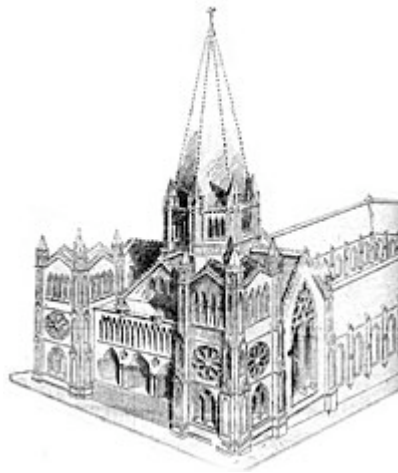


# **The Blinding Effects of Jealousy**

**A Critique of Raymond Carver's "Cathedral"**



**Bunny Sandefur**  
**Mr. Abdallah Boumarate**  
**English Composition II**  
**Fall 2007**

First off, because we don't have names for anyone except for the blind man (eventually identified as Robert), I'm going to actually give the narrator a name for the sake of pure personal satisfaction. And so, I dub him Frank, because that's what he is; "direct and unreserved in speech." I admire people who (in real life) can be like Frank, and just say things on their mind that are perfectly blunt. However, Frank comes off at first as being small minded, and maybe even prejudice. This seems evident because for some time he only refers to Robert as "the blind man." It wasn't until Frank began speaking of his wife's ex-husband ("her officer", as he put it) did I realize that the reference to Robert by a description was not so much Frank being critical of Robert's handicap, but Frank being jealous of Robert's affectionate relationship with the woman in which he loves. She even states that Frank doesn't have any friends, which can lead to the conclusion that she's all he has, next to his late night pot smoking sessions. Frank himself also notes that he smokes alone, and appreciates even the slightest bit of company.

Going down the same road of thought, when interpreting Frank's distaste for the poem that his wife wrote about her experience with the blind man, I do not believe that it has anything to do with him not understanding poetry, as he states. I think it's perfectly obvious that any man would be uncomfortable reading an almost erotic description about such an encounter between a strange man and his wife. It just becomes icing on the cake that the blind man ended up marrying the next woman who came along to work for him, as he probably had some desire to marry Frank's wife initially. This is only speculation of course.

It is not too shocking that the first time in which Frank refers to Robert by his given name is just after describing what he thinks it may have been like when Robert's late wife, Beulah, passed away. In fact, Frank saying his name is almost confusing at first. You read it and think "Wait, who's Robert? Did I miss something? Is that one of Beulah's family members, and I just blacked it out while reading?" His name is clarified a bit later when Frank's wife introduces Robert to Frank by name. By imagining Robert as a real person, and not just a threat to his marriage, he finally refers to him by name and not description alone, admittedly feeling sorry for Robert. However, this name recognition is short lived.

We get to the moment when Frank and Robert meet, and Frank's hostility seems to be diminished a tad. It's one thing for Frank to sit around and think about this person that he doesn't know who may seem as a slight threat to his happy marriage, and completely different when he meets this person face to face and realizes that Robert isn't quite as much of a threat as he had imagined him to be. The moment certainly seems awkward, as Frank really has no damn clue what to say. He honestly seems like he wants to make small talk. However when he stops to think about the subject of the sides of train in which he wishes to ask Robert about, he realizes that the whole conversation is quite ridiculous when discussing scenic views with someone who can't see. He doesn't try much to make conversation after that point for a little while, realizing that he almost shoved his entire foot in his mouth.

My favorite moment is when his wife falls asleep with her robe a bit open, and Frank's natural reaction is to cover her up. However, he decides not to. What does it matter anyway? It's not like Robert's going to see anything! Besides, by leaving her exposed, it's sort of like a victory for him in his head, thinking "I've got a private show that this poor sap can only wish he could see, and yet he's sitting right next to it!"

Aside from the moment when Frank seems bothered when his wife keeps saying Robert's name repeatedly, Frank seems generally accepting of the blind man after welcoming him into his house. He has general curiosities just like everyone else, which are made clear while describing the behavior of Robert's eyes and his ability to smoke. To me, these are normal things to think about. Though it is almost jarring when Frank asks Robert if he has any idea of what a Cathedral is. Thankfully his wife was asleep, because at that moment she would have surely bludgeoned him with the nearest heavy object. However, again I admire Frank for being so outright and honest with his curiosity. People tend to fear what they don't know or understand, and Frank is only helping himself by asking questions. Such as the inventor Paul MacCready said "The only dumb question is the one you never ask." Though after getting high, Robert's perception of a good or bad question, surely was a bit challenged. However it seemed like a normal behavior for his character regardless.

What followed is a beautiful moment expressed in text. When Frank surrenders himself to his new found friend and has somewhat of an out of body experience while exploring what that same moment is like for Robert. It is the exact sort of experience that

his wife had years prior. In that moment he understood so much. A simple minded man, having an epiphany on his living-room floor was described very relatable.

In the end, I don't believe that Frank was really prejudice against Robert for being blind. I do believe that he had ignorant assumptions, but the main key was his own blinding jealousy of the relationship that his wife shared with this stranger. Not only did Frank seemingly lack any real connection with friends of his own to understand that sort of relationship, but it was another man whom was important to his wife that really bothered him. In the course of this story, Frank broke down three walls. The first was his own ignorance of blind people, the second was forming a friendship with someone he was not married to (assuming that what his wife said about his lack of friends was accurate) and third was his irrational jealousy of someone who his wife held dear.