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Issue One is an **open topics issue** which includes the use of poetics in “Vitamins” by Eileen Abrahams, Carver and the Temperance Tradition, by Angela Sorby; Carver’s use of photographic technique by Ayala Amir; a detailed study of Lish’s editing of Carver by Enrico Monti; Carver’s influence on Murakami by Brian Seemann; a review of Kerry McSweeney’s *Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse*.

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Introduction

This inaugural issue of *The Raymond Carver Review* marks a significant development in Carver studies: an annual journal devoted to making available the best in new scholarship on the work and life of Raymond Carver. While the first wave of Carver studies was mainly biographical and focused on his fiction, especially its minimalism, working class portraits, and sojourns into Carver Country and Hopelessville, the second wave shifted its focus to dismissing the minimalism of his fiction and discussing his expanded stories and the initial discussions of his large and significant body of poetry. What is emerging now is the third wave of Carver studies: discussions of the process of creating the Carver stories we know, both those under the influence of Gordon Lish and those out from that influence, and bringing a new set of lenses to view the body of Carver's work, that is, feminist studies, culture studies, textual studies, interdisciplinary studies, often discussed within an international context. Recent scholarship that is leading this new wave begins with G. P. Lainsbury's *The Carver Chronotrope* which initiated culture studies; has expanded with the special issue of *Journal of the Short Story in English* on Raymond Carver, edited by Vasiliki Fachard; and continues with *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Essays on His Poetry, Fiction, and Life*, edited by Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner, forthcoming from the University of South Carolina Press. Additionally, the founding of The International Raymond Carver Society, and its affiliation with The American Literature Association, supports this emerging scholarship through its regular sponsorship of papers and panels at conferences and symposia. In short, this is an exciting time for Carver studies world-wide.

The idea for this journal grew from my discussions with Sandra Lee Kleppe at the ALA in Boston in 2005 when we established The International Raymond Carver Society. We felt that, in order to best promote the new wave of Carver scholarship, a society would promote presentations, conferences, and international dialogue, while a journal would publish quality, peer-reviewed essays from emerging and established scholars.

This first issue offers five essays from emerging international scholars. In "The Glass Half Empty: The Poetics of Raymond Carver's *Vitamins*," Eileen Abrahams considers how Carver's use of lexical repetition, as a manifestation of Roman Jakobson's "dominant," operates as the primary element through which readers may decode this text. In "Raymond Carver and the Temperance Tradition," Angela Sorby considers how John B. Gough, a Washingtonian Temperance writer, established the popular figure of the recovered alcoholic, an historical context in which Carver's poems about alcoholism can be read. " 'I don't do motion shots': Photography, Movement, and Change in Raymond Carver's Stories" by Ayala Amir discusses Carver's representation of movement, linking it to the snapshot and eye-of-the-camera metaphors commonly used to describe Carver's poetics, concentrating on "Viewfinder" and "Feathers." Enrico Monti, in "*Il miglior fabbro?* On Lish's Editing of Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*," investigates the extent of Gordon Lish's editing at the syntactical, lexical and plot level in order to reconstruct his editorial strategy, exposing the role he played in shaping the minimalist quality of that collection. In "Existential Connections: The Influence of Raymond Carver on Haruki Murikami," Brian Seemann compares Carver's early stories with Murikami's early stories, discussing how Murikami's characters, as influenced by his reading of Carver, break from Sartre's existential dilemmas.

This journal would not exist without the fine essays from the contributors, whose work was rigorously peer-reviewed, and by the dedication and commitment of the editorial board who performed this task: Tamas Dobozy from Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada; Jo Angela Edwins from Francis Marion University in South Carolina; Claire Fabre-Clark from University of Paris XII, France; Vasiliki Fachard, independent scholar from Switzerland; Chad Wriglesworth from the University of Iowa; William Wright from Mesa State College in Colorado; and Libe García Zarranz from the University of Zaragoza, Spain. I am grateful as well to the Advisory Board for their support, and to those whom I contacted for advice while in the process of launching this first issue. Thanks also to editorial assistant Lisa Vargas of Kent State University who scrutinized and proofread these essays. This journal might not exist without the ever-available technical talent of Liz Weglendowski of Kent State University who designed the journal and launched *The Raymond Carver Review*. Additionally, I would like to

thank Sandra Lee Kleppe, Associate Editor and Director for The International Raymond Carver Society, with which this journal is affiliated, for ideas, advice, and constant support. Lastly, I need to thank Kent State University Stark for course reductions to develop the journal and for providing technical support as needed, and to New Media at Kent State University for helping to design and develop this journal.

I am pleased to announce that two of the current contributors, Enrico Monti and Angela Sorby, will be joining the editorial board beginning with the second issue, a special issue on Carver and Feminism which will be guest-edited by Claire Fabre-Clark and Libe García Zarranz. Further, I am delighted that Randolph Paul Runyon, author or *Reading Raymond Carver* and eminent Carver scholar, has accepted a position on the Advisory Board. Additionally, I am excited that Vasiliki Fachard will be moving from the editorial board to her new role as Associate Editor beginning with the second issue; this journal will now have the benefit of her exceptional editorial talent.

The Raymond Carver Review is enriched by its bounty of talented individuals, both those who have supported the journal since its inception and those who are joining as it grows, and to its valued contributors, all of whom are committed to the common goal of advancing Carver scholarship. We all do so because of our common belief in the importance and artistry of Raymond Carver's stories and poems. On behalf of everyone associated with *The Raymond Carver Review,* I hope you enjoy this first issue.

Robert Miltner

Editor, *The Raymond Carver Review*

The Glass Half Empty:

The Poetics of Raymond Carver's "Vitamins"

Eileen Abrahams, University of Texas at Austin

Many commentators still tend to focus on the minimalist context within which Raymond Carver writes rather than on the writing itself. Although such an approach might be useful for historicizing Carver's work, it does not provide a useful heuristic with which to understand how his individual texts generate their peculiar literary power. Because his prose eschews metaphor and his narratives resist closure, his stories are difficult for some readers to understand. Nonetheless, if we are to appreciate them fully, then we must understand how the particular literary techniques that he uses generate their meaning. In what follows, I will focus on the poetics of a single story, "Vitamins," from *Where I'm Calling From*, both because its laconic prose and anomic characters are representative of much of Carver's fiction, and because it has drawn little attention from critics.

Michael Gorra's essay "Laughter and Bloodshed" is representative of the critical light through which Carver is often considered. Gorra views Carver as the leading practitioner of minimalism, which Gorra characterizes as

> a mannerist mode in which the intentional poverty, the anorexia, of the writer's style is mimetic of the spiritual poverty of his/her characters' lives, their disconnection from anything like a traditional community. It is a prose so attenuated that it cannot support the weight of a past or future. (155)

To be sure, Carver's characters are often inarticulate and directionless as well as profoundly

disconnected from their community. I suggest, however, that it is the characters themselves who are limited by this disconnectedness; it is not the paucity of the author's style that limits them.[1]

Similarly, contrary to Gorra's disparaging claim that Carver's prose "cannot support the weight of a past or a future," I suggest that this is a strength, not a weakness, of his style. Many of the characters who populate Carver's fictional universe have little or no notion of a continued existence. They occupy disparate states of consciousness; they are, so to speak, concatenations of unconnected states of mind. Often, they have been cut off from their pasts through abuse of drugs and alcohol, and they have no vision of a future because they are benumbed by their own sense of hopelessness. The epigraph for *Where I'm Calling From,* a collection of Carver's short stories, selected and chronologically arranged by the author, is a quotation from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* by Milan Kundera: "We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come" (8). It serves as an apt description of the hyper-temporality in which Carver's characters live; they live so much in the particular that the time in which an event occurs seems to be an essential characteristic of it. Carver's prose is sufficiently rich to represent the minimal slice of time of which his characters are aware.

One may explain in similar fashion the absence of metaphor in Carver's prose. As Kirk Nesset contends, "in this perilously unstable world of Carver's survivors, extended metaphor implies a kind of stability, a tangible unity of vision and awareness, that if applied too deliberately would come off as worse than inaccurate: it would be false"(47). Although Carver's eschewal of metaphor is in keeping with his characters' minimal awareness of possibilities, such eschewal does not lend itself to ease of interpretation. Without the convenient handle that metaphor provides, it is difficult to know how to make sense of many of Carver's stories.

1.

"Vitamins" is a story to which scant attention is given. Some critics, such as Nesset, either neglect or dismiss it altogether; others simply refer to it in passing. Adam Meyer mentions it merely as "one of the more despairing works in the volume" (134). Still others just discuss its plot, then cull from it a broad, sweeping, statement of theme. For instance, Arthur Salzman summarizes its plot briefly before proclaiming, "[f]rom aimless anger, to furtiveness, to apathy and resignation—so runs the course of private ruin" (136), a statement that is of no help in elucidating the story. Randolph Paul Runyon, whose reading of "Vitamins" is one of two extensive readings of the story I have found, interprets it primarily as a dream-like rendering of "A Small Good Thing," the story that precedes it in *Cathedral,* the volume in which the story originally appears. The other extensive reading is Vasiliki Fachard's,[2] and she is the only critic who focuses deeply on the stylistic features of the work.

In "Vitamins," Carver employs repetition to a hyperbolic degree. The story is divided into nine sections of varying length, indicated at least as much by the larger than usual blank space between certain paragraphs as they are by a scene change. He mentions body parts in excess of ninety-five times, approximately five times per page. In section one, there are only three mentions of *breast*, *hand,* and *eye*, but in section two, there are twenty-four mentions of *feet, eyes, legs, hand, head, brain*, *finger*, *face*, *hair,* and *wrist* (in order of mention). The word *girl(s)* is repeated sixteen times, ten of which occur in the first two paragraphs. Sections three, four, and five are some of the briefest in the story, with five, eight, and seven mentions of body parts occurring respectively, and with *back*, *skin*, *waist*, and *shoulder* being added to the catalogue. The relative paucity of mention in these sections is supplemented by other patterns of

word repetition. In section four, the word *vitamins* is mentioned fifteen times and the word *dream,* thirteen times. Section six is the longest section in the story, and added to the litany of body parts are *arms, lids, mouth, ass, lips, nipples, ear,* and various sobriquets for male genitalia, including *pud, hammer, dick,* and one for female genitalia, *sweets.* In section seven, the word *ear*(*s*) is repeated eight times in thirteen sentences. In section eight, the words *chin* and *heart* are mentioned, in addition to the name *Portland,* which, in addition to its previous three mentions, is mentioned seven times in six sentences. Section nine adds *teeth.*

That this pattern of lexical repetition is never alluded to by critics is incomprehensible. Such dramatic use of this device reveals it to be, in Roman Jakobson's terms, "the dominant," the primary element through which we can decode the text. Jakobson identifies the dominant as "the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" (41). Each work of art has its own dominant, and it is this component that not only provides structure to that work but also provides the framework through which we are compelled, or *determined,* to understand it.[3] I contend, then, that the dominant in "Vitamins" is lexical repetition, the plethora of which provides an interpretive framework for my understanding of the story.[4]

Before I proceed to decode the text and, in the process, to lay bare its comprehensive structuring principle, I proffer a brief summary of "Vitamins." The narrator and his lover, Patti, live together. He works nights as a janitor in a hospital while she works selling vitamins door to door. One of the women with whom she works, Sheila, makes a pass at Patti and is rebuffed. The narrator and Patti have a party and invite the women. At the party, everybody gets drunk. Sheila passes out, breaking her finger in the process. Upon her awakening, the narrator, who is angered over Sheila's having made a pass at Patti, has an argument with her. She storms out of

the house. He tells Patti that Sheila has gone to Portland. Also during the party, the narrator makes a pass at Donna, the other core member of the group.

Later in the week, the narrator and Patti have an argument over the sorry state of the vitamin business, after which the narrator leaves for work. After he is done with work, Donna appears in the hospital parking lot. The narrator and she go to a bar for a drink. At the bar they are joined by Benny, an acquaintance of the narrator, and Benny's friend, Nelson, a deranged veteran, who has just recently returned from Vietnam. He talks trash for a while, and then pulls out an ear he cut off of a Vietnamese soldier. The narrator and Donna get up to leave; this agitates Nelson, who verbally assaults the couple. The couple returns to their cars, at which time Donna, upset, announces that she is quitting her job and thinking of moving to Portland. The couple part from each other. The narrator goes home to find Patti having a bad dream. He pours himself a drink and gropes for an aspirin in the medicine chest.

The extreme syntactic parallelism of the opening paragraph creates a distance between the two characters:

> I had a job and Patti didn't. I worked a few hours a night for the hospital. It was a nothing job. I did some work, signed the card for eight hours, went drinking with the nurses. After a while, Patti wanted a job. She said she needed a job for her self-respect. So, she started selling multiple vitamins door to door. (245)

The opening line introduces a conjunction, whose conjuncts *I* and *Patti,* are separated by *and,* a word which mainly connotes togetherness, yet one which Carver here uses to indicate apartness. Three sentences follow in which the narrator describes both his job and his own core group of girls, the *nurses.* The reference to this core group literally separates the narrator's *I* from *Patti,*

after which follow three sentences describing Patti's desire, need for, and attainment of a job.

The next several pages are rife with lexical repetition. For the most part, these repetitions are sequential: on the first two pages, in which the narrator describes the girls who sell vitamins with Patti, the word *girl(s)* appears sixteen times; on the next two pages, in which the narrator discusses both Patti's and his own relationship with the girls who comprise the core group, the names of body parts appear twenty-four times. Although repetition usually serves to tightly bind together a narrative, here the effect of lexical repetition is to dislocate the reader. The repeated use of the third person, *she,* in the opening section, serves to iterate this effect.

About the transient nature of the vitamin business, the narrator comments:

> Sometimes a girl just disappeared in the field, sample case and all. She'd hitch a ride into town, then beat it. But there were always girls to take her place. Girls were coming and going in those days. Patti had a list. Every few weeks she'd run a little ad in *The Pennysaver.* There'd be more girls and more training. There was no end of girls. (246)

By so objectifying the group of women who work for Patti, the narrator prepares the reader for the even greater objectification of its individual members. In addition, the numerous mentions of the word *girl(s),* while mimetic of their apparent replication, numb the reader to any possible difference among them. This distancing effect is also manifest in the passage in which the narrator describes Sheila, who having just awakened from passing out, discovers that she hurt her finger:[5]

> And she was sure her finger was broken. She showed it to me. It looked purple. She bitched about us letting her sleep all night with her contacts in. She wanted to know didn't anybody give a shit. She brought the finger up close and looked at it.

> She shook her head. She held the finger as far away as she could and looked some more. It was as if she couldn't believe the things that had happened to her that night. Her face was puffy, and her hair was all over. She ran cold water on her finger. (247)

Here not only does the narrator objectify Sheila by repeatedly referring to her as *she* and employing anaphora to do so, but he also objectifies her finger by using the definite article twice in referring to it. Thus, his use of *she* iterates the distance between Sheila and himself, and his use of *the* signals distance between Sheila and her own body parts. Both instances of lexical repetition serve to keep things apart.

The fourth section of the story begins with a conversation the narrator has with Patti a few weeks after the party, in which the words *vitamins,* mentioned fifteen times, and *dream(s),* thirteen times, are juxtaposed repeatedly. Patti is constantly dreaming about vitamins: "[e]verybody dreams," (251) she tells the narrator.

> If you didn't dream, you'd go crazy. I read about it. It's an outlet. People dream when they're asleep. Or else they'd go nuts. But when I dream, I dream about vitamins. Do you see what I'm saying? (251)

The narrator doesn't see, and he responds by expressing doubt whether he dreams at all. He does not see why the continuity between her waking and her dream life is so distressing to her. On the other hand, what Patti does not see is that her dreams about vitamins might very well provide her "an outlet," for in dreaming about vitamins, she is, of course, dreaming about a product that presumably restores heath, and in this sense, Patti's dream is displacing her wish for psychological health. Patti lacks the ability to interpret her dreams; hence, she lacks their potential restorative qualities. The narrator,

however, lacks the dreams themselves.

Our discourse on dreams is completely over-determined by Sigmund Freud, so, it is difficult to imagine reading the dialogue between Patti and the narrator, the only extended conversation in which they engage, without thinking of Freud's analysis of dreams. David Lodge proffers a lucid account of the processes of condensation and displacement, the Freudian concepts upon which Roman Jakobson relies to make a distinction between the two poles of metaphor and metonymy:

> These are the basic processes by which the latent content of the dream—the real anxieties or desires which motivate it—is translated into its manifest content, the dream itself. Condensation is the process by which the latent content of the dream is highly compressed, so that one item stands for many different dream thoughts, and displacement is the process by which dreams are often centred from the anxieties or guilts which trigger them off. Thus, something trivial in a dream may have the significance of something important in actuality and the connection between the two can be traced along a line of contiguities by the technique of free association. (79)

If I substitute the words *prose narrative* for *dream* in this passage,[6] then I can claim that by extension, Freud's distinction provides another key for decoding "Vitamins." Indeed, the conversation between Patti and the narrator operates as a kind of meta-discursive metonymy for their conversations, and stands by association, for Freudian discourse about dreams, and this discourse, in turn, points to ways in which subtexts bear upon one's interpretation of the text. Before I suggest how one such subordinate code might work in "Vitamins," I will continue my

linear analysis of the dominant patterns of repetition.

The fifth section is a brief description of the setting of the second half of the story, a bar called *Off-Broadway*, to which the narrator and Donna come on their date. The narrator depicts the bar metonymically, in terms of the regulars who frequent it, and he also depicts these regulars metonymically, in terms of a racial epithet: “it was a spade place in a spade neighborhood. It was run by a spade named Khaki” (252-3). The weaving of lexical repetition has now become far less subtle than it had been earlier; whereas the lexical repetition found earlier in the narrative is separated by clauses, or even by sentences, these repetends are separated only by intervening words. This suggests a greater restlessness on the narrator’s part, perhaps because he is about to relate the details of his date.

