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**“To Feel
Myself
Beloved
on the
Earth”**

**The Destabilization and
Restitution of Intimacy in the
Stories of Raymond Carver**

Clara Román Vanden Berghe

PhD in English Studies | 2023

Director: Dr. Laura Gimeno Pahissa

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

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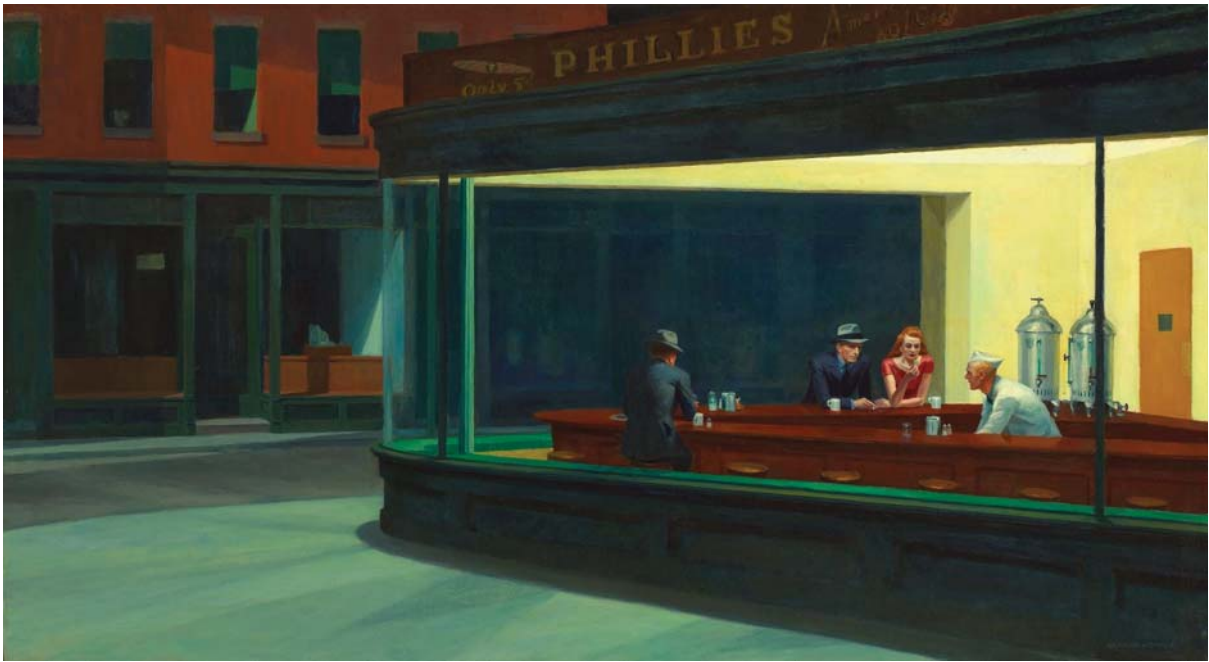


Fig. 1. Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942.



Fig. 2. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled (Brief Encounter)*, 2006.

“And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.”

Raymond Carver, “Late Fragment”

“The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space . . .
The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no
doubt a great deal more than with time.”

Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

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Prefatory Note

List of Abbreviations

The following works by Raymond Carver will be abbreviated as follows, for ease of reference:

Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? (WYPBQ?)

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love (WWTA)

Formatting

This dissertation follows the guidelines established by the *MLA Handbook* (8th edition).

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INTRODUCTION



Introduction

In a 1984 interview with Bruce Weber, Raymond Carver (1938-1988) said, “Until I started reading . . . reviews of my work, praising me, I never felt the people I was writing about were so bad off . . . The waiter, the bus driver, the mechanic, the hotel keeper. God, the country is filled with these people. They’re good people. People doing the best they could.” (92) Though undoubtedly glad that his stories were being well received, he did not expect reviewers to characterize his work as so profoundly bleak. Donald Newlove, for instance, summarized *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) in the following manner: “Seventeen tales of Hopelessville, its marriages and alcoholic wreckage, told in prose as sparingly clear as a fifth of iced Smirnoff.” (77) Similarly, in a review of *Cathedral* (1983) for *The New York Times*, Irving Howe speaks of how Carver’s “actions skid across the troubles of daily life and then, through some eerie turn of chance or perhaps a darker cause, collapse into failed marriages and broken lives.” (par. 2) It seems common for critics to resort to words like “wreckage,” “failed” or “broken” when describing Carver’s work despite it dealing with alienated characters grappling with the complexities of the ordinary and sometimes trying to find relief, and even connection, however they can. Brian Scobie explains that Carver “was credited with giving us access to a neglected part of the social landscape in which people were indeed living ‘minimal’ lives” (273) but perhaps a better word would be “banal” (Fabre-Clark, “The Poetics of the Banal” 173) instead of “minimal.” The slices of lives presented in these stories deal with average white, heterosexual, middle-class Americans dealing with alcoholism, relationship troubles, and unemployment, among other issues, but they often lack the tools to overcome them. Still, there appear glimmers of hope even in the first collection, *Will You Please Be*

Quiet, Please? (1976), and the tales included within show characters who are not “so bad off” but, instead, who attempt to cope with monotony in a myriad of ways. Perhaps a reason why early critics of Carver saw his work as exclusively dismal is because of his pared-down style, which seemed to show no sympathy for the individuals populating his stories. Such a style, however, came mostly from Carver’s editor, the notorious Gordon Lish (1934-).

Carver and Lish met in 1967, and their collaboration helped revive the short story genre which, according to Italian critic Francesco Durante, “only ten years ago [had] seemed in inexorable decline.” (192) It put Carver on the map, and soon he became an influence to a number of writers who would be known as minimalists—mostly because of Lish’s edits—including Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff, and Ann Beattie. Although Carver never hid the fact that Lish contributed to his success, he did not explicitly state the extent of his editorial practices. He was grateful to have found an editor who helped him hone his style and improve his writing, especially considering he was struggling with alcoholism and helping provide for his family. He found his confidence after sobering up in 1977 and tried to convince Lish to approach his new stories more softly, to which the latter refused. The publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* proved immensely successful, but it would also be the last time Lish would edit Carver’s work so drastically. According to scholars William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, who have studied Carver and Lish’s manuscripts in depth,

The editor’s strikethroughs, always liberal, increased exponentially. The total word count of Carver’s manuscript was reduced by 55 percent, with several stories losing more than 70 percent of their content. Lish changed Carver’s titles, reduced his paragraphs to sentences,

and canceled the closing pages of any story that worked toward resolution, revelation, or forgiveness. (“The Critical Reception” 43)

The publication of Carver’s second collection, which received critical acclaim, led to the appearance of new labels to describe this type of writing, such as “K-Mart realism” (Wolfe par. 24) or, more significantly, “dirty realism,” (Buford 4) a concept introduced in a special issue of *Granta* called *Dirty Realism: New Writing from America* (1983). Professor Robert Rebein argues that Carver “almost singlehandedly reversed that trend [of postmodernism], refocusing American fiction on a tersely expressed and concisely rendered version of human affairs that looked nothing at all like realisms of the past.” (35) However, Carver did not reverse that trend “singlehandedly.” Rebein’s chapter was published in 2011, yet he makes no mention of Gordon Lish, even though his contribution to Carver’s success came to light after the publication of journalist D.T. Max’s 1998 article for *The New York Times*, titled “The Carver Chronicles.”

