THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

Issue 5/6

ISSN 1940-6126

THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

ISSUE FIVE/SIX
SPECIAL FEATURE ON JAMES CARVER
WINTER 2016/SPRING 2017

Issue 5/6, **Special Feature on James Carver,** presents an excerpt from *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother James*. This memoir by Raymond Carver's younger brother and only sibling offers significant details and vignettes of Raymond Carver's childhood and early adult life; the memoir is accompanying by a review essay, "Raymond Carver and Biography," from Sandra Lee Kleppe, Director of the International Raymond Carver Society. Issue 5/6 includes five peer-reviewed essays: Taylor Johnston's "'Inside anything': The Evacuation of Commodified Space in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral'" examines how the decomodified experience of co-drawing a cathedral "relocates the act of reading from the entrapments of the consumer apparatus to symbolic indeterminacy"; Madeleine Stein's "Keeping Our Eyes Closed: Unsustainable Transformation in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" uses lenses of narrative distance and gender relations to analyze the metaphorically blind narrator's transformative interaction; In "'Kill who?': Forgiving the Immigrants in Raymond Carver's 'Sixty Acres,'" Ann Olson reviews the conflict between Yakama tribesman Lee Waite and trespassing white duck-hunters as a re-enactment of historical complexities; Cameron Cushing's "The Negative Pastoral in Raymond Carver's "The Compartment" locates Myers' decision not to meet with his estranged son in Strasbourg in an interstitial space between Terry Gifford's concept of an external "contextual pastoral" and Martin Scofield's concept of an internal "negative pastoral"; and Jonathan Pountney's "Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism" considers how Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a societal dislocation tied to the mass-commodification of the late-twentieth century labor markets in America and Japan.

Table of Contents

Peer Reviewed Essays

Introduction

Welcome to the Winter 2016/Spring 2017 Issue 5/6 of *The Raymond Carver Review: Special Feature on James Carver*. Following several unanticipated delays with this combined issue, we believe that this issue is among the best that *The Raymond Carver Reviews* has offered. Most of all, we hope that you find this combined issue informative, interesting, and valuable in promoting the writing and influence of Raymond Carver (1938-1988).

Since its inception in 2006, *The Raymond Carver Review* was represented through the English Department at Kent State University's main campus in Kent, Ohio, which provided the web design, tech support, and hosted the website. In spring of 2016, Kent State re-configured its multi-campus wide website, addressing the way in which websites had been created over a ten-year period and hosted randomly and without coordination, a problem not singular to Kent State. As a result, *RCR* has migrated its website to the Kent State University Stark, which is editor Robert Miltner's campus; this move was fully supported by my campus Dean. This move was complicated, however, by taking place during a period in which the entire interconnected Kent State website—a central campus with seven regional campuses—was initiating an upgrade. As a result, the re-hosting of the *RCR* had to wait until the redesign was complete.

Special Feature: James Carver

Around the time that the re-hosting was commencing this spring, Sandra Lee Kleppe, director of the International Raymond Carver Society, was contacted by James Carver, Raymond Carver's younger brother and only sibling, regarding his memoir, *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother James.* As a result—thanks to James' generosity, and permission from Austin Macauley Publishers—this issue of the *RCR* is delighted to offer an excerpted chapter, "Eleventh Avenue" set in Yakima, Washington during Raymond Carver's childhood. Kleppe, in her accompanying essay "Raymond Carver and Biography," rightly calls this memoir "both a biographic documentary as well as an imaginative and artistic portrayal of the people, places, and events that were significant in [Raymond] Carver's life." *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother James* is a welcome and valuable addition to any Carver scholars' shelf of essential reference books that includes Tess Gallagher's personal essays, *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray*; Maryann Burk Carver's *What It Used to Be Like: A Portrait of My Marriage to Raymond Carver*; Carol Sklenicka's biography, *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*; Sam Halpert's

Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography; and William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll's *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver*. Including the excerpt from *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother James*, accompanied by Sandra Kleppe's essay, moved the release date back further, but offering a special feature on James Carver is an amazing opportunity for the *RCR* to pursue its mission to present new and important contributions to Carver scholarship.

Current Issue

Issue 5/6 of *The Raymond Carver Review* includes five peer-reviewed essays by new and emerging Carver scholars. The issue opens with two essays on Raymond Carver's popular masterpiece, the short story "Cathedral." Taylor Johnston's essay, "'Inside anything': The Evacuation of Commodified Space in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" traces and examines the ways in which the minimalist tendency to delete consumer artifacts opens up space in which decomodified experience can act as allegory through the presence of blindness so as to "relocate[e] the act of reading from the entrapments of the consumer apparatus to symbolic indeterminacy." Madeleine Stein, in "Keeping Our Eyes Closed: Unsustainable Transformation in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" questions, through lenses of narrative distance and gender relations, whether the metaphorically blind narrator's transformative interaction is sustainable, given the parallel de-evolution of his wife's engaged presence. The third and fourth essays examine two lesser studied Carver stories.
In "'Kill who?': Forgiving the Immigrants in Raymond Carver's 'Sixty Acres,'" Ann Olson reviews the historical complexities of native versus immigrant relations in the 1969 story "Sixty Acres" as they play out in a confrontation, between Yakama tribesman Lee Waite and young white duck-hunters who are poaching on his land, that echoes the choice of peace over violence enacted by his ancestors. Cameron Cushing's essay, "The Negative Pastoral in Raymond Carver's "The Compartment" locates Myers' decision not to meet with his estranged son in Strasbourg in an interstitial space between Terry Gifford's concept of an external "contextual pastoral" and Martin Scofield's concept of an internal "negative pastoral," and in doing so, offers a lens that suggests that Myers' acceptance of finding himself on re-coupled train car is concurrently his acceptance of traveling toward a newly re-contextualized emotional landscape. Rather than examining an individual Carver story, Jonathan Pountney's essay, "Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism," explores the literary influence of Raymond Carver on the Japanese author Haruki Murakami within the socioeconomic context of late-capitalism. It argues that Carver's influence resides most powerfully in his example of how to negotiate the complex and

shifting foundations of late-capitalist culture. This article suggests that Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a societal dislocation, one that is distinctly tied to each author's experience of the mass-commodification of the labor market in America and Japan in the late-twentieth century.

News

The Raymond Carver Review: Redesigning and Updating Website

Beginning with its next issue, *The Raymond Carver Review* will be hosted on a website at St. Jerome's University/Waterloo University in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Chad Wriglesworth, Associate Professor of English, for St. Jerome's University/Waterloo University, has secured a university grant to redesigned the *RCR* as a fully digital, annual journal, housed on the server of St. Jerome's University/Waterloo University's Department of English. *The Raymond Carver Review* would like to thank both Dr.Scott Kline, Vice President Academic and Dean, and Dr. Tristanne Connolly, Associate Professor and Chair of English, for their support. As a result, *The Raymond Carver Review* will transition into an annual digital journal, utilizing an online submission manager, and linking more closely with the International Raymond Carver Society, which is directed by Dr. Sandra Lee Kleppe, Professor of English, at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

Beginning with the next issue (*RCR* 7), the editors will include Robert Miltner, founding editor and representative for Kent State University Stark; Chad Wriglesworth, associate editor and representative for St. Jerome's University/Waterloo University; associate editor Molly Fuller, PhD Teaching Fellow in Literature at Kent State University; associate editor Kristen Lillvis, Associate Professor of English at Marshall University; associate editor Libe García Zarranz, Trudeau Scholar and Supervisor, Magdalen College, Cambridge University, UK. These changes represents a major development for the *RCR* as it moves into its second decade as a scholarly journal.

New Editorial Board Members Named

Concurrent with the re-launch of the *RCR* as a digital annual, the journal will expand from two co-editors to an editorial team. *The Raymond Carver Review* welcomes four new editorial board members, beginning with this issue. By expanding its editorial board, the *RCR* supports emerging academics and Carver scholars.

Josef Benson, Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin Parkside, is no stranger to the RCR: his essay "Masculinity as Homosocial Enactment in Three Stories by Raymond Carver" was included in *RCR* 2*,* the special issue on Carver and Feminism, guest edited by Claire Fabre-Clark and Libe

García Zarranz; and his essay, "Ralph Whiteman as White Construction in 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?'" was included in *RCR* 4.

John Estes is Director of the Undergraduate Writing Program at the University of Alabama, where he teaches poetry and fiction. He is the author several books, including *Kingdom Come* (C&R Press) and *Sure Extinction* (Elixer Press); his chapbook, *Swerve,* was selected by C. K. Williams for the National Chapbook Fellowship from the Poetry Society of America.

Lin Tian is a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages at Xiangtan University, Hunan, China where she is writing a thesis on the influence of Raymond Carver on contemporary Chinese writers. Lin Tian presented "Carver in China" in a panel sponsored by International Raymond Carver Society at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco in May 2016.

Molly Fuller, who served as Assistant Guest Editor on this issue, is a PhD Teaching Fellow in Literature at Kent State University and is working on a dissertation on literature and social justice. She has published on Zora Neal Hurston in *Revista Atenea*; on N. Scott Momaday in essay collection *Ekphrasis in American Poetry*; and her essay, "Intentionality and Narrative Thrust in the *Beginners* Version of "Why Don't You Dance?" was included in *RCR* 4. Fuller is co-editor of *Community Boundaries and Border Crossings: Critical Essays on Ethnic Women Writers* (Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

Dedication

This issue is dedicated to Swiss independent scholar Vasiliki "Vickie" Fachard who has retired to spend more time with her family and grandchildren. I have had the distinct pleasure of working with Vickie as co-editors for issues three and four of *The Raymond Carver Review*; during that same period, we co-edited the collection *Not Far From Here: The Paris Symposium on Raymond Carver* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). Before I had the opportunity to co-edit with Vickie, I knew of her talent as an editor from reading (and re-reading) the special issue on Raymond Carver she guest edited for *Journal of the Short Story in English*. I thought I knew editing until I worked with her on the *Carver Review* and *Not Far From Here*. Vickie Fachard introduced me to approaching all editing with a single standard: produce the best issue or book possible from the submitted and selected material. Her macro sense of the project was always evident even while working at the micro level of the sentence, syntax, punctuation; she taught me that it is in the balance between the macro and micro levels that quality editing is achieved. Vickie Fachard edits prose with a poet's instinct: every word counts, content must dance with form, each project seeks its organic logic. While I worked

with her as a co-editor, I now recognize that I was just as equally an apprentice to a master craftsperson. May all scholars be so fortunate to have such a colleague and friend as I have in Vickie Fachard.

Raymond Carver and Biography

Sandra Lee Kleppe

Now that we have entered the "post-truth" age, we can look back on a long line of biographical sources about Raymond Carver (RC)—memoirs, biographies, interviews, photographic and personal essays—with both suspicion of fabricated images and admiration for meticulous documentation.[i] James Carver's newly published memoir, *Raymond Carver Remembered by his Brother James* (London: Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd., 2017), attempts to sort through some of the myths surrounding his brother's life by calling out falsehoods and praising precise fact checking. However, his book is perhaps most valuable for what it adds to the piece of the puzzle of RC's life. It is especially the childhood years, the ones both close to James' heart and farthest from public knowledge, that are filled in here with details about the caring environment created by the Carver parents. Contrary to the popular consensus that the Carver boys grew up in a dysfunctional family with an alcoholic father, James Carver (JC) explains that his parents seldom drank, and when his father did, it was the occasional binge. However, Clevie Raymond Carver did pass on his low tolerance of drink to his son Raymond Clevie Carver, certainly a contributing factor to the writer's later struggle with the chronic alcoholism that almost killed him in the 1970s. This connection between father and son is explored in an emotional poem RC published in 1968: "Father, I love you," he writes, "yet how can I say thank you, I who can't hold my liquor either" (*All of Us* 7).

For readers interested in the biographical details of RC's life there are several sources with varying degrees of reliability that have accumulated over the years. James Carver's memoir is an important addition to the growing number of accounts about the life and times of one of America's most prominent writers. As the last living member of the Carver nuclear family, James has access to a whole world of information preceding even the concept of "Carver Country," a term that took root following the publication of Bob Adelman's photographic essay *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver* in 1990. This lovely book is both a biographical documentary as well as an imaginative and artistic portrayal of the people, places, and events that were significant in Carver's life. Many of the photographs are of Carver family members and other people RC knew, while others seem included to reinforce a specific milieu long-associated with the writer: that of the struggling lower classes. For example, a photo of the "Employee of the Month at the Red Lion Inn, Yakima" from 1989 is included on the same page as a shot of a cannery worker in Yakima the same year. On the opposite page is a photo of a saw filer at a

company where RC's father actually worked. While it is true that Clevie Raymond Carver worked much of his life as a saw filer, the images here present a story we like to repeat about RC: that he grew up in the underprivileged working class and was expected to continue in his father's footsteps.

We get a more nuanced version of this topic in James' memoir, a book filled with authentic photos from his personal collection. Being a saw filer was an important job with an above-average salary, considered so essential, James explains, that Raymond senior was not drafted during WWII (JC 36). At the same time, the boys' mother Ella did indeed work in a cannery in Yakima, but James clarifies that this was a 10-hour a day volunteer job to help the war effort and keep fruit from spoiling. Thus, James offers us quite a different picture of the family background than the one we are accustomed to from various accounts. In fact, one of the many sources for false information about the Carver family came from RC himself, as James explains:

> My brother's life has been sliced, diced, analyzed and dissected, with the apparent consensus that he rose to literary prominence despite drunken parents and a deprived childhood…. Ray himself may have been responsible for some of this confusion. (JC 15-16)

For example, James points out that in an interview from 1983 RC claims that he was expected to follow in their father's footsteps. This interview can be found in the book *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, where RC says to the interviewer: "all through high school it was assumed that I would graduate and go to work at the sawmill" (Gentry and Stull 34). James refutes this "falsehood;" both parents, on the contrary, wanted a better life for their sons than the one they had lived (JC 64). RC's perpetuation of this working-class image was due both to his love of storytelling—inherited from his father—and his need to hone a façade that would promote his work. The many interviews gathered in *Conversations with Raymond Carver* and elsewhere are very rich biographical sources, but sorting the true from the fabricated is a tedious process.

One of James' aims with his memoir is precisely to help correct some of the inaccuracies that continue to propagate about the writer and his life. He takes issue with the tendency to collapse actual facts and fictional stories. Stories such as "Elephant" and "Boxes" both present poignant episodes in family lives where RC used certain details from real life events to enhance the overall effect of the fiction. In "Elephant," the narrator feels hounded by a long line of family members wanting money from him. The brother in the story is not much like the real James, who both borrowed and lent money to RC throughout the brothers' adulthood. In "Boxes" the mother is constantly moving and never feels settled; Ella Carver, on the other hand, eventually settled comfortably in Sacramento, near her son James. In both of these stories, RC

takes bits and pieces of real information that he adapts, his brother states, "to serve his creative purposes" (JC 16). This is a process that most good writers employ; it is a token to the power of RC's neo-realism that readers are lured into believing it is all or mostly true.

One way to discern truth from fiction is to consult Carol Sklenicka's comprehensive biography, *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* (New York: Scribner, 2009). James has also evaluated this source, noting that "her biography is the only serious and credible one so far and I am sure it will stand the test of time" (JC 15). Sklenicka's main task in *A Writer's Life*, however, is not to debunk myths but to present the writer in light of a rich web of personal, literary, and cultural forces that came to bear on his life and works. Her knowledge of Carver's life and times is simply encyclopedic; indeed, James states that, "I learned so much about my brother's life that I did not know about my brother in later years" (JC 15). There are a number of other biographical sources that are not strictly factual, but present RC's life from a particular perspective. Among these are Philippe Romon's journalistic account *Parlez-Moi de Carver: Une Biographie Littéraire de Raymond Carver* (Paris: Agnes Viénot Editions, 2003), as well as two books of interviews with people Carver knew, *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver* (edited by William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993), and *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography* by Sam Halpert (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995). The latter two works contain interviews by family members, friends, and writers who admired RC and they offer the reader a picture of his impact on everyone around him. Almost all interviewees agree that RC was generous, shy, and quick to steal any story from anyone and turn it into a honed piece of fiction. These character traits are also pointed out by James Carver: "Ray always remained gracious, gentle, and kind. Without a doubt, my brother's keen sensitivity to his surroundings and human nature contributed to and shaped his writing" (JC 97).

Both of Carver's wives, Maryann Burk Carver and Tess Gallagher, have written extensively on their relationships with the writer. Burk Carver was married to RC from 1957 until 1982, though they had separated a few years before their final divorce. Burk Carver's memoir *What It Used to Be Like: A Portrait of My Marriage to Raymond Carver* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006) is a detailed account of more than 20 years spent together with RC. Their relationship was both loving and chaotic; Burk Carver understood the aspirations of her husband even as those same aspirations ultimately destroyed the marriage. RC always put his writing first and considered family life a distraction from his work, though he dearly loved his family. RC's second wife, the poet Tess Gallagher, had similar writing rituals and the two of them set up separate offices—and sometimes separate homes—to pursue their careers. Gallagher's own personal essays, gathered in *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years With Ray* (Ann Arbor: The University

of Michigan Press, 2000), present the final ten years of RC's life when he finally achieved both sobriety and success after years of hard work.

RC's dedication to his craft was apparent already from an early age; James informs us that at age 17 his brother "turned a section of the basement into his bedroom and began writing on his typewriter" (JC 63). By this time, their father had already instilled in the brothers a passion for the outdoors that informs much of RC's work. James gives an example from the story "Everything Stuck to Him" (also called "Distance")[ii], featuring a young couple with a newborn baby. The narrator's desire to go hunting clashes with his new responsibilities as husband and father. "My brother writes of the conflict that arises between the two," states James, noting that, in "many of Ray's stories, the essence of the core . . . originated from some part of his life" (JC 74). In many of Carver's poems, however, there is less conflict and more appreciation for the outdoors of his childhood. Poems about fishing trips and the love of lakes, rivers, and the sea dominate his production, witnessed in his choice of titles for his poetry collections such as *At Night the Salmon Move* (1976), *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water* (1985), and *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989). After reading James' memoir, there is no doubt that it was the boys' father, Clevie Raymond Carver, who provided RC with the passion for nature that is one of the undervalued themes of his work.

One difference between RC's story and poetry careers is the influence of the powerful editor Gordon Lish, who helped catapult RC to fame with the publication of *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love* (1981). For decades, scholars have been arguing over the extent of Lish's influence on this and other story collections. Though Lish did not touch RC's poetry, he made huge cuts and edits to the short fiction. James presents one of the more balanced evaluations of this writer-editor relationship to date: "Some say Ray's stories became better because of Lish, other's say Ray's stories were much fuller and better without Lish's excessive editing. In either case, Ray ultimately did get to the point where he trusted his own judgment, gaining enough confidence to cut Gordon Lish loose" (JC 99). In the post-Lish period during the 1980s, RC published what his brother calls "better and meatier" stories in collections such as *Cathedral* (1983) and *Where I'm Calling From* (1988). The title story of the latter collection features a recovering alcoholic at a rehab center; RC himself eventually did reach full recovery from the disease, yet only a few years passed before he was diagnosed with the cancer that would take his life.

One of the most poignant sections of James Carver's memoir is the description of the final visit with his brother two months before RC died in 1988.[iii] The brothers had been very close, especially during childhood and youth, and the impending death of the writer weighed

heavily on both of them. Despite this sad memory, the gist of the book offers us glimpses into the oft-misunderstood early years of growing up in Yakima, Washington. These were mostly happy and exhilarating years for the brothers where they forged an inseparable bond. They also received a solid foundation from their parents that served them well into adulthood. RC's love of stories, for example, came from his father's habit of entertaining the young brothers: "several times a week, Dad told us great stories. He was a marvelous storyteller with a great imagination …. Ray and I were mesmerized" (JC 59). This shared experience between James and Ray is one of many described in his memoir, a book that refutes the largely exaggerated accounts of domestic violence and alcoholism in the Carver family homes in Yakima.

Compared to other biographical sources on Raymond Carver, James' book is precisely most valuable for what it fills in about the family milieu growing up in Washington in the 1940s and 50s. We learn, for example, that their father was a strong union man and that both parents were democrats who greatly admired the accomplishments of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. There were also many books in their childhood home besides the notorious Zane Grey novels sometimes cited by scholars as the only reading material to stimulate the budding writer RC.[iv] Mostly, we learn that big brother Raymond, despite being 5 years older, was James' best friend and mentor throughout childhood and well into adulthood. RC has paid homage to his brother in his poem "Drinking While Driving," where he writes that "I am happy/ riding in a car with my brother" and that "I could gladly lie down and sleep forever" (*All of Us,* page 3). A moment later he adds, "My brother nudges me,/ Any minute now, something will happen" (ibid.). This atmosphere of imminence and expectation is one that the brothers shared their whole lives. James explains that it was a private joke between them that soon things would "bust wide open" and that they "laughed about that phrase a year before Ray died" (JC 92). Perhaps RC had the last laugh with the wave of enormous success that he finally witnessed during the final years of his all-too-short life. Luckily, we have his brother's memoir to fill in some of the gaps of this fascinating writer's life, the ups and downs, myths and truths, and the ultimate busting wide openness of RC's career.

---

[i] Oxford Dictionaries named "post-truth" the word of the year 2016, see https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/16/post-truth-named-2016-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries/?utm_term=.71b050c1626a

[ii] Several of Carver's stories have two or more variant titles depending on the collection in which they were published. "Everything Stuck to Him" appeared in *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love* in 1981 in a pared-down Lish version; Carver called the story "Distance" in *Fires* published in 1983. To compare different versions of stories readers can consult the Library of America *Collected Stories* from 2009.

[iii] The final meeting between the brothers in 1988 is depicted in the chapter called "Glimpses" on pages 115-119 of James Carver's memoir.

[iv] James Carver discusses the books in the Carver home on pages 58-59 of his memoir.

Works Cited

Adelman, Bob. *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver*. Introduction by Tess Gallagher. New York: Scribner's, 1990. Print.

Carroll, Maureen P. and William L. Stull, editors. *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993. Print.

Carver, James. *Raymond Carver Remembered by his Brother James*. London: Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd., 2017. Print.

Carver, Maryann Burk. *What It Used to Be Like: A Portrait of My Marriage to Raymond Carver*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. Print.

Carver, Raymond. *At Night the Salmon Move*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1976. Print.

---. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981. Print.

---. *Cathedral*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983. Print.

---. *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1983. Print.

---. *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water*. New York: Random House, 1985. Print.

---. *Where I'm Calling From*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988. Print.

---. *Elephant and Other Stories*. London: Harvill, 1988. Print.

---. *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Introduction by Tess Gallagher. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989. Print.

---. *All of Us: The Collected Poems*. Edited by William L. Stull. Introduction by Tess Gallagher. New York: Random House, 2000. Print.

---. *Collected Stories*. Edited by William L. Stull. New York: Library of America, 2009. Print.

Gallagher, Tess. *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray*. Edited by Greg Simon. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Print.

Gentry, Marshall Bruce and William L. Stull, editors. *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990. Print.

Halpert, Sam, editor. *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995. Print.

Romon, Philippe. *Parlez-moi de Carver: Une biographie littéraire*. Paris: Agnès Viénot Editions, 2003. Print.

Sklenicka, Carol. *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*. New York: Scribner, 2009. Print.

ELEVENTH AVENUE

In 1951, Dad finally gave in and bought us a new house in a better part of Yakima. 1419 South Eleventh Avenue was a two-bedroom tract home with a modern bathroom. All the houses on our street were brand new, identical to one another, all painted white with big perfect lawns in the front and back yards. There was a giant willow tree in the back yard, right outside the window of the large bedroom Ray and I shared. Every street in our neighborhood was clean and paved with new asphalt, no dirt roads. Even the kids we met were dressed well. Some of the houses in the neighborhood next to us were slightly different from each other, but most likely not built any better than ours. Of course, that didn't occur to Ray or me at the time. We wouldn't have cared anyway. My whole family felt we had finally become middle class and we were overjoyed to be there, especially my mother.

I remember how the smell of apple pies baking filled our house. Our mother was a great cook and we always had good food for the family. Many times we came home from school and could smell fried chicken before we even got to the door. On Sundays we'd have a big breakfast of sausage and eggs and potatoes, or bacon and eggs. Mom kept a coffee can full of bacon grease next to the stove and that grease flavored everything! We now know bacon grease is not good for us to eat, but at that time most people did not realize the health risks. Just thinking about that food makes me hungry.

Shortly after we moved in, Dad bought us our first television set. It was a new RCA console—black and white, of course. We were one of the first in our neighborhood to have TV. Before we got one, Ray and I used to peek in the windows of the few neighbors who already had television and watch as long as we could until someone took notice.

The fifties became known as "The Golden Age of Television." My parents watched the local and national news before we ate dinner. After dinner, Mom and Dad like watching *The Jack Benny Program* and *I Love Lucy*. They especially enjoyed *The Lawrence Welk Show* and the flamboyant Liberace; I was pretty young and watched with them sometimes, but Ray wasn't interested. Ray and I loved *Leave it to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. On Saturday mornings, we watched *The Lone Ranger*, *Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Cisco Kid*. Every Sunday evening, my whole family watched *The Ed Sullivan Show*. We had a very comfortable couch in the living room and two big chairs, plenty of room for the four of us to watch together.

The fifties were a peaceful time for us; there were plenty of jobs to be had and life was good for most people we knew. The annual salary for Americans was $2,992 and bread was 14 cents a loaf. Television shows reflected an uncomplicated and innocent perspective; no controversy, sex or violence, like we would later have in the sixties. Eisenhower was president and the slogan was, "We like Ike!" President Eisenhower was responsible for implementing the Interstate Highway system we all enjoy today. Probably the most controversial thing he did was send troops into Little Rock, Arkansas to help escort black students into the high school there. Although the Korean War began in 1950 and ended in 1953, it never touched us and most people we knew never even talked about it. I heard my parents speak occasionally about the Communist hunter, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and The Cold War with Russia was always in the news. Like most Americans, we had "bomb drills" at school and knew about the bomb shelters across the country, but we didn't spend time worrying about it, maybe because we were kids.

Our family still enjoyed listening to our favorite radio programs. Most school nights, Ray and I fell asleep in the double-bed we shared while listening to shows like *The Shadow*, *The Lone Ranger* or *Charlie McCarthy*. We followed all the boxing championship fights, heavyweight and

middle weight, never missing a match. The most popular boxers of the day were Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson. As we got older, we lost interest in boxing, I guess because of whom was fighting.