Toward the beginning of the longest, most complex section of the narrative, appears a pair of passages, both of which employ the figure of *epizeuxis*, “repetition with no words intervening” (“Epizeuxis”). As Donna and the narrator drive to the *Off-Broadway*, she relates her reasons for wanting out of the vitamin business: “She started right in about vitamins. Vitamins were on the skids, vitamins had taken a nose dive. The bottom had fallen out of the vitamin market” (254). The narrator responds to Donna’s dissatisfaction: “I said, ‘You’re not thinking of going to Portland, are you?’ We were on the sidewalk. I put my arm around her waist. ‘I don’t know anything about Portland. Portland hasn’t crossed my mind once’” (255). No longer is there even any lexical intervention between these repetends, the figurative clash of words here foreshadows the clash of desires that follows. Upon hearing Donna’s lament, the narrator assumes that Donna, like Sheila, will go to Portland, for Portland holds out the possibility of safe harbor for the women in this story. The possibility of a life in Portland stands in marked antithesis to a diminished life selling vitamins. Thus far, it is a possibility Donna has not

entertained.

Once in the bar, the couple's lovemaking is interrupted when an acquaintance of the narrator, Benny, and his friend, Nelson, join them in their booth. Nelson begins to taunt the couple about their infidelity. Benny, trying to change the subject, urges Nelson to show the trophy ear he has brought back from Vietnam. He yanks from his pocket a key chain with a human ear dangling from its end. The narrator and Donna are repulsed. The scene ends shortly after Khaki, the bar's owner drops by the booth:

> He took up the chain and dangled the ear in front of his face. He looked at it. He let it swing back and forth on the chain. "I heard about these dried-up ears and dicks and such." (260)

Several critics attribute symbolic significance to the ear. Kirk Nesset sees it as a symbol of people's unwillingness to listen or to hear other people: "[i]n 'Vitamins,' a . . . more general deafness finds its emblem in the form of a dismembered, dried-out human ear"(64). That the word *ear* is repeated so often, even insisted upon, lends much credence to this interpretation. Vasiliki Fachard, too, regards the ear as symbol of deafness; however, for her the ear is not emblematic of a general deafness, but symbolic of the narrator's specific incapacity to connect with others: "[i]t was above all that disconnection from others in her partner that Nelson wished to warn Donna about when he first showed her the ear . . ."(110). Furthermore, in emphasizing the sexual implications of Khaki's remarks, Fachard argues persuasively that only by forging a truly intimate connection with Donna, "can the narrator's sexuality ward off the menace of the withering like the dead soldier's ear. For as Benny [sic] intimated when he associated 'dried-up ears and dicks and such,' both functions are connected" (110).

To be sure, the ear is a symbol: for Nelson, it is symbolic of the war he had fought or is

still fighting; it is a piece of that war which stands for the whole of it, but it is a piece which no longer has any relation with that to which it had been attached. Like Sheila's broken finger, Nelson's ear is foremost a symbol of disjointedness. Still, however symbolic it might be, the ear is but one repetend within a larger framework of repetition, and as such, it functions as another body part in a series of body parts.

After the disturbing scene in the bar, the narrator has lost interest in Donna, and she takes what happened as a sign for her to leave town: "There must be something in Portland. Portland's on everybody's mind these days. Portland's a drawing card. Portland this, Portland that. Portland's as good a place as any. It's all the same" (262). Each of the female characters in the story experiences a fall of some kind to which she responds with horror. Each of these moments leads to another small, but significant moment of realization or resolution: Patti, horrified to discover that hawking vitamins is on her mind even after she has fallen asleep, comes to realize the extent to which she is stultified. Both Sheila, horrified at having fallen down and broken her finger, and Donna, horrified at the circumstances in which she finds herself once the bottom has fallen out of the vitamin business, resolve to go to Portland. The narrator, too, experiences a fall of sorts, but his fall does not end in similar resolve.

After leaving Donna, the narrator returns home to discover Patti sleepwalking in the middle of a nightmare. The story closes on an epiphanic, albeit enigmatic, note:

> I couldn't take any more tonight. "Go back to sleep, honey. I'm looking for something," I said. I knocked some stuff out of the medicine chest. Things rolled into the sink. "Where's the aspirin?" I said. I knocked down some more things. I didn't care. Things kept falling. (263)

The narrator experiences things falling, yet neither an articulated realization nor a resolution follows from this experience. The pronouncement, *Things kept falling,* has the weight of an epiphany, and given the series of epiphanic moments that precede it, surely, it is reasonable to read it as one; however, it is difficult to know how to interpret it. Gunther Leypoldt identifies in Carver's work a type of epiphany he calls an "arrested epiphany," one he distinguishes from *anagnorisis*, the more standard type of epiphany; the "arrested epiphany" is defined by "a distinct disparity between the character's feeling of revelation and his or her lack of understanding what sort of insight the revelation is supposed to provide" (5). Although the point at which Carver ends his story necessitates that the narrator's realization remain unarticulated, we can reasonably assume from the narrator's lack of self-knowledge that it will remain so.

Furthermore, Leypoldt's analysis of the structural significance of the epiphanic moment in Carver's fiction brilliantly captures the interpretive crux readers experience at the end of "Vitamins":

> The structural significance of Carver's arrested epiphany depends on its functional location within a story's narrative framework. In Carver's most experimental work . . . the protagonist's epiphanic vision emerges as a sudden climax at a point when the reader, expects the loose narrative threads to be synthesized into at least partial closure; yet it typically remains an anti-climax, for it leaves the plot so unresolved that the text almost appears to mock the very notion of *anagnorisis*. In such cases, the reader, whose sense-making is arrested along with the character's helpless groping, concludes the story with a feeling that it fails to accrue coherent meaning, that the "deep knowledge" below the narrated events is at best ambiguous and fluctuating. (6)

Fortunately, the plethora of repetition and the rich, although not yet fully articulated, narrative framework within which these repetends work, gesture toward coherent meaning.

2.

At the beginning of the first section of "Vitamins," and at the end of the second, Carver introduces two terms, *vitamins* and *Portland*, whose repetition throughout the text forms a subtext that provides contiguity among parts of the story. Michael Riffaterre defines "subtext" as a "fragment of the larger text, immersed in it and mirroring the whole" (278). He refines this definition by putting forth a necessary condition for its use:

> . . . a subtext must actualize the same matrix as the whole narrative, or a matrix structurally connected with that of the encircling text. These subtexts operate as units of reading, so to speak, not unlike themes or motifs, except that a theme or motif has a matrix of its own, born elsewhere, and existing before that of the larger text. (278)

The first term of this subordinate pattern of repetition originates as a paratextual element of the story. The title, "Vitamins," introduces a term best understood through understanding its parts. And it comes apart easily for it is a compound noun. According to *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology,* the word is formed from the Latin *vita* (life) and the English *amine* (any group of nitrogen compounds), but to the untutored eye, the word also connotes "less life," or *vita* (life) and *mins* (less). That the word *vitamins* signifies lack, in so far as we take vitamins to make up for the nutrients we lack, reinforces this connotation. When both Sheila and Donna come to realize how diminished their lives are, they plan to go to Portland. Throughout the text, the word *vitamins* operates in opposition to *Portland,* a word that denotes refuge and ground, and whereas

vitamins is emblematic of the diminished vitality of these characters lives, *Portland* is emblematic of wholeness or restoration.

Things kept falling. Something is missing even from what is an arrested epiphany: do things keep falling down? Apart? Once we complete the statement, which we are compelled to do in our search for coherence, we experience our own epiphany. Yes—things keep falling[7] *apart*, *a part*. The narrator has been focused on parts throughout the narrative, on only a partial, fragmented view of himself and others. But the sheer excess of these parts gesture toward something deeper, something whole: namely the narrator's realization, however fleeting and unarticulated, that his life is falling apart, piece by piece, and the reader's realization that meaning in "Vitamins" is only gestured toward, never realized.

Notes

[1] Of course, I do not mean to imply that characters are anything other than the effects rather than the cause of their language. But I do mean to suggest that Carver's conception of characters dictates his style. Had he chosen to represent richer, more integral characters, he would have constructed them in a richer, more integral language.

[2] I read Fachard's perceptive essay, "Regarding the Ear in Raymond Carver's 'Vitamins,'" only as I was editing my own for publication. Although our essays cover similar ground, my own is more rooted in the literary, Empsonian language of ambiguity than in the more linguistic, Jespersenian language of polysemy.

[3] Jakobson also uses this term to indicate paradigmatic change in literary history. During any literary epoch, one literary device will be privileged over another. For instance, during the height of New Criticism, the figure of metaphor was (the) dominant over the figure of metonymy, in part because the lyric poem was the paradigm upon which those critics focused. I would argue that because critics such as Michael Gorra understand the primary function of a literary work as ethical, they see the dominant in any given literary work as metaphor. Thus Gorra sees Carver's work, which is basically devoid of metaphor, as "attenuated."

[4] For an excellent analysis of the interpretive role of reiterative word patterns in literature, see "Reading the Reiterative: Concordance Mapping and the American Novel," by Jeffrey Allan Jaeckle.

[5] I quote this passage at length to illustrate its repetition.

[6] I recognize that this is basically what Jakobson does in making the distinction between prose as tending toward the metonymic pole and poetry as tending toward the metaphoric pole, but Jakobson's distinction has nuances for which I am not prepared to account in this essay.

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Raymond Carver's Poetry and the Temperance Tradition

Angela Sorby, Marquette University

In mid-nineteenth century America, one of the most popular speakers on the lyceum circuit was John B. Gough, a temperance lecturer who made his own struggles with alcohol the centerpiece of his act. In his autobiography, Gough draws a sharp contrast between his two lives: his pre-1842 alcoholic life, and his post-1842 life after he had "signed the pledge" of abstinence. And yet, as he implicitly acknowledges, to draw a sharp line is, to some extent, to keep both halves of the self in constant play:

> As I look back to 1842—27 years ago—it seems almost a hideous dream; I hardly realize my identity with the staggering, hopeless victim of the terrible vice of intemperance; but the scars remain to testify the reality; yes, scars and marks never to be eradicated, never to be removed in this life. . . . I never rise to speak, but I think of it; the more I mingle with the wise, the pure, the true—the higher my aspirations—the more intense is my disgust and abhorrence of the damning degradation of those seven years of my life from eighteen to twenty-five (Gough 125-26).

Ironically enough, Gough climbed the class scale and achieved his highest aspirations by exhibiting his scars, turning his alcoholic past into a kind of moral (and yet morally ambiguous) theater. His story captivated middle-class audiences who thrilled to his descriptions of drunken debauchery even as they identified with his Horatio Algerian recovery narrative.

In a 1983 *Paris Review* interview, Raymond Carver also affirmed the remoteness of his past drinking self, asserting that "The life back then is gone just as surely—it's as remote to me as if it had happened to somebody I read about in a nineteenth-century novel" (Carver *Interview* 207). And yet, to posit the alcoholic/post-alcoholic self as doubled—as a sort of Jekyll-and-Hyde character—is to deploy a nineteenth-century Gothic strategy that has persisted beyond the nineteenth century. So how remote is the nineteenth century, really? As Mikail Bakhtin argues, writers and readers participate, consciously and unconsciously, in historically-determined cultural discourses. Utterances—even poetic utterances—are not private property; every word of every poem is drawn from a larger sociohistorical context which the author may or may not entirely understand, but which he nevertheless channels and changes. This insight is especially important when applied to Raymond Carver, whose poems are so often read through the limiting lens of his life. Arthur Bethea, for instance, notes some of the "awkwardness" associated with identifying speaker and author in Carver's poems, but he still falls back on biography to read those poems associated with alcohol abuse (210-216). To move beyond biography, it is helpful to keep in mind that when Carver wrote his "drinking" poems, he engaged, deliberately or not, with the vast and contradictory history of American alcoholism, which has been variously understood as a disease, as a moral condition, and even as a class marker. In this essay I will suggest that the nineteenth-century temperance tradition is not remote in Carver's alcohol poems, but rather haunts these poems formally and thematically, keeping them ambiguous as they explore issues of class, aspiration and addiction.

The most obvious cultural context for Carver's alcohol poems is Alcoholics Anonymous, and numerous critics, including Hamilton Cochrane and Chad Wriglesworth, have used A. A. as a lens through which to read Carver's work. Wriglesworth, for instance, astutely maps selected

Carver stories onto "key stages" in the A. A. recovery program, noting that "As with any structured program, all steps within the Alcoholics Anonymous sequence are vital—none can be circumvented or left out" (Wrigglsworth, n.p.; see also Cochrane). Such approaches produce useful but perhaps incomplete visions of Carver's work—visions that are reverent, spiritual, and optimistic. My aim is not to undermine such visions but to complicate them via the often irreverent, materialistic, and chronically backsliding history of the American temperance movement. A. A.'s founder, Bill Wilson, was all too aware of this history. A. A.'s Sixth Tradition forbids members from publicizing or profiting from the meetings "lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose" (*Big Book* n.p.). The Sixth Tradition was Bill Wilson's deliberate response to earlier troubles encountered by the largest nineteenth-century temperance group, the Washingtonians, which claimed over a half-million members in the 1840s before collapsing under the weight of shameless profiteering and bad publicity. As Wilson wrote in 1950, "I wish every A. A. could indelibly burn the history of the Washingtonian into his memory. It is an outstanding example of how, and how not, we ought to conduct ourselves" (qtd. in Jensen 15).

The Washingtonians' main strength was also their downfall: the group's proponents (including, predictably, P.T. Barnum) were highly entertaining, depicting their struggles onstage in poems, stories, songs, and dramas. Individual Washingtonians, such as John B. Gough, achieved a celebrity status which backfired when they backslid. In Gough's case, he was discovered, drunk and disoriented, at a New York City brothel, where he claimed to have been dragged against his will after having been slipped a drugged soda. By the 1850s, the Washingtonians were under fire for sensationalism and hypocrisy; having lost credibility, they finally dissolved. But if the Washingtonians faltered as a temperance movement, they succeeded

as a literary force. As David Reynolds has argued, almost every major writer in the nineteenth-century canon was inspired by temperance narratives and images, from Poe to Melville to Whitman to Dickinson (22-3). Authors were drawn to temperance discourses, not for their therapeutic value, which many found laughable, but for their raw depictions of human duplicity, domestic instability, and class conflict. In other words, the very ambiguities and failures that doomed the Washingtonians made them a trove of richly theatrical tropes for writers.

What, then, does this checkered history have to do with Raymond Carver? To unpack the temperance connection is to explicate some of the ways that Carver was a moral (but not moralistic) craftsman, engaging in explorations rather than step-by-step journeys or programs. A.A. confessions form therapeutic bonds among equals, moving along a predictable path. By contrast, Washingtonian performances sold dramas to paying audiences and readers who were not necessarily alcoholics themselves. While temperance narratives were often formulaic, the problems and emotions they unleashed were attractive (to audiences, readers, and writers) because they were socially subversive. In this crucial respect, Carver's alcohol poems are steeped in the nineteenth-century temperance tradition, a tradition that is also a *literary* tradition, and that enlivens the poems with flashes of showmanship and subversiveness.

Washingtonian narratives tended to dwell on the lurid details of rum-fueled domestic destruction; for instance, in "Death in Disguise," a best-selling poem by Walt Whitman's friend McDonald Clarke, hungry children must fend for themselves:

> Through each patched and dirty pane,
>
> The wind blows in the bleak night rain,
>
> See the lean little ones crawl round
>
> The cold scant embers on the ground,

> Whilst the sick mother on her straw
>
> Sighs—Babes, what are you crying for? (472-77)

Domestic destruction, of course, is ever-present in Carver's alcohol poems, such as "From the East, Light," which begins,

> The house rocked and shouted all night.
>
> Toward morning, grew quiet. The children,
>
> looking for something to eat, make
>
> their way through the crazy living room
>
> in order to get to the crazy kitchen.
>
> There's Father, asleep on the couch.
>
> Sure they stop to look. Who wouldn't? (1-7)

The spectacle of innocent children adrift in a ruined domestic sphere is a staple of temperance literature. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler notes, victimized children act as agents of "moral suasion" in texts such as "Death in Disguise," shaming and seducing errant fathers (60-92). Sanchez-Eppler links this strategy to the emergence of what Richard Brodhead has called "disciplinary intimacy": beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class American families abandoned the authoritarian model of discipline for a system of control based on internal bonds of affection. One of the problems with disciplinary intimacy, though, is that power structures did not really shift when they became invisible or metaphorically inverted: children remain legally and economically dependent on their fathers. Moral suasion may give children symbolic power over adults, but this is a "power" granted only to the powerless.

In "From the East, Light," metaphorical power inversions are evident in the very first line: the house "rock[s]" all night, like a cradle, but the adults are rocking themselves. The

children discover a wrecked Christmas tree, and a rope half out of its box; this leads them to think, about their parents, "Let them go hang themselves" and "To hell with it, and them" (20-22). By imposing these thoughts on the children, the speaker of the poem reinforces the damage done by the drunken parents: he takes away their childhood, replacing it with his own adult cynicism. In this way, sentimental temperance conventions are upended: "disciplinary intimacy," a mode that still dominates middle-class families, fails. Love is not enough. The poem's ending both echoes and subverts stereotypical temperance narratives, in which children redeem their dissolute parents. Here, the children symbolically resurrect the father by turning up the television "so he'll for sure know/he's alive. He raises his head. Morning begins" (31). But it is telling that the children cannot wake the father with their own voices; instead, they need the outside authority of the media. The children may appear to be in control, but they are still powerless. In "From the East, Light" (a title that recollects the Star of Bethlehem) the father collapses into a parody of infancy and the children adopt adult roles, but salvation is elusive. In this and other poems, Carver poses implicit questions that were subversive in the nineteenth century and remain subversive today: is the nuclear family really a bastion of security? Can families "save" individuals?

