

THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

Issue 7

THE RAYMOND CARVER REVIEW

ISSUE SEVEN

“WHY DON’T WE DANCE?” SPECIAL FEATURE

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Issue 7, the “Why Don’t We Dance?” Special Feature, is a study in interdisciplinary, ekphrastic scholarly explorations between literature and dance, both by Sophie Bocquet of the Pied de Biche Dance Company in Paris, and by Bocquet and Claire Fabre-Clark, Associate Editor of *The Raymond Carver Review*, at Université Paris-Est-Créteil, in France. A video of Bocquet’s *La Vie Est Une Fête, On Dirait* (Life Is a Party, So They Say) is accompanied both by Fabre-Clark’s essay tracing the historical connections in France between choreography and literature and by an interview with Bocquet and Fabre-Clark, conducted by Robert Miltner, Editor for *The Raymond Carver Review*. As a follow up to Sandra Lee Kleppe’s essay, “Raymond Carver and Biography,” which accompanied an excerpt from James Carver’s *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother James*, Issue 7 includes a lengthy interview of James Carver, conducted by Kleppe of *The Raymond Carver Review* Advisory Board. The issue concludes with two peer-reviewed essays. The first, “Beyond ‘Errand’: Raymond Carver and the Art of Homage” by Rob Davidson of California State University, Chico, considers Carver’s homages to his mentors, who include John Cheever, Czeslaw Milosz, and Anton Chekhov, the last two who shaped Carver’s *A New Path to the Waterfall*. The second, “In this too, she was right”: Alcoholic Acceptance in ‘Gazebo’” by David McCracken of Coker University who, through a background frame related to alcohol addiction and recovery, Carver biography and testimony, and Carver’s previous stories about alcoholism, offers an analysis of the important gazebo signification through an application of Jacques Lacan’s theory concerning need, demand, and desire.

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Introduction

The Raymond Carver Review 7 (Fall 2019/Winter 2020) issue marks the beginning of its new phase as a scholarly journal devoted to the study of Raymond Carver. Now hosted by St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, *The Raymond Carver Review* is an annual digital journal, and now includes relevant video and audio to expand and enhance aspects of Carver studies. Moreover, *The Raymond Carver Review*, while still committed to its core commitment to publishing peer-reviewed essays, will include more interviews, as well as important cultural and pedagogical components of Carver studies.

The opening section, Teaching Raymond Carver through Dance, opens with the video, "La Vie Est Une Fête, On Dirait (Life Is a Party, So They Say...)," which is written, choreographed, and produced by Sophie Bocquet of the Pied de Biche Dance Company in Paris, France. Bocquet adapts the common pairs ("Popular Mechanics"/"Mine"/"Little Things," "Gazebo," "So Much Water so Close to Home," "The Pheasant") or quartets of characters ("Put Yourself in My Shoes," "Beginners"/"What We Talk about When We Talk about Love," "Feathers," "What's in Alaska?") that are common structural tropes in Carver's stories into choreographed couples and quartets, re-telling Carver's stories through gesture, motion, stillness, bodily expression, and physical interaction.

The video is followed by an essay, "Why Don't We Dance?: Sophie Bocquet's Choreographic Interpretations of Raymond Carver Stories and Poems," by Claire Fabre-Clark, Département d'anglais, UPEC Université Paris-Est-Créteil, France, and Associate Editor of *The Raymond Carver Review*. Fabre-Clark's essay discusses Literature and Dance, an experimental, inter-curricular course, that she leads with Sophie Bocquet teach at Université Paris-Est-Créteil. Their project elaborates a continued dialogue around Carver's work, not only upon theoretical issue of the articulation between dance and literature, but also between academic and artistic approaches; the goal is a common language which transmutes Carver's intimate grammar into gesture. Drawing from background of Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham's work at Black Mountain College, Fabre-Clark cites French choreographer Maguy Marin's *May B*, based on Samuel Beckett's works which, was originally performed in November, 1981 in Angers, and which was recently performed again at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris in 2019. Sophie Bocquet's choreographed interpretations of Raymond Carver is therefore representative of the expanding field of research on the convergence of dance and literature, especially in France.

The Interview, conducted by Robert Miltner via email with Sophie Bocquet and Claire Fabre-Clark, focuses on their collaborative teaching of the Literature and Dance class at Université Paris-Est-Créteil. Topics central to the interview include developing, pedagogy, university support, student response, the impact of teaching the class on their art and scholarship, respectively, and their friendship. The interview concludes with representative student responses and self-assessment of their educational experiences.

Sandra Kleppe, former co-editor of *The Raymond Carver Review* and founding director of the International Raymond Carver Society, interviews James Carver, who has recently joined the Advisory Board. James discusses Reaganomics and Ray's political viewpoint, the Carver family's politics, family influences, alcoholism, the Carver brothers and the Vietnam war, Ray's early obsession with writing and empathy for the working class. James comments on the stories "Elephant" and "Boxes"; the poems "The Man Outside," "Bobber," "Drinking while Driving" and "Are These Actual Miles?"; and on film adaptations, including *Birdman*, and *Short Cuts*.

A commitment to publishing peer-reviewed essays from new and emerging Carver Scholars was at the core of founding *The Raymond Carver Review*, and this Issue concludes with two fine peer-reviewed essays: Rob Davidson's "Beyond 'Errand': Raymond Carver and the Art of Homage," and David McCracken's "'In this too, she was right': Alcoholic Acceptance in Raymond Carver's 'Gazebo.'"

"Beyond 'Errand': Raymond Carver and the Art of Homage" is a hybrid work that effectively blends elements of the personal essay with the tradition of the scholarly essay, reflecting the author's writer-scholar identity. Davidson considers Carver's use of homage in the author's later work, specifically his short story "The Train" from *Cathedral*, an homage written as a sequel to his friend John Cheever's short story, "The Five-Forty-Eight"; the short story "Errand," the final story Carver published, written in homage to Anton Chekhov, who is the central character of the story presented as a creative interaction with that author's biographical narrative, one that begins in the mode of historiography, but its final in a speculative form of fiction; and *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Carver's hybrid final book of poetry that couches excerpts, fragments, and quotes from a range of authors including Chekhov, a book influenced by Czeslaw Milosz's collection *Unattainable Earth*.

In "'In this too, she was right': Alcoholic Acceptance in Raymond Carver's 'Gazebo,'" David McCracken reads "Gazebo" as recovery text, one in which Carver demonstrates through Duane the process in which an alcoholic ultimately "wants to" want to get sober. McCracken sees Duane not in denial, at a precarious place where an alcoholic intuitively knows he is alcoholic, but is unwilling to admit powerless over alcohol and do whatever is necessary to stop drinking (i.e., take what in Alcoholics Anonymous is called the first step). Moreover, McCracken sees hope as Duane decides to assume responsibility for his recovery: he wants to want to get sober. Presented through a background frame related to alcohol addiction and recovery, Carver biography and testimony, and Carver's previous stories about alcoholism, the author offers an analysis of the important gazebo signification through an application of Jacques Lacan's theory concerning need, demand, and desire.

La Vie Est Une Fête, On Dirait (Life Is a Party, So They Say...)

A Video of Dance Performance
of Raymond Carver Stories and Poems

Sophie Bocquet, Pied de Biche Dance Company, Paris



Abstract

Fabre-Clark's discusses Literature and Dance, an experimental, inter-curricular course, that she and Sophie Bocquet teach at Université Paris-Est-Créteil. Their educational project elaborates a continued dialogue around Carver's work, not only upon theoretical issues of the articulation between dance and literature, but also between academic and artistic approaches; the goal is a common language which transmutes Carver's intimate grammar into gesture. Drawing from Merce Cunningham's and Martha Graham's work at Black Mountain College, Fabre-Clark additionally cites French choreographer Maguy Marin's *May B*, based on Samuel Beckett's works, which was originally performed in November, 1981 in Angers, and which was recently performed again at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris in 2019, as influences for the integration of literature and dance. Bocquet's choreographed interpretations of Raymond Carver are therefore representative of the expanding field of research on the convergence of dance and literature in France

“Why Don't We Dance?": Sophie Bocquet's Choreographic Interpretations of Raymond Carver Stories and Poems

Claire Fabre-Clark, UPEC Université Paris-Est-Créteil, France

Over the last two years I have been engaged in an experimental, inter-curricular project that I have been leading with French choreographer Sophie Bocquet of the Pied de Biche Dance Company in Paris, France. Our work has been developing along three main lines: a close collaboration on the reading and interpretation of short stories by American writer Raymond Carver; Dance Conferences, and a Dance and Literature class that we jointly offered at the French university of Paris XII-Créteil (UPEC). When I met Sophie Bocquet, she was preparing a performance based on a free adaptation of Carver's short stories and poems which was finally created in September 2017 at the Parisian theater L'Etoile du Nord; the performance was titled “La Vie Est Une Fête, On Dirait” (Life Is a Party, So They Say...). Our readings of Carver converge on the question of a poetics of the banal and the power of images in his work, both of which have been at the core of my academic work. Throughout these different projects we have aimed at elaborating a continued dialogue around Carver's inexhaustible work, seeking a common language which transmutes Carver's intimate grammar into gesture. Our voices have come together in an effort to reflect not only upon the more theoretical issue of the articulation between dance and literature, but also between academic and artistic approaches.

When working on the translation of Carver into dance with Sophie Bocquet, I was led to glimpse an expanding field of research on the convergence of dance and literature, especially in France. This essay is very much indebted to the works of Lucille Toth and Magali Nachtergaele, as well as to the academic writings of Alice Godfroy who has provided paramount landmarks in this new territory. In a seminal collection of essays devoted to this subject, Magali Nachtergaele and Lucille Toth write, “One could talk about contextualized, connected dancing, one for which the text is no longer a mere matrix to apply to dance (as was the famous libretto) but an imaginary and conceptual structure,

even sometimes an aesthetic counterpoint”¹(my translation) (Nachtergaele and Toth, 13). Whether the poems or excerpts are read on stage during the dance, or the dancers themselves play and act the texts, all combinations are possible for this fruitful alliance.

Projects conjugating dance and literature have increased in the last thirty years. Following the tracks of Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham’s work at the Black Mountain College, many choreographers have sought to enhance a postmodern vision of dance which goes on challenging all forms of academism and which open up a space for improvisation. Among the influences that Sophie Bocquet acknowledges and even claims, there are two essential ones: Pina Bausch and Teresa de Keersmaeker. Among more recent initiatives, the yearly festival called “Concordances” set up by Jean-François Munnier, has been happening since 2007 in various locations of the Paris area. The festival consists in bringing together a choreographer and a living writer who collaborate over a short period of time, at the end of which they present a performance on an open stage. A further proof of this renewed interest for the dance and literature couple in France, the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris recently (February 27-March 12 , 2019) re-programmed French choreographer Maguy Marin’s *May B* which had been originally created in November, 1981 in Angers, based on Samuel Beckett’s works, and which is now part of the contemporary repertoire and recently performed again at the Théâtre de la Ville. (Marin 1981, 2019). This show is comprised of ten dancers: five women and five men covered in white clay, as haggard figures representing the wandering souls of Beckett’s written world. Maguy Marin’s special mix of dance and theater and her conception of the dancer’s body as an individuality at the opposite of the classical normed body place her in the lineage of Pina Bausch and Mary Wigman.

If I chose to evoke Maguy Marin’s work in this introduction, it is because there are affinities in Sophie Bocquet’s and Maguy Marin’s projects in the way they ally intense attention to composition but also because of the continuity between Beckett’s work and the work of Raymond Carver. In both Sophie Bocquet’s conception and mine, the reading of Carver’s work as “realistic” limits the scope of its possibilities. As trapped in their daily lives as they may be, Carver’s characters are nevertheless as undetermined as Beckett’s characters. They have generic short names such as Molly, Fran, Jerry, Al (etc). and their destinies are those of ordinary men and women, independently from their social backgrounds. I am not denying Carver’s interest for socially marginalized characters, but their specific situations can be interpreted as metaphorical of a more universal human condition. There is indeed a sociological difference between the door-to-door vitamin salesgirl of “Vitamins” and the university professor who narrates “Blackbird Pie,” but no existential one. On the contrary, what might have been perceived as a social superiority at the beginning of a story is ironically inverted at the end. For instance, in “Feathers,” the narrator and his wife Fran seem horrified by their visit at Bud and Olla’s and the multiple discoveries they make there; the peacock and its awful cry, the crooked teeth cast, and the pop-eyed baby. They observe these with a certain distance at first but upon returning home, they seem to have been caught up by this reality that they cannot get away from: “‘Goddamn those people and their ugly baby,’ Fran will say for no apparent reason” (Carver, 376). It is as if the text were an invitation to cross the border of Bud

and Olla's simplicity and their constitutive ugliness: as if one could not look away from the real which looks at us and fascinates us.

By rejecting the dichotomy between word and body, Carver's work forges a language which remains as close as possible to the gravity of the real. His work on verbal clichés and stereotypes in general are integral to his creation of an aesthetics of the banal, as I have studied before. However, confronting this reading with a dancer's approach of the text has been instrumental in illuminating its corporeal dimension, from the very concrete mention of "bodies" in the text to the more abstract idea of the text's own corporeity. Indeed, its reading implies a particular attention to the bodies in the stories, whose language ranges from imperceptible gestures to clumsy interactions or failed attempts at physical rapture.

If the association between Carver's writing and dance might have seemed incongruous at first, a close observation of Carver's notations of simple gestures and his tragi-comic approach of the body (as in "Preservation" or "Careful," for example) definitely struck a chord with Sophie Bocquet's aesthetics. In "La Vie est Une Fête On Dirait," one can clearly see that Bocquet emphasizes ordinary gestures belonging to the register of daily life by endowing them with precision and deliberate slowness. This is particularly visible through the quartets in which she stages two couples greeting each other and sitting down at a table as for a dinner party or conversation. I am referring to the scene which she has entitled "The Meyers" visible in the video from 20'12 to 32'43. In this scene, dialogues and situations are freely adapted from several stories which stage two couples such as "Put Yourself In My Shoes," "Feathers," "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," "Vandals," "Why Don't You Dance?" and "What's in Alaska?"; this scene includes numerous improvisations in keeping with Sophie Bocquet's technique.

After the conventional gestures and words of greeting, the conversation fails to mimic the elementary social rites: the drink is refused, and the conversation soon turns to alcohol and love, two favorite subjects of Carver's characters, in the form of disparate and scattered fragments. But more than the theme of the stories, what Sophie Bocquet manages to capture is their rhythm and the subtlety of their intimate syntax. I would like to give an example of this translation of syntax into dance in this particular scene. If we refer to the beginning of "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," the two couples are presented as if mirroring each other with a few years' difference (Mel and Terri's couple is older and more disenchanted than the one formed by the narrator and Laura): "The four of us were sitting around this kitchen table drinking gin. ... There were Mel and me and his second wife, Teresa – Terri, we called her – and my wife, Laura. We lived in Albuquerque then. But we were all from somewhere else" (Carver, 310). The syntax of this sentence is difficult to follow even though Carver does not use any relative or conjunctive clauses; its complexity stems from the oral quality of the speech and the hyphenated embedded sentence. The initial syntactic "error" of the narrator ("Mel and me and his second wife, Teresa") seems to multiply the two couples ("the four of us") from the inside: "Mel and me" forms the first couple, to which is added Mel's and his first wife, while Teresa is duplicated into Terri, and Laura appears only at the end of the

sentence, as if distant from the narrator. The sentence in itself condenses the thematic dynamics of the whole story: the progressive distortion of the couple image in the face of reality.

Just like this sentence insidiously reconfigures the couples in the story, Bocquet reshuffles the two couples on the stage. While the first couple occupies the front of the stage, the other one moves in from the back. After the greetings, the two couples remain conventionally close to each other around the table, then the two men are standing and the two women sitting, and finally the partners are briefly exchanged with gestures denoting sexual attraction. At the very end of the scene, the initial positions are resumed around the table and the same gestures are repeated, in silence this time. In the short story, each incipient dialogue is cut off by a rebuff or a new anecdote on part of the speaker's partner. This impression of disharmony, which the characters try to ward off by overplaying their mutual affection is expressed by the incoherent verbal exchanges found in the dance show. The succession of disconnected sentences ("Oh! There are peanuts under the table!" followed by "Do you still teach at University?") marks the moment of the rhythm as the scene intensifies until some powerful centrifugal force violently projects the bodies down onto the floor all over the stage, breaking apart the balance that the characters had been trying to preserve until then.

This analysis of the conversion of text into dance is only one example of the many correspondences that could be found between Carver's stories and Sophie Bocquet's show, whether she found them intentionally or intuitively. During the great number of conversations that we have had about this, she has always insisted on two essential aspects of Carver's writing: on the one hand, when looked at very closely, the text provides a lot of choreographic indications, micro-gestures that the dancer can appropriate. On the other hand, the omnipresence of silence in the stories invites the choreographer to explore slowness and immobility as essential units of her gestural syntax. Dancing Carver then implies choreographing the situations described in the stories, their atmosphere, but also rendering the implicit corporeity one feels when "moved" by the text. As Alice Godfroy states in her study of the relationship between dance and poetry:

[...] the physicality of poetry comes from the corporal experience engaged by the silence underlying the text – underneath the scriptural gesture – a silence requiring that special attention be given to the physical sensations felt while reading. We must pursue our effort to locate the encounter between the poet and the dancer in this infra-poetical space, within the deep night of the body² (my translation) (Godfroy 283).

Clearly, Sophie Bocquet's "The Meyers" offer viewers an opportunity to see an infra-poetical space in which poet and dancer meet in an aesthetic alliance.

Notes:

On pourrait parler d'une danse en contexte, connectée, pour laquelle le texte n'est plus une matrice à appliquer (le fameux livret de ballet) mais une structure imaginaire, conceptuelle, voire un contrepoint esthétique. » (Nachtergaele and Toth 13)

« [...] la physicalité de la poésie provient d'une expérience corporelle du silence qui la sous-tend et qu'elle engage, en deça du geste d'écriture, une attention particulière au ressenti interne de la corporéité. C'est à ce niveau infra-poétique, au cœur de la nuit des corps, que nous devons poursuivre notre effort vers la rencontre du poète et du danseur. (Godfroy 283)

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Abstract

This interview, conducted by *Raymond Carver Review* Editor Robert Miltner, via email with Sophie Bocquet and Claire Fabre-Clark, focuses on their collaborative teaching of a Literature and Dance class at Université Paris-Est-Créteil. Topics central to the interview include pedagogy of the course, course development, university support, contribution to Carver studies and to the arts, and the impact that teaching the class had on their art and scholarship, respectively, and their friendship. The interview concludes with representative student responses and self-assessment of their educational experiences.

Interview with Sophie Bocquet and Claire Fabre-Clark

Robert Miltner

This interview was conducted by Robert Miltner during the late summer of 2019, via email, regarding their collaboratively teaching a class on Dance and Literature at UPEC Université Paris-Est-Créteil, France, with a focus on the writing of Raymond Carver. Choreographer Sophie Bocquet is Director of the Pied de Biche Dance Company, Paris, and Claire Fabre-Clark is Responsable pédagogique de L1, UPEC-Département d'anglais Créteil, UPEC Université Paris-Est-Créteil, France.

RM: How did the idea for the two of you to teach a class on Carver and choreography begin?

CF-C: It began when Sophie contacted me after reading a paper I had written for a special issue on Raymond Carver in a French magazine (*Le Matricule des Anges* 168, November-December 2015). She wanted to read my Ph.D dissertation and, “in exchange,” she gave me recordings of the show based on Carver’s stories she was rehearsing with her company. I watched them and immediately thought that her dance was very close to my understanding of Carver’s work. I went to see the company work one afternoon and later, spent much time talking with Sophie about Carver’s aesthetics of the banal, which is the angle of my academic work on Carver. In September 2017, I went to see the show “La vie est une fête on dirait” (Life Is a Party, So They Say...) three times and Sophie and I had a public discussion on stage about the work following the last performance. I felt like finding ways of collaborating with Sophie and, naturally, inviting her to one of my classes seemed like the best idea.

