Comparison: John Updike’s A&P And Timothy O’brein’s How To Tell A True War Story Essay, Research Paper

Although the short stories, ?A&P,? by John Updike, and ?How to Tell a True War Story,? by Timothy O?Brien, are both written in the technique of first person narrative, the two stories are are conveyed to the reader in very different styles.

John Updike, who was 29 at the time when he wrote ?A & P,? narrates his story from the point of view of a 19 year old boy. The narration of the story of ?A & P? illustrates the scene of the grocery store in which the teenage boy, Sammy, is a cashier who witnesses everything that goes on during the day.

The store is a theater, having numerous skits taking place throughout the day with no script. Sammy is in the audience where he came only observe the acts to make up his own story and narrate the scene to others. Every important detail is observed through Sammy?s eyes and is expressed in the narration of his story of the A & P grocery store.

Sammy sets the scene of a sunny, summer beach day in which three young girls dressed in nothing but bathing suits enter the store to buy some snacks for their day in the sand. Sammy is deeply intrigued by the girls and watches every move they make while ringing in other customers at the store. The girls parade through the isles as if they are putting on a show, just for Sammy. This is Sammy?s first live ?girlie show? and he doesn’t want to miss one single detail. Sammy expresses his excitement and fondness of one particular girl as he conveys the details of the one scene:

She has on a kind of dirty-pink — beige maybe, I don?t know — bathing suit with a little nubble all over it and, what got me, the straps were down. They were a little off her shoulders looped loose around the cool tops of her arms, and I guess as a result the suit had slipped a little on her… with the straps pushed off, there was nothing between the top of her chest sown from the shoulder bones like a dinted sheet of metal tilted in light. I mean it was more than pretty.

Although Sammy?s narration of the story is really Updike?s narration written in the point of view, or ?voice? of Sammy, one cannot be displeased in the way the story is depicted form this particular day at the A & P. There is no better way to narrate the story than though the eyes and thoughts of a teenage boy in is prime.

As stated in the thesis, Timothy O?Brien also writes his short story, ?How to tell a True War Story,? in the first person narrative, although the style in which he narrates is quite different than from the style in ?A & P.?? O?Brien, who was an actual soldier in the Vietnam War takes on more of an autobiographical approach to telling his ?true war story.?

The opening lines to the story, ?This is true. I had a buddy in Vietnam. His name was Bob Kiley, but everybody called him Rat.,? suggests to the reader immediately that he author is telling this story from his own point of you with the fact that he gives the impression of the story being part of a conversation already taking place. The statement, ?This is true.,? gives the reader an idea of two veteran soldiers sharing their war stories in a bar, in which the next one sounds even more unbelievable than the one before.

Not only does O?Brein write is story from a more autobiographical point of view, but he also takes on the style of an essay; as after each dramatically point in the story there is a paragraph following explaining what he wrote in the paragraphs preceding. It is as if there are two narration voices in the story, one for the part telling the actual war story to the other soldier, and one telling the whole story to the reader; war story and it?s reasons.

The paragraph following the descriptive tale of his two buddies fooling around with the smoke grenades suggests this theory.

In any war story, but especially a true one, it?s difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes it?s own happening and has to be told that way…

The story as a whole was written to share with the soldiers who were there with the added tips guidelines to help them tell their own ?true war stories,? and have them be remembered, as well as believed. The graphical depiction of the story is for the fortunate who were not present at the time of the war, who should always be reminded through out time how horrible and unnecessary war is.