Another poem, "My Daughter and Apple Pie" also deploys—and subverts—the model of sentimental salvation, using an iconic dessert as a metonym for the ideal "apple pie" American family. The daughter feeds the father pie, and the father is reminded of a nineteenth-century rhyme: "Sugar and spice and everything nice/That's what little girls are made of" (Halliwell-Phillipps 190). But domestic clichés of sugar and spice are undermined by the specter of domestic violence: the girl is a victim. Can she be saved? The father cannot, or will not, intervene: "I fork the pie in/and tell myself to stay out of it" (11-12). He is implicitly sober in

this poem while his daughter struggles with alcoholism, but even when sober he refuses the role of benign *paterfamilias*. The problem, here, is not just the ravages of alcohol. Rather, "My Daughter and Apple Pie" uses sentimental images to interrogate the very *idea* of the family as a safe haven and the man as a protective (but potentially abusive) authority figure.

In a nineteenth-century milieu that sentimentalized parent-child relationships, temperance writers dwelt, not just on the harm done to "lean little ones," but also on the potential psychopathology of the American family *as an institution*. Non-alcoholics were drawn to temperance narratives not just for their sensational otherness but also for the familiar but forbidden impulses that they uncovered. For instance, the nuclear family structure is organized to support a nine-to-five, out-of-the-home work schedule. But what about work—like writing—that requires concentration, creativity, and personal space within the domestic sphere? Carver's poem, "Cheers," explores this dilemma in the paranoid voice of an alcoholic. The speaker hangs a sign on his door ("OUT TO LUNCH") that uses the language of the office, but still thoughts of his family obligations, and indeed actual family members, intrude:

> Once my son, that bastard,
> slipped in and left me a colored egg
> and a walking stick.
> I think he drank some of my vodka. (9-12)

Here, the alcohol-drinking son competes with the alcoholic father for vodka, but the deeper issue lies with the son's intrusion into the father's workspace. And the talismans the son leaves behind are telling, representing the two kinds of discipline the father has abjured: redemptive love (an Easter egg) and authority (a walking stick). Redemption is impossible, not just because the speaker is an alcoholic but also, more significantly, because he does not want to be integrated

into traditional family life. Domesticity is not a saving grace but a disruptive threat. The speaker refuses to be patriarchal—even referring to his son as a fatherless "bastard"—and his abdication is subversive because it dismantles and questions the cultural norm of the good family.

The increasing visibility of the sentimentalized American family was a byproduct of the rising middle class; it represents, in many ways, a utopian vision of bourgeois individualism. It is no accident, then, that alcoholism was framed as a threat not just to family life but also to middle-class aspirations. Issues of class haunt the history of American addiction. A. A. meetings are determinedly classless in theory, if not always in practice; the success of the model depends, as the Twelve Traditions stress, on rotating leadership, a non-hierarchical organization, and the practice of personal humility. The deliberate exclusion of class status from A. A. makes sense in light of the ways that earlier temperance movements were embroiled in class conflict. The Washingtonians, for instance, addressed a working-class constituency, leading the New England Brahmin Theodore Parker to dismiss them as "violent, ill-bred and theatrical" (qtd. in Reynolds 26). But, as Harry Levine has argued, the Washingtonians and other temperance advocates were not just working class; they were working class and aspirational—and perhaps it was this aspirational quality that threatened Parker. Learning to control their impulses was linked to a broader social transformation as Americans began to identify, *en masse,* as middle class. Levine elaborates:

> In the Jacksonian era, the 1830s, Americans troubled by the disorder they perceived in their society built almshouses, penitentiaries, orphan asylums and reformatories to administer "moral treatment" to the dependent and deviant. . . Like asylum advocates, temperance supporters were interested in helping people

> develop and maintain control over their behavior and actions. Temperance supporters, however, believed they had located, in liquor, the source of most social problems. The temperance movement, it should be remembered, was the largest enduring mass movement in 19th-century America. And it was an eminently mainstream middle-class affair. The temperance movement appealed to so many people, in part, because it had become a "fact of life" that one could lose control of one's behavior. Even the use of the word "temperance" for a total abstinence movement is understandable when we realize that the chief concern of temperance advocates, and of the middle class in general, was self-restraint (504).

To move out of alcohol addiction was to move into the middle class, and to adopt, not just a new restraint, but a new *habitus*—a new way of thinking and acting.

In temperance narratives, this transition is often stark and uncomplicated: drunken people fall and sober people rise—and in the case of reformed drunkards, a split or doubled protagonist emerges who is both working class and middle class. Clarke's "Death in Disguise" conveniently follows the nineteenth-century convention of outlining its plot under the title; I can thus share the arc of the narrative in the poet's own words:

> Boys let loose from School — A skaiting (sic) frolic — SamSub, the genius — Orva, his cousin and sweetheart — Dawn of Affection — Love scene by moonlight on the river's side — Aunt Pat's tea party — Laugh at old Puddy the sottish Pedagogue — Sub's elevation to fame and rank, distinction in the Senate, and battle field — Description of his marriage with his young Cousin — Dizziness of high stations — Sudden fall to drunkenness and disgrace — His ribbons changed for rags —

> Young wife turned from a palace to a poor house — Sick mother and starving children — Bleak winds blowing the rain on their bed of straw — Father found frozen to death with a stone for his pillow, and his white hairs covered with dirt — Satan peeps in at the window and whispers with a sneer — So much for wine! (Clarke, 2-3)

This ribbons-to-rags, palace-to-poorhouse spectacle relies on the emergent, Jacksonian assumption that class is not innate but behavioral. To tell temperance stories is to depict class crossings; by the 1840s, this clearly irked the elite establishment. Leonard Woolsey Bacon, an elite contemporary of Theodore Parker, decried the "narration of horrible experiences. . . by the scurrilous army of ditch-delivered reformed drunkards whose glory was in their shame" (qtd. in Reynolds 26). But the implicit point of poems like "Death in Disguise"—and part of their appeal to middle class readers—was that no one is inherently ill bred or ditch delivered: anyone can rise, and anyone can fall.

Carver's alcohol poems are also infused with this sense of class mobility and its shadow side, class insecurity. In "Drinking While Driving," the speaker makes his intellectual ambitions clear even as he undercuts them in the opening lines: "It's August, and I have not/read a book in six months/except something called *The Retreat from Moscow*/by Caulaincourt" (1-3). Having established and dismissed his credentials, he continues: "Nevertheless, I am happy/riding in a car with my brother/And drinking from a pint of Old Crow" (4-6). This is a blue-collar, in-the-moment drive, but the structure of the poem is anxiously ambitious as signaled by that transitional word, "nevertheless": the speaker is happy *despite* having gotten so little reading done. In other words, he can not entirely stop thinking about his own lack of self-restraint and middle-class discipline. Moreover, he takes the time to tell us the book he did read—a famously

weighty historical account by one of Napoleon's generals. Perhaps it is pressing the point to note that Napoleon was Europe's first truly bourgeois hero, representing the triumph of the middle class over the Parisian communards. But certainly, "The Retreat from Moscow" is a sign, not of aimlessness, but of middle class ambition through education. The pint of old Crow—and the brother—are detours, not destinations. Like all Horatio Algers, Carver's speaker is on his way out of his family of origins and up the class scale; for precisely this reason, the scale itself, and its lower registers, remains visible and accessible to his imagination.

At the same time, alcohol is not simply coded as lower class or blue collar in Carver's poems. In another "double" poem, titled simply "Alcohol," the speaker pictures a bohemian escape into what John Crowley has called the "modernist mode" of drunkenness: "That painting next to the brocaded drapery/is a Delacroix. This is called a divan, not a davenport; this item is a settee" (Carver1-3; Crowley 165). The character wears a red cummerbund in this poem; it is Paris, April 1934. But the whole modernist setup turns out to be a sham, as revealed in the poem's second half: "It's afternoon, August, sun striking/the hood of a dusty Ford/parked in your driveway in San Jose" (28-30). Nevertheless, the same patient, detached voice addresses "you" in both halves of the poem. In Paris, that voice is didactic, lecturing the seemingly clueless drunk about antique furniture and paintings; in the second half, the voice is documentary, reminding the drunk about his ho-hum Californian life. The "you," then, is a subject with an unfixed class position, who can be imagined as either bohemian or working class. But alcohol is a common thread: for the Parisian modernist, it promises an escape from the middle class, and, for the San Jose drunk, it threatens a fall from the middle class. The "you" in the poem is not ill-bred or ditch-delivered; he can, or must, move between identities.

But who is this "I," who speaks to the "you" in "Alcohol," and who narrates, at a distance, so many of Carver's alcohol poems? Like a temperance lecturer, he defines himself through alcohol and yet abstains from it; he displays, but does not practice, a loss of control; he is a productive artist whose art requires open access to a chaotic former self. The class valences of this balancing act emerge in Carver's poem, "The Possible":

> I spent years, on and off, in academe.
> Taught at places I couldn't get near
> as a student. But never wrote a line
> about that time. Never. Nothing stayed
> with me in those days. I was a stranger
> and an imposter, even to myself. Except
> at that one school. That distinguished
> institution in the Midwest. Where
> my only friend, and my colleague,
> the Chaucerian, was arrested for beating his wife.
> And threatening her life over the phone,
> a misdemeanor. He wanted to put her eyes out.
> Set her on fire for cheating. (1-13)

Like the horrifyingly entertaining drunks in temperance texts, this Chaucerian is not just an inebriate but a nut. Temperance writers made the same moves; T. S. Arthur's famous *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* was a best-seller, surely because of (not despite) three murders, a case of the delirium tremens, and an eye-stabbing. But also, in this poem, the speaker admits to feeling like an imposter at every university except the one where he found the Chaucerian. Somehow, that

Chaucerian—that drunk, that eye-stabber—made him feel authentic, even if he was just an observer of the mostly rhetorical violence. His moderate, middle-class self, now secure in middle age, does not use his old friend (or his old self) as a moral lesson. Rather, like dark-temperance reformers, he displays his friend's excesses as a way to contemplate the strangely magnetic unpredictability of lives that subvert domestic and professional norms. To read Carver through the temperance tradition is to acknowledge not just the survival of horrifying impulses and appetites within all of us, but also to note their perhaps equally horrifying attractiveness—and thus the poem earns its puzzling title: "The Possible." Even middle-class academics can lose all sense of propriety, slipping into chaos and violence, and, the poem implies, this possibility is necessary to remember or even to cherish.

Carver evokes the figure of the morally ambiguous double in his late poem, "Artaud": "Among the hieroglyphs, the masks, the unfinished poems,/ The spectacle unfolds: *Antonin et son double.*/ They are at work now, calling up the old demons" (1-3). While the spectacle of a demon might appear to advance a species of rigid moralism, "Artaud" is clearly also about the process of making art, and the way that art, unlike therapy, courts demons instead of exorcizing them. If the "old demons" are Satanic, they also work as compelling psychological images, hieroglyphs, or masks, as T. S. Arthur and Walt Whitman, Antonin Artaud and Raymond Carver all understood. Like a classic temperance writer, Carver exploits "the monster," embracing it as a spectacle even as he disavows it. The stakes are evident in another poem, "The Author of Her Misfortune": "I am not the man she claims. But/ This much is true: the past is/ distant, a receding coastline/ and we're all in the same boat . . ." (1-4). *I am not my old self*, the speaker protests, *and yet my old self haunts me*. Moreover, as the title of the poem suggests, his old self is necessary to him *as an author*.

The drunken "other" troubles—and entertains—the reader, who is not a fellow drunk but a spectator, or (to draw on another major trope in Carver's work) a voyeur. In "Nyquil," for instance, we watch two men who will drink almost anything:

> I knew a man
> whose drink of choice was Listerine.
> He was coming down off Scotch.
> He bought Listerine by the case,
> and drank it by the case. The back seat
> of his car was piled high with dead soldiers.
> Those empty bottles of Listerine
> gleaming in his scalding back seat!
> The sight of it sent me home soul-searching.
> I did that once or twice. Everybody does.
> Go way down inside and look around.
> I spent hours there, but
> didn't meet anyone, or see anything
> of interest. I came back to the here and now,
> and put on my slippers. Fixed
> myself a nice glass of NyQuil. (5-20)

The irony of the poem is that the narrator is in denial, convincing himself that NyQuil is somehow less pathetic than Listerine, but a further irony is generated as the reader is invited to see both men as interchangeable. Is the speaker's generic quality due simply to his being an alcoholic? Or is it a function of consumer society, with its brand names and its proliferating

"choices" (NyQuil vs. Listerine) that are not really choices at all? In the end, the speaker remains immobile, and this is critical to the success of the poem: "I waited through hours of darkness with NyQuil./ And then, sweet Jesus! the first sliver/ of light" (24-26). If the light is supposed to be hopeful, its promise is undercut by the narrator's passivity: he just waits for things to get better, without working to better himself. This poem is despairing not just because the speaker is a drunk but also because he has lost his aspirations and sense of upward mobility.

Gunter Leypoldt, writing about Carver's stories, has described his "arrested epiphanies" in which nothing, or at least nothing significant, is finally revealed (531-49). To appreciate how arrested epiphanies work in his poems, it is necessary to read them against the redemptive arc of his public life. This is a counterintuitive move, because, unlike his stories, his poems are often framed as documentaries, naming real names and citing real life events. However, the poems have the real merit of being fragments; they are not a grand life narrative, but rather a series of tableaus that depict some problems (domestic troubles, class insecurities) as irresolvable. There is a productive tension in Carver's poems between the need to practice restraint and the impulse to embrace chaos—a tension that dissipates if readers mine Carver's life for an exogenous happy ending.

In linking Carver with the temperance movement, I do not mean to assert that he ever curled up with "Death in Disguise" or *Ten Nights in a Bar-room.* The connection is not so direct, although McDonald Clarke did influence Walt Whitman, who even eulogized him in a poem, "The Death and Burial of McDonald Clarke" (Whitman 652). And Whitman, in turn, clearly influenced Carver. Yet my larger objective is to expand our understanding of his place in literary history by showing how he borrowed words and images—whether consciously or unconsciously—from an historical archive that predates him. To draw on this archive is to draw,

not just on personal memories, but on cultural memories that are embedded in speech and literary genres. Before the 1930s—the decade when A. A. was founded and Carver was born—cultural assumptions about alcohol abuse were being established and naturalized. An historicized understanding of Carver's assumptions might help to wrest his "drinking" poems from the writer's fixed biography, allowing these remarkable texts to register the ambiguities of the still-unfixed American middle class.

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"I don't do motion shots"

Photography, Movement, and Change in Raymond Carver's Stories

Ayala Amir, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

1.

In interviews with Raymond Carver, published after his death, he acknowledged the resemblance of his stories, his poems, or the process of their creation to photographs or the act of photography. Carver responded to an interviewer's comment comparing his works to snapshots with: "I like the idea of the picture because there's a glimpse of something that stays fixed in your head" (Gentry 223).

According to Carver, the 'snapshot' quality inheres in the stories being pieces of reality which go on living their life, as it were, in the mind or memory of the viewer/ writer/ reader. Carver's remark implicitly underscores the subjective aspect of photography. He refers to its latent work in, or connection to, the deeper, perhaps unconscious layers of the mind. This view—however flippantly Carver may have phrased it—is consistent with the discourse on photography since its debut, especially by thinkers who sought to challenge the view of photography as a precise rendition of reality.

These thinkers speak of photography as poised between objectivity and subjectivity, reality and perception—a tension not unlike the one suggested by Carver's remark, as well as by his technique, which this essay will explore. For example, Walter Benjamin noted the "optical unconsciousness" which photography reveals by capturing the smallest details, which are "clear and *yet hidden enough to have found shelter in daydreams*" (203, my emphasis). This enigmatic observation implies both the accuracy of photography *and* its

latent permeation through consciousness. Similarly, when Roland Barthes contends that the best way to look at a photograph is to close one's eyes, he evokes photography's internal-subjective effect/affect (53). From a different angle, Ann Banfield analyzes the eye of the camera as both purged from consciousness and suggesting a potential human presence (71). In fact, as Martin Jay has suggests, photography, despite its aspiration to accuracy and liberation from subjectivity, plays a crucial role in challenging the very possibility of an objective or innocent vision of reality (*Downcast* 124-147; "Photo-Unrealism" 344-360).

It seems needless to say that Carver is mostly known and appreciated as a master of the short story—a genre that from the days of Edgar Allan Poe has been compared to a picture (Poe 108). Furthermore, in many of his stories Carver seems to have followed the Hemingway tradition of the eye-of-the-camera technique, namely an objective mode of representation which betrays almost no trace of a mediating consciousness. However, a reading of Carver's stories, focusing on the visual dimensions of his writing, could arguably problematize both poles of the visual metaphor: photography itself as well its application to Carver's texts. Both photography and Carver's poetics reveal an intricacy at the level of representation, whereby the seeming adherence to reality paradoxically deepens the sense of a subjective, limited vision, and the failure in capturing reality "as is."

In this essay I would like to address only one aspect of Carver's complex relation to photography, that of representation of movement. In a sense, representation of movement may be seen as a metonymy, or one representative and crucial element, of Carver's overall approach to the mimetic task, or, to use his own words, the writer's linking of "concrete words . . . to make up the visible action of the story" (*Fires* 17). In one of his stories, Carver addresses explicitly the movement issue, and he does it through the theme—or metaphor—of photography. The story "Viewfinder" is therefore a key text when discussing Carver's approach to the representation of reality as flux, even as it elucidates his connection to

photography. A reading of this text will be followed here by a reading of another story, "Feathers," with reference to other stories as well. Through these readings I will illustrate this meta-literary issue, while connecting it to the 'actual' experience of Carver's characters

2. Viewfinder

"Viewfinder" is a first-person narrative told by a lonely man who has shut himself up in his house after his wife and children have left him; he describes his encounter with a photographer with no hands, who offers him a picture of his house. The two engage in a mysterious conversation; it seems that the photographer, an occasional visitor, keenly grasps his host's mental and existential condition, even though the latter has not explicitly shared it with him or with the reader. This encounter culminates in a series of photographs taken by the photographer at the request of the narrator. The photographing scenes reveal the theme of representation that is central to the story, while its implications reach beyond it.