SB: I wanted to go deeper into the work I had started with the show and I was curious to see how the students would react. Also, I felt it was exciting to discover each other’s universe, to look at the way each of us works. I also like to bring dance to people who are not versed in artistic practices, and even less in contemporary dance.

RM: Was there a model for a class of this type? If so, what was it?

CF-C: No there wasn't. We had no idea where we were going, which made it both difficult and very open at the same time. I was curious to see how Sophie would lead the students to a "physical" understanding of Carver's (or anyone else's) work...and I myself was eager to find new ways to "feel" the text, to experience it. This absence of model is precisely what made this experiment interesting for me: I wanted to break away from the vertical model of the teacher who talks and the student who listens. Although I don't think I ever teach "vertically", the dance workshop definitely contributed to pulverize such a model!

SB: I have an on-going experience of workshops called "Que savez-vous de nos rêves ?" (« What do you know about our dreams? ») which is an artistic program destined for marginalized adults that I animate together with a visual artist. I like thinking about the transition and continuity between the ordinary "moving" gesture and the "dancing" gesture. Working with the support of words enables me to appeal to people's imagination, also to their sense of rhythm and of dynamics. Each person has a different way of reading and interpreting a text which is interesting to me, that's when creation happens. Take two paragraphs by Carver and each person will choose to "translate" what they read into dance differently.

RM: Why did you select the particular stories and poems to choreography?

SB: I try to choose inspiring stories, with a strong visual impact, almost cinematic sometimes, that strongly suggest the presence of the body. The narrative part of a story is important too for the dancer to be able to improvise on. For the creation, there were stories that we had initially chosen but which did not survive in the end, when we weren't convinced by the staging, or by the choreography. A good example is probably "A Small, Good Thing": it started out as very theatrical and narrative and ended in complete abstraction. A choreographic narrative which expresses the text—its feelings and its tensions— in silence. The power of dance is precisely to be able to do away with words. During the class, my aim was to use the micro events in Carver's stories as a basis for improvisation.

CF-C: For this class, I initially selected stories which would be useful for the study of clichés, namely "Intimacy," "Feathers," and "Gazebo." In my conversations with Sophie while preparing the class we also talked in detail about other stories like "Put Yourself in My Shoes," "Vitamins," and "Jerry, Molly and Sam." We first read the stories with the students and left everything open to their reactions. We wanted to take into account what they felt and projected on the stories when they read them. This preparatory phase was quite long and included many discussions among the students. I oriented the conversations on the subject of the cliché and the treatment of everyday life in the stories. I wanted them to be aware of the importance of verbal clichés as well as stereotypes and how literature can use or shun them. Mostly, I wanted them to be aware of Carver's use of cliché, especially in "Intimacy." Although we had two English speaking students, we worked on a translated

version of the texts. To illustrate the type of work we did, I can give one example of a scene that we created. It consisted in a movement of all the students gradually walking together and standing still all together, in a sort of “forest,” crying out loud parts of the wife’s lines: “my eggs in one basket,” “Inconsolable,” “You think you’re God or somebody?” etc. The students were entirely free to choose which line they wanted to cry out. The result was absolutely stunning and turned the wife’s part into a beautiful choral piece. I thought it was a very relevant “translation” of this story into theatre-dance as we get both the feeling of an individual story and the collective value of the cliché.

RM: What was the initial response from your university regarding your proposal for this class? What it enthusiastic and supportive?

CF-C: The reaction was quite positive about the principle of the class, but I had to fight quite a lot to get the actual financing of the class. Significantly, we were not able to program this as a “literature” class in the English Department, even as an optional course. However, I personally defended the project in front of the administrators of the university’s cultural services. Then again, we came in competition with other dance teachers who practice a more codified type of dance: hip-hop, modern-jazz, or tango etc. Every spring, my university has a final show involving all these different “courses” which is usually built around a set theme, but we felt we couldn’t fit into a pre-defined project as this seemed diametrically opposed to our experimental work. We finally convinced the administrators to finance the course which was open to students from all faculties –science, economics, law and humanities.

RM: What was the initial response from students? And their final response to the class?

CF-C: At first, the students were taken aback. As we were in an experimental process, I questioned them a lot on their experience as we were going along, especially during the first year. Their responses helped me shape my idea of what I was doing. Also, I chose to follow the dance part “as a student” and not remain an outside observer which totally changed my relationship to the students, naturally. I was discovering Sophie’s way of working alongside them and I was just as surprised as they were. For instance, it’s very unsettling to have to improvise a dance in front of your own students.

SB: Yes, some of them were surprised, but others liked it immediately. The very title of the course “Dance and literature” was mysterious to them, they told us so both consecutive years. But there’s a moment when they embark! The moment when you see the core of the group really forming is generally during the third week. It’s important for them to call for a sort of rough imaginary vision. Working in small groups at first, which reassures them, makes them communicate with one another and leads them towards an interpretative process. My dance is not imitative at all. The gestures I use are not codified. The more uncertain, blurred and vibrant it is, the more interesting it is to me.

RM: For each of you, what were particular challenges in creating and teaching this course? What were the moments or sources of satisfaction?

CF-C: The whole experience was a challenge, until the last minute, even 5 minutes before the end-of-semester show, partly because Sophie likes to always push the students into looking for new sensations and ideas! This uncertainty was quite unsettling for me, but I was (slightly) more serene the second time. As for the joys, they were numerous, uncountable, even. The first was when we saw that the students really took in the texts and made them theirs. They even went as far as writing their own texts, so that creation was happening both “on stage” and in language. We were working on all these levels simultaneously. During the second year, we asked the students to look for texts in their native languages, which some of them did. Two of them translated a poem by Emily Dickinson respectively into Arabic and Chinese. And of course, the final “shows” were very gratifying each time. The students were proud of their work and they felt they were part of a “team.”

SB: Uncertainty is the basis of my work. I hardly ever anticipate what is going to happen in dance. I prepare each session meticulously beforehand and I film each workshop so that I can watch them and rebound on what has been grasped by the students. The principle for me is to bring people to a creative process, to think about it. We never premeditated the scenes; we invented them with the students. Improvisation, composition, and creation: we all think together. And what’s important also is that from one week to the next, the work follows its own progress, without your thinking about it. The time between workshops is just as important as the workshops themselves; it enables things to settle. I see uncertainty also at the core of Carver’s writing. For example, at the end of “One More Thing,” you see the character hesitant, burdened and blocked, yet no psychological comment enlightens his intentions. It is this combination of very precise gestures and the opacity of psychology that is interesting to me. Carver gives me words with which I can compose my score.

RM: Did using dance as a way to teach Raymond Carver generate any level of American Culture Studies for your students? In what ways that they expressed?

CF-C and SB: Our approach was not a Cultural Studies one. We really wanted the students to read the texts and maybe identify with the characters and become aware of their linguistic strategies, but we did not contextualize them. We read “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe to introduce the notion of a very “interior” American Gothic and also to reflect on the persona of the (unreliable) narrator. During the second year, as we were using texts by Emily Dickinson, we showed parts of the 2016 biographical film “A Quiet Passion” by Terence Davies. So if there is any cultural content, it is conveyed indirectly, through the study of literature.

RM: If the two of you could do a similar class on choreography and another writer, who would you consider? Someone like Lydia Davis?

CF-C and SB: The first year was almost exclusively centered on Carver but, as we have mentioned earlier, we introduced other writers in the second edition of the workshop. We chose writers (French and American) whom we both like besides Carver: Emily Dickinson, Tarkos, Xavier Durringer and Henri Michaux. We deliberately chose to mix poetry and theater. (Tarkos is a French writer who writes mainly monologues). But the common point was always the possibility of a “physical” embodiment of the texts on stage, or their narrative quality. As we went along, one of the themes that emerged the second year was the question of identity as Dickinson’s poem “I Am Nobody” made a very strong impression on the students and generated a lot of debates in the group. But Carver remains the writer we always want to go back to even if we find others.

RM: In what ways has this class been shaped by your friendship, and how has it deepened your friendship?

CF-C and SB: It was a great experience to be able to work with someone we trust, as we were very often insecure and uncertain about where the workshop was going! And it gave us even more opportunities to meet up informally and exchange our views about the work. As a result we have made plenty more projects; for instance, we have a new project in Romania for example, with Diana Benea from the University of Bucharest, who works on contemporary American community theater and who would like to introduce contemporary dance in her classes.

RM: How do each of you feel enriched—personally and professionally—as a result of this class experience?

CF-B: Personally, this experience has made me think about vulnerability and exposure both in the classroom and in general. I realized it required a lot of courage to show others the way you move consciously when trying to physically express the subtle emotions created by a text. I was excited to think about the meeting point between literature and dance, and it also has reflected on my critical approach of texts—which I now read like pieces which can “move” us in unsuspected ways. More particularly, I love being able to read Carver over and over again in this new perspective. It has enabled me to discover new layers of meaning which I had tended to ignore. Finally, I had to build a completely new relationship with the students, one in which the bodies—theirs and mine—are involved, within the limits of the teaching space, of course. It has certainly given me a greater sense of freedom and a more creative and active way of teaching.

SB: It is very gratifying professionally to decenter oneself; not to stay within your own little chapel and brings new encounters and professional possibilities. This experience has also

reinforced my idea that it is necessary for everyone to work on the body (and I am constantly thinking about the way to transmit this), to help people physically and mentally. We both think that literature and dance are essential to life...combining them is even better: it liberates, calms, rejoices, surprises, awakens.

RM: What do you think the students learned from this class?

SB: Placing the students in the creative process is an important vector of autonomy. With the show at the end, they develop a sense of responsibility and change the way they look at one another. It unifies the group.

CF-C: Our students usually don't go out to shows much. It was extraordinary for them to be able to perform in a real theater house (as we did in April 2019), especially at the MAC of Créteil, a reputed contemporary dance scene in France. I like the idea of making literature and dance natural and accessible. Finally, those who gave us their impressions, in written texts or orally, all insisted on the fact that the class increased their self-confidence.

RM: Anything else you would like to add by way of final comments?

CF-C and SB: We conclude our course by asking students to write a reflective response to their experiences, and we would like to share some excerpted comments, in their own voices.

Yuliana: For the past four years, I have dedicated the majority of my academic career to the study of art, and consequently I have taken many different artistic courses. I have found them all vastly interesting and influential but none of them have changed me as much as the course, "Dance et Literature" offered by Madame Fabre and Madame Sophie at l'Université Paris Est Créteil. At this time, I was a foreign student spending my second year in France and although my comprehension of the language was at a good level, my ability to speak combined with my shy personality made it extremely difficult for me to communicate. In this class, however, I found a new way to express myself. Being required to move my body in ways that it was not familiar to really aided me in feeling more comfortable with my skin. I always left class feeling accomplished and very happy, and after a few days I began to feel more confident. I cared less about what people thought, because I realized how little power anyone's opinion actually had over me. I found this class to be very challenging because it required me to be vulnerable in front of other students, but I soon realized that the majority of us were trying something new. Academically, this class really helped in finding a new way of seeing and studying poetry. I had never once tried moving my body to the rhythm of words or pictures and had never once attempted to use my body to convey and express different emotions and scenes presented by a poem. It felt very much like acting, but more beautiful. Furthermore, this new approach of studying poetry really allowed me to understand the idea that, in our case, Carver was trying to portray through his work. This class made me understand and appreciate the complexity in simplicity, and I will forever be

grateful for it. Personally, I believe this class to be exemplary. It would be great if everyone was at least exposed to something similar. I strongly believe that this class helps in not only understanding one's body but also in truly connecting with a different type of art. This class allows for a lot of personal growth and this cannot be said about many courses. I would love to say that we have something similar in the United States, but we do not, and it really saddens me. I truly hope that classes like this continue to be taught, the ideas and methods shared within this class are extremely helpful, and they should be shared with as many people as possible.

Chloé: You asked us to write a few lines to express our feelings about this optional course, based on the innovative concept of a combination of dance and literature. I am just about to express my point of view through the following sentences, typed on my computer, at 11:10 pm the night before one of our very dear classes. Yes, these classes are very dear to me! Thanks to you, I learned how to let myself go and be guided, in spite of my fellow students' mysterious gazes which made me very self-conscious at the beginning, or rather hesitant to show myself in front of them, in front of you, and soon in front of other people with our dear upcoming performance. Still, this course is everything but obvious, one must admit, or is it our favorite author, Mr. Carver, who isn't easy to grasp? That is the question! In spite of the difficulties I had with my leg (in a cast) with my lack of self-confidence, you were able to guide me and all of us into a project that enabled us to gain a new perception of detail, in the broadest meaning of the term, for isn't that what Mr. Carver wanted after all? I thank you for having tried this experiment with us, and I hope you persevere in allying both your works so that you can pass on to new students what you gave us, who almost all lack self-confidence and are perpetually questioning ourselves.

Antoine: I really loved this course; it was a mix of several things: dance and literature but also theater. I think the course could be entitled "Dance, literature and theater." I started theater and hip hop dance two years ago, and this course really helped me for those two disciplines. For instance, I had an end of the year hip-hop show for which I had to dance a solo that I had not worked on enough but I was able to do something acceptable thanks to the keys and self-confidence that this course gave me. This course enabled me to let go and express myself. I loved the improvisation because we could express our feelings and emotions. It's not necessarily easy because you have a lot of thoughts constantly crossing your mind but when you succeed, even for a few seconds, it's really thrilling. Concerning the literature part, I enjoyed discovering Carver and I liked the work we had to do between the extracts and the dance. I also remember another text we had to read by Edgar Allen Poe about a mad guy who wants to kill someone and spends nights watching him before he kills him. I remember that I was very paranoid at the time and I would control my heart beat; well, after reading this text, I did not feel too well...the punctuation created a very stressful feeling. That's when I realized the importance of punctuation in a text.

Catalina [student from 2018 course]: Danse et Literature, a course that I am still trying to process. I enrolled in this class with the goal that my French skills may improve through traditional learning of literature but did not really question the dance aspect. But little did I know what I got myself into when entering room 203 at Bâtiment I1. My nervous system never fails to manifest in my daily endeavors. And this class was not the exception. My palms have never sweated that much. In fact, during this course I saw myself. I had eye contact with myself. I fought with my own instinct of avoiding situations that made me feel uncomfortable in my own skin and worse of all, my being. The idea of feeling that way made me cringe and even so when I type it. One of my philosophies is to fake it until we make it but in this class such belief wasn't as wise as I thought it would be.

This course has changed my life. Let me explain: this class has helped me to free myself from insecurities. The fact that my French is a work in progress makes me anxious and especially in an academic setting, which is usually a place where I like to participate, connect ideas and even make friends. But to make it even more stressful I had to move my body in ways that I've honestly never done before. The multi-tasking between my language skills and my body movement created a battle within me. Often in the middle of the class in between giggles I would ask myself why I put myself in such position? But what astonished me the most is that at the end of each course, I felt good. I felt accomplished that I did something each Wednesday that made me cringe but each time I would get over it after my mind told me so many negative things about my self-image and self-love. But I must admit that such battle remains to be a work in progress. The interpretation of Raymond Carver's stories, an American short-story writer and poet, but in French through dance has been one of the most valuable classes I have taken. Although, when I read it in French, I wouldn't exactly get what I got when I read it in English, but nonetheless his words still captured life in an ordinary way, simple and vivid. Dancing and words have more in common than I ever imagined. Both can reflect one's soul. Madame Claire and Sophie, thank you from deepest of my heart. This class is different and weird. I hope you continue teaching it because it has freed me from myself. I hope others can be part of it too.

Abstract

Sandra Kleppe's interview with James Carver includes discussions on the relationship he had with his brother, Raymond Carver, Ray's political viewpoint, Carver family's politics, family influences, alcoholism, the Carver brothers and the Vietnam war, Ray's early obsession with writing and empathy for the working class, James' view on the stories "Elephant" and "Boxes"; the poems "The Man Outside," "Bobber," "Drinking while Driving" and "Are These Actual Miles?"; and on film adaptations, including *Birdman*, and *Short Cuts*.

The James Carver Interview

Sandra Kleppe

This interview was conducted by Sandra Kleppe in July 2017, in the home of James Carver, in Salem, Oregon. It was the summer of the American publication of his memoir *Raymond Carver Remembered by His Brother*, and James was very excited to talk about growing up with Ray.

SK: Thank you very much, James. It's my privilege to be able to interview you. Some of the topics are about your memoir and others are just general topics about your life together with your brother Raymond. So my first question: It's been almost thirty years since your brother passed away in 1988, and the world, not to mention the United States, has changed so much since then; I'm wondering what you think your brother would make of our current times?

JC: Well, I know Ray would be fascinated with the current political figures we have on the scene and that we had in the past. I think he would have liked Bill Clinton very much, and he would have liked Barack Obama. He would have been fascinated with the political figures we've had since he passed away, especially nowadays with Trump. [laughs] I think he would be fascinated with Trump. But my brother Ray had a real curiosity about people. He didn't necessarily get involved in current events that much or issues of the day, whether it might be health care, or whatever. He didn't get that involved in the issues of the day. But he would be curious about the *personalities* we have now. And I think his stories would emanate from some of the figures that we have now. You mentioned Reaganomics—I don't know if that was Ray's word or your word.

SK: Yeah, that was my word.

JC: That's what I thought. I don't think Ray used that word. He would have said "Reagan economics." I think his stories, from the Reagan era, were not Ray's political statements—I don't believe. Now maybe it's been suggested by others, that he was making political statements. I don't believe so. In that context, he wrote about the characters that suffered from the *policies* of those political figures, like [people who] suffered from Reagan during the recession. I know half my neighborhood was out of work under Reagan. I was

fortunate: I kept working. But half my neighborhood was out of work. Now Ray would have written stories in regards to the people, the deprivation of people, losing their jobs under Reagan's policies—shipping the jobs overseas, and Reagan I think began that. You know the old saying, “The rich get richer, the poor get poorer”—that started under Reagan, by closing the factories, shipping the jobs overseas. So Ray would have written about people who lost their jobs as a *consequence* of Reagan's policies, but he would not have gotten involved deeply in the *issues* of the day. I mean really gotten that involved by studying the issues and the pros and cons of them. He was more interested in just dealing with writing about people, everyday people, and their lives and how they suffered from losing their jobs—not working, not being able to pay the rent, getting behind on their bills, lacking food, maybe proper medical care, because what money they had had to go toward food—or rent. So he would have continued to write about that. And he wasn't a high-tech person. Nowadays, with all the high tech we have, the iPhones and everything that can be done with iPhones—Ray was not a techie, and I don't think he would be now.

SK: He wrote by hand, right?

JC: Yeah. He might even be using his old Underwood typewriter, I don't know. I read about some writers who still use a typewriter, and maybe Ray would still be using his typewriter, although it's so much easier on a computer, you know, to write, as I do. He probably would have learned to type his stories on the computer, but again who knows? He was not a high-tech person. He was certainly smart enough. Ray was very, very smart and intelligent. I'm sure he could have learned all the high tech if he had really wanted to pursue that. But he really would not have been that interested.

SK: Except in the capacity that it would help him with his writing.

JC: Yeah, exactly.

SK: Okay. I wanted ask a question about your memoir. Your parents appear in your book as very strong Democrats, and your father was also a union man, if I understand correctly. Is that true?

JC: He was. When he was younger he was working in a sawmill, like most of my family, who came from Arkansas, who went to Washington—first Omac, Washington—they worked for lumber companies. Once the mill went on strike, and they offered my father a job as a supervisor with higher pay, he could have gone to work the next day. He said, “No. I'm not crossing the picket line.” So he was a very pro strong union man, and remained so all his life, and pro-Democrat. I think that you could have strangled my father and he wouldn't have voted Republican. [laughs] He was so pro-Democrat, pro-labor. He was a blue-collar worker. I was a white-collar worker, and so was Ray, but my sympathies have always been with the blue-collar workers, not with the people who are lawyers and doctors and what have you. And my father was that way. He loved Franklin Roosevelt. He had a set of books on Franklin Roosevelt. I think it was written somewhere in *Carver Country* that all we had in our house to read was Zane Grey novels!

