

A Visible Cathedral with Closed Eyes: the
Moment Imagination Comes to Reality

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Introduction

Generally, the phrase "to close one's eyes" is often used in the context of negative and passive sentences, such as "to die" or "not to pay attention". But in Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" (1983)¹, the protagonist discovers a truth of life by closing his eyes. He sees through the real nature of life with closed eyes, as in the Japanese expression "kokoronomanako."

It seems to be inevitable that the study of "Cathedral" treats the "epiphany" in the last scene. As a matter of fact, so many critics center their studies about the interpretation of the last scene's epiphany. Robert Clark says that "[the]narrator's epiphany in "Cathedral" is only possible because he treats the person he was in the past as a separate entity" from the view point that protagonist reflects his own conducts in the past. According to Clark, the protagonist can get a revelation of life by viewing himself objectively.

Also Kirk Nessel gives such an evaluation about the final scene as this: [T]he narrator of "Cathedral" finds not escape but sanctuary within self-confinement, his sanctuary existing, by virtue of his, closed eyes, within that inner vestibule of self, where selfishness gives away at last to self-awareness. Also Nessel concludes the protagonist's discovery has toward the inner vector, a self-awareness.

Furthermore Chris Bullock says that "[drawing] a Cathedral, then, becomes a metaphor for building, or at least designing, a kind of masculinity" and protagonist understands the truth beyond "[the]conventional socialization of the masculinity ego" by drawing a cathedral. Bullock thinks of the final scene as the moment protagonist feels the self-introspection.

I do not want to oppose these ideas about epiphany that the protagonist experiences the self-discovery. It is clear that he experiences somewhat a change in his consciousness. The aim of my paper is studying about the direction of his changed consciousness. I try to prove that he finds out something

beyond his self-discovery, because I think that his self-discovery is, not so much an inner vector result, as an outer vector result. In order to realize this aim, I show the structure of visible and invisible nature in the text in part 1, and in part 2, I give an explanation about the meaning of drawing a cathedral. What does the protagonist see through by his closed eyes?

1. The matter of visible and invisible

The study about the structure is clear in the thesis of Bullock. Carver often uses the closed sphere as fictional scenes, and Bullock pays attention to the protagonist's inner and outer sphere of his consciousness. He says that " [T]he narrator's powerful need to draw the line between what is inside and what outside is revealed by the anxiety and aggression the narrator displays about having a blind man in his house " (Bullock). Bullock deals with Carver's trait of sphere in light of the protagonist's inner and outer problem.

Here, I develop Bullock's argument of structure about the inner and outer matter into a question about the visible and invisible matter surrounding the protagonist. This story " Cathedral " starts by the sentence, " [this]blindman, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night " (514), which emphasizes a visual expression. This is especially emphasized by the grammatical trait at this sentence. For example, there is a possessive case of " wife " in this sentence which appears as " wife's. " The grammatical pattern of " wife's " is not grammatically regular, and we can understand this sentence has a type of inverted sentence which puts emphasis on " [this]blindman. " Also this sentence's participial construction meaning an collateral condition can be proof for that emphasized phrase. Both of these grammatical traits stress the visual feature expressed by the word " blindman. " I think the way of opening is related to the visible and invisible matters, if speaking differently, the

clear and unclear matters in the work overall.

First, I explain about a visible and clear matter in the work. Husband did not think it agreeable to have a blindman, wife's old friend, in the house, saying " I wasn't enthusiastic about his visiting " (514). He is asked to receive the blindman warmly as wife's old friend, but he repeatedly continues to show his clear jealousy in his words and behaviors. When he is asked to pay respect to wife's friend, he says a ironical reply as " I don't have any blind friends " (516). Although his wife says that if she receives the husband's friends in the house, she treats them politely from the bottom of heart, these words can not have any effect on his jealousy. He continues to make an ironical remark about Robert's ex-wife Beulah, saying, " Was his wife a Negro? " (516). Of course the word " negro " is a discrimination expression for black people. Furthermore, he suggests an irony saying " Maybe I could take him bowling " (516) at the time when Robert comes in the house. Needless to say, bowling is an almost impossible game for a blindman to play.