The Carver family would spend the next six years on Eleventh Avenue, and they were good years for us all, especially for Ray. He was losing weight. Our family doctor, Dr. Coglan, was giving him appetite suppressant injections. Ray's self-confidence increased and his social life began to improve. He managed to retain an acceptable weight for the rest of his life.

Ray and I each found friends our own age once he began seventh grade at Washington Middle School, but we still had plenty of adventures after school and on weekends. He was the best older brother anyone could ask for. We were buddies. In the story, "Nobody Said Anything," Ray talked about fishing in Birch Creek. That creek was actually Bachelor Creek, about two miles from our home on Eleventh Avenue, across from the Yakima Airport. Fishing in Bachelor Creek with Ray brings back some of my fondest childhood memories. The creek was small and narrow, not very deep, but great for trout fishing. Almost every day after school we'd pack sandwiches and cookies and ride our bicycles there. If we weren't fishing, we were playing baseball or softball in the neighborhood park with our friends. We played marbles and board games, and perfected our skill with yoyos. We were active and happy kids.

When Ray was fourteen, he fell in the pond at Sportsman Park. He cut his left knee on a tin can and had to be taken to a doctor for many stitches, leaving him with a large scar. Years later, whenever I saw that scar, I thought about all the happy hours we spent fishing at Sportsman Park, with its tall cottonwood trees and wide grassy lawns. There were lily pads floating on the surface of the ponds and in the back of the park were pens filled with peacocks. We'd sit on the banks watching our bobbers in the water, hoping a big bass would come by and pull the bobber

under. I remember being there with Ray and Dad in the still and quiet of late afternoon, and how the cry of peacocks would suddenly break the silence, but not the peacefulness we shared.

We always had a great family Christmas with a fresh tree we cut down ourselves and decorated. There were many presents and good food all day. On Christmas mornings, Ray and I found games, books and toys under our tree—one year trains and bicycles another.

Every Easter before dawn, the four of us would attend sunrise service at Terrace Heights Memorial Park. There, on the beautiful grounds with white swans swimming in serene ponds, we and several hundred listened to the sermon as the sun rose over the horizon. After service, we went home to eat a big Easter breakfast: sausage and eggs or ham and eggs, with hot cross buns that had a white cross of sweet frosting on each one. We usually had ham with all the trimmings for dinner, and Mom's delicious pumpkin and pecan pie for dessert. It was always a very quiet and peaceful day with plenty of good food all around us. Now, I read from many different people about how unhappy and impoverished we all were supposed to be at this time. What a misconception. Life was good and we all enjoyed what it had to offer.

In 1951, our beloved dog, Mike, died. He had been our dog for as long as I could remember. Dad later made up for it, bringing home a black Labrador mix puppy for my ninth birthday. We named him Toby. Like Mike, Toby was our best friend and went everywhere with us. He appears in many of our family snapshots. One night while Ray and I were sleeping in our bedroom, Toby growled loudly enough to wake us. I jumped up to look out the window. Just as I put my nose against the windowpane, I saw another face outside with his nose pressed against mine. It scared me enough that I screamed, waking the whole family. The next morning, Ray and I looked in the back yard for footprints. We found large shoeprints in the vegetable garden. Ray had a fingerprint set and dusted for prints. I can remember how smart we felt, investigating as

detectives would, but we came out with only one smudged print. Our neighbors had similar experiences with a prowler. The men in the neighborhood banded together and caught the Peeping Tom. He turned out to be a man our father knew from the mill.

Dad often took us duck and pheasant hunting, and on fishing trips to the lakes and rivers all around Yakima: Rimrock Lake, Natches River, Wenas Lake, Tieton River and Blue Lake, to name a few. Most of my memories of fishing are from after we moved to Eleventh Avenue. Before I was old enough to go, he took Ray fishing for sturgeon in the Columbia River. I can remember how excited I was when they came home with several large sturgeons. Dad would put them in the bathtub and they were so big they covered the whole bottom of the tub. My father always kept us well-supplied with fishing rods, reels, guns, boots and clothes for hunting and fishing. I know for a fact that is where much of his money went and he probably did not have the money for those things.

Once I was old enough to come along, Dad took us both fishing on the Columbia River. I remember being awakened around 5 AM on those Saturday mornings. Dad would usually fix a breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon; our mother stayed in bed. One morning, we noticed the eggs had a gray appearance, but we ate them anyway. After we finished, Dad asked how we liked our eggs. We told him we did. He then told us they had pork brains, which he liked, mixed in. We would not have eaten them had we known.

After breakfast, Dad, Ray, Toby, and I would drive out to the river; it usually took an hour and a half. I'll never forget how cold it was on that river in the fall. We'd fish for whitefish—called "white" because of their silver appearance in the water. They were long and slender and one to five pounds in weight. We used maggots for bait. Many of the old fishermen would keep the maggots underneath their lower lips for easy access. Our maggots stayed in the can. We built

a small fire to keep our hands warm but some of the other fishermen built larger fires in metal barrels. Thankfully, the bone-chilling mornings got warmer as the day progressed. Ray and I were determined fishermen. We loved the outdoors, fishing and hunting, even if it meant freezing in the cold sometimes. We both enjoyed every minute of these trips and seldom went home with less than a dozen fish.

On hot summer days, Dad took us to Rimrock Lake, about an hour and a half northeast of Yakima. Dad told us the lake was a crater of an ancient volcano; it was so deep that the bottom had yet to be discovered. He would blow up the rubber raft he bought from the Army Surplus Store and we'd drift out on the clear water, so clean you could drink it but it much too cold to swim in. We would fish all day.

In winter, Rimrock Lake froze over with a solid sheet of ice, so we cut individual holes in the ice to fish. The three of us sat on campstools in a totally pristine atmosphere under an unending blue sky, white ice as far as the eyes could see. Eagles circled high above while Ray and I watched our father smoke his Camels, catching glimpses of our breaths in the chilled air. We were enveloped in a blanket of silence and snow. Not until one of us spoke would the silence break. I shall never forget those wonderful times we spent together with our beloved father.

Another great fishing spot was Wenas Lake, northeast of Yakima, a small lake that sat in a pocket surrounded by dry hills. We three never missed opening day. The day before opening, we rented a boat or used our own rubber raft and floated around on the lake, just enjoying ourselves. Sometimes Dad put up a tent, but more often he slept in our car. Ray and I were always too excited to sleep. We stayed up most of the night, just hanging around and listening to the jukebox in the little all-night café that sold bait, hamburgers, snacks and drinks.

In the fall, Dad took us duck and pheasant hunting in the cornfields on the outskirts of Yakima. We loved to go geese hunting on the bluffs above the Columbia River, that mighty river that divides Washington from Oregon. Our hunting method was to hide behind large rocks the other hunters had piled up on the edge of the bluff, hundreds of feet high above the water. Dad always made sure we wore our warmest clothes and knee-high boots to protect us from the rattlesnakes so prevalent among those rocks. Thousands of geese sat on the islands far down below in the middle of the river,. At dawn, all the geese would lift off honking, their wings creating a tremendous roar, turning the morning sky black. It was all the geese could do to get over the towering bluffs on windy days; they'd fly so close to us we could almost knock them down with our shotguns. We never knew which side the geese would fly to feed since wheat fields lined both banks of the river. If they flew to the Oregon side our day was over, yet the hour-and-a-half drive from Yakima was always worth the trip. Ray and I were so fortunate that our beloved father gave us the gift of love for nature and the outdoors. In many subsequent conversations, we reminisced about those cherished moments we all shared together, hunting and fishing in the beautiful waters around Yakima with the father we adored.

On many Saturdays, one of our parents would drive us downtown to the Capital Theater to see a movie. The Capitol was the most beautiful theater in Yakima. The exterior of the Capitol was somewhat ornate but inside it was absolutely breathtaking. The high dome ceiling was painted with gold angels whose arms extended wide against the brilliant blue background, surrounding the whole theater. It really was a work of art, especially for a theatre in Yakima, of all places. Yakima had three other downtown theatres; one called the Liberty, which was also very nice but nothing compared to the Capitol. The other two were twin theatres, underground, with a long flight of stairs leading down to them. They never played first-run movies but we

liked going there to see westerns with Roy Rogers or Gene Autry and scary movies with vampires and monsters. Ray and I both loved Lon Chaney in *The Wolf Man*. Our favorite adventure movie was *King Solomon's Mines*, with Deborah Kerr and Stewart Granger. We went to see it three or four times and still talked about it years later. Whenever I see it now on television, I think of Ray. Down the street from the twin theaters on Yakima's main street was a hotel called The Chinook. Every three or four weeks, Dad took us there to get our hair cut and our shoes shined.

Once each year, our family went to Seattle for a long weekend. We stayed in the Fry Hotel, which was moderately-priced and very comfortable. It was an adventure for Ray and me, sleeping and eating in a new environment. In the mornings, our parents took us to the Seattle Zoo and we spent the afternoon in a nearby amusement park, enjoying the different rides and games. My family did not go out to eat often, but when we did, we usually went to a restaurant called The Golden Wheel, on First Street in downtown Yakima. I remember it as dark and elaborately decorated, as Asian restaurants usually are. The food was good and affordable. My wife and I had dinner there in 2006 and it hadn't changed a bit.

Around the corner from The Golden Wheel is Yakima's tallest building. Ray always called it "The Landmark" because we could see it from a distance towering high above the city. It is the Larson Building, dating from the 1930s, sixteen stories of red brick with an American flag flying from the top. It is still there today, just as prominent and adding old charm to the city.

For three or four years, Ray and I were members of the YMCA. In the winter, we played handball and ping pong there. I sang in the Glee Club. Winters in Yakima were very cold; when long icicles formed on the house gutter, Ray and I would break them off and use them as swords to fence.

Summers were as hot as the winters were cold. On warm summer nights, Ray and I often slept in the back yard with our sleeping bags, our faithful dog Toby right beside us. We would lie and gaze up at a sky heavily filled with bright stars that weighed down upon on us, listening to the crickets and other night sounds we couldn't identify. Time did not seem to matter, it had no meaning for us; it would last forever. We both told stories and talked for hours. I don't remember Ray then being an especially good storyteller as has been written. One night, the whole yard and back of the house turned a light blue, then a very bright luminous blue. We looked up and saw a large luminescent blue object moving slowly and silently over the house; there was not a sound. We both jumped up and ran to the back window, yelling for our parents to come out to see what we were seeing. I believe, as Ray did, we had witnessed a UFO. This was in 1952 and there were reported sightings over Washington State at that time. That was my first and only encounter, but Ray later told me that he and his first wife Maryann saw another one in the early 60's when they were living in Chico, California.

It was on Eleventh Avenue that Ray developed a genuine interest in reading. Our father liked to read adventure books and magazines and kept many in the house. He had a collection of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* series, as well the *John Carter on Mars* series and many Zane Gray westerns. Dad also had books on the Civil War and President Roosevelt's Administration. Ray and I read all of Dad's books, except maybe the ones about the Roosevelt Administration, we were a little young for those books, but I'm sure we read all the others maybe three or four times. We also read his outdoor magazines which were always filled with adventure. Several times a week, Dad told us great stories. He was a marvelous storyteller with a very creative imagination. He made them up as he went along. Ray and I were mesmerized. I believe Dad's

stories certainly helped motivate Ray's interest in storytelling, and later his desire and driving need to write fiction.

In the book, "Carver Country," it was said that Ray grew up in a home where there were only Zane Grey books to read. This is totally untrue. We may not have had classics or contemporary literature at the time, but we did have many other books to read besides Zane Grey. I am sure this writer also may have come from a working class family and most likely did not have great literature lying around either. How many working class families do? Was Ray supposed to be reading great literature at a young age? By the time he was in high school he had read most of the classics, including Tolstoy and Chekhov; courtesy of his high school sweetheart, Maryann.

The fifties brought about Rock 'n Roll, a blend of Southern Blues and Gospel music. Ray and I loved that music when it first appeared on the scene. Some of our favorite artists were Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly and Richie Valens. Our mother liked Dinah Shore, Johnny Ray and Perry Como. I have read that Ray and my family liked Country Music. Not true, as are so many other things that have been written about us. My parents also played the records of Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra and other popular singers of that era. There was a lot of different music in our house, but never Country.

Every week during baseball season, Dad took Ray and me to Parker Field in Yakima to see the Yakima Bears, a local minor-league team. Dad would buy us all popcorn, hot dogs and cokes. We'd sit under the bright lights in the crisp night air, cheering with the crowd for our home team and following the game on the huge illuminated scoreboards. Ray and I loved watching the games and sharing them with our father.

All in all, we were typical boys during these years, playing rough games boys usually play. We liked catch, baseball and some basketball—weren't much interested in football, but occasionally we tossed one back and forth. Young people in those days were more self-sufficient and creative; we did not have all the technology kids do now. Back then, we had to be inventive in finding our own fun, and we always were! My brother and I seemed to enjoy more creative things like chemistry sets, fly-tying kits and stamp collecting. We constructed buildings from Lincoln Logs and Erector Sets. Ray and I used our minds while playing inside. When playing outside, we were always physical.

Abstract

This essay examines Carver's minimalist style as a response to postmodern culture. Taylor Johnston suggests that Carver's spare prose has the effect of stripping away as many consumer artifacts as possible without jettisoning referentiality entirely. In this way, Carver's stories clear the overpopulated, decorative space of both consumer culture and more canonical postmodern literatures. "Cathedral" exemplifies this operation in that it not only prunes brand names, but also allegorizes the utopian possibility of experience removed from commodification. The essay performs a close reading of this story in which blindness becomes a figure for the evacuation of consumer culture from lower-middle-class space.

'Inside anything': the Evacuation of Commodified Space in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral'

Taylor Johnston

In 1986 John Barth gave a cheeky account of the American minimalist movement "both praised and damned under such labels as 'K-Mart realism,' 'hick chic,' 'Diet-Pepsi minimalism' and 'post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism'" (1). He provides the following list of its possible origins:

> Our national hangover from the Vietnam war. . . . The more or less coincident energy crisis of 1973-76. . . . The national decline in reading and writing skills . . . Along with this decline, an ever-dwindling readerly attention span . . . Together, with all of the above, a reaction on these authors' part against the ironic, black-humorist "fabulism" and/or the (sometimes academic) intellectuality and/or the density, here byzantine, there baroque, of some of their immediate American literary antecedents . . . [and finally] The reaction against the all but inescapable hyperbole of American advertising, both commercial and political, with its high-tech manipulativeness and glamorous lies, as ubiquitous as and more polluted than the air we breathe. (5)

This rather schizophrenic theory encompasses both the objections to and celebrations of the movement: according to critics, minimalism operated via the consumer idiom (K-Mart, Diet-Pepsi), but also positioned itself against the excesses of consumer culture—advertising in particular. In making these comments, Barth relies on superstructures like political history (the Vietnam War and energy crisis) and class ("hick chic," blue-collar workers, anti-intellectualism). But if you asked Raymond Carver, as *The Paris Review* did in 1983, the origins of his style were personal and simple, though readily identifiable as lower-middle-class circumstances: "I used to go out and sit in the car and try to write something on a pad on my knee," his car offering the only refuge during the period

of his late twenties and early thirties when his children from teenage pregnancies were adolescents and he was still working a series of odd jobs. His writing was minimal in the most basic sense of the word; he wrote very short stories because time between low-wage work and child rearing was limited. When he finally had the means to attempt a novel, he was only months away from his untimely death. This essay will attempt to straddle these very different ways of explaining Carver's minimalist style. His spare prose strips away the commodities to which Barth refers, at once reacting to the extravagance of postmodern culture and carving out a dignified aesthetic for the lower-middle-class characters who resemble Carver himself. "Cathedral" will serve as an important example in that it both prunes brand names and allegorizes the utopian possibility of experience removed from commodification.

The critical consensus defines minimalism as a tendency that encompasses Carver, Ann Beattie, Mary Robison, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason, among others. For many of their contemporary critics, what united these writers aesthetically and conceptually was an alleged "unstylized and even clumsy attempt to depict the more prosaic aspects of everyday life, resulting in a literature of utter banality," as Daniel Just puts it in his 2010 article "Is Less More?" (304). The symbolic uncertainty of minimalist stories (gaps in description and inconclusive endings) was deemed disorienting and inadequate in combination with an at times brutally humdrum aesthetic (316). Just repurposes this assessment for his own, more flattering definition:

> The referentiality of [Carver's] style arises precisely from the heaviness and exhaustion of his language—blank and transparent. In other words, Carver attempts to bring the referentiality of language to the point of its breakdown, but rather than completing it, he suspends it for inspection. The effect of heightened realism thus becomes paradoxically indistinguishable from a blankness of meaning that, as he hopes, can still carry all the notes. (312)

Minimalism's particular achievements can be found in this collision of a realist portrayal of everyday, middle-class life and the near collapse of referentiality (315), which confounded the critical discourse's available means of describing literature of the postmodern period. This confusion conformed to the more general privileging of the luxuriant, decorative, excessive style employed by maximalist writers such as Thomas Pynchon, who became exemplars of canonical postmodernism.

A second critique of minimalism coalesced around the moralism to which Barth alludes: minimalism crumples the distinction between art and mass culture by inviting the artifacts of late capitalism into its pages. As a realist literature, minimalism colludes with the signifying work of Pepsi and Kmart by allowing those brand names to signify precisely as they are meant to in the context of

consumerism (unlike, say, the distorting surrealism of Warhol). Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country* exemplifies this operation. As Phillip Simmons observes in "Minimalist Fiction as 'Low' Postmodernism," brand names and consumer products do their usual symbolic work to serve the novel's characterizations. The character Anita is marked as elegant by the protagonist Sam because she "smelled like a store at the mall that has a perfume blower in the doorway" and prefers Betty Crocker brownie mix over Duncan Hines (53). For Simmons, the reliance on consumer culture is an historically authentic strategy that "questions the adequacy of the mass cultural idiom while remaining sympathetic to the characters' use of that idiom" (57); however, contemporaries of minimalism objected to consumer language for its collaboration with late capitalism, and, more specifically, for its compromise of both the morality and meritocracy of literature:

> The marked presence of mass culture in these texts, in which outward signs of emotion or psychological conflict . . . are given as a choice between fast food outlets or the impulsive decision to buy a ceramic cat at the mall, is seen by some critics as a renunciation both of moral seriousness and the rigors of the novelist's craft. That reliance on mass cultural allusions makes this fiction "shallow" in its characterization and historical sense is another instance of the complaint that postmodernism sacrifices "depth" for a banal poetics of "surface." Worse than banal, the reliance on mass culture is seen as an abandonment of the historical awareness necessary to stave off cultural decline. (315)

One such critic, Diane Stevenson, writing the same year *In Country* was published and four years after "Cathedral" first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, describes minimalism's allegedly complacent treatment of consumer objects as the following:

> The writer tells you his character eats Cheerios. The Cheerios he means are not something you eat. They are not themselves. They are simply code (a sign). And here's the rub, everyone knows that the Cheerios augur ill, allude to something lacking in the character. There is consensus here, and this is the real break with modernism, the issue of consensus: *which* consensus? Everyone will see green after red, say the modernists. Everyone will see a class code, a consumer code, a code of enervated character when he sees Cheerios—this is the leap the postmodernist makes. (author italics 88)

Reading her irritated account of minimalist writing, one begins to wonder about the status of the "everyone" gazing at the Cheerios being consumed by the lower-middle-class character. Six years after Stevenson was writing, Fredric Jameson noted that while we may cast lamenting looks at our fellow Cheerio-eaters, we are all in a literal and figurative sense eating postmodern Cheerios now

that "aesthetic production . . . has become integrated into commodity production generally" (4). Not only that, but the Cheerios discourse has learned to neutralize countercultural observations of the kind that Stevenson is attempting. In other words, mass culture now knows that "Cheerios augur ill, allude to something lacking in the character" and can thematize this lack. We need only think of the recent advertising campaign that depicts Jack-in-the-Box meals as junk that people would only choose to eat late at night while high in their parents' garage.

In "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson warns against moralizing critique along the lines of Stevenson's by describing both the all-encompassing nature of capitalist influence and its efficiency in coopting all capacity for critique into its own functions. As in the Jack-in-the-Box commercials, mass culture seems to acknowledge the ways in which it has been (and might yet be) criticized, and incorporate that critique as its own content. A more notable example of this procedure is mass culture's response to sixties social critique: it simply reproduced that critique as its own material (think mass-produced tie-dye shirts with peace signs). For these reasons and others that I will observe, the critic and the content she criticizes are now in the same cultural category:

> [I]f postmodernism is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgments must finally be identified as a category mistake. All of which becomes more obvious when we interrogate the position of the cultural critic and moralist; the latter, along with the rest of us, is now so deeply immersed in post-modernist space, so deeply suffused and infected by its new cultural categories, that the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable. (Jameson 46)

In postmodernism, the historical specificity that enables real political engagement has been replaced by a simulacrum of the past (more on this in a few pages), and the subject is disoriented to the extent that viable criticism has been abolished. And still no leftist theory has been able to forgo "the possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, from which to assault this last" (48). Taking the postmodern subject's cognitive disconnect from global capital as a metaphor, Jameson configures this critical impotence as a spatial problem that denies us the "time-honored formula of 'critical distance,'" that persistent darling of the Left; "our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation" (49). Multinational capital has successfully inhabited the realms we have considered pre-capitalist (the psychological, for example), an invasion which even the conspiracy theories pervasive on the left have failed to account for (49). Most simply put, a category separate from

capital and its functions does not exist. All forms of resistance the Left has cherished—from guerilla warfare to *The Clash*—"are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it" (49).

The critique of minimalism like Carver and Mason's as a collaborator in late-capitalist cultural decline (along with all similar critique of postmodernism generally) has been effectively debunked by this argument. The only hope for culture as a political intervention in our present historical context exists in a hypothetical aesthetic, as of yet completely unrealized; this representational strategy would have to restore the subject position proper to criticism and to an uncompromised awareness of capitalism's totality, as the compass once oriented explorers to totality mediated by the stars and the mathematics of triangulation (52). As hopeless as this sounds, however, Jameson elsewhere observes a different kind of potential in leftist postmodern productions that has had to narrate the exhaustion of American radicalism "by way of that very cultural logic of the postmodern which is itself the mark and symptom of [this] dilemma" (25). These works achieve a distinguishing self-consciousness even if they do not constitute a true alternative. E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, for example, takes the twentieth-century demise of the Left as its "elegiac backdrop," at the same time collaborating with the ahistoricity symptomatic of that demise; an apparently realistic novel, it is "in reality a nonrepresentational work that combines fantasy signifiers from a variety of ideologemes in a kind of hologram" (23). It is a mix of historical and fictional characters exceed the usual operations of historical novels by reifying Houdini, Tateh, Coalhouse, etc. into a simulacrum that evades historical specificity (24). Moreover, Doctorow's particular use of the simple declarative sentence renders the plot a series of "isolated punctual event objects" that are severed from the contemporary context (24). But in this sense, the novel and its postmodern cohort does ironically achieve a kind of historical mimesis:

> a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping [our] confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop history and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. (25)

I will return to this crisis of historicity later, but for now I would like to observe the particular way in which minimalism performs a similar kind of realism, which adopts this aesthetic of ahistorical "mirage," but to an historically apt effect. Just as *Ragtime* uses its fantastical simulacrum of history to narrate the very real demise of historical consciousness, writers like Carver empty commodified space in order to depict an alternative that can only exist as fantasy in our historical context. The

mirage quality of the minimalist aesthetic parallels the fantasy status of utopian desire in late capitalism.

Importantly, Carver himself never understood his project as a political one the way that Doctorow certainly did. Carver once remarked to an interviewer, "I write oftentimes about working-class people, and the dark side of Reagan's America. So in that respect I suppose the stories can be read as criticism, as an indictment. But that has to come from outside. I don't feel I'm consciously trying to do that" (Qtd. in Mullen 112).

But his stories foreground a crisis observed by the American Left every bit as much as Doctorow's work: the status of the American lower middle class, a contingent that subscribed to the hegemonic narrative of social ascent much in the way that Carver and his wife once did. As he describes in "Fires,"

> For years my wife and I had held to a belief that if we worked hard and tried to do things, the right things would happen. It's not such a bad thing to try to build a life on. Hard work, goals, good intentions, loyalty, we believed these were virtues and would someday be rewarded. . . . The time came and went when everything my wife and I held sacred, or considered worthy of respect, every spiritual value, crumbled away. Something terrible had happened to us. . . . We couldn't fully comprehend what had happened. . . . We simply could not have anticipated anything like what was happening to us. (Carver in Harker 720)

The crumbling away of spiritual values might be more practically described as bankruptcy and unemployment, which haunted his first marriage just as they plague the American lower middle class—the population of Carver's stories. "Popular Mechanics,"[i] for example, retells a familiar middle-class scenario: a husband packing for an abrupt move-out from what we understand to be the small suburban home he shares with his wife. This precipitates their violent conflict over who will keep the baby. The story's title—borrowed from the name of the magazine that explains the workings of automobiles, electronics, and other appliances—signals that something instructive about middle-class life will be divulged. But in place of a class-specific narrative, we receive an ahistorical parable-turned-upside-down that abandons its context entirely. A biblical allusion accompanies the story's palpably biblical aesthetic; as Francoise Sammarcelli rightly identifies, "the theme of the judgment of Solomon is never made explicit but can be detected as if in a negative image, since the edifying conclusion brought about by the king's sentences strikingly contrasts with the parents' mad determination of the story" (235). Unlike the true mother of the biblical episode who forgoes the right to her child in order to preserve its life, "the parents pictured in Carver's text seem impervious

to their child's suffering and go on fighting to keep him at all costs" (235). After narrating a perverse tug of war, the story ends with the horrific suggestion that the baby has been torn in two, though it leaves this event in ontological uncertainty. The dismemberment itself is never named (and it feels like a violation to do so now).

