

# THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

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Issue 3

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# THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

ISSUE THREE

THE MISCELLANY ISSUE

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Issue Three, **the miscellany issue**, opens with David Muldoon's interview with Riccardo Duranti, Carver's Italian translator. The three peer reviewed essays include Keith Abbott on social class and property issues in Carver's "Why Don't You Dance?"; John A. McDermott explores the influence of James Joyce's 'epiphany' on Carver in "American Epicleti"; and Michael Hemmingson examines Carver's forays into early solo playwriting and late playwriting with Tess Gallagher. Also included are two bilingual poems about Carver by Robert Gurney and Alessandro Martini.

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## ***Introduction***

When I told a colleague a few years back that I was starting an academic journal, his response at the time surprised me. The first two issues, he told me, are easy. But if you can get past the third issue, he added, it'll be fine. After a lengthy delay, the third issue of *The Raymond Carver Review* is finally posting. Comprised of three peer reviewed essays, two bilingual poems—Spanish and Italian—and an interview, this miscellany offers a range of material and genre that expand the possibilities of the *RCR*.

Raymond Carver's publishing history begins in 1961, with two stories, "The Furious Season" in *Selection* and "The Father" in *Toyon*. His first poem, "The Brass Ring," followed in *Targets* in 1962. Yet that same year, he also had his only play produced, the one-act *Carnations*. Though he never wrote another single-authored play again, readers can see residual effects of his dramatic sense in early short fictions such as "Little Things" in which the characters move almost across a stage, from bedroom to living room to kitchen, as the action rises as the conflict escalates. In 1982, twenty years later, interestingly, Carver was contacted by director Michael Cimino to rework an existing screenplay by Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on the life of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, a project he accepted and co-wrote with Tess Gallagher. The huge screenplay—some 220 pages, nearly twice the length of an average screenplay Carver notes in his introduction to the 1985 Capra Press excerpt, was delivered to Cimino but never produced, nor was a second screenplay, *Purple Lake*, that he and Gallagher co-wrote in 1983, or the third unidentified screenplay mentioned by Gallagher in her essay

“Two by Two” in *Tell It All*. Even more interestingly, also in 1982, to pass the time on their drive from Syracuse, New York to Port Angeles, Washington, Carver and Gallagher co-wrote two one-act plays—*The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?*—for a playwriting contest sponsored by The Actors Theater in Louisville, Kentucky. Carver had returned to playwriting, co-authoring with his screenplay co-author Tess Gallagher.

Michael Hemmingson’s “‘Will we still be us?’: Raymond Carver’s Short Plays” offers a study of the three one-act plays in Carver’s career: *Carnations* when he was a student at Humboldt; *The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?* in collaboration with Tess Gallagher. The plays are not generally available for the general reader, published in limited, out-of-print and foreign editions. For Carver scholars, however, they shed necessary light on the writer’s evolution and life—as a student, and as a collaborator with his second spouse. Hemmingson examines the plays’ common themes also found in the short stories: infidelity, marriage dynamics, lies, a man’s deficit at being a husband, and a woman’s body image. Yet he also considers some of the weaknesses in the composition of the plays: Carver was influenced by the absurdists in *Carnations*, and while it incorporates the surreal imagery of absurdism, it lacks the political elements of the absurdist school of writing. *The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?* are scenes rather than complete works, written more as an experiment between the two writers rather than as a serious effort to compose a work of stagecraft. Nevertheless, all three works offer the potential of future Carver scholarship that go beyond his poems, essays, and stories.

When asked by Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee to name some writers he admired, Carver quickly identified James Joyce, and *Dubliners* especially. Kerry McSweeney, in his study of realist short stories, notes Carver’s use of the Joycean

epiphany, even if in what he calls a loose, generalized way. No wonder then that John A. McDermott, in “American Epicleti: Using James Joyce to Read Raymond Carver,” offers Joyce as a lens for sharpening readers’ focus as they read Carver. “I am writing a series of epicleti,” James Joyce wrote of *Dubliners*. Scholars have seen this as a variation of the Greek word, “epiclesis,” the invocation in the mass when “transubstantiation” occurs. But in 1995, Wolfhard Steppe argued that the word Joyce had actually written was “epiclets,” or little epics, a reasonable, but much less intriguing coinage. Even without “epicleti” as a term, the act of literary transubstantiation is still a pertinent tool for examining both Joyce’s work and that of his literary descendants. Raymond Carver’s stories seem particularly “epicletic.” Carver’s later stories have been studied with narrative theology in mind, but his early stories are also ripe with transformative “epicletic” moments. By examining Joyce, readers gain understanding of Carver’s technique, especially in “Nobody Said Anything” and “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”

While Carver’s work has long been viewed as working class writing, it is not often enough considered within the broader context of social class issues. “The Gift of Anonymity: Social Class and Property in ‘Why Don’t You Dance?’” by Keith Abbott reconsiders how the placement and exchange of property affirms or destroys standards of status correlative to social class. Abbott borrows basic principles from both Native American potlatches and American consumer culture to provide fresh perspectives on the subtext of a story which is too easily relegated to the realm of situation comedy in which a young couple misconstrue what is a man’s attempt at making a social statement as nothing more than a yard sale. In his essay, Abbott analyses the ways in which, systemically, both potlatch and American class status procedures confirm or deny

affluence and/or status through the distribution of names and titles, goods, delivery systems, and donors or recipients. For Carver's story, it is anonymity that is distributed, instead of positive or negative validation, and Abbott examines how anonymity is generated for participants, goods, and their venue for distribution. By doing so, Abbott locates "Why Don't You Dance?" in class structure, and, but using Native American potlatch and American consumer culture, he opens up new territory for the study of Carver's work through a cultural studies lens.

In the first of what will hopefully be the inclusion of relevant interviews in *The Raymond Carver Review*, David Muldoon talks with Carver's Italian translator, Riccardo Duranti, who is himself a poet. Duranti discusses how Carver crosses cultures to appeal to Italian readers because of his exploring issues of sexual politics, betrayal, and violence, but especially of his speaking in a common register that has been Duranti's challenge as a translator. These challenges include translating both the fiction and poetry, in their varied registers, so as not to lose Carver's voice, between those "two ways of telling a story"; too much minimalism, he suggests, and the Italian "will be like sandpaper." He expresses his interest in translating the pre-Lish stories and the later post-Lish work, from "Cathedral" onward into what Duranti sees as Carver's entering "a wider arena" of writing.

Supplemental to Duranti's discussions of translation, two bilingual poems are included, each a homage to Carver's life and his poetry. Alessandro Martini's "Ortensie" ("Hydrangeas"), submitted in Italian and translated by Vasiliki Fachard, narrates the details of a relationship that could have been written by Carver had the story come to him first. Additionally, "Escupiendo sangre" ("Spitting Blood"), submitted in Spanish and

English by Robert Gurney, connects the poet to incidences in Carver's life, evoking a lament for his own father. Each poem, an homage to Carver's poetry, reminds readers that poetry was the "other language" with which he wrote. By including these pieces, *The Raymond Carver Review* enters a wider arena for the study of the body of Carver's writing.

*The Raymond Carver Review* welcomes Robert Pope to its Advisory Board; a professor at the University of Akron, Bob heard Carver read when he was a student in the University of Iowa's MFA in creative writing program, and he is familiar to Carver scholars for his "Raymond Carver Speaking" interview in Gentry and Stull's *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Joining the Editorial Board is David Houseman, a doctoral student at the University of Alberta whose specialization is in the Beats but whose interest in Carver brings him to the *RCR*. This issue might not have been possible except for the dedication and immense talent of Vickie Fachard, who joined me as co-editor with this issue. Her astoundingly good eye for revision, her always brilliant insights, and her talent for locating the always necessary question, her excellent editorial instincts, and her unwavering support and friendship consistently inspire me. *The Raymond Carver Review* is doing fine. I dedicate this issue to her.

Robert Miltner

Editor, *The Raymond Carver Review*

***Carver's Domestic Adaptations:***

***An Interview with Riccardo Duranti, Carver's Italian Translator***

*David Muldoon, University of Milan, Italy*

**Muldoon:** Film critic Stephen Wood says that Carver's work is a "set of variations on the theme of marriage, infidelity and the disquieting tricks in relationships." Something in this phrase reminds me of current day Italy—Tradition's brutal encounter with materialism. What makes Carver so adaptable for a translation into Italian as a language and culture?

**Duranti:** It is more a question of a shift taking place in the class system. The middle class is going downhill. And there is of course a clash there and as a consequence there is all kinds of un-ease, dis-ease generated from this process that can be expressed through infidelity, and alcoholism, that can be expressed, among other things, through a lack of a sense of protection, a sense of abandonment. That's what Carver addresses and that's what makes his stories pretty universal, especially in Italy where he is recognized as a valuable witness to this process.

As far as Italy is concerned, that is one feature that has made the appeal of Carver so great. I sent you that survey (Number of quotations of Carver: Italy, 81,600, Germany 30,500, Greece, 403: Duranti on Google May 6, 2008) which shows that his work has had quite a huge appeal here. As for the reasons it would be worth investigating further. Certainly there was a well-organized launch but it wouldn't have worked if the works didn't fit some need in the readership.



**Muldoon:** Well it was definitely well-organized considering that you retranslated the entire work of Carver. There is the idea of re-translation in its entirety.

**Duranti:** Yes, presenting the complete Carver, unifying his voice. In that frame, it is very important that the publishers chose to translate not only the stories but the poems as well, which is a necessary thing to do when trying to understand the legacy of Carver as a whole.

I can tell you my personal experience with the translation. I met Carver in 1985 and we became friends but I didn't translate him until the year he died. So the translation became a sort of what we call in Italian an "elaborazione del lutto," a way of getting over the mourning and sense of loss by trying to recuperate a voice that I had loved and I had lost. Translating him for me was that kind of recuperation of a lost voice. Maybe that's what made Tess Gallagher choose me as the translator of the whole work.

**Muldoon:** Translators might be considered inheritors of a language, passing on words, images, innovations, etc. What do you think about the responsibility of inheriting Carver, relating that to the responsibility of mourning?

**Duranti:** There were moments where I doubted my ability to do it. As I said there was this kind of push of trying to reproduce his voice. I think it was a privilege to have heard his conversations and to recognize the rhythms and quirks of his dialogue in them. There was also a big responsibility. That kind of language, that kind of register is very often avoided in Italian

literature. It is thought of as not high enough. There is still this idea that the register should be constantly “high” in fiction, but I thought there was also the task of the translator to show Carver’s kind of register, his kind of language. It is a very precious tool used to make literature work, to make fiction come alive, real. I think that is what is behind my interpretation of the language.

**Muldoon:** In the poem “Venice” we see Carver thinking about death, the arguably third phase of his writing where he is distracted and self-aware. This poem shows the beauty of translating into Italian with the use of words like “biasimare,” “trapelata,” “sorci,” but it also shows the potential problem with register in Italian. How does the translator escape the heavy tradition of this language in order to transmit Carver’s everydayness? Could this be an example of where the register gives way to the beauty of Italian even though it has some distance from the original text?

**Duranti:** There is always this dialectics between registers, especially in his poetry where he is less loose than in the fiction. Once in a while he does try to crank up the register in the poems a little bit. It is not that you make a conscious choice when you translate. You try to do your best, and sometimes your background “trapela” comes to the surface. There is also an unspoken pressure on the translator to keep a high register. Carver helped me to stabilize that register. Of course there might be some leftovers. Some occurrences might have gone over the base line, but I think it depends on your ear, the kind of what you call everydayness is often heard in the other words, in the syntax. You have to be careful about the interference of dialect. Immediately when you think of everyday speech in Italian the connection is right away to local dialect.

Whereas you have to find an Italian equivalent, which doesn't really exist in Italian literature because Italian writers tend to be very conservative. The role of the translator is also to import ways of writing and ways of playing with language that maybe some Italian writers don't fully dare to use because they are afraid of alienating the publishers. The publishers tend to conform to the average literary language, especially when there is a lack of translation of interesting material, such as Carver's for example. They also have the difficult task of making this lower register acceptable, but it's very difficult to do without falling into traps like local language. For example the first translation I saw of Carver, which was the 1994 edition of *Cathedral* in Italian by Mondadori, the translator characterized the Italian that came out in a recognizably northern fashion. I think that was a fault in the translation, whereas my effort was to stay away from instinct: I would normally resort to central Italian dialect if I have to lower my register, even though I am aware that I have to be careful not to go too far in that direction.