[laughs] Zane Grey. Well, that's completely untrue. I think I put that in my memoir, I'm sure I did, that my father had Franklin Roosevelt books. But I think Ray and I were too young actually to absorb those books and read them. We had more interest in *Tarzan* and *John Carter on Mars*, written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, that my father had. Ray and I must have read those books three or four times apiece. So we were certainly not political at that time, but my father was. He always voted, never missed voting Democrat. You could have run a monkey, and if he had been a Democrat he would have voted for him. And my mother was very pro-Democrat too. Now, she was informed about the issues of the day. She was informed. She was not oblivious to what was going on, just baking apple pies with an apron on. She knew what was going on. And there's always been this rivalry between the Republicans and the Democrats, the Republicans wanting lower taxes and the Democrats wanting more, knowing that it provided social programs to help people, and my mother was aware of all this. She really was. So they were both very strong Democrats and voted.

SK: I can clearly tell that your parents' attitudes and political habits during your childhood shaped probably both of you, but I'm wondering: did you ever rebel against their ways, as a lot of young people do?

JC: No, no, because Ray and I respected our parents so deeply and we loved them so much that we did not really rebel in any way. They were not strict on us, "you have to be in at a certain time or you're grounded, you can't go anywhere for a period of time." They knew that we weren't going to get into trouble, and we respected them highly. We were very loving towards them and went along with what they wanted us to do, without rebelling, saying, "No, we're not going to do that," like a lot of kids do nowadays who just ignore their parents and do what they want to do. If they want to go out and smoke pot all night, so be it, they don't care what their parents think. So Ray and I more or less followed what our parents wanted us to do, and we were glad to do it because we respected them so much. That was a good foundation for Ray and me.

SK: Were there any other family members or family friends that you feel strongly influenced you two brothers while you were growing up?

JC: Well, our uncles did. My father's brother-in-law, Bill Archer, who was married to his sister Vonda Archer, who lived in Yakima, and his brother Fred Carver, who lived in Yakima also—they didn't use any profanity—we grew up around this—no profanity, no cussing. And they did not drink, which later kind of turned around for Ray and me, but at that time we respected that, we respected that they did not drink alcohol. We had parties, card parties, big picnics, and family gatherings where no alcohol was served. So, Ray and I grew up in that atmosphere, where alcohol was not served. Now, our father drank, of course, occasionally, you know. He drank. But my uncles and relatives did not. I think I had one uncle—I've heard that he was a drinker—he shot his foot off.

SK: Oh, no!

JC: He got drunk and shot his foot off.

SK: That was a good lesson for you!

JC: [laughs] So otherwise we grew up in a family of very decent, honorable, hard-working, blue-collar workers who were very respected by Ray and myself.

SK: Wonderful. So, my next question is just to sum up what we were talking about with the politics, so we don't overlap too much. Here is something that you write in your memoir that I thought was really spot-on in terms of the way I think about Ray and his writing: "Ray was not involved in politics, economics, or worldly events. My brother was totally immersed in his own writing." So that's basically just summing up what we were talking about.

JC: He was. He was. We already talked about it.

SK: He was aware but he wasn't politically involved.

JC: He was aware, but he didn't get involved in the issues that much.

SK: Wonderful. There's a funny passage in Carol Sklenicka's biography about Ray when he was living in California and collecting unemployment during the Reagan years. But he was also working, teaching at two different universities at the same time—

JC: Santa Cruz and Iowa University.

SK: I was just wondering, it didn't seem like it'd be a good idea to register to vote under those circumstances?

JC: No.

SK: So do you know if he did vote?

JC: Well, I knew, of course that he was teaching at both universities, which was quite difficult to do—you know, get off the plane and *whoosh!*—later get back on another one and fly back and forth, collecting two salaries. But he managed to do it. As far as collecting unemployment, it seems like *vaguely, vaguely*, in the back of my mind, I remember something about it, but I really don't know that much about that. Now, maybe it's true. Maybe Carol Sklenicka found out it was true, that he did do that. But I personally —

SK: Right. You don't—

JC: —don't recall it. No.

SK: But I think you did say something in your memoir about the Vietnam War and that Ray encouraged you not to—

JC: Oh, that's totally not true.

SK: —join the draft?

JC: That's totally just—

SK: That's not true?

JC: I've read the same thing, that James's brother Ray encouraged him to burn his draft card. Ray never, never said that to me. And I was totally against the Vietnam War, I mean *totally*, not just because I may have to go in. I got a school deferment when I was in [junior college], and then after I got out, they [draft boards] were like spiders everywhere. They were after me. And I evaded them. I managed. I used my wits, and I moved from place to place. I was moving around a lot and it affected my life, but I evaded them. Every time I'd move to a place, later a letter would come—"James Carver—you appear at such and such a time"—well, I moved. And so they finally gave up on me. They thought, "Oh, this guy, we don't want him in the first place!"

SK: Interesting choice!

JC: I was ready to go to Canada. But now Ray was kind of, I have to admit: later he came around to see that the Vietnam War was wrong. To begin with, he wasn't quite sure. He was like many people who thought, "Well, maybe the old domino effect: if one country falls, then another country falls." He wasn't quite sure. Let's say he was leaning against it in a way, but he wasn't totally, totally committed against the war, like I was. I mean, I was ready to go out there and march and carry a sign, do everything possible, because I felt like it was an unjust war, we had no business being there.

SK: He had other priorities.

JC: Yes, he had other priorities. He was more interested, again, in his writing. I mean, that was number one to Ray: writing. I guess it even came before his family. Obviously, it did; unfortunately it did, in a way, because, as we know, he put writing first, even before his kids and his wife. But he had several opportunities to have gone to work full-time. There was a pharmacy in Yakima and the owner, because he liked Ray, was willing to send him to college to learn to be a pharmacist¹. I couldn't see Ray being a pharmacist!

SK: That would have been unfortunate for us!

JC: [laughs] So he said no to that. And then he had a chance to have another position later, I think, teaching or something, somewhere in the valley, not near San Francisco but in the valley, and he turned that down because he thought it would take away from his writing. My parents were disappointed in that; they thought, well, Ray could have gone to work, he was offered a full-time job. But he had this driving force, which I guess is what it takes for a great musician, a great artist, a great writer. You have to have that passion, that burning desire. You put that first, practically, before everyone you love, people you love. I mean, it's so strong. But Ray never had that when he was young. He was just an ordinary kid. Now, I've read he was carrying a book around at six years old or something, which is

totally untrue. He was just an ordinary kid, just like the rest of us. He wasn't carrying a book around eight or nine years old, had his nose stuck in a book, that's totally untrue.

SK: I see.

JC: But later he just wanted to write, be immersed in his writing, and that's all he really wanted to do.

SK: Sounds almost like a call.

JC: Yeah. He did have this burning desire to write, and he put that before his kids and his family. His wife and his kids suffered from it, I hate to say it. I love Ray who was a tremendous human being, I respect him just tremendously, and I know he loved his children, he loved his wife, but he put his writing first before everything else. That came first. And that's why he is so successful now, around the world, because he did that.

SK: Absolutely. He had that total dedication. For people who have not yet read your memoir: it will be out on August first [2017], in the United States, you said?

JC: August first, in the U.S., it will be released.

SK: So a lot of people haven't read it yet. What would you say are the most important mistruths or misconceptions that you uncover there about your brother's life and works?

JC: Well, I've already written that he didn't come up *dirt poor*. I guess I'm repeating myself.

SK: I don't think so.

JC: He just didn't come up dirt poor. He had a decent family life, decent clothes to wear, and decent food. So, a lot of people still tend to think that he just struggled. That's what I tried to convey in my book. He did have just an ordinary life as a child. I mean, we grew up together playing games such as baseball. He had good food, he had great parents, and everything was normal. I read how terrible his life was. I mean, he was wearing rags, apparently, and grew up on—I don't know what he grew up on—hot dogs every day or something, I don't know. So, anyway, that is a mistruth. And something else: he was not trying to make political statements. I mean, that is a mistruth in relation to his works. He was not making political statements. I mean, that was not Ray. If it can be interpreted in that way, then it was a consequence of the economic policies of the day and people losing their jobs. He wrote about the ordinary person losing his job, or her job, and not putting food on the table and not being able to pay the bills.

SK: He was interested in people, not politics?

JC: People, not politics. He *knew* about the issues. Ray was certainly informed. He was very smart. He was bright when he was a kid. I think he took advantage of it a lot. [laughs] No, he didn't do that, I'm just kidding. But he was very smart, and I'm sure if he had been inclined he could have learned all the issues of the day and been well informed on them and he could have discussed all the issues. Now, I myself have always been very

political, since the Vietnam War, of course. So I've been interested in politics ever since then. And I was not writing. I didn't have this burning desire to write, even though I love writing, I've written poems to Caroline [James' wife]. I love to write poetry, but during those times I did not have this burning desire to write like Ray did. I was just interested in politics, the elections and the issues of the day and so on, and I voted, as long as it was a Democrat. Ray could have been very well informed on all the issues if he had chosen to.

SK: I have some more questions about your memoir. Like I said, a lot of people haven't read it yet, especially here in the United States. My favorite chapter is the one that you call "Eleventh Avenue." It seems like that was such a happy part of your childhood from the 1950s.

JC: It was, it was.

SK: Lots of fishing and hunting. So I wanted to ask you a little bit about growing up with your brother. I can tell that there's a great appreciation for the outdoors reflected in his poems, and stories like "Nobody Said Anything" and "Everything Stuck to Him." I would really like to hear more about this period.

JC: Well, during that period my father started taking Ray fishing before he ever did me, because Ray was five years older. I was too young. Ray and my father, they used to go to the Columbia River a lot to fish for sturgeon, and they'd bring back big sturgeon. But I was too young to go. So Ray really appreciated that. Our father gave us this appreciation of the outdoors and of stream fishing. There are a lot of streams around Yakima, Washington. There are lot of rivers and streams and lakes where he would take us, and he bought us all the best fishing gear, and that's where a lot of his money went. It's not cheap, you know, good fishing gear and so on. Hunting came when we were a little older and we could carry a gun without shooting each other. So, once we learned how to use a gun, he took us duck hunting, pheasant hunting, grouse hunting—you name it—deer hunting, elk hunting. And the fishing was probably the best part. I like to hunt, but now of course I've gotten away from hunting, I haven't done it for years, never would. My father gave us such an appreciation of the outdoors that Ray and I never forgot. He had always fished and hunted in Arkansas, where he's from, and when he came to the Northwest, it was so beautiful there: Omac, Washington, where he first settled, I think it was, and then Oregon later when my brother was born. But he just loved the fresh air and the sound of the rivers flowing over the rocks—the sky—and we all enjoyed being together, we three. My mother never went with us, except on certain occasions where the family went to some lake where we all had a big outing where we stayed a few nights. But otherwise it was just my father and Ray and myself and all the rivers and streams and fish.

SK: It almost gives me goose bumps, because when I read Ray's poetry, a lot of it is that love—

JC: —of the outdoors. Yeah, he never forgot that. Now when Ray and I lived in California, in Sacramento or San Francisco, I don't think we even fished together. We just

didn't fish. [snaps fingers] We may have gone out on a party boat in California to salmon fish a couple of times at a little town called Trinidad north of Eureka. We went out on a party boat sometimes. But Ray didn't really start fishing until he moved to Port Angeles, and then he started salmon fishing. He got a boat, and he got a motor and went salmon fishing all the time, and he loved it. It brought back memories of when we were young and fishing, but otherwise, no fishing in California. We had too much going on, in other words. Probably didn't have the money to *buy* a pole! [laughs]

SK: Okay. So, we've already mentioned some of the misconceptions surrounding your brother's work and upbringing, and one of the things that I meet a lot when I read is the assumption that his characters are all from the struggling underclass.

JC: Mm-hm.

SK: I'm thinking about a story like, just for example, "Jerry and Molly and Sam," where the main character works in the aerospace industry at a fictional company called Aerojet. This sounds suspiciously like a stage in your own career?

JC: No, I never worked for Aerojet there. I worked for Aerospace; I ended up there. Aerojet was one of the biggest employers in Sacramento; that and state work. State work and Aerojet employed thousands [in Sacramento].

SK: Oh, cool, so that's not a fictional company? That's a real company?

JC: No, no, that was a real company, Aerojet, in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, until they started phasing out. I don't even know if they exist now². Maybe in some small capacity they do. I know that I read where they were renting out spaces there because the business had declined, so they were renting out spaces to other businesses. That was a real company, but I never applied there, and Ray never applied there, although he and I applied for a lot of different state positions. Even though our scores were high—thousands of people were taking the tests because those were hard times—people were standing in line to work at McDonald's. So even Ray said that in Sacramento you either work at McDonald's or you work for the state.

SK: Yeah, because this story is set in Sacramento, clearly.

JC: Yeah. So we took different tests and were on the list, and Ray really wanted to go to work. He really needed to go to work at that time. I think that was a kind of a slow time in his writing where, you know, he wasn't feverishly writing. It was sort of a time where he just knew that he needed to work.

SK: He did work in a hospital in Sacramento.

JC: He worked in a hospital, Mercy Hospital. It was supposed to be an eight-hour shift. Ray worked I think a max of four hours. [laughs] He worked four hours a night. He'd go out and punch in, and he would punch out later, but he got paid for eight. Somebody got by with him, the house-cleaning department or something. So, at Mercy Hospital, I don't

think he *ever* worked eight hours. I mean, he thought four hours was the max. [laughs] He also worked at Weinstock. I don't think I wrote in the book that he worked at Weinstock, in the receiving department. I think he wrote a poem, "Woolworth's, 1945," about women's lingerie.

SK: That's right. That's a funny poem.

JC: Yeah. Working in handling women's lingerie or something. And I remember one day he'd been to where he split his pants, right? He split his pants all the way up in the back, and he called me, said, "James, bring me a pair of pants!"

SK: [laughs] He could just have put on some of the lingerie!

JC: [laughs] So, I took him a pair of pants. So he worked there and at Mercy Hospital. I'm trying to think where else, but I think that was the extent of it.

SK: Okay. There's a story you write about in your memoir where family members are featured quite prominently: "Elephant." It starts with the following line: "I knew it was a mistake to let my brother have the money"! [both laugh] You've clarified in your memoir that the money-lending that haunts the character there in that story in reality went both ways and that Ray simply used what he needed for the mood of the story. Is that correct?

JC: It was very mutual, he and I borrowing money: he would borrow money from me, but he always paid it back; I borrowed money from him and always paid it back. And one time he had a D.U.I. in Mountain View, California, and called me at six a.m. in the morning, and it just so happened I had two hundred and forty or fifty dollars in my wallet, and I went down to bail him out. I bailed him out of jail, for about two hundred and forty dollars. Well, he paid it back later, of course. So we helped each other out financially like that. It's true that I did borrow money from him later and he said, "James, instead of paying me back, why don't you just pay mom back?" Now see, that follows the storyline quite a bit, but with changes. He was helping my mother a little bit at the time, and I gave her money too, but he was doing it on a monthly basis, where I guess I wasn't. I had the money, but he was doing it for us. And so he said, "Why don't you just give it to mom?" and I said, "Okay, Ray, I will." Because my first wife had a lot of medical problems then, I had to take off from work for a long time. They're not going to pay you forever for being off. I was off about five or six months and then the money sort of tapered off a little bit. So I had to borrow some money from him, but then I did pay my mother back—*our* mother—I did pay her back each month. But of course Ray wrote that somehow I didn't pay the money back.

SK: Just for the purposes of his story.

JC: Yes, that's true, but I did pay it back, every cent, to my mother along the way, you know. But it was mutual; we borrowed money from each other over the years.

SK: That's what brothers do.

JC: Yes, help each other out in times of need.

SK: Okay, the story “Elephant” that we were talking about also relates to me an almost euphoric mood in the passage where the main character dreams about childhood when his father carried him on his shoulders like an elephant carrying a human, and I almost feel like Ray is capturing the essence of the father-son relationship in that story.

JC: I think that’s very true. He tried to bring that memory back and relive it. Because my father did carry each of us on his neck, not at the same time of course, with our legs wrapped around him, you know. He did carry Ray that way, and he carried me that way later. So Ray was trying to capture that. He never forgot. We both loved our father so much. So he tried to relive and capture those moments when he used to ride on his father’s back and there was that joy of it, the security of being carried by his father. He probably just felt full of joy and happiness of it. And I think the elephant, of course, must mean such a load he was carrying, giving money to my mother, giving money to Vance, giving money to Maryanne, and Christie. He gave to everybody, and he felt so burdened down, he felt just like an elephant. I mean, he was carrying such a burden financially, to his family, and he couldn’t say no. He couldn’t say no to his daughter, who needed the money, or Vance—well, Vance could’ve probably earned the money, but he was getting money too. And my mother, I was helping her, and Ray was helping her. So he probably felt like a real elephant, carrying such a burden. And as far as my father, that was a true moment. My father did do that to Ray. I remember too, when he carried me, and just laughing and the joy that we felt. Those were good moments; good, good, good moments.

SK: It’s such a beautiful passage, because you have all of this heaviness, the carrying, and then suddenly there’s this opening up.

JC: Yeah. That was a great story. I love that story.

SK: It’s beautiful.

JC: But I think a lot of people will probably take it literally and think that I didn’t pay him back, I don’t know. [laughs] But it was all paid back. Ray changed things to suit his stories.

SK: Of course. So in the story “Boxes” I also see this movement from kind of grim towards a beautiful moment near the end. This is the story where the mother moves around so frequently. You did set the record straight in your memoir about real and factual events in that story, “Boxes,” but there’s a lovely moment near the end where the son remembers his father calling his mother “dear,” and then he says, “Always, hearing it, I felt better, less afraid, more hopeful about the future.” Do you remember times like that?

JC: I remember that. They called each other “dear” all the time. They didn’t call each other “sweetheart” or “honey” or “darling” or any other endearing terms like that. They called each other “dear.” My father called my mother “dear.” My mother called my father

“dear.” It was always “dear.” It was reassuring, I think, to Ray and myself, to hear our parents speak to one another in such a loving term, “dear,” which is very *en-dearing*. And so I think it really meant something to both of us. We felt the security of it, that our parents were loving, getting along fine, and, you know, everything was wonderful, everything was great. And they didn’t fight. The only time they ever argued or fought was when my father drank too much on a binge. Now, maybe other people would disagree with me but I wouldn’t consider that being an alcoholic, going on a binge every three, four, five months. But otherwise he would not drink a drop, because he knew that was a no-no. He knew that if he started drinking, he couldn’t quit.

SK: Did Ray inherit that?

JC: Well, yeah, I guess he did. I guess he did.

SK: He had a tough, tough time in the seventies.

JC: Yeah, he did, to a certain extent. I mean, you know, he liked to drink. I guess it relieved a lot of stress. And he did have that tendency too. They say it’s genetic, that if one parent is alcoholic the children may inherit the same gene or have a tendency toward it? And maybe Ray inherited that gene, but he and I drank together and we didn’t get drunk. I mean, we liked to drink together, but we didn’t get *drunk*. And so Ray may have had that same problem where he just didn’t know really when to cut it off, you see.

SK: So finally he just cut it completely out.

JC: Yeah, he had to just cut it completely or it was going to kill him. And the doctor told him, “You’re gonna die if you don’t quit drinking.” He was getting water on the brain or something. It was something really bad, because I remember in the mornings when I was there he would pour a big glass of milk and pour two or three shots of scotch in it.

SK: In the milk?

JC: In the milk. [laughs]

SK: In the morning. [laughs]

JC: In the morning! And so he drank in the mornings, but obviously he was always sober enough to write. He was not drunk when he was writing. He was sober when he was writing. He certainly wasn’t inebriated when he was writing. He was clear-headed when he wrote.

SK: That’s kind of important, because a lot of people think that he wrote during binges, but—

JC: No, no.

SK: —that’s not true.

JC: That's not true. That's not true. I don't think he could have written as well as he did if he had been half looped.

SK: That's a big myth about a lot of writers.

JC: He was pretty well sober. Now, I know a lot of writers drink. That's very common among writers. Look at Norman Mailer, of course. He was a real drinker, and reputedly he'd beat up his girlfriends or his wives, and he was quite violent at times. But people are wrong when they say about Ray, "Oh, he was drinking when he was writing." That's not true.