1. Literary Review

“The Carver Chronicles,” published ten years after Carver’s death, called for a reappraisal of the writer’s work, and gave way to what would become known as the Carver “controversy.” (Stull and Carroll, “The Critical Reception” 47; Kleppe 366) Readers, critics and scholars wondered how to approach his stories now after reading an article that portrayed Carver as a “composite author” (Stull and Carroll, “The Critical Reception” 42) but offered no way for them to analyze the differences between edited and unedited stories for themselves, since neither of the writers’ manuscripts were easily accessible. This would change with the 2007 publication of *Beginners*, the unedited version of *WWTA*, and, two years later, the appearance of the Library of

America's *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*, which included all of Carver's published stories as well as the unedited *WWTA*. Since then, numerous scholars have studied the impact of Lish's edits on Carver's output, particularly his second collection. Among them is Enrico Monti, who has published analyses in both *The Raymond Carver Review* and Vasiliki Fachard and Robert Miltner's collection *Not Far From Here: The Paris Symposium on Raymond Carver* (2014). By thoroughly analyzing stylistic features as well as the content of the stories, Monti concludes that Lish sought to remove any trace of humanity from Carver's work ("*Il Miglior Fabbro?*" 69). Professor Tim Groenland has gone further in his 2019 book *The Art of Editing: Raymond Carver and David Foster Wallace*, in which he seeks to give the editor a more prominent position within literature. He devotes multiple chapters to the relationship between Carver and Lish and rigorously analyzes edited and unedited stories from *WYPBQ?* and *WWTA* as well as the correspondence between the two writers in an effort to understand how Lish made Carver the quintessential minimalist (61). However, despite the role Lish played in making Carver a so-called minimalist, and even though he "deliberately set out to dehumanize the stories," (Monti, "*Il Miglior Fabbro?*" 69) his stylistic changes did not entirely transform Carver's work.¹ Humanity can still be distilled from his earlier stories, whether edited or not, for key to his talent are his themes, subjects and characters. In the words of James Plath, "More than the much-ballyhooed style or cryptic endings, it was Carver's blue-collar content, a still-stark storytelling sensibility, and understated emotional core, and his empathic treatment of characters that made his fiction distinctive." (4) Indeed, despite Lish's beliefs that Carver was "an ingrate whose amateurish stories had been saved from 'mediocrity,'" (Stull and Carroll, "The Critical Reception" 41) there is a clear thematic continuity between the

¹ For more comparative analyses of Carver's edited and unedited stories, see also Addington, 2016; Blackwell, 2016; Clark, 2012; Sklenicka, 2009; Tutter, 2009.

pre- and post-Lish collections (Fabre-Clark, "The Poetics of the Banal" 173) which shall be noted in the present dissertation. Carver detached himself from Lish with *Cathedral* (1983) and all subsequent publications. Upon reading his newest work, many critics were surprised by the sudden change in Carver's style, which now appeared more generous; they saw "Carver's transformation from postmodern minimalist to humanistic realist" in what appeared to be a "stunning reversal of field." (Stull and Carroll, "Prolegomena" par. 5) Although comparing *WWTA* with *Cathedral* does show a variety of changes, thematically the stories are quite similar, as previously suggested, although some do indeed offer more hope than others, such as "A Small, Good Thing," which contrasts with its edited counterpart, "The Bath." Generally, however, many stories portray the characters in a similar light whether edited or not, as is the case of "One More Thing" or "So Much Water So Close to Home." These stories, among many others, will be analyzed in the present dissertation, and mention of both the edited and unedited versions will be made. Because of my belief in the thematic continuity of these stories, the present text does not seek to be comparative, although some comments will be made to further support my arguments. Throughout the dissertation, all mentions of Carver appear with the understanding that his early work should be considered a collaborative effort with Gordon Lish.

Prior to the discovery of Lish's heavy influence on Carver's stories, many studies and articles had been published that evidently made no mention of Lish's edits. This uncovering has rendered some of them outdated, though in general many of their arguments still stand and can be applied to the edited and unedited versions of Carver's work. Contemporary scholars must now decide whether to approach his work with the intention to compare its multiple versions or to see it as a whole, as is my case. Many of the recent publications devoted to Carver do acknowledge Lish's

impact but focus on the collections themselves without attempting to analyze the differences between Carver and Lish's stories. This is the case, for instance, of the essays collected in *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction and Poetry* (2008), edited by Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner. The essays cover a wide range of topics, from loss to voyeurism (which spans three different articles), and focus on both the poetry and the fiction of Carver. Similarly, most of the articles included in *Critical Insights: Raymond Carver* (2013), edited by James Plath, do not focus on Lish. Instead, they discuss Carver's approach to narrative, feminism, and alcoholism, among others. These volumes are just two examples of the many approaches to Carver's work.

Some monographs written before D.T. Max's article prove quite relevant still, including Kirk Nessel's *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study* (1995), which offers an overview of Carver's main collections, though it lacks some depth and sometimes nuance. More recent studies include Arthur Bethea's *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (2001), which does provide a thorough analysis of the majority of Carver's stories, although sometimes his analysis can lack some empathy.² The *Journal of the Short Story in English* dedicated an issue to Raymond Carver in 2006, with a variety of articles covering topics such as violence, symbolism, and space. As time passes, the perspectives on Carver's work are widening considerably, with scholars focusing on new aspects that might not have received much—if any—attention before. This is the case of fat studies, for instance, an emerging field that has seen scholars tackle Carver's aptly named "Fat." (*WYPQB*) The story has been anthologized in *What Are You Looking At? The First Fat Fiction Anthology* (2003), edited by Donna Jarrell and Ira Sukrungruang, and has

² See section 3.3.1 for an example of this.

been analyzed by Maud Ellmann (2015). More common approaches include gender studies, with multiple scholars viewing Carver's work through a feminist lens (Fabre-Clark, 2013; Kleppe, 2016) or within the field of masculinities (Bullock, 1994; Miltner, 2008). The second issue of *The Raymond Carver Review* (2009) focused on feminism and the fourth (2014) included some essays on masculinity in Carver's stories. His fiction and poetry have also been studied in areas such as religious studies (Bieber Lake, 2011; Duffy, 1998; Mirarchi, 1998), medical humanities (Graham, 1997; Kleppe, 2006) and film and media studies, particularly with reference to Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) (Deemer, 1997; Kolker, 2007), Ray Lawrence's *Jindabyne* (2006) (Roberts, 2006) and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2014) (Pountney, 2020), to name a few. In essence, "every book, nearly every story, and a great many poems by Carver have been the subjects of scholarly studies," (Stull and Carroll, "The Critical Reception" 50) most of which are listed in the *Raymond Carver Review* website.³

Carver's work has also been compared to a wide array of writers, perhaps most notably Hemingway (Plath 1994; Bethea 2007) and Chekhov. Of the first, Carver said, in an essay called "Fires," "On occasion it's been said that my writing is 'like' Hemingway's writing. But I can't say that his writing influenced mine." (28) This seems interesting, considering that the title of his first collection, as well as the short story of the same name that closes said book, heavily draws from a line uttered by one of Hemingway's characters. In "Hills Like White Elephants" (*Men Without Women*, 1927), the woman tells her partner, "Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?" (27), a line that is echoed by Ralph when he tells Marian, "Will you please be quiet, please?" (180) Paul Sweeting argues, "Carver's reluctance to pair himself with Hemingway

³ See www.raymondcarverreview.org/bibliography.

was understandable given that it was in fact Lish who applied the ‘iceberg principle’ so regimentally to the collection.” (par. 14) However, and has been noted before, many of the similarities between the two writers also had to do with their themes and their decision to depict slices of the lives of individuals downtrodden by the complexities of modernity. Similarly, numerous critics have come to see Carver as the “American Chekhov” (Plath 16) and have written articles on the latter’s influence on his work (Boddy, 1992; Kelly, 1996; Clark, 2014). Carver’s last story, “Errand” (*Where I’m Calling From*, 1988) is a fictional account of Chekhov’s death, thus demonstrating his indebtedness to the Russian writer. Carver also admired John Cheever, and dedicated his story “The Train” (*Cathedral*) to him. The tale seems a response to Cheever’s “The Five-Forty-Eight,” which Mark Facknitz explored in a 1985 article. Other authors that have been compared to Carver include Haruki Murakami (Matsuoka, 1993; Seeman, 2007; Josipović, 2010; Pountney, 2020), Louise Erdrich (Downes, 1996), Flannery O’Connor (Lonnquist, 1987), Sherwood Anderson (Bruyere, 1997), Stephen Crane (Banks, 1991) and D. H. Lawrence (Cushman, 1991).