Although the husband repeatedly expresses his dissatisfaction about wife's friend Robert with these cynical phrases, his ironical words do not have his desirable effects on wife. She says heartlessly " Are you crazy? " (516), and says " You don't have any friends " (516) to his reply that he has no blind friend. Husband's cynical remarks only causes wife's repulsion, and he does not have desirable ends by saying the jealousy-oriented comments.

There is his prejudice against a blind man that " the blind moved slowly and never laughed " (516). He says this information is from a movie, but actually he has that negative prejudice from the reality of inviting the blindman in his house. That is to say, the reality that the guest is blind is not the first, but the reality that wife's intimate man comes in his house is the first for his dissatisfaction called jealousy. When he meets Robert for the first time, he shows his clumsiness from his jealousy. Robert says politely, " I feel like we've already met " (518), but the protagonist's reply is an extremely

brief, and rough-spoken one, saying, " Likewise " (518). After that reply, he corrects his attitude and says, " Welcome. I've heard a lot about you " (518) in a manner of mechanical reception, but this is an unnatural and artificial way of speaking, intended to deny the unsociability of opening words for Robert, " Likewise. "

In the following conversation, he says, " Which side of the train did you sit on, by the way? " (518), but this phrase is also a difficult question for a blindman who has difficulty in confirming the direction of train's progression. So that, it is not impossible to say that this is his cynical comments for Robert. Also the reality that the table manner of Robert is desirable and polite wipes out his prejudice against Robert,² and it becomes a new cause for jealousy and dissatisfaction against him. As mentioned above, the visible and clear nature in the text is the feeling of jealousy which the protagonist husband has against Robert.

On the contrary, what is an invisible and unclear nature in the text? Simply speaking, I give the secret relationship between wife and Robert. Wife introduces Robert as her old friend to her husband, but their relationship can be imagined that they are more than friends each other. When wife finished her work with Robert at last, Robert asked her to let him touch her face (514). This action is not only a confirmation of the shape of her face, but is an indication of their deep relation between them. It is not too say much that this action implies a sexual nature in that. This action is beyond the relationship between the boss and subordinate, but this is an action by sweethearts. There is an implication of them in the first part of the text, so that I think it is important to cite and examine it. Husband explains in these words: " She hadn't seen him since she worked for him one summer on Seattle ten years ago. But she and the blind man had kept in touch. They made tapes and mailed them back and forth " (514).

The interchange of tapes between them more than ten years is enough for us to think that wife and Robert have something

in common. That something is not proper for a big word of love affair, but at least that can be expressed by the words, the deep relationship. In a sense, their relationship seems to be more than the relationship between husband and wife. There is no clear showing of love affair between wife and Robert in the text, but these explanation mentioned above is enough for conjecturing the relationship of lovers. This nature is explained by Clark like, " [the]implication is that the man's marriage is fragile. "3

As mentioned above, there is a structure of visible and clear, besides a structure of invisible and secret in this work, and I can give the further explanation to that nature. That is, the visible jealousy is caused by an invisible relationship between wife and Robert. In " Cathedral " husband feels a jealousy because of the invisible. This work's principal axis is an invisible matter if we shed light on the protagonist. This trait is organically linked with the end of the work where the protagonist closes his eyes. The invisible nature in the work has an important role as a motif.

2. The meaning of drawing a cathedral

If we ask a question whether husband continues to have an indifferent and heartless attitude toward Robert because of his jealousy, the answer is no. He gradually shows his rapprochement toward Robert. Their mutual concession have come to the highlight when they draw a cathedral on TV together with hands in hands. At first, I examine about the husband's mind change toward Robert.

When wife temporarily withdraws in her own room and they are the only persons in the room, they come to find a symptom of spiritual intercourse by something of an action: that is an action of inhaling drug together. Husband and Robert start to be closer with each other by drug. Husband tells a lie to Robert that he has just prepared for inhaling, and urges Robert to inhale it together. Actually, husband's remark that he has

already prepared for it is a lie, but he says like, " but I [plan] to do so in about two shakes "(522). This remark is a proof that he is always accustomed to make drug tobacco. We can understand that he always inhale drug, and Robert's participation in husband's behavior has a big meaning. Robert says, " I'll try some with you "(522) and accepts husband's recommendation. Seeing Robert's participation, husband comes to feel comfortable and makes a remark, " That's the stuff "(522). Husband rejoices that Robert degrades himself to the same level as himself. This behavior of inhaling drug together marks the beginning of empathy between husband and Robert.