SK: So my next question is a longer one. It's about how Ray incorporates bits and pieces of factual events into new contexts in his work. In your memoir, there's an episode from the nineteen-fifties when you write that your dog woke you up in the middle of the night and you were startled to find a peeping tom at your window, and then the next day you and Ray investigated and found large footprints in the vegetable garden. And then later in life Ray wrote a poem called "The Man Outside."

JC: Oh, yeah.

SK: He seems to just have lifted that episode from your childhood?

JC: He did. I'm sure. I'm sure he did.

SK: This is what he writes in that poem: "The space outside my bedroom / window! The few flowers that grow / there trampled down." So I guess it's true that he did reconstruct this humorous but creepy event.

JC: He did, because he and I slept together in the same bed. We had a two-bedroom house on Eleventh Avenue. I looked right into the person's face when I got up on the stool, eye to eye, but Ray was in bed. He could see, he was awake so he could see the person's face through the window. So that's an incident that we did not forget. We talked about it a few times later in life. Ray had a fingerprint set. He was quite inventive when he was young. He had a fly-tying kit. He liked to tie his own flies for fishing and had different little feathers and stuff. He'd tie his own flies and all the other games we played, Lincoln Logs, Erector Sets, and the whole thing. We were always very inventive, using our heads, and not just looking at a cell phone all day. We didn't have cell phones, of course. I'm sure he remembered that incident, and he wrote about it. He went out and took fingerprints the next morning. Why, he was a real detective, boy. He was on the windowsill, and he was checking the windowsill for fingerprints, and he did get one. It was kind of smudged, but he got one or two fingerprints. He felt like a detective, he was going investigate this. And then we saw the large footprints out in the vegetable garden too. We went out and saw these large footprints, so I'm sure he incorporated that into his poem.

SK: It seems very clear that he did.

JC: He remembered that. It's something you don't forget. The peeping tom turned out to be some guy that worked at the local sawmill that my father knew; how embarrassing. He probably had to move from there, he was probably so embarrassed. [both laugh] So Ray was quite the detective, though. He was quite inventive when he was younger.

SK: I'm really interested in the poetry. There's a passage from a poem called "Bobber" that I find so very powerful concerning the relationship between father and son during youth. It goes like this "My dad kept his maggots alive and warm / under his lower lip / ...he kept silent and looked into the river, / worked his tongue, like a thought, behind the bait." Do you think these lines are a mix of fact and imagination?

JC: Well, that's a great poem.

SK: It's beautiful.

JC: But it's untrue. My father wouldn't have carried maggots in his lower lip no more than Ray would have or I would have. The maggots stayed in our can. They did not get into our lower lip, I guarantee you. [both laugh] But a lot of the old fishermen, these gnarled old guys that were tough and rugged and fished on the Columbia River for god knows, thirty, forty years—boy, nothing bothered them—cold—nothin' else—they'd put the maggots underneath their lips—[pantomimes it]—then on the hook. My father never did that.

SK: Okay, so he just stole that and added it into the poem.

JC: Yeah. I like that poem, though.

SK: The poem "Drinking While Driving" features two brothers enjoying each other's company. Could you say a few words about it?

JC: Well, we weren't working at the time. Ray wasn't working and neither one of us had much money at all, but we enjoyed each other's company. I'd go down there practically every day, and he wasn't writing much at the time, just sporadically, not very much. But we would laugh and talk and then we'd get in the car and say, "Well, let's go for a drive." So we'd pool our money and buy a Ten High whiskey bottle, the cheapest whiskey you could buy, Ten High. I think it must have been a pint, because a half a pint would have been gone in five minutes. [laughs] So it must have been a pint of Ten High that we put in the glove compartment. We had no place in particular to go and we certainly couldn't drive around town drinking. We went out in the countryside. We'd just drive around, laugh, talk, take a big drink of whiskey, but not enough to get drunk, and put it back in the glove compartment. Ray was doing the driving, but he didn't drink enough to get *drunk*, you know, where he couldn't drive. He just drank enough to where he felt good. So we did that quite often, not just a few times—quite often. I visited Ray quite often, that's when he lived on Larkspur Avenue? I think that's where they lived when they had the red convertible. He wrote about the red convertible? Where Maryanne tried to sell the car?

SK: Right. "Are These Actual Miles?" [laughs]

JC: Yeah! It was a beautiful car, now, the red convertible, and she [Maryann] was gone during the day, so we had the whole day to ourselves. I went down there quite often and we'd go out and get a hamburger, and we'd pooled our money somehow. It was called Tiny's, funny how you never forget these names: Tiny's Hamburgers, our favorite hamburger place in Sacramento. It was only about a mile or so away from where Ray lived, so we'd go down and get a big hamburger, fries, and come back, and then we'd get in the car and go for a drive and do our little thing, our little drinking. But we enjoyed each other's company, we really did. I enjoyed being with Ray, Ray enjoyed being with me. Even though we didn't have much, we felt in a way sort of a freedom. I think Ray felt that even though he had no money and he had obviously obligations, there was a sense of freedom for both of us just to get in the car, roll the windows down and—

SK: —and he just really captured that mood in the poem, I think.

JC: I think he said that was one of his favorite poems, "Drinking While Driving." So he never forgot that, just like I didn't. We mentioned it in the coming years, those times, being together, enjoying each other's company and stories. Ray was a great storyteller. He told stories and laughed. He was a quiet person, though, like I was. I've always been a quiet person too, both of us have, maybe introspective in a way, but I can be very social. I've had to be over the years. I can turn it off and on just like Ray could, I guess. But basically he was a quiet person, introspective, and so was I. But I was a little more outgoing when we were children because Ray was overweight and felt inferior, because kids made fun of him. I didn't have that problem, so I was involved in school things and behind the scenes. Not acting, but I was quite active in grade school. I felt I was a real hotshot in grade school and Ray had problems until he started losing weight. But he always remained quiet. We're both inclined to be the same way.

SK: You think that might explain how in your memoir there is a strong connection between the brothers, a really strong, intimate bond there. It might have something to do with you're both being introspective?

JC: I don't know. I think there was a strong bond there because we were both inclined to be that way. We could both be very social, Ray could be very social, he could be very funny and tell stories and everybody'd laugh. We'd have some good times at family gatherings or parties because Ray could be the life of the party. Give him a few drinks, he'd be the life of the party. [laughs] But he was different then. Other times, when there was no party going, he was very introspective, a quiet person. Ray talked very softly, as you know—very softly. It was even hard to understand Ray sometimes because he talked so softly. He was not a loud person. I don't like loud people. I can't stand guys who are obnoxious and loud. I've always talked fairly softly. Maybe I have a deeper voice than Ray, I don't know [imitates deep voice]. [laughs]

SK: Apparently, his voice might not even have come up on recordings, because people have had trouble with capturing it.

JC: Capturing what he was saying, yeah.

SK: We'll see how this comes out. Okay, before we conclude, I wanted to ask about adaptations of your brother's works, in films like Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, and there's a film called *Jindabyne*, from Australia, by Ray Lawrence.

JC: Complete fabrication.

SK: And there's *Birdman*. A lot of people seem to have an agenda when working with these materials.

JC: Always, always.

SK: Have you seen these movies, and what is your impression?

JC: Yeah, I've seen every movie that has been made of Ray's stories, also the one with Will Ferrell, you may be aware of that too, *Everything Must Go*.

SK: That one too, I've seen it.

JC: It's where he puts the furniture outside.

SK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JC: And he has a lawn sale, or a yard sale.

SK: That's true.

JC: Will Ferrell was in that. It followed the storyline [of "Why Don't You Dance?"] somewhat—*somenbat*—but now *Jindabyne* was just complete fabrication. I mean, more so than the others, even though Laura Linney, who I like, was in it, and Gabriel Byrne. These two people I admire and respect as actors were in the film, and even though these films can be written well, by professional writers, of course, they still do not deal with the truth [of Ray's works]. *Jindabyne* especially, the Australian movie. *Short Cuts* followed many of the stories. The storyline where the couple house-sits and the guy's looking in the drawers for lingerie or something of the woman. He's a sneak, he's snooping around. You go into a person's house, you're going to look in the medicine cabinet, "What is this person taking?" [laughs] So none of us may do that, you know, go through drawers, but you may look in the medicine cabinet and see, just out of curiosity. So *Short Cuts* was based on seven to eight stories. Robert Altman liked my brother, obviously. I read he was coming back on a plane from Europe and read my brother's stories and said to his companion, "Well, I've got to make a movie of these," so he just put them all together, mashed them together, and made *Short Cuts*. Some of those stories he followed, like the one with the baker ["A Small, Good Thing"] where the child is hit, and the baker demands his money. He keeps calling and demanding his money for the cake, even though the child couldn't enjoy his birthday because he was injured being hit by a car. Now that follows the storyline. But much of it was fabrication, it took place in L.A., Altman had it taking place there, and not the Northwest. So some films more or less follow the storyline, but in

others they change so much that you wouldn't even recognize Ray's stories, except it may say "by Raymond Carver" in the credits. Like *Birdman*, that didn't really follow "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love". It was supposed to have been based on that story. Now, I couldn't see really that much connection in it. Did you see that?

SK: Yes, yes.

JC: Maybe you could see more of a connection than I could, but I couldn't see a big connection between what Ray wrote and the movie. I thought it was great acting. You can't denigrate the acting, the writing, the directing—it was excellent. That's why the director, I can't think of his name [Alejandro G. Iñárritu] now, won best director, or whatever it was, best film. But I couldn't really truly, to be honest, recognize Ray's story in that, I mean, except in the credits, "by Raymond Carver" or "based on his short story." Most of the movies that were made off of Ray's stories were just changed, where they were just almost—

SK: Unrecognizable?

JC: Unrecognizable.

SK: But I think the directors take the artistic liberty to make something that they can own. It's no longer Carver, it's—

JC: That's right. Exactly. It becomes their baby.

SK: It's their artistic liberty, it's their stamp, it's the Altman or the —

JC: They mold it.

SK: Right.

JC: Into the shape that they want to.

SK: Exactly.

JC: By writing it or directing it or whatever, it becomes their work of art.

SK: Exactly, yeah.

JC: —"This is mine. I shaped it. I wrote it. I directed it. I won an award for it. I was up for best picture." The critics³ called *Short Cuts* one of the best films of the year. In San Francisco, the critic there said it was the best film of the year, but the competition was *Schindler's List*.

SK: That year. Yeah, I see.

JC: The particular year *Schindler's List* came, they both came out the same year. *Schindler's List* won the best picture and I think *Short Cuts* was up for one or two nominations. Well, Robert Altman was up for best director⁴.

SK: Right. Absolutely. I like to think of these directors as being inspired by something your brother wrote but not feeling obligated to reproduce what he did. They want to do something else.

JC: Yeah, to be truthful to their intent.

SK: So it's inspiration.

JC: Now, maybe they have to do it for commercial reasons. Maybe, to be successful at the box office they're required to alter somehow for it to be commercially successful. Now, as you know, *Short Cuts*, unfortunately, was not commercially successful. It did not make a lot of money. Even though it was recognized across the nation as being one of the most critically acclaimed films of the year in 1993, it did not make much money. So, they don't follow Ray's stories. We love the stories, his heart and his soul were put into them. They can't duplicate that exactly, because—

SK: That's his.

JC: Yeah, that's his, and they want it to be theirs. They want to shape it, like Robert Altman did—and some of the other directors—this guy who directed *Birdman*. But those were good films. I mean, I liked *Birdman*, you know. I mean, it was quite an honor seeing your brother's name in the screen credits and based on his story, but to me it just didn't ring that true.

SK: Okay, I'm nearing the end here. I'm a teacher so this is a question that is kind of important to me: for people who are privileged enough to have the opportunity to teach your brother's works, what would you say is his most important legacy that we should never forget to convey to new generations of students?

JC: Well, I would say his honesty, his integrity in writing: honesty, integrity. He wrote from his heart, his soul, and his passion. His complete honesty in writing and trying to portray the human condition, so to speak, in the average person—not the rich and the famous—but the average person. That should never be forgotten. He really wrote from his heart and his soul and not for the sake of making money commercially or just stringing words together to be clever in phrasing. He really, truly thought every word was so important to capture his feelings and his emotions in what he was writing. Ray was a very sensitive soul; he was *very* very sensitive. I'm sensitive, too, probably to a fault, in a lot of ways, I suppose. But Ray was even more so. He was *extremely* sensitive, and he *really*, really, *truly* wanted to put down on paper what he was feeling. He just tried so hard.

SK: Those human emotions I'm sure he could read, being as sensitive as he was.

JC: His blood, sweat, and tears went into his writing. He had this passion for writing. He could sit in the car all night writing. [laughs] He had to write, he had to write. So I think that should never be forgotten: his sincerity, his passion for writing, and his honesty. His complete integrity was never compromised.

SK: And I think for me that is why every new generation of students manages to connect to that, because that's something timeless, that integrity that he has.

JC: Exactly, exactly. So, he never compromised that. He never sold out, so to speak, commercially, just to sell out, thinking, "Well, I can make some money doing this or that. I don't care what I write, as long as I write something, you know." Every piece he wrote from his heart and his soul and he meant every word of it, so I think that's so important to remember for future writers and generations who study writing.

SK: Right. That's a wonderful lesson. Okay, is there anything else you'd like to include in our interview, that you find important to remind the world about Raymond Carver? That's my final question.

JC: Oh, this will sort of overlap. One should never forget Ray's love for writing and wanting to portray the human condition for the average person, the average man and woman who's out there struggling and living in the shadows of life, or just living in the shadows, paying their bills, paying the rent, putting food on the table. Just ordinary people, and good people. He didn't write about the drug addicts or people who were liars, cheats, and thieves or whatever, but just the ordinary person, trying to make a living, trying to struggle, but always living in the shadows of people who were prosperous and doing well. So I think that's what he tried to portray, with as much integrity as he could. I admire Ray tremendously for the human being he was, such honesty, in trying to put this down on paper.

SK: Thank you so much. This is so wonderful. I couldn't imagine that this would generate so much!

¹ See "Some Prose on Poetry" in *All Of Us: The Collected Poems*. 265-67.

² Aerojet operated a plant in Chico in 1978; Aerojet is now owned by Gencorp.

³ James Berardinelli called *Short Cuts* a "magnificent triumph" and Peter Travers called it an "intimate epic."

⁴ Altman was nominated as Best Director for an Academy Award Oscar, a Chicago Film Critics Award, a Los Angeles Film Critics Award, a National Society of Film Critics Award; Altman won the Film Independent Spirit Award for Best Director

Abstract

“Beyond ‘Errand’: Raymond Carver and the Art of Homage” by Rob Davidson is a hybrid work that effectively blends elements of the personal essay with the tradition of the scholarly essay, reflecting the author’s writer-scholar identity. Davidson considers Carver’s use of homage in the author’s later work. He reads “The Train” from *Cathedral*, as an homage written as a sequel to his friend John Cheever’s short story, “The Five-Forty-Eight.” Davidson reads the short story “Errand,” the final story Carver published, as written in homage to Anton Chekhov, who is the central character of the story presented as a creative interaction with that author’s biographical narrative, one that begins in the mode of historiography, but concludes in a speculative form of fiction. Additionally, Davidson considers *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Carver’s hybrid final book of poetry, as a book influenced by Czeslaw Milosz’s collection *Unattainable Earth*, which couches excerpts, fragments, and quotes from a range of authors including Chekhov.

Beyond “Errand”: Raymond Carver and the Art of Homage

Rob Davidson

The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person,
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

Czeslaw Milosz, “*Ars Poetica?*”¹

Raymond Carver is best remembered as a master of the minimalist short story, as a literary lion of the 1970s and 1980s. Celebrated as a realist by some, a postmodernist by others, he breathed new life into the form. It is a testament to the power of his work that he is widely read and taught today. Carver was also a celebrated poet, yet the relationship between his poetry and prose is perhaps less commonly understood by many readers. One point of correspondence is found in Carver’s homages. As some of his most experimental work, these pieces stand apart from the rest of his oeuvre in interesting ways.

Carver’s late story “Errand” is easily his best-known homage, and scholars have offered a variety of compelling interpretations regarding how that individual story works, formally. As an homage, however, “Errand” demands to be read in a broader context. The story was not Carver’s first homage, nor would it be his last. This essay explores the lineage of homage in Carver’s late work, from “The Train” (*Cathedral*) to “Errand” (*Where I’m Calling From*), and into his final book of verse, *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Carver’s love of homage led him to increasingly experimental forms of tribute and appropriation. The result is a deeper, more nuanced appreciation for Carver’s late work, and the ways that homage cross-informs both his poetry and prose.

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Homage derives from twelfth century feudal law where to pay homage literally meant a formal and public acknowledgment between a vassal and a superior, typically a lord or king, involving payment, oaths of fidelity, or obligations of service. In a certain sense, the same idea informs the literary homage: one pays tribute to a writer or a work one deems superior. This can take many forms. Margot Livesey has cataloged several categories of homage, from the affectionate, to the oblique, to the profane.² Regardless of the tone or manner of approach, the homage's sine qua non is an acknowledgement of the power to influence or inspire in the original work or author. There must be that vital spark to which one responds and pays tribute, or there wouldn't be an homage, only a pilfering, or a plagiarism.

An affectionate homage begins in tribute, but it is often more than this: it is one writer reaching back to another writer's example, tracing a connection, claiming a branch of the artistic family tree. As Lewis Hyde notes, "Most artists are brought to their vocation when their own nascent gifts are awakened by the work of a master. That is to say, most artists are converted to art by art itself" (59). The best homages do more than offer tribute: they are a case study in artistic renewal, the reawakening of a primal sense of wonder and amazement, the crucial fountainhead of all art. They remind us that every artist is always and already in dialogue with all who have come before, with the very history and lineage of one's form. It is a dialogue that never ends, but can only begin again and again, repetition with variation.

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"Errand" is Raymond Carver's best-known homage and one of his most famous short stories, yet it stands apart from the bulk of his published work both in terms of form and mode. The story concerns the death of Anton Chekhov, one of the writers Carver held dearest. As a work of fiction, "Errand" is a hybrid. The story starts out in a biographical mode, with the narrator quoting from the diaries and letters of Chekhov's friends and intimates, then segues into historical fiction, speculating on events corroborated by those same sources.³ As Chekhov lies dying in a hotel bedroom, his doctor calls for a bottle of champagne. "It was one of those rare moments of inspiration that can easily enough be overlooked later on," Carver writes, "because the action is so entirely appropriate it seems inevitable" ("Errand" 386).

What happens next is magical. Carver dips into the mind of the bellhop who served the champagne and who, later that morning, will be asked to summon a mortician. The bellhop lapses into a daydream, written in the future conditional, imagining his task as it is narrated to him by Chekhov's widow. After she has given him her detailed instructions, she shakes him out of his reverie with her questions—did he understand her? Will he now leave on his errand? The story concludes with one final, concrete detail, as the bellhop stoops to collect the champagne cork from the floor, an affront to his sense of order and decorum.

In “Errand” one finds not only a tribute to a favorite author, but a creative interaction with that author’s biographical narrative. Carver takes that storyline, finds an artistic point of entry, and extends it, adding brushstrokes that could only be his own. As the story itself notes, the bellhop has been lost to history, unnamable. The story begins in the mode of historiography, but its final pages are purely speculative. They are fiction. The result is unquestionably one of Carver’s best stories.

In a brief essay, Carver described the process of writing “Errand.” The moment that first sparked his interest—the doctor calling for champagne—he found in Henri Troyat’s biography of Chekhov. “This little piece of human business struck me as an extraordinary action,” Carver writes. “Before I really knew what I was going to do with it, or how I was going to proceed, I felt I had been launched into a short story of my own.” Carver wrote that scene, working backwards from it to the onset of Chekhov’s tuberculosis, then eventually forward to the writer’s death. As he wrote, he did not know exactly what he was doing, or where the story was headed. “The only thing that was clear to me was that I thought I saw an opportunity to pay homage—if I could bring it off, do it rightly and honorably—to Chekhov, the writer who has meant so much to me for such a long time” (Carver “On ‘Errand’” 197-98). Something happened when Carver wrote “Errand.” The story, which very much became the homage he had hoped it would be, did something more: it inspired him to approach Chekhov’s creative work differently, too, appropriating it and integrating it into his poetry. First, however, it is worth noting that the inspiration for “Errand” goes back even farther than Carver reading Troyat’s biography. Carver likely had a precedent in mind as he wrote “Errand,” for it was not his first literary homage: it was his second, and a comparative study of these two stories reveals surprising connections.⁴

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Carver’s 1983 collection *Cathedral* includes “The Train,” a short story written in response to John Cheever’s masterpiece “The Five-Forty-Eight.” Cheever’s story is about a predator and his prey; Blake, who is unhappily married, has a history of choosing lovers for “their lack of self-esteem,” the mark of a hunter (Cheever 238). After sleeping with his latest secretary, Miss Dent, he fires her and will not respond to her inquiries. But Miss Dent will not give up so easily. She follows Blake on his train commute home, confronts him, and orders him at gun point to put his face in the dirt.