**Muldoon:** Speaking of infidelity, a problem you talked about in an interview on translation where you said, and I am translating "In translating, the problem of trust is so complex that it even transcends the question of whether there is more or less of an affinity between languages." ["Il Problema della fedelita e talmente complesso che trascende anche la questione delle minore o maggiore affinita tra le lingue."] How does Carver's minimalism expose the level of difference between the Italian and English languages? Is it the minimalism that is particularly hard to keep? There is a lot of punch in Carver, a lot of boxing. How did you get that in Italian?

**Duranti:** It is a problem that I am going to face again pretty soon. I think minimalism is a sort of wrong track to take. He certainly thought there was some mislabeling there. I think the

invention of minimalism was part of a campaign that Gordon Lish was doing to promote his own way of writing. He is the only *real* minimalist and he tried to use Carver as a kind of spearhead to launch his own vision of writing. He did this by heavily editing Carver's work. He was very intelligent and he understood that Carver's work could handle all the editing that he did. My next project is to translate the stories that came out heavily edited by Gordon Lish in *What we talk about when we talk about love*, to translate the original versions *before* the editing and that's where I am going to find the differences there are between the two languages and the two ways of telling a story. From my experience, because I have already translated some of the original stories, I think I am more comfortable with the longer versions. That dry, cut to the bone language is more difficult to reproduce in Italian. I think I'm going to enjoy the longer versions more. There has been some criticism about my translations, saying that they do not respect that dry quality of Carver's dialogue but I feel that beyond a certain point Italian cannot be dried up so much. There is a level that has to be lengthened a little bit, diluted a little bit; otherwise it will be like sandpaper. You cannot sandpaper the Italian reading public so much.

**Muldoon:** To say that Carver writes about Sexual Politics seems to be very limiting, others have called it Anti-Politics. What would you say?

**Duranti:** He had no agenda. When he wrote he was not thinking about sexual politics. He was just writing about his experience. And his experience is full of contradictions like all his life. He was brought up with very traditional, rigid roles between women and men. I think in a sense he was caught in the contradiction between the way he was brought up and the way he wanted to do things. For example even in his first marriage, besides all the problems with getting married

very early and having to juggle his will to improve himself through education and having to keep the family together, when he was not fully equipped to do that economically, there was always this contradiction between doing things in the traditional way and wanting to do them in the new, cooler, hippie way that he was discovering. I think they [Ray and Maryann] actually managed to gain some sort of balance in this, before the stress got them. For example, they really took turns in getting an education because they couldn't both study at the same time, as it was already difficult as it was. He even followed his wife in a scholarship abroad, in Israel of all places, because she had this opportunity. It was a disaster because you cannot go from working class Washington State to Israel without having some cultural shock. His experiences were certainly contradictory, as he couldn't keep up with this pull in several directions, at once, in the long run. As far as I know in the second part of his life, the last, and the most productive one, he certainly had solved a lot of his problems, also thanks to meeting Tess Gallagher. Their relationship was much more balanced, much less traditional. The traditional roles didn't put as much pressure on him as his earlier experience. Sexual politics is divided into two phases in his life and in the later phase, this awareness comes out better. The earlier stories are just witnesses to the contradictions he was living in, and the fact was that very often he was aware of wanting to do things differently, but was being pushed back to doing them in a traditional way.

**Muldoon:** Infidelity between women and men is a major theme in Italian life as well, being almost an everyday discussion, an accepted norm. What is characteristically different about the Italian and American version of having an affair?

**Duranti:** That kind of frankness about it is fairly new in Italian culture. It explains some of the uneasiness in the male characters in his stories. It is a sign of the conflict he lived through in his own life. In Italian culture this is coming to the surface more and more but not so much like in Carver's world, along with the awareness that women do work even if they are relegated to a traditional role at home and really do more than men who often take shelter in their jobs with traditional Italian "furbizia." They keep up their role as the breadwinners but the actual management of the family falls is on the shoulders of the women. With all the differences involved, I think the Italian audience can catch the analogies in the conflict even though it is not the same.

**Muldoon:** Thinking about the 80's and being in America, with the divorce rate at the time when Carver was writing and even, in a way, Carver predicting divorce in the 70s with his stories, in Italy there was and is less divorce but at the same time the birth rate is very low. Maybe it is quite timely that Carver is getting put out again in this complete form. The reaction is different, but could the traditional state of marriage in Italy be under question nonetheless?

**Duranti:** I think as far as social trends are concerned there is always a gap of at least ten/fifteen years between Italy and the States so it was timely because some of the problems he was talking about may not have been as prominent here in 1984, but have certainly become more current since the beginning of the 90s up to today.

**Muldoon:** Word choice is a top priority in translation as there are a lot of words in the world. Obviously the short story collection title *Cathedral* is translated as "*Cattedrale*," but what about

Carver's word choice in itself. An everyday working person would go to a simple "Church," what is the connection in this collection?

**Duranti:** There are two problems. In that particular story "Cathedral" there is the special problem of choosing something that is not everyday. The whole situation is pretty original and absurd. There is a very typical, low/middle class American man trying to explain something as difficult as what a Cathedral is to a blind man so he couldn't have just said church because a church would be something they would be familiar with. They are thinking of the traditional European Gothic cathedral, a cathedral in France, Germany, and Italy in a sense. The Cathedral represents another world so he had to use a different word not just church. There is an element of pretension there. He was trying to tackle something out of the ordinary. I also think there is a kind of prejudice about Carver, that he should always deal with everyday typical American life, which doesn't do justice to him because he was very well read, very interested in things like Russian stories, French writers, even Italian writers, (he was a lover of Italo Svevo and Calvino) so he felt that kind of fascination with European culture. I always thought that one of the biggest pities of his early death was that it happened just when he was on the verge of changing his outlook. The kind of working class American he depicted was beginning to grow a little too narrow for his talent. The last story he wrote, "Errand," shows that very well as it is set outside of America, and it is set in the past. It describes the death of Anton Chekhov, who was of course his favorite writer. There are some sophisticated choices of words there when trying to portray a very different world from the one he was used to writing about. Then you can find this in the poems; the poems about literary experience, reading the French and Russian writers. "Cathedral" is one of the first examples of this ambition of going into a wider arena.

**Muldoon:** Was naming the whole group of stories *Cathedral* part of it as well?

**Duranti:** *Cathedral* does represent his attempt to upgrade himself. It's very different from all his other titles which are very colloquial and long, and this one is short, to the point: from *Would You Please Be Quiet, Please?* to *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, he goes to *Cathedral*. It was that part of an attempt to reassert himself as a more complex writer than the labels that were stuck on him as being a minimalist. He felt like he was being constrained in a corner and he wanted to show that he could get out of that corner.

**Muldoon:** If you take that final sentence and you attach it to things like alcoholism or different traps that people get into, you see that you need time to get out of corners sometimes.

**Duranti:** He was doing it in many different ways. I think the poems are a key to understanding the more complex side of Carver because they go beyond the labels that journalists would resort to just to put him in a niche where they could deal with him. I think he was more complex than that.

**Muldoon:** There is a poem which really shocked me where he talks about his daughter, and how his daughter would be an alcoholic. It is outside any scheme. You can just see his personal fears.



**Duranti:** The problems he had with both his daughter and his son were deep and painful. He said in an essay that they were the biggest influence on his work in a sense. In an essay called “Fires,” he talks about the fact that in his writing he was able to address something that was very tormenting to him. Even in the final period of his life, he divided his life into the Good Ray’s days and the Bad Ray’s days, or what he called in one of his last poems the “Gravy” years. Even in the Gravy years, the past and the problem that came from his relationship with his children was something that really haunted him, working against his tranquility and balance. It is very well expressed in his poems; this contradiction between love, responsibility and his awareness of his failure as a parent was a big problem of his until the end.

**Muldoon:** Do you think that communicability, the ability to talk about things in the family, especially on the part of the father, is an issue in Italy? My father is Irish and Catholic, and there are some similarities between this image of a father, Italy and Carver. In Italy there is so much domestic violence, unfortunately not just abuse, but actual homicides and a lot of daily domestic killings.

**Duranti:** Compared to the tensions in his works there is relatively little violence in Carver, the violence is inside I think. For what I can remember there are only two cases where it really erupts, in “Popular Mechanics” [“Little Things”] and “Tell The Women We Are Going,” but of course in the poems there are more instances of this.

**Muldoon:** Do you think that in a way talking about it, having an open line of communication, is a way of getting over that disease? Maybe there aren't as many channels of communication here in Italy.

**Duranti:** Especially here, if you notice, there is an official way and then there is the real way. Everybody is very superstitious and there is also the church, which keeps exalting the family values of family, but at the same time all this talk works as a lid put on a reality which is actually much more complex, more contradictory. Under this lid, because of this lid, all kinds of things fester and violence ensues because there is no other way of expressing it in other ways. Carver's luck was to have this gift of story telling and being able to verbalize some of these tensions because these tensions could have had much more violent outlets. The gift of telling with such power is what eventually saved his life, his sanity. The contradiction here is much heavier because of all this talk of utopia, of an ideal sense of family, and all the social contradictions that end up brewing and building up pressure in family life and finally give way to violence or betrayal.

***The Gift of Anonymity: Social Class and Property  
in Carver's "Why Don't You Dance?"***

*Keith Abbott, Naropa Institute*

**Introduction**

How the placement and exchange of property may affirm or destroy social class status provides some crucial elements for Raymond Carver's "Why Don't You Dance?" Because of the story's status confirmation or invalidation issues, this paper utilizes some basic principles from both Native American potlatches and American consumer culture to provide fresh perspectives. Systemically, both potlatch and consumer class status procedures use four levels to confirm or deny affluence and/or status: names/titles, goods, distribution systems, and donors/recipients. In Carver's story, anonymity is distributed at all four levels instead of positive or negative validation. This paper will discuss how that anonymity is generated for the participants, their goods, and their venues for distribution.

As in other Carver stories, property and its proper presentation also validate and/or cancel his characters' social class status. Some short examples may suffice. For the married couple in "Are Those Actual Miles?" the wife's generic red convertible functions as their middle-class trophy, but its status may match *their hopes* more than the couple's class reality. Loss of the anonymous car through bankruptcy annuls their temporary rise in status. This annulment sends the wife into vindictive sexual betrayal and the husband into a paralyzing paranoid depression.

Carver was sensitive to how correct or incorrect placement of possessions is crucial, too, for displays ranging from effective to inept. In “Feathers,” a husband prominently places the plaster cast of his wife’s crooked teeth atop the family television to celebrate her new orthodontic eminence. This charmingly grotesque moment acts as a middle class validation for Carver’s couple because now the wife has perfect teeth just like those people on television.

Carver’s characters frequently suffer from a fear of disclosure and scrutiny. In “Feathers,” panic erupts during commonplace social interactions, such as visiting a co-worker’s home for their first dinner together. There the couple’s selection of a hostess gift arouses verbal aggression and malaise. In “Feathers,” exposing one’s choice of a minor gift, even when the donation remains confined to a home, provokes unease and dismay over possible rejection, presumably generated by the couple’s taste or etiquette in gift giving. But these three instances do not take place in a public space, as does the distribution of goods in “Why Don’t You Dance?” For that issue, selected aspects of tribal potlatch customs may provide some applicable metaphorical insights, when viewed alongside American social class and consumer validation issues.

### **Speak, That I May See Thee. Consume, So That You May See and Be Seen**

Inside American communities a public display of personal property for any interaction between the property owner and the public arouses various complex responses. First, issues of judgment arise depending on whether the objects are for sale, designated as payments, or displayed as gifts or trophies. Second, how the participants are selected or unselected depends upon their names, rank or titles for particular positive or negative purposes that define the events.

Property dispersal invites comparative judgments from the recipients who usually employ those standards relative to their class and status.

Before examining how this story's exchange works in a fictional consumer culture, it may prove useful to review tribal potlatch cultures' complex webs of prestige, obligation, honor and reciprocity, all emblems for different social powers. This potlatch overview functions as a metaphorical obverse of a consumer society and will concentrate on prestige and reciprocity practices common to both.