The entire story transpires in three short pages, and with only the fewest of details to locate it in what we know (after reading the other stories of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*) must be the post-Vietnam United States. But the only words traceable to this context are "flowerpot" and "backyard" (123). Had the third-person narrative not hovered for moment at the "little shoulder-high window" that looks behind the house, perfectly viable readings of the story could place it in Chekov's Russia, say. At the climactic moment, the wife gathers the swaddled baby and goes to hide in the "little kitchen," specifically "behind the stove" (124), a scene we could imagine in the late nineteenth century or 2008. This generality leaves the story guilty of the postmodern deployment of pastiche described by Jameson: "the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (17), which is in this case the biblical, borrowed from "the imaginary museum of a now global culture" (18) to be paired with the idiom of the middle-class magazine. But these historically abstracting moves lend the narrative the grave simplicity denied to these kinds of characters in much other postmodern content, from television soaps to the garish scenarios of Hollywood blockbusters; even the grotesque ending is chastely described as the "manner" in which "the issue was decided" (125). In deploying this aesthetic, the story grants new weight to a commonplace fixture of the lower-middle-class narrative that has been commandeered and trivialized by the hegemonic one (divorce). According to the American Dream, this couple could have (and still might) work hard and attain some kind of social mobility. Instead, an unnamed hardship—which we imagine to be the kind of working-hard-and-getting-nowhere Carver describes in his interviews—has brought the couple to where we now discover them, in a separation which (in this case literally) tears their child apart. The pared-down prose permits the story to flee the particular setting that likely suffocated its characters in the first place and grants their crisis the weight of its bare brutality; it asks us to imagine the horror of the drama, but without the sensational means conventionally provided that might render it an absurdity.

We might wonder: is this not the very crisis of historicity that Jameson describes, "the spell and distance of a glossy mirage" (21) resulting from the fantasy collage of historical contexts and genres enacted by postmodern literature? I'd like to propose that in Carver's work mirage is being enlisted as allegory, which seeks to supplant commodified space as an alternative form, even if it

cannot entirely succeed in doing so. His prose strips away as many commodified objects as possible without jettisoning referentiality entirely; in this way, it clears the overpopulated, decorative, excessive space of both consumer culture and the more canonical iterations of postmodernism. A few consumer artifacts necessarily survive the cleanse, but these form part of the 'biblical' sparseness that so often makes way for allegorical meaning. In "Popular Mechanics," the baby becomes not only symbolic of the way parents commodify children in the negotiations of divorce, but also a more general example of the violence of reification. Unlike the magazine, which collaborates with capitalism's commodifying functions, the story is an oblique warning against them.

These allegorical meanings endeavor to preserve the characters from the determining grasp of commodification, enabling a new dignity for their defunct working class who must otherwise vacillate in the purgatory of shrunken political consciousness. In doing so, however, allegory also masquerades as an autonomous space unfettered by late capitalism while surreptitiously collaborating with it every bit as much as the rest of postmodern cultural production, insofar as it relies on generic, ahistorical representation. Is it a sleight of hand to represent "reality" in this fashion? Yes, absolutely, and not least because it promises greater subversive potential than is actually available in postmodernism if we subscribe to Jameson's argument. But in the context of postmodern realism, this kind of slippage may be the only slim but available means of configuring the *possibility* and *desirability* of an alternative political reality. For Theodor Adorno and others of the Frankfurt School, art's oblique access to critique is the most potent subversion it can enable; the artwork's semblance of a not yet existing reality verges on consolatory fantasy, and yet persistently reminds us of its own illusion status, as Carver's stories do in their refusal to provide definitive meaning.

The following analysis will propose that "Cathedral" allegorizes the utopian possibility of shedding the artifacts and effects of commodification and, through its allegory, conveys the slimness of this hope for change. Some of the consumer world survives in "Cathedral" as it does in the rest of minimalism (and certainly all of it will revive as soon the story is over), but only as a necessary frame of its startling omissions, relocating the act of reading from the entrapments of the consumer apparatus to symbolic indeterminacy. The effect will necessarily be blurred, ahistorical, and (yes, still) defined by the productions of late capitalism. But the story's simultaneous uncertainty *wishes to* pause commodification, positioning itself against the overpopulated landscape of central postmodern content. This tenuous desire is both utopian in its longing for experience that predates commodification and ideological in its collaboration with the neoliberal concept of universal,

autonomous experience. The story's dutiful attention to the undecidability of these alternatives places a careful wedge for minimalist social critique. In doing so, it breaks with the usual treatment of commodification in minimalism, as I believe many of Carver's stories do.

In "Cathedral" readers meet a lower-middle-class couple, hardly in the crisis of "Popular Mechanics," though palpably disconnected, who spend most of their discretionary time in the living room, in which the organizing object is the television. Even in this relatively luxurious phase of Carver's minimalism—which is slightly less paratactic, more ornate, and no longer under Gordon Lish's tight editorial grip—we have almost no visual sense of the characters and their home apart from its most determining features. We know they have a driveway (in which the wife and an important guest arrive), a kitchen (in which they stuff down what sounds like a 2,000 calorie meal), a bar (in an unknown location which they often frequent), and an upstairs (which interestingly includes a separate room for the wife). Beyond this we have no sense of the objects that populate their home, nor do we see any of their physical traits, which serves to deprioritize whatever sensory experience one could have in this space. We could chalk this muteness up to the depressive mood of the narrator and a certain sensory obtuseness that the wife and their guest also seem to share at times. But if we read our confined knowledge of this commodified space (the lower-middle-class home) against the established genre of minimalism and its flagrant use of the brand name, we recognize Carver's attempt to empty out a typically over-determined setting (which is also scattered with consumer objects in much of canonical postmodernism and mass-cultural content like advertising). The objects that survive the minimalist trim in "Cathedral" get repurposed for the story's own critical purposes; the television, for example, becomes the occasion for what turns out to be a transformative moment of quiet subversion in the narrator's experience.

The character who ironically comes into most precise focus is a blind man, their guest and the only character who has a name (Robert). He's an old friend of the narrator's wife who comes to visit them after his own wife dies of cancer. We know that he's a well dressed, "heavy set," balding man, probably in his late forties, with "stooped shoulders," a full beard that's getting some "winter" (an adjective supplied by the blind man based on what he's heard from other people), a booming voice, and eyes that "seemed to move around in the sockets without his knowing it or being able to stop it" (greatly preoccupying the narrator) (215-6). And we soon perceive his relative emotional adeptness, particularly in relating to the narrator's wife—much to the narrator's chagrin, it seems. From the moment he first introduces us to the blind man, the narrator can only begin to comprehend him through the mediation of consumer content. "His being blind bothered me," he

tells us—in narration that has a distinctly spoken feel—"My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to" (209).

The narrator first encounters the blind man through the tape recorded letters he sends to the narrator's wife; eventually, the blind man sends a tape in which he comments on the wife's nascent relationship with the narrator, and she coaxes him into listening to it with her. Even in this preliminary encounter, the narrator can only apprehend the blind man's aberrant way of corresponding as though it were part of the televisual spectacle; "I got us drinks and we settled down in the living room. We made ready to listen"—only to be interrupted by "a knock at the door, something," from which they never return, much in the way that one can easily never return to a casually chosen television program (212). The narrator never hears the part where the blind man mentions him, but this disjuncture doesn't seem to bother the narrator—in the same way that his apparent disconnect with his wife rarely and barely gets any mention as a source of worry. In fact, all content which resists the mode of perception he has clearly borrowed from the hours he spends watching TV seems to slip from the narrator's grasp—he cannot assimilate it into his more global understanding, nor does he wish to (at least not until the end of the story).

The blind man's inability to interact with the content familiar to the narrator in the "proper" way—the one dictated by consumer code—makes him suspect from the moment he enters the house. The narrator is persistently uncomfortable with the fact that the blind man cannot see the TV when they sit down to watch it (at a later point in the night he tells us the blind man was "leaning forward with his head turned at me, his right ear aimed in the direction of the set. Very disconcerting" [222]). Blind people can't even *see* their wives and appreciate them in the way that televisual culture instructs, a fact that disturbs the narrator when he reflects on what must have been this blind man's relationship with his now deceased wife. "Imagine a woman who could never see herself as she was seen in the eyes of her loved one. A woman who could go on day after day and never receive the smallest compliment from her beloved" (213)—a woman outside the hegemonic scheme of the televisual, which requires that she be processed as image. "She could, if she wanted, wear green eye-shadow around one eye, a straight pin in her nostril, yellow slacks and purple shoes, no matter" (210), much in the way the blind man's right eye is often "on the roam without his knowing it or wanting it to be" (218). This kind of life-gone-rogue from the televisual mode proves threatening to the narrator—less because it is estranged from his own way of apprehending the world, and more because it evades the guiding hand of hegemony that dictates when and how one

should gaze and be gazed on. All of the blind man's modes of contact and expression—from the tapes to his aural relation to the TV—seem to flout the hyper-visuality of consumer culture, in which the narrator is fluent. For these reasons and others which I'll shortly examine, the blind man is clearly someone for the narrator to distrust—particularly at times when he seems to have greater intimacy with the wife than the narrator has ever enjoyed, a fact which continues to dumbfound him in its small manifestations throughout the story. As the wife pulls into the driveway with the blind man after picking him up from the train station, the narrator says "I saw my wife laughing as she parked the car. I saw her get out of the car and shut the door. She was still wearing a smile. *Just amazing*" (214, my emphasis).

The blind man's arrival ushers in a nearly insurmountable awkwardness that the narrator wants to locate in the shortcomings associated with his disability, though it seems much more traceable to the narrator's continuing misapprehensions of blindness. Much in the way that the televisual mediated his initial conceptions, he relies on commonplaces in speaking with the blind man, which continually fail to anticipate and account for experiences outside the hegemonic one: "I wanted to say something else, small-talk, about the scenic ride along the Hudson. How going *to* New York, you should sit on the right-hand side of the train, and coming *from* New York, you should sit on the left-hand side" (author italics 215). The narrator does ask which side of the train the blind man sat on, and his wife immediately registers a clumsiness about this comment. But the blind man seamlessly proceeds to detail his train ride, and how good it is to see them, as though nothing out of the ordinary has been said—and it hasn't in terms of his own experience. Next the narrator recalls having read that the blind don't smoke, supposedly because they don't see the smoke they exhale: "I thought I knew that much and that much only about blind people. But this blind man smoked his cigarette down to the nubbin and then lit another one. This blind man filled his ashtray and my wife emptied it" (217). This generic act of "knowing" and "reading" about certain commonplaces begins to resemble the lack of cultural and historical specificity Jameson attributes to the postmodern subject and his culture; any kind of nuance for which the cliché and commonplace cannot account seems out of the narrator's reach.

The narrator's reliance on the stereotypical past grows more pronounced as the story reaches its thematic cornerstone, a television program about cathedrals. After their robust dinner, the three return to the living room where the wife falls asleep on the couch and the narrator and blind man reach a stuttering agreement to stay up smoking and watching television together. (Even when they

are asleep, high, and blind respectively, they can't seem to do without TV.) The program about cathedrals comes on:

> Something about the church and the Middle Ages . . . Not your run-of-the-mill TV fare . . . I turned to the other channels. But there was nothing on them, either. So I turned back to the first channel and apologized. (223)

The narrator soon feels socially obligated to describe this regrettably out of the ordinary program to the blind man, since the voiceover often lapses into montages of Spain, France, Portugal, or Italy. (But again this urge to cancel or dispel blindness comes from the narrator and not the blind man himself.) The narrator quickly realizes, however, that he's unable to narrate this particular content because he can't seem to summon the historical context surrounding cathedrals; their televisual reproduction as reified image seems to have created this de-historicizing effect. "There's a painting on the walls of this one church," he explains, but when the blind man asks if the paintings are frescoes, he's forced to admit that it's a "good question" but he doesn't know (223).

Though he can glean no visual content from the program, the blind man ironically retains much more of the historical as it has been presented in this commodified form. In doing so, he begins to take his place as the figure and catalyst for a provisional alternative to experience determined by consumer culture and its language of stereotype. When the narrator asks him if he has any idea what cathedrals are really like, he rehearses what was apparently part of the voiceover:

> I know they took hundreds of workers fifty or a hundred years to build . . . I just heard the man say that, of course. I know generations of the same families worked on a cathedral. I heard him say that, too. The men who began their life's work on them, they never lived to see the completion of their work. In that wise, bub, they're no different from the rest of us, right? (224)

Here the blind man produces a clichéd though somewhat applicable stand-in for the political consciousness that has largely slipped away from his world, and which evades the narrator entirely. We learn through their earlier conversation that the narrator feels numbed by his unnamed job:

> From time to time, [the blind man would] turn his blind face toward me, put his hand under his beard, ask me something. How long had I been in my present position? (Three years.) Did I like my work? (I didn't.) Was I going to stay with it? (What were the options?) Finally, when I thought he was beginning to run down, I got up and turned on the TV. (218)

Bill Mullen's analysis of the televisual in Carver can lend an explanation of this moment. Readers frequently meet his characters before or after their jobs (if they have one), when "the dull,

omnipresent hum of television serves as a soporific cocoon against the intrusion or consideration of social discontent" (103)—the kind of discontent this narrator seems to feel over the futility of his current work. Yet he is unable to synthesize this futility with the one experienced by the individual laborers who built the cathedrals, in the way the blind man seems to do intuitively. And this disconnect in itself constitutes a blindness of cognition.

The reception history of this story has explained the narrator's experience as various kinds of blindness (that prove far more blind than the blind man's blindness)—a willful spiritual blindness (Peterson 168), a general lack of interest in examining feeling on the part of Carver's characters (Clark 113). These readings offer a compelling account of the narrator's particular obtuseness, but his condition also pertains to a more collective blindness, a class blindness, which refuses to see its condition as a historically situated one. It surfaces in the narrator's attempts at describing cathedrals, as it variously does at other moments. In this way, the narrator becomes a figure for the postmodern "waning of our historicity" described by Jameson. The past that produced the surviving artifacts of the cathedral blurs into the commonplaces of the cultural present in the narrator's account of it; "In those olden days, when they built cathedrals, men wanted to be closer to God. In those olden days, God was an important part of everyone's life. You could tell this from their Cathedral building" (225). Moreover, the narrator is hardly unaware of the impotence of these remarks; his preparations to make them read like an attempt to summon the working class urgency for which Carver longs in his biographical writings. "I stared at the Cathedral on the TV. How could I even begin to describe it? But say my life depended on it. Say my life was being threatened by an insane guy who said I had to do it or else" (224). These mental exercises fail to produce, which the narrator finally acknowledges to the blind man; "I'm sorry . . . but it looks like that's the best I can do for you. I'm just not good at it" (225)—at producing anything other than utterly generic notions of the "olden days" that therefore remain in the obscurity of Jameson's "stereotypical past." Cathedrals do not really signify much of anything for him—a fact he attributes to his indifference towards religion—but even his own agnosticism remains culturally nondescript: "I guess I don't believe in it. In anything. Sometimes it's hard. You know what I'm saying?" (225). He seems not to know quite what he's saying—or what this religious "it" is exactly. "The truth is, cathedrals don't mean anything special to me. Nothing," he continues; "Cathedrals. They're something to look at on late-night TV. That's all they are" (226).

The narrator's inability to generate historically specific content is a social rather than a personal poverty, indicative of his interpellation by the hegemonic, largely televisual discourse; and

this content determines, even scripts all that he can say about cultural artifacts like, say, cathedrals. But the blind man, provisionally and paradoxically allows him to break out of this class "blindness." Much ink has been spilt over the meaning of the narrator's apparent epiphany in the final scene of the story. In it, the narrator draws a cathedral on a shopping bag he recovers from the trash while the blind man follows his movements and then retraces his lines. The act of drawing finally obviates his pseudohistorical attempts to explain the structures. And the moment abruptly becomes an occasion for what we the readers experience as unexplainable intimacy; "His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now" (228). Critics often describe this experience as a kind of awakening—spiritual or otherwise (Peterson 168)—and the story's somewhat incidental religious content (cathedrals) assist this kind of reading. I would add, however, that in this moment sensory experience becomes a stand-in for the emotional depth and understanding the narrator lacks (like so many of Carver's characters). Instead of an epiphany of understanding, he gets the rapture of shared sensory experience (drawing a cathedral with the blind man) that leads to greater intimacy, at least provisionally.

This small miracle goes largely unexplained, though readers can easily recuperate its origins, in light of the way it interacts with the symbolic elements I've already identified—the narrator as a figure for postmodern lack of historicity and political consciousness, and the blind man's growing candidacy as a faintly possible alternative. The beginnings of the narrator's drawing resemble his other efforts to recover something of cathedrals, with his own limited means; "So I began. First I drew a box that looked like a house. It could have been the house I lived in. Then I put a roof on it. At the end of the roof, I drew spires. Crazy" (227). In constructing this unfamiliar historical artifact, he is literally using the tools of his own domestic sphere—the commodified space of what is likely (though significantly we're never told) his small tract home or condo in a lower-middle-class suburb. This reliance renders the drawing as culturally and historically indeterminate as his previous attempts to explain cathedrals. The narrator himself admits that, while the box he draws could be the likeness of a medieval structure, it could just as easily be his own house—until he adds the simulacra of historical detail he's gleaned from the television program, his persistent mediator. But rather suddenly his tacit awareness of this mediation seems to dwindle in the fury of the creative act; "I put in windows with arches. I drew flying buttresses. I hung great doors. I couldn't stop" (227). The more his sense of himself as creator grows in these urgently brief sentences, the greater his precision becomes, until he's actually naming the very details of cathedrals that before either eluded him or came off as inadequate souvenirs of what the TV told him. And then, "the TV station went off the

air. I put down the pen and closed and opened my fingers. The blind man felt around over the paper. He moved the tips of his fingers over the paper, all over what I had drawn, and he nodded" (227). It would be easy to read this moment as the senses supplanting cognition (Clark 110) or some other surmounting of the numb quality that has until now characterized the narrator. This interpretation would be a sensitive one, if also somewhat blind to the more prevailing allegorical meaning that emerges from this sparely illustrated moment; for the channel going off marks something else as well—the *apparent* receding of hegemonic determinants in the narrator's experience. His drawing still relies entirely on the content of the television program, but he no longer mentions TV or wants to remember it at all.

The allegory amplifies this small change, to the extent that the narrator's wife is unable to fathom their project when she suddenly wakes up, saying "What's going on? Robert, what are you doing? What's going on?" (227). What she seems to register as uncanny is in fact the real significance of this moment: the narrator's provisional power over the media which until now stymied his ability to create—or to say anything worth hearing at all. And for the first time, what he creates, in this case draws, can mean something to the blind man; "We're going to really have ourselves something here in a minute" (227) the blind man says, affectionately, following which he tells the narrator to close his eyes:

> Then he said, 'I think that's it. I think you got it,' he said. 'Take a look. What do you think?'
>
> But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do.
>
> 'Well?' he said. 'Are you looking?'
>
> My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.
>
> 'It's really something,' I said. (228)

The narrator is now as blind as Robert the blind man, and as blind to specificity as he ever was—he doesn't feel like he's inside anything at all, let alone inside a class history that might somehow include cathedrals. But if nothing else, he experiences this make-believe silencing of the hegemonic as a welcome and striking novelty he wishes to extend, even just for a few moments. And for the reader as well, the entirety of the story's commodified space is emptied, leaving us a few lines of darkness in which to contemplate this character's experience as something other than its role in late capitalism. The story adamantly refuses to reassure us about the significance of these final events.

What is the narrator experiencing exactly? We cannot know, yet neither do we feel that meaning has been hung out to dry. Carver removes the significance of his "revelation" from textual determination and delivers it to our own cognition, where it exists as a multiplicity of possible meanings—just as it seems to for the narrator. A palpable *desire* for autonomous dark—or what we might think of as a blank canvas—emerges in this moment, but its agency is as vague as the longing for the bourgeois household that Jameson identifies in a descriptive passage from Balzac's *La Vieille Fille* (*Political Unconscious* 420):

> [W]e cannot attribute this particular desire . . . to any individual subject. Biographical Balzac, Implied Author, this or that desiring protagonist: none of these unities are (yet) present, and desire here comes before us in a peculiarly anonymous state which makes a strangely absolute claim on us. (Jameson 228)

In "Cathedral," the desire for autonomous experience is as class-specific as the Balzac novel's bourgeois yearnings, and yet desire is felt as a universally applicable utopian value that ultimately comes to rest with the reader in the way Jameson describes—a movement assisted by the story's deliberate omissions.

Wolfgang Iser argues that such gaps in meaning are not only commonplace in reading fiction but constitutive of it. Literary texts structure the reader's understanding, but the latter will never submit entirely to their control (24); fictional objects "cannot have the total determinacy of real objects, and, indeed, it is the elements of indeterminacy that enable the text to 'communicate' with the reader, in the comprehension of the work's intention" (24). This collaborative meaning, made available by the text and completed by the reader in the fulfillment of "communication" depends on what Iser refers to as "blanks," which have taken various forms in narrative—for example, in Jane Austen's apparently superficial dialogue that, as Virginia Woolf observed, "expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial" (Woolf Qtd. in Iser 168). In this case and in narrative more generally, "What *is* said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning" (168).

This account of reading would *seem* to perfectly describe the experience of reading Carver, particularly when we consider that so much of his description is inhabited by what is not said. However, for Iser these blanks have the instrumental role of coalescing into the themes of narrative. An initial set of blanks prompts the reader to produce theories to fill them, and secondary sets allow her to modify the initial ideation into a more complete understanding (203). Ultimately,

> The discarded image imprints itself on its successor, even though the latter is meant to resolve the deficiencies of the former. In this respect, the images hang together in a sequence, and it is by this sequence that the meaning of the text comes alive in the reader's imagination. (203)

At the culmination of this effect, the images and understandings enabled by the text's series of blanks become linked seamlessly enough for the blanks to effectively "disappear" (183). But in "Cathedral," as in much of Carver, the narrative fetishizes its blanks to the extent that they never fully submit themselves to this process of meaning-making; rather, they maintain their status as conspicuous holes in referentiality, in collaboration with the allegorical removal of the hegemonic. We struggle to supply images of the un-described narrator, wife, and living room, which, in their starkness, do not completely conform to whatever pre-fabricated image of commodified space we might summon. Likewise, we develop theories of the narrator's revelation in drawing the cathedral, but this last, like so many final moments of Carver, refuses to be consolidated by ideation and instead ends the narrative on an utterly unfinished note.

Benjamin's observations in "The Storyteller" can help us make sense of this undetermined quality in relation to the rest of postmodernism. It is precisely indeterminacy which most distinguishes Carver from the prevailing postmodern content—the overpopulated space of advertising and the more canonical maximalist novels that respond to the political dilemmas of representing commodified space in the exact opposite mode. Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, for example, narrated by Wall Street banker and serial killer Patrick Bateman, crowds the reader's imaginary space with brand names and consumer objects. This too has the effect of distorting commodified space, but, unlike Carver's strategies in portraying the lower middle class, Ellis multiplies consumer objects into a hyperactive satire of upper-middle-class New York. We can observe this effect in Bateman's description of the objects of his apartment:

> A down-filled futon lies on an oakwood frame in the center of the bedroom. Against the wall is a Panasonic thirty-one-inch set with a direct-view screen and stereo and beneath it in a glass case is a Toshiba VCR. I'm not sure if the time on the Sony digital alarm clock is correct so I have to sit up then look down at the time flashing on and off on the VCR, then pick up the Ettore Sotass push-button phone that rests on the steel and glass nightstand next to the bed and dial the time number. A cream leather, steel and wood chair designed by Eric Marcus is in one corner of the room, a molded plywood chair in the other. A black-dotted

> beige and white Maud Sienna carpet covers most of the floor. (Easton Ellis Qtd. in Weinrich 68)

This narrative obsession with the minutia of commodified space confines the novel's meaning to the surface of Bateman's words and actions (68); even the heinous murders he commits are unfelt and unjustified. The dichotomy of Ellis' congested prose and Carver's omissions corresponds to Benjamin's distinction between information and storytelling as a retreating form. In particular, the novel has disembodied the modern act of reading, banishing the artisan process by which the oral narrator of epic, folklore, and fairytales conveys his experiences as counsel to his listeners (though writers like Leskov still succeed in replicating this act). This kind of knowledge has been supplanted by modernity's obsession with information:

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it … The most extraordinary, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Benjamin 89)

We can read Ellis' novel as a parodic exaggeration of information's determining effects (though ironically "the psychological connection of the events" is nonetheless banished by the sheer quantity of both descriptive details and the murders), and Carver's stories, an aesthetic and social counterpoint, as an attempt to recuperate the symbolic openness of storytelling. Their meaning derives from the extent to which the reader is permitted to "interpret things the way he understands them." The negative spaces left by the stories' abstention from explanation are where their intensity surges through, and where allegorical meaning finds its location.

Though they must speak to each other across theoretical schools, Iser and Benjamin are actually closer than we might think in their shared desire for a reading practice that prioritizes the reading (or listening) subject's participation. For Benjamin, storytelling grants the reader a collaborative role in meaning denied by the novel. The story's "chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis" (what better descriptor of Carver?) and resistance to "psychological shading" has the strange effect of installing it more completely in the reader's memory (91). This in turn means the story has been integrated into the reader's own experience, making him more inclined to

repeat the story and its wisdom (91). In describing the reader this way, Carver subtly removes the reader from the status of interpreter to that of co-experiencer and co-author; in both the moment of the story's recounting and the subsequent times when the reader will tell it again, the reader becomes an intimate associate of its contents and effect. This status puts the reader in closer, more sensory proximity to the writer as well; storytelling

> does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. (92)

It is exactly this kind of contact that thrills the narrator in the culminating moments of "Cathedral," with the blind man's hand encouragingly pressed to his own; representing the cathedral to the blind man enables a moment of counsel between them as much as it produces an informational understanding of the cathedral's structure. And the indeterminacy of this act creates a parallel experience for the reader, who has the impression of a creative subjectivity behind the imperfect rendering. The utopian *desire* for this kind of subjectivity, free from commodification, is precisely what "Cathedral" allegorizes in this last scene.