In a brief dénouement, Blake hears Miss Dent leave him in the train yard: “he heard her footsteps go away from him, over the rubble. [...] He heard them diminish. He raised his head. He saw her climb the stairs of the wooden footbridge and cross it and go down to the other platform, where her figure in the dim light looked small, common, and harmless” (Cheever 247). Blake then picks himself up off the ground, dusts off his hat, and walks home. The question readers ponder upon is whether Blake has been changed by any

of this. Cheever wisely leaves the reader to do his own thinking, a fine case of literary ambivalence.

But what about Miss Dent? That final image of her on the train platform—“small, common, and harmless”—is perhaps less than hopeful. Here is where Carver steps in, picking up with Miss Dent as the viewpoint character in “The Train” precisely where Cheever left her: on the platform, waiting for a train back into New York City. Carver’s story begins in the third person intimate, with close access to Miss Dent’s inner thoughts and feelings—her turmoil following the encounter with Blake, which she hopes to put aside: “She wanted to stop thinking about [Blake] and how he’d acted toward her after taking what he wanted. But she knew she would remember for a long time the sound he made through his nose as he got down on his knees” (Carver “The Train” 148). Miss Dent, who first fell into Blake’s arms because of her intense loneliness and despair, still seems shaken and troubled.

She is distracted from such thoughts by the arrival of two rather odd characters, an older man wearing a white silk cravat but no shoes, and his companion, a middle-aged Italian woman in a dress. They have just come from some sort of raucous party, an affair that shocked and disgusted them, the details of which are never clear to the reader. What is clear, however, is how the details echo Cheever’s story. The older couple speaks of the revelers they have just left behind: “It’s that girl I feel sorry for,” the woman said. “That poor soul alone in a house filled with simps and vipers. She’s the one I feel sorry for. And she’ll be the one to pay! None of the rest of them. Certainly not that imbecile they call Captain Nick! He isn’t responsible for anything” (Carver “The Train” 150). Whoever Captain Nick is—he sounds like a fugitive from a Jimmy Buffet song—his actions sound disturbingly familiar to any reader of Cheever’s story, and this brief bit of dialogue points to a common reaction among readers. We may be disgusted by Blake, or we may be hopeful he can change, but any reader with a heart pities Miss Dent.

In the middle part of “The Train,” the older couple reaches out to Miss Dent in their own peculiar way, engaging her in conversation. The story’s point of view becomes increasingly objective and camera-like; the emphasis is on the external behavior of the older couple and less with Miss Dent’s private thoughts. The older woman says: “Young lady, I’ll wager you’ve had your share of trial and error in this life. I know you have. The expression on your face tells me so. But you aren’t going to talk about it. Go ahead then, don’t talk. Let us do the talking. But you’ll get older. Then you’ll have something to talk about” (153). If the exchange sounds aggressive or intrusive, it is also a gesture of solidarity: this older woman, who claims to have suffered, recognizes a kindred spirit.

The train arrives. The three passengers board it. Here, Carver does something surprising, shifting point of view to the passengers on the train and what they would see: two women boarding the train, followed by an older man. “The passengers naturally assumed that the three people boarding were together,” Carver writes, “and they felt sure that whatever these people’s business had been that night, it had not come to a happy

conclusion. [...] The world is filled with business of every sort, as they well knew. This still was not as bad, perhaps, as it could be” (155). In the story’s final lines, the passengers shift their attention to other matters, forgetting the new arrivals. The story concludes with the actions of the conductor and train engineer, who get the train rolling again.

The ending of Carver’s story affords Miss Dent some measure of hope. If she has not exactly found a family, it shows us that she has, however briefly, found kindred souls who recognize her suffering and reach out to her. The story recognizes, as Miss Dent surely must, that there is suffering everywhere in the world, and that the train keeps rolling, filled with walking wounded. Miss Dent is more alike than different from the others. It is the Blakes of the world we must watch out for.

Carver’s “The Train” is another fascinating example of an homage, this time to a famous American writer and one of his most beloved stories. Importantly, the artistic moves Carver makes in “The Train” bear an interesting correlation to “Errand.” Like that later story, Carver takes the liberty of shaping his story around a received narrative. In both stories, Carver finds his artistic point of entry and then begins to play with it, reshaping and speculating. In each story, the point of view shifts and the nominal center of the story changes. We begin “Errand” in the mindset of Chekhov’s widow and physician, but end in the viewpoint of a bellhop. In “The Train,” we begin in the mind of a troubled young woman, but end in the viewpoint of a generally sympathetic collective of train passengers.

“Errand” stands out as the most formally inventive story in Carver’s all-too-brief oeuvre, but the artistic moves he made there were to some degree a revision of moves first made in “The Train.” The earlier story is interesting, but not among Carver’s most vital fictions. “Errand” is a masterpiece, driven both by Carver’s intense love of his subject and the fact that, in this second homage story, he uses artistic moves he had already worked through one time. The second time is more graceful, more emotive, in a certain sense more refined. And if “The Train” helped beget “Errand,” the latter story would beget another sort of homage—a gesture more radical than anything Carver had attempted previously.

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Raymond Carver’s final book is a volume of verse, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, was completed shortly before his death in 1988 and published the following year. Interestingly, Carver’s is not the only voice in the collection. The book is like a crowded literary salon. Couched between Carver’s poems are various excerpts, fragments, and quotes from a wide range of authors, but one is quoted more frequently than any other, and that is of course Chekhov. Fascinatingly, Carver does not merely excerpt short prose passages; he alters them by breaking them into lines of verse, creating short poems out of what had been prose, complete with a new title. The results vary, but when it works it is wondrous. Here is one Chekhov fragment, “Night Fragment,” that certainly works, all the more beautifully because the piece from which it is drawn, “Across Siberia,” is not fiction, but reportage:

I am sick and tired of the river, the stars
that strew the sky, this heavy funereal silence.
To while away the time, I talk to the coachman, who
looks like an old man.... He tells me that this dark, forbidding river
abounds in sterlet, white salmon, eel-pout, pike, but there is no one
to catch the fish and no tackle to catch it with. (qtd. in Carver *A New Path* 47)

This works surprisingly well. And, for what it is worth, it would be a classic Ray Carver poem. It is firmly rooted in a narrative impulse, and driven by images of water and fishing. A somber, melancholy tone hangs over everything. And that string of fish names in the fifth line is pure music. It is a fine example of a found poem.

It is worth pondering why and where Carver places the poem in *A New Path*. Carver intended “Night Dampness” to be read intratextually, alongside his own work. The various pieces in the book play off one another, creating resonant echoes. For example, “Night Dampness” follows one of Carver’s stronger poems, “The Sturgeon,” which begins with a description of an ancient species of fish who “lives alone, confines itself / to large, freshwater rivers, and takes / 100 years to get around to its first mating.” In the poem, Carver remembers seeing a nine-hundred-pound sturgeon at a state fair, and further remembers his father regaling him with stories of even larger catches in Russia and Alaska. The boy Carver listens in a state of fascination—the wonder of a fish so large, and the magic of his father’s voice, recounting these impossible stories. Carver concludes the poem with the memory of “...just my father there beside me / leaning on his arms over the railing, staring, the two of us / staring up at that great dead fish, / and that marvelous story of his, all / surfacing, now and then” (*A New Path* 44-46).

It is a poem about fathers and sons, about memory and storytelling, as much as it is about a strange, prized fish. The echoes and connections between “The Sturgeon” and “Night Dampness” deepen both efforts and speak to the larger project of *A New Path*. In each poem, a speaker listens as another man regales him with tales of fishing. In Carver’s poem, the father’s tales are of inconceivably large catches; in Chekhov’s, the coachman’s description is of inaccessible abundance. In each, life and death, gain and loss, hang in close relation: in Carver’s poem, a boy’s fantasy of catching The Big One plays off an older, mature man’s treasured recollection of his father “surfacing, now and then” in memory; in those lines from Chekhov, as arranged by Carver, the strange “funereal silence” of the train coach is juxtaposed against the image of a fertile river teeming with life.

There are some fifteen such Chekhov passages tucked away in the pages of *A New Path*, along with entries from many others, including Robert Lowell, Charles Wright, Tomas Tranströmer, and James Chetham’s seminal 1681 tome, *The Angler’s Vade Mecum*. Carver exercises artistic license with these works, especially Chekhov, placing them into conversation with his own, and the effect is deeply moving. *A New Path* is more than a collection of poems; it is a record of Carver’s reading, the range of his artistic thought, and the sources of his inspiration in the months leading up to his death.

In her Introduction to *A New Path*, Carver's widow Tess Gallagher explains part of Carver's process. We learn that, in the months preceding his death, he worked vigorously to complete this final book. And he read differently, with an eye towards his own project and how he might bend or reshape Chekhov to fit its parameters:

Ray began to mark passages [in Chekhov] he wanted to include and to type them up himself. The results were something between poems and prose, and this pleased us because some of Ray's new poems blurred the boundaries between poem and story, just as his stories had often taken strength from dramatic and poetic strategies. Ray had so collapsed the distance between his language and thought that the resulting transparency of method allowed distinctions between genres to dissolve without violence or a feeling of trespass. The story given as poem could unwind without having to pretend to intensities of phrasing or language that might have impeded the force of the story itself, yet the story could pull at the attention of the reader in another way for having been conceived as poetry. (Gallagher xxi)

In taking Chekhov's prose and arranging it as poetry, Carver creates something new, a series of found poems intended to be read as a homage to an inspiring master, but also as a conversation between the work of two fellow writers. It is the most personal of gestures, almost a private act.

Additional precedent exists in addition to Carver's repurposing of Chekhov. As Gallagher explains, again in her Introduction, Carver had been reading prodigiously in his final months and had been profoundly moved by Czeslaw Milosz's 1986 poetry collection *Unattainable Earth* (Gallagher xix-xx). Milosz weaves in poems from Walt Whitman and D. H. Lawrence, as well as prose passages from Baudelaire, Casanova, and his distant cousin, the Lithuanian poet Oscar Milosz. But mostly it is Whitman who pervades the book, his poems—or fragments of them—tucked in between Milosz's verse. The end result is truly splendid, a bold chorus of voices, ideas, and reflections. In his Preface, Milosz explains that, as he wrote the poems in *Unattainable Earth*, he

lived among people, was feeling, thinking, getting acquainted with others' thoughts, and tried to capture the surrounding world by any means, including the act of the poem, but not only. [...] Why then separate what is unified in time, in my case by the years 1981-1984? Why not include in one book, along with my own poems, poems by others, notes in prose, quotations from various sources and even fragments of letters from friends if all these pieces serve one purpose: my attempt to approach the inexpressible sense of being? (Milosz xiii)

This attempt was part the "more spacious form" Milosz had called for in his 1968 poem "*Ars Poetica?*": "I have always aspired to a more spacious form / that would be free from the claims of poetry or prose / and would let us understand each other without exposing / the author or reader to sublime agonies" (*Collected Poems* 211). Carver, discovering the example of Milosz's "more spacious form" right around the time he was writing "Errand," felt inspired—perhaps felt he had been given license—to produce a final work unlike anything

he had previously written: a book of last things, final thoughts and ideas, a concluding conversation with the dead he loved and would soon join.

A New Path is a feat of inspired imitation, a point worth emphasizing, for imitation is clearly the essential quality of any homage, regardless of form or tone. Yet the best imitations or homages are never limited by what inspired it; rather, in a sense, they transcend it. Carver's collection is patterned on Milosz's *Unattainable Earth*, yet composes its own music, presents its own power, and offers its own testimony; it is a kind of "free" or creative imitation, rather than something rote or unoriginal. Carver reminds us that imitation can be liberating, rather than restrictive; it can be inspiring, rather than deadening.

Some might go even further, arguing that imitation is an essential part of the creative process. Nicholas Delbanco, who has offered an entire pedagogy of writing based on imitative practices, asserts that "to imitate is not to be derivative; it's simply to admit we derive from what was accomplished by others. [...] Artists who borrow or adapt a form—all artists, in effect—engage in imitation all the time" (59, 61).⁵ Jonathan Lethem, paraphrasing artist and activist Kembra McLeod, seconds the idea: "appropriation, mimicry, quotation, allusion, and sublimated collaboration consist of a kind of sine qua non of the creative act, cutting across all forms and genres in the realm of cultural production" (61). One might argue that on some level, be it intuitively or consciously, every artist understands these concepts. But that does not mean they are at peace with them. Authors sometimes deny or obscure the writers who inspired them, or, as critic Harold Bloom has argued, otherwise reveal deep-seated anxiety about their artistic forebears.⁶

Yet, one of the most powerful aspects of *A New Path to the Waterfall* is that Carver does not occlude or obscure any of his "outside sources"; he openly celebrates them. It is quite moving to consider that Carver's final gesture as a writer was to pay tribute to someone who had been with him from the beginning—his first true master, the Russian who played a seminal role in defining the modern short story, and who, Carver was always the first to admit, put an indelible stamp on the work of a quiet boy born half a world away, in Clatskanie, Oregon, in 1938. In doing so, Carver foregrounds what some writers prefer to keep in the background, and that is the power of influence, the inspiration taken from an artistic forebear, a source never abandoned or forgotten but only returned to, over and over again, as we search endlessly for that new path to which Carver alludes.

When we acknowledge those debts of inspiration, we declare that we are not alone in our journey, that originality is not something sucked out of thin air; it is the exhaled breath of our artistic mothers and fathers, those giants of an earlier generation whose work engendered ours. And when we do more than merely acknowledge that debt, when we create in direct response to the work itself, when we imitate, borrow or steal those words and images, breaking and bending them, twisting them around in our own peculiar ways, we do so lovingly, knowingly, with respect and gratitude.

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I sometimes ask my students: For whom do you write? It cannot be only for yourself, for no one genuinely desires an audience of one. You wouldn't be here, in this classroom, I tell them, if that were the case. We write to be read, to reach an audience. But we also write in homage, an inspiration born out of a kind of debt, an acknowledgement of our long and ongoing education—all those hours spent studying the work of our self-appointed masters. Their work speaks to us, and we speak back. The written word is not an object, not a dead thing; it is an *act*. Literature acts upon us, and we pick up our pens and act in return. We write, as John Berryman once put it, for the dead we love.⁷

Artists have long been doing this. In *Ulysses*, James Joyce wrote back to Homer; in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys riffed on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; in *Imitations*, Robert Lowell knelt before his masters. And so too did Carver, taking his master's work and reshaping it, presenting it not in pedantic imitation, but in ode. Not in a derivative way, but in a highly original and highly charged way. When done well—"rightly and honorably," as Carver puts it—the final result is something larger, more expansive. Carver inspires us to view not only a single, new work, or to re-view an older one, but to ponder, with wonder and with fresh eyes, the larger dialectic of art itself. This is the true spirit of homage: an acknowledgement of allegiance, an admission of another artist's superior worth. It is an act of dutiful reverence; it is an act of love.

Notes

¹ Czeslaw Milosz, "Ars Poetica?" *The Collected Poems 1931-1987* (Ecco, 1988), p. 212.

² Margot Livesey, "Neither a Borrower nor a Lender Be: Paying Homage," *The Hidden Machinery: Essays on Writing* (Tin House, 2017), pp. 151-83.

³ For a nuanced reading of the intertextual relations Carver plays with, see Claudine Verley, "'Errand,' or Raymond Carver's Realism in a Champagne Cork." *Journal of the Short Story in English* 46 (Spring 2006), pp. 147-63. <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/502>.

⁴ For more on Carver's debt to Chekhov, see Lionel Kelley, "Anton Chekhov and Raymond Carver: A Writer's Strategies of Reading." *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 26, 1996, pp. 218-31. JSTOR, doi: 10.2307/3508660.

⁵ See also Delbanco's *The Sincerest Form: Writing Fiction by Imitation* (McGraw-Hill, 2004).

⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Second Edition. (Oxford UP, 1997).

⁷ John Plotz et al., "An Interview with John Berryman," *Berryman's Understanding: Reflections on the Poetry of John Berryman*, ed. Harry Thomas (Northeastern UP, 1988), p. 17.

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Abstract

In “‘In this too, she was right’: Alcoholic Acceptance in Raymond Carver’s ‘Gazebo,’” David McCracken reads “Gazebo” as recovery text, one in which Carver demonstrates through Duane the process in which an alcoholic ultimately “wants to” want to get sober. McCracken sees Duane not in denial, at a precarious place where an alcoholic intuitively knows he is alcoholic, but is unwilling to admit powerless over alcohol and do whatever is necessary to stop drinking (i.e., take what in Alcoholics Anonymous is called the first step). Moreover, McCracken sees hope as Duane decides to assume responsibility for his recovery: he wants to want to get sober. Presented through a background frame related to alcohol addiction and recovery, Carver biography and testimony, and Carver’s previous stories about alcoholism, the author offers an analysis of the important gazebo signification through an application of Jacques Lacan’s theory concerning need, demand, and desire.

“‘In this too, she was right’: Alcoholic Acceptance in ‘Gazebo’”

David McCracken

In one of his famous *Esquire* essays, later published in *The Crack-Up*, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, “Now the standard cure for one who is sunk is to consider those in actual destitution or physical suffering—this is an all-weather beatitude for gloom in general and fairly salutary day-time advice for everyone. But at three o’clock in the morning, a forgotten package has the same tragic importance as a death sentence, and the cure doesn’t work—and in a real dark night of the soul it is always three o’clock in the morning, day after day” (75). An alcoholic understands Fitzgerald’s figurative description of this particular strain of insomnia. Of course, Fitzgerald knew this dark night intimately, felt first-hand the minutes dripping by, the eerily dull quiet, and the acute loneliness that was palpable. Eventually achieving a short period of sobriety before his death, Fitzgerald wrote about recovery earlier in his life in the well-known “Babylon Revisited,” but he was more brutally honest about it in the lesser-known “An Alcoholic Case.” Even though his main character in *The Great Gatsby* was not an alcoholic and this novel’s narrator denied excessive indulgence, Fitzgerald felt an obligation to write honestly about dipsomania, and most of his best fiction included valid portrayals of the catastrophic consequences of alcoholic inebriation.

Raymond Carver’s own drive to depict alcoholism realistically is confirmed by one of his own recovery stories, perhaps his most authentic in capturing a particular aspect of the disease, “Gazebo.” Published in *Beginners* in 2009, the 1979 manuscript of “Gazebo” was cut extensively by Carver’s editor Gordon Lish for inclusion in *The Missouri Review* in the fall of 1980. Carver published the final version, which was 44% shorter than the manuscript, in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981 (Stull and Carroll 999-1000). In this story, Carver provides a literary snapshot of the crucial moment when an alcoholic chooses recovery. He describes accurately the decision process of the still hopeful alcoholic, not yet broken by the disease, who is perhaps at that place in his drinking career when he is finally

ready to surrender, to become at least willing to take a step toward sobriety. This opportunity is tenuous, just beyond Fitzgerald's three o'clock in the morning. Those unfamiliar with alcoholism underestimate the vital importance of this turning point, and honestly few recovering alcoholics are capable of communicating clearly what happens. Most will admit that they just do not have the words. The artistry of "Gazebo" is how Carver presents this event. Considering an audience of mostly non-alcoholics, he shows the complexity in a seemingly simple decision, an alcoholic not drinking. With empathetic objectivity, Carver allows readers to experience this miracle through Duane, his narrator. Duane finally stands at the spot of self-insight, and Carver knew this ground well, traversing it for at least five years of his life.