Aldona Jonaitis, in *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch*, describes the most important potlatches as "occasions on which a noble family invites guests who witness the display of the host's status ... Guests received payment from the host for their service as witnesses; their acceptance of these payments signified their validation of the host's claims of status" (11-2). With over "700 named [tribal] positions" operating, titles/ranks were intimately involved in navigating social distinctions via proper gifts/responses, thereby affirming or invalidating the social status of rival clans (Jonaitis 135).

For Marcel Mauss' study, *The Gift*, "[A potlatch] is religious, mythological, and shamanic, juridical, economical and a phenomenon of social structure (it brings together tribes, clans, families etc.). There are three obligations that make up the essence of potlatch: the obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate" (Reader). Mauss' analysis also "called this system a system of total services...each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honor of giver and recipient are engaged" and furthermore, that "a very strict hierarchy and the whole tribe or clan is identified, for all that it possesses and all that it does . . ." (Reader).

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If we substitute “class” for clan above, this process of social identification by public displays or transfers of goods may be likened to similar judgments provoked by one’s speech patterns, a common public process for designating class status. In *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*, Paul Fussell notes, “Your social class is most clearly visible when you say things” and quotes Ben Jonson, “Language most shows a man. Speak, that I may see thee” (151). For potlatch celebrants, a guide seems “Consume, so that you may see and be seen.” Being seen means the celebrants function inside all that the status system possesses and all the status system’s empowerments, including validating names/titles for status identity approval. American consumer culture shares many similar “See and be seen” exchanges for granting status and Carver’s “yard sale” in “Why Don’t You Dance?” occupies one of its stranger public intersections.

In contrast to a potlatch’s “total services” that assign status and/or power with dispersal of goods, in “Why Don’t You Dance?” the distribution of goods generates a debilitating anonymity not only for a protagonist, his family history and his objects, but also anonymity for the recipients and their newly acquired objects. The potlatch’s shape-shifting properties are, “By moving such an object through the social landscape, the gift-giver so to speak rearranges the fabric of sociality—and it is this that forms the basis of the gift’s power” (Reader). Particular powers were also assumed for goods, that “everyday objects such as spoons and storage boxes [were] decorated and imbued with spiritual power...” (Global Oneness). For Carver’s people, their objects’ powers turn both negative and contagious.

The readers of “Why Don’t You Dance?” enter a twilight zone of the anonymous owner’s yard at night. When two young lovers assume that the objects are for public sale from their

placement, their owner shows scant respect for these goods and for the status his implied vendor's role confers on him. His actions steadily leach out any socially significant authority from these goods because he treats his role as if vacant of powers or status. His acts of zero sum validations also shift those objects, recipients and himself into a limbo of blurred, if not obliterated, social entities.

### **Out in the Front Yard**

The story takes place *after* an evening ramble of an older unnamed man. Our anonymous man has repeatedly left the house or his house, to move all the domestic possessions outside. Because its ownership is also kept anonymous, we assume this is his house, though we don't know if he rents or owns it. From the kitchen the man surveys the house's contents in "his front yard" (223).

Every larger domestic possession is present and he names each by its household function: bed, candy-striped sheets, chiffoier and pillows. He notes that his nightstand and his reading lamp, her nightstand and her reading lamp, are *correctly placed* on his side and her side of the bed. This female is neither named nor assigned the title of wife.

These possessions are given names that designate their *utilitarian* purposes: portable heater, rattan chair, decorator pillow, a big console-model television set and so on. Without the particulars their status values remain obscurely generic or null. Some possessions are lit up, ready to run or ready to serve and/or be placed in their proper relationships for use *inside*. Then our anonymous man elaborates the big picture of this singular event.

He had run an extension cord on out there and everything was connected. Things worked, no different from how it was when they were inside.

Now and then a car slowed and people stared. But no one stopped.

It occurred to him that he wouldn't, either. (223)

Outside or inside the house, the man asserts no comparative difference between his "things," effectively annulling their roles for both private or public status display. After the man notices the reactions of passersby, only then does he realize how he and his goods must look to others. This negative public recognition changes the man's self-regard but he accepts that implication as proper, not the usual reaction for most American citizens.

### **The Iconography of the Front Yard**

On the subject of the public nature of status and front lawns, Paul Fussell remarks, "Approaching any house, one is bombarded with class signals" (77). And on objects placed there, he writes, "When the front lawn becomes a showcase for permanent objects meant to be admired, we know that we are proceeding down toward the proles"(78). So a well-kept lawn sans ornaments has a primary higher status power for eliciting admiration. About the negative side of this pursuit of admiration, Fussell cites different cases of "prole drift," the term he uses for a virulent middle-class fear of signaling a drop in status via their displays (170-78).



When someone showcases *outside* their home the permanent objects meant for *inside* the home, some other social transaction is evoked and the choice of words for such an event connotes levels of status. Take four terms—estate sale, garage sale, yard sale and rummage sale. These suggest voluntary actions for distributing property but also, in that order, imply a diminishing social cachet. Estate sale usually indicates the voluntary disposal of an inheritance with quality but often duplicate goods, while a rummage sale signals well-used cast-offs. Carver’s anonymous man seems indifferent to naming his actions or what purpose they serve, so this omission creates an eerie mood of disconnection.

### **The Secret Powers of the Unnamed**

What Carver leaves out is often more important than what he puts in. For example, the word lawn is never used. Front yard, yard, grass, my yard, and his yard are all mentioned only once. A lawn is what belongs next to the driveway—which is mentioned four times. So, for this story, a middle-class lawn becomes a key secret omission in a story rife with omissions. The assumption that his yard has suitably trimmed and maintained grass—hence a lawn—is left unstated. Given the man’s apparent indifference, the reader is free to imagine a lush suburban lawn with a curving asphalt drive at best, or at worse, a balding grass patch next to a straight concrete slab driveway. For either extreme (and any points in between) no proof is evinced, so the exact status and appearance of the yard remains indistinct or subject to change.

### Shadow Status

In potlatch fashion, his front yard becomes both a stage and—with anonymous but critical witnesses—also an ad hoc civic court for a theatrical display of the man's private household props. When a status procedure loses its names or titles, then the shadow sides of that protocol's powers are shown: anonymity's potential for insecurity, humiliation and ennui.

In his chapter "Anatomy of the Classes," Fussell notes that the middle-class "remain[s] terrified at what others think of them and to avoid criticism [is] obsessed with doing everything right" (39). For Fussell what marks the true middle class man is "a longing for dignity"; he notes that such a man's front yard and his house's presentation is crucial for that peace of mind (82). However, rather than suffering terror, Carver's anonymous man approves of his fellow citizens' negative judgment along with their shunning him. This implies that he acknowledges his exhibit violates a taboo and therefore implies that he accepts his outcast role and forgoes any desire for dignity as the owner of such items.

Motivation also is left unspecified. We are not told if, after a previously unmentioned event, he decided to affirm his loss of (or resignation from) his former status; or if the man *became* an outsider by emptying his house and putting his disposable property on display. This anonymity is now free to view this conspicuous spectacle of his implied loss of rank with the same curiosity, distaste and/or indifference as any one else. However, for the reader, confirmation of up or down status movement is not obtained without a further public inspection of these goods and his display. This distribution of anonymity is reinforced because something else very public has been missing all along: brand names.

Without brand names for his household goods or even some clue of possible monetary values to suggest the man's social rank, hence motivation, his exhibition drifts into a more urgent situation, perhaps a divorce-fueled fire sale. This public replication of his private life also hints at far worse social disgraces: a public pre-emptive strike on a public bankruptcy, foreclosure and/or an eviction notice. Provenance—that method of judgment so crucial for assigning value, by adding or demoting—is excluded (except for the bland detail that a gift tablecloth was much too large), another silent omission. Such omissions suggest that the property exists as anonymously as its owner and its history of a family and/or their objects' sources. His possessions' displacement from their household spaces (where their worth might be better judged) cancels any chance that the readers might now imagine his portable heater as top of a particular brand's product line, and these omissions reflect back on the man's anonymity.

In the earlier version found in the *Collected Stories* section and titled *Beginners*, the man is first called "Max" when he returns from the market and finds the girl "Carla" and the boy "Jack" (751-56). Given Carver's penchant for assigning generic placeholder first names to his characters, the fact that Carla originates from the German for "man" and meant "strong" in English seems hardly helpful (Parents Connect). Likewise, Max seems to function as a similar generic male, as does the name Jack. To give Max some symbolic significance, such as the slang connotation of "max," a verb meaning to take something to the limit, seems alien to Carver's past practices. Pynchon he is not. One might note that "Jack" historically functioned as an anonymous male placeholder for numerous slang uses: from Shakespeare's "saucy jacks" for a generic horny guy to the American "Hit the road, Jack" for a one-size-fits-all loser. Certainly, if one's gender may function as a tribal affiliation, then these characters belong to the tribes of

man, boy and girl. For this revision the names' excision appears to be good editing for artistically inducing anonymity.

### **Carver's Generic Tribe**

In the second section, the man's impromptu tribe or audience consists of the boy Jack who lives with an anonymous girl. Jack is only used once, as part of the girl's suggestive invitation to "try this bed" (Carver 224). Jack then reverts back to the generic "boy." Both lack surnames. However, their importance for the story is stressed, because the narration switches to the girl's point of view and her effect on the boy.

When the two drive by and stop at this front yard display ,the man is gone. Their car has no brand name, either. And then "this girl and this boy" briskly dispense with the circumstances for their curiosity.

"It must be a yard sale," the girl said to the boy.

This girl and this boy were furnishing a little apartment.

"Let's see what they want for the bed," the girl said.

"And for the TV," the boy said.

The boy pulled into the driveway and stopped in front of the  
kitchen table. (223-24)

The couple examines these goods and tries out some machines. We realize that Carver picks a precise and emotionally charged moment to let us know that we are definitely in the girl's point of view—when she tests the bed and we are told what she thinks.

The girl sat on the bed. She pushed off her shoes and lay

back. She thought she could see a star.

“Come here, Jack. Try this bed. Bring one of those pillows,” she said.

“How is it?” he said.

“Try it,” she said.

He looked around. The house was dark. (224 )

Obviously, their relationship is in its early romantic stages if they need furnishings *after* moving into “a little apartment” so her test-driving the bed morphs into some erotic by-play. When she asks the boy to kiss her, he resists because they are displaced, out in someone else’s yard, on that someone else’s bed, with that someone else’s house dark. The boy wants to know “if anybody’s home” (224).

The girl sees the lights in the houses around them go on, so other neighbors may be anonymously watching—a familiar motif of all-purpose menace in Carver’s stories implying both past and future public humiliations and disgraces. As the evening grows darker, the girl seems to revive her erotic fantasy when she says, “Wouldn’t it be funny if,” and then grins without finishing her remark (224).

From her point of view the event’s value shifts from a chance for potential (random and a little randy) sex play to cheap furnishings. This is not their neighborhood, obviously, and their implied furniture-free status is somewhere below the man’s. The story is quite specific about how this loss of these objects’ original purpose as household goods affects the girl and the boy differently—she’s excited and he’s uneasy—and also how the couple fails to revive the potential

status of those goods by using them. “The boy laughed, but for no good reason. For no good reason, he switched the reading lamp on” (224).

In this public setting, the boy does not reciprocate the girl’s romantic mood. So she switches their game to one of bargaining, a skill for wives. With her assumption that this display is a yard sale, she advises him about how to deal with the owner and with any prices. She does not sort out the values, seek out the brand names of any property, or pick which item is most desirable and which less desirable for their situation. Rather, she advocates a ten-dollar knockoff across the board for any item’s suggested price, then adds, “And, besides, they must be desperate or something” (225). Her romantic impulses attempt to assign some emotionally distraught cover story to this unsettling display—mirroring the man’s earlier assumption about why no drivers will stop.

### **The Gift of Anonymity**

In the third section, the point of view shifts back to the man who returns with anonymous food and drink, “sandwiches, beer and whiskey,” without brand names or other hints about their potential status value (225).