The shooting session in "Viewfinder" begins once the photographer has guessed that the narrator's family "cleared right out" (SRC 194), implying that he, too, has suffered from some type of family break-up. "They're what gave me this" (193), he says, gesturing to the hooks he has in lieu of hands. "I sympathize," he adds while thanking the narrator for his hospitality. To which his host replies, "Show me, show me how much" (193), and he then asks the photographer to photograph him and his house. "It won't work," says the photographer, "they are not coming back" (194). However, the two step outside nonetheless; the photographer adjusts the shutter, and the shoot begins:

> We moved around the house. Systematic. Sometimes I'd look sideways. Sometimes I'd look straight ahead.
>
> "Good," he'd say. "That's good," he'd say, until we circled the house and were back in the front again. "That's twenty. That's enough." (194)

Much like other acts described in the story, this one seems whimsical and without reason. We can only guess its meaning. Perhaps the narrator wishes to see himself from the outside, to look at himself through the eyes of the photographer and of the camera, thus telling his story and that of the abandoned house in pictures rather than in words, knowing that either way, "they" are not coming back.

However, the psychological motivation behind the host's curious behavior is less important in this context than the manner in which the series of photographs is executed. The photographer works "systematically," that is, step by step, creating a sequence of pictures in which the background is adjacent segments of a house. Were the pictures to be placed side by side, they would create only a partial and false sense of continuity: the arrangement would appear fragmented, lack inherent flow, and depend on the eye and the imagination of the viewer to set the photographs in motion. The sequence is based on adjacent, immobilized images of the pictures' subject—the host. It conveys the gestures that comprise movement, but not movement itself, which appears to be more than the sum of its parts. It seems not all the segments of time and space have been detected, and that, even if the interspaces were further reduced, movement itself would still elude the spectator. The subject's positioning has cut off actual movement, just as the click of the camera has cut off represented movement.

Viewing such photos may be compared to scanning pictures on a roll of film, for which only accelerated, successive screening creates the illusion of movement. It is also comparable to the movement of the eye along the contact sheets of the chronophotographer Edward Muybridge, who created shot-sequences that registered previously invisible details in the body movements of people and animals (see pictures 1 and 2). Naturally, this comparison is only partial: in "Viewfinder," the movement seems not to take place in front of the camera at all, as it does in the celluloid roll and in Muybridge's pictures, and the intervals between

clicks are much longer than the split second intervals of those movement sequences. However, the similarity is still striking: "Viewfinder" suggests the will to represent movement, but ends up arresting it, while Muybridge's photographic process fractures continuous movement, no matter how "systematic" it seems. Paradoxically, these two photographic series exploring movement demonstrate precisely the impossibility of fully representing it. The proximity of time-points and space-positions actually underscores the elusiveness of the passage between them.

Picture 1

Eadweard Muybridge, Striking Blow with Right Hand (1884-5)

There are other types of photography in "Viewfinder," however. The narrator, being photographed in various positions with the house as a background, asks the photographer to take his picture while he stands on the roof. There he finds a few rocks and asks the photographer to shoot him while he throws them:

> "Ready?" I called, and got a rock, and I waited until he had me in his viewfinder.
>
> "Okay!" he called.
>
> I laid back my arm and I hollered, "Now!" I threw that son of a bitch as far as I could throw it.
>
> "I don't know," I heard him shout. "I don't do motion shots."

"Again!" I screamed, and took up another rock. (194)

This is the end of the story, which freezes, like a photograph, on the throwing gesture. Two options of photographic representation are thus offered. One is a series of successive photographs of the subject, which obtains its movement from the moving eye of a potential spectator, a series based on the "motion picture(s)" principal. The other is the "motion shot," the stone-throwing photograph. This photograph seems to express a resistance to representing movement in a series of successive static positions, and a will to contain it in a single shot, independent of the passing eye or of the rolling of a film. However, the possibility of such a photograph is questioned: "I don't do motion shots," says the photographer. His concern is understandable—he does not want the picture to be blurred—but I believe that this statement reflects a broader issue in Carver's work.

To further understand the implications of this statement, it is important to note that "Viewfinder," like many of Carver's stories, is written in the *scene* mode, namely a duration technique in which there appears to be a one-to-one correspondence between the time of the story (or fabula) and the time of the text (or sujet).[1] The scene mode manifests a literary ideology, that of "showing" or mimesis, which embodies a wish to place the reader inside the occurrences of the story, as it were, and to minimize narratorial mediation as much as possible. Carver thus continues the Hemingway tradition, which strives to imitate the eye of the camera by accompanying the events "as is," without editing or selection. Moments follow each other successively and visible space is described accurately. However, the scene mode, as simple as it sounds, intrinsically negates itself. As implied by Mieke Bal's discussion of narrative duration, the scene technique's very effort to cling to story time—a task that could never be fully accomplished—exposes the impossibility of representing continuity and the unavoidable breakdown of rhythm (106-107). My analogy is probably clear by now: the photographer and the narrator, circling the house together at the same pace, symbolically

express the aspiration for a correspondence between text and story, representation and 'reality.' However, the series of pictures underscores the break in sequence inherent in the very act of representation. The possibility of tracking movement is but an illusion; continuity is false and delusive. This also holds true in the series of "motion pictures" and in the use of the scene mode. The scene mode, which allegedly represents continuity, might actually break the illusion of succession, supported by the linearity of the text. By taking the clinging-to-story time to its extreme, it exposes the omissions—however minute—that any representation of movement and time entails.

The breaking of sequence is thus inherent in the very act of representation. This is hinted at in the story by "I don't do motion shots," though it is shown in other ways too, which become especially apparent if we compare two versions of the story. "Viewfinder," like other stories by Carver, exists in more than one version. The first was published in 1978, and it is quite different from the 1981 final version. Among the differences is the addition of the phrase "I don't do motion shots" in the latter version. The changes were no doubt motivated by Gordon Lish's editing of the story before its publication in the collection *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*. Lish"s role in shaping the character of Carver's earlier stories has been recently acknowledged. It seems that Lish changed the texts radically, reducing and thinning them out, adapting them thereby to the somewhat notorious label of "minimalism" or "lean prose." Some contend that these changes were more in accord with Lish's brand of experimental poetics than they were consistent with Carver's "natural" style, as revealed in his later stories.[2] According to this view, the subsequent republication of some expanded and altered versions of early stories that had previously been edited by Lish reflects Carver's liberation from Lish and a return to his own original, fuller version. My intention is not to determine which of the versions of "Viewfinder" is more authentic, or which of the changes reflect editorial enforcement versus inner development of the story. However, I

believe that the declaration "I don't do motion shots," added to the final (1981) version, is compatible with other changes made in the story, making it (inter alia) a meta-literary statement.

A careful comparison of the two versions is illuminating. I will conclude it by saying that in comparison to the first version, the later version, the one which doubts the very possibility of representing movement, embodies different kinds of fragmentations and discontinuities. The most conspicuous among them are the graphic and syntactical discontinuities: sentences detached from paragraphs and places separately; sentences shortened and propositions omitted, enhancing the story's staccato rhythm. The creation of discontinuity is evident also at the level of meaning, in the lack of information about characters' background, in the less overt symbolism, and in a very curious conversation. Indeed, the fragmentation of movement corresponds to the fragmentation of meaning both where reader response is needed and in the dialogue between the characters. The exchange of words seems to indicate both deep familiarity and total estrangement, revealing an inexplicable emotional link between people who otherwise seem to talk past each other.

It is important to note that, despite the changes made to the final version, the text still clings to the time-space frame of the events in the "front" of the story. With the exception of one comment—the narrator notes that he discerned the photographer before he knocked on his door, thus deviating slightly from the present time—the abridged version does not skip over substantial chunks of time or move to other locations. The changes in the 1981 version do not directly impact the scene technique; however, they underscore the discontinuity lurking in the text, and challenge the illusion of succession that the scene technique strives to create.

In Muybridge's photos of movement, the spectator perceives the fragmentation of movement because he looks at the successive acts almost simultaneously, that is, side by side,

rather than one after the other (unlike a motion picture, where each picture rapidly replaces the previous one).[3] When reading a text, illusions of continuity and movement are created by the linearity of the reading process, which produces the "one after the other" sense of the represented actions while automatically filling the inevitable gaps between them. It seems, though, that the final version of "Viewfinder" deliberately attempts to hinder the reader's work of connecting and stitching together the sequence of events, scattering bumps, as it were, in the text in order to hamper the passage (or movement) between its parts. The reading process thus illustrates the difficulty in representing continuous movement. It foregrounds the gaps that *scene* representation usually treats as a necessary evil, and tries to cover them up, or distract the reader's mind from them. This is a conscious move in the development of the story, which draws the reader's attention to these unavoidable gaps.

3. Fractioning of Movement

At this point, I would like to move beyond "Viewfinder" in order to examine what I would call the "fractioning of movement" in various aspects of Carver's work. I define the "fractioning of movement" as the representation of movement or action that emphasizes the inevitable segmenting of continuity inherent in the very act of representation, thus making movement a mere juxtaposition of gestures that seem to be connected and to follow each other, but are, in fact, separated from each other by brief intervals. This process is noticeable mostly in the way Carver describes body movement by tracking the minute details of physical action. A good example is "Errand," in which Carver elaborates on a marginal episode in the death scene of Anton Chekhov, as described in Henry Troyat's biography of the Russian writer. Although Carver did not quote Troyat verbatim, one can hardly fail to notice where Troyat ends and Carver begins. Only Carver would describe Chekhov's doctor pouring champagne into a glass or measuring the pulse of a dying man without missing one gesture,

revealing Carver to be a kind of literary Muybridge. At the same time, Carver manages, in different ways, to siphon momentum out of body movement, and to crumble it into merely adjacent gestures. I will illustrate this point with some examples from other stories.

"Little Things" (the former "Popular Mechanics")—a story about a couple literally grappling over their baby—draws much of its terrifying power from an accurate description of actions detached from their purpose or their emotional content, focusing instead on the limbs and motions involved:

> The kitchen window gave no light. In the near-dark he worked on her fisted fingers with one hand and with the other hand he gripped the screaming baby up under an arm near the shoulder. (WICF 153)

The description of an emotion-filled action that is reduced to its basic elements both enhances and hinders the reader's vision, as if the reader, too, were wrapped in the darkness of the room. The scrupulous detailing of simultaneous motions, reported one after the other, delays the reader's grasp of the overall situation. The tangle of limbs (the husband's hands, the wife's fisted fingers, the arm and shoulder of the infant) is blurred by the absence of possessive adjectives ("an arm" or "one hand").

Sometimes, when action is fractioned into its basic elements, one gesture—typical but unnecessary—stands out, like the gesture of putting a hand behind one's back while drinking, in "The Train":

> The old man got up from the bench and moved over to the drinking fountain. He put one hand behind his back, turned the knob and bent over to drink. (SRC 393)

Again, it seems that the description is meant to induce visualization, but at the same time, the minor gesture underscores the mechanical aspect of physical action. This is even more conspicuous in the story "Neighbors":

> Bill and Jim shook hands beside the car. Harriet and Arlene held each other by the elbows and kissed lightly on the lips. (WICF 86)

The minor gesture of holding each other's elbow hollows out the ritual of parting, emphasizing the element of mimicry in the "neighbors" relationship. This minor, perfunctory action is displayed on center stage, as it were, in the theater of decorum. It is remarkable for being insignificant and unintentional, and thus it de-automatizes the act as a whole. The eye of the camera technique works here by focusing in on a marginal, non-representative movement that seems to be captured accidentally, an effect that has played a major role in the way that photography has influenced the concept of vision (Spiegel 93-101).

At other times Carver tears a single gesture from the causal chain of events. A fist hitting a head introduces the main familiar-strange event in "Careful":

> The day she came, he was on the sofa, in his pajamas, hitting his fist against the right side of his head. Just before he could hit himself again, he heard voices downstairs on the landing. (WICF 266)

The meaning of this gesture becomes clear in the next paragraph: "He'd awakened that morning and found out that his ear had stopped up with wax." However, the comic—as well as the emotional and symbolic—effect of a man hitting his head with his fist had already has its emotional effect on the reader.

In all the above instances, movement is detached from performer, cause, or purpose, and seems to be diverted from its center of gravity. All of these descriptions end up by disrupting the perception of the act as a whole and defamiliarizing it. This effect of Carver's techniques could be connected both to the tradition of the experimental *nouveau roman* and to the influence of postmodern fiction with its breakdown in the causal chain of events. However, it is important to note that, in accordance with the general character of Carver's work, the fractioning of movement does not verge on radical disruption of narrative

conventions, as for example in an extreme lengthening of the duration of the text, which interrupts the reader's understanding of what he "sees." In that sense, Carver's technique differs from that of the *nouveau roman*, in which the texture of events and objects is distorted as through a powerful magnifying glass, losing entirely its familiar look in the process. However, the splitting and dispersion of visible action (as a result of the lingering of the gaze) and the delay in, and disruption of, the perception of action are easily discernible in Carver's stories. By dwelling on the details of action, he dispossesses the moving person of his limbs, detaching movement from its purpose and context. Most of all, movement itself is appropriated from its observer, no longer available as an uninterrupted flow, thus foregrounding the very effort it takes to see.

In "Signals," for example, an entire silent scene is captured in the corner of the eye, its description segmented by a rhythmic insertion of verbs which pertain to vision:

> When Wayne *looked* back, he *saw* Aldo take Caroline's waiting hand, *saw* Aldo draw his heels smartly, *saw* Aldo kiss her wrist. (SRC, 165; my emphases)

The rhythmic scattering of verbs pertaining to vision in the above sequence illustrates how the gaze frames segments of action that are adjacent in time and space while interrupting the sequence of their presentation. In "Where I'm calling from," the seeing verb indicates the shifting of the narrator's gaze between husband and wife:

> I *see* this woman stop the car and set the brake. I *see* J.P. open the door. I *watch* her get out, and I *see* them hug each other. I *look* away. Then I *look* back. (WICF 293; my emphasis)

Whereas "Viewfinder" presents us with the difficulty of representing movement, here the difficulty lies in the process of perception. Verbs indicating vision—to see, to watch and to look—underscore the presence of the observer, the clinging of his gaze, and the continuity of

perception. At the same time, these verbs are also located in the elusive passages between situations, thus constituting a persistent effort to bridge them. The observer has an unhindered view of the situation, and the description is of figures in motion. However, perception and representation entail the omission of connecting links and the disruption of movement. Much like "Viewfinder," where the click of the camera cuts the continuity of movement, these last examples entail an observer who produces a series of snapshot descriptions that are adjacent but not interconnected.

4. Before and After

My crossing over between representation of movement and perception in general is not as unintentional as it might seem. It is in accordance with my belief that questioning the very possibility of "doing motion shots" reaches beyond the meta-literary scope and issues of representation. It seems to reflect at the same time the mental condition of Carver's characters. They are often somewhat paralyzed when facing a movement or a change in their life or surroundings. This is apparent most of all when the character tries to put a finger on the moment when an actual rupture occurred. Therefore, I think that the poetic principles discussed here are connected to a basic existential experience, which is embodied in Carver's special use of *scene*, as well as in other representation modes. A brief reading of "Feathers," from the collection *Cathedral*, will illustrate this connection. "Feathers" is a very different story from "Viewfinder." It is much fuller and does not adhere to the scene mode as the earlier stories do. However, a network of symbols and motives makes this story a thematic complement to the poetic issues raised by "Viewfinder."

Jack, the first-person narrator of "Feathers," and his wife, Fran, pay a visit to his co-worker, Bud, and his wife, Olla. Unfolding retrospectively, the narrative ultimately reveals that Jack and Fran have had a marital crisis. For Fran, the evening marks the beginning of the

crisis and may even have caused it, while Jack sees the evening as a moment of grace, and denies its influence on their life. "The change," he says, "happened much later" (WICF 354), refusing or unable to pinpoint the exact moment where intimacy turned to estrangement from the long–haired, beautiful Fran ("She cut her hair a long time ago. She's gotten fat on me, too" (355), who now sits beside him, silently watching TV. In fact, the elusiveness of any transition is expressed in several ways in this story, of which I will mention only one.

At some point during the evening, Jack notices a plaster cast of teeth standing on the television near a vase of flowers ("the horror-show teeth on top of the TV" (342). We learn that the frightful teeth serve as a reminder of the debt Olla owes her husband for financing her orthodontic treatment.[4] They were "the most crooked, jaggedy teeth in the world," (341) comments Jack, and Bud gets up and puts the cast teeth near his wife's (now) straight teeth:

> Bud had gone to the TV and picked up the teeth. He walked over to Olla and held them up against Olla's cheek. "Before and after," Bud said. (343)

The use of the phrase "before and after" is an interesting example of Carver's flirting with popular culture, which is ever present in his work, and is not only evident in the silent television flickering in the background of his stories; the expression obviously alludes to the ads promising a radical change for the better if one would only use a specific product. The "before" picture presents an undesirable situation (fat figure, long nose, pimples), while the "after" picture depicts an ideal state of affairs (toned body, perfect nose, smooth skin). The two pictures stand side by side, and the time elapsing between them is referred to only in words (and is surprisingly short). The proximity of the opposite images and their simultaneous presentation supports the implied message that the change happened in a miraculous leap forward, a sprint through time. "The orthodontist who fixed Olla's teeth must have been a whiz," says Fran, in that spirit (342).