This is precisely why "Gazebo" is such a significant story within the Carver literary canon. None of Carver's other stories broach the psychic revelation toward recovery with as much subtle veracity. Carver portrays Duane as an alcoholic without relying on caricature, stereotype, or parody, and comparable to recovery testimonies in the *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AA) Big Book, Carver steers away from moral platitude or temperate rhetoric. In the literary tradition of dirty realism, Carver displays starkly and frankly the addiction conundrum: the alcoholic repeats the same pattern of abuse expecting different results. Granted, there are several comprehensive studies related to Carver and drinking—the best three articles published by Chad Wriglesworth, Peter J. Donahue, and Hamilton E. Cochrane, with a nod to Kirk Nessel's survey. No critic has directed, however, close attention to how Duane represents the alcoholic who becomes motivated toward sobriety. Many sources document Carver's insights about his own turning points toward sobriety, notably in interviews with Bruce Weber, Kay Bonetti, and Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee. Of all the Carver biographers, Carol Sklenicka devotes the most attention to the years Carver tried to get sober. My intention is not to rehash the plethora of work already produced by scholars such as Collin H. Messer, Jim Harbaugh, Eileen Abrams, Angela Sorby, Olivia Laing, or those cited in this article. Instead, by applying Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, I will demonstrate how Carver depicts the mercurial alcoholic moment of clarity in "Gazebo," when Duane finally *wants to* want to get sober. As someone sober for a decade but who first attended an AA meeting in 1988, I understand the difficulty of ultimately committing to sobriety. On the surface, Duane and Holly are meeting to discuss the future of their marriage after Duane's infidelity. I will prove that they are actually coming to terms with the effects of their alcoholism. Put another way, I will show how Duane and Holly essentially confront their demands and their desires. At the end of the story, Holly's mentioning Duane's name is tantamount to calling for a major life change, one that absolutely must include recovery. In his essay, I will explain how Duane ultimately desires getting sober.

People who know little about alcoholism (or mostly get what they know from popular media) might not truly understand Duane's circumstance. When a person realizes that he or she is alcoholic—consciously understanding the theoretical and the practical meaning of the word—this person is no longer technically in denial. In AA, denial is

considered without the technical medical jargon as “refusing to recognize the obvious.” Of course, there are other explanations of denial. Jack H. Hedblom comments, “We must keep in mind that alcoholics phrase these questions [‘How did I end up here again?’ and ‘Why do these things happen to me all the time?’] in terms of what is being done to them. . . . In their minds, their problem is not alcohol; they have other problems. They believe they can control alcohol, and this illusion prevents them from putting their lives back together. . . . However, they cannot stop drinking and fear what will happen if they do” (60-61). E. M. Jellinek defines the “crucial phase”: “Although he will not admit it, the alcohol addict believes that he has lost his will power and that he can and must regain it. He is not aware that he has undergone a process which makes it impossible for him to control his alcohol intake. To ‘master his will’ becomes a matter of the greatest importance to him. When tensions rise, ‘a drink’ is the natural remedy for him and he is convinced that this time it will be one or two drinks only” (363). The Hazelden Betty Ford website provides another simple definition: “Denial is the tendency of alcoholics or addicts to either disavow or distort variables associated with their drinking or drug use in spite of evidence to the contrary.” Moreover, this website notes the extremely important point that self-knowledge does not automatically lead to recovery: “It’s a common misconception that all alcoholics and addicts are in denial. In fact, people have various levels of awareness of their substance use problems and readiness to change behavior. People may recognize certain facts concerning their use [while] they may woefully misperceive the impact their use has had on the people around them, their relationships, how they feel about themselves, or the implications of their drinking history.” Besides helpful clarifications by scholars such as Neil Levy, Eviatar Zerubavel, and Patricia Ann Stoddard Dare and Leanne Derigne, Laurie Champion provides a clear summary of the alcoholic progression. In her criticism of Carver’s stories, Champion applies the pattern that Julie Irwin uses in her study of Fitzgerald’s works:

Currently the best medical model of alcoholism rests on the progression of three stages most alcoholics go through. The early stage is characterized by relief drinking, growing preoccupation with alcohol, increased tolerance for alcohol, and improved performance while drinking; the middle stage by physical dependence on alcohol, loss of control over drinking, withdrawal symptoms upon abstinence, denial of the problem, and attempts to rationalize it away; and the final stage by malnutrition, decreased tolerance, morning drinking, and estrangement from friends and family, evolving in many instances to the classic Skid Row disaster and ending in death. (418)

In AA, at the beginning of each meeting, someone reads “How It Works” in *Alcoholics Anonymous* to explain why a person cannot “recognize the obvious”: “Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. . . . They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. . . . There are those, too,

who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest” (58). In the *Rational Recovery* Small Book, Jack Trimpey argues “the Beast,” the “addictive voice,” manipulates the alcoholic to use, and without cognitive reprogramming, alcoholics are destined to continue facing problems associated with drinking. Trimpey contends, “Addiction is chemically enhanced stupidity, literally crazed pleasure-seeking that results in an anti-family, immoral lifestyle. . . . You are free to summarily quit drinking/using at any time, but the thought of lifetime abstinence brings you a cringing, sinking feeling. That morbid feeling is a sensory entity in your consciousness we call the Beast.” He adds, “Your brain is not you, but a part of your body. . . . No part of your brain is out to get you, and no part of your brain will ever come to your rescue. In AVRT-based recovery, *you are on your own*, with no support, no sponsors, no cheering section, no rescuing deity, no brain to intervene for you, *no nothing* but your dread fear of going to the very bad place” By working through his character’s self-deception, Carver presents how Duane knew this “dread fear” all too well.

Carver is able to communicate “recognizing the obvious” so well because of his experience. As Sklenicka reports in her biography, after filing for bankruptcy in 1974, Carver had to confront the inevitable: “Ray admitted he was a drunk now. He met 1975 with ambition to change his life. He tried to cut back. For the next two years, he would straddle two diverging tracks, one leading toward the bottom of his alcoholism, the other toward recovery and literary success” (275). Sklenicka writes about “Gazebo”:

Carver read three new stories to the Salisbury students: “Why Don’t You Dance?” “Gazebo,” and “If It Please You.” In a video recording of the event, Ray’s sideburns are neatly trimmed and he’s wearing a jacket and tie. After finishing the second story, he sighs and says, “I didn’t realize until I began reading these particular stories that they all seem to have a common concern [sigh] a theme if you will [sigh] a meaning as Flannery O’Connor would say.” Carver speaks as if this thought had just now occurred to him and doesn’t name the concern. Surely even the young undergraduates in the audience understood, though: these were stories about young love and damaged love, fresh couples and jaded couples, dreams and losses. All had been written since Carver quit drinking in 1977. (354)

Carver was hospitalized numerous times for alcoholism, went in and out of AA (as did his first wife Maryann), and stayed twice at Duffy’s notorious drunk ranch (depicted in “Where I’m Calling From”) (Sklenicka 209-10, 300-10). Similar to Duane in “Gazebo,” Carver knew about infidelity and the resulting dishonesty and distrust, in addition to the remorse, self-pity, and self-loathing. After what seemed an insignificant glass of wine turned into a bender, Carver stopped drinking, what he termed the “line of demarcation” (Weber 89) separating his drinking life from his last ten years of sobriety. Pertinent to events described in “Gazebo,” Carver finally got to the point where he became completely honest with himself and made a personal commitment toward recovery. This moment was not marked by self-aggrandizing ceremony, just an ordinary yet monumental personal decision. As Carver states,

“. . . I woke up, feeling terrible, but I didn't drink anything that morning. . . . I didn't drink for three days, and when the third day had passed, I began to feel some better. Then I just kept not drinking. Gradually I began to put a little distance between myself and the booze. A week. Two weeks. Suddenly it was a month. I'd been sober for a month, and I was slowly starting to get well" (Simpson and Buzbee 311). Cochrane states, "Carver depicts alcoholism and its attendant spiritual ills—self-absorption, isolation, the inability to make sense of one's experience—but he also depicts a recovery process, the healing of broken lives, and, metaphorically, a spiritual rebirth based on the principles of community, service, and the telling of one's story—principles just as capable of redeeming modern man as curing an alcoholic" (80). In "Gazebo," Duane is at a place similar to where Carver was when he made the crucial decision to stop drinking.

Carver summarizes this event in several published interviews. Significantly, Wriglesworth claims, ". . . it is evident that Carver's rehabilitation brought sense and order to a chaotic personal narrative and that, beneath 'the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things' . . . Carver's own life and work coincide with the patterns of Alcoholics Anonymous, suggesting that this recovery program contributed significantly to his spiritual and literary transformation" (134). Wriglesworth asserts that Carver merges the religious with the humanist producing the spiritual (148), and Carver's own testimony (corresponding greatly with those in the Big Book) describes a simple yet transcendental moment of grace. Importantly, Wriglesworth argues that Carver believed in the power of God's grace, although Carver did not attribute it explicitly to traditional Christian ideology (139). Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory concur,

While Carver did acknowledge a renewed sense of self-esteem through his recovery from alcoholism, he also suspected the influence of "something" else that he was unable to name. When asked about his "more generous" writing, Carver could only state, "I'm more sure of my voice, more sure of *something* I don't have that sense of fooling around, of being tentative. . . . When I go to my desk now and pick up a pen, I really know what I have to do. It's a totally different feeling." (67).

For instance, as Carver tells Weber, after binge drinking, after being dried out, "after two or three stints of three-week stretches of not drinking," his life-defining moment was seemingly devoid of anything blatantly spiritual:

When I woke up the next morning, I was hideously hung over, and I drank half a pint of vodka, and I drank all that day. I drank all through that weekend, and I don't think I went back up north until Tuesday. Then on Tuesday morning, somehow, I go to the plane back to Arcata. I asked the cabbie to stop for a bottle on the way to the plane. I got back to my house, and I was drunk when I got there, and then I was sick for four days. The fourth day, I was feeling a little better. And I didn't drink, didn't drink, didn't drink. No great long-range plans. It was just a day at a time. (90)

Wriglesworth insists that Carver saw the spiritual working within the commonplace, and he points out AA allowed Carver to cultivate his idea of mystical intervention (134). During AA

meetings, members frequently confess that they almost never notice overtly when a higher power directs their lives.

Remarkably, those interested in Carver's recovery expect him to describe his own moment of clarity in terms of the miraculous, stupendous, or supernatural. Completely in line with his personality, Carver is self-deprecating, honestly explaining that his recovery was a series of twenty-four hours without imbibing, solidly illustrating the AA mantra of "Keep it simple." This might insinuate that the cessation of drinking is an easy endeavor, but this was certainly not Carver's intention. He never minimized the fierce and unrelenting compulsion to take a drink. To reiterate, recovering alcoholics understand the AA steps are only guidelines, and there is no straight-forward recipe how to get sober. An active drinker consumed by self-loathing wants concrete directions, which just do not exist, no matter what addiction charlatans might advertise. Even though treatment programs emphasize the importance of "giving oneself" to a higher power, or "turning over" through the relinquishing of psychic control to a superior energy, the basic dictum of not picking up the first drink is a simple yet effective action in the beginning of recovery. In an interview with Bonetti, Carver admits his decision to stop was influenced by one solitary realization: "But my life seemed to have gotten completely away from me. It was out of control, and I was hospitalized twice in a space of about twelve months, which is some indication of how serious the problem was" (55). A cerebral or intellectual knowledge of addiction is to no avail; not many people stop drinking because others rationally point out the dangerous cause and effect relationship drinking has on their lives. The unpredictable moment of clarity is usually associated with experience. Carver continues, "Finally, after the fourth hospitalization, it occurred to me that I was not going to be able to drink socially any longer. So I stopped. I just didn't drink one morning. And I didn't drink the next morning, and the next morning. Fortunately I was able to get a week of sobriety and a second week, and then lo and behold, I'd been sober a month, and I just took things very carefully. As they say in AA, 'One day at a time'" (55). Carver adds about this experience, "June second, 1977. If you want the truth, I'm prouder of that, that I've quit drinking, than I am of anything in my life. I'm a recovered alcoholic. I'll always be an alcoholic, but I'm no longer a practicing alcoholic" (Simpson and Buzbee 309). As Wriglesworth points out, these matter-of-fact descriptions do not convey the spirituality that Carver attached to his sobriety: "Carver was a writer deeply concerned with spiritual matters, one who spoke of the unnamable 'higher power' that entered his life through grace" (139).

This stoic depiction of grace is evident in several of Carver's stories dealing with alcohol abuse. Comparing these stories to "Gazebo" helps to put Duane's experience onto what amounts to a spectrum of recovery. In many, such as "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" or "Vitamins" (both published in 1981), Carver's characters display active abuse but may not be (at least not yet) alcoholic; in "Where I'm Calling From" (1982), the hallmark story about alcoholism, Carver's characters overtly demonstrate the difficulty inherent in staying sober after recovery has begun. In his 1982 tale, the narrator admits he

had conflicting feelings about recovery while at Frank Martin's the first time: "But I didn't know if they could help me or not. Part of me wanted help. But there was the other part" (288). In three stories, Carver portrays what happens in between these extremes, when characters are still finding their way in the nebulous psychological landscape of deciding if they want to take action toward sobriety. Brief discussions of these stories help to single out "Gazebo" as Carver's benchmark work about the moment of grace when recovery is indeed approachable. In "The Direction of the Treatment and Principles of Its Power," a lecture given in 1958, Lacan describes patient use of non-verbal cues to decrease frustration evoked by silence, when the patient ceases to talk and the analyst refuses to probe: "He is simply demanding of me . . . , by the very fact that he is speaking; his demand is intransitive—it brings no object with it" (515). In "Gazebo," verbal transactions are therapeutic exchanges that privilege the unspoken over the spoken and imply demands and desires. Lacan seems to explain this kind of transaction: "Of course, his demand is deployed against the backdrop of an implicit demand, the one for which he is here: the demand for me to cure him, . . . Thus the analyst is he who sustains demand, not, as people say, to frustrate the subject, but in order to allow the signifiers with which the latter's frustration is bound up to reappear" (515-16). Unfortunately, most characters in Carver stories do not have a surrogate analyst with whom to interact. The narrator in "Where I'm Calling From" almost achieves this self-realization through J.P. and Roxy, and even the phone call to this girlfriend transcribed in the last two lines suggests this might occur: "'Hello, sugar, I'll say when answers. 'It's me'" (296). Only "Gazebo" takes this all the way through the final conversation between Duane and Holly.

In "Careful," published three years after "Gazebo," Carver focuses on the subtleties of problem drinking. Lloyd has been given a couple of options, marriage or drinking, and he seems to have selected booze over his wife. Within the context of the story, Lloyd has agreed begrudgingly to get sober, for the most part, to appease his wife. As the narrator states, "After a lot of talking—what his wife, Inez, called *assessment*—Lloyd moved out of the house and into his own place" (264). Through Lloyd, Carver describes accurately how alcohol takes over daily living, as seen in his character's acknowledgement that booze is central to all activities:

One morning he woke up and promptly fell to eating crumb doughnuts and drinking champagne. There'd been a time, some years back, when he would have laughed at having a breakfast like this. Now, there didn't seem to be anything very unusual about it. . . . Time was when he would have considered this a mildly crazy thing to do, something to tell friends about. Then, the more he thought about it, the more he could see it didn't matter much one way or the other. He'd had doughnuts and champagne for breakfast. So what? (265)

There appears to be a moment when reconciliation between the two is possible, but after Inez finds the champagne hidden in the bathroom, she realizes Lloyd has chosen alcohol over her. At the end of the story, after Inez has successfully unclogged his ear, Lloyd resigns

himself to continue drinking: “He took the bottle of champagne into the living room and made himself comfortable on the sofa. . . . He wasn’t in the habit of drinking from the bottle, but it didn’t seem that much out of the ordinary” (277). As Donahue posits, Lloyd appears stuck at the point of not understanding that recovery would instill “new meaning” in his life:

The implicit understanding among the characters in “Where I’m Calling From,” which Lloyd fails to grasp in “Careful,” is that only by maintaining an open-ended narrative can the alcoholic free himself from the dependency and begin his recovery. The maintenance of this open-ended narrative is why—again in AA terms—the alcoholic is never *recovered*, which suggests closure, beginning with new meaning. The alcoholic must always consider himself as *recovering*, the process of putting new signifiers, new meaning, into his life. So, when, at the end of the story, the narrator in “Where I’m Calling From” imagines reaching his girlfriend over the telephone and telling her, ‘It’s me,’ hope and possibility are evident in that statement. (146)

Unlike Duane, Lloyd has yet to exhibit signs that he is ready to take action toward his own sobriety. He appears to be on the cusp of recovery, but he is just not there at end of this story.

In “Chef’s House,” published a year after “Gazebo,” Carver shows the tenuousness of making a real commitment (unlike Lloyd’s half-hearted try) to sobriety. Edna questions whether recovery is even possible, and her first sentence indicates her attention to her husband’s sobriety: “That summer Wes rented a furnished house north of Eureka from a recovered alcoholic named Chef. . . . He said he was on the wagon. I knew about that wagon. . . . I listened to him talk. He didn’t slur his words” (297). Edna places life experiences in the context of drinking: “We drank coffee, pop, and all kinds of fruit juice that summer. The whole summer, that’s what we had to drink. I found myself wishing the summer wouldn’t end. I knew better, but after a month of being with Wes in Chef’s house, I put my wedding ring back on. I hadn’t worn the ring in two years. Not since the night Wes was drunk and threw his ring into a peach orchard” (298). Unfortunately, Edna is cynical that Wes will stay dry (between active addiction and solid sobriety). Even though Wes attends “Don’t Drink meetings” (298), Edna clearly senses a relapse is imminent. When Chef evicts Wes from the house, Wes immediately places this news into a drinking context. He remembers the new tenant, Chef’s daughter Linda, as Fat Linda, one of his previous drinking buddies. Edna admits, “Wes had that look about him. I knew that look. . . .” (300). Trying to minimize the gravity of the situation, Edna coerces Wes to ignore the eviction, to pretend it, in addition to other problems in their lives, never happened. In contrast to “Gazebo,” besides the narrative coming from a wife’s point of view rather than from the husband’s, the details build toward a pessimistic ending, one foreshadowing alcoholic disaster, rather than leading to an optimistic beginning, one encouraging sober success.

In the 1987 story “Menudo,” published a year before Carver’s death, the narrator has seemingly accomplished sobriety, moving past the difficult period of trying to stop drinking.

Nevertheless, his life is not very stable as a result of his choice. As he looks over at his lover's house, the narrator remembers when he was in the middle of his addiction. Restless from lack of sleep, he contemplates his drinking "destiny" (458): "I used to drink whiskey when I couldn't sleep, but I gave it up" (457). He recalls the effects of guzzling water from a bottle kept in the refrigerator during "those whiskey days": "Suddenly I'd be drunk all over again and weaving around the kitchen. I can't begin to account for it—sober one minute, drunk the next" (457). This triggers his recollection of Alfredo fixing menudo to calm his "nerves" after a night of heavy drinking when the narrator convulses from the alcohol combined with anxiety. The narrator admits, "I didn't care any longer what happened to me. Everything, I thought, that could happen had happened. I felt unbalanced. I felt lost" (466). He finally remembers the calmness after falling asleep in a room adjacent to the kitchen where Alfredo prepared menudo, a traditional Mexican stew eaten to remedy hangover ailments: "When I woke it was mid-afternoon. The *menudo* was gone. The pot was in the sink, soaking. Those other people must have eaten it! They must have eaten it and grown calm. Everyone was gone, and the house was quiet" (468). At the end of the story, the narrator turns to physical action, raking his neighbor's leaves, instead of taking a drink. Duane could be like this narrator if he were able to make a firm commitment to sobriety. Of the three stories and the ensuing possibilities, this option is the one that the end of "Gazebo" anticipates, optimistically inferring that Duane, like this narrator, can successfully "give up" whiskey.