The three talk about the property in a manner that destabilizes its value. In conversation his property’s assigned values start at generic bland, “pretty good,” and degrade to “good” (225). When the couple tries to find out the prices, they are also so perfunctory, that their negotiations rapidly become pointless in an almost farcical way.

“How much do you want for the bed?”

“I was thinking fifty dollars for the bed,” the man said.

“Would you take forty?” the girl asked.

“I’ll take forty,” the man said.

He took a glass out of the carton. He took the newspaper off the glass. He broke the seal on the whiskey.

“How about the TV?” the boy asked.

“Twenty-five.”

“Would you take fifteen?” the girl said.

“Fifteen’s okay. I could take fifteen,” the man said. (225)

Both the goods and money are reduced to equally null or intangible values; dollars shift to numbers such as fifteen, then those morph into an abstraction: “Name a figure” (226). The word “figure” suggests the literal shape of the numbers, and that distinction reduces the status of payment to anonymous numerical placeholders, similar to man, boy and girl.

### **The Closing**

The three prepare to drink whiskey together to close their deal, but the girl prefers watered whiskey. The man directs her to a spigot as if she somehow did not know what use that object serves, what it provides, and how it is utilized. So he instructs her that a spigot holds water and a spigot may be turned to let that water out: “There’s water in that spigot over here,” the man said. “Turn on that spigot” (225). Even the transfer of information is atomized in a way that relegates each part to its most plebeian individual function.

Before the young couple can drink, the man finishes his whiskey, makes another, and then drops his cigarette between the sofa cushions. Just as the couple by mutual consent avoided some

public sex before this, the man and girl avoid the public destruction of the sofa with their joint efforts. But beyond that singular act of maintaining value, the man won't be a party to their attempts at *creating* distinctive value.

“I want the desk,” the girl said. “How much money is the desk?”

The man waved his hand at this preposterous question.

“Name a figure,” he said.

He looked at them as they sat at the table. In the lamplight there was something about their faces. It was nice or it was nasty. There was no telling. (226)

This closing effectively cancels out any assignation of worth created by practical use, brand names, status display, monetary considerations or personal gain. Their former owner, our anonymous man, no longer seems capable of making such distinctions. Nor does he gain any status from his new role as seller. From the man's point of view he no longer needs to distinguish good from bad, nice from nasty. With his anonymous goods passing on, he too becomes null, simply a placeholder unaffected by this ritual of exchange.

But the girl wants reassurance that they are getting something valuable. However, her expectation turns out to be impossible because all their actions and the property itself have rapidly moved outside normal frames of status validation. Just as during a potlatch, drink, food and dancing are valued for relieving collective tension and greasing social interactions, so too does this trio attempt all three celebratory gestures.



### **The Festivities**

In the fourth section the man has his third whiskey, backs it with a beer and pours his fourth. The girl joins him for her second drink, but the boy does not. The man proposes that the girl “pick something” as a gift and gives her a box of records (Carver 120).

The boy was writing the check.

“Here,” the girl said, picking something, picking anything, for she did not know the names of these labels. She got up from the table and sat down again. She did not want to sit still.

“I’m making it out to cash,” the boy said. (226)

Because she’s incapable of judging the man’s records (and by implication what kind of music or musicians may be heard—thereby canceling out her past preferences), the girl picks randomly. This disabling moment makes it seem as if the man’s dysfunctional state has been passed onto the girl along with his property. Because the names on the record labels are empty of meaning, she becomes as incapable as he is to pass value judgments to guide choice. Unlike a potlatch’s passing on goods as a powerful reaffirmation of communal and private status distinctions for donor and recipient, this transfer has been emptied of any such reciprocal empowerments.

The boy writes the man a check for an undisclosed amount made out to “cash” because the name of the man remains unknown. Once their transaction is over, music and dancing are proper celebrations. The man is shown coming to this decision in silence and then duplicating it in speech.

“Why don’t you kids dance?” he decided to say, and then  
he said it, “Why don’t you dance?”

“I don’t think so,” the boy said.

“Go ahead,” the man said. “It’s my yard. You can dance  
if you want to.” (226-27)

This stop-time, slow motion action further atomizes their social exchange in the same fashion as when Carver’s man verbally diagrammed where to find water and how and why water then appears there. He claims the rights of a property owner to permit behavior on that property, but this yard sale has devolved into something off-kilter and weird, and the characters undergo another defamiliarization of a basic human situation once again.

### **The Triumphal Dance**

In the fifth and sixth sections the man watches as the girl and boy dance and squabble about how drunk the boy has become, and then she dances with the man. The recognition that anonymous neighbors, the others, are *watching* their celebration emboldens her. Her need for some cover story for validation returns the girl to her earlier romantic expectations. For the second time she imagines that some overwhelming passion pushed this man into irrational behavior.

Our man could not care less what she thinks, but for her he summons a little defiance, a show of specious triumph over neighbors, those others out there in the dark.

“Those people over there, they’re watching,” she said.

“It’s okay,” the man said. “It’s my place,” he said.

“Let them watch,” the girl said.

“That’s right,” the man said. “They thought they’d seen everything over here. But they haven’t seen this, have they?” he said. (227)

This flourish of their mutual but depleted rebellion thrills the girl. Somehow for her, their display has shamed or humiliated their nameless unseen neighbors. She then sanctifies their transgression and romanticizes their roles by telling the man, “You must be desperate or something” (227).

But such generic terms as “my place” and “seen everything” for his neighbors’ reactions and “or something” for his motivations, prove impotent status markers. This last distribution of anonymous actions to the neighborhood community and anonymous motivations to the man’s actions signals a definitive invalidation. Whatever these past actions or reactions were, no specific judgments such as my home, outlaws, revulsion, or rebellion can be assigned.

In his chapter on “Climbing and Sinking, and Prole Drift” Fussell notes, “If social climbing, whether in actuality or in fantasy, is well understood, social sinking is not, although there’s more of it going on than most people notice” (171). And here, rather than a drifting class devolution, the man achieves Fussell’s most extreme action, a “precipitate lunge” downward into the out of sight class for the socially invisible (176).

### **The Voodoo Epilogue**

“Why Don’t You Dance?” ends with a jumpcut in time. Later the girl tries to explain to anonymous guests how “all these things” came into their possession (121). The mystery of why

the boy and the girl took such items as “these crappy records” torments her (227). Her obsession suggests that she may have realized that, instead of affirming her social situation and her romantic relationship, the man’s anonymous goods may have the shape-shifting powers to saddle her and her mate with bad luck from a failed life and marriage. So she acts out her anxiety, trying to transform this event into something of worth. But words fail. Only the mute objects of another household’s anonymous lives remain.

Neither the players, their transactions, nor their goods obtain validation for functioning in any conceivable status system. In this shadowy shape-shifting world of lost status, the society’s key elements for affirmation morph into drifting phantoms. So distribution of anonymity on multiple levels in “Why Don’t You Dance?” becomes complete.

On a closing stylistic note, in its eerie luminous way “Why Don’t You Dance?” functions, paradoxically, much like Northwest Indian tales via their inexplicable shape-shifting, abrupt shifts, and dislocations of narrative expectations. Periodically throughout *Passage to Juneau*, Jonathan Raban discusses the “strange narrative grammar” of the original Northwest Indian tales in Franz Boas’ “faithful transliterations”(218). He notes how abruptly and inexplicably the stories start and end, and that Northwest life is “turbulent and random” as “creatures move through a landscape full of powers—hapless babes in the malevolent wood” (218). This observation has a curious resonance with Carver’s darker work in general and with this story in particular.

Northwest Indian stories also may function as both classic cautionary tales and celebratory fate tales about how the most innocuous of transactions or actions may give objects the power to alter lives forever—also a feature of Carver stories such as the plaster dental cast

and the hospitality gift in “Feathers” and the generic red convertible in “Are These Actual Miles?” “Why Don’t You Dance?” may also bestow a fresh look at the old American proverb: Be careful what you wish for.

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## ***American Epicleti: Using James Joyce to Read Raymond Carver***

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Since the publication of James Joyce's letters, one statement has held particular interest for scholars: "I am writing a series of epicleti," Joyce told his schoolmate Constantine Curran, referring to the collection that would become *Dubliners*. "Epicleti" was interpreted as a slightly-mangled use of the Greek word, "epiclesis," the invocation in the Greek Orthodox mass when what the Roman Catholic Church calls "transubstantiation" occurs: the transformation of bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ. In 1995, Joyce scholar Wolfhard Steppe argued convincingly that "epicleti" was not faux-Greek, but actually an error in reading Joyce's handwriting. "Epiclets," or little epics, is the word that Steppe sees on the Curran letter—a reasonable, but much less intriguing coinage.

If scholars accept Steppe's research and erase "epicleti" from Joyce's lexicon, does it mean that the accepted definition of epicleti, the writer's attempt to transform "the everyday bread of life" (Scholes 255) into miraculous literary moments, is no longer a fruitful way to examine Joyce's work or that of his literary descendants, such as Raymond Carver? Even without "epicleti," the act of literary transubstantiation is still pertinent. Robert Scholes notes this important passage in Joyce's letter to his brother Stanislaus:

There is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the mass and what I am trying to do...to give people a kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own...for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift.  
(255)

Steppe rightfully points out that Joyce was describing his poetry at this time, not his fictional prose, but that does not mean readers cannot apply this comment to Joyce's later work. Joyce was fond enough of the idea to recycle it in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when Stephen Dedalus considers himself "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life"(240). Though "epicleti" may not then be Joyce's word, it can still be a useful critical tool for examining his work and others, including Raymond Carver's.

Of the many authors deeply in debt to Joyce's ground-breaking fiction, Raymond Carver seems particularly to employ the "epicletic." Carver certainly knew of Joyce's theory of the epiphany and, while not a religious man, he may have been familiar with epicleti as well. His later stories, especially the oft-anthologized "Cathedral" and "A Small, Good Thing," have been studied with Joycean narrative theology in mind. The paper on which the narrator draws his titular cathedral, the portal through which he discovers his home can be transformed into something glorious, is a grocery bag which minutes before the transcendent final scene held shreds of onion skin, modest beginnings for the catalyst of the narrator's revelation.

It is not difficult to recognize the baker in "A Small, Good Thing" as a kind of priest, consoling the bereaved parents with his simple benediction over the work of his kitchen, "eating is a small good thing in a time like this" (404). In the story's final paragraph, there is a moment of communion as the trio share the baker's work.

"Smell this," the baker said, breaking open a dark loaf. "It's a heavy bread, but rich." They smelled it, then he had them taste it. It had the taste of molasses and coarse grains. They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. (405)



Eating the “dark” and “heavy” bread—grief embodied in food—allows them to listen to the baker’s words and offers them at least a moment of peace. Bread is more than bread. Moreover, the fluorescent lights of the kitchen become sunlight. “They did not think of leaving,” the story ends, a recognition of how fleeting the moment may be and that once they leave that space the real work of grieving—and living—begins.

Yet Carver’s less studied early stories, especially those in his first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please*, are also ripe with epiphanies (both true and false) and especially epicletic moments. By examining Joyce’s illustrations of epicleti in stories from *Dubliners*, in particular “Araby” and “The Dead,” along with episodes from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, contemporary readers gain a better understanding of Carver’s technique, especially in “Nobody Said Anything” and the title story, “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please.”

Unlike epiphany, which implies that the character learns something or comes to some knowledge (whether accurate or not), Joyce seems to use the moment of transformation as a spectacular, but not necessarily revelatory, event. If characters experience an epicletic moment, they may or may not experience an epiphany. The key to epicleti is the move of the mundane into the brilliant. The unnamed narrator of “Araby,” a young boy suffering a crush for a comrade’s older sister, experiences the epicletic while speaking with her one day:

She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light of the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease. (24)

The attention the boy pays to her physicality is more than mere lust. Yes, he’s a romantic of the most hopeless sort, corrupted by Sir Walter Scott and visions of the exotic East, but the ability to see beauty on brown “blind” Richmond Street is a gift, as tormenting as

it is delightful. The boy can transform the squalor of a market into “a single sensation,” her name into “a prayer,” his hormone-addled body into “a harp” (23). Though his imagination is overactive, his idealization of Mangan’s sister an adolescent folly, in the end Joyce wants us to lament the loss of the narrator’s ability to transform the commonplace into the electric. When, at the conclusion of the tale, the boy’s revelation comes and he sees himself as “a creature, driven and derided by vanity” (28), it is a reverse-epicletic moment. The boy becomes less than a boy, he becomes a “creature,” and Dublin becomes a little bit bleaker.