But how can such a recruitment of Iser's "Reader" serve what I have interpreted as the story of a class-specific experience? After all, this undetermined reading act is a virtual experience of the kind of subjectivity that no longer seems possible in late capitalism, according to Jameson and the Frankfurt School before him: that of the autonomous subject with meaning and value-making capacities not limited by the political context, as meaning in Carver is often undetermined by the text. The narrator is allowed his few moments of sovereign darkness, and we too have the quiet space with which to supply our interpretation of whatever revelation has occurred (or not). This may seem like the ideological fantasy of independence entertained by the bourgeois subject that Adorno and others have so thoroughly problematized, yet it is at the same time utopian, albeit in an ahistorical sense. Carver's narrator, like all postmodern subjects, can no longer have the autonomous experience he may wish to have and believe he is having. For Adorno, however, this kind of fantasy is constitutive of the artwork's critical capacity:

> Fantasy is also, and essentially so, the unrestricted availability of potential solutions that crystallize within the artwork. It is lodged not only in what strikes one both as existing and as the residue of something existing, but perhaps even more in the transformation of the existing. (173-4)

We can locate this "transformation of the existing" in the story's repurposing of a hegemonically determined setting as autonomous, creative space. The narrative's provisional enactment of autonomy may be the only kind of utopia its characters—and we as readers—can access at all, a fictional critique of both the seeming inevitability of late capitalism and art's collaboration with its operations. Moreover, our identification with what seems like the narrator's own experience in "lack of symbolic closure" collapses the kind of readerly moralism Diane Stevenson practices in her objection to Cheerios. Both reader and narrator are determined by late capitalist productions, and in turn the dismissal of those productions functions as a utopian alternative in both the diegetic world and our own.

Consolidating reader and characters may seem like a reinstallation of the bourgeois subject as ideal recipient and an erasure of the story's class awareness. But such a move is either universalizing in Iser's mode or utopian in the Benjaminian sense of recapturing a creative act that predates commodification. I locate the story's most important moment of critique in the very *simultaneity* and *undecidability* of these two contingencies. They sustain the crepe-like thinness between utopian and ideological thought, a thinness essential to art's critical functioning. As Adorno has described, art wishes to be utopian, "yet at the same time art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance and consolation" (32). To avoid crystallizing into this static, self-satisfied utopia, a kind of fluctuation is required, between the ideology of empirical reality and the autonomy towards which the aesthetic necessarily, though problematically, strives:

> Artistic experience is brought of its own accord into movement by the contradiction that the constitutive immanence of the aesthetic sphere is at the same time the ideology that undermines it. Aesthetic experience must overstep itself. It traverses the antithetical extremes rather than settling peacefully into a spurious median between them. (349)

In "Cathedral," the moment when we might distinguish between the utopian and ideological intentions of the aesthetic is configured as blindness with a double valence; the narrator can literally close his eyes, remove the hegemonic narrative, even if these few moments are a delusion of autonomy. And this allows for brief tenderness with the only person he has encountered who can sidestep the hegemonic, through a disadvantage that ironically enables fledgling access to affective, social, and historical knowledge—the blind man, Robert. Moreover, the narrator's experience with Robert generates a creative act parallel to the reader's own interpretive co-authorship in Benjamin's analysis. When Carver's narrator closes his eyes in sympathy and concentration, the space of his home recedes to the point that he doesn't feel like he is "inside anything"—itself an ahistorical,

universalist status—but one that serves as a fragile subversion to being inside the consumer something.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. and Ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Duluth: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Print.

Barth, John. "A Few Words About Minimalism." *Webster Studies: An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal* 4.2 (1987): 5-14. Print.

Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." *The Novel*. Ed. Dorothy Hale. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 229-234. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. NY: Shocken, 2007. 83-110.

Carver, Raymond. "Cathedral." *Cathedral: Stories*, NY: Knopf, 1983. Print.

---. "Raymond Carver, the Art of Fiction No. 76." Interview with Monica Simpson and Lewis Buzbee. *The Paris Review* 88.5 (1983): 192-221. Web.

---. "Popular Mechanics." *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. NY: Knopf, 1981. Print.

Clark, Robert C. "Keeping the Reader in the House: American Minimalism, Literary Impressionism, and Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.1(2012): 104-118. Print.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalism Realism*. London: Zero Books, 2009. Print.

Harker, Ben. "'To be there, inside, and not be there': Raymond Carver and Class." *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007): 715-736. Print.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke U P, 1991. 1-54. Print.

---. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithica: Cornell UP, 1982. Print.

Just, Daniel."Is Less More? A Reinvention of Realism in Raymond Carver's Minimalist Short Story." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 49.3 (2008): 303-317. Print.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. London: Harvard U P, 2009. Print.

Mullen, Bill. "A Subtle Spectacle: Televisual Culture in the Short Stories of Raymond Carver," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 39.2 (1998): 99-114. Print.

Peterson, Poly Rose. "Psychological Distance in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral.'" *The Explicator* 70.3 (2012): 167-169. Print.

Sammarcelli, Francoise. "What's Postmodern about Raymond Carver?" *Critical Insights: Raymond Carver*. Ed. James Plath. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013. 226-243.

Stevenson, Diane."Minimalist Fiction and Critical Doctrine."*Mississippi Review*14 (1985): 83-89. Print.

Simmons, Phillip E. "Minimalist Fiction as 'Low' Postmodernism: Mass Culture and the Search for History.'" *Genre* 24.1 (199): 45-62. Print.

Weinreich, Martin. "'into the Void': The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 49.1 (2004). 65-78. Print.

Abstract

Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" can be read as a story of a metaphorically blind narrator's intimate and transformative interaction with a physically blind man, an interaction in which the narrator evolves from someone who"[doesn't] believe in anything" into someone capable of finding meaning in life. By focusing attention on the parallel de-evolution of his wife's engaged presence, this essay suggests that the couple inhabit a world of the dispossessed in which agency is a zero-sum game, and thus questions, in part through consideration of narrative distance and gender relations, whether the story can promise any lasting change.

Keeping Our Eyes Closed: Unsustainable Transformation in Raymond Carver's "Cathedral"

Madeleine Stein

The arc of Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" appears smooth and complete: a narrator warily and grumpily awaits the arrival of a blind man whom his wife has invited to dinner. He seems bent on getting through most of the evening by sharing a series of sardonic jokes with himself ("It's one of our pastimes," he says to the blind man after offering him a drink (216)), but his plans to remain disengaged are derailed when he is called on to describe a cathedral to the blind man. He takes a minute to absurdly consider if he could describe a cathedral even if his "life was being threatened by an insane guy who said [he] had to do it or else" and finally tells the blind man that it just "isn't in [him] to do it" (226). He doesn't have the words. But the blind man, who by now seems more divine messenger than guest, has an idea: they will draw one instead. And so they do, on an old paper shopping bag, with a ballpoint pen, the blind man's hand resting on the narrator's until, with his own eyes closed, he gets it. Throughout the story the narrator, even more unreliable to himself than to us, reveals his hopes and fears through the choreography of mundane actions and objects--his clueless search for a ball point pen, or an onion skin floating ominously at the bottom of the shopping bag. Determinedly anhedonic at the start, he experiences a moment of intimacy and freedom, maybe even joy, as he and the blind man draw. His last words to us are: "It's really something"; as such the ending not only exemplifies but helps us to define epiphany.

On initial reading, the narrator's wife neatly provides a motivating counterpoint. Ten years earlier, on a different coast, she had worked as a reader for the blind man and stayed in touch with him through tapes. Early on, the husband turns aside from his own narrative to tell us the history of this friendship, and what clearly astounds him (but not us) the most is that on her last day on the job, the blind man touched her, tracing the shape of her face "—even her neck!" (210). Robert C.

Clark suggests that the narrator, by dwelling on this detail of touch, is retrospectively recognizing that his wife "provided the impetus for the drawing scene…by demonstrating how engaging in a sensory exchange with another person can lead to profound understanding" (113).

Thus the wife (and to the end she is known as "my wife") is established as one whose sensibility is exactly that which escapes the husband. Unlike him, she is, in this reading, "actively involved in the process of living," and finding meaning in her life, as Vanessa Hall suggests is typical of Carver's female characters (60). To her ability to be intimate with another is quickly added emotional delicacy (her suicide attempt in the face of an unfeeling military establishment), her inclination to turn towards words for solace and escape (she tried to write a poem about the touch, as was her habit), and her ability to move outward into the world (she is at the outset, out of the house, gone to pick up her friend at the train) or what Kirk Nesset calls "her independent nature in general" (124) —all those exact attributes without which the narrator is trapped inside himself.

All is in place, but, as with most rich literature, the story turns itself over with each reading to reveal more complications, and at a certain point what is revealed begins to undermine this neatness and even the reliability of the concepts of epiphany and transformation in reading this story. Does the narrator, in fact, undergo a change?

That in this story the narrator has experienced something for the first time is made explicit: "It was like nothing else in my life up to now" (228). But, do all epiphanies—all realizations or revelations—by their nature bring about change? It seems likely that one of the oldest scenes of epiphany—that is, the Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Magi—did bring about felt change. Like other religious revelations, what was revealed concerned our relationship to divinity, and, in a worldview that includes divinity, there is a story, an arc, and most importantly, the possibility of existence in a world made *meaning*ful by its relation to another world. But that's not Carver's world. Carver writes from a world narrated by a man who says, "I guess I don't believe in anything" (225), a world in which revelations/epiphanies, as powerless as those who experience them, occur simply as that—brief revelations, or glimpses, that not only do not in themselves last but do not necessarily impinge upon life as lived and perceived by an individual, because the world, as experienced by Carver's narrator, is only a parallel, or even subordinate, world to an unspecified other world in which larger forces bring about change. In his world, even interior changes are tenuous and passing, no more capable of sustaining themselves in the face of external circumstances and pressure than the uplift after the first sip of Scotch.

The nature of this world is made clear, and in some ways set, as if by contract, in the first sentence. The opening word of the story "this" (followed by "blind man,") first induces our awareness of the narrator's (and so our own, for already with this word he has established his occupation of ourselves, and his interest become ours) futility and absurdity. "This" (the more neutral version would be "a") connotes not only his distrust of the world and his need to keep his distance but also his perception that his situation is a given, which, although as yet unspecified by him, has been specified somehow by a force larger than himself. This sense continues throughout the story, through the use of short passive sentences ("Arrangements were made" (209)) that say to the reader: *you know what I mean, it's all been written already,* and his use of parentheses (later in the story, he sums up his responses to the blind man's question in this fashion: "How long had I been in the present position? (Three years.) Did I like my work? (I didn't.) Was I going to stay with it? (What were the options?)" (218))—parentheses that say: *What else could I say; what else could be true? Do I have any choice? And, anyway, you know all this.* How this particular nameless working-class white man, and maybe we, can continue to live with this inevitability, is then the question that carries us through to and beyond the end.

That there is no explicit change recorded does not, of course, preclude the fact of a change. Robert C. Clark, in an exploration of the aesthetic of Carver's minimalism, sees the story's narrator as an example of a minimalist narrator who "objectively reports past sensory experiences" but cannot grasp their significance (104). Specifically, he notes that "time and distance have not granted [the narrator of "Cathedral"] the capacity to explain why he is different" (111). The change, the difference, this would imply, then manifests itself in the intervening time and space between the narrative and the reading. But has time, in fact, passed; has distance been covered? Clark would say yes, as this "oft-anthologized tale is a first-person *retrospective* narration, a crucial fact that most scholars tend to either miss or ignore" (108; emphasis mine). The narrator's position, he articulates, is "one of remembrance; he is thinking back to a previous state of 'self.'" While possible, maybe even probable, this is not the only reading, and there are others that free the narrative more from the present time of the reader, the one into which presumably time has passed.

The fact that the narrative is recounted in the past tense may seem enough to support Clark's claim and, according to Genette's taxonomy, this fact *is* enough to make the narrative a *subsequent narration (220)* yet Genette, in his examination of subsequent narrating, recognizes that "one of the fictions of literary narrating—perhaps the most powerful one, because it passes unnoticed, so to speak—is that the narrating involves an instantaneous action, without a temporal

dimension' (222), creating a paradox in all subsequent narrations both connotes the temporal relationship of the narrating to the story and an atemporal "essence." Genette likens this to a Proustian reminiscence, " a minute freed from the order of Time" (223) And it is this fiction that works on the reader, a self already in the mood, ensconced as she is in a reading of fiction, for the suspension of disbelief, and though this suspension is more commonly associated with a willingness to discard the physical laws of reality, imagine instead that one possible way in which we suspend disbelief when we read fiction is the acceptance of a narrative consciousness that is conscious in two times at once—that is, a voice in the present who tells the story from the exact point at which it—or even each of its moments—ends without taking the *time* to turn it into narrative. In this sense, the husband in the room (the hero) is making an instantaneous escape into the narrating "I," the "I" that, unlike him, speaks without interruption, that gets, in the midst of the other stories that erase him, to simultaneously tell *his* story in all its (possibly scotch-soaked) poetic coherence, an imaginary dialogue between him and someone who cares (not, for him, we learn, God) that will replace the broken off, necessarily not fully heard statement of who he is, a story in short, in which he rises to the level an unassailable protagonist. In other words, the disbelief that we are asked to suspend is that the narrativization cannot occur without the passage of time; instead we accept that it happens as soon as the story comes into being and is thus a disinterested rendering, or at least disinterested in the sense that no future present imposes its distorting interests (wants and needs) on memory, but only the deep-seated, timeless and language-based pressing upon us of the unconscious with its buried wants and needs that maybe come as close as possible to revealing a moment's self.

In this reading, what this immediate recall cannot do is have any consciousness of difference beyond the ending, not because it has not been granted by time and distance, but because the narrator has experienced neither progression in time nor distance since the ending. His narrative does not reveal an incapacity for reflection; in fact, he has a significant and revealing though small moment of reflection as noted below. Thus, as a colleague points out, if we accept this instantaneous narration, "the narrator is no longer necessarily read as 'unseeing' (*not* like us, and somehow damaged or disabled) but rather still in a place of experience (like us)" (Osborne).

If the narrator does not undergo even an implicit change, then what is the role of the wife who has been understood as the impetus for this change? In fact, it is the narrative of the wife that first unsettled my more comfortable reading of the story and led me to re-imagine its structure. What I first noticed in the course of a repeated re-reading is that Carver has allowed in, as if in a musical composition, a contrapuntal undercurrent to the narrative of wife as impetus for change—a

series of exchanges between the narrator and his wife that begin before we even meet the blind man and that eventually undermine this reading of the wife's role.

The first exchange in this series opens with the narrator suggesting to his wife that he take the blind man out to bowl. We don't know for sure if the absurdity and callousness is conscious or not, but in any case, the reader's heart ticks on until the wife puts down the knife with which she's been slicing potatoes and lays it bare: "If you love me, you can do this for me, If you don't love me, okay" (212). The husband's next gambit is to ask if the man's wife is a Negro, at which point the wife *seems* to hurl a potato on the floor ("She picked up a potato. I saw it hit the floor"—again phrased as a record of the inevitable) while saying: "Are you crazy?… Are you drunk?" "I'm just asking," the husband says (213). The narration doesn't crack a smile; but we laugh a bit. And so it begins, a series of questions, suggestions, or actions that exasperate the wife and seem both to be aimed at belittling the idea of her friendship with a blind man or to be ineffectual attempts on the part of the husband to get his wife on his side, to enact the coziness of hosts' chitchat that one has before one settles down to the arduous work of behaving oneself in front of the guests.

No coziness ensues. The story moves forward. The wife goes to the depot, returns with the blind man, whom she introduces as Robert (the only named character in the story), and the three of them move into the living room, as, the narrator says with plaintive hope, "a little group" (215). The wife guides the blind man to the sofa that she tells him they bought two weeks ago, and, as noted above, the narrator tells *us* that he liked the old sofa, and that he started to say something about that old sofa but decided not to. And so it seems that he will stay silent, excluded from the world his wife inhabits, the world of expression, not part of any "little group."

The pattern of exchanges between the husband and wife continues, even with Robert there, as if now the narrator, who truly is drunk, is left with only himself and cannot let go of some desperate cosmic joke. The narrator asks Robert, "Which side of the train did you sit on, by the way?" knowing that when traveling up the Hudson there is a better side, but only because it is the side from which one *sees* the river. "What a question, which side. What's it matter, which side?" the wife says to protect the blind man (215). Before they dig in to a meal, the narrator husband says, "Now let us pray," and the wife looks at him agape (217), knowing as we will later come to know, that he is not religious, but she's fallen for the bait: he offers up a mock grace. And so on: "I got up and turned on the TV. My wife looked at me with irritation. She was heading toward a boil" (218). When the narrator offers the blind man a joint, the wife gives him, he tells us, "a savage look" (220).

But in Robert's presence, the exchanges begin to acquire a different tone, and it is in this sense that they provide counterpoint, one that undermines our, the reader's sense, of the wife's positioning as the healthy, wise, and agentic one. After the wife protests the train question, Robert answers and responds thoughtfully as if there was nothing odd at all about it. Because it turns out he does know which side he sits on, he does know the difference between color and black and white TV, and he probably would go bowling as quickly as he would try smoking a joint. ("Robert, I didn't know you smoked," the wife says. "I do now, my dear. There's a first time for everything," Robert says" (220).)

And so, from this point onward, with each step, it is the wife, not the husband, who is excluded, shunted more and more to the edge of the conversation, until, in fact, drunk and a bit stoned, she falls asleep. The husband, at first a bit alarmed at being alone with the blind man and with us, distracts himself by playing the role of an oaf, telling us that his wife had, in falling asleep, exposed "a juicy thigh," and that he had begun to draw her robe over it. But no sooner does he let out this ironic caricature of objectification than he thinks, "What the hell!"—*the blind man can't see*—and flips the robe open again (221) in wry recognition at the absurdity of his ever gaining an edge in his world.

What is noteworthy is that as she sleeps, the husband begins to awaken from what Hall refers to as Carver' protagonists' "inexplicable lethargy" (60). When the blind man asks him whether he minded if the blind man stayed up longer, the husband says, "I'm glad for the company." (222) And then, as if coming upon himself from behind, he turns to us and adds, "And I guess I was," as if he had come upon himself unawares, and was allowing himself to take note of something previously unknown. He also soon drops into his narration that he usually stayed up alone at night, smoking dope, as long as he could, because he "had these dreams" from which he'd wake, "[his] heart going crazy" (222), and then, after that intimate glimpse, he turns quickly back to the television.

From then on his narration is taken up with his attempt to convey to the blind man what is on the TV, but in the middle, a strangely layered bit of narration occurs. He says to us, "Then something occurred to me, and I said, 'Something has occurred to me. Do you have any idea what a cathedral is?'" (223). The phrasal repetition "something occurred", a mocking authorial intrusion, or possibly a half conscious self-mocking intrusion on the part of the narrator, both amuses us and joins the moment of experience to that of narration, and, more significantly, suggests that in this

passage the narrator considers for the first time what it feels like to be someone else, considers that there are other ways of being.

But still he can't, it turns out, convey experience, even televisual experience, with just words. And so he and the blind man literally escape the new sofa and sit on the carpet in front of the coffee table, like children, to draw. As the narrator draws, the blind man closes his hand over the narrator's (a healing hand, the same hand he once placed on the wife's neck) and the reader watches, breath withheld, as if our hands, too, were on top of theirs. Rather than the narrator suggesting, as Clark has it, that his wife has provided the impetus for the drawing, the narrative's staging suggests that she seems to have to disappear for the drawing to happen.

Consistent with his reading, Clark also connects the wife with the narrator's *present* interest in telling the story. "Carver," he writes, "omits one of his speaker's primary motivations for telling the story: he is indirectly admitting that he has a better understanding of his wife" (113). It is this understanding that he identifies as the "difference" the narrator cannot apprehend. Samira Sasani, focusing not on the story so much as on the narrative (217), goes further; not only does the narrator understand his wife, he is imbued with her sensibilities, in a process that Sasani describes as "the gradual transformation of the male narrator [of "Cathedral"] to the female narrator [that] happens when the narrator sees the blind man in his house" (221). Here she invokes Rebecca Warhol's distinction between a "distancing" male narrator and an "engaging" female narrator, in which distance—and here Warhol too draws on Genette's analysis of narrative discourse, is the distance between narrative and the story. The more intrusive narrator, by reminding us (through his or her presence) of the fictionality of the story, creates more distance. Sasani sums up Warhol's distinction in this way:

> Generally speaking, a distancing narrator, as the name implies, discourages the actual reader from identifying themselves with the narratee, with the characters and in general with the story. The distancing narrator may evoke laughter or annoyance in an actual reader who do [*sic*] not like to identify with the narratee. The task of the engaging narrator, in contrast, is to evoke sympathy of an actual reader who is unknown to the author (218-19).

With this theoretical approach established, Sasani then points out that the early narrator of "Cathedral" aims for "comical effect" (221), one that will allow him to retain a "manly" distance and to highlight the fictionality of the narrative and thus not engage the reader's empathy. Later, Sasani says, "the more the narrator gets familiar with the blind man the more she employs engaging strategies" (221), using the pronoun "she" at this point to refer to the voice of the husband's

narration. Thus, while in Clark's reading the ending signifies that the *husband* reaches a new understanding of his wife, in Sasani's the ending signifies that the *narrator* becomes capable of empathic narration.

When the wife wakes, she finds the husband and the blind man, hand over hand, drawing a picture of a cathedral on an old shopping bag. She is unsettled and says, "What are you doing? Tell me, I want to know" (227). The narrator reports that he doesn't answer and that Robert answers, "We're drawing a cathedral. Me and him are working on it," but turns right back to the husband: "Press hard." Neither of them look at her, though the narrator notes her robe has fallen open, so she repeats, now directly challenging the blind man: "What are you doing?" "It's all right," he says, and then, without explanation, turns again to the husband: "Close your eyes now." He does; he closes our only eyes, and she's gone to us. The narrative continues to unfold, paced like love-making, until Carver has the narrator tell us: "It was like nothing else in my life up to now;" the words themselves sound like nothing else we've read in our lives up till now.

"I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything," the narrator tells us, before closing with what he says to the world: "It's really something." The issue of getting out, literally and metaphorically, is pressing throughout the story. But although the wife's ability to move outward from the home (we know the narrator goes off to a job, but his parenthetical resigned responses to Robert's questions about his work tell us that he does so in an even more numbed state than that with which he leads his life at home) suggests that the husband, counter to stereotypical gender roles, is confined to the domestic space, there really isn't much of a *domestic* space, a space of home—or a safe haven—for either of them.

Their common space is a vulnerable one. In the early paragraphs of the story the narrator tells us about his wife's life before their marriage. "How do I know these things?" he feels compelled to ask us; "She told me," he answers, as if telling one's story is remarkable (210). She told him, for instance, and also told the blind man by means of the tapes she made, that "she loved her [first] husband but she didn't like it where they lived and didn't like the military industrial thing" and "got to feeling lonely and cut off from people she kept losing in that moving–around life" (211). She swallowed all her pills and got in the bath to die but instead, the narrator tells us, got sick. Why does the husband tell us specifically of her response to the military? In this detail that doesn't enter otherwise into the story's plot, what foreshadowing is Carver offering in this tightly resonant story? The story was written in 1981, the events related "ten years ago," and when the narrator tells us that he has "these dreams" from which he awakes, "his heart beating like crazy" (222), the narration

echoes that of a war veteran. Can we think of this as an implicit and imploring reference to Vietnam? Has he too been adrift in the "military industrial thing"? Those questions cannot and don't necessarily need to be answered, but the suggestion is there that the husband has experienced horrors that leave him alienated and unable to return to the land of believers.

His "space" seems more like a moving cocoon, about as large as the "old sofa" and the drink in his hand, and that, the old sofa, has been jerked out from under him, disorienting him. Her space is the basket of pens on her table. It is this orbital cohabitation, the waking/sleeping pendulum, and the shared trauma that adds another possible reading of the ending. In this reading, the wife and the husband remain at once isolated from each other, in a zero-sum exchange of lethargy and wakefulness, joined by their communal traumas in a way that even may constitute a form of tenuous love. Love *is* in their vocabulary: "'If you love me,' she said, 'you can do this for me. If you don't love me, okay'" (212).

As such, the information given us by the narrative suggests a world in which even the power of gender to define us is made irrelevant by the presence of other forces. After all, that "comical effect" that Sasani attributes to the distancing narrator lasts well beyond the arrival of the blind man. Yet, neither character seemed liberated in the way one might anticipate from being loosed from outside definitional forces, particularly gender. In other words, rather than the male narrator becoming a female narrator, the story shows us that, in their particular constellation of socioeconomic (working class) and historical (post-Vietnam disillusionment) factors, neither can claim privilege, and yet Trauma transcends gender and has taken it out of them, whatever arrogance is necessary to truly believe one's wants and needs can be expressed as morally or naturally justified, is gone. What is left is the possibility for a more authentic expression, free of stupefying power and institutionalized illusion, a moment in which one can say, "It was like nothing else in my life up to now," and so reveal a conscious self.

For several years I have adhered to the Aristotelian notion that, in a good story, a protagonist can be identified as the character who undergoes a significant change. So, if the narrator does not have a better understanding of his wife, what is the change? Does he come to realize his own prejudices, a common reading? Too superficial; and in any case, Carver doesn't suggest this is true; in one of the last small paragraphs, the narrator continues to refer to Robert, whose name he knows, as "the blind man." Does Carver want to suggest that the narrator can now get off the floor, sit on that new sofa, and then walk out the door into a meaningful job, a meaningful life?

In an overview of "Cathedral," Diane Henningfeld notes that while the reader of the story has been engaged in meaning-making, in reading the signs in the minimalist narration, the narrator himself has recused himself from creative participation, until the moment of drawing. Then, with his hand guiding the blind man's, (or maybe being guided by the blind man's in the manner of an Ouija board), Henningfeld claims that "for the first time in his life, the narrator is actively participating in meaning-making," and sees "the essence of human life." In this reading, the ending offers both the image of momentary engagement and the promise of a new and sustainable understanding of life.

By *sustainable*, I mean to connote what *sustainable* means in the world of development: a change that not only occurs in the context of a revelatory moment, but which is accompanied by the perceived necessary infrastructural and institutional support. I'm not sure we can promise ourselves the miracle of sustainable change in the reading of "Cathedral." In the system the narrator lives in, a possible fictional representation of our own, *transformative* epiphanies without material change may no longer be available.

As such, the story, which is highly anthologized and widely taught, becomes perhaps less optimistic, and students often, we know, crave optimism, crave the message that affirms the notions of consequentiality that have led some of them to college. It seems privileged to ask students to question this, but illusory not to, and I want to suggest that the text as an artistic creation may have to be enough for us, that is, still worth our while, just as the moment of drawing is enough for the narrator. The story may not have wanted to suggest that art supplies *meaning*, a meaning that illuminates life, but only that art, creation, makes life livable, in moments. We only know that art has given the husband, as long as his eyes remain closed, a moment of peace, a sense of being in a world not dwarfed by any other, not "inside anything," and yet inside himself. But his story ends there; he will not be opening his eyes. The story has a beginning, middle and end not because of the occurrence of change, but because it has illustrated a passing, and not a necessarily enduring, moment of unmitigated presence.