In a sense, Jack's feeling that he cannot bridge the gap between sweet memories and the bitter present is a dark reversal of the media's mirage. Like many of Carver's characters, he experiences the gap between the happiness of "before" and the crisis of "after" without being able to identify the moment of change. As if facing a reversed miracle, he cannot contain in his mind more than an ungraspable chasm between opposite situations. As if to illustrate this difficulty, the evening itself presents us with an ungraspable relationship between opposites, in particular, beauty and ugliness. In addition to the images of Olla's teeth and the ghastly mold, the story includes a peacock, who Olla believes to be the "the most beautiful thing" she ever saw (347), and a baby of which it is said that "calling him ugly does it credit" (349).

"Feathers" is not the only Carver story that reflects bewilderment in the face of inexplicable change, as if it were something that "had happened to other people" (354). In stories where the minds of the characters are being penetrated or their thoughts verbalized, they often wonder, in different ways, at the transformation in their lives and emotions or in the personality of someone close to them (e.g., in "Fever," "Menudo," and "Intimacy"). The wife in "Intimacy," marveling at how intimacy is there, then gone, arbitrarily pinpoints the change to the fourth decade of her husband's life. In "Will You Please be Quiet, Please?" a man in crisis expresses the will to face the moment when his life shifted direction. In "Why Don't You Dance?" the "before and after" juxtaposition consists of an analogy between a young couple launching their life together and a lonely man who went through a divorce or breakup.

Another version of facing change but failing to locate or define its source is found in stories where the changeover is felt while it is taking place, though the character finds it hard to link it with the specific event causing the change. In "Sixty Acres," one specific event (Lee's confrontation with a gang of boys invading his property) is experienced, while it is

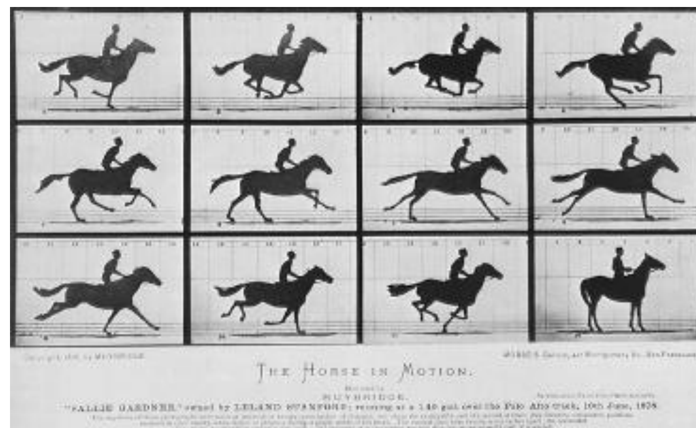
happening, as a crucial break and a failure, yet the protagonist comments that "nothing had happened" (SRC 61). The same lack of correlation between the minor event and its impact on the character's life is found in "Whoever Was Using This Bed," in which a harassing telephone call and a conversation at the break of dawn make the narrator feel as though he has crossed an invisible border to a strange place, but he doesn't know how he got there. In "The Hair," a small, disturbing event shakes the very foundations of the protagonist's life. In this story, says William Stull, one can see how Carver prefers (inspired by Chekhov) what "becomes" over what is "happening" (Stull 468). He thus shifts the focus of his short stories from the "decisive moment" to the "non-events" of life, which paradoxically turn out to be decisive after all. Similarly, Marc Chénetier says that Carver's stories deal with pure change, not with the events, but with what lies between them (168).

Thus there are many ways to approach crisis, and many literary means to express it. Sometimes the two sides are juxtaposed with an abyss gaping between them; sometimes the gaze is focused on what precedes the change or what followed it. In other cases, the gaze is fixed on the very heart of the transformation, without fathoming its meaning. In any event, the change is always painfully felt, yet remains ungraspable. We can conclude then by the saying—along with Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson—that when movement and change are experienced only through the adjacent and immobile stances of "before" and "after," as in the stories discussed here, they are in fact happening "behind one's back," and are thereby inaccessible to whomever experiences them (Deleuze 3).

5.

Muybridge's snapshots created a revolution in painting: they revealed movements that were incompatible with the era's concept of motion, and a difference of opinion erupted over the right way to paint it. For example, his famous pictures of a galloping horse have the horse

lingering in the air with his legs bent, not extended as they appear to be. Suddenly, a fissure erupted between the visible and the real: the minute tracking, step by step, of the stages of movement, seemed to sabotage the impression of movement. The snapshot, says Therry de Duve, attempts to illustrate the sign and verb “the horse gallops,” but, in the process, it “steals the life outside and returns it as death.” The series leaves us with images deprived of movement. All that is left is a name, a shape, and stasis. “This is why it appears as abrupt, aggressive, and artificial, however convinced we might be of its realistic accuracy,” and, as a result, says de Duve, the effect of a snapshot is that of the “real unreality,” an effect that was attributed also to photo-realism (in painting) and to hyperrealism (in painting *and* literature) (Duve 116).[5] De Duve explains that representing movement through a series of successive gestures exposes the artificiality of separating events. It thus challenges the very concept of “event,” revealing that events are fundamentally changed when isolated from a sequence and are, therefore, but a mental construct. Leo Charney adds that movement photographs represent the invisible and hidden in the forces of life and the basic inability to represent such forces (289-290).[6] Here too, the closer the events to each other, the more conspicuous this is.



Picture 2

Eadweard Muybridge, The Horse in Motion (1878)

Based on this principle, Carver’s use of the series of snapshots technique succeeds in challenging the illusion of continuity, despite the linearity of the text. He achieves this by

meticulously tracking actions, a technique that parallels his characters' obsessive need to perceive (in one character's words) “the tiny makings of the catastrophe that thereafter set their lives on different course,”[7] and to locate the moment of change. Both levels—the poetic and the psychological—are marked by an awareness that one cannot bridge the gap between “before” and “after,” an awareness sometimes accompanied by a contradictory feeling that the “after” was in fact already present in the “before.”

In this way, the problem of representing movement, expressed allegorically in “Viewfinder,” is closely bound up with the experience of characters who suddenly feel deprived of any sense of continuity, a feeling that shakes their sense of reality. Their experiences are reproduced, as I have been attepting to show, by the reader who experiences the text as both continuous and fragmented. However, Carver’s use of the aesthetics of mimesis (or *showing*), which may be compared to the eye of the camera and its connection to his portrayal of characters in crisis, reaches beyond the representation of movement and his use of the *scene* technique. The metaphor of the photograph is therefore a fitting tool for further exploring different aspects of this poetic and its connection to recurrent themes and plots in Carver’s oeuvre.

In reading and analyzing Viewfinder,” I referred solely to the first of the two series of shots, that in which the photographer follows the man encircling his house. I avoided the other possibility—or impossibility—that ends the story: that in which the photograph encloses movement and at the same time expresses it. The photographer declares that he doesn’t do motion shots. But is it really impossible to photograph the man throwing a rock or the flying stone? Is the series of snapshots the only option of “motion pictures”? I will refrain from answering this questions here, but let me suggest that Carvers description of a snapshot as “a glimpse of something that stays in your head” refers mostly to this elusive and somehow impossible option—a seemingly static image which is rendered dynamic in the

mind of the reader, and, much like the rock in the hand of the lonely man, is thrown far beyond the frame of the photograph *and* of the story. For me, these stationary-dynamic images connect Carver to other great writers and to other "pictures" or frozen moments in the history of literature: Flaubert and James's *tableaux vivant*, Joyce's epiphanic stasis and Faulkner's visionary glimpse, the same Faulkner who said: "The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life" (253).

Notes

Images by Eadweard Muybridge are in the public domain.

1 For a summary of the *scene* mode and its characteristics, see Genette 86-112.
2 For a discussion of the nature of the changes Lish made, see Scott.
3 Deleuze (p. 5) elaborates on the contribution of Muybridge's motion pictures to the cinema's concept of movement.
4 Apparently, the autobiographic source of this story is the mold of crooked teeth of Tess Gallagher, Carver's second wife. See Adelman photograph in *Carver Country*, 114.
5 De Duve describes two ways of referring to photography: the snapshot, which refers to an event but does not convey flux, and therefore representing the elusiveness of the referent; and the slow time-exposure, which creates an autonomic picture, detached from the event of the unfinished past. De Duve's interpretation of the snapshot is comparable to Barthes' account: the photo stands for an unfinished past, a gesture that was cut off n the middle.
6 Charney points out here the paradoxes in Modernist approaches to representing movement (referring mainly to Walter Benjamin) and their relationship to the cinematic experience.
7 "Were there other men, he wondered drunkenly, who could look at one event in their lives and perceive in it the tiny makings of the catastrophe that thereafter set their lives on a different course?" ("Will You Please Be Quiet, Please," SRC 177)

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Il Miglior Fabbro?

On Gordon Lish's Editing of Raymond Carver's
What We Talk About When We Talk About Love

Enrico Monti, University of Bologna, Italy

1. Introduction

In April 1981, when *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* appeared, Raymond Carver was still little known to wider audiences and few could predict that he was soon to be acclaimed as the "American Chekhov" and the father of literary Minimalism. Yet, those seventeen short fragments managed to reinvigorate the realistic trend of the short-story with their spare and laconic portrait of small-town America: a portrait free of condescendence, irony, or denunciation, yet full of hopeless desolation. That collection's pared-down narrative has come to represent for many readers Raymond Carver's stylistic trademark, although it undeniably marks a "minimalistic" peak in his career, and a point of no return.[1] It is precisely in relation to that minimalism that we shall reconsider the role played in the collection's final output by Gordon Lish, Carver's longtime editor and friend. To do so, we shall analyze the scope and the extent of Lish's editorial work on the collection, as it is now visible in the archives of the Lilly Library at Indiana University.[2]

2. Lish and Carver

A flamboyant fiction editor at *Esquire* (1969-76), McGraw-Hill (1976-1977) and Knopf (1977-1990) and a writer himself, Gordon Lish acquired a reputation in the 70s as a provocative, brilliant talent scout, "at the epicenter of American literary publishing" (Birkerts 252). He and

Carver had been friends since the mid-60s, and he was Carver's best advocate once he became a fiction editor at the magazine *Esquire*.[3] Rumors about his role in shaping Carver's early stories started circulating in the 80s, although neither Carver nor Lish publicly addressed the matter. It was only in the early 90s, when Lish sold his personal papers to the Lilly Library, that scholars got a clear sense of his impact on those stories. The debate received an international echo[4] in the wake of a *New York Times Magazine* article that appeared in 1998, in which D.T. Max revealed the results of his research on the Lish archives.[5] Ever since, the Carver-Lish relationship entered the sphere of the most controversial editorial relationships, alongside the famed Eliot-Pound collaboration over *The Waste Land*, or Hemingway-Fitzgerald over *The Sun Also Rises*, or again Maxwell Perkins-Thomas Wolfe on *Look Homeward, Angel*, only to name the most renowned (and documented) cases in contemporary American literature.[6]

Among the Lish folders at the Lilly Library, one can find the original proofs of several of Carver's stories, namely the two Knopf collections that made him famous (*What We Talk* and *Cathedral*), complete with Lish's editing, as well as Carver's letters to Lish during their collaboration. Examining those archives, one may reconstruct a complex editorial relationship and reconsider the transformations that Carver's prose seemed to undergo in his later collections, starting from *Cathedral* (1983), on to *Fires* (1983-1984) and *Where I'm Calling From* (1988). In particular, one is led to reconsider Carver's decision to publish "extended" versions of some early stories in those later collections, a decision which Carver and most critics explained in terms of reprise and expansion of a narrative felt too pared-down, and not as the retrieval of previous, longer versions of the stories (Gentry and Stull 125, 229-30).

Going through the manuscripts of *What We Talk*, one is immediately struck by the extent to which Lish's editing contributed to "minimalize" the collection. Operating at different levels

(syntax, lexicon, and plot), Lish emphasized several aesthetical features of literary minimalism, defined by Kim Herzinger in terms of "equanimity of surface, 'ordinary' subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story, and characters who don't think out loud" (7) and "spareness and cleanness" (14); or again as "terse, oblique, realistic, or hyperrealistic, slightly plotted, extrospective, cool-surfaced fiction," in the words of John Barth (1). In particular, Lish heightened the peculiar sense of bleakness which pervades Carver's stories and which he admittedly perceived as Carver's main strength: "Carver's way of staging a story, staging its revelation, is, I think, unique. Carver's sentence is unique, but what has most powerfully persuaded me of Carver's value is his sense of a peculiar bleakness" (Gentry and Stull 84). Having identified the force of Carver's prose, Lish moved on to sharpen it, editing those stories (at least) twice,[7] rewriting titles and endings, and cutting out several pages of the original versions, thus pushing his vision of the now well-known "less is more" aesthetic to its limits. In this sense, his editorial work turned out to be essentially a subtractive operation, aimed at expelling any sentimentalism and bringing Carver's spare prose to its extremes.

3. The Editing at Close Range

We shall start our analysis with a few words about the complex genealogy of *What We Talk*. Out of the seventeen stories composing the collection, five had appeared, in a different form, in a small-press collection that Carver had put together, independently from Lish in 1977, entitled *Furious Seasons and Other Stories*.[8] Those stories are a precious touchstone, for they are often fairly similar, if not virtually identical, to the typescript versions edited by Lish and now archived at the Lilly Library. Among the remaining stories, one had appeared in a magazine

years before (“Friendship” [1971], later “Tell the Women We’re Going”), but the bulk of the collection had been written between 1977 and 1980.

After Lish’s editing, four of those stories were to be restored by Carver in their unabridged form in later publications.[9] Odd as it may sound, two of those stories (“The Bath” and “Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit”) circulated in two fairly different versions at roughly the same time, for they had been accepted for publication in magazines before Lish’s extensive editing.[10] Just to get a sense of the editorial intricacies behind *What We Talk*, one may consider that only two of the seventeen stories appeared exclusively in this collection, while a story like “So Much Water So Close to Home” can count as four different publications in collections (1977, 1981, 1983-1984, 1988)[11] and “Popular Mechanics” can count as three, with different titles: in order, “Mine,” “Popular Mechanics,” and “Little Things,” although the three versions of the story are fairly similar to one another, and the latter two are actually the same story.

While Carver’s penchant for revision may somewhat explain this textual restlessness on his part, there is no doubt that *What We Talk*’s controversial editing added to his urgency in revising some of the stories after their publication.

3.1. Titles

As these preliminary considerations suggest, *What We Talk* has quite a complicated publishing history, and we shall now see in detail the role Gordon Lish played in all of this. Our point of departure shall be the new titles which Lish gave to more than half of the stories of *What We Talk*. His new titles are generally more oblique or allusive, and they foreground a sentence or an object of the story. A striking (and brilliant) example of this technique is the title “Sacks” given to “The Fling,” a story of a father’s fling told to his own son, who narrates the story. The

new title cleverly enlarges a plain, incidental element of the story—a sack of gifts that the narrator received from his father and eventually forgot at the airport after their talk—and invests it with a deeply symbolic power (beside introducing a hardly coincidental homophony with "sex").

Plain one-word titles (such as "Beginners" and "Friendship," or the conventional "Dummy," after the story's main character) were replaced by such long and intriguing titles as "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," "Tell the Women We're Going," and "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off." In all these cases, the new titles echo a sentence of the story and appear more captivating and stylized than the earlier ones. "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" (for "Where is Everyone?") goes in the same direction, while introducing an almost ironic tone which is absent in the earlier version of the story (as well as in most Carver's stories). The new title appears to be in line with the different characterization given to the narrator in the final version of the story, a characterization which denies the sense of solitude emerging so clearly in Carver's earlier (and later) version, and evident in its initial title.[12] Incidentally, one may also note how two of the three titles in the interrogative form ("Where Is Everyone?" and "Want to See Something?") were changed by Lish, which may be seen as symbolic of his intention to reduce the explorative, introspective dimensions of the stories. Indeed, in both edited stories, the narrators appear colder and more detached from the facts they are narrating, and they barely ask any questions at all.

In several cases, the decision to re-title the stories goes along with Lish's editing process, to the point that sometimes a new title becomes only necessary after the changes he made to the story. A striking example is the story "Friendship," a peculiar one among Carver's works for its sheer (and well-detailed) outburst of violence. Its initial title offered a clear interpretative clue

into the significance of the story: however peculiar, given the violent event into which the two friends were joined, it was a story of friendship. Not only was that title too benevolent, but it was truly unfit for the edited story in *What We Talk*. In fact, Lish had traded its final act of friendship (the hug between the two friends after the tragedy) for one of his most lapidary endings, in which all the untold violence is suddenly condensed in the unsettling image of the rock used in the killing.

In the end, one cannot help admiring the strength of some of the new titles, most notably that of “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” which, significantly, became the title for the collection. It is true that Carver did object to some of the new titles, and indeed restored a few of his initial ones in the following collections (or further changed them, as for the above-mentioned “Popular Mechanics”).[13] It may be argued that titles are tightly connected to “marketing” considerations and, as such, are more liable to be changed in the editorial process—although this appears to be more the case with the collection title, rather than with those of the single stories. In this case though, the new titles appear to reflect a wider editorial scheme, as we shall see more in details.