An application of two particular Lacanian concepts, demand and desire, helps to explain Duane's psychic change at the end of "Gazebo." This approach assumes that Duane and Holly express their intentions through unconventional linguistic strategies, so Lacan's terms provide a vocabulary through which to examine the motivation of both characters. This type of analysis also accentuates the background information about Carver as well as enhances previous scholarly criticism about this story. Lacan's ideas warrant flushing out before proceeding to a dissection of "Gazebo." In "The Signification of the Phallus," a lecture given in 1958, Lacan explains the need, demand, and desire theoretical progression. Lacan states, "Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand for a presence or an absence. This is what the primordial relationship with the mother manifests, replete as it is with that Other who must be situated *shy of* the needs that Other can fulfill" (579-80). He continues,

demand annuls (*aufhebt*) the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions demand obtains for need are debased (*sich erniedrigt*) to the point of being no more than the crushing brought on by the demand for love For the unconditionality of demand, desire substitutes the "absolute" condition: this condition in fact dissolves the element in the proof of love that rebels against the satisfaction of need. This is why desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that

results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*). (580)

As Lacan specifies, within a relationship, the demand is always for love (583), and “for each of the partners in the relationship, both the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be subjects of need or objects of love—they must hold the place of the cause of desire” (580).

Explaining these points, Anthony Wilden writes,

Since demand is articulated and addressed to another in a situation where the other has nothing to give, it is distinguished from need (for an object which will satisfy a need) by the fact that the object involved is nonessential; thus any demand is essentially a demand for love. . . . Demand is thus *for* something, whether that something is desired or not, whereas desire, as an absolute, is fundamentally the Hegelian desire for recognition, in that the subject seeks recognition as a (human) subject by requiring the other to recognize his (human) desire; in this sense one desires what another desires. And in the sense that desire is unconscious, one desires what the Other (here the unconscious subject) desires. (189)

Taking this discussion further, Anika Lemaire explains, “. . . desire always lies both beyond and before demand. To say that desire is beyond demand means that it transcends it, By articulating desire with its own conditions as a linguistic form, demand necessarily betrays its true import. But desire is also dug out of the area below demand. In this case, a reversal of roles seems to take place. Miming the frenzy of desire, the unconditional absolute demand recalls the radical lack of being which underlies desire” (163-64). Additional studies by Roberto Harari and Martin Murray confirm that Lacan basically contends that needs are satisfied, demands are not, and desires could be. Yael Godwin Baldwin’s anthology applies Lacan to addiction. Not surprisingly, Lacan’s theory coincides with addiction research, particularly concerning addictive impulse and motivation.

In “Gazebo,” drinking is central from the onset of the narrative; booze is undoubtedly the focus of attention. The first four sentences set up the marital disharmony, introducing Duane’s piecing together details that will eventually lead him to ascertain that the whiskey has stopped working as a panacea to keep his marriage functional. As the situation evolves, Duane begins looking inward at his self-motivation, but he still gives credence to Holly’s directives and criticisms. The series of indefinite pronouns immediately indicate that Duane is a little unsteady about why they are meeting, and this ambiguity is representative of the discursiveness of the discussion. Duane tells Holly “this can’t continue” and “This has got to stop” (139). Holly replies, “Duane, this is killing me” (139), and then exclaims, “I’ve had it, . . . I can’t take it anymore” (139). Duane responds that he “could die seeing her like this” (139). The “that,” “this,” and “it” pronouns appear to refer to the stress, pain, and trauma caused by Duane’s affair, but paying attention to Holly’s “I don’t have to spell it out for you again” (139), with an eye on the “again,” they could relate to the couple’s chronic alcohol abuse. Displaying uncertainty Duane feigns ignorance when he replies “Take what?” but then cancels this out with the confession “though of course I know” (139). Significantly,

the first sentence of Duane's recount introduces drinking, "That morning she pours Teacher's over my belly and licks it off" (139); he does not begin his narrative with a reference to the infidelity that indirectly seems to be the impetus for the entire story. Although he applies the word "stop" to Holly's actions, there is constant fluidity inferred in Duane's statements, not issuing ultimatums to halt his wife's behavior, but drawing on "go" rather than "said"—"she goes" (139) or "I go" (140)—to keep time moving, not to stabilize or to plant events as artifacts into the past. Duane's tone is of concern but also of condescension. After mentioning he must physically restrain Holly from jumping, he says "But even so" (139) to diminish potential reader shock affiliated with a fall from the second story but perhaps also to deny the dysfunction inherent in the entire situation. Holly admits that she has "lost pride" and is no longer a "proud woman" (139), and Duane follows with a repetition of "known," "knew," and "know" (140) that he understands her, yet he also reveals that he looks at the ceiling and floor—not paying full attention to the matter at hand—while he wonders what is happening to them (140). Holly declares in several phrases that her "heart is broken" (140), but Duane does not seem to pay attention totally to this admission. Sometimes talking around each other, hearing but not listening, they will continue imbibing Teacher's Highland Cream Scotch whiskey as a lubricant to facilitate what they assume is productive communication.

In the next section of the story, Duane deflects responsibility for his sexual promiscuity onto Holly. Ironically, Duane praises his wife, seemingly elevates her in status by claiming she "was meant for something greater" (140), is a "smart woman" (144), is a "wonderful woman" who had "opportunities," albeit these infer sexual liaisons (145). When he says they were finally "out of the woods" (140) by taking these jobs, Duane insinuates that both he and his wife were lost in some way, and chances are this likely corresponds to financial hardship as well as, to use an AA term, spiritual bankruptcy. Of course, their newfound prosperity only lasted about a year, and probably like previous attempts to satisfy their potentially unrealistic desires, their "plans" (140) eventually did not pan out. When he describes Juanita, Duane makes sure to state "It was Holly had hired her" (140), and his difficulty in articulating the dynamics that initiated the affair puts the focus on language. Duane simply begins his coverage of the incident with "Then one morning, I don't know" (140), and then he reports that he "can't really say" he noticed her attractiveness previously. In sentences in which he comments how he was visually drawn to her distinctive mouth, Duane reiterates how his familiarity with this woman increased as she started calling him his first name instead of the courtesy "Mister" (141). In fact, the two have intercourse after Juanita calls him Duane. This inference of meaning surrounding his name compares with the significance of non-verbal expression when Holly states his name. When Holly articulates his name, Duane intuitively assigns shared meaning between him and his wife that has been developed through their relationship. When Juanita says his name, he seems to have an instinctive knee-jerk, so to speak, reaction by attributing sexual physicality to the declaration. Duane's reading of his spoken name can slip according to context. In other

words, the signification of “Duane” varies according to the either Juanita’s or Holly’s intention and Duane’s reception, allowing for multiple interpretations.

Duane’s ability to decode Holly’s non-verbal and partially complete communication is vital to understanding the end of the story. Duane comments the goal of isolating themselves in this suite is to “be able to talk” (139), with “No calls. No guests” (144), only them and “ice, glasses, bottles” (145). When he describes Juanita, Duane offers an incomplete sentence yet still communicates his intention, “Anyway, one thing and the other” (141). Likewise, Holly indirectly relies on cues to express her intentions. After claiming she is at a breaking point, Holly gives her anxiety physicality by putting her chin in her hand, closing her eyes, and rocking back and forth while emitting “this humming noise” (139). Duane says that Holly “shakes her head” and “begins to cry” (141), prompting him to hug her. Significantly, Duane gets on his hands and knees to visually display his devotion to his “first love” (142-43), and his announcement that he loves Holly appears born out of impulsivity to deflate the crisis rather than a sincere articulation of supreme affection. Duane’s statement of “Holly” and her retort “Holly *nothing!*” (142) call into question that anything beneficial will result from this encounter. Instead of direct declamations of “I love you” to function as linguistic glue to temporarily draw the two together, these three words have as much value as “Fix me another pop” (142). At this moment, the expression of love might not be as desirable as the feeling provided by a stiff drink, and Holly’s calling Duane a “son of a bitch” (142) reflects her sacrifice of spousal civility in favor of the freeing of inhibitions brought about with liquor. Comparatively, the dialogues of bewildered travelers wondering why no one is accepting customers downstairs, people trying to figure out why this business is not practicing normal protocol, imitates the two upstairs attempting to figure out their conventional marital roles and to discover why they are so unhappy. Incidentally, as Holly becomes more verbally belligerent and abrasive, Duane admits that he did not have anything left to say: “I feel all out of words inside” (143). After Duane says this and refills Holly’s drink, he adds, “I drink my drink and think it’s not ever going to be the same” (143). Noteworthy, he “thinks” this but cannot clearly express the idea through words. The indefinite pronoun refers to the relationship, but what Duane has started to realize is that Teacher’s (or any other booze) has done more damage to his marriage than Juanita. Simultaneously, there seems to be controlled chaos downstairs and upstairs, both groups trying to figure out the root causes of their annoyance and frustrated by their incapacity to express their agitation.

With tremendous acuity, Carver provides three important sections that contain axioms concerning alcoholic drinking. Indubitably, Carver knew firsthand the truth underlying these booze truisms, and Duane’s expression of them reinforce his authenticity as a drunk. Alcoholics on the verge of recovery would likely voice similar comments, and they reveal an innocent naïveté about addiction. Considering Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, the first important passage containing Duane’s comments give the abstract reality of alcoholism a symbolic meaning through textualization in language:

Drinking's funny. When I look back on it, all of our important decisions have been figured out when we were drinking. Even when we talked about having to cut back on our drinking, we'd be sitting at the kitchen table or out at the picnic table with a six-pack or whiskey. When we made up our minds to move down here and take this job as managers, we sat up a couple of nights drinking while we weighed the pros and the cons. (143)

For what its worth, this is conventional wisdom from someone trying to stop drinking, and Carver (and recovery old-timers) surely had heard versions of this during AA meetings that he attended. There is an adage in AA that alcoholics think "everything is better with a drink." No matter what the circumstance, alcohol smooths the rough edges and irons out all the wrinkles of any occasion, particularly a stressful one. To a counselor treating alcoholics, Duane's questioning of this behavior as "funny" is a disguised godsend. This indicates that Duane is starting to articulate the cognitive dissonance between normal and abnormal drinking that makes him intuitively uncomfortable. He is starting to situate his discomfort (or more, put another way, dis-ease) into words, and this signals the beginning of what could be recovery. Generally, alcoholics start off drinking heavily without impunity, but as their disease progresses, there are negative consequences, and this is where Duane and Holly are at the moment. Chances are that the couple will continue drinking on this Saturday until their supply runs out (or they pass out, black out, or money out). Duane continues, "I pour the last of the Teacher's into our glasses and add cubes and a spill of water. . . . I give her the glass and sit down in the chair. I drink my drink and think it's not ever going to be the same. . . . things here were going downhill fast. We just didn't have the heart for it anymore" (143-44). The dual signification of "it" referring to their marriage or to their drinking obscures tidy and convenient interpretation, but this represents the conflict Duane is attempting to resolve in his narrative. This entire story is Duane's unraveling of the various factors that cause him distress.

The second crucial passage is an alcoholic understatement, perhaps Carver applying a bit of sarcasm to bolster Duane's credibility. Duane's description of qualities associated with his addiction reifies alcoholism through language, solidifying the disease into something tangible or malleable. Nonetheless, Duane's comment is almost an "uncanny sense of the obvious" statement for anyone who is afflicted with the compulsion to drink. Duane states, "Well, the truth is we were both hitting it pretty hard. Booze takes a lot of time and effort if you're going to do a good job with it" (144). On the one hand, this statement illuminates Duane and Holly's subconscious desire to continue fueling the engine that perpetuates their dysfunction. The statement infers that they want to succeed in their dubious enterprise. On the other, by using the word "truth," Duane identifies their self-destructive behavior as real; therefore, he does not deny through "pretty hard" that his drinking is abusively excessive. A potential slip might be Duane's selection of "good." In his application of the term, "good" is antithetical to the actual "job" that alcohol is doing to his health, to his marriage, and to probably every other aspect of his life. To be fair, Duane is likely not joking—he is honestly

reporting his progress—so this paradoxical meaning calls attention to the tension between what happened previously near the gazebo and what is occurring presently in the motel. Considering *jouissance*, which Lacan identifies as “truly symbolic of sexual satisfaction” (“In Memory” 597), Duane is partially correct, as there is certainly visceral pleasure mixed with the pain manifested by the couple’s ineffectual responses to life complications. Lacan believes *jouissance* is a substitution or is compensation for what is desired. Indeed, many alcoholics feed off of alcoholic mayhem, and they relish a misery that for most would be abhorrent. To put this in perspective, a practicing alcoholic essentially tries to recapture that nascent moment of pleasure when alcohol provided the positive feeling of euphoria, inebriation relative to orgasm. By the time he or she is deep into addiction, the elusive pleasure is replaced by a comfortable pain because the good times with booze are now pure nostalgia, only a pipe dream and no longer possible. Furthermore, if Duane equates “good” with “successful,” he is accepting as his goal all of the negative repercussions from alcohol abuse. Ironically, a person in active addiction must sacrifice time, energy, and income to ensure a desirable level of drunkenness. Unfortunately, success guarantees failure, and a true drunk never achieves the optimal level. “Good” drinking leads to “bad” results, the concomitant humiliating circumstances, DUIs, cirrhosis, and a host of other horrible products of abuse. Duane only has to look to the deterioration of his marriage, the loss of two jobs, and other failures because of his “good” drinking.

The last significant passage contains a possible linguistic slip. Duane offers what is closely related to the rhetorical device or figure of speech called antistasis, repetition of words in a different or a contradictory sense in a sentence. He does not repeat identical words, but there is obvious similarity between “anything” and “everything.” Duane states, “There was this funny thing of anything could happen now that we realized everything had” (145). Parsed out, Duane appears to anticipate a beginning (“anything could happen”) as a result of an ending (“realized everything had”), and this is prefaced with “funny” referring to the “not ordinary” or “notably different” perception of how this start would logically follow the conclusion. Carver is again playing with language, and although Duane toys with syntax in other parts of his narrative, this one is more sophisticated in its layers of meaning. Unconsciously, Duane might have just articulated the guiding principle, the crux or the axis, for the entire story. If “funny” refers to “unexpectedly odd” and is not related to comedy or humor, Duane may sense, in a roundabout turn of phrase, a newfound willingness toward sobriety. Thinking about the alcoholic moment of clarity not as a romantic event but as a pragmatic action, Duane might nevertheless understate flippantly the magnitude of the situation. The backward/forward movement of the sentence might reflect the attraction/repulsion relationship of Duane and Holly. Considering the example of notorious drunks F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald (and many other celebrity couples that built relationships upon alcoholic havoc), they bring out the best as well as the worst in each other. When they traveled the dirt road and asked for a drink of water from the elderly couple, they were free, content, and happy, obviously enjoying where they were in their lives.

As drinking buddies, they codependently promote and cultivate each other's abuse, and as they share the happiness of inebriation, they reciprocally also share the pain. This special occasion in the country is perhaps Duane's own demarcation, reminiscent of Carver's own moment of clarity. Duane has declared that this Saturday morning is an aberration from previous ones, not just because he and Holly are irresponsibly shucking their obligations at the motel, but more so because their addiction is now transparent, out in the open, counterbalancing Holly's vision of the gazebo.

Duane and Holly have taken a gigantic step toward self-actualization by trying to put into words their understanding of living in a motel, a temporary home for people in transition. Language allows Duane and Holly to make their despair tangible, if nothing else, something upon which they may matter-of-factly attach their anger, frustration, or disappointment. Duane mentions that representatives from the company that owns the motel have already heard complaints from dissatisfied customers. As Duane acknowledges, "there were words" (144), and these signifiers of the couples' obvious incompetence to operate and to maintain this establishment set in motion a concrete result, a certified letter, language on a page verifying their lives are descending to a new bottom. Duane states, "But we had stopped caring, and that's a fact. We knew our days were numbered. We had fouled our lives and we were getting ready for a shake-up" (144). These "words" serve as another reason for this next level of dissipation. The couple assume they have nothing more to lose sequestered in the room. This narrative is not along the lines of an informal fourth step in which Duane makes "a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" (59). According to the Big Book, this step addresses the reasons for the drinking: "Our liquor was by a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions. . . . First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations" (64). Duane is not in the position to write this kind of document, not ready to evaluate this situation objectively, but his narrative enables him to gauge his proximity to taking the AA first step, admitting that he is "powerless over alcohol" and that his life "had become unmanageable" (59).

When she introduces the gazebo, Holly is unconsciously revealing her unrealized demand for an idealized love that Duane could never satisfy. Unknowingly, Holly confesses through her allusion to Wyatt, whom she designates as her sexual "first" (145), that this demand was not met previously. When she remembers her first love, or at least her first intimately adult relationship, she experiences *jouissance* by torturing herself. She appears to enjoy the regret of losing her previous beau, who is likely an idealized replica in her mind. Passive-aggressively, Holly asks Duane to consider all that she has missed in life, putting the focus on what she has wasted by hooking up with him (145). Duane requests Holly to stop, including a term of endearment, which suggests that he must also go through the pain to feel a sense of relief: "No more now, honey. Let's not torture ourselves" (145). Holly's vision of the gazebo helps to give form to the unrequited love that she feels slighted by the two

men. Inadvertently, Holly starts to participate in what people in AA phrase as “wallowing in the muck of her self-pity.” Through most of the story, Holly complains about her life decisions, stressing what has been done to her, while sucking down glasses of Scotch whiskey. Duane is certainly subservient to her commands, perhaps overzealously so, especially when she needs another drink. Exhibiting *jouissance*, Holly is latching onto the alcoholic egocentrism that identifies her as the victim, and this provides an additional escape from responsibility, a perverse sense of security, while slowly getting drunk. In Lacanian terms, this stance permits Holly to recognize Duane’s inability to fulfill neither her demand for love nor her desire for a better life. Holly’s wants are simply beyond what Duane is capable of providing, and she is left at the end of the story knowing that she “was right” (146), but maybe not that much better off than she was at the beginning of the narrative.

Duane tries to persuade Holly to share his increasing awareness about their abusive drinking. In an ingenious turning the table on Holly, Duane puts this incident through a similar lens as her memory of the gazebo: “I can’t say anything just yet. Then I go, ‘Holly, these things, we’ll look back on them too. We’ll go, ‘Remember the motel with all the crud in the pool?’” (146). Instead of filtering both through the same perspective—maybe an example of a “good” drinking anecdote—Holly just sits on the bed with her drink in her hand. The split between the two occurs when Duane realizes she “doesn’t know” (146) about the nature of this change—they are not destined to share the spiritual harmony portrayed by the elderly couple. The sad fact is that at the end of the story both characters are moving irreparably apart rather than closer together. Their lives have been psychologically subsidized by *meconnaissance*, self-deception in which misknowing is preferable to clarity, what Lacan terms one of the “defense structures” against knowing their essential selves (“The Mirror” 81). Alcohol only intensifies this avoidance of reality. The cars leaving downstairs signal the need for these two to move on as well. There are signs that Duane is ready to break his pattern of self-destruction; Holly is left, for better or worse, with a glimpse of self-knowledge. At this intersection between what may be two opposing desires, Duane’s for sobriety and Holly’s for the idealized relationship, both have difficulty expressing their intentions. In AA, the benefit of a fourth step is getting out all resentments onto paper, to lay them out so they may be examined to determine the writer’s own part in the problems that fuel his or her alcoholic drinking. This allows a person to investigate the “causes and conditions” (*Alcoholics* 64) underlying excessive drinking, and what appears a symptom is often either the attempted solution or a component of the problem. This narrative enables Duane to visualize his addiction for what it is, and sensing the urgency of the moment, Duane appears desperate for change. Some alcoholics can hold things together and function relatively well until a tipping point is reached, and then everything falls apart. The end of the story is the tipping point.

Strategically, Carver offers just enough information to set up an effective semiotic crescendo. In response to her husband’s inquiries, Holly asks Duane to think about a gazebo.