The reverse-epicletic experience is also evident in the complexities of Carver’s later story, “Feathers.” Jack and his wife Fran, a couple childless by choice, reluctantly visit a co-worker’s family and are inspired by the surprising beatific vision of a threatening peacock, Joey, a mother, Olla (who has had a physical transformation in the form of much-improved dental work, funded by her husband, and remembered in a cast of her once-hideous teeth), and a noticeably homely baby. The peacock-mother-child trinity inspires the visiting couple to go home and have fruitful sex, but the outcome is not what they expected. They are unhappy parents, burdened and bitter:

“Goddamn those people and their ugly baby,” Fran will say for no apparent reason, while we’re watching TV late at night. “And that smelly bird,” she’ll say. “Christ, who needs it?” Fran will say. She says this kind of stuff a lot, even though she hasn’t seen Bud and Olla since that one time. (355)

The invocation of God and Christ in her curse is no accident. Jack and Fran succumbed to one transformation (ugliness into beauty), only to find that beauty (their own relationship and offspring) has shifted back to ugliness. They, too, are creatures driven and deluded by vanity. They believed they could have what Bud and Olla and the peacock and the baby share, but they did not truly have what it takes to make a family. Symbolically, they have a feather, not the whole bird.

Jack and Fran seem to believe they are victims of some sort of emotional bait-and-switch. They could even be considered victims of the epicletic, or what Kerry McSweeney calls “moments of expanded consciousness.” McSweeney notes that for Carver’s characters, “the problem with such moments of expanded consciousness is that they are exceptional and that their intensity is the antithesis of the duration that precedes and follows them” (111). The contrast between the beauty or the simply fantastic nature of the epicletic makes the mundane harder to accept. McSweeney rightly notes that in “Feathers,” Carver lets us know that this “expanded consciousness” led to a poor decision for Jack and Fran, but there are characters—granted, not the body of Carver’s population—who are not fooled, but enlightened, by the epicletic moment. Perhaps one rule of avoiding victimization by the epicleti is to avoid the fantasy of controlling it. Characters, by both Joyce and Carver, who submit to the epicletic rather than attempt to control it, fare better.

Gabriel Conroy in Joyce’s “The Dead,” a character more worldly and mature than the boy of “Araby,” is as apt to romanticize the mundane, particularly in moments of lust, yet Gabriel is more aware of his adult imaginative power than the earlier adolescent narrator in “Araby.” But by recognizing his transformative abilities, as when he spies his wife, Gretta, after a holiday party, Gabriel undermines his power by corrupting it with worldly labels:

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter. (211)

Unlike the boy in “Araby,” who was at the mercy of epiclesis, Gabriel tries to control it, with limited results. It is only when his subconscious is activated that he can truly turn the commonplace into the remarkable. Walking behind his wife after the party,

moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. A heliotrope envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hand. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness. They were standing on the crowded platform and he was placing a ticket inside the warm palm of her glove. He was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace. It was very cold. Her face, fragrant in the cold air, was quite close to his... (214)

This flood of remembrances imbues minor objects, animals, and places (the envelope, the breakfast-cup, the birds, the curtain, the crowded platform, the ticket, her glove, the grated window, the man, the bottles, the cold air, her face, her fragrance) with power beyond their day-to-day existence. If love can alter the “everyday bread” into the brilliant, then love coupled with memory has even more potential to create epicleti. Gabriel, fortunately, seems at the mercy of his memories here, his critical sense temporarily stripped of the capacity to trivialize or complicate the transformation with comparisons to popular art or intellectual movements. Where he deflates the image of Gretta listening on the stairs by seeing it as a painting, the memories are ripe with sensory detail he seems at a loss to control. Like the priest invoking the holy spirit to transform mere bread and wine—or the baker in Carver’s “A Small, Good Thing”—Gabriel may be able to recognize the epicletic moment, but once begun, he can’t really control it; he is at the mercy of a much larger power.

The well-known conclusion of “The Dead” can also be read with an eye to the epicletic. “Snow,” though relatively rare in some areas of Ireland, is hardly a weather

phenomenon unknown to Dubliners. Yet the snow that falls “general all over Ireland” (225) that night is more than frozen rain. It becomes, simultaneously, both a shroud and a wedding gown, a cover to muffle the pain of the past and a clean slate for the future. The “everyday bread of life” here, dreary weather and newspapers, becomes transformed into a profound voice, a Cassandra whom Gabriel believes. This epicletic moment embraces both the “living and the dead,” as the epiclesis of the mass likewise combines the dead and the living.

Beyond *Dubliners*, Joyce found epicletic moments to herald in his account of Stephen Dedalus’s life as well, from early childhood to young adulthood. Reading itself becomes an epicletic moment; transforming ink on a page into more than mere symbols is a pretty handy trick, as young Stephen realizes that even “sentences to learn the spelling from” (6) can become poetry. Seamus Deane notes, in his edition of *Portrait*, that Stephen, as a teen, is encouraged by the priests to practice the “composition of place” (137), St. Ignatius of Loyola’s belief that “meditating upon a physical object [can be] an aid to contemplating spiritual truth” (300). What is epiclesis but a vision of the physical used as a gateway to the spiritual? As did the boy from “Araby” and Gabriel Conroy, Stephen experiences visions of the physical (particularly in the form of women) as epicletic moments. In a foreshadowing of the most explicit epicletic moment in *Portrait*, what Hugh Kenner refers to as “the bird-girl” episode, the mundane is transformed into the exquisite as Stephen passes “frowsy girls” sitting “along the curbstones before their baskets”:

Their dank hair hung trailed over their brows. They were not beautiful to see as they crouched in the mire. But their souls were seen by God; and if their souls were in a state of grace they were radiant to see: and God loved them, seeing them. (152)

Unlike humankind, God can experience the epicletic at any moment, perceiving the beautiful wherever He wishes, even in people and places particularly forlorn. Humans merely capture choice, ephemeral moments.

Later, after Stephen has eschewed plans to become a priest, a representative of God on earth, he experiences the epicletic and realizes that artists can also become as God, illuminating and transforming the mundane:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slate-blue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (186)

The "magic" of transformation abounds in this passage; seaweed is emerald, flesh is ivory, threads are feathers, and she is simultaneously girlish and birdish. Her face is not the only aspect of her presence graced with "wonder."

When the girl notices Stephen's attention, she allows him, "without shame or wantonness" (186), to continue watching her. When she circles her foot in the sea, she does not break the spell, rather she announces her transformation, as if she understands her role in the epicletic moment, as chimes do in a Catholic mass: "The first faint noise of gently moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither, hither and thither, and a faint flame trembled on her cheek" (186). This spark,

reminiscent of the Holy Ghost that visited the first cowering apostles, glows upon her flesh and Stephen cries “Heavenly God!” in an “outburst of profane joy” (186). Stephen experiences the epicletic moment, but unlike Gabriel Conroy, he does not try to control it, instead he recognizes the epicletic moment as a kind of ecstasy, a call to “recreate life out of life!” (186). Stephen interprets the epicletic moment as artistic inspiration. He recognizes this power as a “wild angel,” but one that can help him. Though no longer a believer of Catholic dogma, Stephen does not abandon the otherworldly; he perceives that his call to a “vocation,” artist rather than priest, has a similar goal—to become the impetus of transformation, the agent behind the epicletic.

In a 1981 article about craft, Raymond Carver made explicit his belief that writers can make everyday items remarkable: “It’s possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring—with immense, even startling power” (Storyteller 4). Like Joyce, Carver did not stop at objects; visions of people and even the connections that humans make with one another can take on the aura of the epicletic.

Aside from the explicit prayer in “The Student’s Wife” (a story that ends with the title character down on her knees pleading with God to help the unhappy couple), the works in Carver’s first collection are not concerned with the large issues—theology, politics, the artist’s role in society—that haunt Joyce’s characters. Carver composed fiction centered on not only commonplace things, but people with commonplace jobs and concerns. Waitresses, salesmen, clerks, and housewives populate his West Coast landscape. What these characters do share with Joyce’s Dubliners are lives limited by paralysis, filled with futility. Yet in these ranch homes and trailers creep spectacular moments. Perhaps the most compelling is the conclusion to “Nobody Said Anything.”

“Nobody Said Anything” traces one day in the life of a junior high school boy as he plays hooky and goes off to fish a neighborhood creek. His parents are going through an angry time in their marriage—fights so frequent and vicious that divorce seems inevitable—and the boy is left alone to cope with this anguish and with the challenges of adolescence sexuality. Carver may have written this story with the closing sequence of Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* in mind. While the ritualized food preparation and task management in both halves of “Big Two-Hearted River” is shown to reveal Nick Adams’ postwar healing-through-nature, Carver seems to echo Hemingway in the way he shows the hollowness of the boy making lunch and fishing in his polluted hometown river. The boy does not find solace in isolated activities the way Nick does; the boy wants human connection and the fishing trip is merely a replacement for his absent father.

The epicletic moment in “Nobody Said Anything” does not arrive as the boy gazes at a girl, although Carver goes out of his way to show the boy’s awkward and obsessive interest in sex. When a strange woman offers him a ride to the creek, the reader is not given a vision of beauty reminiscent of the boy’s imagined love in “Araby.” Instead, Carver’s boy imagines an outlandish rendezvous with the driver, but cannot bring himself to act. After she drops him off, the boy curses himself. “What was wrong with me?” he thinks.

What I should have done to start things off was ask if we could have lunch together. No one was home at my house. Suddenly we are in my bedroom under the covers. She asks me if she can keep her sweater on and I say it’s okay with me. She keeps her pants on, too. That’s all right, I say. I don’t mind.  
(49)

While humorous, this passage highlights the boy’s futile lust and naiveté. He is clueless about women and simultaneously romanticizes their encounter, makes it tawdry, and keeps it innocent. This is not epicletic. But it does have the immediacy and spontaneity of Gabriel



Conroy's memories and the choice of "suddenly" reveals that the boy can lose control of his imagination. This is not a moment when the commonplace becomes radiant; this is the uncommon, the fantastic, made comic.

While at the creek, the protagonist makes an ill-considered alliance with another wayward boy and together they catch a gargantuan, repugnant fish. Both boys want to show it to their respective fathers and they split their catch in half. The story finishes in early evening, as the narrator listens from the back porch as his parents fight in the kitchen. Believing that they will be impressed by his fishing prowess and the monstrosity of his catch, he bursts into the kitchen to show them. The parents, at war with each other seconds before, bond in their disgust and send the boy outside to dispose of his fish. He leaves and Carver paints a picture of the castaway back on the porch:

I went back outside. I looked into the creel. What was there looked  
silver under the porch light. What was there filled the creel.

I lifted him out. I held him. I held that half of him. (61)

This is sudden—shifting as quickly as his imagined lunch date. Daniel Born calls this a "liturgical" moment (Bourne). As in the liturgy, some magical transformation has occurred: the fish becomes more than a fish. But who is changed? Does the hideous half-fish transform or is it the boy's perceptions that change? What was revolting is now "silver." Where he had nothing, the boy's creel is now "filled." When he raises the fish and holds it, what exactly does he have half of? Half his father's respect? Half a family? Half a life? Or is it just half a fish? Is the girl that Stephen spies on the seaside just a girl? Both Joyce and Carver use the epicletic to give the reader interpretive options.