As a matter of fact, husband shows his kindness to Robert who has come to be sleepy because of the drug, saying he takes Robert in the room upward. Robert replies he wants to be together if husband does not feel uncomfortable with him. Answering these words, husband says, " That's all right "(524) and " I'm glad for the company "(524). That remark is from the bottom of his heart, which is proved by the phrase, " I guess I was "(524). Now Robert has become a needful and comfortable existence, not an object of jealousy.

A screen image on TV can be a clear proof for an empathy between husband and Robert. Husband explains about a cathedral on TV screen in detail, but Robert can not understand fully.⁴ But the conversation between them starts from a description of cathedral to the story of cathedral itself, and goes to the difference between cathedrals and the churches of Baptist, and develops into the families which take part in the construction of it through generations, and so on. Their conversation develops by an image of cathedral on TV. Up to this stage, what enables them to have empathy can be said, the power of words. But the initial power of words reaches to the limit. Robert asks husband to explain about what a cathedral is, but husband says, " I'm not doing so good, am I "(526) and he notices the limit of explanation by words.

The action to break through the wall of word's limitation is drawing a cathedral on TV, on the paper together with hands

in hands. About that time, wife wakes up, and after the persons on the spot become three, husband and Robert continue to draw a picture together. While the wife left her seat for some time, he said to himself that " [he]wished she'd come back downstairs. [he] didn't want to be left alone with a blindman "(522). Comparing to this attitude of the former stage, the present attitude of husband toward Robert has an obvious contrast. Husband and Robert continue to engross in drawing a cathedral without paying attention to wife's remark, " What are you doing? " (528). This state is explained by Yuko Kawase in these words: they begin to notice the limitation of explanation by words. Robert also comes to notice his limitation to understand. Both of them begin to accept the state as their own matter with each other. The inhaling of drug is the first for empathy, and that this empathy reaches the ultimate condition in the drawing of a cathedral.

The empathy which the drawing cathedral makes possible is different from the obligational feeling, if we compare to the opening stage. Husband feels jealousy toward Robert at first, at the same time, it is clear that he has a compassion and pity to him. He makes a comment on Robert's marriage and his deceased wife like this.

All this without his having ever seen what the goddamned woman looked like. It was beyond my understanding. Hearing this, I felt sorry for the blindman for a little bit. And then I found myself thinking what a pitiful life this woman must have led: Imagine a woman who could never see herself as she was seen in the eyes of her loved one. (517)

The pity husband feels for Robert is concerned with eyesight. Husband cannot show his understanding to a blind man who is lacking in eyesight which is naturally equipped with husband. He feels a pity because Robert is lacking in eyesight, and he never understand Robert in the same position. It does follow

that he is looking at Robert from an upper position, so that Robert should be a pitiful person whom the compassion should be suitable for. Husband strongly feels a difference of position between him and Robert.

The obligational feeling has changed obviously when the husband understands Robert beyond the feeling of pity. I cite the last scene in the text where husband and Robert talk about a drawn cathedral on the paper.

Then he said, " I think that's it. I think you got it, " he said. " Take a look. What do you think? " But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do. " Well? " he said. " Are you looking? ". . . " It's really something, "I said. (529)

Although he is asked to open his eyes, but he keeps on closing his eyes, and continues to be in the same position as Robert. Here, husband experiences the change of obligation. The pity which husband feels toward Robert as a blind man changes into the true understanding, by putting himself in Robert's position. The obligation that he must deal with Robert as a blind man and as a friend of wife changes into the obligation of oneness that husband must keep in the same condition as Robert. This attitude is not a pity from the upper state, but this is an understanding by placing himself in the same position. Also in that attitude, there occurs a revelation, saying " It was like nothing else in my life up to now " (528). This is the moment when the imagination comes to reality in life with the image of cathedral which you should not see in the usual condition.

Drawing of a cathedral causes a change of husband's jealousy into empathy. In this empathy, his pity transfers to his true understanding about Robert.