3.2. Cuts

As anticipated, Lish’s editing is first and foremost a subtractive operation and indeed his extensive cuts are the first things one notices while leafing through the manuscripts at the Lilly Library. Lish’s imposing black marker literally crossed out several pages of the manuscripts, eventually managing to condense 17 stories in the 150 pages of *What We Talk*. “Beginners” and “Friendship” lost respectively 12 pages (out of 33) and 18 pages (out of 37) in the editing process; “A Small, Good Thing” (restored in *Cathedral*) was reduced to a third of its original

length to become "The Bath;" and "Where is Everyone?" (restored in *Fires*) lost more than half of its 15 pages to become "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit." While not all of the stories underwent such "amputation," it is true that most of them lost significant parts in the editing process, and quite often they were heavily truncated toward the end (see § 3.5). In particular, Lish chose to remove many descriptive passages providing a more detailed scenario for the stories, most traces of psychological introspection, as well as several stories within the stories. This is evident in his crossing out a number of positive, encouraging episodes, which counterbalanced the bleakness of the facts narrated. As D.T. Max aptly put it, Lish was "constantly on guard against what he saw as Carver's creeping sentimentality" and indeed expunged most if not all concessions to sentimentality, so as to avoid diverting attention from that core of "peculiar bleakness" (35).

A case in point is the long digression on the Gateses, the elderly couple who miraculously survived a serious car accident in "Beginners" (later "What We Talk"). Their story is brought up by Mel McGinnis as an exemplum of "what real love is," something which, in his words, "ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we're talking about when we talk about love" (*What* 144, 146). However, the story of their recovering is substantially reduced in the published version, and deprived of its "happy ending," fading away almost unnoticed on the wake of their progressive drunkenness. This same intent can be found in Lish's significant editing of another sample of "real love" in the story "Gazebo": it is once again the case of an old, loving couple, and Carver's initial version devoted several more paragraphs to celebrating their persistent love.

A similar "extrospective" intention can be found in Lish's extensive editing of "Want to See Something?"—a story which was also cut almost by half and re-titled "I Could See the Smallest Things" in *What We Talk*. In this story of familiar dramas converging into a nocturnal

encounter between two neighbors, Nancy and Sam, Lish crossed out a full page in which Carver offered some backgrounds on their troubled state. In the final version, the reader is left with fewer clues about the causes of Sam's insomnia and his tragicomic, nocturnal hunt for slugs: only a hint of the death of his first wife remains, but nothing about his daughter's leaving him, nor about his albino son, nor Nancy's horror in seeing the baby, nor again Sam's cries in the middle of the night. Dramas are rarely given voice in *What We Talk*, and the conversation between Nancy and Sam remains grounded on the silences of what is left unsaid, incapable of overcome the two fences separating their neighboring houses and lives. Like elsewhere, Lish's editing took the "famed" strategy of omission to its extremes, leaving almost everything implicit, most notably Nancy's liberating words to her own husband at the end of the "fuller" story. With what can be seen as a typical Lish's touch, those words were replaced by an ironic parallel between her sleeping husband and Sam's slugs.[14]

As a final sample of psychological introspection erased by Lish, we can take this passage from an "extended" version of "The Bath" (which appeared in the literary magazine *Columbia* in 1981)—a passage which was crossed out in *What We Talk*, only to be restored, in a slightly different form, in Carver's later collections.

> While the baker was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand, the woman studied the man's coarse features and wondered if he'd ever been anything but a baker. Had he been a father, perhaps? Did he know about birthday cakes and parties only insofar as he was a baker? (32)

In Lish's choice to expel this paragraph, one cannot help noticing the characters' refusal to "think out loud" identified by Herzinger as one of the key features of literary minimalism. Interestingly enough, the paragraph (devoid of this passage) closes on what seems a declaration of intent:

"This was all the baker was willing to say. No pleasantries, just this small exchange, the barest information, nothing that was not necessary" (*What* 48). In Lish's editing, all that was not strictly necessary was to be left out, and in a few cases, one has the impression that some of what may have been necessary followed as well.

3.3. Syntactical Changes

At the syntactic level, Lish's editing accentuated fragmentation in various ways. The breadth of some narrative passages in the original stories became a syncopated and fragmented rhythm in the published collection. Lish enhanced Carver's use of parataxis by reducing sentences to minimal units, at times simple nominal constructions. The increased punctuation, together with other similarly "fragmentational" typographical devices, such as the insertion of blank lines to create small sections within the stories, led to the disintegration of all narrative blocks of any considerable length.

This different typographic impact can be appreciated comparing *What We Talk* with the manuscripts held at the Lilly Library, or again with the stories of *Furious Seasons* (1977). In fact, five stories from that small-press collection were recovered and re-edited for *What We Talk*, and the versions on which Lish performed his editing are altogether similar to those published in 1977.[15] One has only to leaf through the two published collections to get a wholly different textual feeling: so dense and compact is the first, so spare and rarified the second, with short paragraphs separated by blank spaces and words hardly capable of filling the whiteness of the page.[16] A similar feeling can be found in the final outline of "I Could See the Smallest Things" (published earlier as "Want to See Something?").

> […] Everything lay in moonlight, and I could see the smallest things.

> The clothespins on the line, for instance.
>
> I put my hands on the glass to block out the moon. I looked some more. I listened. Then I went back to bed.
>
> But I couldn't get to sleep. I kept turning over. I thought about the gate standing open. It was like a dare.
>
> Cliff's breathing was awful to listen to. His mouth gaped open and his arms hugged his pale chest. He was taking up his side of the bed and most of mine.
>
> I pushed and pushed on him. But he just groaned.
>
> I stayed still awhile longer until I decided it was no use.
>
> (*What We Talk* 31-32)

While this passage does not show any particular editing at the lexical level (except for a couple of minor changes), it was initially made of one single paragraph. By dividing it into six short paragraphs, Lish enhanced its syncopated rhythm, exploiting Carver's tight sequence of very short and simple sentences.

As a final example of this general penchant for fragmentation in Lish's editing, we can compare a short passage from "Where Is Everyone?" (restored in *Fires*) with its concise version in *What We Talk*, "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit."

> The last time he'd been jailed, a month before that Sunday, I found out from my daughter that her mother had gone bail for him. Daughter Kate, who was fifteen, didn't take to this any better than I did. It wasn't that she had any loyalty to me in this—she had no loyalties to me or her mother in

> anything and was only too willing to sell either one of us down the river.
> ("Where Is Everyone?" *Fires* 174)

> His own wife jailed him once. The second one did. I found out from my daughter that my wife went bail. My daughter Melody didn't like it any better than I did. About the bail. It wasn't that Melody was looking out for me. She wasn't looking out for either one of us, her mother or me neither.
> ("Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" *What We Talk* 18)

It is evident that its increased punctuation and shorter sentences gave the edited version a much tighter, brisker rhythm. Also, the repetition/clarification of concepts like "The second one did" or "About the bail" added a more colloquial touch to the narration, while emphasizing the indecisions and inarticulateness typical of drunken discourse. And this leads us directly to another distinctive feature of Lish's editing, which becomes apparent at the lexical level.

3.4. Lexical Changes

On the whole, Lish's lexical changes are directed at simplifying Carver's language and enhancing its colloquiality. Lish introduced several colloquial expressions in the stories, which lowered the register of the narration. At the same time, he increased the use of indefinites (terms such as "thing," "something," etc.), somehow enforcing that "permanent recycling of words that generates semantic abrasion" (Chénetier 174-75). Examples include terms such as "booze" and "folks" replacing the more conventional "drinking" or "people," or again the indefinite "thing" replacing several more detailed nouns, ranging from "affair" to "accident" to "woman."[17] Similarly, more specific or formal verbs were replaced by their generic, colloquial counterparts

(e.g., "to comment" and "to attend" became "to say things" and "to have been to"); various curses and imprecations were introduced (especially in "Gazebo" and "What We Talk") and several "sophisticated" references were expelled (such as one to *Ivanhoe* in the title story, or to the scene of the dying father in Italo Svevo's novel *Zeno's Conscience* in "Where Is Everyone?", or again to the proper names of Buzz Aldren [sic] and Neil Armstrong, dubbed as "the astronauts" in that same story [*Fires* 175, 179, *What* 20]).

The lowering or "impoverishment" of Carver's lexicon often resulted in a more bragging voice, especially in the case of male characters and narrators (notably in "What We Talk," "Gazebo," and "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit"). Their discourse became looser, more violent, macho, and excessive, as well as increasingly detached from their narrative matter. An example can be found in the way Mel McGinnis (in the edited title story) cynically recalls the tragic accident in which the above-mentioned Gateses were involved:

> […] There'd been this thing out on the interstate. Drunk kid, teenager, plowed his dad's pickup into this camper with this old couple in it. They were up in their mid-seventies, that couple. The kid—eighteen, nineteen, something—he was DOA. Taken the steering wheel through his sternum.
>
> (*What We Talk* 146)

The tone of this passage lost all its initial compassion to resemble the cold report of a tired and cynical doctor. Lish decisively contributed to it by eliminating conjunctions and the subject itself in the last sentence, as well as by inserting several deictics. This latter feature is quite frequent in his editing, for instance in expressions such as "this Ross guy" or "there was this funny thing of anything could happen" (*What* 18, 27). As Toolan rightly suggested in his stylistic analysis of

"Cathedral," deictics can produce a "reverse-deictic effect" (130), in that, while pretending proximity with the indicated object/person, they may, in some contexts, mark a sense of detachment from them. A similar effect is pursued through another recurrent deictic structure in Lish's editing, "there is/are." A striking example can be found in this excerpt from the published version of "Gazebo," where Lish introduced as many as five such structures in rapid sequence (only one "there was" was present in the first version of the story).

> […] I tell you, *there were* complaints, and sometimes *there were* words. Folks would load up and go somewhere else.
>
> The next thing, *there's* a letter from the motel management people. Then *there's* another, certified.
>
> *There's* telephone calls. *There's* someone coming down from the city.
>
> (*What We Talk* 26-27, emphasis mine)

One final significant intervention can be noted at the level of dialogue, where Lish added several of those "I said," "s/he said" which eventually became a trademark of Carver's style. This is true of most stories, but it is especially visible in "Tell the Women We're Going" (earlier "Friendship") and "One More Thing." While already present in Carver's earlier stories, this feature was undeniably heightened in Lish's editing, as we can perceive from this short, emblematic passage, as it first appeared in "Friendship" in 1971, and then in its edited version in *What We Talk*.

> "Where you going?"
>
> The girls didn't answer. The little one tittered. They kept riding and Jerry drove along slowly beside them.

> "Oh come on now. Where you going?"
>
> "No place," the little one answered.
>
> "Where's no place?"
>
> "Just no place."
>
> "I told you my name. What's yours? This is Jerry."
>
> ("Friendship" 66)[18]

> "Where are you going?" Bill said.
>
> The girls didn't answer. The little one laughed. They kept bicycling and Jerry kept driving.
>
> "Oh, come on now. Where you going?" Bill said.
>
> "No place," the little one said.
>
> "Where's no place?" Bill said.
>
> "Wouldn't you like to know," the little one said.
>
> "I told you my name," Bill said. "What's yours? My friend's Jerry," Bill said.
>
> ("Tell the Women We're Going" *What We Talk* 62-63)

Comparing the two versions, one is immediately struck by the frequent use of "said" introduced by Lish (literally one every sentence), which gave the dialogue a syncopated, almost hypnotic rhythm. Repetition is undoubtedly a trademark of the minimalist aesthetics and one of Lish's preferred rhetorical devices, as it emerges in several occasions throughout his editing (in the passage above, one may note as well the repetition of "the little one" and "kept"). In particular,

repetition seems to be privileged for its capacity to alienate the reader and enhance the spareness of the narrative.

On the whole, Lish's lexical choices are meant to deepen the sense of desolation of the stories and to reduce the compassion in the narrators' voices. It is worth noting that several lexical changes occurred in Lish's second editing, the one to which Carver objected the most.[19] One could argue that, upon completing a first reading and (lighter) editing, Lish came to develop a precise idea of the overall project of the collection and proceeded with his second editing accordingly, turning the single "episodes" into a deadpan, homogenous whole. In so doing, he contributed in a way to create that "cumulative effect" which readers and critics alike found to be one of the most compelling features of the collection—as opposed to Carver's first collection, which struck critics such as Nesset as "hardly uniform in subject or voice" (9).

3.5. Endings

To conclude our analysis, we shall spend a few words on the story endings, which reveal a major influence on the part of Lish, for he rewrote (or reshaped) at least nine of them. In line with his search for minimalistic effects, the new endings are usually epigraphic and laconic. They truncate the stories in the middle of their course, abandoning the reader with little clues and no consolation. We have already mentioned the case of "Tell the Women We're Going" (§ 3.1), but the story "One More Thing" is certainly emblematic of this intent, and all the more so given its symbolic position at the end of the collection:[20]

> He said, "I just want to say one more thing".
>
> But then he could not think what it could possibly be.
>
> (*What We Talk* 159)

What follows in Carver's typescript version is L.D.'s earnest declaration of love, regardless of what will happen between him and his wife (and his daughter).[21] Needless to say, the story gets a whole different feeling as a consequence of this omission, which reinforces the characters' inability to articulate their feelings, abandoning the reader amidst despair and squalor. The characters' inarticulateness is a feature of Carver's stories that Lish resolutely enhanced in his editing, eventually making those people more speechless than they already were (as we showed in the case of "I Could See the Smallest Things," § 3.2). In the end, they appear not only unable, but also unwilling to make any effort toward comprehension, almost too tired to think and certainly too tired to look into themselves.

A similar intent can be found at the end of "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit," and the result is just as abrupt, and possibly eerier, even "baffling" in Meyer's words (248). The new ending manipulates a sentence of the narrator's mother and puts it, colder than ever, in his wife's mouth.

> "Honey," I said to Myrna the night she came home. "Let's hug awhile and then you fix us a real nice supper."
>
> Myrna said, "Wash your hands."
>
> (*What We Talk* 20)

In other cases, the new endings adopt a recurring foregrounding technique (similar in a way to that employed for some titles), in which an incidental object of the story is recalled and invested with an unprecedented iconic value.[22] This is notably the case of the ashtray episode at the end of "A Serious Talk," which struck Carver himself as a master touch, an example of Lish's editing at its best.[23] Elsewhere though, this search for startling effects seems to accommodate more Lish's personal taste for provocation and "avant-gardism" than that accuracy of statement that Carver set, after Pound, as "the one sole morality of his writing"(Phillips 7). At times, the new endings

appear in fact almost perfunctory and not quite motivated in their puzzling ambiguity: almost one of those "tricks" which Carver openly rejected in his "On Writing" (*Fires* 23).[24]

4. *Il Miglior Fabbro*?

Several critics explained the stylistic transformation that Carver's stories seem to undergo since *Cathedral* (1983) in terms of a recovered peace of mind and personal serendipity. Even if one were to endorse such a strict relationship between life and writing—which, however simplistic, may retain some validity—one should consider that most *What We Talk* stories were in fact the result of that period of recovered serenity.[25] Carver felt those stories intimately connected to a new and fragile personal equilibrium, which may have found a way into the note of hope and optimism emerging from his earlier versions (as well as from his later publications). In this sense, one may argue that Lish (and his manifest aversion to any sentimentalism) contributed to freezing Carver's "shift" toward what Stull defined as "humanist realism" (6).

As we tried to show in our analysis, Lish's extensive editing on *What We Talk* cut conversations, introspections, side stories; enclosed Carver's characters in painful silences, devoid of answers, devoid even of questions; and, finally, abandoned them with little consolation left (and no tears, nor shoulders to lean on). Ultimately, Lish showed much less sympathy than Carver for those characters and for their dramas, which in *What We Talk* are left not only unsolved, but mostly unspoken. Lish deliberately set out to dehumanize the stories and decontextualize them by expelling geographical coordinates, reducing scenarios to their basics, and omitting names and the few references to renowned people—as if to make the stories *topoi* of a modern, hopeless life.

Was Lish Carver's *miglior fabbro*? All things considered, Lish's editorial strategy comes across as a mix of sheer perception of Carver's talent and crafty understanding of what groundbreaking, innovative fiction should be at that time. Lish was undeniably a major (and mostly beneficial) influence in Carver's writing, as Carver publicly acknowledged in "Fires" and in various interviews. And indeed his influence on Carver's prose, through fifteen years of exchanging and editing manuscripts, may well go beyond the traces that are left for us to examine and speculate on. What seems to be at stake in *What We Talk* is their collaborative relationship, for up to that point Carver's reaction to Lish's editing had always been submissive and appreciative. With *What We Talk* though, things appear to have changed quite drastically: Lish's editing became more aggressive than ever[26] and Carver's position more assertive as he became less willing to accept such imposing editorial emendation. Carver's dissatisfaction is apparent in his decision to restore the longer versions of some stories shortly after *What We Talk*,[27] but also in his claiming better control over his future works, as demonstrated by the virtually untouched manuscripts of *Cathedral* (also held among the Lish papers in the Lilly Library). Needless to say, such a "conditional" collaboration was to be his last collaboration ever with Lish.

Rereading the "fuller" versions of the stories, one discovers a narrative breadth which is undoubtedly missing in the pared-down versions of *What We Talk*, as well as that respectful sympathy for his characters and their stories, which appear to be Carver's true trademarks throughout. As it was published, *What We Talk* shows Carver's talent acutely sharpened into a cohesive collection of deadpan, unsettling stories, capable of shocking the reader with the threatening power of their crafty omissions.[28] As such, the collection marks a point of no return in Carver's work and a dead-end point in many respects, for his style appears to be exploited to its limits (and possibly beyond them). While Lish's editing, at its best, succeeds in giving

Carver's prose a deeper intensity, in its most aggressive form it comes across as a challenge on the verge of excess, and the risk of slipping into a pretentious, tiresome provocation is sometimes palpable.

Notes

[1] The non-linear evolution of Carver's career has been stressed by several critics. In particular, Adam Meyer tried to account for the "oddity" of *What We Talk* among Carver's works, proposing an "hourglass" model, in which this collection represented its narrowing middle part (239).

[2] I would like to thank the librarians and archivists at the Lilly Library of the Indiana University at Bloomington for their kind assistance during my research period there, as well as professors Valentina Poggi and Franco Minganti for their precious help in directing my work.