Works Cited

Carver, Raymond. "Cathedral."*Cathedral*. New York: Vintage, 1984. Print.

Clark, Robert C. "Keeping the reader in the house: American minimalism, literary impressionism, and Raymond Carver's "Cathedral."' *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.1 (2012): 104-118. Web.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse*. Tran. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1980. Print.

Hall, Vanessa. "Influences of Feminism and Class on Raymond Carver's Short Stories." *The Raymond Carver Review* 2 (Spring 2009): 54-80.

Henningfeld, Diane Andrews. "Cathedral." *Short Stories for Students*. Detroit: Gale, 2002. *Literature Resource Center*. Web.

Nesset, Kirk. "Insularity and Self-Enlargement in Raymond Carver's Cathedral." *Essays in Literature* 21. (1994): 116-128.*Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson)*. Web.

Osborne, Sandra. "Re: Cathedral." Message to the author. 21 July 2015. E-mail.

Sasani, Samira. "Raymond Carver, Male and Female Interventions in 'Cathedral."' *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4.1 (January 2014): 217-223. Literature Online. Web.

Warhol, Rebecca. Qtd. in Sasani.

Abstract

Raymond Carver's "Sixty Acres" is an early story, first published in 1969 and then included in his 1976 collection *Will You Please be Quiet, Please?* In this essay, Ann Olson examines the historical complexities of native versus immigrant relations. The story's main character, Lee Waite, is a Yakama tribesman in the late 1950's who re-experiences, on an absurdly smaller scale, what his ancestors lived through one hundred years earlier: a resolve to avoid further bloodshed and live in peace with white intrusion. Working against unspoken directives from his children, mother, and neighbors to kill the intruders on his land, Waite takes his gun, confronts young white duck-hunters, and—verging on the paternal in his forgiveness—lets them go.

"Kill who?": Forgiving the Immigrants in Raymond Carver's "Sixty Acres"

Ann Olson

Americans have a long history of love-hate relationships involving immigrants. We regularly hear news of hate crimes like that of recently-executed Mark Stroman, the white-supremacist "Arab slayer" who, in imagined retaliation against the 9-11 terrorist attacks, shot three convenience store clerks in Dallas, killing two. All three of Stroman's victims were South Asian Muslims—not one was Arab. Raisuddin Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi immigrant, survived Stroman's gunshot to the face. Working against the pattern of violence, Bhuiyan fought to save Stroman from Death Row. Bhuiyan even mounted a lawsuit against former Governor Rick Perry and the state of Texas—believing that the answer to violence against immigrants is *not* more killing. Bhuiyan believed that forgiveness and letting go are essential to reconciliation and the healing process (Giridharadas). A story with similar implications of violence, Raymond Carver's "Sixty Acres," explores the long and complicated history of native vs. immigrant relations through Lee Waite, a fictional Yakama Nation tribal member who is trying to live in peace with whites on reservation land. Waite confronts the descendants of immigrants who stand for the cause of all his troubles and, like Mark Stroman, he takes his gun with the threat to kill the intruders. Instead of violence, however, Waite opts for a fatherly forgiveness, yet that does not mean the story has a happy ending as the interstices of history and story demonstrate.

A difference between the Texas incident and Carver's story is the perception of who is native and who is immigrant. Stroman, based on his *whiteness* and American citizenship, assumes to be "native" American while othering immigrants of color. Waite, based on his aboriginal status and citizenship in a sovereign Indian nation, assumes his identity as "native" while perceiving Carver's

white duck hunters as immigrants. In each situation, the "natives" (both Stroman and Waite) see themselves as protectors of their native land. From the perspective of the youthful duck hunters, "native" (with its early and late historical connotations of savagery, etc.) is othered and disempowered while "whiteness" (with its early and later historical connotations of civilized) is empowered. From Waite's perspective, on the other hand, he strives to retain his power of "native" connoting an original and spiritual relationship with his environment. Waite sees the duck hunters—the white immigrants—as the violent, destructive new-comers and usurpers. In the Texas incident and in Carver's story, the *white v. other* and the *native v. immigrant* binaries shift claims, perceptions, and assumptions of power.[1] These same binaries of power are the very stuff of Carver's story as it incorporates past and present history of the Yakama Nation. "Sixty Acres" is a small-stage repetition of the broader, historical, European-immigration into the New World, specifically of the nineteenth century European-immigration into the Yakima Valley. What the story historicizes is the personal and communal psychological dynamic that is missing from the "history" of the 1855 treaty and which continued into the mid-twentieth century of Carver's home place and, indeed, into the twenty-first century, as recent American-Indian protests againt the oil pipeline running through sacred Indian lands attest to.

What happened between Mark Stroman and his immigrant victims, and what happens whenever a "native" population is forced to deal with a new wave of immigrants into an area, has all played out before in the United States. William Bradford, the first governor and committed historian of Plymouth Plantation, characterized the New World as a New Canaan, blatantly claiming that the land was granted to them by God.[2] While there were some initial and lasting friendly relations between the English immigrants and the Indians, Bradford also chronicles several violent skirmishes, the most notable being the "War" with the Pequots, who by mid-nineteenth century were nearly exterminated.[3]

This ideology of God-given land evolved into the notion of "manifest destiny," which fueled the westward expansion of the nineteenth century and the displacement of nearly all indigenous people east of the Mississippi River. North European immigrants (Mark Stroman's ancestors ironically among them) stretched their presence and influence across the continent, killing Natives and confining them to reservations.[4] When the settlers began reaching the Pacific Northwest, there were tribes who fought back. The Yakama, under Chief Kamiakin, led the would-be ancestors of Carver's fictional character, Lee Waite, in armed resistance. Most battles between indigenous people

and colonizers ended in defeat, but some ended in treaties that still maintain the legal standard for protecting American Indian rights today.

The Washington Territory Treaty of 1855 describes 12 million acres of land that the Indians "ceded" to the government, leaving roughly one-tenth of their original holdings as closed reservation. In exchange, the Treaty promises the Confederated Tribes including the Yakama Nation near Yakima, Washington, "exclusive right" to the foods they consider essential to traditional life through fishing, hunting, and gathering in "usual and accustomed places" (U.S. Department of State). Their continued access to traditional water courses and food sources was of utmost importance and their main point of treaty negotiation. It should be noted that all tribal treaty-signers were learned in oral, not written, communication, and they understood the Americans' words on the treaty would honor their right to traditional livelihood "as long as the sun shines and the river runs" (Fisher 10).

In the Yakama oral tradition of their creation story, the Creator decreed that they be protectors of the living bounty, the "sacred gifts" of these accustomed places, establishing the original covenant between the people and the fish, game, and plant life of that specific area. Chief Me-ni-nock in 1915 explained, "I was not brought from a foreign country and did not come here. I was put here by the Creator" (Fisher 12).[5] Elizabeth Woody further clarifies that this divine directive establishes her "people of the salmon" as being one with the earth:

> It was a holistic worldview that spoke of unity with the Earth, the sky, waters, and our little relatives upon the land. The law was unwritten, and our responsibility was to be the "voice of the land." That is our law. (180) [6]

The people, then, as the Creator intended them, were put here to protect these living resources as they would protect themselves. Moteover, it was this mutually sustaining and protecting interconnection with their land that the Yakama sought to guarantee in the Treaty of 1855 and that the Yakama Nation still strives to protect today.[7]

However, tribal signers of the Treaty could not have envisioned how their land would look more than one hundred years into the future: the towns, rectangular fenced fields, cars and highways; the sheer numbers of immigrants who would dam the Columbia, populate and pollute their "accustomed places," and, like the teen-aged Raymond Carver, ignore tribal licensure to hunt illegally on reservation property (Sklenicka 30-31). They could not have predicted the injustice and oppression, the "social, economic, and environmental repercussions embedded in federal land and

water management policies in the Pacific Northwest" that would keep most of their people poor for the next 150 years (Wriglesworth "Stepping" 56). In the context of Carver's short story, members of the Yakama Nation could not have foreseen that their sons would come to inherit the embarrassing absurdity of defending a 60-acre plot of reservation land from white-boy duck poachers.

Carver's Lee Waite is a Yakama husband and father who *is living* that absurdity. He re-enacts what Chief Kamiakin went through in 1855, but on a pathetically smaller scale. Carver symbolically reduces the Indians' original 12 million acres to a sixty-acre allotment of reservation land situated between Fort Simcoe State Park and the site of the Battle of Toppenish Creek. At that battle, the Yakama tribal forces drove the U.S. soldiers off their land, but the soldiers repeated their trespass until the Yakamas were defeated. Kamaikin and his people ultimately chose to sign the treaty and live in peace with the fact of white immigrant intrusion as an alternative to endless war and killing. One hundred years after that battle, Waite, as Kamaikin's fictional descendent, also faces repeated trespass by white intruders *on this same land*. Instead of soldiers, Waite must drive off illegal hunters, two scared-to-sobs white boys, and—like Kamaikin, Waite chooses not to enact violence, but instead to let the poachers go.

Before letting the poachers go, however, Waite feels the pressure of the unspoken message of his family and neighbors to fight, and possibly even to kill the white intruders. The intrusion on Waite's land recalls the historical intrusion of white colonists onto Yakama land. Joseph Eagle is the first one to call on Lee Waite to "do something" about the men shooting, as it was "the third or fourth time this winter someone had been in there" (on Waite's part of Toppenish Creek). Waite wishes "the old Indian would let him be about that land," that Eagle would "do something else about it, if he wanted, besides call." Waite is a peaceful, hard-working supporter of his family who clearly would rather not have to deal with any hunters: "He wasn't afraid; it wasn't that, he told himself. He just didn't want trouble" (49).

The second appeal for Waite to do something comes from his two small boys who feel excited as they watch their father take the double-barreled shot gun and a handful of shells from the cabinet. Benny, the oldest, asks, "Aren't you going to load it, Papa?" Waite knows exactly what his sons are hoping for: "Ever since the call they had been after him—had wanted to know if this time he was going to shoot somebody. It bothered him, kids talking like that, like they would enjoy it" (50).[8] Later, Carver reveals that Waite had already lost his two older brothers when they were only

boys, so his own children's eagerness for killing reflects the historical reality of tribal loss through violence that Waite wants to avoid.

The next and perhaps strongest appeal is from Waite's usually unresponsive mother who is dozing in a chair by the heat; when he "glanced covertly" at her in Carveresque silent communication, "She squinted her eyes at him and nodded" (50). He could take the nod as a sign of her approval, but Waite can't be sure what the nod means; in fact, "he didn't know any more what her little signs and signals, her silences, were supposed to mean" (50). He speaks directly to her but she will not respond: "Waite looked at her for a minute and watched her tug at the ends of her braids, waited for her to say something. Then he grunted and crossed by in front of her, took his hat off a nail, and went out" (51).

The final appeal is another stare and nod, which comes from fellow tribal member and neighbor, Charley Treadwell:

> He [Waite] remembered what Charley had told him a few days ago, about a fight Charley had had last Sunday with some kid who came over his fence in the afternoon and shot into a pond of ducks, right down by the barn. The ducks came in there every afternoon, Charley said. They *trusted* him, he said, as if that mattered. He'd run down from the barn where he was milking, waving his arms and shouting, and the kid had pointed the gun at him. If I could've just got that gun away from him, Charley had said, staring hard at Waite with his one good eye and nodding slowly. (51-52)

The "If I could've . . ." phrase is left unfinished; Lee must infer Charley's meaning from the hard stare and the slow nod, so similar to his mother's silent signals. What Charley leaves unspoken is that he could have killed the intruder, could have taken the kid's gun and shot him with it; after all, the kid had threatened him with the gun first, and on his own property. Waite's mother's nod and unspoken message to "do it" made him so uncomfortable that he had to leave the room, and his exchange with Charley also makes him uncomfortable as he "hitched a little in his seat. He did not want any trouble like that. He hoped whoever it was [poaching ducks] would be gone when he got there, like the other times" (52). Like Kamiakin before him, Lee Waite is tired of the burden of protecting the land and the life dependent upon it, and now there's the added spoken, and therefore more powerful, burden of this idea that the ducks *trusted* them with their survival—"as if that mattered," Lee thinks.

Waite seems to understand exactly what Charley means about the ducks' trust, as it reminds them both of the ancient covenant with the Creator that has been nearly erased by time and circumstance, by the loss of the ceded lands, and by the fact that they and the ducks live in the shadow of Fort Simcoe that has made that trust nearly impossible to protect. Waite had just driven past the entrance to the Fort, hawking spit in disdain at the permanent symbol of tribal losses and white interests in the Treaty settlement. For the local Yakamas, the Fort is a symbolic gate blocking historical Yakama trails to Columbia River salmon and confining Indian life to the reservation. Chad Wriglesworth explains how Fort Simcoe represents complex layers of colonial oppression of the Indians: "Prior to white occupation, the land at Fort Simcoe was an indigenous seasonal camp near a trail that led to Celilo Falls, a salmon fishing site that was used by the Yakamas and other Mid-Columbia River Indians for at least ten thousand years" ("Stepping" 63). The US military built the fort to subdue the Yakamas in their wars against white incursion in 1855. It is no accident that Carver set "Sixty Acres" on Toppenish Creek just east of Fort Simcoe on or near the site of the October 5, 1855, Battle of Toppenish Creek, the first recorded conflict in the Yakima Wars 1855-58. Chief Kamiakin and his cousin won against U.S. Army Major Haller, driving the government soldiers from Indian homeland back to the Columbia River, killing eight and wounding seventeen. Tribal forces were later defeated on the west side of the Yakima River near present day Union Gap (Splawn 46-48). As a result, ever since the Tribe has been trying non-violent measures, under their Treaty rights, to protect the trust of the land, but always under the reminder of what Fort Simcoe means for them.

After the Treaty, Fort Simcoe housed the boarding school which forced assimilation and acceptance of allotment farming that replaced the traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering. By 1955, the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Treaty and the approximate time of Carver's story, Fort Simcoe had been designated as historically significant and preserved as a state museum, ironically, under a 99-year lease from the Yakama Nation. However, there is no fort or standing symbol to protect the Native American interests in the Treaty settlement. In Carver's story, there is only Lee Waite, alone with this burden of his inheritance: "Waite was the one it came down to, all of it" (53). "All of it" is more than the 60 acres his father intended for his sons (of his three sons, Lee is the only survivor of dire reservation statistics): "all of it" seems to imply here the whole complicated, unjust history of Indian-White relations, and it makes Waite spit as he passes by the state monument to violence.

Waite, doing what his family and his tribe expect of him, confronts the Treaty-breakers and catches them red-handed with their game pockets stuffed with dead birds. Though they are only "kids," they still stand as representatives of their great-grandfathers of Treaty times, and all their words and lies recall the nuances of the Treaty that felt like lies to Waite's ancestors. When Waite asks, "How do I know you wasn't here before?" One boy sobbed: "Word of honor, sir, we never been here before. . . . For godsake. . . . That's the whole truth" (54-55).[9]

With all the negative connotations of historical lies that these phrases ("word of honor" and the "whole truth") must hold for Waite, Carver shifts the atmosphere to reflect Waite's growing anger: dark falls, rain drizzles, the drake who survives the massacre at the pond complains loudly, and the trees around them take on "awful shapes" (55). When the boys lie about their names, Bob Robertson and Bill Williams, Waite understands that they are young and scared, but still something in him, his reserve, snaps. He shocks himself with his own intensity, "You're lying! . . . Why you lying to me? You come onto my land and shoot my ducks and then you lie like hell to me!" In anger, Waite points the shotgun directly at the boys; he even lays "the gun over the car door to steady the barrels." Something about Joseph Eagle—perhaps the thought of how a violent confrontation with whites might affect the old man, alone and vulnerable "up there in his lighted house," or perhaps the opposite thought of why should *he* bother with all this while Eagle sits with his feet up, listening to the radio?—causes Waite's potential violence to pass, but it was very close because "his knees unaccountably began to shake." He says, "Go ahead and go. Go on!" When the boy in the driver's seat worries what will happen if he "can't get this thing started," Waite offers his help with fatherly exasperation, "I guess I'd have to push you out" (55). As he watches their taillights fade toward Toppenish, he considers: "He had put them off the land. That was all that mattered. Yet he could not understand why he felt something crucial had happened, a failure"(56).

On Waite's returning home, his wife tells him he did "right" to let them go. But he looks only at his mother, her "black eyes staring at him" as he experiences a kind of cultural déjà vu: "He tried to think about it, but already it seemed as if it had happened, whatever it was, long ago" (57). A legal "letting go" had happened nearly a century before, when Chief Kamiakin experienced firsthand what white "word of honor" could mean. In 1853 a transcontinental railroad survey team entered the Yakima River Valley, assuring Chief Kamiakin that "Americans had no interest in settling this grassland country," that they only wanted to *lease* a right of way across Indian land. Isaac I. Stevens was the survey overseer and recently appointed Washington territorial governor, the one who would

force Chief Kamiakin to cede most of his land to the government only two years later (Scheuerman and Finley 24). Witnesses at the Treaty signing in June of 1855 recall that Stevens used intensive persuasion on the Indians, saying that if the Indians did not sign the treaty, they would "walk in blood knee deep." Stevens' assistant reported that the severely frustrated Kamiakin finally placed his mark on the Treaty paper, saying take it, "if it will do you any good; it is no use to me." Kamiakin's interpreter, Andrew Pamburn, recalled in his memoir that Kamiakin "was in such a rage [when he made his mark] that he bit his lips until they bled profusely" (Pambrun 95).

In Carver's "Sixty Acres," what Waite says next to his wife and mother could have been said or thought by Chief Kamiakin in 1855: "I should've given them more of a scare . . . . My land, . . . I could've killed them" (57). His mother then speaks her only two words in the story, "Kill who?" As if to ask, how many whites would you have to kill and keep killing, all the way back to the first European immigrants? The blood would be knee-deep. Her simple two-word question speaks to the futility and failure of treaty relations; it speaks to the lost hope of remedy for a history that has placed her family in this absurd, poor, and paradoxical present.

Yakama traditional life depends on a whole ecosystem: fishing salmon-filled rivers that connect to the Columbia and then to the Pacific, hunting deer and migratory birds, and seasonal gathering of roots and berries from as far away as the Kittitas and Wenatchee valleys and the Palouse of central and eastern Washington state. The reduction of open traditional lands to a fenced-in, rectangular piece of "allotted" land makes Waite's 60 acres a most apt symbol of what the Treaty did *not* protect for the Indians, what Kamiakin surely knew. The original Treaty signers sought to maintain sustenance for their traditional way of life, but this 60 acres of tribal inheritance has brought its heirs no feasible way to sustain pre-treaty tradition. Lying at an inconvenient distance from his house, the acreage is "no good to us down there like that," says Waite (58). He has inherited only the stress of keeping white hunters from trespassing and poaching. When he thinks of a way to make a profit on the land by leasing it to one of the local hunting clubs, his mother can only turn her head and close her eyes. *Lease* is not a word she can trust.

Fort Simcoe stands preserved as a state park, museum, and Job Corps Center on reservation land *leased* against the tribe's wishes in 1956. Celilo Falls drowned like Atlantis under the Dalles Dam in 1957, also *leased* against the tribe's wishes, to the federal government under the Reclamation Project Act that "transformed the Columbia River Basin [and the area's largest salmon fishery] into a hydroelectric empire" (Wriglesworth "Stepping" 68). When Waite looks up to his shelf and sees the

now useless "brown mesh of a gill net wrapped around the prongs of a salmon spear" (57) that would have belonged to his father, it represents both the family and tribal loss of Celilo Falls. Waite squints at the netting as though he doesn't even recognize the traditional fishing gear. All the while, his mother's eyes "narrowed" and followed him as "he turned the spear in his hands and began to unwrap the netting." When his wife asks how much money they would get from the lease, he feels confused. When his wife then asks, "What will Mama say?" they both turn to his mother, "But her eyes were closed and she seemed to be sleeping" (59) in a letting go of her own. Her last tie to the land of her father and mother, this untilled 60-acre remnant, is about to be leased, given over *again*, to white users.

History tells us that Kamiakin faced criticism from all sides. The immigrant Americans blamed him for inciting the natives to battle in direct violation of the Treaty confederation. His own Yakama tribe was internally divided: some held Kamiakin responsible for their spilled blood in an unwinnable war, while other tribal voices cried out against him for signing the treaty (Splawn). Waite, too, has no blame-free way to win this: he feels the weight of "all of it" so heavy he must lean on the wall. His "legs began to tremble," and his body slides down the wall to a squatting position as he cups his ears with both hands and hears "that roaring, like the wind howling up from a seashell" (59). Yakama poets and other writers like Earle Thompson, Ed Edmo, Elizabeth Woody, Carol Craig, and Craig Lesley—some who were there the day of the flooding in 1957—tell how the "voice of Celilo Falls" sounded like wind in the "roaring waters" of the Columbia River (Wriglesworth "Stepping" 71-72). Woody explains clearly in traditional terms what sound it is that Lee Waite hears in his head:

> The spirit of the "Place of Echoing Water upon Rocks" [Celilo Falls] is not silent. We care for the river and the life of traditional unity, the humble dignity, and purity in intention—wholeness. . . . Ultimately, we restore life with our attention and devotion. Each hears the echoing water within. (184)

For Lee Waite and his mother, the sixty-acre lease issue is a microcosm of the larger, irrevocable loss of what the Creator originally intended his people to protect. Through Raymond Carver's story, which he experienced as one of the young poachers, we may imagine the Waites' land as it was before the whites came, the land where for ten-thousand years indigenous people camped on the trail to the salmon runs of Celilo Falls, the land Kamiakin defended in his victory at the Battle of Toppenish Creek, the land where Fort Simcoe still stands on a life-long lease as a monument to

white control, and now the land whose future will go to some local hunting club as one of the only ways to serve Waite's children. Waite is trying to do the right thing, to live in peace with all life on what is left of this sacred, Creator-intended land even if it means *forgiving* the ignorant and thoughtless, the self-entitled descendants of those first Treaty-bearing immigrants. Because the alternative—the unspoken answer to his mother's "Kill who?"—was never a choice.

---

[1] In Carver's later story "Pastoral" we see a further shift in these same binaries when a white, middle-aged fisherman/hunter assumes the role of knightly protector/steward of the wildlife with his fishing rod as his lance. He confronts young white hooligans (newcomers from a temporary construction camp) who have shot a deer badly and then threaten the white "knight" with their guns. He fails to protect nature against these destructive new-immigrant intruders in a similar way to Lee Waite's failure to save his ducks.

[2] See Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which covers the period from the "Pilgrims" leaving Leyden, Holland, and landing at Plymouth, Massachuesettes (1620), to the dissolution of the Plymouth Plantion during the 1640s (his history ending at 1648).

[3] For detailed and extensive discussion of the ideology of early American colonization see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (1978) and *The Rites of Assent* (1993).

[4] Steven Olson summarizes this movement from 1780 to post Civil War, including land purchases, classification of frontier and settled lands, technological developments in transportation, land acts, and "Indian Removal" (pp. 4-6). For more complete discussions of these issues see Billington and Ridge, *Westward Expansion,* (*passim* and especially pp. 413-18, 591-610), and Richard White*, It's Your Misfortune,* on land acquisition (pp. 61-84), Indian removal (85-118), and American land policy (137-54).

[5] It is noteworthy that Me-ni-nock's statement points out the shared cultural belief between European-immigrant claims and native claims of a supreme being's deeding both people the same land. This shared belief, of course, is catalyst for opposition and continued disagreement. Consider Puritan claims of the "promised land" and nineteenth-century claims of Manifest Destiny, as noted ealier.

[6] Another noteworthy and ironic instance of circulating discourses appears here. Woody's statement asserts the present-day discourse that defines a positive unity or harmony between *native* and *nature*, a discourse that empowers the native and disempowers the white destroyers. Not discounting the value of this discourse nor the broadly accepted validity of Woody's empowering statement, it is worth considering Shepard Krech's *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. Krech convincingly presents evidence that the Noble Indian living in holistic harmony and unity with all of nature is a construction—one that is, in part at the very least, a product of Euro-American stereotyping-colonization. Krech quotes notable historian Richard White, who posits that such a construction "demeans Indians. It makes them seem simply like an animal species, and thus deprives them of their culture" (Krech 26). Krech himself claims that such a construction "distorts culture. It masks cultural diversity. It occludes its actual connection to the behavior it purports to explain. Moreover, because it has entered the realm of common sense and as received wisdom is perceived as a fundamental truth, it serves to deflect any desire to fathom or confront the evidence for relationships between Indians and the environment" (27). That is, in short, it dissolves interest in and dismisses the need for further, particular study.

[7] Similar to the one described in the immediately preceeding note, another complication of the discourse is revealed here. A closer look into environmental history in the Pacific Northwest will tell a far more complex narrative, particularly regarding the preservation and use of salmon. Many tribes, now working in alliance with the federal government because they need employment, are engaged in activities that would be viewed as questionable by most environmentalists' standards.

I insist, however, despite these complications in the historical, fluid discourses, the dominant discourse—the most broadly accepted and therefore most powerful and arguably the presently *real* discourse, or *truth*--is the one expressed by the examples of Me-ni-nock and Woody, and as expressed in Carver's story.

[8] Here is yet another instance showing the complexity and depth of the cultural exchanges—the fluid, historical discourses—as they are incorporated in Carver's story.

What Waite sees here, but perhaps doesn't fully recognize, is that the Yakama are by no means immune from America's gun-culture leanings toward violence. Somewhere, Waite's children have consumed the same narrative . . . despite being set apart on a reservation.

[9] This passage reveals another aspect of the fluid discourses—the privileging of written over oral language. The boy pleads, not in terms of "written" testimony, but in terms of orality. The irony is, of course, that the boy pledges "honor" orally, implying the binding power of, the truthfulness of the spoken word in the native discourse, whereas the historical backdrop of this scene evokes the whole idea of treaty making and the colonizers' demand for "written" documentation and Kamiakin's response to the demand. The boys seem to *perceive* themselves as lacking power, ironically as natives in a sense. And ironically, Waite also feels like a traditional white land and order man.

Works Cited

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad.* Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1978. Print.

---. *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America.* New York and London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Billington, Ray Allen, and Martin Ridge. *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier.* 5th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1982. Print.

Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation.* 1620 and later. Available in various formats.

Carver, Raymond. "Sixty Acres." *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories.* Eds. William I. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll. New York: Library of America, 2009. Print.