Despite the tremendous variety of approaches to Carver’s work, little attention has been paid to the way he presents space, particularly the house, in his stories. This seems quite surprising, considering how many of his stories are set indoors and how important the relationship between the characters and their environment is. *The Raymond Carver Review* has published two articles that deal with domestic space. The first was written by Aoileann Ní Éigartaigh in 2009 and is titled “Space, Domesticity and the Everyday: Re-reading Raymond Carver’s Women.” Ní Éigartaigh focuses on the possibility for the ordinary to prove empowering for women. Her research revolves around the role of women in Carver’s stories and how they are “defined by their daily, domestic routines” (34) and argues for the impact that space has on identity, particularly as a

reflection of social values that establish a dichotomy between private and public space. Although in Carver, as Ní Éigartaigh argues, most women are confined to the domestic sphere, they can find freedom within routines and the everyday as a way to cope with the chaos inherent to the modern world. Her arguments, however insightful, could also be applied to the many men populating Carver's stories, who also find themselves entrapped, stagnant and lonely, and for whom the "repression of suburbia" (40) is paralyzing. In addition, a number of her claims might require some more nuance; for instance, she explains how, in "Fat," the narrator's account of her sexual encounter with Rudy is an "unremarkable part of her daily routine." (40) The word "unremarkable" does not seem particularly adequate in this instance, for the narrator notes how she has sex unwillingly, which is in itself quite violent; as my analysis in the third chapter shows, she seeks to escape her hostile reality through her imagination. In spite of this, I do agree with her argument that even within what seems ordinary, there is room for hope and possibility. The second article published in *The Raymond Carver Review* is by Katrina Polonsky. In it, she writes about the relationship between men and domestic space in her essay "Masculinity and the Domestic Space: Reconsidering 'Neighbors' and 'Collectors.'" (2014) Like Ní Éigartaigh, but in an apparent turn of the tables, she argues that even though Carver's men appear oppressed and constrained, sometimes they manage to thrive in the domestic sphere. However, she quickly specifies that the stories actually hint at the possibility of hope—not the practice. Polonsky focuses on two stories, namely "Collectors" (*WYYPBQ?*) and "Neighbors" (*WYYPBQ?*). Her rigorous analysis of "Collectors" is quite perceptive and convincing, but that of "Neighbors" suggests an interpretation that I disagree with, as my analysis of the story in the present dissertation shall show. She believes

that the ending, in which Bill and Arlene are locked out of their neighbor's apartment, suggests connection and intimacy in what she calls a "clear affirmation of reconnection." (33) She continues,

The act of leaning into the door *together*, confronting the forces unleashed by their transgression, suggests a forward progression rather than a retreat. Moreover, it is crucial that this final, silent union take place *outside* the Stones' apartment, suggesting that the Millers will return to their own reality to grow and transform together. (33-4)

As my own analysis suggests, the ending of the story, considering the way the characters relate to their environment, hints at further stagnancy instead of movement. The Millers' change happened because of and while they were allowed into their neighbor's apartment, but once that door is locked, their aspirations stay out of their reach. In any case, although both of these articles address the relationship between men, women, and domestic space, they do so briefly due to constraints in length, and some arguments lack depth.

Another article that deals with Carver's approach to space comes from Hilary Siebert. Published in the *Journal of the Short Story in English*, the essay is titled "Houses of Identity: Inhabiting and Emerging from Despair." (2006) After having chosen my topic and reading Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), I came upon Siebert's article and noticed he had also mentioned Bachelard's work, although he does so briefly. His article is a great introduction to the study of spaces in Carver's short stories, for it offers a general overview of the way his characters experience life through a phenomenological approach. He aims to study how spaces are "haunted by the harsh facts of failure and isolation" (par. 7) but also to show an aspiration to consider what lies beyond the private sphere. The main point of his article is that the house builds identity and changes the characters that live within by allowing them to expand their horizons, both physically

and mentally. To support this, he establishes three categories through which characters change by virtue of their surroundings. The first is what he calls “Transformative Houses,” (par. 18) which, as the name indicates, relates to the way certain spaces encourage characters to change, as is the case of “Neighbors” or “Chef’s House.” The second category is that of “Past and Present Houses,” (par. 19) which deals with the way characters contrast their bleak present with a better past. Siebert calls the last category “A Glimpse Outside,” which refers to a moment when a character is confronted with what lies beyond the confines of their own house, whether by choice or due to their circumstances. Siebert’s thoughtful arguments remain inevitably underdeveloped due to space constraints, but his article could be seen as an introduction to spatial studies in Carver’s work.

In light of the above, the present dissertation seeks to considerably expand the existing research on Carver’s approach to space. Unlike Siebert, my aim is to study not the formation of identity, but that of intimacy, a notion that has not received much attention among Carver’s scholars. I understand intimacy as the connection between closeness or familiarity and domesticity, or feeling at home, and want to explore how Carver presents such a concept in his stories. I argue that Carver destabilizes traditional understandings of intimacy by stripping the house of its warm qualities, to the point where it becomes heterotopic, and by unsettling the language of love. Despite this, however, some of his characters find ways to communicate more directly by utilizing the spaces around them in different ways, and their exploration of their environment and brief moments of connection with others—including strangers—allow them to find home in new, less obvious places.

2. Aims and Methodology

The main aims of the present dissertation draw from Lauren Berlant's theories on intimacy, which they⁴ develop in their essay "Intimacy" for a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* (1998). In it, they argue, "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way. Usually, this story is set within zones of familiarity and comfort." (281) This quotation highlights the three main aspects that I wish to cover in my analysis of intimacy in Carver's stories: communication, love, and space. I shall begin by discussing the latter. Intimacy is "set within zones of familiarity and comfort," that is, places that foster togetherness by virtue of their welcoming qualities. This traditionally happens in the house, which, as shall be explained in the first chapter, has generally served as the quintessential intimate space; Carver's stories, however, destabilize such understanding. Although the way he presents space has many traditional characteristics, he often subverts it to the point where it becomes what anthropologist Marc Augé (1934-2023) has called a "non-place" (34) and what Michel Foucault (1926-1984) named a "heterotopia." (2) Berlant also states that key to the experience of intimacy is communication, particularly one that materializes through "the sparest of signs and gestures." Carver's characters, as is discussed in the second chapter, have often been called inarticulate, and I wish to challenge that by noticing how Carver portrays myriad ways of communicating that go beyond the spoken word. When they do use it, however, they do it in ways that challenge traditional understandings of romantic communication by changing, for instance, the meaning of "I love you" or that of terms of

⁴ Berlant used they/them pronouns in their academic work. (Traub)

endearment. I have chosen to focus on romantic communication because of the vast number of couples or separated people who are still in touch with their partner that feature in the works of Raymond Carver. Indeed, most of the stories analyzed throughout the dissertation include these kinds of relationships, but sometimes examples are offered from stories that do not revolve around them to further support my arguments. The last aspect that seems particularly relevant in Berlant's quotations is their argument that intimacy "involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared." It is not only about connection itself, that is, "something shared," but also about the "narrative." The quotation chosen for the title of this project reads, "To feel myself beloved on the earth," a line from Carver's "Late Fragment," which is preceded by, "To call myself beloved." (122) Many of Carver's characters share this desire for intimacy, with his quotation highlighting the three main themes of this topic: space ("this earth"), love ("beloved") and communication ("call"). Together, as Berlant states, these form intimacy. In Carver's stories, such intimacy is hard to come by. After noticing how the writer destabilizes the house and the language of love, I wondered what happened after the loss of home and the loss of love. Does Carver offer his characters any solace? Can they find connection and/or intimacy? How do they communicate more directly? Can they find home? If so, where? Although the first two chapters might seem bleak, the last one aims to offer some hope by exploring how Carver's characters use the spaces around them to communicate more openly, in an effort to engender intimacy, and where they find connection and home when their house can no longer do that. In the words of academic Rita Felski, home is a "specific materialization of the body and the self; things and spaces become layered with meaning, value and memory. This materialization does not fix identity but anchors it in a physical space that creates certain continuities between past and present." (89) Felski's description of the home here is quite

vague in that it posits that the home can essentially be any place where one has had experiences, suggesting then that one can make a home out of any space that holds special meaning and value to its inhabitant. Carver shows the home's mutability by allowing his characters to find it in new places, however briefly, and offering his characters a chance for connection, transformation, and intimacy.

My approach to Carver's stories will be fundamentally phenomenological. I endeavor to study his character's experiences through close textual analysis and understand how these shape them as well as their relationships with others and their environment. The following section presents an outline of the three chapters of this dissertation and includes the main works that are used in each chapter to support my arguments.

3. Overview of Chapters

The purpose of the first chapter is to analyze and understand the concept of domesticity, focusing particularly on the relationship between self and home, and to see how Carver portrayed such elements in his stories. At its core, domesticity implies that which is *domestic*, or, in other words, relating to the home or to family life. As proposed by Kathleen Anne McHugh, "domesticity . . . refers to home, family, maternity, warmth, hearth." (6) According to this definition, domesticity necessitates location, socialization and comfort. McHugh does not delve into the meaning of "home," but the concept is intrinsically linked to space. Beyond that, the definition remains quite vague, for what exactly is a home? What does it mean to be at home? In addition, how has the notion of domesticity evolved through time? What constitutes domesticity in the twentieth century? The aims of this chapter are the following: first, I not only attempt to

answer the previous questions, but also to define modern understandings of domesticity and its evolution through time, as well as to focus on such a notion specifically in the United States, the country in which Carver's characters dwell. Second, I show how Carver unsettles domesticity, and I suggest that in his stories, the house, though sacralized by its characters, has become a heterotopia (Foucault) and a non-place (Augé).