[3] A role which Carver never failed to acknowledge, defining him one of the major influences on his career, in his essay "Fires", as well as in several interviews (Gentry and Stull 60, 181-82, 234-35).

[4] In Italy for instance, the novelist Alessandro Baricco wrote an article titled "L'uomo che riscriveva Carver" (The man who used to rewrite Carver) for the national newspaper *La Repubblica* (27 Apr. 1999), discussing the extent of Lish's editing and his own reading of the manuscripts.

[5] Rumors had been circulating for several years before then, and had found one of the first public "recognitions" in a 1991 interview with William Kittredge (collected by Sam Halpert), where he revealed that one of Carver's most famous "extended" story, "A Small, Good Thing", was in fact a "restored" earlier version (Halpert 152). Professor Brian Evenson was one of the pioneer scholars to research the manuscripts, although he never published the results of his research. At the time of the final revision of this essay, a *New York Times* article raised new interest on the matter, hinting at the possibility of the unabridged stories being published in the next few years (cfr. *New York Times* 17 Oct 2007).

[6] Eliot acknowledged Pound's decisive editorial work by dedicating *The Waste Land* "To Ezra Pound: Il miglior fabbro" (The greater craftsman), an expression taken from Dante's *Purgatorio*. All these cases are much more documented, and annotated versions of the initial drafts were published for *The Waste Land* and Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (titled *O Lost*).

[7] Two subsequent rounds of editing are visible in the manuscripts held at the Lilly Library and the second one was carried out on a retyped version of Carver's stories, which had incorporated Lish's first editing. However, the Carver-Lish correspondence suggests that some of the stories had already been read and edited earlier.

[8] The stories are "Dummy" (later "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off"), "Distance" (later "Everything Stuck to Him" [1981] and "Distance" [1988]), "So Much Water So Close to Home", "The Fling" (later "Sacks"), "Mine" (later "Popular Mechanics" [1981] and "Little Things" [1988]). However, the Random-Vintage edition of *What We Talk* acknowledges only 3, omitting both "The Fling" and "Mine".

[9] Namely "Where Is Everyone?" ("Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" in *What We Talk*) appeared in *Fires*; "A Small, Good Thing" ("The Bath" in *What We Talk*) appeared in *Cathedral* and *Where I'm Calling From*; "If It Please You" ("After the Denim" in *What We Talk*) appeared as a chapbook for John Lord Press in 1984; "So Much Water So Close to Home" appeared in *Fires* and *Where I'm Calling From*.

[10] "The Bath" appeared in the literary magazine *Columbia* in 1980 in a "fuller" version than the one in *What We Talk*, closer in a sense to "A Small, Good Thing", although not quite the same story (see Hashimoto 1995 for an in-depth analysis of this case). Similarly, "Where Is Everyone?" appeared in *TriQuarterly* in its longer version (later collected in *Fires*), just a few months before its "abridged" version in *What We Talk*.

[11] Actually a fifth one appeared in the anthology *The Pushcart Prize* in 1976, before being collected in *Furious Seasons and Other Stories* (1977). Nevertheless, among these 5 publications, two main versions can be identified, from which the remaining ones differ only for minor changes and copy-editing. For a detailed, comparative analysis of the development of the story, see Leypoldt 2002.

[12] Scott objects quite strongly to the short version of the story, denouncing what he perceives as "sitcom gags": "The people in 'Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit' are jerked around like puppets, without intelligible motive or meaningful engagement with each other" (58).

[13] Cfr. Letter to Lish 7/8/1980, *Lish Mss*.

[14] Despite the fact that Nancy's words are spoken to her sleeping husband, they have the same redeeming force of L.D.'s "one more thing" at the end of the homonymous story—a passage also edited out by Lish, as we shall see in § 3.5 (and both passages can be found in Stull and Carroll 2007).
[15] It is in a way the same operation he did with *Fires*, after the publication of *What We Talk*. Both *Furious Seasons* and *Fires* were published by the small Capra Press and are now out of print. However, *Fires* was reissued by Random-Vintage a year later, in 1984, and it is still available in that form.
[16] Significantly, Trussler points out how Carver's public reading of his stories "ignored these textual spaces, preferring instead to read the text as if it were one uninterrupted narrative" (31).
[17] This latter instance can be found in "Gazebo", where the narrator Duane refers to the Mexican maid he had an affair with as a "neat, little thing" (*What* 23).
[18] Except for a light copyediting, this story is altogether similar to the one submitted to Lish's attention in 1980. The only significant difference is in the ending, which was expanded by Carver after its publication in *Sou'wester* in 1971 and appears more complex and richer in the Lish Mss—only to be cut out completely.
[19] Cfr. Letter to Lish 7/8/1980, *Lish Mss*. As mentioned, Lish's second editing was carried out on a retyped version of Carver's stories, which had incorporated Lish's first editing.
[20] In fact, one can perceive the difference between this collection and the next one, *Cathedral*, by simply comparing their last sentences. *Cathedral* closes on a much more affirmative tone, with the following words (from the title story): "'It's really something,' I said." (228).
[21] Coincidentally, this passage was published in the *New York Times* during the final revision of this essay, as part of a just-announced project of publishing the restored versions of those stories (see Stull and Carroll 2007).
[22] This is particularly true of "A Serious Talk", "Sacks", "I Could See the Smallest Things" and "After the Denim". This same technique was employed in Lish's new ending for "Gazebo", although the published version restored Carver's earlier ending—and that is one of few cases in *What We Talk* in which Carver managed to reverse Lish's changes.
[23] Cfr. Letter to Lish 7/8/1980, *Lish Mss*.
[24] Interestingly enough, this essay appeared a few weeks before the publication of *What We Talk* in the pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, with the title "A Storyteller's Shoptalk".
[25] Most stories were in fact written after 1977, and were the result of Carver's recovering from alcoholism.
[26] Although some earlier stories had known some extensive editing, one should not forget that several of the stories of *What We Talk* had already been seen and edited by Lish (e.g. "Friendship"), which makes that kind of aggressive editing all the more startling. Incidentally, one may also note Carver's implicit acknowledgement of Lish's "creative" operation when he said to feel "A Small, Good Thing" and "The Bath" as "two different stories" (Gentry and Stull 200).
[27] At the same time, it should be noted that some stories were included in their "heavily" edited version in Carver's final collection, *Where I'm Calling From* (e.g. "What We Talk", "Gazebo", "One More Thing" and "Tell the Women We're Going"), which may well be taken as an endorsement of Lish's editorial work.
[28] As Bethea colorfully put it: "'A Small, Good Thing' would fit as well in *What We Talk* as a bull in a china shop" (113), although one could argue that if "A Small, Good Thing" had had other earlier versions as its companions, it probably wouldn't have felt so odd and awkward.

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Existential Connections

The Influence of Raymond Carver on Haruki Murakami

Brian Seemann, Wichita State University

Of contemporary short fiction's many distinguishing characteristics, existentialism, and the manner in which it functions as a theoretical foundation for many modern short stories, has become an almost archetypal theme, and of the many contemporary short story writers applying the dilemmas of existentialism, Raymond Carver is one of the foremost influential practitioners. William Stull notes this level of influence and suggests that when examining Carver as an influence, we as readers "are likely talking not about individual stories individually assessed but rather about the expectations we bring to (and take back from) one kind of Carver story" (1). Stull's use of the term "Hopelessville" to portray the landscape of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, and in some regard Carver's entire cannon, argues for the perception of a type of Carver story, yet it also draws attention to what some have used to criticize Carver's work. One aspect of criticism levied against Carver by Charles May is "that his characters are inarticulate and insufficiently realized because they seem unable to explain why they do what they do" (39). An all too familiar claim against most of Carver's work, the assertion seems to sum up his work a bit too easily and fails to take into consideration the reccurring existentialism prevalent in much of his fiction. More importantly, this sort of critique disallows the opportunity to recognize how Carver's characters, rather than being undeveloped and a bit too easily identifiable, are significant in illustrating influence upon American short fiction, and, even more

so, on all contemporary short fiction, including the short stories of one of Japan's most renowned writers, Haruki Murakami.

Existentialism as a wide-ranging philosophical concept factors heavily into much of Carver's work[1], and, despite Gadi Taub's suggestion to the contrary, much of it reflects Jean-Paul Sartre's examination of human exploration into moments of choice and consciousness. The notion within existentialism that individuals are free to make their own decisions, and that these choices ultimately can become a source of anguish, is further investigated in *Existentialism and Humanism,* in which Sartre hypothesizes that, through the act of discovery, the individual is in the process of moving from being in existence to being in the act of discovery and finding his essence. Sartre expounds:

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself (28).

Sartre continues, saying, "[m]an is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (28). He further argues that humans must engage themselves in some sort of action to break from a passive and undetermined condition; otherwise, they have no motive beyond their existence—they simply are being. Sartre's philosophy is evident in Carver's short stories as one recognizes that the reason Carver's characters may seem incapable of expressing why they do what they do is because they are in the process of detection, figuring out their actions and their purpose for acting. Their inarticulateness and inaction exemplify the struggle, and sometimes the reluctance, to determine their essence, and, as Stull proposes, the

existential realism that Carver uses, along with the aesthetic, minimalist framework, "suggests a subject as well as a style: Hopelessville. It calls for characters who are more often cowardly than heroic, for Erostratus instead of Achilles" (5). Certain stories, Stull maintains, "end not with a bang but a whimper, a hasty retreat, a failure to connect" (5); this failure to connect ultimately serves as the existential foundation for many Carver stories as his characters strive to relate in environments that may prevent the acts of discovery and engagement.

Unlike Carver, Murakami has gained much critical attention as a novelist, but, within his short stories, he most resembles the existential pattern found in Carver's work. *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*, a compilation of twenty-four stories published between 1979 and 2005 and translated by Phillip Gabriel and Jay Rubin, features Murakami's distinctive late-twentieth century characters which Celeste Loughman identifies as individuals who "live exterior lives that are efficient, predictable, and mechanical to create the illusion of purpose and meaning" (91). Loughman's assertion points to an existential theme similar to that in Carver's work. Murakami's characters project an image of "purpose and meaning," but, beyond the facade, the individuals within his stories recall those within Carver's work in the manner in which they come to terms with their own existence and an everyday life that is often hostile and incomprehensible. In their daily activities, Murakami's individuals give readers reason to suspect they are not always in their proper place, and *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* contains several stories that reaffirm Loughman's claim that "[t]o a certain degree, [his] characters are universal stock figures of contemporary literature, almost a cliché of the existential condition" (88). In "The Mirror," a janitor gazes at his reflection in the mirror, only to note, "My reflection in the mirror wasn't me" (58). Elsewhere, a man awakes to find his lover missing, so, in the middle of the night, he searches for her outside, under the moonlight: "This wasn't me walking

in the moonlight," he says. "It wasn't me, but a stand-in, fashioned out of plaster. I rubbed my hand against my face. But it wasn't my face. And it wasn't my hand" ("Man-Eating Cats" 123). In yet another story, a man again awakes in the night, this time due to illness. After vomiting, he stands in front of the mirror, washing his face: "His face looked gaunt, wrinkled, his skin the color of dirt. He couldn't believe this was really his face" ("Crabs" 212). Finally, in "The Year of Spaghetti," a man receives a phone call from a friend's ex-girlfriend, and, as he explains that he has little information to offer as to his friend's whereabouts, he comes to the realization that "My voice didn't sound like my own" (171). In each of these instances, the individual at the center of attention arrives at a decisive moment; in this dichotomous moment, the individuals are not fully cognizant of their condition. The physical traits (face, hands, voice) that would normally act as reminders of awareness have deceived them, and this deception, coupled with a general lack of full engagement with the issues surrounding them, reaffirms the view that Murakami's characters serve as representative existential contemporary figures.

These examples owe some debt to Carver, because in a majority of his fiction, Carver employs the same kind of existential isolation, most recognized in his career-spanning collection *Where I'm Calling From*. David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips articulate the notion of existential isolation, labeling it "disassociation" and defining it as "a sense of disengagement from one's own identity and life, a state of standing apart from whatever defines the self, or of being unselfed" (75). Due to this disassociation, Carver's characters live overwhelmed by menace and a deep sense of uncertainty. At different stages in Carver's career, fear is a marked emotion; characters feel detached from their environments, and their response to this sensation is to admit that they are afraid. In an early Carver story, "The Student's Wife," Nan, a young wife, is unable to fall asleep. Lying in bed, "She touched the wedding band on her ring finger and with her

thumb. She turned onto her side and then onto her back again. And then she began to feel afraid" (41). Nan's next action is to pray, an "unreasoning moment of longing" (41) that serves only to provide temporary relief from the anxiety she feels. Beyond the Sartrean existential connections, a convincing feminine existentialist association evolves here as well, most notably through the perspective argued by Simone de Beauvoir in *Second Sex*, where de Beauvoir states that "[woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with references to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (xxii). Nan seems displaced in her role as wife and mother as her husband reads to her in bed, her passivity a sign of a lack of engagement and subordinate position as the "Other." Only in her visions does she contemplate the possibility of discovery: "But I like that, flying in airplanes," she says. "There's a moment as you leave the ground you feel whatever happens is all right" (39). Her dream of flying translates to an aspiration of discovery, of becoming, a notion de Beauvoir emphasizes when stating, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267). The act of engagement and the act of becoming cause Nan to fear the uncertain, prompting the existential dilemma she has at the conclusion of the story.

Years later, in "Blackbird Pie," Carver presents the demise of a marriage caused by the reluctant and stubborn narrator, again revealing the acts of engagement and becoming. The narrator's wife, whose assertiveness prompts the end of the relationship, slips a goodbye note under his door just before leaving one night. Reading the letter, the husband refuses to believe his wife is the writer of such a note, and, when he grows suspicious, he opens his door to look down the long hallway where his wife would be: "At that moment I found myself afraid—afraid, if you can believe it, in my own house!—to walk down the hall and satisfy myself that all was well" (498-99). The narrator perceives the menacing situation and, rather than confront the

issue, he retreats; like Nan, he has disengaged himself from his own identity and life due to an overwhelming fear of what will follow. His wife, conversely, illustrates de Beauvoir's view of one "becoming" a woman by escaping the failed marriage and the futile masculinity of her husband, who is left disassociated from his surroundings. The pattern of disassociation in Carver's stories connects to Murakami, whose characters also experience physical and emotional trials that separate them from a customary, harmonious existence. Furthermore, the existential themes prevalent in Carver's short fiction, primarily the notion that characters are in some way displaced—through gender roles, physical changes in surroundings, unfamiliar conditions—and have an opportunity to discover themselves—to define (Sartre) or to become (de Beauvoir)—signal a strong correlation to Murakami and offer the possibility of viewing Carver as an influence upon Murakami's short fiction.

This connection between Carver and Murakami's fiction has drawn the attention of critic Naomi Matsuoka, who chooses Murakami's novel *A Wild Sheep Chase* rather than his short stories to view the impact of Carver and American literature on Murakami. Matsuoka acknowledges the tone of disengagement in both Murakami's novel and Carver's "Blackbird Pie," detecting that "[t]heir language is limited to the description of concrete objects, emphasizing the detachment from emotions" (425). Further noting the corresponding existentialism in each text, Matsuoka comments that the protagonists in each story "realize through self-reflection their alienation from . . . society" (425). Matsuoka's assertions certainly provide insight into the association between Carver and Murakami, yet additional research concerning the relationship between the short stories by Murakami and Carver may provide even further points of connection.

The earliest stories found in the chronologically arranged *Where I'm Calling From* identify individuals who, because of their isolated condition, look into the lives of others as a way of forming their own sense of identity. This voyeuristic tendency is one that Boxer and Phillips include in their argument concerning disassociation; voyeurism, they claim, is recognized as a "wishful identification with some distant, unattainable idea of self," and they note that Carver's characters, in an attempt to reach out to others, discover "sudden, hideously clear visions of the emptiness of their lives; even the most familiar takes on the sharp definition of the strangely unfamiliar. They become voyeurs, then, of their own experience" (75-6). An early highlight of Carver's canon, "Neighbors" offers a startling example of what Boxer and Phillips contend. A young couple, when asked to take care of their neighbor's apartment, find their lives stimulated by the chance to live their neighbor's lives, yet they ultimately discover the distress of such an act. Feeling as though they have "been passed by somehow" (86) in their circle of friends, Bill and Arlene Miller immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the apartment across the hallway where they revive their marriage by mimicking a life more attractive than their own. In existential terms, Bill and Arlene may be attempting to make something of their lives by the process of claiming their essence; however, what they encounter at the conclusion of the story is despair, defined by Sartre as when "we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills" (*Existentialism* 39). Returning from across the hall, Arlene realizes she has locked the key to the neighboring apartment inside, forcing the two of them to linger in the hallway:

> He tried the knob. It was locked. Then she tried the knob. It would not turn. Her lips were parted, and her breathing was hard, expectant. He opened his arms and she moved into them.