Fisher, Andrew H. "'This I Know from the Old People': Yakama Indian Treaty Rights as Oral Tradition." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 49.1 (1999): 2-17. Print.

Giridharadas, Anand. *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2014, Print.

Krech, Shepard, III. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History.* New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1999. Print.

Olson, Steven. *The Prairie in Nineteenth-Century American Poetry.* Norman and London: U of Oklahoma P, 1994. Print.

Pambrun, Andrew Dominique. *Sixty Years on the Frontier in the Pacific Northwest.* Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1978. Print.

Scheuerman, Richard D. and Michael O. Finley. *Finding Kamiakin: The Life and Legacy of a Northwest Patriot.* Pullman: Washington State UP, 2008. Print.

Sklenicka, Carol. *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life.* New York: Scribner, 2009. Print.

Splawn, Andrew J. *Ka-mi-akin, The Last Hero of the Yakimas.* Portland: Kilham Stationery & Printing, 1917. *Secretary of State, Legacy Washington.* Web. 4 Nov. 2014. Retrieved from http://www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/publications_detail.aspx?p=24.

U.S. Department of State. *Treaty with the Yakimas. Camp Stevens, Walla-Walla Valley.* Washington: GPO, 1855. Print.

White, Richard. *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West.* Norman and London: U of Oklahom P, 1991. Print.

Woody, Elizabeth. "People of the River—People of the Salmon Wana Thlama—Nusuxmí Tanánma." *Water and People: Challenges at the Interface of Symbolic and Utilitarian Values.* 2008. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. (General Technical Report PNW-GTR-729). 177-99. Web. 4 Nov. 2014. Retrieved from http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr729.pdf

Wriglesworth, Chad. "Stepping on the Yakama Reservation: Land and Water Rights in Raymond Carver's 'Sixty Acres.'" *Western American Literature* 45.1 (2010): 55-79.

---. "Trampling Kamiakin's Gardens: The Legacy of Theodore Winthrop's Stay at St. Joseph's Mission." *Columbia* 24.4 (Winter 2010-11): 30-35. Print.

Abstract

Cameron Cushing's essay examines the use of the "negative pastoral" in Carver's short story "The Compartment," from his 1983 collection *Cathedral.* Raymond Carver explores the emotional landscape of Myers, who is en route to Strasbourge, France, to visit his son. Carver locates Myers' emotional landscape within a locus where Terry Gifford's external "contextual pastoral" intersects Martin Scofield's internal "negative pastoral." It is Scofield's concept of the "bizarre" actions that lead to "strange and contorted expressions" of emotion that provide a lens for decoding Myer's decision to break his appointment with his son, leading to his calm acceptance to finding himself on re-coupled train car that is taking him to an unknown destination toward a newly recontextualized emotional landscape.

The Negative Pastoral in Raymond Carver's "The Compartment"

Cameron Cushing

While Raymond Carver was categorized early in his career as a Northwest American writer, Carver stated that it was the "emotional landscape [he was] most interested in." As a result, Carver believed his stories could take place anywhere, and his short story "The Compartment" confirms that notion. I argue that "The Compartment," a later story from his 1983 collection *Cathedral*, is an example of what Carver described as an "emotional landscape," placing his characters into landscapes similar to what Terry Gifford calls "contextual pastoral" (2) in order to reveal what Martin Scofield identifies as a "negative pastoral" (248).

Pastoral literature, "traditionally takes the lives of the lowest social classes—originally shepherds and country labourers—and finds in them fundamental forms of human nature and behaviour" (243), notes Martin Scofield, who sees elements of the traditional form of pastoral as evident in some of Carver's characters who are "generally working class [. . .] preoccupied with the simplest elements of life" (244). While some of Carver's short stories offer traditional pastoral landscapes—rolling hills, green pastures, rivers, and so on—most others are set in urban landscapes. Terry Gifford, in his book *Pastoral,* defines what he views as a kind of "contextual pastoral," that is, "literature that describes the [pastoral] country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2). Gifford's sense of contextualizing the pastoral is useful when considering the presence of contrasting or augmenting rural and urban elements that can add meaningful dissonance or tensions into some of Carver's short stories. Moreover, these tensions can generate what Scofield identifies as

aspects of the "negative pastoral," which includes "bizarre" elements of "'essential passions' . . . twisted into strange and contorted expression" (248). I take Gifford's "contextual pastoral" to mean a literature that demonstrates how the external world is implicitly or explicitly a reflection of the character's "negative pastoral"—in short, his internal landscape. In Raymond Carver's "The Compartment," the external landscapes Myers observes outside his train compartment window contribute to tensions of the "negative pastoral" of his internal landscape.

Myers is traveling through Europe by train prior to arriving in Strasbourg; his plan is to spend several days there with his son before making his way to Paris before he will fly home to the US. Ironically, Myers views his son, to whom no name is given, as an interloper because Myers believes his son to be the reason his marriage to the boy's mother failed. This is a bizarre conclusion, one that is "far from universal" (248), though one which Scofield sees as a recurring element of the negative pastoral that is evident in some of Carver's writing. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect is that after eight years, Myers denies his son and himself any chance of reconciliation based on what appears to be the impassioned revulsion of his only son.

Carver reveals the negative pastoral of Myers action in the early section of the story as he shows Myers focusing on the landscape outside the train compartment in which he is traveling. As a minimalist, Carver uses his artistic energy to describe a contextual pastoral that expresses Myers' negative pastoral within a train compartment. Moreover, in order to achieve this mode of expression, Carver has his protagonist extensively gazing out the window, making it obvious that what Myers observes are some of the most important moments within the story. Myers finds the rural European landscapes to be pleasant:

> It was early in the morning and mist hung over the green fields that passed by outside. Now and then Myers saw a farmhouse and its out-buildings, everything surrounded by a wall. He thought this might be a good way to live—in an old house surrounded by a wall. (393)

Previous to these pleasant images, Myers reminisces about the last time he saw his son and how it was a "horrible scene" as Myers' wife broke dishes and cups one at a time while he asks her to stop. When his son "charged him" in defense of his mother, Myers "sidestepped and got him in a headlock while the boy wept and pummeled Myers on the back and kidneys. Myers had him, and while he had him, he made the most of it. He slammed him into the wall and threatened to kill him" (393). Instead of confronting and trying to address his bizarre passionate hate towards his son,

however, Myers shakes his head as if to to eject that "horrible" memory from his consciousness. In an act of escapism, Myers gazes out of the train, imagining himself living a life within the pleasant pastoral landscapes he sees, in which farm houses stand in the middle of farm fields. What these first contextual landscapes confirm is Myers' escapist tendencies and his inability to live within his own reality. As such, as "Compartment" begins, readers are given a fictional character who lacks the personal *character* to make peace with his own negative pastoral.

The memory of the father-son fight serves to escalate the underlying menace of the story. After the expensive watch that Myers bought as a reconciliation gift for his son is stolen, Myers becomes filled with anger. This current anger over the stolen watch calls up that anger Myers has had ever since he last saw his son eight years ago during their fight. Readers are shown Myers looking outside the slowing train as his anger is projected onto an urban landscape:

> Farming and grazing land had given over to industrial plants with unpronounceable names on the fronts of the buildings. The train began slowing. . . . He got up and took his suitcase down. He held it on his lap while he looked out the window at this hateful place. (398)

During this time, Myers' contextual pastoral changes. The pleasant pastoral rural landscape has been replaced by an unpleasant urban landscape of "industrial plants" that he views as a "hateful place." This shift in the contextual pastoral initiates and enacts the negative pastoral as Myers' perception of the pastoral landscape shifts with his rising anger as his internal landscape becomes negative; his bizarre passion becomes the lens through which he sees the world. Using the words "given over," unpronounceable," and "hateful" creates a sense of dark angering tension, and as the pace picks up in these few sentences even though the train is slowing to a stop, Carver's narrative tone matches Myers' internal landscape. Instead of describing what Myers is feeling and the landscape outside the train as opposite, Carver expertly utilizes the urban landscape to offer Myers an opportunity to confront his negative pastoral.

Prior to pulling into the Strasbourg train station and having his son's watch stolen, the contextual pastoral represented a stable place of escape. Yet the landscape no longer represents a sense of escape, but instead prompts a realization:

> It came to [Myers] that he didn't want to see the boy after all. He was shocked by this realization and for a moment felt diminished by the meanness of it. He shook his head. In a life-time of foolish actions, this trip was possibly the most foolish thing he'd ever done.

> But the fact was, he really had no desire to see this boy whose behavior had long ago isolated him from Myers's affections. He suddenly, and with great clarity, recalled the boy's face when he had lunged that time, and a wave of bitterness passed over Myers. . . . Why on earth, Myers asked himself, would he come all this way to see someone he disliked? He didn't want to shake the boy's hand, the hand of his enemy. (398)

It is not until the landscape outside reflects what Myers' is struggling with that he is able to face his passionate enmity towards his son. The urban landscape serves as a reflection of the change Myers is undergoing. The urban setting represents everything Myers' despises, and, interestingly, his son is settled in that urban landscape.

Myers' "realization" represents what David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips call "Carver's chosen task": "to convey through the most fitting language and symbols the special moments when these people have sudden, astonishing glimpses behind the curtain which separates their empty lives from chaos" (76). As well, it relates to Scofield's argument because what exists behind the curtain of the contextual landscape of "The Compartment" is Myers' complex bizarreness. As Myers' gaze of the landscape outside the train's compartment shifts to match his landscape behind the curtain, he "become[s a voyeur of his] own experience" (Boxer and Phillips 76). Pointedly, Boxer and Phillips redefine voyeurism in the context of actions by Carver's characters: "voyeurism is used advisedly [. . .] to mean not just sexual spying, but the wistful identification with some distant, unattainable idea of self" (76). Myers' realization arrives because he is a voyeur of his own life. Everything Myers gazes at is his form of taking action, for voyeurism is Myers' way of internalizing his lived experiences. As he gazes out onto the urban landscape he identifies it with his true feelings about his son, while the rural landscapes highlight a disconnect within Myers which represents the "unattainable idea of self."

Boxer and Phillips use the term "dissociation" to describe the kind of disconnection seen in Carver's characters, that is, as "a sense of disengagement from one's own identity and life, a state of standing apart from whatever defines the self, or of being unselfed" (75). The urban landscape represents Myers true passions about his son. All previous pleasant pastoral landscapes represent Myers as "standing apart from" himself; for that reason, Myers daydreams of living within one of the old farming complexes surrounded by a wall. Myers has dissociated himself from himself and the thing that drove Myers to continue to dissociate his internal feelings about his son, and what caused him to take this trip in the first place, was the word "*Love*" in a letter he received from the "boy" several months previously [emphasis in the original] (Carver 395). Myers' son ending the letter with

the word "*Love*" causes Myers to further mollify the repulsion he has for his son. Kirk Nesset discusses how Carver's use of love is as "a darkly unknowable and irreversible force, a form of sickness not only complicating but dominating the lives of characters" (293). In "The Compartment," Carver uses the word "love" to complicate Myers' negative pastoral. Eventually, Myers sheds that dissociation, eventually confronting his enmity for his son that is reflected in an urban contextual landscape. This realization leads to Myers feeling at peace with himself, though in the bizarre way wherein passions become, according to Scofield's concept of the negative pastoral, "twisted into strange and contorted expression." When the train comes to a complete stop in the Strasbourg train station, Myers watches domestic behaviors taking place on the train platform. Ironically, these domestic behaviors appear to bring him peace even though they are the actions he avoids with his own son. This act of Myers finding peace in watching everyday events resembles what Carver termed "'dis-ease'": "'a certain terrible kind of domesticity'" (Nesset 292). Even though this act of gazing out of his train's compartment is a normal human behavior, it is actually dis-ease that results from the negative pastoral, for Myers finds these domestic behaviors as a bizarre balm that helps solidify his decision not to see his estranged son.

Myers is not presented as a very loving father, for his relationship with his son is shown to include a physical altercation, distancing himself over time from his son, and then deciding not to meet his son despite arranging to do so. It is ironic, then, that Myers finds comfort in watching the very acts of others which he himself physically avoids: "These days he lived alone and had little to do with anybody outside of his work" (Carver 393). Interestingly, Nesset describes Carver's writing as a road to recovery: "the road to recovery is part of the journey . . . the remedy for such dis-ease lies in its cause" (310). Therefore, "the remedy" for Myers is this urban landscape his son lives in, one in which a voyeuristic character who lives vicariously through what he sees uses an urban contextual landscape to bring about peace with his bizarre "dis-ease." Furthermore, Myers' watching the loving domestic behaviors on the train station highlights how the word "love" dissociated Myers from his diseasing "negative pastoral." Carver had his own character read the letter without observing love-like behaviors in a contextual landscape. Since Myers is a voyeur of his life, his observing loving notions outside his train compartment helps confirm the love-like dissociation and push him towards a personal realization.

In "Faces in the Mirror: Raymond Carver and the Intricacies of Looking," Christof Decker identifies three types of gazes that Carver's characters exhibit: "narcissistic, televisual, and

cinematic." The "narcissistic gaze" represents a form of introspection, the televisual gaze signifies looking out at the (mediated) world, while the cinematic gaze establishes a (self-reflexive) form of looking which acknowledges the observer as a participant in a narrative sequence" (43). During the course of "The Compartment," Myers is engaged in "televisual gaze;" that is, except for a couple of scenes, he is always "looking out at the (mediated) world." However, while there is a constant state of the "televisual gaze" in the background, there is an evolution of the "narcissistic gaze" to the "cinematic gaze" over the course of the story.

At the beginning of the story the first contextual landscapes are typical rural pastoral landscapes. As Myers is looking at those "mediated" rural landscapes, he also participates in a form of "narcissistic introspection." What confirms this notion is when Myers is reminiscing about the last time he saw his son, and in attempts to ignore that "old anger," he imagines himself being happy in an old farmhouse. This is narcissistic behavior instead of a "cinematic" behavior because Myers is attempting to make himself feel better about being a distant and unloving father. This is a "form of introspection," however, it allows Carver to show that Myers is not yet an active "participant in a narrative sequence." Rather, it shows Myers as a character who is dissociated from the beginning "narrative sequence" because he has yet to accept his dis-easing "negative pastoral." What Carver is highlighting in the beginning of the story is that Myers doesn't belong in that train compartment heading to see his son. Paradoxically, though, it becomes necessary that Myers remains in the train compartment in order to accept who he is.

When the train slows and Myers' anger is boiling over, it is then we see this evolution of Myers moving from a "narcissistic gaze" to a "cinematic gaze" in this mediated world Carver has brought to life. The rural landscape shifts to a hateful and unwelcoming urban landscape that matches Myers' "negative pastoral." What this highlights is Carver's making Myers an active "participant in a narrative sequence" via Myers' negative pastoral matching the contextual pastoral. Therefore, after Myers chooses not to get off the train and see his son, and after Myers accepts the fact that he cannot let go of his enmity for his only son, we see him gazing out the compartment—while attempting to hide himself—and observing people embracing and kissing. Oddly, it is as if Myers is supposed to be there actively observing these domestic behaviors he despises and which simultaneously fill him with peace. The Strasbourg train station shows Myers cinematically gazing out onto a mediated world that confirms the peculiar peace he is starting to feel within himself.

Decker argues that there are two crucial aspects regarding how Carver's characters gaze out at the world:

> Firstly, gazing invites a consideration of place and self. It revolves around the issue of how the observer fits into the scene he or she is watching (and describing). Secondly, it is presented as an activity creating a special bond between the observer and the person or object looked at. (43)

As Myers sits in his train compartment cinematically gazing out at the Strasbourg train station, where no internal or external dialogue is provided, readers recognize this as a dis-easing experience because it is unsettling how peaceful Myers seems to be with his decision not to see his son, yet at the same time it is a relief that he has overcome his internal struggle. Critic Charles May describes experience as seen through the stories of Carver's short fiction "in such a way that the truth is embodied rather than explained" ("Do You See" 40). As the train comes to a complete stop, Myers sets his briefcase down "and inche[s] down in his seat" because he is worried what he might do if his son sees him and because he is "afraid he might shake his fist" at the boy (399). Once the other passenger leaves the train's compartment, most likely with his son's watch, Myers returns his gaze to the Strasbourg platform:

> looking out the train window again . . . He saw a man in an apron standing in the door of the station, smoking a cigarette. The man was watching two trainmen explaining something to a woman in a long skirt who held a baby in her arms. The woman listened and then nodded and listened some more . . . One of the men chucked the baby under its chin. The woman looked down and smiled . . . Myers saw a young couple embracing on the platform a little distance from his car. (401)

As Myers gazes upon these particular people and their accompanying domestic behaviors, readers can recognize the embodied dis-easing truth of what Myers is experiencing.

What Myers looks out upon are very pleasant, happy, and loving moments. While Myers does not articulate what constitutes or describes the emotion of happiness, Carver's lyric-narrative poem "Happiness" describes Carver himself looking out his window on an early morning with his coffee, watching two boys deliver newspapers. At the end of the poem Carver experiences a wave of happiness that can not really be explained, though as the speaker in the poem, he articulates that: "Such beauty that for a minute / death and ambition, even love / doesn't enter into this. / Happiness. It comes on / unexpectedly. And goes beyond, really, / any early morning talk about it"

(L 19-24). In this poem Carver participates in a "cinematic gaze" and then articulates what he experiences, similar to what Myers does while gazing cinematically at the urban landscape of Strasbourg and the train station; however, reader are the ones left to articulate what Myers is embodying. After Myers has had his moment of clarity, which is not articulated but simply embodied, he scrunches down in his seat and voyeuristically gazes out at the cinema before him. This contextual landscape reflects Myers cinematic participation, experiencing a tranquil moment after coming to grips with the fact that he is a terrible domestic kind of father. By using landscapes to show the evolving movement towards Myers' dis-easing passion, Carver gives the readers an embodied experience that is concurrently dark and beautiful; it is dark because Myers is abandoning his only child and taking away that chance of reconciliation—a potential healing, and beautiful because for the first time in the story Myers is at some sort of peace with himself. Decker writes "What the characters are looking at, how their look is qualified, and how it affects their (self-) knowledge becomes vitally important against the background of a pervasive feeling of speechlessness" (43). As mentioned earlier, Decker describes a crucial aspect of how Carver's characters' gaze "revolves around the issue of how the observer fits into the scene he or she is watching" (43). After realizing his dis-easing quality via the changing contextual landscapes, Carver has Myers internalizing happy and loving domestic behaviors from the people at the train station. This renders the reader speechless, and Myers speechless, because Myers' realization represents both a terrible apprehension of what it means to be a distant and unloving father, and a bizarre feeling of peace.

Myers accomplishes the act of deciding to not see his son without conversation. Many of Carver's short stories demonstrate how language often falls short of being able to capture emotion, a trait often associated with minimalism. Bramlett and Raabe write that the unnamed narrator in Carver's story "Intimacy" "seeks something beyond the power of language to convey emotion . . . 'No ideas but in things'" (185). Such moments of conversation that take place in "The Compartment" are not even conversations, they are instead necessary statements of trying to get information, materials, greetings, pardons, and Myers attempting to find who stole his boy's watch. Carver, as readers notice, uses various landscapes to bring out the emotive experiences of Myers throughout the story. Myers' "speechlessness" is embodied and conveyed to and for the reader by how Carver uses the landscapes Myers gazes out upon; the things Myers looks at represent

everything he is trying to seek "beyond the power of language": a reconciliation with his own "'dis-ease'" that makes him who he is.

It is not so much Myers seeking the love a parent has for their child nor the love of a lover, but rather an acceptance of one's true self. Using a term from May's "Chekhov and the Modern Short Story," Carver "apprehends" Myers' paternal failure and acceptance via the impressionistic landscapes and lack of conversations that exist in "The Compartment," that is, "a basic impressionistic apprehension of reality itself as a function of perspectival point of view" (199). In the final scene where Myers has accidentally been "uncoupled" from his original train compartment and enters a completely different train compartment full of "small, dark-skinned men who spoke rapidly in a language Myers had never heard before," he falls asleep (401).

This is significant because sleep has been a struggle throughout the story for Myers. His mind will not let him fall asleep until he comes to some kind of mindfulness about the emotional situation in which he has put himself. When Myers does fall asleep, it demonstrates two things. First, this story is about Myers' struggle to reconcile with his own "'dis-ease'" as a father who is distant and unloving regarding his only child. Second, conversations cannot be the device that reveal this "bizarre" reconciliation for Myers because this struggle is "beyond the power of language" (Bramlett and Raabe 185); this seems evident from the ways in which "The men went on talking and laughing. Their voices came to him as if from a distance. Soon the voices became part of the train's movements—and gradually Myers felt himself being carried then pulled back, into sleep" (Carver 401). This new train compartment's landscape is a cinematic scene where Myers seems at peace with himself as a result of his engagement with the negative pastoral that exists in a space between his bizarre anger and a negotiated peacefulness. As well, it is no use for Myers to attempt to understand where he is headed because he cannot understand anybody and no one can understand him—conversation is mute. At this moment, where Myers is surrounded by unfamiliar people, languages, and train compartments, he is tentatively a grounded participant in a contextualized landscape.

Works Cited

Boxer, David, and Cassandra Phillips. "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *Iowa Review* 10.3 (1979): 75-90. Print.

Bramlett, Frank, and David Raabe. "Redefining Intimacy: Carver and Conversation." *Narrative* 12.2 (2004): 178-94. Print.

Carver, Raymond. "Happiness." *Poetry* 145.5 (1985): 251. Print.

---. "The Compartment." *Raymond Carver Collected Stories*. Eds. Stull, William, L., and Maureen P. Carroll. New York: Library of America, 2009. 393-401. Print.

Decker, Christof. "Faces in the Mirror: Raymond Carver and the Intricacies of Looking." *American Studies* 49.1 (2004): 35-49. Print.

Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

May, Charles E. "Chekhov and the Modern Short Story." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 199-217.Print.

---."'Do You See What I'm Saying?': The Inadequacy of Explanation and the Uses of Story in the Short Fiction of Raymond Carver" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 31 (2001): 39-49. Print.

Nesset, Kirk. ""This Word Love': Sexual Politics and Silence in Early Raymond Carver." *American Literature* 63.2 (1991): 292-313. Print.

Scofield, Martin. "Negative Pastoral: The Art of Raymond Carver's Stories." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 23.3 (1994): 243-62. Print.

Abstract

Jonathan Pountney's essay explores the literary influence of Raymond Carver on the Japanese author Haruki Murakami within the socioeconomic context of late-capitalism. It argues that Carver's influence resides most powerfully in his example of how to negotiate the complex and shifting foundations of late-capitalist culture. This new theory of influence is unethered to Bloomian psychoanalysis and more closely connected to contemporary academic discussions of aesthetic representations of late-capitalism, and consequently opens up fresh avenues of inquiry that cater for a more extensive exploration of Carver's influence. Murakami is a good candidate for this model because he is clearly influenced by Carver and also consciously working both within and against the boundaries of late-capitalism. This article suggests that Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a pervasive societal humiliation and dislocation; one that is distinctly tied to each author's experience of the mass-commodification of the labor market in America and Japan in the late-twentieth century. It concludes by suggesting that both writers respond to separate and deeply personal events in their lives by attempting to map out an undogmattic spiritual solution to this humiliation, which, while offering some release from the pressures of late-capitalism, ultimately fails to provide a wholly successful resolution.

Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism

Jonathan Pountney

"I did it because I knew that if I did not do it, somebody else would […]
And I thought I was the one to do it in the right way".[1]
~ Haruki Murakami

On March 23, 1999 the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami wrote a letter of confession to Raymond Carver's widow Tess Gallagher. In it he admits to translating D.T. Max's *New York Times* article "The Carver Chronicles", and, knowing Gallagher's displeasure at the original publication, wrote to explain his actions. Max's article, which purports that Gordon Lish played "a crucial role in the creation of the early short stories of Raymond Carver" (para. 1), was demonstrably rejected by those loyal to Carver's legacy, including Gallagher, who viewed it is a piece of sensationalism designed to present a "disconcerting and equivocal" message that depicted Carver as a "composite author" (Stull *Critical Insights* 42). Gallagher replied to Murakami's confession only days later and absolved him of complicity in the denigration of Carver's name. "Don't worry at all about my distaste for D.T. Max's article," she wrote. "I have no distaste for truth, but many things were mistaken to a high degree in that piece." She then concludes the matter by thanking Murakami for accompanying the translation with his own opinion piece on the saga (Gallagher Archive Mar. 29, 1999). Their brief exchange exemplifies Murakami's sensitivity to Gallagher's concerns. Concerns he shares. For Murakami—an internationally bestselling author—inextricably ties his fiction to Carver, claiming him as his "greatest literary comrade" (*Remembering Ray* 132).

Murakami's claim might seem conceited for those who are unfamiliar with the close connection between the two writers. In 1982, early on in his writing career, Murakami first encountered Carver's fiction when he read the longer version of "So Much Water So Close To Home" in the anthology *West Coast Fiction* (*Remembering Ray* 130). Writing after Carver's death he vividly described the experience:

> The story literally came as a shock to me […] There was the almost breathtakingly compact world of his fiction, his strong but supple style, and his convincing story line. Although his style is fundamentally realistic, there is something penetrating and profound in his work that goes beyond simple realism. I felt as though I had come across an entirely new kind of fiction, the likes of which there had never been before (130).

