end. The wife is left alone and in utter shock. The first story shows the wife arguing, and the husband feels estranged before succumbing to a wound on his leg. The second Hemingway story shows the wife killing the husband during a hunting expedition. These stories present a conflict that leads to either a happy or sad ending. Interestingly enough, it depicts the short story form by the quick sequence of events within minimum diversion from the single plot.

The texts center on marriage and relationships, as noted from the description of the narratives. The theme of relationships is evident in all four stories. All the connections seem to struggle with a situation that directly involves their association. The readers see parents struggling to treat a boy who was in an accident, another couple trying to accommodate a longtime friend who is also a widower, and the other couples are in a safari but are not enjoying themselves. Everything seems to revolve around marriage and conflicts. Hemingway presents couples who end up in a tragedy when one of them dies while Carver shows couples willing to work out their differences. Hemingway talks about how Francis dies after a fateful shot from Margot and Harry succumbs to his wounds during the safari when the emergency planes fail to come on time. Carver portrays the life of Ann and Howard, who goes to confront a baker out of

frustration and ends up moaning with him. The other Carver's story is that of a man who welcomes Robert, a long-time friend to his wife, and they bound together as the wife intended. All these scenarios focus on the challenges facing relationships and, most notably, those in a marital union. The analysis provides of this story both positive and negative circumstances found in marriages.

Carver and Hemingway showcase the theme of death in all the short stories as a conflict in the plot or part of the conclusion. Hemingway's stories end at a point of demise for one of the main characters; it also serves the purpose of an unforeseen and quick completion. In *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, Harry dies with the realization that he wasted his life in sloth, married someone he did not love, and will die in the wilderness. Every memory that runs through Harry is that of deterioration and sadness at the turn of events. Francis, from *the Short Happy Life of Francis*, dies in an attempt to restore his dignity after killing a wild buffalo (E. Hemingway 18). His death comes swiftly after his wife shoots him down during the hunt. Again, the theme of death appears in Carver's story with the death of Scotty and the death of Robert's wife. Carver uses the issue as a confrontation starter where the main character starts to change and fulfill their purpose in the storyline. The car accident leads to the hospitalization of Scotty and eventual death in *A Small Good Thing*. At the beginning of *the Cathedral*, the narrator asserts that the visitor, Robert, is a widower because his wife died of cancer (Carver, Cathedral 1). Both authors use death as a motivation for the development of the plot. The theme becomes instrumental in exploring depression and feelings of alienation among the characters. Additionally, there is a general somber mood in the texts, coupled with feelings of exhaustion and sadness.

Exploration of the four texts provides an incredible depiction of the short story form. All the stories have a simple setting which the readers relate to and fit into the fabric of the plot. For

example, the couples are in the wilderness, talking to people. They are at residential places and institutions — the movement from one scene to the next focuses on less than three locations. Additionally, the authors provide a bare minimum when it comes to background information, and the endings are unsatisfying and leave readers wondering what will happen next. For example, *A Small Good Thing* shows an end where the bereaved couple shares a conversation with a baker until morning. As an addition, the characters are few in each case, and the duration of the plot spans less than five days in all the texts. It is also paramount to see how the themes of marriage and death aid in experiencing key features of short stories. These themes either spark the idea of confrontation in the plot or provide for the sense of abrupt ending mentioned earlier. Every aspect of the text centers its design to the short story form.

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