She commands him to remember an “old farm place outside of Yakima” where an elderly couple befriended them after they requested drinks of water (145). As Holly describes the structure, “It had a little peaked roof and the paint was gone and there were these weeds growing up over the steps. And the woman said that years before, I mean a real long time ago, men used to come around and play music out there on a Sunday, and the people would sit and listen. I thought we’d be like that too when got old enough. Dignified. And in a place. And people would come to our door” (146). Ewing Campbell comments that Carver’s image has a dual function to contrast Holly’s “gaze [of] a beautiful future” with the reality of her “sordid” and “chaotic” present:

A fitting place for musical gatherings and fellowship, the gazebo evokes an image of a beautiful view, the literal meaning of the synonymous belvedere. There is speculation, as well, that gazebo is a formation of gaze and the Latin ending for the future tense – ebo. Holly’s gaze beheld a beautiful future. The reality, however, is sordid, reduced to chaos, without center, as Holly confesses, ‘I’ve lost control’ . . . but the characters are not bad people. They are decentered, pathetic, no longer—in their fevered and dulled states—even pretending to revel in living. (42)

Campbell points out that the story “serves to remind us of the continuous becoming that confronts all people. Some handle it better than others. Some, like Duane and Holly, fail utterly and are left with only an incontinent nostalgia that accentuates the pain. Holly’s remembrance of the gazebo is a recurring instance of the impotence and hopelessness found in yearning for the past and its lost or imagined equilibrium” (43). Nettet offers a more direct interpretation of the gazebo’s signification:

The gazebo represents everything that Holly and Duane are not or have lost: rural serenity, old-world refinement, nostalgia, respectability, domestic accord, and, sadly, love. As a symbolic structure, further, the gazebo signifies (attached as it is to the “old farmhouse,” as noted in the original text) as sort of solidity unrelated to the structure they occupy now: the motel, a rest stop, not a home. It is a tawdry, generic place for wayfarers and others, some of them making illicit connections, and all of them just passing through. Again one sees characters held up as mirrors or yardsticks for others. In this case, the elderly couple is a foil for Holly and Duane. . . . Granted, the gazebo in is [sic] less solid than the structure appearing at the end of “Cathedral”—less luminous, less expansive, offering less possibility—but less possibility is exactly the point. A weed-invaded gazebo, in contrast, is indeed less substantial and is outdated, outmoded, and for many, merely an ornament, rarely used. Still, it claims weight nonetheless; it is the perfect emblem, evoking the sentimental, defeatist grasping at straws Holly does as her marriage collapses. (93)

Both critics are correct, but there is a third possibility. Holly’s interjecting this image, flushed out with vivid descriptions, into this particular situation shifts the mood from pessimistically nihilistic, in which Duane and Holly only exist to service other people, to optimistically spiritual, in which both have the potential to choose recovery. Through recovery, everything

in their lives has the opportunity for positive change. This reflects Wriglesworth's argument that people thrive looking forward to potentialities associated with human connectedness and an emphasis on the future. In short, if Holly had not brought up the gazebo, this would be just another wasted day defined by intoxication, nothing out of the ordinary or particularly distinctive. Holly's recollection of the gazebo changes everything.

Within the context of recovery, this vision of the gazebo is clearly projection. In the manuscript of "Gazebo," about twice as long as the publication, Carver flushes out the reasons for Holly's anxiety, expanding upon her feelings of marital betrayal ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 774-78). After the "Drinking's funny" statement, Duane exclaims, "But we used to be able to handle it. And this morning when Holly suggests we need a serious talk about our lives, the first thing I do before we lock the office and go upstairs for our talk is run to the liquor store for the Teacher's" ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 775). Carver provides additional details to emphasize the dysfunctional relationship. For instance, Duane adds,

I think Holly and I could have weathered that. Even though she was wild drunk when I got in from work that night and threw a glass at me and said awful things we could never either of us forget. I slapped her for the first time ever that night and then begged her forgiveness for slapping her and for getting involved with someone. I begged her to forgive me. There was a lot of crying and soul-searching, and more drinking; we were up most of the night. Then we went to bed exhausted and made love. It simply was not mentioned again, the business with Juanita. There'd been the outburst, and then we proceeded to act as if the other hadn't happened. ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 776)

In the manuscript, Carver allows both characters to sense that a major change must occur, and similar to the day he began living sober, Carver has both awaken with hangovers ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 778). To foreshadow the conclusion, Carver lets Duane make two assertions. First, Duane states, "Holly knew. . . . Even if we'd had the heart for it, there was just never enough time with one thing and the other, the drinking especially. That consumes a great deal of time and effort if you devote yourself to it fully. Holly began some very serious drinking of her own during this time" ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 777). Second, he comments, "But we had stopped caring, and that's a fact. We knew things had to change, our days at the motel were numbered, a new wind was blowing—our lives fouled and ready for a shake-up. Holly's a smart woman, and I think she knew all this before I did, that the bottom had fallen out" ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 778). After all of this, Holly complains, "But here we are. I know something now I didn't know then. Don't I know it! . . . now here we are in this awful town, a couple of people who drink too much, running a motel with a dirty old swimming pool in front of it" ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 780). The gazebo is Holly's projection of a romantic possibility, her pipe dream while she is in the midst of her addiction.

In the published version of "Gazebo," Duane does not admit he is alcoholic, but his dialogue indicates that he identifies his addiction—his language betrays itself. To Duane (and Lloyd and perhaps Wes), a completely logical reaction to his wife's anger over his infidelity is

to start drinking, albeit this is really a return to drinking. As holder of the physical phallus, Duane needs fulfillment through his Other, Holly, to satisfy his instinctual need for love, and as Duane demands this love, he realizes Holly is incapable of satisfying his need. Duane desires Holly's love, and he assigns her the authority to provide this, but she is incapable of satisfying his demand. The expression of desire is through language (Wilden 190-93), or as Lacan mentions in "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," "While desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be, the ego is the metonymy of desire" (534). Underlying much of the narrative is Duane's discontent with most aspects of his life, and he gives Holly power (granting her the psychic phallus) through codependency to influence his feelings of discomfort. This is evident in how he asks Holly to make decisions. Duane wants a better life, but he has no idea—no sense of future direction—how to put this into motion. Thus, he relies on Holly, granting her almost motherly jurisdiction over his own choices. When Holly talks about the gazebo, she introduces the opportunity for what Lacan describes in "The Signification of the Phallus" as the "closed field of desire" (580). As "partners in the relationship, both the subject and the Other" (580), Duane and Holly see in the metonymy of the gazebo a desire for a positive spiritual possibility. Duane gives Holly the power through her words to construct the symbol of their desire. Considering the signification of his name, Duane acknowledges that meaning, and he ties together the signifiers expressed through their dialogue. Lacan points out that the "phallus as signifier requires that it be in the place of the Other that the subject have access to it. But since this signifier is there only as veiled and as ratiō . . . of the Other's desire, it is the Other's desire as such that the subject is required to recognize—in other words, the other insofar as he himself is a subject divided by the signifying [splitting] *Spaltung*" ("The Signification" 581-82). To connect this with recovery, what "the subject" (Duane) and "the Other" (Holly) essentially desire is sobriety and the life that they expect sober living to provide. Importantly, Holly's descriptions of the gazebo construct their idealistic projection of a positively spiritual potentiality through recovery. Nevertheless, Holly precipitates the possibility of Duane's transformation, and readers can only hope Duane's change serves as a vehicle for her own choice of sobriety.

The end of this story is the underpinning for every point discussed thus far in this essay. To clarify exactly what occurs, Duane finally understands he must take action toward his own recovery. Although Nessel does not see Holly's recount of the gazebo possessing the same spiritual meaning as the description of the cathedral in Carver's "Cathedral" (93), the gazebo illustrates Holly's desire for an almost bucolic, serene, and tranquil life represented by the elderly farm couple, an unexpressed desire for Duane's unwavering love. The gazebo signifies dually the private and the public. The structure is located in the back of the couple's property, so it provides a marital sanctuary. Similarly, the gazebo invites spectator voyeurism, as Holly thinks about the space's social opportunities. In the manuscript, Carver has Holly say she "dreamed" about this gazebo, the house, and the couple "from time to time" ("Gazebo," *Beginners* 779). Even in the published version, Holly

imagines the gazebo through a romantic construction of memory, recreating only fantasy through her drunken imagination (145). Her descriptions of cake, of trees, of weeds, and of the Sunday music are accessible only through remembrance (146). Paradoxically, Holly's drinking fuels the happiness while simultaneously intensifying the sadness over the memory's unobtainability. Duane attempts mediation by equating the importance of this Saturday heart-to-heart discussion with what they experienced standing next to the gazebo. At the end of the story, when Holly mentions the name "Duane," she places the focus back on the temporal now, the realistic moment, leaving the vision of the gazebo and looking directly at her husband (146). Duane's confirmation of this—the moment when he potentially reaches a decision to take action—is the last line of the story, "In this too, she was right" (146). Almost cryptic, this final utterance looks forward to an optimistic future as Duane fills in the linguistic gaps with meaning that conveys positive change. To reiterate, this future is predicated on Duane's individual move toward recovery, deciding he wants to stop drinking. Holly must also have her own epiphanic breakthrough, her own revelation that she too wants to take this life-altering step. Holly is not cancelled out or devalued at the end of the story by mentioning Duane's name and, through what might be viewed as sacrifice, therefore empowering him, but she assumes a subservient role by promoting the chance for Duane's change.

Applying Lacanian theory, this last line indicates that Duane recognizes finally that neither Holly, Juanita, nor anyone else is capable of satisfying his demands for love or his desire for change—in this case, to find a way to get him to stop drinking. Duane is ready to desire his own sobriety, to acknowledge that only he can decide through his own free will to take action toward his recovery. Randolph Runyon suggests this last line is condescending, even "derogatory" (101). Arthur M. Saltzman claims it predicts impending doom: "Holly needs only utter his name for [Duane] to take it as a sign that it—everything, now—is too late" (108). Runyon and Saltzman simply misinterpret the optimism in this conclusion. In AA, one proposition reiterated at meetings is that an alcoholic's psychological development ceases when his or her addiction takes hold; recovery allows emotional maturity to continue. Duane might be moving toward recognition of what he desires. Holly is correct in that he must take responsibility for his sobriety, and the "too" in her statement refers to past occasions when Duane trusted her, thus emphasizing the importance of this moment. As Lacan's theory of need-demand-desire is grounded in the unconscious, Duane might not even consciously realize he has made such a crucial decision—cognitively missing the inference that Holly is correct in the proposition that he must assume responsibility for this sobriety—and this might infer that his desire is unobtainable, illustrating Trimpey's "dread fear" of being scared of sobriety. On the contrary, Duane instinctively wants a life change, and he will intuitively respond to the possibility when it is offered through Holly's exclamation. This urgency is what actually drives Duane's narrative. In fact, sobriety as a desire is never fixed (a premise that Donahue emphasizes in his article about "Careful"). Friends of Bill W. declare that they are constantly "recovering" alcoholics, and even someone

with years of sobriety is “only one drink from a drunk.” AA has a “chip system” to mark sobriety, and even a person with twenty years of not drinking must pick up a “desire” chip (designating a “desire to stop drinking”) if he or she honestly “works” the AA program. Carver surely knew that no alcoholic is ever completely cured in the sense of a fixed finality. Furthermore, he certainly recognized that recovery is fluidly dynamic and constantly unstable, and anyone has the potential to make a commitment to sobriety at any moment in time. All one must do is make the decision, just as Carver did. He also knew that an alcoholic, however, must continually work toward fostering a productive recovery. Duane must maintain momentum toward achieving whatever he desires beyond the borders of the story. Hopefully, Holly will find her way as well.

This is why Carver’s emphasis on the gazebo as a trope is so important. In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Lacan explains how metonymy and metaphor promote signification: “Metaphor’s creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other’s place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection” (422). As a literary feature, the gazebo serves as a part of a larger home, with a house and yard, signifying to Holly happiness and prosperity. The gazebo infers the kind of future that Holly desires for her and Duane, and as a literary device, its meaning transcends the physical and refers to the spiritual realm Carver only touches on in his other stories (in particular, “Careful,” “Chef’s House,” and “Menudo”) concerning alcoholism. Corresponding to Wriglesworth’s assertion about Carver and spirituality, the gazebo would logically function semiotically as a sign of grace, identifying what Holly and Duane are trying to communicate throughout their dialogue, a serenity that is only obtainable through Duane’s commitment to sobriety. When Holly mentions Duane by name, and he grants her word the power to express significantly more than its denotative meaning, Duane is capable of intuitively internalizing the force of the connotative implications of this linguistic action.

Likewise, this is precisely why everything comes together at the end of this story. Through Holly’s articulation of his name and his reception of all the meaning this contains, Duane is finally able to accept the present moment for what it is and is therefore capable of taking responsibility for what he must do in the future. In “Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict,” one of the personal testimonies in the Big Book, the narrator admits:

And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation—some fact of my life—unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. . . . Until I accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life’s terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitude. (449)

One of Lacan's famous phrases is "man's desire is the desire of the Other" to stress the relevance of one wanting what one does not have ("Of the Subject" 38). The gazebo represents what is desired on a surface level—a happily functional marriage—and most readers could easily understand this as the point of Holly describing it. However, digging deeper, the gazebo also signifies the desire for a life of sobriety yet unobtainable to both Holly and Duane. Holly bestows hyperrealistic significance to the structure, which increases the value of this object as totem and consequently has worth attractive to Duane. Holly is "right" in that Duane must assume the responsibility of actualizing this vision, of accepting his alcoholism to change himself and change his attitude. Significantly, this articulation will inspire Duane to want to want to get sober. Interpreting Holly's vision this way, the gazebo could be seen as a commodification of sobriety, giving something as intangible as sobriety a tangible referent.

Applying deceptively simple and concrete language, Carver displays with realistic precision what is at its core the first of the AA twelve steps, the difficulty of accepting one is truly powerless over alcohol. According to the Big Book, "Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon" (*Alcoholics* 59). Duane is at the proverbial turning point, and he cannot rely on Holly or anyone else to help him. In AA, many recovering alcoholics believe the Higher Power demands that each individual take action toward his or her recovery, each person is fundamentally responsible for not drinking, and absolutely no one can get sober for anyone else. To reiterate, Carver's firsthand knowledge of this precarious place is paramount for his effective portrayal of the subtle urgency underlying this crucial moment in an alcoholic's life. Duane represents a typical alcoholic who wants to want to get sober. The last line of the story suggests he has accepted his alcoholism—internalized its meaning—and is prepared to do whatever is necessary to attain sobriety. In his own Lacanian reading of Carver stories concerning the narrative "instability of the voyeur" (75), William L. Magrino draws on Gary Krist's premise that Carver's characters typically fixate on something that signifies their "existential existence" (qtd. in Magrino 81). The notion of cosmic isolation is illustrated by Holly's apparent fixation upon the gazebo to signify her separation from the serenity she envisioned for herself as she grew older, and this distance between what is and what could be accentuates her *jouissance* as she simultaneously feels connected to and apart from her husband as she becomes inebriated. Magrino writes, "Silence, whether shared or experienced alone, seems to be the medium in which Carver's characters attempt to express the inexpressible. . . . These moments of silence, and the corresponding actions that emphasize them, are the agencies of expression in which one may see what cannot be said. Instead of removing the object from discourse, silence serves to magnify its importance and accentuate its distance" (82). Holly's minimal "Duane" is all that is necessary by the end of the story for Duane to recognize the immensity of this turning point. In this way, he looks forward to the finality of all that he and Holly have endured, and, consequently, anticipates the erasure of the potential codependent alcoholic existence that could have been in store for both of

them. Holly's terse yet potently significant utterance is the "right" one signifying "appropriate" as well as "correct" for a much more optimistic temporality. Magrino claims that Carver's "characters are drenched in this pursuit of the unobtainable" (83). Holly might be stuck in her vision of impossibility of tranquil paradise, but as every recovering alcoholic knows, Duane has to push through the illusion that recovery is an impossibility. This self-sabotaging fear of sober happiness is what Duane and Holly must finally relinquish. Their hope is indeed obtainable. In her reading of "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Catherine Humble agrees that "Lacan enriches our reading of Carver" (117), particularly concerning how Carver's edited and unedited language tackles the "inexpressibility of love" (115). Carver overcomes this linguistic quandary in "Gazebo" by "magnifying" the unspoken so that signification becomes, no matter what Runyon or Saltzman argue, the decoding of hope.

Essentially, Duane and Holly both desire serenity, feeling the peace within themselves to live life on its own terms. As I once heard from a recovery guru, a prestigious university philosophy professor who eschewed many AA principles as another totalizing ideology cribbed from grand narratives, serenity is an acceptance of things as they are and as they should be, with an emphasis on "should be" as not in anyone's personal control. Carver understood the concept of serenity from probably an AA perspective in addition to more intellectualized positions, and chances are he did not buy all of AA's doctrine wholesale (not many really do). As most recovering alcoholics discover, Carver likely embraced the principles that worked for him. One crucial point is humility, and in "Gravy," the quintessential work expressing his gratitude for sobriety, Carver humbly writes,

Gravy, these past ten years.
Alive, sober, working, loving, and
being loved by a good woman. Eleven years
ago he was told he had six months to live
at the rate he was going. And he was going
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?
After that it was all gravy, every minute (3-10)

The last line of "Gazebo" offers hope, and this could describe Duane or Holly after the accumulation of sobriety and taking advantage of recovery opportunities. As a recovery text, "Gazebo" depicts how an active alcoholic potentially "changed his ways somehow." Duane is not in denial. Instead, he is at the difficult place where an alcoholic intuitively knows he is alcoholic but is unwilling to admit powerlessness over alcohol and do whatever is necessary to stop drinking. Hence, the entire story is basically Duane's working through his next move concerning his addiction. In AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, in the first chapter dedicated to the first step, there is a description that could apply to Duane: "Who cares to admit complete defeat? . . . No other kind of bankruptcy is like this one. Alcohol, now become the rapacious creditor, bleeds us of all self-sufficiency and all will to resist its

demands. Once this stark fact is accepted, our bankruptcy as going human concerns is complete” (21). Carver knew this admission of complete defeat could only provide the opportunity for recovery, and “through utter defeat,” Duane can take the “first steps toward liberation and strength” (*Twelve* 21). Moving forward, Duane may have the chance to experience some of the “gravy” Carver eventually enjoyed. The AA “Serenity Prayer, “attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, is the perfect complement to Carver’s uplifting “Gravy.” The poem is recited by participants at the beginning of every AA meeting, and it is one of the most useful spiritual tools in a recovering alcoholic’s arsenal against the detrimental first drink:

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference. (“Origin”)

In Lacanian terms, things that cannot be changed relate to demands, the requests that cannot be fulfilled or satisfied; things that can be changed refer to desires, the wants that can be given or accepted. Fitzgerald understood the difference between what can and cannot be changed. Carver also understood. There is hope that Duane now is beginning to understand.

This comes back to Fitzgerald’s “dark night of the soul” reference in the first paragraph. Fitzgerald is quoted as saying, “That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong” (qtd. in Graham 261). By participating in AA, Carver knew that to keep his sobriety he must “give it away.” This relates to the twelfth step of AA: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (60). When I stayed sober a little over thirty days “and a thousand nights,” referring to the agonizing alcoholic insomnia, a woman whom I saw at every Monday night meeting picked up her very special one-year blue chip. This woman’s family was there for the occasion, and when she received her chip in front of the group, with tears in her eyes (as her husband and two daughters were also visibly emotional), she declared, “To keep this, I must give it away.” With that, she gave me her blue chip to pass forward when I achieved a year. Wriglesworth reports learning from Jay McInerney that Carver “accompanied friends in need to their first AA meetings” and offered examples of Carver responding directly to mail from readers inquiring about symptoms associated with alcoholism (147). In one instance, Carver writes to Mr. Hallstrom, “Listen, I’m glad you wrote to me. . . . Stay well. Don’t drink, as they say. Think of me if ever you feel like you want to drink. I know if I can kick it, well, then there is hope for just about anybody. I had the world’s worst case of it” (qtd. in Wriglesworth 147). In a sense, “Gazebo” is Carver’s giving away what he was blessed to receive, of carrying the message of recovery to others after his own spiritual awakening. Through this story and others pertaining to alcohol abuse, Carver puts into fiction intricacies about addiction that cannot be articulated any other way. Duane’s experience no doubt reflects Carver’s own struggle with making the decision to get

sober, and readers are fortunate that he could express this crucial alcoholic dilemma with such poignant clarity. Undoubtedly, this story lets some readers know they “belong.”

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