The first two sections of this chapter focus on the connection between self and space and self and home, in order to introduce the relationship between individuals and the space that surrounds them and, by extension, the places they consider their residence. To that end, I have selected authors who study space based on two different approaches; the first is phenomenological and was pioneered by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who founded the school of phenomenology. Heidegger's work, particularly that focused on place and dwelling, influenced a variety of scholars, including anthropologist Marc Augé (1935-2023) and philosopher Edward S. Casey (1939-), all of which wrote seminal works on the theory of space, and which are used throughout this chapter. Another prominent phenomenologist and a contemporary of Heidegger was Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), who also wrote about space and would go on to influence philosopher Michel Foucault as well as the aforementioned Casey. The second approach to the study of space is psychological, and I focus mostly on the work of Clare Cooper Marcus (1934-), a professor in the Departments of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley.

The following section delves into the evolution of domesticity focusing mostly on modern understandings of it to contextualize the representation of domesticity in the stories of Raymond Carver. Finally, I analyze Carver's fiction in two parts. The first part deals with traditional

representations of domesticity following the theories introduced by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*; the second part shows how Carver disrupts and unsettles said domesticity by turning the home into the space of the Other. To support my arguments, I draw from the works of Michel Foucault (“Of Other Spaces”, 1967) and Marc Augé (*Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 1992).

The goal of the second chapter is to study the language of the loss of love in Raymond Carver’s stories. Scholars have argued that his characters are heavily inarticulate (see, for instance, Gearhart, 1989; Nessel, 1995; May, 2001) but they often solely focus on the spoken word. However, Carver’s stories show people who attempt to communicate in different ways. Although they are not always successful at explicitly voicing their needs, they do find ways of expressing discomfort, longing and fear. Seeing as communication is a two-way street, one should note how the problem does not solely lie on the difficulty of the characters when it comes to articulating their worries, but also on their inability to listen to each other. Thus, this chapter seeks to explore how the couples populating Carver’s stories communicate by analyzing dynamics of conversation and mapping out the multiplicity of languages with which they express themselves, including the spoken word, the written word and nonverbal communication. The aim is to suggest that Carver reshapes and disrupts the language of romantic love, endowing it with new connotations of menace and alienation, thus turning relationships into a threatening place in which discomfort abounds. In addition, it seeks to challenge the assumption that Carver’s characters are inarticulate by showing how they express themselves in their own ways.

Throughout the second chapter, I first concentrate on the Western construction of romantic love, focusing on the United States, in order to show its gradual breakdown in the

postmodern world. To that end, I primarily draw from the works of sociologist Eva Illouz (1961-), including *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (2007), *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (2012) and *The End of Love: A Sociology of Negative Relations* (2019). Her works grapple with the intersection between capitalism and emotions, particularly the commodification of romantic love in the modern world. Other notable scholars that will prove essential to the present analysis include sociologist Anthony Giddens (1938-), author of *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (1992) and David Shumway (1952-), who, influenced by Giddens, wrote *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (2003), which would in turn influence Illouz's work ("Review" 243). These three scholars are generally considered some of the most salient voices in the modern and contemporary discourses on romantic love in the Western world (Brooks, 2020).

Then, I explore the language of the loss of love in Carver's stories, looking at three main areas: the utterance of love, nonverbal communication, and written communication. In the first part, the utterance of love, I explore how Carver portrays the literal language of love through the use of the phrase "I love you" as well as terms of endearment, both of which lose their meaning to convey the loss of love. After that, I discuss nonverbal communication, focusing specifically on looking and touching, to show how often Carver's characters use them to express themselves when words fail them. Finally, I analyze instances in which individuals resort to the written word, unable—or unwilling—to talk face to face, to communicate to their partners.

The aim of the third and final chapter is to bring domesticity and romantic love together by studying how the first informs the second in the stories of Raymond Carver. When both the home and the language of love are unsettled, as seen in chapters one and two, Carver's characters navigate

the spaces around them and their relationships with others in new ways. They communicate with and open up to others by using the spaces they inhabit as vehicles to facilitate dialogue: they speak through windows, mirrors, and walls, and they express themselves more freely in thresholds. In addition, they continue their quest for a place to call home—if only temporarily—and find it in unexpected spaces, such as the workplace, a bar or a hotel, among others. Thus, there is a tentative movement beyond what critic Donald Newlove referred to as “Hopelessville” (77) when describing Carver’s cosmos and towards a restitution of intimacy, however brief it may be, in which the writer brings solace to certain characters.

The first section of the chapter establishes a framework on the discourse of intimacy by primarily drawing from the works of some of the most prominent contemporary scholars on intimacy, namely, Eva Illouz, whose works have already been introduced in the second chapter, Lauren Berlant, with a particular focus on “Intimacy,” a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* (1988) that they edited, and David Shumway, who elaborates on the concept of intimacy in *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis* (2003). Of relevance as well is Anthony Giddens’ *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), which delves into the intimate connection between partners through what he has called the “pure relationship” (Giddens 58), which will be elaborated on in the next section.

The second section delves into the way Carver’s characters use the spaces around them to communicate verbally in a more straightforward manner. They shield themselves by speaking through a variety of reflections instead of directly, or stand in doorways to elude certitude and seem to momentarily embrace uncertainty in the threshold. Sometimes, it is the house itself that affords

the characters the ability to feel more comfort, although it is usually short-lived, as shall be later seen.

The last section intends to grant a more hopeful end to the dissertation by suggesting that, sometimes, Carver's characters manage to resignify intimacy and carry it to new places, namely, bodies and buildings, showing the potential for the home to be found in a wide variety of locations, and the ability for Carver to allow his characters to move beyond "Hopelessville."

CHAPTER I



“I’d Like to Go Back Home”: The Destabilization of Domestic Ideals

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“I’d Like to Go Back Home”: The Destabilization of Domestic Ideals

1.1. Geographical Being: The Connection Between Self and Space

First, it would seem sensible to distinguish *home* from *house*. A house can be understood as a concrete place specifically built for people to live in, including necessary amenities such as a bathroom and a kitchen, among others. A home, on the other hand, can be a house, but it can also be any place where a person feels comfortable enough to endow it with intimate and domestic qualities. A house does not always imply that a home will be made out of it. On the other hand, a home will always be a place, located usually, but not exclusively, in a building. Buildings are generally made for people to occupy them, whether it be for work or living purposes. Indeed, people build places—not just physically, but also symbolically. By existing in a place, a living body dwells in it, if only for a short period of time, and endows the place with meaning and purpose.

To begin understanding the concept of domesticity, it is important to analyze the idea of dwelling. In order to examine the relationship between the self with the space that surrounds it, I will first refer to German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who devoted part of his work to existentialism, in which he often connected self and space. He remains a key figure in the analysis and study of dwelling and being, two concepts that are essential to the present dissertation. In his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” (1954) he noted, “dwelling would in any case be the end that presides over all building.” (348) Heidegger argued that even a bridge could be seen as a dwelling place, if only because it occupies a space “in the domain of our dwelling.” (347) He speaks of “the end,” or the goal, rather than the reality of building(s). While it seems true that buildings are made

to be occupied, this is not always the case, especially as seasons change and technology progresses. Sometimes people are central to places, but sometimes buildings do not need the presence of people in order to function. Edward S. Casey states,

A remote and unattended lighthouse, for instance, may be determined—mechanically—in its admonitory function without anyone’s actual presence in the building. And the alternation of seasons will significantly affect an already constructed place, whether that place is located in wilderness or in civilized space and regardless of whether it is presently occupied or not. In such cases as these, lived bodies are not directly determinative of built places; at most, they are marginal in status. (117)

To be sure, however, “built places” do not exist in a vacuum; they were made by and for people, regardless of how often they are occupied, or how often people dwell in them.

In the aforementioned essay, Heidegger asks himself what it means to dwell, and how the concepts of *building* and *dwelling* are connected. For him, “to be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.” (349) Heidegger broadens traditional understandings of dwelling (that is, to reside somewhere) to signify the idea of living on earth. A bridge, he says, is not a place where one resides, but it occupies a space in “the domain of our dwelling,” (347) a domain which not only includes the house, but also any place that could be potentially inhabitable by man. Indeed, central to Heidegger’s philosophy was the concept of *Dasein*, literally meaning “to be there,” thus evoking and juxtaposing the idea of existence with place. In his words, “Self and world belong together in a single entity, the Dasein.” (*Basic Problems* 297) Therefore, man exists in relation to the universe; existence presupposes dwelling. Heidegger’s ontological approach to space posits places as fundamental to our existence.