The last story in the collection, "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" follows Ralph Wyman, a protagonist who is truly a "Why-man," as he torments himself with doubts about his wife's fidelity and the paternity of their youngest child. Since his college days, Ralph has

sensed that he was headed for an epiphany, for he “felt himself on the brink of some kind of huge discovery about himself” (227). But the more he seeks revelation, the greater it resists arriving. Early in the story, Carver uses an epictetic moment—with echoes of Mangan’s sister and Gretta on the staircase—to reveal Ralph’s transference of his own self-doubt into insecurity about his marriage. On their honeymoon in Guadalajara, Ralph recognizes and resists a transcendent moment. Rather than revel in it, he responds to it with fear:

One vision he would always remember...it was late afternoon, almost evening, and Marian was leaning motionless on her arms over the ironwork balustrade of their rented casita as Ralph came up the dusty road below. Her hair was long and hung down in front over her shoulders, and she was looking away from him, staring at something in the distance. She wore a white blouse with a bright red scarf at her throat, and he could see her breasts pushing against the white cloth. He had a bottle of dark, unlabeled wine under his arm, and the whole incident put Ralph in mind of something from a film, an intensely dramatic moment into which Marian could be fitted but he could not. (229)

As in Joyce, feminine beauty is juxtaposed with the hardness of an iron rail, highlighted by color, and coupled with both physical and emotional “distance.” Yet Ralph, lacking either Walter Scott’s chivalry or Catholicism’s mysticism, does not equate the vision of Marian with a celestial authority. He imagines no power but Hollywood could produce such an image. This is reminiscent of Gabriel’s titling Gretta on the staircase as *Distant Music*. But Ralph does not even go that far; all he can really do is recognize Marian’s brilliance and his own smallness. No praise to “Heavenly God!” or sudden quest in her honor, Ralph simply fears he is not capable of the same sort of transcendence and therefore mistrusts Marian because of her potential to transform.

The couple's later, fierce argument about Marian's faithfulness contains two references to the epicletic moment in Mexico. As the couple fights in the kitchen, the narrator (often Ralph's indirect discourse), describes Marian's response to Ralph's increasing anger:

She turned off the gas under the water and put her hand out on the stool; then she sat down again, hooking her heels over the bottom step. She sat forward, resting her arms across her knees, her breasts pushing against her blouse. She picked at something on her skirt and then looked up. (234)

Again there are the rail (here the bottom step of the stool), feminine sexuality (her heels, her breasts), and emotional distance. Yet this is not epicletic; there is no transformation from the mundane to the radiant. This is the taunting shadow of the epicletic and it seems only enough to prick Ralph's recognition and increase his fury. Ralph cannot praise God for the transcendent; all he can do is curse it. Unable to appropriately name or pin down his anxiety, he accuses Marian of impulsiveness: "'Christ!'" The word leaped out of him. 'But you've always been that way, Marian!' And he knew at once that he had uttered a new and profound truth" (235).

While Ralph may believe he's onto some "huge discovery," the reader becomes increasingly aware that Ralph is forcing this argument, prodding Marian to admit to things that need not be discussed or would more wisely be considered ancient history. Moments after Ralph has "uttered a new and profound truth," his memory flicks back to Mexico once more: "He looked down at his hands and noticed they had the same lifeless feeling they had had when he had seen her on the balcony" (235). By seeing Marian as more than the average, Ralph senses he is less. Experiencing the epicletic makes Ralph dissatisfied; too much life in others sucks the life out of him.

Impulsively, Ralph strikes Marian, then flees his home. Over the course of the night he gets drunk, is mugged, and returns home the next morning battered and exhausted. He hides

in the bathroom as his small children pound on the door. Marian shoos them away and pleads with him to come out. Ralph checks himself in the mirror, looking for changes. Other than bruises, no transformation has occurred. He is still just Ralph. He slips into the bedroom and into his bed, his back to the door. Marian follows him. Saying only his name, she lies down beside him.

He tensed at her fingers, and then he let go a little. It was easier to let go a little. Her hand moved over his hip and over his stomach and she was pressing her body over his now and moving over him and back and forth over him. He held himself, he later considered, as long as he could. And then he turned to her. He turned and turned in what might have been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marveling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him.  
(251)

This is where Carver leaves us, mid-epicleti. The mundane—a husband and wife in bed after a fight—has become the catalyst for something to marvel at. To Ralph, his acquiescence to Marian brings him the change he has desired for years. Dreamlike, perhaps a “stupendous sleep,” certainly a stupendous step, Ralph comes to some epiphany but we are never told what. Unlike the boy in “Araby,” Ralph does not name the “impossible changes,” but because the story ends with Ralph and Marian embracing, it seems he has been brought into her world and will no longer mistrust her ability to transcend. This is more than using “commonplace” language to give “immense, even startling power” to everyday objects, but less than epiphany. Carver transforms the “bread of everyday life” into something “radiant,” but is not so God-like as to tell us explicitly what that radiance means. L.J. Morrissey believes that Joyce’s epicleti were “moral calls to action” (34). Yet transcendence and transformation are not calls to action. The purest epicleti is an unconscious experience and the call to act is really in how one responds to experiencing the “transubstantiation.” The experience of the

epicletic mocks the boy in “Araby” and leads him to self-castigation, as it does Jack and Fran in “Feathers.” It spurs Stephen Dedalus to create art. It gives solace to the boy in “Nobody Said Anything.” It gives Ralph a way back into his marriage. As with the grief-stricken parents in “A Small, Good Thing,” Ralph’s life will be richer by learning to trust the epicletic moment and embrace its fantastic nature.

Craft analysis of, and narrative salutes to, Joyce have so often focused on his fiction’s revelatory elements that contemporary writers have grown weary of the flood of epiphany-based stories published frequently in literary magazines. Essays such as Charles Baxter’s “Against Epiphanies” and David Jauss’s “Some Epiphanies about Epiphanies,” often lay the blame for the deluge on Joyce. Yet the other, lesser known “e” term that Joyce may have considered, the concept of epicleti, is one that should not be overlooked, either by critics or writers. It may complicate our use of the epiphany in “stupendous” ways. Though Joyce’s reference to epicleti may turn out to be a case of bad handwriting, we as critics and artists can transform that illegibility, that simple error, into an aesthetic tool. It seems a particularly fitting lens through which to examine Carver since the interpretive tool itself is the result of endowing the commonplace—poor penmanship—into something with “immense, even startling power.”

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***“Will We Still Be Us?”: Raymond Carver’s Short Plays***

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Though general readers know Raymond Carver for his short fiction and poetry, as well as a handful of essays, he also wrote for the theater and the screen. These works have been published in limited and hard-to-find, out-of-print editions, not easily accessible; one must search through the on-line booksellers or eBay to find copies, or visit special collections libraries. This essay examines the three existing Carver one-act plays, comprised of an early work, *Carnations*, written prior to its first produced in 1962, and two co-written with Tess Gallagher in 1982, *The Favor* and *May I Help You?* While these works may not be the best representations of Carver’s work, for Carver scholars it is necessary to examine these works inclusive of his oeuvre. In these plays, the evolution of Carver’s creative efforts adds a necessary dimension to his short fiction and poetry, from the period before his work started to appear in literary journals to the time of occasional collaboration with his second wife after his career as a major American writer had been established. The plays which this essay examines have deficiencies as works of theatrical narrative, weaknesses manifest in *Carnations*—an early work of a young writer learning his craft, influenced by absurdist playwrights such as Beckett and Ionesco, yet lacking the political nature of absurdity—but also in the two later one-act plays, which can be seen as incomplete scenes rather than full dramas, thus falling short of being as complete collaborative works.

While attending Humboldt State University in 1962, Carver wrote *Carnations* for a drama studies class as a nine-page play in three short scenes. It received one performance on campus<sup>1</sup> and the script was tucked away in Carver’s files until William Stull arranged for a

limited edition publication in 1992.<sup>2</sup> The play is not easy to find with the small print run and collector's item status; existing copies have an expensive price tag.<sup>3</sup> *Carnations* concerns the existential predicament of 28-year-old George Redfeather. It is an impressionistic, overtly-symbolic work of stagecraft influenced by the playwrights Carver was studying in the class. George, in Scene One, is in a park, standing next to a bench, holding a bouquet of carnations. He places the flowers on the ground and sits on the bench, forlorn. He is joined by 25-year-old Lucy Lascombe; he seems delighted to be in her company, saying, "It's not often you meet somebody you can talk to" (3). Their conversation is oblique:

LUCY

Everything is unsure.

GEORGE

It's not that life is meaningless...

LUCY

It's just unsure...anymore. (2)

Things become dream-like. She slaps him across the face for no reason. This baffles George, and then he is on his knees proposing to her; they seem to be getting married; an "extra large" (5) man, Freddy, enters. He asks Lucy if George is bothering her and Lucy cries: "*HE FELT MY BREAST!*" (6). Freddy attacks George, George succumbs to the physical abuse, and Freddy leaves with Lucy. Stagehands and a "dwarf" drag the unconscious George to a room with a bed.

Scene Two opens with George alone in the room. He hallucinates that there are people having a party around him. Lucy joins him in bed, the dwarf dances around and cackles, never saying a word. George is then left alone, delivers a monologue, first uttering: "I don't know how long it's been since I've seen my wife" (9). He reads from *Crime and Punishment*, reacting to Rashkolnikov's murder of Alyona Ivanova: "Horrible! He should have hit her



only once, when she wasn't looking" (11). He then considers killing an old woman who is making noise upstairs from him. Two policemen show up to arrest him.

In Scene Three, George faces three judges in black suits; one wears a carnation on his lapel. The dwarf, "staring off into space," laughs just once and (19) George states again: "I don't know how long it's been since I've seen my wife" (20). The judges all declare that he is guilty and George once again lapses into a monologue, talking about "the crime" (21) of parents outliving their children and offering his take on Herodotus' tale of Persian king Xerxes, who

received a request from one of his friends, asking that the man's favorite son be released from the invasion and allowed to return home. The king, Xerxes, answered the father by ordering the son to be cut into two pieces, and he had these pieces placed on each side of the road for the army to march past on its way to Greece. (21)

A "vacuum TV set opens up loudly overhead" (22) and the stage directions call for the sound of 100 pigs. Carnations rain over George, who is "mute, without expression" (23). He picks one of the flowers up and smells it. The play ends.

Carver's former teacher at Humboldt, Richard Cortez Day, wrote the introduction to *Carnations*, and noted Carver scholar William Stull wrote the afterword; both offer their interpretations of the text, keeping in mind that it is "an apprentice work" (Stull 25) and originally written as "no more than a class assignment" (Day ii). Carver did not show any grand inclinations of becoming a playwright then, nor when he co-wrote two more short plays with Tess Gallagher.

At the time, Carver was taking Day's class, "What is Existentialism?" and reading Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Albee's *The Zoo Story*, and Kafka's *The Trial*, all of which have an apparent influence on "Carnations" as seen respectively in the park bench (Albee),

George's "waiting" for someone to come into his life (Beckett), the arrest without any crime and the quick condemnation by the court (Kafka). Day contends George is typical of many Carver male characters—a victim of outside circumstances, trapped in a bad marriage and feeling the pressure of society around him, living a double life (inner and outer) and playing the role expected of him (husband, provider) while having an inner desire to be an artist (the carnations, his hallucinations).

"Loneliness drove his characters into failures of intimacy," Day contends about Carver's overall work (*Carnations* ii), claiming this is also obvious in the play as much as in Carver's later fiction. Without a doubt, George is a lonely man and the entire play is about his loneliness—it opens and ends with him being alone, betrayed by the woman he loves, condemned by society for not being man enough to keep his wife happy—or stop her affair—and for prioritizing his desire to become an artist rather than his duty as husband and breadwinner. Carver has depicted aspects of the above male character in a number of short stories. "What Is It?" "A Serious Talk," and "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit," (originally "Where Is Everyone?"), are stories about men who are powerless when confronted with a wife's lovers. In "Blackbird Pie," the narrator's wife of twenty-seven years writes a letter of her grievances before she decides to walk out of the marriage one night.

Both Day and Stull agree that Lucy is George's wife—we see a brief marriage scene in which she slaps him: the slap is both a turn of character, something he did not see coming, and a symbolic "slap in the face" for not being the ideal husband, before claiming he committed the 'crime' of grabbing her breast. Stull compares George to the man in Carver's two-page story "The Father," which Carver wrote and published around the same time as *Carnations*, and who, at the end, is left "mute, without expression" (23) just as in "The Father" the character is left "white without expression" (42).