For English language readers who are familiar with Murakami's fiction, his admiration of Carver's writing might come as a surprise. His lengthy and complex novels embody a kind of postmodern surrealism—one that blends the ubiquitousness of life in late-capitalism with the distinctly American styles and modes of detective writing and science fiction.[2] Carver's style on the other hand—as readers of this journal will no doubt be aware—is quite distinct. And while proponents of Carver's fiction still exist in their myriad and varied forms, it seems that there has been an increasing critical trend in recent years to view Carver's writing as evidence of a failed and limited late-twentieth century realist project—what Fredric Jameson superciliously calls "realism after realism" (183).[3] Murakami himself offers a rebuff to those critics when he claims that Carver's fiction goes "beyond simple realism"—and by that, surely he means, beyond its supposed minimalist limitations—that beneath the surface of Carver's fiction are important, communicable, and relevant truths, even for the postmodern age. For Carver this conservative view of literature finds its root in John Gardner who held that "true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not debase it," (5) and finds an analogous outlet in Murakami's own writing, through which, as I shall argue later in this article, he feels he has a "vested duty" to improve Japanese society (*Underground* 204). Indeed, while a major strand of my argument in this article is that the influence of Carver on Murakami is seen most strongly in their responses to their specific socioeconomic conditions, it does appear that Murakami—especially in his short stories—often borrows from Carver's fascination with the uncanny strangeness of everyday life. In his more surreal writing, this appropriation of the quotidian and ubiquitous existence of late-capitalism—from shaving and dressing to dull work and empty materialism—is given free reign, and often turns into moments of explicit psychological distress. However, in his more realistic writing, such as his story collection *after the quake*, this quotidian world more simply reflects Carver's aesthetic, exploring, as his translator Jay Rubin describes, "the lives of realistic people in

realistic situations, people whose outwardly satisfactory lives leave them feeling unfulfilled and who live on the edge of some devastating discovery" (258).[4]

If the connection between Carver and Murakami is less apparent for English language readers, then in Japan, Murakami has undoubtedly had a big influence on how people experience Carver's writing. He has translated all of Carver's fiction, including his posthumous stories, and also published interviews and articles about him. And even though Murakami's translations and fiction are distinct entities, there is clearly an intricate relationship between the two outputs. In May 1983, only a year after he had read Carver for the first time, Murakami published his first translation, *Boku ga denwa o kakete iru baso* [*Where I'm Calling From and Other Stories*], in the same month that he published his own first collection of short stories, *Chugoku-yuki no suro boto* [*A Slow Boat To China*]. This patterned continued for the early part of his career, demonstrating the close correlation between the two processes.[5] The strong synergy is further emphasized by Murakami's translation technique which is painstakingly meticulous, working word by word, so that his translation, in his opinion, personifies the deceased writer and conveys "the rhythm of his breathing, the warmth of his body, and the subtle wavering of his emotions" (*Remembering Ray* 131). Murakami refers to this process as "experiencing Raymond Carver", a feeling so powerful that he claims he becomes one—"body and soul"—with Carver (131).[6]

While Carver is a central influence for Murakami, the development of his distinctive literary style has a broader base that just one man. Born in 1949, Murakami made a notable diversion from his ancestral past when he was young. It was possibly his proximity to Kobe and Osaka—two east-coast mercantile port cities—that began to shape his sensibility for Western culture. Discovering English language paperbacks in second-hand bookshops when he was a teenager, Murakami began to immerse himself in the fiction of Raymond Chandler, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Evidence of the influence of those American writers can be found in his first two novels *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*.[7] Both novels found a small but committed audience among the young, postwar generation but conservative Japanese critics denigrated their explicit references to Western pop culture and condemned them as items for popular consumption (Miyoshi 234). It was not until 1982 when he published his third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*—significantly, the year he first encountered Carver's fiction—that his writing reached a wider audience.[8] The commercial success of the novel allowed Murakami the financial stability to immerse himself further in his writing. His fourth and fifth novels, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *Norwegian Wood*, bare the hallmarks of his early Americanized fiction, but also denote a shift towards the exposition of a clearer critical evaluation of the contemporary Japanese experience.[9]

In Issue 1 of *The Raymond Carver Review* Brian Seemann offered a thought-provoking analysis of what he considered to be an existential connection between Carver and Murakami's short fiction. While there is value in pursuing this line of enquiry—one that finds its precursor in the foundational Carver scholarship of David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips—it is the proposition of this article that Carver's influence on Murakami resides most powerfully in the example or model which he set of how to negotiate, for better or worse, the complex and shifting socioeconomic foundations of the late-twentieth century. This new—and tentative—theory of influence is untethered to Bloomian psychoanalysis and more closely associated with contemporary academic discussions of aesthetic representations of late-capitalism.[10] This article argues, therefore, that the process of reading and meeting Carver enabled Murakami to engage with, and think through, his own similar yet distinct socioeconomic experience. Murakami is, I propose, a good candidate for this influential model because he is not only clearly influenced by Carver but he is also consciously working within, and often against, the boundaries of late-capitalism. I will present my argument through a number of comparative close textual readings, position each in its relevant socioeconomic context, before judging the extent and limitation of Carver's influence. Ultimately my readings suggest that Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a pervasive societal humiliation and dislocation; one that is distinctly tied to each author's experience of the mass-commodification of the labor market in America and Japan in the late-twentieth century. I will then conclude by suggesting that both writers attempt to map out an undogmattic spiritual solution, which, while offering some release from the pressures of late-capitalism, ultimately fails to provide a wholly successful resolution.

: :

In what has become the prescient account of the socioeconomic transformation that occurred in the late-twentieth century, the anthropologist David Harvey declares that working life in America was marked by the inability of the hegemonic Fordist system to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism (141-42). The Fordist principles that had dominated since the early 1900s, designed on the premise of the mass production and mass consumption of goods, led to a postwar boom and eventual market saturation. As a result, the long-term, large-scale fixed capital investments that had proved stable in the past became increasingly profitless. The labor force, instead of adapting to new markets, became rigid—reallocation was problematic—and any attempt to overcome these rigidities were opposed by the immovable force of working class power. Unable to maintain the compromise, the capitalist system shifted, as Harvey describes, to a system of flexible accumulation.[11] Resting not on the premise of rigidity but flux, this new

system was designed to promote flexibility in labour markets, labour processes and consumption. As a result those attempting to achieve socioeconomic prosperity through a Fordist mentality of constant work and consumption were blocked by a system designed to directly confront the rigidity of the Fordist narrative.[12] Instead of long-term narratives, which offered delayed gratification, institutions began to focus on short-term plans and short-term goals. Thus in a perverse paradox, despite rising economic expectations, many Americans did not see an increase in long-term personal prosperity. In order to prevent an economic slowdown a debt economy was introduced, and credit became easily available. The result, as Richard Sennett notes, was that the economy promoted an attitude of quick profit, which left large groups of middle-Americans feeling like their lives (that is, their long-term plans of socioeconomic prosperity) had been cast adrift, and the lack of long-term occupational future destroyed the hopes of attaining their American Dream (7).

: :

Growing up in the postwar period, Carver felt the effect of this transition. Writing about his experience in "Fires", an essay published in 1982, he recalls—in a moment uncannily reminiscent of Harvey's description of the failed Fordist narrative—when he realized that his long-term plans for economic and social mobility were little more than fantasies, "We had great dreams, my wife and I. We thought we could bow our necks, work very hard, and do all that we had set out hearts to do. But we were mistaken" (31). Carver never fully reveals what their "great dreams" were—although we can surmise they involved education, movement out of the working class and a successful writing career—but the Carvers' ressentiment fails to account for a reality beyond their control. Critic Ben Harker helpfully unpacks this when he suggests that:

> They [the Carvers] invested in the hegemonic narratives of contemporary consumer society—working hard, loyalty, trying to advance themselves through education, doing the right things. But the socioeconomic world inflicted experiences—bankruptcy, unemployment, and working hard and getting nowhere—about which these hegemonic narratives had little or nothing to say (720).

One need only spend a short time studying Carver's early life to find a number of pertinent examples to illustrate this. Most applicable for our discussion is the account of their first bankruptcy in 1967. Carver, who had just completed his university education at Humboldt State, was honing his writing while working a variety of low-paid jobs, most notably as a night janitor at a local hospital. His wife, Maryann, on the other hand, was beginning to earn a reputable salary as a saleswoman. Still, despite a level of financial security, Carver found a number of outstanding debts—mainly college loans and credit cards—to be a daily burden. After meeting a

bankruptcy attorney at a bar, he decided that the easiest way to escape from their onerous loans would be to declare bankruptcy and start afresh. What is particularly interesting about the situation is that Maryann opposed Carver's plan. Carol Sklenicka records that, from Maryanne's point of view, they both had steady employment and, with time, was sure they would have been able to pay back their creditors (129). Her embrace of America's new debt economy can be seen as being tantamount to an acceptance of the new era of flexible accumulation. Carver's attitude, and fear of debt, on the other hand, reflects the rigidity of the Fordist narrative. Sklenicka makes this point clear when she summarises the situation by writing, "In Maryanne's opinion, the bankruptcy was unnecessary; indeed, her credit-based notion of how to get ahead has since become an American norm" (129). This small anecdotal example serves to illustrate Carver's struggle to adapt to the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation—and might be best understood therefore, as a reflection of the difficulties faced by many Americans trying to adjust to a new era of capital in this period. The humiliation that he faced before the facts of working life in the era of flexible accumulation—or as he put it in his laconic prose, "the imminent removal of the chair from under me" ("Fires" 31)—reveals the flaw of the Fordist principle in a society based on increasing flexible accumulation.[13]

It is unsurprising therefore that his early fiction represents a wide spectrum of middle-American jobs and documents much of this humiliation. Often caught "in-between" circumstances, Carver's characters are humiliated because of joblessness, unable to improve their lot through hard work, and left yearning for a missing "something" in their lives. The working life that his first collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* depicts—waitresses, students, teachers, writers—does not represent a demeaning life in itself; rather it is the threat of fragmenting institutions and fragmenting lives that weaken his characters' long term socioeconomic plans and cause humiliation.[14] For Carver and for many Americans it was *hard* work that was the vehicle for long-term social and economic prosperity; joblessness, bankruptcy, or even the prospect of either, therefore, reflected a weakening of that American Dream. This, in turn, led to a dislocation that Sennett argued was emblematic of late-twentieth century capitalism where "institutions no longer provide a long-term frame" and individuals had to "improvise his or her life-narrative, or even do without any sustained sense of self" (4).

: :

Carver's story "Are These Actual Miles?" deals with the humiliation of broken socioeconomic aspirations.[15] The opening sentence reveals an ultimatum, "Fact is the car needs to be sold in a hurry" (*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* 150). After a period of uncontrollable consumption, Leo and Toni have been forced to declare bankruptcy. They are advised by their lawyer to sell their

most expensive possession: the convertible, "today, *tonight*" (150). Such insistence calls for urgent action and, in a darkly equivocal manner, "Leo sends Toni out to do it" (150). This action marks a significant moment in their lives. As the desperate couple part company amid empty promises of an unrealistic future—"I'll get out of it" and "Things are going to be different!" (153)—they let go of their final vestige of consumer addiction, the yardstick by which they measure socioeconomic success. This humiliation is underlined a few hours later when Leo, after contemplating their predicament, in a moment of voyeuristic perception considers whether "he should go to the basement, stand on the utility sink, and hang himself with his belt" (153). Pulled out of his suicidal thoughts by Toni who rings from a restaurant, where she is with the salesman who is buying the car, Leo verbalises his chief concern a number of times, "Did somebody buy the car?" (154). Toni reveals she has sold the car for "six and a quarter" (155), which she counts as lucky—although it is not the nine hundred dollars Leo wanted—and, after repeating the salesman's opinion that, "he'd rather be classified a robber or a rapist than a bankrupt" (155), she hangs up the phone. In a moment of subtle ambiguity, Carver underlines Leo's humiliation. Not only has his economic situation drawn him to suicidal thoughts but it is now compounded by the salesman's opinion that bankruptcy is worse than robbery and rape—two crimes which, we are now almost certain, are about to be committed in one form or another. When Toni returns, the two lie in bed and Leo feels the stretch marks on her body, a physical reminder of their distorted ambition, which seem like "roads", and finally thinks of the lost convertible, "He remembers waking up in the morning after they'd bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, gleaming" (157).

The foundational problem to Leo and Toni's predicament is that they have brought into the hegemonic narrative that work and consumption lead to long-term economic and social success:

> She wanted something to do after the kids started school, so she went back selling. He was working six days a week in the fiber-glass plant. For a while they didn't know how to spend the money. Then they put a thousand on the convertible and doubled and tripled the payments until in a year they had it paid (152).

Their embodiment of the Fordist principles of mass production and mass consumption belie a contradiction that cannot be contained by their belief in the hegemonic narrative, for soon they enter a period of uncontrollable consumption. They spend their money on their children, buying them bicycles, clothes and food. Their actions are motivated in large part by a desire to escape their working class roots through consumption and Toni's admission confirms this, "I had to do without when I was a kid" (153). Their acquisition of books and records is a symbol of an

attempt at a cultural education before they buy the obligatory consumer capitalist appliances and luxury goods that denote graduation to middle-America. Their compulsive spending reflects the consumer zeitgeist described by Sennett:

> In using things we use them up. Our desire for a dress may be ardent, but a few days after we actually buy and wear it, the garment arouses us less. Here the imagination is strongest in anticipation, grows ever weaker through use (137-38).

For Leo and Toni the initial freedom offered by an expendable income in consumer-capitalist America mutates into a consuming addiction. The convertible is a significant symbol in this regard.[16] Its symbolism is concomitant with Gareth Cornwall's notion that Carver's characters have "no limit to the range and scale of their desire" and therefore presents a defining paradox for Toni and Leo (346). One might expect the acquisition of their most notable consumer item, the convertible (the sky's the limit), to be the catalyst to release them from the confines of their working poor life, but instead, it becomes a prison of consuming addiction. Consequently it is *that* addiction and the impending humiliation of bankruptcy that leads to the collapse of their upward economic and social mobility. For Leo and Toni hard work and consumption does not lead to the acquisition of long-term socioeconomic dreams. The sky is *not* the limit. Instead they are caught in the dark-side of America, where, just like Carver's experience in real life, hegemonic narratives are undermined by a capitalist society in transition.[17]

: :

The effect of Carver's literary response to his socioeconomic situation on Murakami's own fiction can only be understood with clarity by placing it within the context of the social and cultural crises that Murakami's fiction depicts in late-twentieth century Japan. Prior to the dramatic socioeconomic changes after 1955, Japanese life was defined by the humiliating defeat in the Pacific War, the Emperor's surrender and the subsequent military occupation by the U.S. The level of poverty in immediate postwar Japan was high, but advances in industrial technology and procurement orders from the U.S. military during the Korean War ignited economic recovery. From 1955 onwards, consumption of traditional necessities declined as the country began to adopt more Western ideals, most notably increasing expenditure on leisure, education and financial investments (Takafusa 322). This coincided with Prime Minister Ikeda's income-doubling plan in 1960 which began a period of huge economic growth. In an effort to improve exports many companies moved towards the Pacific coast causing significant migration. In Murakami's home region, Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe, for example, the population increased by 62% (Takafusa 379). The movement towards the Pacific was significant in a cultural sense, too, as television ownership increased and imported American films and television programs began to

have an impact. The media became American-centred—the material and social success of the postwar period in the U.S. became an emulative model—and depictions of American families surrounded by consumer goods had a powerful impact on the Japanese mind-set. Marilyn Ivy recognises that "The middle-class 'American way of life' became the utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese in the 1950s", a goal tied to the classic American (even Fordist) conviction that unflagging hard work is the basis for commodity acquisition (249). Crucially this positive impression was passed on to the postwar generation, "'When I was in my teens in the sixties,' Murakami recalls, 'America was so big. Everything was shiny and bright'" (Kelts 38).

The specific boom period between 1966 and 1970, known as the Izanagi Boom, paved the way for a swift change in lifestyle priorities for the Japanese people in two distinct ways. Those who were older, who were tied to corporate infrastructure and could remember Japan's immediate postwar poverty, embraced their new prosperity with vigour. They became intensely proud of their achievements, and began to enjoy their gains in an increasingly materialist society. Commodities such as electrical appliances and cars became common among the masses. If the "American way of life" was their goal then they were certainly coming close to achieving it. The postwar generation however, like Murakami himself, had a different attitude to Japan's rise. Many of them, embedded in Japanese universities, began to harness a particularly strong grievance against the established priority given to the economy and industry, which they viewed as leading to an excessive level of corporate control on individuals.[18] This came to a head in 1968 with widespread rioting at the universities.[19]

Writing two decades after the event, Murakami's novel, *Norwegian Wood*, gives a fictional account of the riots. His farcical descriptions undermine the protester's attempt at revolution. The novel's protagonist, Toru Watanabe, unimpressed with their propaganda, claims that "The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination" (75). The novel's mocking tone belies the fact that Murakami initially became involved in the riots. However, he came to view the political organizations that erected barricades and pursued a violent agenda as hypocritical. When the police were called in to break up the students the revolutionaries gave in easily and the Establishment claimed victory. After almost a year of closures, universities began to reopen and the majority of students came back the following semester. Those who had once thrown rocks and handed out propaganda were now studiously taking notes in lectures preparing for life in Japanese society. "The mood of excitement and idealism collapsed", Rubin writes, "leaving in its wake a terrible sense of boredom and politeness" (23).

Talking in an interview with Larry McCaffery a number of years later, Murakami summed up the events of his youth in this way:

> I belong to a generation of Japanese people who grew up during the counterculture era and the revolutionary uprisings of 1968, 1969, and 1970. The Japan when I was a child was poor, and everybody worked hard and was optimistic that things were getting better. But they are not. When we were kids, we were a poor country but very idealist. That began to change in the sixties; some people just got rich and forgot their ideals, while other people struggled to save idealism […] Then, very quickly, all that simply disappeared. The uprisings were all crushed by the cops and the mood became bleak. The whole sense of the counterculture rebellion seemed finished (117).

It is this sense of humiliation before the hegemonic narrative of Japanese life that Murakami is responding to in much of his fiction. Like Carver's bleak depiction of the ubiquitous humiliation of middle-Americans caught in a world where full time work is in decline and low paid, irregular work is increasing, Murakami's portrayal of the boredom and politeness of corporate work and consumption in post-1970s Japan represents a national sentiment. It is a feeling that is still so pervasive that Rubin recognises that Murakami's fiction continues to "attract readers too young to have experienced the events themselves, but who respond to the lament for a missing 'something' in their lives" (29). The crux of Murakami's fiction is often found when characters, distracted by corporate conformity or a consumerist mentality—a way of life that Murakami clearly depicts as an unfit antidote for the prevalent malaise in late-twentieth century Japan—realise they are still suffering from the debilitating burden of post-1970s humiliation. For, in Murakami's fiction of the 1980s we frequently meet characters who are awkwardly and painfully caught between the failed idealism of the 1960s and the materialism of the 1970s and 1980s. The resulting sense of humiliation as characters reflect on their lost idealism echoes the kinds of humiliation suffered in Carver's America.

: :

Boku, the narrator of Murakami's story "The Second Bakery Attack", is typical of a character struggling to come to terms with a post-1970s humiliation.[20] One night he wakes up suffering from "tremendous overpowering hunger pangs" (36). Sitting at the kitchen table with his wife he reveals that he suffered a similar feeling when he was caught up in the anti-establishment riots as a student. His resistance to corporate infrastructure was so firm at the time that he refused to get a job even to buy food. So, in order to eat he and a friend decided to rob a bakery. The foolishness of their plan is underlined when their violence is deflated by a baker who offers no physical resistance, and instead gives them free bread on the condition that they sit and listen to an album of Wagner overtures. The students decide to accept the offer because it was not work "in the purest sense of the word" (40). When Boku's chosen form of escape—violence—gives

way to compromise, his idealism mutates into a humiliating reality. The failed bakery attack marks the failure of idealism and a humiliating victory for the Establishment in his life. Talking to his wife he concludes:

> It was a kind of turning point. Like, I went back to the university, and I graduated, and I started working for the firm and studying for the bar exam, and I met you and got married. I never did anything like that again. No more bakery attacks (41).

The return of the hunger pangs cannot be seen as coincidental, for they correspond with his significant move into the mainstream—he has only been married two weeks and recently passed the bar exam—and so the pangs reflect a re-emergence of old countercultural desires. The inability of the hegemonic narrative of corporate work to satisfy the humiliation of his lost idealism is indicative of its failure. His justification for his conformity is merely a reticent "Times change. People change" (40), a prophetic declaration of the socioeconomic transitions in late-twentieth century Japan that is reminiscent of Sennett's argument that "The normal path of the adult's 'sentimental education' is meant to lead to ever greater resignation about how little life as it is actually conducted can accord with one's dreams" (182-83). In light of this, we might tentatively consider the humiliation of failed Japanese idealism exhibited in much of Murakami's fiction as correlative with the humiliation Carver felt when he realised the failure of the Fordist narrative in 1970s America.

It is apt that as Murakami attempts to develop Carver's example that he presents the couple in "The Second Bakery Attack" not alone, like the separate actions of Leo and Toni, but working in communal activity. With the aid of his wife, an indication that familial community is an important ideal in combatting corporate conformity, Boku attempts to fight the threat of mutated dreams. His wife deems that the only way to resolve the "curse" of the first bakery attack is to implement another, more successful, raid. She loads up their Toyota Corolla—the most ordinary of Japanese cars—with the extraordinary: a Remington shotgun, ski masks, rope and cloth-backed tape, and the newlyweds set off into the Tokyo night. Unable to find a bakery, Boku's wife decides that a McDonald's will suffice and the pair enter the restaurant and hold up the staff. Notably the only other customers are a couple of students who are asleep at their table and are oblivious to the attack. There is a significant distinction between the idealism of students in the 1960s and the post-postwar generation. The former were defined by a principled refusal to enter the corporate structure, but the latter are defined by a pervasive sleep. Boku characterises the students "like a couple of deep-sea fish" before asking, "What would it have taken to rouse them from a sleep so deep?" (48). Disaffected by the example of failed idealism set by the postwar generation, the students of post-1970—who represent the core of Murakami's

readership—have succumbed to the failed promise of anti-establishment ideals and entered a symbolic boredom expressed through inactivity.

Managing to escape with thirty Big Macs, Boku and his wife drive half-an-hour away to a deserted car park where they *consume* a third of their spoils. The result and conclusion of the story is significant. Firstly, the couple's insatiable hunger begins to fade, but this is not an end in itself for it leads to an epiphany, symbolised by dawn breaking over the Tokyo skyline, and what they see as they look out the windows of their car: the "filthy walls" of the urban environment around them, a huge Sony Beta ad tower glowing with "painful intensity", and the "whine of highway truck tires" as ubiquitous as the dawn chorus (48).[21] For Murakami's characters in "The Second Bakery Attack" the humiliation of lost idealism causes an insatiable hunger that is apparently only satisfied by extreme consumption. The absence of a bakery, their magnetism to McDonald's, the thirty stolen Big Macs, and the capitalist cityscape symbolise as much. But this consumption, in turn, only leads to distract from the threatening narrative of materialism. The sleep that Boku's wife succumbs to in the final scene after she has consumed the hamburgers is reminiscent of the "deep-sea" sleep of the students in McDonald's. This sleep, which was so elusive at the beginning of the story, has finally come, but with it a menacing undertone. For the couple are left isolated in the capsule of their car, with the looming narrative of materialism rising high in the filthy urban environment around them.

: :

June 7, 1977 was, famously, the date when Carver stopped drinking. Almost a decade of alcoholism had ruined his marriage, crippled his fledgling career and almost ended his life. Slowly beginning to recover from his destructive binge, his writing appeared to change. His fiction, once described by Donald Newlove as "sparingly clear as a fifth of iced Smirnoff" (77), began to intimate signs of embellishment and growth. At the time, critics viewed the transformation as part of a wider development in Carver's oeuvre. Writing in 1985, William L. Stull claimed that Carver's fiction was beginning to embody a metamorphosis from "sorry tales more transcribed than told" (1)—the Carvers' first bankruptcy and "Are These Actual Miles?" is a premium example of this—to more generous, humanist realism in "a spirit of empathy, forgiveness and community" (6). The idea of positive progression and development fast became the prevailing opinion and was backed up by critics like Ewing Campbell who viewed Carver's four main collections (*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *Cathedral*, *Where I'm Calling From*) as representative of a four stage evolution: apprenticeship, breakthrough, maturity, and mastery and growth. While this view remained hegemonic among scholars for a number of years, it was soon dropped after D.T. Max's article. Those loyal to the

Carver cause rushed to the archives to invalidate the journalist's spurious claims, only to be disappointed and find that, yes, it seemed Lish had played an important role in shaping the Carver aesthetic. The "Evolution Theory" was disproved. His early writing was as "generous" as his late writing. A move soon followed to establish and publish Carver's original manuscripts, thus preserving the purity of the Carver canon. William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll completed *Beginners*, the original and unedited text of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 2007.[22]

The situation regarding Lish is complicated by Carver's lack of denial concerning Lish as a negative influence. In fact, more often than not, despite their fractious relationship, he tended to present a positive front and praise Lish for his editorial involvement—or at least for giving him the opportunity to begin his career.[23] His death, ten years before D. T. Max's article, and Lish's continued reticence additionally obscures any attempt that scholars might have at full clarity of the situation. A second factor further obfuscates the issue: Carver's relationship with Tess Gallagher. It seems to be no accident that Carver's publication of longer, generally positive and more expositional stories coincides with the reduction of Lish's editorial control *and* the development of his relationship with Gallagher. The critic Chad Wriglesworth is convinced that Carver's relationship with Gallagher "remains the most significant influence on his spiritual and relational recovery" (149). Evidence of this abounds, Wriglesworth claims, not only in Carver's latter fiction and poetry, but also his non-fiction prose. He offers Carver's final piece of writing, a short essay written for the University of Hartford's 1988 graduation ceremony at which he was due to receive an honorary doctorate, as an apposite example. Carol Sklenicka reinforces Wriglesworth's claim when she notes a strong undertone of Gallagher's vision in the text, "the Hartford speech moves in a rhythm that sounds more like Gallagher's than Carver's", although she does concede that "there's a definite Carver touch in his valedictory paragraphs" (469). The address echoes a belief that Carver claimed to hold in the sacred toward the end of his life and turns on a phrase he borrows from Saint Teresa, "Words lead to deeds…. They prepare the soul make it ready, and move it to tenderness" (123). Carver moves on to describe phrase as being "mystical" and focuses particularly on the words "soul" and "tenderness", finally exhorting his audience to "remember that words, the right and true words, can have the power of deeds" (125). Such power comes, in the speech's own admission, from a spiritual place, especially in a time "less openly supportive of the important connection between what we say and what we do" (123), a sentiment that, since Carver's death, Gallagher has placed as a template for Carver's second-life recovery:

> [Carver] never heaped credit upon himself for having overcome his illness. He knew it was a matter of grace, of having put his trust in what AA identifies as a "higher power", and of having miraculously been given the will to turn all temptation to drink aside (199).