The self is housed within the body. The self's relationship to space is thus contingent on the body's existence, which is, in itself, space. The body must be seen as a place, which houses not only the self but can also prospectively house another body. It occupies a place in the world; therefore, simply by virtue of that and without taking into account its potential, the body exists in space and is, in itself, space as well. In the words of Henri Lefebvre, "Before *producing* effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space." (170) Thus not only is external space fundamental to our existence, but also our existence *is* space and generates space, both inwardly and outwardly.

It is in space that the self not only exists but also develops, connects and grows; indeed, "human experience is formed and gleaned, life-sharing managed, its meaning conceived, absorbed and negotiated, around places." (Bauman 102) Our sense of identity is heavily connected with the places we occupy and the way we relate to the world. Therefore, we otherize the places that we do not occupy, seeing them as prospectively dangerous, or as possible threats to our carefully-woven identity. As Marc Augé stated, "The group has to defend against external and internal threats to ensure that the language of identity retains a meaning." (45) The possibility that meaning and identity might be challenged from within is one that we shall discuss in later sections of this dissertation.

The self finds itself more deeply connected to familiar space, particularly one that brings it comfort and safety. The self is gestated in the womb, sheltered from danger in the maternal body.

Thus, the body is the self's first dwelling place. Once outside, it seeks that protection wherever it goes. As Mircea Eliade notes,

One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is world . . . , the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of 'other world', foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, foreigners. (138)

This "cosmos" could be divided into a macrocosm and a microcosm, where the former would refer to that territory while the latter to a smaller area of that space that would stand as a shelter, otherwise known as a house. The self builds a place to find the protection and warmth it initially found in the womb. Like the embryo's, its "world becomes divided into the house, that microspace within the greater world that he knows through personal discovery, and everything that lies beyond it, which is unknown and perhaps frightening." (Cooper Marcus, "The House as Symbol" 138)

Here, Cooper Marcus goes even further than Eliade by defining the world not as the opposition between "inhabited territory" and "the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it," (Eliade 138) but as the opposition between house and "everything that lies beyond it." (Cooper Marcus, "The House as Symbol" 138) The house is therefore the microcosm where the self can be, sheltered from the outside world, theoretically without threats to its safety.

1.2. Domestic Being: The Connection Between Self and Home

Self and space are thus connected from the very beginning: Heidegger coined the term *Dasein*, and this connection is still central to scholars whose studies revolve around housing and/or space in one way or another. More recently, anthropologist Marc Augé reprised Heidegger's ideas when he wrote that "to be born is to be born in a place." (53) The self, however, is also tied to the home not only as a concept but also as a physical space usually represented by the house. The house aims to shelter its inhabitants but this connection between self and home is not merely physical. It is also psychological. One of the earliest proponents of this argument was Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961), whose theories have been quite influential in the field of architecture studies (see, for instance, Cooper Marcus, 1976).⁵ In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961), Jung stated, "It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche." (160) In his exploration of the human psyche, Jung studied what he called the collective unconscious, which, according to him, was a series of inherited unconscious beliefs shared by all people, regardless of individual experience. Within the collective unconscious there exist the instincts and their counterpart, the archetypes. Archetypes are abstract and consist of innate knowledge unconsciously shared across all societies throughout time and space. In Jung's words, "by [archetypes] I understand forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin." (*Psychology and Religion* 63) Although they are abstract, archetypes have concrete representation in the form of symbols or archetypal images. One example of an archetype

⁵ This dissertation's approach is not psychoanalytical but rather, and as previously stated, phenomenological. However, Jung has proven a key figure in the study of our understanding of space, and it seems relevant to refer to him to introduce the connection between self and home.

is the self, which stands for “totality of the psyche.” (Henderson 128) Clare Cooper Marcus explains how the self is commonly represented by two distinct, yet similar, archetypal images:

The first and most consciously selected form to represent self is the body, for it appears to be both the outward manifestation, and the encloser, of self. On a less conscious level . . . man also frequently selects the house, that basic protector of his internal environment . . . to represent or symbolize what is tantalizingly unrepresentable. (“The House as Symbol” 131)

Thus, both the body and the house act as archetypal symbols of the self. As we have already mentioned, a body’s first house is the womb. Our first connection with shelter is thus related to the body, and as we grow up and develop our sense of self, the latter is housed within the body. As Marc Augé puts it, “The human body itself is perceived as a portion of space with frontiers and vital centres, defences and weaknesses, armour and defects.” (60) Like open territories, the body has borders, thresholds and the potential of shielding the self from the outside world. This space “can be invaded from the outside,” (Augé 61) both physically and psychologically, but it is assumed that the space that the body occupies cannot—or rather, should not—be entered without consent.

There is thus a dichotomy between the inside and the outside and between the space the body occupies and one of the roles of the physical body, which is that of housing the self, or the mind. The body’s lived experiences and memories are sheltered within it and allow the self to potentially find a home wherever the body resides. Gaston Bachelard noted how “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home,” (27) suggesting that by virtue of occupying a space and residing in it, its becoming a home is increasingly likely. It is our experiences and connections with places that allow us to make them homes, regardless of their architectural

features. Bachelard also said that “A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.” (68) Indeed, rather than being a set of walls, the house comes alive through experience, particularly that of the living body that roams and feels through that space.

The physical body and the self are inherent to the home; indeed, they *create* the home. Edward S. Casey states, “Both the continuing accessibility and the familiarity of a dwelling place presuppose the presence and activity of the inhabitant’s lived body. This body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere *site* into a dwelling *place*.” (116) By living somewhere, we create the possibility of the formation of the home. The body is thus central to the home, “for it is by and with bodies that we inhabit dwellings.” (Casey 117) The actions we carry out within the spaces we dwell in give the house meaning and transform it into an ever-shifting space that contains a myriad of experiences, whether positive, negative, or neutral.

Memory, connection and experience all hold a key role in the way we relate to our surroundings. In the same way that the self remembers life experiences, the body develops spatial habits when dwelling in a place. Inhabiting a place renders it familiar and creates in the body behavioral patterns based on customs. As Edward S. Casey postulates, “Thanks precisely to the familiarity established by habitual body memories, we get our bearings in a place of residence, the interior analogue of orientation in open landscape.” (117) The way we utilize space, how we move within it, where we position ourselves and how we relate to our surroundings informs our understanding of space and our relationship with it. Positive experiences will render a place more welcoming and can turn it into a home, whereas painful memories and circumstances might make such a place hostile.

I have shown how the body can be seen as a metaphor for the house; in the same way, the house can be seen as a metaphor for the body. As Cooper noted, the first archetypal image that represents the self is usually assumed to be the body, but another one is the house (“The House as Symbol” 138). Both the body and the house enclose the self. The similarities do not stop there; both house and body behave in similar ways and can almost look alike, if one carries out the exercise of anthropomorphizing the house. Edward S. Casey explains, “In view of the intimate relationship between the human body and the dwellings in which it is placed (and where it places itself), it is only to be expected that dwellings will themselves be likened to bodies.” (118) The house’s exterior can look like the self’s exterior, that is to say, the body, and more precisely the face. Oftentimes, windows, which can allow an outsider to peek inside, are associated with the eyes, which have been traditionally considered as the window to the soul (Beer 5). The door bears a resemblance to the mouth, and the whole exterior that features both windows and a door is known as a “façade,” a word that is etymologically connected to “face.” The fireplace has generally been understood as the center of the house; also known as the hearth, though not etymologically related, it can remind one of the heart (Casey 119). As Mike Hepworth suggests, “the hearth is closely associated with the heart as the organ which gives life and is traditionally regarded as the source of human emotion.” (25) Although nowadays it is increasingly less common to find a house with a fireplace, in the past it was indeed the center of the home, as it provided warmth to its inhabitants, who would gather around the fire. Like the heart, the fireplace would ensure that the residents stayed alive. Today, the warm and protective qualities of the fireplace have been, in most cases, replaced by the kitchen.

The house can also bear resemblance to the body in the way it manifests and reflects its inhabitants' self. In the same way the body can show the passage of time, pain, love and other factors that affect its appearance, so can the house show traces of neglect, hurt or joy, among others. Through its being inhabited, "The house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body," (Bachelard 67) especially in its protective qualities and its desire to keep its inhabitants alive. There exists thus a strong connection between house and safety. This connection is not only of a physical nature, but also psychological.

The home as a physical space has often been regarded as a place of tranquility, where one can feel at ease, especially after facing the often-threatening outside world. Rita Felski notes that "familiarity is an everyday need, and familiarity combines with the promise of protection and warmth to create the positive everyday associations of home." (85) Here, Felski uses familiarity to refer to memory, connection and comfort. As we have previously commented, these are crucial elements when it comes to making a house a home; endowing a space with experience can make it a *home*, not just a dwelling place. Scott DeGarmo adds to this idea of protection suggested by Felski by saying, "the home is a refuge to which we head when trouble strikes." (6) Thus, it represents solace and stands as a private sanctuary where all the pressure of the outside world can be lifted.