Lucy is relegated to “the bad person” role—the one who has made the protagonist’s life miserable, who has cheated on the husband and left the hero to face his demons alone, much like Toni in “Are These Actual Miles?” who goes off to have dinner and drinks with a used car salesman in an attempt to get a better deal on the family car before the bankruptcy court takes the vehicle away. Left in the house alone, the husband is tormented as he imagines the stratagems of seduction his wife may be using to achieve her (their) goal. We never quite know why, in any realistic sense, Lucy slaps George in the face or lies about a ‘crime.’ George does not recognize in Lucy the woman he courted and married. In Carver stories where the woman has an affair or leaves her husband, it often seems to be over a betrayal or trespass caused by the Carver male. Thus, in “A Serious Talk,” although the wife has a boyfriend on the side, she feels it is justified by her husband’s alcohol abuse and the hardship he has put the family through. In “Are These Actual Miles?” Tina similarly feels justified going out on a date with the salesman because her husband has failed her and allowed them to fall into financial ruin. Her ‘slap in the face’ is the very torment she willingly causes her husband as she keeps calling him to let him know she’s out to dinner with another man and getting drunk. Perhaps George did something that makes Lucy feel justified going to Freddy and having Freddy physically assault George. Whatever the reason, this act is the cause for George’s downfall and later condemnation for his own incapacity to keep his wife from going astray.

As an apprentice work, *Carnations* contains *in germen* several themes and characters that will be developed in later works. Its weakness lies in its attempt to incorporate absurdism into what is best suited to a realistic situation from a writer whose strengths were in realistic narrative. The playwrights Carver was studying—Beckett, Kafka, Ionesco and Albee—used absurdist theater to make political statements of the era and culture in which each writer lived. While it has been argued by some that much of Carver’s work is political in nature as it

comments on American culture and the political atmosphere in the 1970s and 1980s through the plight of the blue collar worker, poverty in a rich nation, alcoholism as a way to escape the broken American Dream, such elements are lacking in “Carnations,” a play that concerns the personal more than the social, political, or cultural.

In her essay “Two by Two,” which accompanies the two short plays in *Tell It All*, a collection of previously unpublished work by and about Raymond Carver, Tess Gallagher explains that she and Carver wrote the short plays *The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?* because neither wanted to “pass up a challenge” (69). They had heard about the Ten Minute Play Contest sponsored by The Actor’s Theater of Louisville; mutual friends had entered the contest and, Gallagher states, “we resolved to go cheek by jowl with our pals to see if we could write two or three one-act plays that might be chosen and produced” (69). They wrote in the car, “Ray’s old practice of his ‘Bad Raymond’ days” (69). While Carver drove, Gallagher transcribed both their oral compositions: “The initial draft was as much ‘said’ as ‘written.’ Collaboration is a fluid process and it is now impossible to say which lines are Ray’s and which are mine” (71). The plays were never submitted to the contest. Forgotten, they were “discovered” by William Stull, once again, found the handwritten drafts in the Carver-Gallagher papers archived in the William Charvatt Collection of American Fiction at Ohio State University.

*The Favor* depicts a couple, Jim and Beth, harassed over the telephone by a friend who has lost something. The friend holds them responsible and blames them for this loss. They look everywhere for this object—if it is indeed a tangible physical thing—but they cannot find it. “I even looked in the toilet,” Beth complains (27). As the couple frantically search they also analyze their relationship, how they appear to others, especially this particular, nameless friend. They do not seem to be in their own

home, nor is it ever stated who the friend is and what was lost. We are told, however, that at a party or gathering once Jim witnessed Beth kiss the friend:

BETH: I never expected that to happen.

JIM: Don't give me that! You asked for it. You cozied up to him all night.

BETH: I didn't want to disappoint you.

JIM: Well you didn't. You didn't disappoint me. It looked like a good kiss, too, a real smackeroo, from where I was standing.

BETH: Maybe not as good as you'd like to think it was. (31)

The word "disappoint" vaguely suggests that Jim had a game plan, an ulterior motive for having his wife "cozy" up. Perhaps they were going to ask the man a favor, or they owed him something, as at the end of the play Jim mentions the man "coming to collect his favor" (43). While evoking a similar situation in "Are These Actual Miles?" the couple in *The Favor* show a further concern with how the man views them, and every time the phone rings, they feel they will be judged by him (similar to George's position in *Carnations* while in court).

As the phone rings, stops, and rings again, it almost becomes a third character on stage that puts the couple on edge: "they look at each other accusingly" (31) with each new call. Although the other man never appears on stage, he is there with them via the phone. They consider taking the phone off the hook, but if the other man gets a busy signal "it'll make him uneasy" (31). Finally, Beth answers the phone and has a nervous conversation, telling the person on the other end they cannot find whatever was lost. The man on the phone wants to know if Jim is sorry. Jim shakes his head "no" and Beth lies: "He says he's very sorry. I think he's been crying. Yes, I can see he's been crying. There are tears on his face. He's standing right here, heartbroken" (61). Jim, however, does not hide his anger: "Why in the hell don't

you get off our backs?” (61) Beth’s last words, as they walk off stage, are: “He said there wouldn’t be any surprises. No more surprises” (61).

While *Carnations* is symbolic, *The Favor* is realistic, yet baffling, as a Harold Pinter play<sup>4</sup> or the shorter stage works of David Mamet. Consider the setting: Jim and Beth are in a house, not their house; it seems to be the home of the other man. Jim opens a closet and finds a tweed jacket that is not his jacket:

Jim puts his hands in the pocket of the jacket. He straightens his shoulders and then begins to bring some items out of the pockets: a ballpoint pen, some small change, matchbooks, a tube of lipstick. He puts everything onto the chest of drawers. Beth picks up the lipstick and sniffs it. (29)

Beth claims the lipstick is “not my shade” (29) and a few minutes later, she has Jim strike a pose to emulate the other man’s mannerisms: facial expressions and the tapping of the foot. She also finds a hat with a feather and has Jim wear it. This is reminiscent of Bill and Arlene Miller in “Neighbors”<sup>5</sup>—the couple that feel “passed by somehow” while others in their circle, such as their next door neighbors, “lived a fuller and brighter life” (9). When their neighbors go on vacation and Bill and Arlene look after the home, they are obsessively fascinated with what their neighbors have that they do not, slowly taking on their neighbors’ personas. Like Jim with the jacket, Bill Miller tries on both male and female clothes and under garments while looking through drawers; he is attempting to become the Other just as Jim attempts to imitate his Other. Arthur M. Saltzman, in *Understanding Raymond Carver* (1988), posits that the Millers are “galvanized by their sovereignty [...] they indulge themselves by forgetting themselves” (26). Jim and Beth would also like to forget themselves if they can get the other man out of their lives and stop his critical gaze. At the end of the play, when Jim exits, he still wears the other man’s jacket, perhaps in an attempt to be like

him. This could be why Jim loathes the other man so much: he wishes to be this Other. At the end of the play, the telephone rings only once in the dark, as if the person on the other side knows Jim and Beth have departed.

The ringing phone, in fact, is a familiar motif in a number of Carver stories. In “Are You a Doctor?” a wrong phone call leads a man, Arnold, on an adventure outside his home and possibly into a potential affair. In “Whoever Was Using This Bed,” the telephone similarly disrupts the domestic tranquillity of a husband and wife. This is also a wrong, misdialed number. No matter how much the narrator tells the caller she has the wrong number, she keeps calling. The ringing phone is just as menacing and interfering in “Gazebo,” and in this case, it is the owners of the motel calling to see why Duane and Holly have abandoned their post as managers of the establishment. They do not answer the phone because they know by answering they will have to face their failures, their alcoholism, and the fact they no longer have a job and a place to live. In “A Serious Talk,” the phone rings and Burt knows his wife’s lover is on the other line; he disconnects the phone so the two will be unable to communicate. In “The Bath” and its later longer version, “A Small, Good Thing,” a vindictive baker uses the phone to harass the couple who did not pick up and pay for their child’s birthday cake; the phone calls become so terrorizing that the couple confront the baker and demand an answer for his behavior. In “Elephant,” the narrator comes to dread answering the phone because he knows either his brother, ex-wife, mother or his children are on the other line, hitting him up for money. Avital Ronell suggests in her critical study, *The Telephone Book*, that if Heidegger had not answered the telephone when the Nazi Party called, seeking his alliance for their cause, history would have never associated Heidegger with the Nazis, and critics would have never condemned his philosophical views to be aligned with the Nazi war crimes. The implication from Ronell is that if we “answer the call,” we subject our lives to change that may not be positive, depending on whom the caller is and

what they want. This is true for Arnold in “Are You a Doctor?” By answering the phone, he is set on a journey that leaves him disillusioned and wishing he had never left the comfort of home. In “Gazebo,” if Duane and Holly answer the phone, they will have to face the failure of their job and marriage. In “A Serious Talk,” Bert cannot allow his wife to answer the phone because any communication with her lover may result in permanently losing her, and in “Elephant,” if the narrator answers his phone, he will have to give the demanding people his life money. Likewise, Jim and Beth are afraid to answer the phone because they do not wish to disappoint the caller with bad news; so when Beth finally answers, she lies.

Beth is self-conscious of the image they project: “We’re not perfect. He ought to know that by this time” (39). They feel this friend is “around our necks” and “looking over our shoulder” (39), a persistent critical eye, the eye of the other, perpetually watching and judging their evolution in time, as Beth wonders:

Will we still be us? You know what I mean. [...] We’d feel different about everything, that’s for sure. And we’d act different, too. I think we would, anyway. He might even meet us on the street and wonder who we were.

“Who’s that nice couple?” he might ask himself. (39)

Gallagher claims that “The Favor” is “certainly Carveresque” and “as in the darkly humorous stories ‘Why Honey?’ and ‘Harry’s Death’ [...] the play raises more questions than it cares to answer” (“Two by Two” 71). For her, it “may not really matter” (71) what the lost object is, what the favor entails, or what happened between Beth and the other man: “The focus of the play is on the dangers of performing and receiving favors, which confer both benefits and responsibilities—as well as a high quotient of the unknown” (71). Favors implicate power over someone, or powerlessness in owing something to another person. It appears that the man, and the ringing phone, indeed hold power over Jim and Beth. But what does it mean when Jim leaves the house still wearing the other man’s jacket? Who has the power in the



end—Jim, now owning the other man’s clothes, or the other man, whom Jim still tries to emulate?

While couched in realism, “The Favor” does have an element of absurdity similar to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1954). Estragon and Vladimir await the arrival of the mysterious Godot, worrying over and debating Godot’s critical opinion of them. Beth and Jim are waiting for the friend’s phone call, or even his appearance, worrying as they debate over this man’s critical or moral opinion of them. It seems that what Carver learned in Day’s theater class lingered in his creative conscience for years after.

Clothes are at the center of “May I Help You?” set in a women’s clothing store as two friends trying on outfits reach an epiphanic moment over age and weight gain. Gallagher writes that the play “grew out of something that actually happened to me, namely, a run-in with an intrusive sales clerk” and “includes some dialogue Ray and I overheard at a truck stop diner” (71).<sup>6</sup> The play is about “the sudden onset of aging, the way you’re shocked to see how much your body has changed without your realizing it” (71-72).

Janice and Barbara, 30 and 25 respectively, are talking about what kind of food they want for lunch when the play opens. The saleswoman is in her sixties and condescending to Janice and Barbara. They tell the saleswoman they do not need help, they’re just looking. Barbara whispers: “She’ll be right down on us if we act the least bit interested in anything” (71). The clothes Barbara tries on do not fit, and food references dominate in the color of blouses: “melon” and “apricot” (49). Janice keeps mentioning that she is hungry. Barbara cannot look at herself in the mirror. “I don’t need a mirror to tell me” (51), she says about the blouses that are too tight on her frame. When the saleswoman tries to peek in, Barbara yells: “Please! I don’t like to be spied on. I have burns over ninety percent of my body” (51). This is

not true, of course; she does not want to be bothered by the intrusive saleswoman and feels ashamed if the saleswoman observes that she cannot fit into the blouses.