While it is easy to be sympathetic towards the argument that Carver's post-alcoholic life and work evinces a spiritual recovery—although, Wriglesworth is quick to point out, that it is a spirituality "not bound by orthodox creed or specific doctrine" (133)—it does seem that balancing this spiritual solution with the material, socioeconomic diagonosis found in his earlier fiction, is rather problematic.[24] Even leaving aside Lish's role in shaping Carver's aesthetic, the posthumous publications that Gallagher has commissioned—*Call If You Need Me*, *Carver Country*, *Soul Barnacles*, *A New Path To The Waterfall*—with their overt spiritual content, seems to lead towards a curious, and partisan, veneration of Carver's name. Gallagher concludes her foreword to *Call If You Need Me*, for example, by asserting that Carver's writing holds an almost scriptural property, one that "we can dip into at any point and find something to refresh and sustain us" (xv). Again, when considered against the intensely materialist world of Carver's fiction, Gallagher's remarks seem to obscure as much as they illuminate. One wonders if whether, for good or ill, this new narrative is motivated in large part by an attempt to usurp an older and more established view of Carver's life and canon and present a new spiritualism that denies—or rather, forgives—his minimalist persona or his personal, wilful involvement in the actions of his first-life. It may be associated with the acrimonious break-up of Carver's first marriage, or with the negativity associated with his "Running Dog" alcoholism—the abusive relationships, the infidelities, and the defrauding—but one is apt to point out—for the sake of balance, for we all admire Carver's work—that the image that Gallagher has attempted to preserve since Carver's death subtly denies the sin of his first-life. Her rhetoric promotes a redeemed view of Carver—a recipient of a kind of literary salvation—that fails to accept broader socioeconomic factors—financial circumstances, relationships and Carver's own will power—that might have contributed to his recovery.

Whether or not we choose to accept or deny what Wriglesworth calls a "manifestation of a sacred reality" in Carver's second-life fiction (139), it is interesting to note that Murakami's more recent publications offer a correlative proposition to the idea that words have the power to provoke actions of tenderness and spirituality. This idea is very much part of his answer to the postwar obsession with corporate identity and materialism and post-1970s malaise. Perhaps unsurprisingly too, Murakami's move to a clearer critical response is marked—much like Carver's—by a profound real-life experience.[25] In 1995 catastrophe hit Japan twice in the space of three months. In January an earthquake struck Murakami's home city of Kobe and killed over

6,000 people and in March the cult Aum Shinrikyo dropped multiple bags of sarin gas on the Tokyo subway and killed 12 people and injured over 1,000. Pulling the events together, Murakami viewed both disasters as wake-up calls to the mindless corporate conformity or excessive materialism that had dogged Japan since the 1970s. In *Underground*, a non-fiction account of the Tokyo gas attack, he explicitly highlights what he sees as the problem for Japanese society at large. Writing with a rhetoric which curiously reflects Carver's phrase "words lead to deeds", Murakami calls for "words coming from another direction, new words for a new narrative" that will have the power to "purify the [old] narrative" of mindless conformity to work and consumption (197).

: :

Murakami's call is mirrored in the fiction that he produces after these two events. Set in February 1995, the month between the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo gas attack, his story collection *after the quake* documents how the natural earthquake acts as a wake-up call for characters caught in the net of post-1970s malaise. The severe hangover that Yoshiya, the protagonist of "All God's Children Can Dance", is suffering from is surely the physical symptom of what Murakami sees as an increasingly "spiritual" void amongst the young, post-postwar generation.[26] Attempting to regain some kind of semblance after a hedonistic night, Yoshiya epitomises the addiction to hyper-consumerism in post-1970s Japan. Suffering too from a spiritual void, he elicits a plea to the heavens, "Please, God, never let this happen to me again" (43), a cry, which we suspect is uttered more in despair than in genuine petition. Yoshiya's mother, who he still lives with, conducts a hypocritical life. On the one hand a devout member of a Christian cult, she holds to the purity of a works-based religion, and on the other succumbs to the depravity of her sexual desires for her own son. With the perverse, organised religion of his mother offering no real alternative to his hyper-consumerism, Yoshiya embarks on a series of alternative sexual experiences, but these also fail to remedy the void of his spiritual nature. Claiming that Yoshiya has no biological father—an ideology proffered by her cult—his mother one day describes a string of sexual experiences she had with an obstetrician before his birth. Spotting a man on the train that matches the obstetrician's description the day of his severe hangover, Yoshiya begins to trail him. When he alights he follows him in a taxi before pursuing him on foot and losing him in a series of dark alleys. Left in a void of blindness and silence, Yoshiya's quest represents a broader search for meaning in 1990s Japan:

> What was I hoping to gain from this? he asked himself as he strode ahead. Was I trying to confirm the ties that make it possible for me to exist here and now? Was I hoping to

> be woven into some new plot, to be given some new and better-defined role to play? (56).

Whether the man was Yoshiya's father or not is irrelevant to the plot of the story, the point is that he represents an outside guiding force that leads to a moment of perspicuity, "Now the stranger had disappeared, however, the importance of the succeeding acts that had brought him this far turned unclear inside him. Meaning itself broke down and would never be the same again" (56). Having begun to realise the brokenness of the "old" narrative, Yoshiya is at a point of self-diagnosis, and his next act embodies a solution:

> Unable to think of a song to match his mood, he danced in time with the stirring of the grass and the flowing of the clouds. Before long, he began to feel that someone, somewhere, was watching him. His whole body—his skin, his bones—told him with absolute certainty that he was in *someone's* field of vision. So what? he thought. Let them look if they want to, whoever they are. All God's children can dance (58).

This moment, an example of what Rubin in a BBC documentary calls Murakami's "down to earth spirituality" is Murakami's solution to the hangover-malaise of the orthodox narratives of corporate conformity and materialism. If Yoshiya's quest reveals a longing to fill the internal void present in The Lost Decade, then his improvised dance, in time with nature, reveals a kind of independent pantheism that frees him from the constraints of postwar Establishment and protects him from the darkness of the post-postwar generation. And yet, this new narrative mirrors Carver's non-creedal spiritualism in that it is inacted out in the presence of a benign guiding force—what, if Gallagher is to be believed, is analogous to Carver's "higher power". Rubin continues to explain Murakami's spiritual solution by suggesting that his fiction is "dealing with religious themes without the remotest appeal to established religion. He's getting into those things that you can call spiritual without any spiritual nonsense. It's down to earth spirituality." The success of Murakami's solution is, of course, far more equivocal. If, for instance, Rubin's definition seems a little vague, it is, perhaps, because it fails—much like the definitions that describe Carver's second-life spirituality—to mirror the specifity of the strongly materialist, socioeconomic diagnosis found in both writers' his early fiction. In this way it is perhaps better viewed not as a definitive model, but an idealistic one; an undogmattic solution that presents fleeting moments of connection and fulfilment to a society steeped in orthodoxy.

: :

The strong literary influence that this article has been exploring between Carver and Murakami was reflected in a trip that Murakami and Yoko, his wife, took in 1984 to meet Carver and Gallagher at their home in Port Angeles. The four spent their time together discussing Carver's

fictional depiction of the many humiliations in daily life, something, Murakami thought, that the Japanese people could strongly associate with. By the end of the afternoon Gallagher recalls that she and Carver recognised they had "met an extraordinary couple to whom they felt somehow connected" (Rubin 98-99). A number of years later Carver recalled the meeting and wrote the poem "The Projectile" and dedicated it to Murakami. The poem begins:

> We sipped tea, politely musing
> on possible reasons for the success
> of my books in your country. Slipped
> into talk of pain and humiliation
> you find occurring, and reoccurring,
> in my stories. And that element
> of sheer chance. How all this translates
> in terms of sales (11).[27]

The poem continues to describe a defining event in Carver's adolescence when a snowball fight ended in a broken eardrum after "a ball of packed ice" fluked its way through a three inch gap in Carver's car window (12). The pain, the poem notes, was "stupendous", but more pertinently, so was the humiliation—which is isolated on its own line—and led to Carver weeping in front of his "tough" peers (12). Ulitmately the binary denotation of the defining couplet in the poem's opening, "How all this translates / in terms of sales" (12), encapsulates the close association between his world and Murakami's, and, perhaps, even though Carver did not know it at the time, presciently highlights the connection between both writers' fiction.

Notes

[1] Personal correspondence, Haruki Murakami to Tess Gallagher of March 23, 1999.

[2] Although it ought to be noted that there are strong realist elements to Murakami's fiction which are often overlooked by critics. His first best-selling novel in Japan, *Norwegian Wood*, for instance, is devoid of any fantasy elements. Likewise so are many of his short stories, particularly those featured in *after the quake*, as well as his latest English language novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*.

[3] Mark McGurl's recent influential formulation of postwar American literature is another apposite example of this anti-realist periodization. While McGurl presents a thorough and eminently readable analysis of Carver's fiction, realism is a term that he does not associate with Carver, instead opting for his own, more obscure, "lower-middle-class modernism" (273-320). For a helpful summary of the debates surrounding literary realism to date, see the introduction to Ian McGuire's recent publication *Richard Ford and the Ends of Realism*.

[4] Rubin's description mirrors how Carver's fiction is often described. Take Martin Scofield's more recent summary, in which he writes:

> In Carver we are often left with "anti-epiphanies", where the realization (at least for the characters) just does not come. But what makes Carver's stories humane as well as artistically subtle is the feeling that his characters are striving, often desperately for understanding; and that even where (as is usually the case) it is not achieved, its absence is felt and registered as a central element in the story (228).

For more on the stylistic similarities between the two writers see Naomi Matsuoka's excellent article in which she argues that Murakami bases his representation of the quotidian on the "subtle but realistic and humanistic depiction of life [in] Raymond Carver" (425

[5] From the mid-1980s to the year 2000, Murakami published the following translations of Carver's fiction (publication dates given in parentheses after the title): *Boku ga denwa o kakete iru baso* [*Where I'm Calling From*] (1983), *Yoru ni naru to sake wa …* [*At Night The Salmon Move*] (1985), *Sasayaka da keredo, yaku ni tatsu koto* [*A Small, Good Thing and Other Stories*] (1989), *Carver's Dozen: Reimondo Kava kessakusen* [*A Dozen of Raymond Carver's Best Stories*] (1994), the eight volume *Reimondo Kava zenshu* [*Complete Works of Raymond Carver*] (1990-7) and finally Carver's posthumous collection *Hitsuyo ni nattara denwa o kakete* [*Call If You Need Me: The Uncollected Fiction and Other Prose*] (2000). Note, the dates of Murakami's own story collections in the same period: *Chugoku-yuki no soro boto* [*A Slow Boat To China*] (1983), *Kangaru-biyori* [*A Perfect Day For Kangaroos*] (1983), *Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sono-ta no tanpen* [*Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories*] (1984), *Kaiten mokuba no deddo hiito* [*Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round*] (1985), *Pan'ya saishugeki* [*The Second Bakery Attack*] (1986), *TV Piipuru* [*TV People*] (1990), *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1979-89* [*Murakami's Collected Stories 1979-89*] (1990-1), *Rekishinton no yurei* [*The Lexington Ghost*] (1996), and *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru* [*after the quake*] (2000).

[6] Jay Rubin supports this idea. At a symposium on Murakami's fiction at the University of Berkeley in 2008, Rubin, in response to a question about Murakami's translation technique said, "I remember reading a Raymond Carver story twice in one day—once in English, once in Japanese—and it was like reading the same thing twice."

[7] While both novels were published in 1979 and 1980 in Japan, they were only published for the first time in the U.S. and the U.K. in English translation in 2015.

[8] *A Wild Sheep Chase* sold 50,000 copies in Japan in its first six months of publication (Rubin 96), and while I am keen not to equate sales figures with literary merit, it is worth emphasising the large readership that Murakami's fiction had in Japan, even at this very early stage of his career.

[9] *Norwegian Wood*, for instance, depicts the social turmoil of the 1960s and has also been viewed by many critics as mirroring Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

[10] While I may not subscribe to all of the arguments posited in Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge's *Reading Capitalist Realism*, their recent publication presents a useful compilation of approaches to the question of the relationship between social context and cultural production.

[11] For a more in-depth account see Part II of Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, "The Political-Economic Transformation of Late-Twentieth Century Capitalism" (121-197).

[12] As a brief example, take the restructuring of labor contracts in the 1970s and 1980s, which moved work arrangements away from regular employment to part-time, temporary or sub-contracted agreements. These shifts in labor had their most profound effect on middle-America. In her account of the period, Katherine S. Newman argues that 1985, a year when 600,000 white-collar management jobs were dissolved, was exemplarily of the situation (34). Much of these shifts can be traced back to the breakdown of the Bretton Woods currency agreement in the early 1970s, which appeared to weaken national constraints on investing and resulted in a period of economic instability. In this period, the ethnographer Richard Sennett argues that "corporations reconfigured themselves to meet a new international clientele of investors—investors more intent on short-term profits in share prices than on long-term profits in dividends" (6-7).

[13] Interestingly, at the time, Carver showed little sign of humiliation in going through the bankruptcy process. The final couplet of his poem "Bankruptcy", "Today, my heart, like the front door, / stands open for the first time in months" (*All Of Us* 8), reveals a certain level of relief; a chance at a fresh start. It is only later, as we shall come to see, that his writing starts to register the humiliation of the situation.

[14] Note that it is not the occupations that were demeaning, Carver's emphathetical tone makes that clear. These are jobs that any American might hold, and which Carver, as he documented in "Fires", did at one time (35). Later, in an interview with Bruce Webber, Carver claimed that "the country is filled with these people. They're good people. People doing the best they could" (92).

[15] The story was first published in 1972 as "What Is It?" in *Esquire*.

[16] To illustrate this kind of consuming purchase Sennett uses the example of an iPod whose "commercial appeal consists precisely in having more [memory] than a person could every use." The car that Leo and Toni buy therefore reflects this desire. "Buying a little iPod similarly promises to expand one's capabilities," and here is the crux, apt to the point of cliché, "As the salesman who flogged my iPod said, without any embarrassment, 'The sky's the limit'" (153-54).

[17] The symbolism of the story is made even more pertinent when considered in the context of the Carvers' first bankruptcy, for they too had recently bought a convertible on Maryanne's salary and were forced to sell it during the bankruptcy.

[18] Chie Nakane describes the situation in her anthropological study of Japanese life in the twentieth century. "The point where group or public life ends and where private life begins no longer can be distinguished" she explains. Continuing, and in reference to the average worker in late-twentieth century Japan, she states:

> Their sphere of living is usually concentrated solely within the village community or the place of work […] The provision of company housing, a regular practice among Japan's leading enterprises, is a good case in point […] In such circumstances employees' wives come into contact with and are well informed about their husbands' activities. This, even in terms of physical arrangements, a company with its employees and their families forms a distinct social group […] With group-consciousness so highly developed there is almost no social life outside the particular group on which an individual's major economic life depends. The individual's every problem must be solved within this frame (10).

[19] There are clear parallels between the student movement in Japan and the New Left in America in the 1960s. Richard Sennett's opening lines to *The Culture of New Capitalism*—which describe life in America—uncannily echo the sentiments of the Japanese student movement, "Half a century ago, in the 1960s—that fabled era of free sex and free access to drugs—serious young radicals took aim at institutions, in particular big corporations and big government, whose size, complexity, and rigidity seemed to hold individuals in an iron grip" (1).

[20] Boku is the Japanese word for the "I" that Murakami chooses to narrate the majority of his short stories. It positions Murakami's short stories in a line, as Rubin elucidates, of traditional Japanese "I-novels" (37).

[21] The scene is reminiscent of another Murakami story, "A Slow Boat To China", in which the narrator describes Tokyo as a place full of dirty facades, nameless crowds, unremitting noise, packed trains, grey skies, billboards on every square centimetre of space, hopes and resignations; and the crux, 'everywhere, infinite options, infinite possibilities. An infinity, and at the same time, zero' (238). The weak ideology of 1960s Japan, and post-1970s conformity, brings with it hopes but more pertinently, resignations; a parallel of the humiliation of lost Fordist narrative in Carver's fiction.

[22] *Beginners* was first published in Japan in 2007, of course, translated by Murakami.

[23] In "Fires", writing only months after Lish had severely cut *What We Talk About*, Carver writes that Lish was one of two individuals who held irredeemable notes of influence on his work (39). A fact that is almost impossible to contest, but one stated, I think, with a note of positivity.

[24] For further critical writing on spirituality and religion in Carver, see articles written by Edward Duffy, Steve Mirarchi, Kathleen Westfall Shute, as well as William L. Stull's "Beyond Hopelessville".

[25] One of Murakami's English translators, Philip Gabriel, argues that 1995 marks a significant turning point in Murakami's fiction, as his fiction began to show the "beginnings of a serious critique of contemporary Japan" (89).

[26] The idea of a spiritual void amongst the post-postwar generation is mirrored in many of the stories in the collection. In the first story, "UFO in Kushiro", for instance, the protagonist, Komura, is asked to deliver a mysterious box by a colleague to Hokkaido, an island in the far north of the Japanese archipelago. The transportation and delivery of the box becomes, as Jonathan Boulter recognises, "a portentous emblem, a physical object correlative to Komura's own emptiness" (87). After delivering the package, and gaining some insight into the significance of his actions, Komura nearly commits a violent act with a woman at a love hotel. The combination of tropes appears to align with the "wake-up" call presented by the natural earthquake, and the potential danger of filling the "void" with, what Murakami sees, as a kind of inner-darkness, as seen in the cult gas attack.

[27] While it *is* my contention that the thematic similarity between Carver and Murakami did indeed contribute to Carver's success in Japan, it is surely apparent that the commercial success of Murakami's own fiction in the 1980s contributed to the commercial success of his translations of Carver. In a letter dated 12 September 1986, Murakami informs Carver that his most recent translation had just been released in paperback and was "selling well"'. That particular translation was no doubt aided by the success of Murakami's 1985 novel *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, which won the prestigious Tanizaki Literary Prize in Japan.

Works Cited

Adelman, Bob. *Carver Country*. 1991. New York: Quantuck Lane, 2013. Print.

Anderson, Sam. "The Fierce Imagination of Haruki Murakami." *New York Times Magazine* 21 Oct. 2011. Web. 3 Aug. 2014.

Boulter, Jonathan. *Melancholy and the Archive: Trauma, History and Memory in the Contemporary Novel*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011. Print.

Boxer, David and Cassandra Phillips. "*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* Voyeurism, Disassociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *Iowa Review* 10.3 (1979): 75-90. Print.

Campbell, Ewing. *Raymond Carver: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne, 1992. Print.

Carver, Raymond. *A New Path to the Waterfall*. London: Collins Harvill, 1989. Print.

---. "Bankruptcy." *All Of Us*. 1996. London: Harvill, 1997. Print.

---. "Are These Actual Miles?" *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* 1976. London: Vintage, 2009. 150-157. Print.

---. *Beginners*. London: Vintage, 2010. Print.

---. *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories*. 1988. London: Vintage, 2009. Print.

---. "Meditation on a Line from Saint Teresa." *Call If You Need Me*. Ed. William L. Stull. New York: Vintage, 2001. 123-125. Print.

---. "The Projectile." *Ultramarine*. 1986. New York: Vintage, 1987. 11-12. Print.

Cornwall, Gareth. "Mediated Desire and American Disappointment in the Stories of Raymond Carver." *Critique Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 46.4 (2005): 334-356. Print.

Duffy, Edward. "Word of God in Some Raymond Carver Stories." *Religion and the Arts* 2.3 (1998): 311-336. Print.

Harker, Ben. "'To Be There, Inside, And Not Be There': Raymond Carver and Class." *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007): 715-736. Print.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford UK, Blackwell, 1990. Print.

Gabriel, Philip. *Spirit Matters: Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature*. Honolulu: U Hawai'i P, 2006. Print.

Gallagher, Tess. *Soul Barnacles*. Ed. Greg Simon. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000. Print.

Gardner, John. *On Moral Fiction*. New York, Basic Books, 1977. Print.

Ivy, Marilyn. "Formations of Mass Culture." *Postwar Japan as History*. Ed. Andrew Gordon. Oxford UK: U of California P, 1993. 239-258. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013. Print.

Kelts, Roland. *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S*. Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Print.

Kingston, Jeff. *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics and Social Change Since the 1980s*. Chichester UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.

Matsuoka, Naomi. "Murakami Haruki and Raymond Carver: The American Scene." *Comparative Literature Studies* 30.4 (1993): 423-438. Print.

Max, D.T. "The Carver Chronicles." *The New York Times* 9 Aug. 1998. Web. 3 May. 2015.

McCaffery Larry, Sinda Gregory and Toshifumi Miyawaki. "It Don't Mean A Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing: an Interview with Haruki Murakami." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 22.2 (2002): 111-119. Print.

McGuire, Ian. *Richard Ford and the Ends of Realism*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2015. Print.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era*. London: Harvard U P, 2009. Print.

Mirarchi, Steve. "Conditions of Possibility: Religious Revision in Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral.'" *Religion and the Arts* 2.3 (1998): 299-310. Print.

Miyoshi, Masao. *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States*. London: Harvard U P, 1991. Print.

Murakami, Haruki. "A Literary Comrade." *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography*. Trans. Tara Maja McGowan. Ed. William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll. Santa Barbara: Capra, 1993. 130-135. Print.

---. "All God's Children Can Dance." *after the quake*. 2002. Trans. Jay Rubin. London: Vintage, 2003. 41-60. Print.

---. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki And His Years Of Pilgrimage*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. London: Harvill Secker, 2014. Print.

---. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991. Print.

---. *Norwegian Wood*. Trans. Jay Rubin. London: Harvill Press, 2000. Print.

---. "The Second Bakery Attack." *The Elephant Vanishes*. Trans. Jay Rubin. 1993. London: Vintage, 2003. 35-49. Print.

---. "A Slow Boat To China." *The Elephant Vanishes*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. 1993. London: Vintage, 2003. 217-239. Print.

---. "UFO in Kushiro." *after the quake*. 2002. Trans. Jay Rubin. London: Vintage, 2003. 41- 60. Print.

---. *Underground*. 2000. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel. London: Harvill, 2001. Print.

---. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990. Print.

---. *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels*. Trans. Ted Goosen. London: Harvill Secker, 2015. Print.

Nakane, Chie. *Japanese Society*. 1970. London: U of California P, 1972. Print.

Newlove, Donald. "Fiction Briefs." Rev. of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, by Raymond Carver. *Saturday Review* Apr. 1981: 77. Print.

Newman, Katherine S. *Falling From Grace*. New York: Pantheon, 1989. Print.

Rubin, Jay. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. London: Harvill, 2002. Print.

Scofield, Martin. *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge U P, 2006. Print.

Seemann, Brian. "Existential Connections: The Influence of Raymond Carver on Haruki Murakami." *The Raymond Carver Review* (Winter 2007): 175-91.

Sennett, Richard. *The Culture of New Capitalism*. London: Yale U P, 2006. Print.

Shute, Kathleen Westfall. "Finding the Words: The Struggle for Salvation in the Fiction of Raymond Carver." *Hollins Critic* 24.5 (1987): 1-10. Print.

Sklenicka, Carol. *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009. Print.

Snyder, Gary and Philip Gabriel., ed. *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1999. Print.

Stull, William L and Maureen Carroll. "Beyond Hopelessville: Another Side of Raymond Carver." *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 1-16. Print.

---. "The Critical Reception of the Works of Raymond Carver." *Critical Insights: Raymond Carver*. Ed. James Plath. Ipswich, MA: Grey House, 2013. 39-55. Print.

Takafusa, Nakamura. *A History of Showa Japan, 1926-1989*. Trans. Edwin Whenmouth. Tokyo: U of Tokyo P, 1998. Print.

Tess Gallagher Literary Archive, in the William Charvat Collection of American Fiction of The Ohio State University Libraries.

The Raymond Carver Papers, in the William Charvat Collection of American Fiction of The Ohio State University Libraries.

Webber, Bruce. "Chronicler of Blue Collar Despair." *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Ed. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1990. 84-97. Print.

"A Wild Sheep Chase: In Search of Haruki Murakami." *Imagine*. BBC, London. 24 June. 2008. Television.

Wriglesworth, Chad. "Raymond Carver and Alcoholics Anonymous." *New Paths to Raymond Carver*. Ed. Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2008. 132-153. Print.

Contributors

James Carver is Raymond Carver's younger brother and only sibling. His memoir, *Raymond Carver, Remembered by His Brother,* has been published by London publisher Austin Macauley (2017). His previous book was *Memories of Ray,* a signed, limited edition chapbook from Sore Dove Press (San Francisco, 2007). James has retired to the Oregon coast where he reads, writes poetry, paints, and enjoys listening to classical music, jazz, blues, and big band music from the 1940s.

Cameron Cushing earned his BA in English from Boise State University and his MA in English from the University of Idaho. His literary research interests include realism, dirty realism, and writing short stories. Recently, he has worked as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer with rural schools in North Idaho as well as with people with disabilities at Community Connections in Northwest Idaho. Cushing is currently applying to the University of Idaho's M.Ed. program in Rehabilitation Counseling and Human Services.

Taylor Johnston is a PhD candidate in Department of Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley. She has a BA in English and American Literature and an MA in Italian Literature from Middlebury College. Her interests include nineteenth-century realism in French, Italian, British, and American traditions, the fate of realism in postmodernism, postwar and contemporary American fiction, and critical theory. Johnston's dissertation examines the appropriation of realist style in postwar American fiction of the lower middle class.

Sandra Lee Kleppe, founder and director of the International Raymond Carver Society, is Professor of English at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences. Kleppe was co-editor for issues one and two of *The Raymond Carver Review;* co-editor of *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction, and Poetry* (University of South Carolina Press, 2008); and author of *The Poetry of Raymond Carver: Against the Current* (Ashgate, 2014). She recently edited *Ekphrasis in American Poetry: The Colonial Period to the 21st Century* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

Ann Olson is Professor of English at Heritage University in Toppenish, Washington. She holds a BA in English from the University of Texas at El Paso, an MA in Literature from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and an MFA in creative writing from Eastern Washington University.

Her writing has appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly* and *When Last on the Mountain.* Olson lives within the Yakama Tribal Reservation in Washington.

Jonathan Pountney is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University of Manchester, England. His core research is one of literary influence, and he is currently working on a thesis tentatively titled "The Afterlives of Raymond Carver: Neoliberalism, Realism and Literary Influence." He has contributed to scholarly journals including *US Studies Online* and *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. Pountney has spent time in the US studying Carver's manuscripts at Ohio State University, and he is an active member of the International Raymond Carver Society.

Madeleine Stein is a lecturer in the Expository Writing Program at New York University. Stein has also taught at Hostos Community College in the South Bronx and at The American University in Cairo, Egypt. Her writing has appeared in *Saranac Review*, *London Review*, and the *Cairo Times*.