In his seminal work *The Poetics of Space* (first published in France in 1958, then translated to English in 1964), particularly influential to scholars like Michel Foucault, Clare Marcus Cooper or Edward S. Casey, among others, Gaston Bachelard carried out a phenomenological analysis of space, that is to say, an enquiry focused on lived experiences within space, particularly the house, its various parts (drawers, chests, corners, miniatures, among others) and the relationship between inside and outside. In order to complete his topoanalysis, he drew from poetic works from different

times and places. Bachelard tried to analyze the trans-subjectivity of the poetic image related to space; he believed the poetic image transcends the individual image to the point where it becomes universal. The following paragraphs aim to provide an overview of Bachelard's work, for his theories will prove instrumental in analyzing the stories of Raymond Carver later on in this chapter.

One posture Bachelard maintains throughout the entire work is that of the positive connotations of the house. To him, the house is what he calls a "felicitous space," (19) and that is precisely the object of his study:

Indeed, the images I want to examine are the quite simple images of *felicitous space*. In this orientation, these investigations would deserve to be called topophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space. Attached to its protective value, which can be a positive one, are also imagined values, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect. (19)

Here, Bachelard brings forward two elements that will be essential to his analysis of space: first, his focus on "eulogized space," which has "protective value"; second, the importance of imagination. As he carries out his exploration of space, he will essentially focus on the space of the house, specifically one which contains multiple floors, including a cellar and an attic.

Bachelard does not intend to simply focus on the house itself and its architectural features; rather, he seeks to show how humans connect with their dwelling places through imagination and memory. These two concepts are key to his analysis, and they remain linked throughout. Memories deal with past moments, while the imagination concentrates on the future, but it also plays a role in the development of the first. Indeed, according to Bachelard, the imagination “engraves [images] on our memories. They deepen the recollections we have experienced, which they replace, thus becoming imagined recollections.” (52) Imagination and memory coexist within the house, where personal experience is the most valuable as it permeates the whole space, from cellar to attic, from wardrobe to drawer. Imagination is the “major power of human nature” (Bachelard 18) and it allows the self to bring back the past through the practice of daydreaming, which connects past to present and blurs time. Bachelard argues that rather than time, space is central to the remembrance of memories, because these are inscribed in the geography of the house.

The importance of daydreaming is another key element of Bachelard’s work. To him, the house is the physical space of a daydreamer, and each area of the house has the potential to enable daydreaming, particularly corners, which are half-closed, half-open. Those dreams begin in childhood and transform the house. As we grow, those dreams become part of our memories and resurface when navigating other spaces, especially dwelling places. They inform our relationship to every house we will ever live in. As Bachelard writes,

The house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of

Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. (27-28)

Everywhere we go we look for that experience, but it has been transformed by “imagined recollections” (Bachelard 52); images have changed the reality of that past experience. Interestingly, Bachelard seems to suggest that the house is aspirational, an ideal that remains in our psyche from birth to death and that has become part of our collective unconscious, transcending individuals. We “reliv[e] memories of protection” and “treasures of former days” as we move to different houses, seeking that experience over and over again, but it might be possible we never find the positive connotations of the childhood home again. This argument, however, can prove somewhat problematic, for Bachelard’s approach to space seems quite optimistic. He talks about “protection” and “treasures” and fails to address the reality of many whose connection to the house is saturated with pain and sorrow. Although he insists on the idea that imagination is extremely powerful, for it allows us to “realize the unrealized potential of the world,” (Kearney xx) thoughts alone cannot transform our surroundings. Instead, it is our lived reality, imprinted in the space we inhabit, that changes a dwelling.

Bachelard consistently places emphasis on the childhood home. He considers it key to our relationship to domesticity and intimacy, as our life and daydreaming begins there. In his words, “The house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams.” (Bachelard 37) As we grow older, we long for that primal feeling of protection and refuge that the childhood home is supposed to offer. The reality of that home may not be as positive, but it is within the house that we allow ourselves to daydream, and each corner, drawer or wardrobe can generate intimacy. For that reason, daydreaming and imagination are central to Bachelard’s

theories on topoanalysis. The childhood home has the ability to resemble a nest, or a shell, in that it “knows nothing of the hostility of the world” (Bachelard 123) and “invites daydreams of refuge.” (127) Here again, Bachelard offers a somewhat simplistic view of the house, for it assumes that the inside is thoroughly protected from the dangers that lurk outside. The “hostility of the world” can easily penetrate any space, and no child—or adult—is safe from it. The ideal house should protect us and offer refuge, but this is not always the case, as Carver’s stories adeptly illustrate.

Bachelard argues that inside our first house, we exercise our imagination and allow ourselves to daydream. The childhood home is thus “our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.” (Bachelard 26) Not only that; it is “our corner of the world,” (26) which, as mentioned before, enables daydreaming by virtue of its physical qualities of semi-openness. It is a space of possibility that allows one to imagine what could be and revel in the prospect of building a home. Within corners, the self can exist privately, free from external invasion: “every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house.” (Bachelard 155) Corners invite seclusion without fully closing the self off from the outside world. Here, Bachelard conflates home and house and believes them to be “a space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy.” (68) For him, the house is a positive space that protects its inhabitants from pain, danger and despair.

Many of Carver’s stories portray the home as sacralized or idealized, present in the imagination of the characters rather than their reality. As we shall see, many elements in the stories align with Bachelard’s theories on “felicitous space” (19) and the houses seem replete with domestic features that should bring comfort to the characters. However, I contend that Carver unsettles that

domesticity by putting forward a more postmodern understanding of the house, where many characters no longer feel safe or comfortable enough to call those places home. My analysis of domesticity in this chapter will thus focus first on the traditionally positive domestic elements in Carver's stories, then on the ways in which Carver destabilizes them.

1.3. Making the Home, Leaving the Home: The Modern Evolution of Domesticity

The twentieth-century western approach to domesticity varied throughout the years, particularly during the early twentieth century, the WWII postwar period and the postmodern era. The nineteenth century had heightened the view of the house as a place of comfort, security and safety. As previously stated, Kathleen Anne McHugh defines domesticity as relating to “home, family, maternity, warmth, hearth,” and, she continues, “to the creation of a private place where we can be who we really are, to a set of experiences, possessions, and sentiments that are highly symbolically valued in our country.” (6) Traditional understandings of domesticity, as McHugh notes, all relate to the idea of the private as a space where one can truly behave naturally, without external social pressures. McHugh’s words, which speak about American domesticity, show how the house offers the individual the possibility of opening up, of existing without being judged in a society where freedom is limited by the pressures of capitalism. However, the implication of such a definition is that the domestic offers that which the non-domestic cannot, thereby supposing that domesticity equals security and that the private sphere provides a liberty and warmth which does not exist elsewhere. This suggests that the public sphere is threatening, as opposed to the private sphere. This belief took hold during the nineteenth century, when industrialization and urbanization changed the make-up of western societies and the pressure and straining effects of work turned the house into a refuge.

Towards the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the idea of the house as home slowly came to be mistrusted by many. On the one hand, women found their voice in the feminist movement and strove to distance themselves from their roles as housewives. On the other hand, men saw the house as less desirable than before. They believed women belonged to the

private sphere, thus the feminine connotations that the house had come to possess became uninviting to many men who instead sought to let go of tradition and embrace newness, change and mobility. According to Felski, “the vocabulary of modernity is a vocabulary of anti-home. It celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary, crossing. It speaks enthusiastically about movement out into the world, but is silent about the return home.” (86) Indeed, the house was seen as an oppressive and confining space. As the world was becoming more open, people wanted to leave rather than stay at home. The beginning of the century saw the meaning of domesticity shift and evolve as the house’s borders became less defined. For some, home was no longer associated with the physical space of the house, but with cities, countries, people, or other places. Susan E. Reid notes how “Modernity and dwelling have been assumed to be at odds. Pathologized by Walter Benjamin and others as a nineteenth-century petit-bourgeois addiction, domesticity and the need for comfort were to be shrugged off in favour of the freedom to roam. Homelessness, and not ‘homeyness’, was the valorised figure of modernity.” (11) The turn of the century was thus marked by change and exploration as well as a desire for emancipation, reflected in the culture of the time (Forcey 253; McElwee 2). Domesticity seemed antithetical to modernism because the historical, social and cultural changes taking place during the early twentieth century spread everywhere, seeping into the smallest corners of the house. One could no longer find comfort in the house as easily as before. For many, the effects of industrialization as well as previously inconceivable military conflicts made it impossible for them to feel safe anywhere. In the words of Deborah Clarke, “even the home provides no refuge from the vicissitudes of modernity.” (191) Such a reappraisal of domesticity would linger on throughout the twentieth century and enter the twenty-first.