In the stall next to Barbara, a woman also tries on clothes. This woman, who admires Barbara's shoes and says she could never fit into them, has weight and image problems as well:

It's not my feet I worry about. It's my face. Some days I just want to cut my head off. Right below the chins [...] you can change your hair, your shoes, your clothes, but you can't change your face...Not unless you let them go to work on you. Cut you, I mean. They can lift the bags under your eyes, or take away an extra chin—I've got one to spare—they can do all that [...] I can keep a team going for a month! (55-57)

This sounds like something Carver and Gallagher probably "overheard" at the diner, as the woman continues her lengthy monologue:

Later that morning, we were eating our eggs. Stan looks at me and says, "What did you do to your face?" "DO?" I said. "What's wrong with my face?" I said this, mind you, but I knew what he was talking about. We left it at that. But every once in a while I'd catch him looking at me. I felt sorry for him, I really did, having to look at this face every time he turned around. (57-59)

These words call to mind "They're Not Your Husband" where Earl Ober observes the way other men gaze at his aging, overweight wife, Doreen. It is only when he considers what they see that he realizes what he finds physically unattractive about his wife. A woman's body image is also the core of "Fat," where a waitress tells her friend Rita about a very large, overweight man who comes into the diner one day. That night, as the husband Rudy "gets on [her]," although it is "against [her] will" (8), the wife resists him by imagining she is as fat as

her customer: “But here is the thing. When he gets on me, I suddenly feel I am fat. I feel I am terrifically fat, so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all” (8). In this case, as Randolph Paul Runyon notes, “To be fat... is to be sexually powerful, even virile. For the waitress-narrator, to be as overwhelmingly large as the man in the restaurant is to be able to turn the tables on her usually dominant husband, who as a result has shrunk to practically nothing, ‘hardly there at all’” (12). The waitress wishes she were not petite, Ober desires his wife to lose weight, Barbara is dismayed and shocked that she has gained weight, whereas the woman in the other dressing stall has come to accept her weight, and there is nothing she or her unhappy husband can do to change it.

“Disfigurement. That’s the word” (63) Barbara says about her false skin burn, but also about her weight, speaking for the other woman as well, who has departed. Barbara never sees the woman’s face to determine if it is as grotesque as claimed. Barbara then concocts a bigger lie—to Janice’s amusement—about the house fire, how her body was scarred yet she was blessed because “my face, this face, came away untouched” (65). The fake fire symbolizes her age and weight gain; although she has more flesh on her torso than she did in the past, her face is still the same, and she has that to be grateful for. The play ends with Barbara needing to lie down after telling her faux traumatic story; the saleswoman goes to get her a glass of water and Janice soothes Barbara for her pain, saying, “Close your eyes now. Don’t think about anything” as she “passes her hand over Barbara’s face and closes Barbara’s eyes” (67). Janice, who is 25, knows that her friend has only now come to realize she is 30 and that she is rapidly changing.

At the core of both these short plays, something Tess Gallagher does not address in her assessments, is a concern for the perception of the self that others may have. Beth and Jim worry over how the nameless friend views them and that influences their actions and relationship. Barbara worries about the saleswoman—and society—knowing she can no

longer fit in a certain size blouse, resulting in a critical view of her body. She manifests this complex in a lie about a fire, making her a victim in the eyes of the saleswoman, rather than a woman gaining weight because she eats too much. George in “Carnations” shows some of these elements as well in his concern about how society, and the court, may view his marriage and his failure as a husband.

Carver’s stories have been adapted for the stage<sup>7</sup> over the decades, but Carver never set out to put on the playwright’s hat, nor did he pursue it with any serious intent. These three plays were written as an assignment or as amusement with a collaborator. “I recall our having a lot of laughs over the characters [...] Ray and I had so much fun,” Gallagher writes (73). “Carnations” was an exercise in early writing, experimenting with absurdist symbolism, while in “The Favor” and “Can I Help You?” he explored themes found in the short fiction: the dynamics of marriage, the interactions of close friends, the moments of epiphany when characters realize something has changed inside, and outside, their bodies.

These three plays offer Carver scholars opportunities to examine both Carver’s range and evolution as a writer as well as his collaborative efforts with his spouse, particularly the three unproduced screenplays, including *Dostoevsky*, which Carver and Gallagher coauthored. Each play sheds light on Carver’s career, his life, the influences during the composition (a class, a short play contest), and where these works currently stand in Carver studies. Future critical examinations could explore other avenues, not developed in this essay, such as comparing the plays to short stories not discussed herein; to Carver’s poetry, to works by Beckett, Albee, and Pinter, the listed influences. Essentially, these works should not be ignored by Carver scholars as they offer a wealth of critical discourse.

Notes

1. "Carnations" first performed at Founder's Hall Auditorium at Humboldt State University on 11 May 1962, with another student play by Ken Gatlin, "Buttersworth: A Diversion" and Thornton Wilder's 1931 one-act, *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*.
2. Engdahl Typography. Vineburg, CA: 1992. 200 copies first edition, 124 numbered and bound in full cloth, 26 lettered A to Z and quarter-bound in leather slipcases; the remaining 50 - 45 in full cloth and 5 quarter-bound. Designed by Lee Engdahl. Paper 80 lb Mohwak Superfine eggshell.
3. The copy I read and cite is housed in Indiana University's Lilly Library, indicated as #9 of the 24 numbered copies bound in cloth. It is here that I would like to acknowledge the Helm Fellowship Committee and the Lilly Library for awarding me a grant to research the library's archives for a different project, where I had the opportunity to examine other items in my spare time, such as a copy of this play.
4. Tess Gallagher notes that while she and Carver composed these plays in a moving car, she read aloud from Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (1959), "and this may in part account for the absurdist flavor in our plays" (*Tell It All*, 73).
5. *Will You Please*, 9-16. This story was Carver's first publication in *Esquire*, a major commercial magazine with a far wider audience than the small literary journals such as *December* and *Western Humanities Review* that Carver was publishing in at the time, 1971, when *Esquire* readers found the minimalist style and sexual implications controversial. Gordon Lish was editor.
6. In a number of interviews, Carver states that certain stories often come out of overhead conversations at bars and parties.
7. One company in Sweden named itself The Carver Theatre. The most recent known stage adaptation was in January, 2009, by Laterthanever Productions in San Diego, California, which mounted three stories: "Put Yourself in My Shoes," "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," and "What's in Alaska?" See <http://www.laterthanever.org/whatwetalk.html>.

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***Escupiendo sangre***

*a Raymond Carver*

*Robert Gurney, University of Wales*

Escupí sangre  
en la noche  
y me encontré esperando  
una radiografía  
leyendo el poema de Carver  
sobre el perro de su hija  
que fue atropellado.

Y luego escribió un poema  
contando cómo le escribió ese poema.

Luego leí algo de su padre,  
cómo murió,  
y pensé en mi padre,  
muerto  
y lloré.



***Spitting Blood***

*for Raymond Carver*

*Robert Gurney, University of Wales*

I spat blood  
in the night  
and found myself waiting  
for an X-ray  
reading Carver's poem  
about his daughter's dog  
that got run over  
and how he wrote a poem for her  
and then wrote a poem  
and then how he enjoyed  
writing a poem  
about writing that poem.

Then I read about his dad,  
how he died,  
and I thought about my dad,  
how he died,  
and I wept.

## **Ortensie**

*alla Raymond Carver*

*Alessandro Martini (translated by Vasiliki Fachard)*

Ho sposato a trent'anni una ragazza  
timidina, sembrava, ma tenace.  
Non esperta di niente. Mani capaci.  
Mi ha fatto conoscere Malher.  
Non sentiva i passaggi da maggiore a minore.  
In cucina approntava solo mele in pigiama.  
Buone, per altro, come lei. Sua madre  
non la trovava tanto sveglia.  
Le parve onesto dirmelo.  
Non sapeva le lingue, figurarsi il latino.

Adoperando al meglio le mie mani,  
le più incapaci della famiglia,  
le scoprii, mi scoprii doti nascoste.  
Finii per trapiantarla in una terra  
scabra, fredda. Poco sole, tanta nebbia.  
Una lingua che dicono sorella,  
tra le più ostiche.

Prospera come le ortensie in Bretagna.  
Tre figlie, tre cani, un gatto  
(non amavo i cani, non amava i gatti),  
una casa in fermento, una ambulante.  
Troppi i progetti, troppi i cantieri.  
Bene accetta agli indigeni, come fosse dei loro.  
Se le piacciono, piacciono anche a me,  
si fanno amici. Se no  
me li tiene alla larga.

Fan diciotto anni. Io sono appassito.  
Tentato di dire: fallito.  
Ma chi molto mi ascolta mi ha detto  
quest'estate alle ore piccole  
riportandomi al paese:  
"Hai saputo darle molto".  
Non me ne ero accorto.  
A notte adesso rubo ortensie e gliele porto.  
Certe, seccate, son quasi più belle.

## ***Hydrangeas***

*in the manner of Raymond Carver*

*Alessandro Martini (translated by Vasiliki Fachard)*

At thirty I married a girl  
somewhat shy, but headstrong.  
Not excelling in anything. Capable hands.  
She introduced me to Mahler.  
She had no ear for the passage from major to minor.  
In the kitchen she prepared only baked apples.  
Good ones in fact, like her. Her mother  
didn't think her very bright.  
It seemed to her honest to tell me.  
She knew no languages, much less Latin.

Using, as best I could, my hands,  
the least capable in the family,  
I laid them bare, revealing to myself hidden skills.  
I ended up transplanting her in a country that was  
rough, cold. Little sun, so much fog.  
A language they call sister,  
among the harshest.

Flourishing like hydrangeas in Brittany.  
Three daughters, three dogs, one cat  
(I didn't like dogs, she didn't like cats),  
One house in frenzy, another on the move.  
Too many projects, too much on the go.  
Taken in by the locals, as if she were one of them.  
If she likes them, I like them too,  
They become friends. If not  
She keeps them away from me.

Eighteen years have gone. I have faded.  
I am tempted to say: failed.  
But one who listens to me a lot told me  
this summer in the early hours  
while taking me back to my village:  
"You knew how to give her much."  
I had not been aware of it.  
At night I now steal hydrangeas and bring them to her.  
Some, dried, are almost more beautiful.

## Contributors

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**Riccardo Duranti** teaches English and translation at Rome University. His poetry collections include *Bivio di voce, Mompeo e Dintorni, The Archer's Paradox, and L'Affettuosa Fantasia*. In addition to translating Raymond Carver's writing into Italian, he has also translated works by Richard Brautigan, Sam Shephard, Tennessee Williams, and Seamus Heaney. He was awarded a National Prize for translation by the Ministero dei Beni Culturali.

**Vasiliki Fachard**, who translated Alessandro Martini, is co-editor of *The Raymond Carver Review*. An independent Swiss scholar who studied at the Sorbonne and earned her Ph.D. in French literature from the State University of New York at Albany, Fachard wrote on "Put Yourself in My Shoes" for the special Carver issue of *Journal of the Short Story in English* which she edited.

The author of *El cuarto oscuro y otros poemas* (The Dark Room and Other Poems), **Robert Gurney** is Honorary Lecturer at the University of Wales in Swansea. He was introduced to Carver's work when translating the Argentine poet Andrés Bohoslavky's *El río y otros poemas* (The River and Other Poems). While the Spanish version appeared in the anthology *Nueve monedas para el barquero* (Nine Coins for The Ferryman), this is the first publication of the English version.

**Michael Hemmingson**—poet, novelist, short story writer, playwright, critic—is the author of a criticism monograph, *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver on the Aesthetics of the Ugly* (Borgo Press). He has written critical books and essays on William T. Vollmann, Barry Hannah, and Ernest Hemingway. His study of Gordon Lish's writing and editing is scheduled for publication from Routledge.

Born in Cavigno (Ticino) in 1947, **Alessandro Martini** is professor of modern Italian literature at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). His preferred subjects of study are the poetry of the seventeenth century, notably by Giovan Battista Marino, the tradition of literary studies in Italy since the nineteenth century, the relationship between poetry and music, and the poetry and fiction of his father, Plinio Martini. He has published two poetry books: *Fior', frondi, herbe* (Lugano 1996) and *Restauri* (Fribourg 1999).

**John A. McDermott** is an associate professor of English at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, where he directs the BFA program in creative writing. His criticism has appeared in *American Book Review* and *The Journal of Popular Culture*, and his short stories have appeared in a variety of literary journals, including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *Natural Bridge*.

**David Muldoon**, from the University of Milan, Italy, has presented on “Being Others: Anglo Saxon Tribute Bands and Italian Identity” at the Cultural Borrowings Conference at the University of Nottingham, England. His interview with Riccardo Duranti was conducted in 2008.