In Popular Mechanics by Raymond Carver we have the theme of separation, conflict, struggle and communication (or rather the lack of it). Taken from his What We Talk About When We Talk About Love collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator. And the tone of the story is one of anger and aggression. It begins with an unnamed male packing his suitcase while his wife (or girlfriend) looks on. Immediately the reader can sense the distance between the two characters (she is standing by the door while he is standing by the side of the bed) and if anything (and as the reader is told), the wife/girlfriend is pleased that her husband/boyfriend is leaving.

This physical distance between both characters is important because it sets the scene for later in the story when it becomes obvious that both characters no longer wish to be with each other. Unfortunately the narrator never tells the reader the reason for the couple’s separation but it is obvious that it is not amicable.The opening line of the story is also interesting. Carver opens the story by telling the reader ‘Early that day the weather turned and the snow was melting into dirty water.’ This opening sentence is important because it acts as symbolism. Snow is white and usually in literature white would symbolize or represent some sort of purity or cleanliness.

It is possible that Carver may be suggesting to the reader, through symbolism, that what was once a healthy, loving relationship between the couple has been tainted in some way.Lighting also plays a significant part in the setting of the story. Very early on the reader is aware that it is getting dark not only outside but inside as well. In some ways the lack of light (or the darkness) acts as foreshadowing within the story. I think this is  something that becomes clearer to the reader as we see both parents struggling with the baby.

Carver also uses short sentences throughout the story which gives an emphasis to the finality of the relationship between both characters. Whatever has caused the end of the relationship between both characters, it becomes clear to the reader that there is no going back or there will be no resolution between the two of them. The use of short sentences also helps or assists in raising the tension in the story. Another interesting thing about Carver’s language usage is his use of the word ‘little’ in the story. It is used at the beginning of the story when the narrator is describing the streaks running down the shoulder high window. It is also used later when the wife ‘stood in the doorway of the little kitchen, holding the baby.’ Its usage is important as Carver may be suggesting to the reader that the house is too small for three people (the couple and the baby) and that it was inevitable that the couple’s relationship would come to an end.

What is also interesting or possibly symbolic is that Carver may be using the symbolism of the house (being too small) to suggest that the relationship between both parents will never grow.Carver also uses symbolism when both parents are fighting over the baby. The flowerpot in the kitchen falls to the ground and breaks. Though it is only mentioned in one sentence, it acts as foreshadowing for what will happen later in the story as both parents are pulling on the baby.Though it is not expressly said by the narrator and it is open to interpretation, it may be a case that as both parents are pulling on the baby, they break the baby’s arm. If this is the case then the baby’s broken arm would mirror the relationship (between the parents) which also appears to be broken (or over).

Works Cited

<https://estadisticas.pr/en/datos-del-huracan-maria>