Conclusion

In part 1, I explained about the nature that invisible relationship between wife and Robert controlled the overall structure in the text. In part 2, I showed husband's jealousy changes into the empathy between him and Robert by drawing a cathedral together. Husband experiences a change of obligation which develops into a true understanding by placing himself in the same position as Robert.

The change from the jealousy into understanding is of course a desirable transition. It is a matter of course for husband that the condition of being alone with Robert helps him change his feeling toward Robert. Wife's absence during her sleep is a force to enable him to experience a true understanding with Robert without the implied relationship between wife and Robert. The force to bring about the jealousy disappears temporarily, and there occurs a situation where husband and Robert come to grip with each other at the bottom of their heart spiritually.

It is interesting that the change from jealousy to a true understanding links to the description of a cathedral in the text. Husband explains to Robert as follows. " They reach up. Up and up. Toward the sky. They're so big, some of them, they have to have these supports. To help them up, so to speak. These supports are called buttress " (526).

Eventually husband draws on the paper a cathedral reflecting on TV and is moved by the imaginary sublime figure of it with his eyes closed. The description of cathedral which stands high toward the sky is overlapped with the refinement and growth of mind that the jealousy develops into a true understanding. The buttress is an aide which is equal to Robert and which makes possible a spiritual sophistication. The cathedral can be read from the viewpoint that husband's spiritual sophistication is implied in that image.

Actually, husband is moved by the imaginary figure of cathedral with his eyes closed, and that is a moment that the fictional matter comes to the reality in life. The invisible cathedral which only husband can see is not an accidental figure,

because the spiritual sophistication is in fact an invisible change of his inner mind. When husband feels intuitively his inner change of mind, that is, the refinement of mind, he finds out a value of mind which is exhibited by the solemn figure of imaginary cathedral.

I will answer the question of this thesis that what husband feels and experiences at the last scene with his eyes closed. I started my argument from the point, that in the last epiphany, he must see something beyond his self-recognition by himself. As mentioned above, it is clear that husband gets over his jealousy and reaches the empathy with Robert. He sees in the last epiphany a spiritual sophistication. His refinement of mind is expressed by the image of cathedral which is invisible, but is visible only for himself. Husband sees his spiritual sophistication⁵ which has enabled him to have a true understanding toward Robert,⁶ an outward vector from an inner force.

Notes

1. The citations of " Cathedral " are from *Raymond Carver: collected stories*, ed. William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll.
2. The politeness of Robert's table manner and the way of speaking imply his social status which makes a clear contrast with husband who is accustomed with drug inhaling. Intellectual level and jealousy are usually said that they are thought in the same line, so that it may be possible the strength of husband's jealousy may be concerned with his intellectual level.
3. Carver often writes about the fragile marriages. This familiar thing makes readers discover an unexpected finding in an ordinary life. The married couples are the most familiar material in writing about a usual life, so the material may be easier for readers to feel naturally.
4. About the conversation concerning a cathedral between husband and Robert, it is possible that Robert applies his attitude to husband with pretention that he does not know about a cathedral. It is clear there is a difference of intellectual level between them in light of the way of talking and their usual habit. It is possible that Robert lets husband explain about a cathedral in order that husband can sweep away an inferior complex and feels a superior complex by the action of teaching. Husband could feel comfortable because of that action. People often feel comfortable by the action to teach.
5. Saltzman uses the phrase " depth of feeling " in the similar meaning as " spiritual sophistication, " but he does not explain about the relationship between the drawn cathedral and the state of spirit, or the change of obligational feeling.

In light of these matters, my study about " Cathedral " may have the meaning for readers.

6. There is room for other critics to define what the empathy could be, but for example, that may be love. Husband may understand the love in itself and of itself, beyond the jealousy toward Robert. By his sophisticated state of mind, husband may understand love partially between Robert and wife, though its love is not permitted. Formerly the topic of Beulah whom Robert cannot see is mentioned. At the last scene, he can feel love beyond the eyesight with his seeing a invisible and imaginary cathedral. Husband can understand the sublime love between wife and Robert, but he does not allow their relationship of love. This feeling is an understanding about love itself. These arguments may be possible from the other point of view.

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