After the Great Depression, and especially after WWII, domesticity proved desirable again. The nation thrived as the economy improved and consumer goods as well as better housing were made available to most people. Driven by such prosperity, Americans were keen on forming families, leading to the “baby boom” of the 1950s and 1960s. The house turned, once again, into a safe haven where families could grow and relax, particularly as tensions mounted between the United States and the Soviet Union. According to Elaine Tyler May,

in the early years of the cold war, amid a world of uncertainties brought about by World War II and its aftermath, the home seemed to offer a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world. The message was ambivalent, however, for the family also seemed particularly vulnerable. It needed heavy protection against the intrusions of forces outside itself. The self-contained home held out the promise of security in an insecure world. It also offered a vision of abundance and fulfillment. As the cold war began, young postwar Americans were homeward bound. (1)

The house proved even more comforting by virtue of the new appliances that families could now own, which made housekeeping less demanding. Domesticity during this time was epitomized by the housewife, who devoted her time to making sure the house was hospitable, comfortable and proper. Though many women had worked during the war, and the twentieth century saw more and more women finding employment outside of the house, in the 1950s many went back home, giving up prospective careers (E. May 1-18). Single-income households were the norm, as men worked while women took care of the house. Because this was a prosperous time, middle-class families were able to afford a comfortable lifestyle on a single salary. The government fostered this way of life, which was becoming the standard around the industrialized world. As Justin

Rogers-Cooper notes, “During their famous Kitchen Debate at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev argued over the relative merits of capitalism and communism, but they agreed on what success meant: nice furniture, big houses, and cool appliances.” (235) This was the western ideal at the time, particularly in the US, and it informed the collective consciousness of North-American society.

The Cold War period serves as a backdrop for most of Raymond Carver’s stories. It was the era of the return home, in which the family stood at the center of American society. While the early years following WWII proved beneficial in terms of economic stability, the hostility between the US and the Soviet Union brought back a pervading sense of dread throughout the nation. Therefore, the house served as the physical place that provided protection and comfort to families. In the words of Elaine Tyler May, “Americans turned to the family as a bastion of safety in an insecure world, while experts, leaders, and politicians promoted codes of conduct and enacted public policies that would bolster the American home. Like their leaders, most Americans agreed that family stability appeared to be the best bulwark against the dangers of the cold war.” (9) Carver’s characters thus find themselves in search of home. However, as we shall see, though Americans turned to the house and the nuclear family to find respite from the outside world, what they found within did not always appease them. Carver adeptly depicted this by showing his readers a portrait of suburban America where the house was no longer the source of comfort for many; home had become aspirational. Always tied to a house, it had become idealized and almost unattainable. In Carver’s stories, characters often attach too much weight to the role of the space around them and focus much less on their personal growth. The house has become a place of

transition that many people inhabit while they seek something else. For that reason, I argue that the house in Carver's stories has become what Michel Foucault called a "heterotopia" (Foucault 2) and Marc Augé named a "non-place." (Augé 34)

1.3.2. Those Other Spaces: Heterotopias and Non-Places

As previously stated, Gaston Bachelard's seminal work *The Poetics of Space* proved extremely influential in the field of space and housing studies. A wide array of works dealing with space were produced after the publication of Bachelard's book, including Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974), Edward S. Casey's *Getting Back Into Place* (1993) or Clare Cooper Marcus's *House as a Mirror of Self* (1995), among others. These works deal with the formation of space as well as how people deal with, inhabit and shape places. Although Bachelard never directly tackled this, he also influenced works focused on places that are considered different, or "Other," as well as places that, though situated in space, lack sufficient significance to be regarded as a place. In order to support my thesis, I will introduce and use two key works by Michel Foucault and Marc Augé, namely "Of Other Spaces" (1984) and *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992) respectively, which introduce new elements to the theory of space: the heterotopia (Foucault, 1987) and the non-place (Augé, 1992).

Although Michel Foucault (1926-1984) devoted most of his academic work to the study of power and its connection to other concepts such as sexuality or justice, he also delved into the field of space and architecture. In 1967, he gave a talk that would become known as "Des Espaces Autres," or "Of Other Spaces" at a conference by the Cercle d'Études Architecturales in Paris. Foucault allowed the talk to be published in 1984, in a journal called *Architecture, Mouvement,*

Continuité. Because he did not review the text before publication, it has not become part of his official body of work; however, it has grown to be quite influential since its inception to a range of scholars from varying fields (Hetherington, 2003; Bosteels, 2003; Miller and Palladino, 2015).

“Of Other Spaces” introduces the concept of the heterotopia, coined by Foucault, and delineates its various iterations. A heterotopia is a real space (as opposed to the utopia, which is an imaginary space) created in order to seclude people that exist on the margins of society, including criminals, people with mental illnesses, and the elderly, among others. Heterotopias can be cultural and/or institutional, and can juxtapose spaces that appear incompatible, such as a theater or a garden. In the words of Foucault, heterotopias are “real places . . . which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites . . . are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.” (3) In essence, a heterotopia is the displaced space of the Other. Social and personal circumstances can change the perceptions of heterotopias; the ordinary can become different, threatening, or distant, depending on our experiences, whether individual or shared. As Foucault notes, “each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another.” (5) This means that places that were not necessarily heterotopic before can become so at any point in time, depending on the circumstances, or that heterotopias can change functions as society changes and evolves.

Foucault makes it clear that there is no universal form of heterotopia, but it does exist in all cultures. He distinguishes two main categories: heterotopias of crisis, and heterotopias of deviation. The first are “privileged or sacred or forbidden” (4) places that, as the name indicates, are created for people who are in a state of crisis, such as pregnant women or the elderly. The second

harbors people who have deviated from the norm. These include rest homes, psychiatric hospitals or prisons, among others. In addition, heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable . . . [It] is not freely accessible.” (7) Indeed, in order to gain access to such a heterotopia, one must accept having to go through a ritual (for instance, in a sauna) or one might be forced in but not allowed out, as happens with prisons.

Because of the shifting nature of heterotopias as well as of the modern world, I contend that, for many, the house has become a modern heterotopia, and that Carver skillfully portrayed this changing reality in his short stories. Individuals in a state of crisis seem a staple of modern western society, with feelings of anxiety and alienation spreading around an ever-expanding world, and these are precisely the type of people that Carver depicts in his work. The house lacks comfort and warmth because the individuals inhabiting it seem unable to provide it with these qualities. Consumed by their own fears, these solipsistic characters struggle with intimacy, hindering the possibility of true connection and its potential domestic development.

Another prominent scholar who also focused on “Other” or different places is Marc Augé, a French anthropologist best known for having coined the phrase “non-place” in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992). This work deals with the evolution of places in a time that Augé has called the “supermodern,” (29) which is characterized by excess. The author talks of three “accelerated transformations” (24) intrinsic to the contemporary world, namely time, space and ego, which are all defined by “overabundance.” (28) I will focus on his analysis of space, which proves particularly relevant to the present dissertation.

Augé talks of “spatial overabundance” (32) when describing the contemporary acceleration, or expansion, of space. He claims that the world is becoming more and more

accessible; every day we receive countless images of events happening somewhere else through the television, which shows other spaces within the privacy of our house. The emergence and availability of visual media has created an endless supply of images featuring spaces, many of which have increased in scale, contributing to the aforementioned “overabundance.” Other contributors include a “proliferation of imaged and imaginary references” as well as a “spectacular acceleration of means of transport,” (34) which have resulted in physical changes to space. Among these one can find urban concentrations, movements of population, and interestingly, the expansion of non-places.

Augé defines non-places as “installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods.” (34) He continues, “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.” (78) Thus, places and non-places are inherently opposed, since the first, by virtue of its historical and relational qualities, will exist forever, whether physically or culturally, whereas the other will never fully be completed. Moreover, “the space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.” (103) Identity and meaning are forged in places, but non-places operate as sites of transit, marked by anonymity and lacking enough meaning to be seen as “anthropological places.” (101)⁶ Examples of non-places include shopping centers, highways, airports, and hotel rooms, among others; these make movement more effective, but prevent much interaction between people who do not know each other. Like heterotopias, places previously imbued with meaning can become non-places by virtue of conflicts, isolation or other challenging situations that might strip a place of its identity.