> "Don't worry," he said into her ear. "For God's sake, don't worry."
>
> They stayed there. They held each other. They leaned into the door as if against a wind, and braced themselves. (93)

Having adopted the lives of their neighbors, Bill and Arlene neglect their own existence, and, without the key to the apartment, they are without means to retrieve the life upon which they have grown dependent. Bracing against the door, they sense the emptiness of their lives and realize they have very little beyond each other. Kirk Nesset observes that

> What both Bill and his wife leave behind are, in fact, themselves: shreds of the identities they have been trying self-destructively to nourish in their daily visitations across the hall—shreds that have grown, visit by visit, increasingly malnourished. Finally locked out of their new paradise, and too jaded in the end to appreciate the old quiet ways of the past, they are in "limbo" (as Boxer and Phillips put it), and thus, "dissociated from both lives, the Millers only have each other." (13)

In "limbo," the Millers personify the concept of bad faith explored in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* as when the individual "is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth" (49). Sartre's theory of bad faith rests on the notion that in order to deflect the feelings of emptiness or despair, the individual imagines himself as not being free, a self-deception, Sartre posits, that triggers the very emotions the individual wishes to avoid. By ignoring the principle that he is free, the individual begins to abstain from making any decisions at all, thus leaving himself passive and unwilling to engage in life. Sartre presents this concept of bad faith in the example of a young woman who, while out with a man, must determine what to do when the man places his hand upon hers: "To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to

engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm" (55). By doing neither, Sartre asserts, the young woman acts in bad faith. She would be in the state of limbo, the passive condition Boxer and Phillips observe the Millers to be in at the end of "Neighbors." Since the Millers participate in the voyeuristic exploration of another's life, they are merely spectators rather than participants, and, in the end, they fail to engage in action. Their passivity—they choose to indulge in others' lives rather than participate in their own—exposes them as acting in bad faith. Eventually, the Millers must make a decision, and while one might argue that this decision would allow them to break from their act of bad faith, one must remember that the Millers have been acting in bad faith for longer than just at the conclusion of the story. If Sartre defines the act of bad faith as concealing a displeasing truth as a form of self-deception, "Neighbors" must be read as a story of a couple living in bad faith, and in the end, embodying the struggle of existentialism.

Murakami best replicates the existential themes found in "Neighbors" in "A Perfect Day for Kangaroos," first published in 1981. Murakami introduces a young couple searching for the right day to visit the zoo and catch sight of the baby kangaroo, yet in their hesitation, a month passes before their visit, and the baby has grown beyond its infant appearance. While the narrator fails to recognize the importance for such a trip, his girlfriend places a great emphasis on the event:

> "If I don't see the baby kangaroo now I don't think I'll have another chance to. Ever," she said.
>
> "I suppose not."
>
> "I mean, have you ever seen one?"
>
> "Nope, not me," I said.

> "Are you sure you'll ever have another chance to?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> "*That's* why I'm worried." (96)

The couple finally sees the baby kangaroo, albeit in its mother's pouch, a sight, the narrator admits, that "definitely made our trip worth the effort" (98). This declaration might make for a positive assessment of the couple's trip to the zoo; however, the trip to the zoo, just like the Millers' constant trips across the hall, appears to be nothing more than a distraction from a monotonous life. The fact that they delay their visit until the baby has outgrown its infant appearance attests to their being busy, confirming how little the visit really means. Their passivity, and practice of acting in bad faith, intensifies at the conclusion, where the couple prepares to leave the kangaroo exhibit:

> It looked like it was going to be a steamy day, the first hot one we'd had in a while.
>
> "Hey, you want to grab a beer somewhere?" she asked.
>
> "Sounds great," I said. (99)

Through their interaction and nonchalant attitude, the couple exists in a state of limbo as they aimlessly move from event to event; much like any other event the couple casually could engage in, the kangaroos offer nothing in the way of a lasting impact. All said, the narrator's observation on the couple's being busy at the onset of the story bears substantial consideration because what appears to be their busy life is in fact an inactive one. The couple is never engaged; instead, they exist without purpose in a life lived in bad faith, much like the Millers in "Neighbors." Furthermore, the women in each story suffer through the anxiety of "becoming." The persistent themes of motherhood and pregnancy introduced in "A Perfect Day for

Kangaroos" illustrate the existential dilemma the girlfriend undergoes while visiting the zoo, whereas in "Neighbors," Arlene's visits across the hall, while an act displaying the basis of bad faith, reveals a woman's desire to become another, more successful, woman. Both cases exemplify the anxiety of becoming as well as present acute examples of bad faith.

The behavior of the couple in "A Perfect Day for Kangaroos" is representative of the conduct displayed by many others found in the early 1980s work by Murakami, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. Stories such as "The Year of Spaghetti" (1980), "The Mirror" (1982), and "Crabs" (1983) concentrate on characters at odds with their emptiness, many of them unable, or unwilling, to remedy their problems. The narrator in "The Year of Spaghetti," who receives a phone call from a friend's ex-girlfriend, chooses to continue fixing spaghetti rather than carry on a conversation. He defends his choices in the conclusion, noting, "I want you to understand my position though. At the time, I didn't want to get involved with anyone. That's why I kept on cooking spaghetti all by myself" (173). He opts to remain isolated, working industriously at the one comfort he has—spaghetti. At the conclusion of "Crabs," the young man, who has spent the entire night awake with illness, arrives at this own hideously clear vision of emptiness: "His heart felt enclosed by something formless, surrounded by a deep, soft mystery. He no longer had the faintest clue where his life was headed, and what might be waiting for him there" (214). Murakami's conclusion, with its allusions to fear and uncertainty, echoes the conclusion of "The Student's Wife," where Carver focuses on the anguish of Nan, who desperately longs to sleep. While the young man in "Crabs" wants "to sleep soundly and wake up to find that everything had been solved" (213), Nan, in her desperation, ultimately pleads to a higher power in an attempt to solve matters: "'God,' she said. 'God, will you help us, God?' she said" (43). Like Carver before him, Murakami's characters are displaced in situations where they must confront

the terror and uncertainty of life, and, whether by the definition of Sartre or de Beauvoir, the existential condition his characters endure is often not immediately rectified. Stories like "Neighbors" and "The Student's Wife" show Carver leaving characters at an impasse in decisions, much like the way in which Murakami corners his own characters in "A Perfect Day for Kangaroos" and "Crab," for the characters in these stories come to no clear resolution or positive revelation; thus, their existential unease continues.

In the introduction of *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*, Murakami, discussing his method of short story writing, notes: "One more nice thing about short stories is that you can create a story out of the smallest details—an idea that springs up in your mind, a word, an image, whatever" (viii). The attention to detail, particularly the focus on precise images to create the foundation of a story's meaning, lends further weight to associating Murakami with Carver, whose stories often revolve around a single image meant to draw much of the focus. Most notably, "Cathedral" provides an exemplary illustration of just this kind of story and image, and one can see a correlation between "Cathedral" and Murakami's "Hunting Knife": two stories that rely on central images to present men who have the potential to break from their existential isolation.

The narrator of "Cathedral" certainly experiences emptiness in his life, since he seems to lack a substantial relationship with his wife or with any kind of real friendship in the outside world. When his wife invites an old friend to visit, the narrator gets a sense of his wife's past, as well as the connections she has made, particularly with Robert, the visiting blind man. Upon Robert's arrival, the three eat and converse, yet Robert and his wife dominate the conversation, leaving the narrator to listen for mention of his name:

> They talked of things that had happened to them—to them!—these past ten years. I waited in vain to hear my name on my wife's sweet lips: "And then my dear husband came into my life"—something like that. But I heard nothing of the sort. More talk of Robert. (364-5)

The narrator feels a great sense of disassociation as he has been ousted, "unselfed," in his own environment, yet once the wife leaves the narrator and Robert together in the living room, the two watch television and talk. This act of connection shows the narrator attempting to ease his existential dilemma by associating with Robert, and, when the narrator finds Robert unfamiliar with the subject on television, he attempts to describe the cathedrals, yet his words fail to convey meaning. In place of talking, the narrator allows Robert's hands to follow his as he draws a cathedral on paper. The ensuing moment reveals the two men finding a commonality, and this helps the narrator eliminate his existential despair and isolation: this becomes apparent at the conclusion of the story as he remarks, "My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything" (375). The sense of uncertainty lingers only briefly, for the narrator then verbally admits, "It's really something" (375). In saying this, he does not feel deceived, but rather he acknowledges his existence, and, in doing so, he appears finally capable of realizing his essence—a sign acknowledging that, as a male protagonist, he can fulfill Sartre's belief that a man can making something of himself. With phallic images abounding in the final scene (the cathedral, the pen, the rhythmic movement of the pen), "Cathedral" becomes a story in which the significance of masculine discovery leads to a deterioration of the underlying existential isolation.

The parting images in "Cathedral" provide further evidence of Carver's influence on Murakami, whose "Hunting Knife" ends with a similar bonding experience between two men.

Unable to sleep, the Murakami's narrator leaves his sleeping wife to explore the surroundings of their vacation lodge. Coming across a wheelchair-bound young man at an outdoor bar, the narrator strikes up a conversation in which he learns that the young man has a hunting knife he has never used. Physically incapable of putting it to good use, the boy, wondering if the knife is any good, asks the narrator to cut a few things. Like "Cathedral," "Hunting Knife" revolves around two men, one of whom is in some manner physically impeded, and he other who is impeded socially. On their vacation, Murakami's narrator and his wife must determine many things, including "whether we should move to a new apartment when we got home, what we should do about jobs, whether or not to have kids. This was the last summer of our twenties" (82-83). Despite the need to attend to such matters, the narrator discusses very little with his wife; instead, he seems adrift and shares insignificant conversations with strangers on the beach. His encounter with the young man in the wheelchair, however, offers him the same sort of possibility of reduced existential isolation previously allowed the narrator in "Cathedral."

The connection between Carver's "Cathedral" and Murakami's "Hunting Knife" revolves around invitation, specifically the invitation from the physically impaired to the socially inactive. In "Cathedral," when the narrator finds the task of describing the cathedral on television too difficult an endeavor, Robert presses the narrator to find alternative ways to communicate. The narrator notes:

> It was then that the blind man cleared his throat. He brought something up. He took a handkerchief from his back pocket. Then he said, "I get it, bub. It's okay. It happens. Don't worry about it," he said. "Hey, listen to me. Will you do me a favor? I got an idea. Why don't you find us some heavy paper?

> And a pen. We'll do something. We'll draw one together. Get us a pen and some heavy paper. Go on, bub, get the stuff," he said. (372-3)

Robert urges the narrator to fight through his inarticulateness and act, rather than speak. Once the narrator begins drawing, Robert continues his encouragement: "'Swell,' he said. 'Terrific. You're doing fine,' he said. 'Never thought anything like this could happen in your life, did you, bub? Well, it's a strange life, we all know that. Go on now. Keep it up'" (373). What follows is the moment that draws the narrator out of his existential dilemma, for the narrator's admission that "It's really something" reveals the altering effect Robert has had on him. Whether the moment is a fleeting glimpse or an incident of true discovery—and some would argue it makes no difference—Robert's insistence that the narrator take action, to do a "favor," illustrates how one man is capable of inducing another out of the emptiness of life.

With "Cathedral," then, it seems Carver introduced the possibility of change in the lives of his characters, and this story offers an instance where characters work beyond the existentialism and disassociation of their lives; these attributes are still evident, yet Carver also allows the potential for engagement. Murakami also leans toward this trend toward the possibility of change in "Hunting Knife," which replicates the final scene of "Cathedral" by focusing on one man provoking another into action. Like Robert, the young man in the wheelchair is unable to participate actively in a normal life due to physical limitations, and he prompts the narrator to act in his place by using the knife:

> "I wonder if you could do me a favor," he said. "Could you cut something with it?"
>
> "Cut something? Like what?"

> "Anything. Whatever's around. I just want you to cut something. I'm stuck in this chair, so there isn't much I can cut. I'd really like it if you'd cut something up for me." (93)

The narrator proceeds to slash the knife through several objects around the bar. The use of the knife, another phallic symbol, mirrors the use of the pen in "Cathedral" in showing another man in the midst of the Sartrean notion of making himself; just as the narrator in "Cathedral" is in the works on constructing a new self, the narrator in "Hunting Knife" slices away his old self as a way of allowing a new self to become. The narrator's enthusiasm and movement contrast with his earlier, languid behavior of lying on the beach, and he admits, "This knife's fantastic" (93). Recognizing the narrator's amazement, the young man encourages him to continue:

> "Cut some more things," he urged me.
>
> I slashed out at everything I could lay my hands on. At coconuts that had fallen on the ground, at the massive leaves of a tropical plant, the menu posted at the entrance to the bar. I even hacked away at a couple of pieces of driftwood on the beach. When I ran out of things to cut, I started moving slowly, deliberately, as if I were doing Tai Chi, silently slicing the knife through the night air. Nothing stood in my way. The night was deep, and time was pliable. The light of the full moon only added to that depth, that pliancy. (93-4)

The narrator finds the moment with the knife exhilarating, and, like the narrator of "Cathedral," he too has responded to a request for a "favor" from another individual and has experienced a moment of transcendence. His acknowledgement that "This knife's fantastic" verbalizes the wonder at his involvement. Like the narrator of "Cathedral," he appears to break from his existential isolation, and, whether this break is longstanding or transitory, the significance lies in

the deed of discovery and the connection with another person, thereby eliminating the disassociation in his life.

The existentialism in Carver and Murakami's work does not automatically link them, nor does it force readers to see Carver as the sole influence on Murakami's short stories. It does, however, prompt readers to scrutinize the already well-documented connections between the two. Despite Murakami's reluctance to admit Carver as an influence, the patterns of character displacement and disassociation make Carver's influence on Murakami's work recognizable and easier to accept, showing that the influence Carver has on contemporary short stories extends beyond the boundaries of American fiction.

Notes

[1] Proof of existential ties in Carver's work can be found in "The Stories of Raymond Carver: The Menace of Perpetual Uncertainty" (Powell, 1994) and "On Small, Good Things: Raymond Carver's Modest Existentialism" (Taub, 2002).

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Book Review

The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse: Chekhov to Carver. Kerry McSweeney. University of South Carolina Press, 2007. Hardback $29.95.

McGill University professor Kerry McSweeney's *The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse* should be well received by Carver scholars. While the book includes chapters on the merits of realist fiction writers Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Flannery O'Connor, it reads, in some ways, as a book on Carver's influences.

The chapter on Chekhov distinguishes between aesthetic and interpretive meanings of Chekhov's stories, relative to his realist presentation of experience, and McSweeny connects Carver's idea of realist short fiction, as "something glimpsed from the corner of the eye, in passing," to Chekhov's idea of compactness. McSweeney's focus on Joyce's "stories of my childhood," that is, the first three stories in *Dubliners*, uses a cultural studies approach to consider how Joyce's urban settings require realist prose fiction to present the cultural milieu of the stories; his analysis of this "trilogy" of childhood stories will be popular with anyone using *Dubliners* when teaching Joyce. An excellent chapter on Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, and "the dynamics of interrelationships among stories in a sequence," offers a close textual reading of the Adams pieces by analyzing drafts and deleted passages of the stories; scholars who work in the area of short story sequences and composites will find this chapter of special interest. McSweeney's discussion of Flannery O'Connor, as a writer of the realist short story in the tradition of Chekhov and Joyce, is centered on her writing both within the realm of dramatic Christian realism and the reigning principles of New Criticism.

"Carver's Dark View of Things," the fifth and final chapter, recaps much of the

prevailing view of Carver's stories as tales of the working poor, shaped by "the limitations of his subject matter, the minimalist means and the bleak vision" that he adapted from Hemingway's fatalistic code. Through this lens, McSweeney discusses "Chef's House," "Menudo," "Neighbors," and, of course, "Cathderal," while he offers a fine brief analysis on "Intimacy." But his greater focus is on three longer stories, "What's in Alaska?" "What We Talk About When We Talk about Love," and "Feathers." Regarding the latter, McSweeney offers an interesting discussion concerning how, had Carver not included the "retrospective comment on what happened" to the narrator and Fran, then "the close of 'Feathers' would have been as affirmative" as that of "Cathedral." In addition to discussions of middle and late Carver stories, McSweeney's notes G. P. Lainsbury's argument that the early story "The Cabin" is both a corrupted version of Hemingway's Nick Adams stories and a cultural commentary on the late 20th century American quest of "something heroic." All in all, the chapter engages in detailed and interesting discussions of a diverse selection of Carver's fiction.

While *The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse* examines the work of five important realists, it is a valuable book for other reasons as well. Fiction writing teachers will find the opening chapter, which is stitched together with statements from Carver on fiction writing, an effective introduction to short story theory, or at least the ideas of one of the 20th centuries most important practitioners. Moreover, by ending its study with Raymond Carver, McSweeney's book becomes a useful reference for anyone interested in tracing Carver's literary influences. All in all, McSweeney's book makes an excellent contribution to Carver studies.

Contributors

Eileen Abrahams is a PhD candidate in English at The University of Texas at Austin, where she is completing her dissertation, "*A Burden of Sighs": Petrarchan Ambivalence in the (Self) Chastening Sonnets to God of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Geoffrey Hill*. She is also an instructor of English at Schenectady County Community College. Abrahams lives in Schenectady, New York with her husband, the philosopher Lewis Schwartz, and her dog, Homer, who is named neither after the poet nor the Simpson.

Ayala Amir, PhD, is a lecturer, a teaching and research position, in the Department of Comparative Literature at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. "I don't do motions shorts": Photography, Movement, and Change in Raymond Carver's Stories," the first study of photographic technique in Carver's fiction, is based on a doctoral dissertation, awarded with special merit in 2004, which is being prepared for publication.

Enrico Monti received his PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Bologna (Italy), with a dissertation titled *The Translation of Metaphors in William Gass's Novellas* (2007). Currently a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Haute-Alsace, France, Monti has worked on literary translation and contemporary American fiction, especially in relation to authors such as William Gass, Richard Brautigan, and Raymond Carver. His essay is the development (and condensation) of his "Laurea thesis" in Anglo-American Literature at the University of Bologna.

Brian Seemann received his BA from Stephen F. Austin State University and his MA from Wichita State University where he is currently teaching and working on an MFA in fiction. Seemann has presented papers on Raymond Carver at the American Literature Association conference and J.D. Salinger at the Popular Culture Association conference.

Angela Sorby, associate professor of English at Marquette University, is secretary for the International Raymond Carver Society. A scholar of nineteenth century American children's literature, she is working on a biography of late nineteenth century poet and freethinker, Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Sorby is the author of a book of poems, *Distance Learning* and a forthcoming chapbook, *Flyover State*.