⁶ Augé defines “anthropological places” as “the spatial arrangements that express the group’s identity” (45) as well as “places of identity, of relations and of history.” (52)

As Augé states, “In the concrete reality of today’s world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place.” (107)

The house can thus potentially be a non-place. In the twentieth-century accelerated world, people move in and out of houses rapidly, in search of the perfect home. This seems particularly relevant in the US, a country characterized by expansion and frontier culture since its inception. According to Augé, “in the world of supermodernity people are always, and never, at home: the frontier zones . . . no longer open on to totally foreign worlds. Supermodernity . . . naturally finds its full expression in non-places.” (109)

Augé’s reference to “frontier zones” seems particularly relevant within the stories of Raymond Carver, which take place in the United States, where the myth of the frontier still permeates the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. The frontier became an abstract concept in American history, from the early colonization period to the late nineteenth century; no longer strictly describing the physical border between east and west, it served to define liminal notions of promise and improvement in the face of a land that many considered “unstoried, artless, unenhanced,” as worded by poet Robert Frost (425). In describing the frontier, academic Jean Michelin talks of possibility (120), while scholar Henry Nash Smith uses words such as “opportunity,” “democracy” and “freedom,” (5) stating that there exists a “mythical conception of the West as the Garden of the World.” (4) Such a parallelism underscores the paradisiacal qualities ideologically conferred to the lands that stood beyond the frontier before white Americans reached the Pacific coast. Nash Smith also states that “the wilderness beyond the limits of civilization was not only an area of free land; it was also nature. The idea of nature suggested . . . a poetic account of free land as a rebirth, a regeneration, a rejuvenation of man and society constantly recurring where

civilization came into contact with the wilderness along the frontier.” (5) Note his use of the past tense; while this conception of the West characterized American society in the nineteenth century, it changed throughout the twentieth. The idea of the frontier still brings to mind notions of possibility and progress, but its synonym, the *border*, has come to define American politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Grandin, 2019; Hofstadter, 1965), as it signifies protection from what lies beyond. In the stories of Raymond Carver, characters stay mostly indoors, closing themselves off to the outside world. The walls of their houses act as borders that protect them from the threatening outdoors. Therefore, these characters leave no more room for exploration or wonder, instead becoming driven by fear and uncertainty.

In light of Augé’s work, I believe that Carver’s presentation of domesticity as well as his portrayal of the house fit into the anthropologist’s description of a non-place. As we shall see, Carver’s characters rarely feel at home, constantly looking for another place that will grant them the domestic feeling they so desperately seek. In that sense, they view the house as a transient place they can move out of once they have found a better option, which rarely meets their expectations. In addition, characters struggle to form connections and establish their own identity.

1.3.3. An American Heterotopia: Suburban Domesticity in the US

In the United States, the suburbs seem the perfect place where domesticity can thrive. They became popular during industrialization, specifically towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the dichotomy between the public and the private sphere was made increasingly evident. As Laura J. Miller puts it,

The very rise of the suburbs in the early 19th century was closely connected to a new preoccupation with domesticity, one that arose out of changes in the family that transformed it from a center of economic activity to a unit that emphasized raising children and providing affection to its members. At the same time as the family was being redefined as a source of companionship and emotional sustenance, the suburb began to be seen as the ideal location for it. (394)

Indeed, due to their isolated location, away from the busy city and closer to nature, the suburbs have proven to be the perfect place for families to settle down. Miller adds, “there is little doubt that, in many ways, the social and spatial structure of suburbia does promote family togetherness.” (395) In other words, their seclusion and organization invite families to spend more time together, avoiding the distractions and business of the city.

The suburbs gained prominence around the 1950s and became a staple of North-American society throughout the Cold War period. They epitomized the American Dream, embodying American values of class, gender roles and success. This did not necessarily reflect the lives of many Americans, who were not affluent white families. As Davies and Frink explain, “For Cold War Americans, the suburban home was a compelling, gendered symbol of America . . . At the same time, the image of the suburban family did not match reality for most American families, based on race, class, or other factors. Many women worked, despite the dominant gender rhetoric.” (32-3) Davies and Frink’s use of the word “rhetoric” seems particularly interesting here, as it points to the discourses established by the culture of the time. The early Cold War years were characterized by an increase in consumerism and the promise that the American Dream was within reach, despite the elusiveness inherent in its very name. The suburbs attracted a significant number of mostly white

American families who saw in them the possibility of devoting more time and attention to their families, and the government facilitated this desire. According to Elaine Tyler May, “American leaders promoted the American way of life as the triumph of capitalism, allegedly available to all who believed in its values. This way of life was characterized by affluence, located in suburbia, and epitomized by white middle-class nuclear families.” (8) Suburbia thus became the apparent physical representation of the American Dream, where families would spend time together and revel in their newfound intimacy.

Nevertheless, family togetherness does not equate with healthy domesticity. The simple geography of the suburbs forces the family together because they have nowhere else to go. Suburbia fosters mobility only where economic profit is involved; otherwise, neighborhoods remain mostly dormant, with families mingling as little as possible. In the gated communities that constitute the suburbs, “homes . . . exist to protect their inhabitants, not to integrate people with their communities.” (Gumpert and Drucker 429) Throughout the twentieth century, especially towards the end, real estate advertisements mostly promoted “master-planned communities” (Miller 403) where privacy was placed at the forefront. Families looked for quiet neighborhoods in which to settle down, where they could be free from the hustle of the city. For that reason, communities in the suburbs began to thrive, offering couples a sense of belonging without investing in spaces that would encourage socialization. The majority of communities lacked shops or places where people would gather. Any attempt to connect with the Other would therefore be each individual’s responsibility. In the words of Richard Sennett, “innate to the process of forming a coherent image of community is the desire to avoid actual participation. Feeling common bonds without common experience occurs in the first place because men are afraid of participation, afraid of the dangers

and the challenges of it, afraid of its pain.” (42) Consequently, suburban domesticity began to feel increasingly contrived by its very own secluded nature, and the weight of realized familiarity might have proven a burden for its inhabitants. In this sense, protection was no longer guaranteed. Furthermore, homes purported to keep their inhabitants safe from the so-called depravity of the outside world, but sometimes the threat can come from within. When families grow apart, the security and comfort provided by the home are no longer assured.

Zygmunt Bauman also supports this idea by claiming that “homes have turned from shared playgrounds of love and friendship into the sites of territorial skirmishes, and from building sites of togetherness into the assemblies of fortified bunkers.” (64) It might seem rather optimistic to see homes as having been “playgrounds of love and friendship,” although the way they were sold to the public, especially after World War II, did nothing to soften the quasi-religious devotion with which domestic ideals were understood. As Lynn Spiegel notes, “the nuclear family, living in a private suburban home, was a potent utopian fantasy that engaged the imagination of many men and women. While the actual lived experience of domesticity was fraught with problems, the family ideal still promised material benefits and personal stability in a confusing social world.” (34) Indeed, the domestic ideal persisted—and still does to this day—in advertising, novels, and other types of media, making a clear distinction between the threatening city and the tranquil suburbs, in turn convincing people that in the home, anxieties would be soothed and arguments forgotten. While Bauman assumed that homes used to be playful and welcoming, perhaps referring to the ideal and not the reality, he is nevertheless accurate in his depiction of homes as “assemblies of fortified bunkers” (64); it is the bedrooms and not the house itself that can act as protective places

where characters can lock themselves in and build walls to avoid invasions from the strangers that dwell in their own home.

For these reasons, the suburbs could be considered heterotopic; in other words, they have become a non-place. Discouraging connection due to their separateness, the suburbs isolate individuals who exist in a time of excess, which can become overwhelming. The reality of suburban life differs from its idealized form. As Robert Beuka postulates, “the suburb . . . emerges as a place that reflects both an idealized image of middle-class life and specific cultural anxieties about the very elements of society that threaten this image. Indeed, the notion of suburbia as an American heterotopia suggests long-held utopian and dystopian views of suburban life to be really two sides of the same coin, evidence of our culture’s uneasy relationship to a landscape that mirrors both the fantasies and the phobias of the culture at large.” (7-8) Indeed, people seek to escape the woes of city life and work by moving into gated areas paradoxically known as communities that rarely invite socialization: hostile to pedestrians, they instead force its inhabitants to confine themselves further by traveling by car. They also hinder interaction and company, as previously noted, even within the house. Though originally conceived as a safe area that would offer protection and comfort to its residents, its lack of communal spaces forces people to remain in their houses. However, when their family life falters by virtue of each member’s troubles and there is nowhere to turn to in their surroundings, they must look elsewhere for protection, be it within a room, a threshold, or their own body.

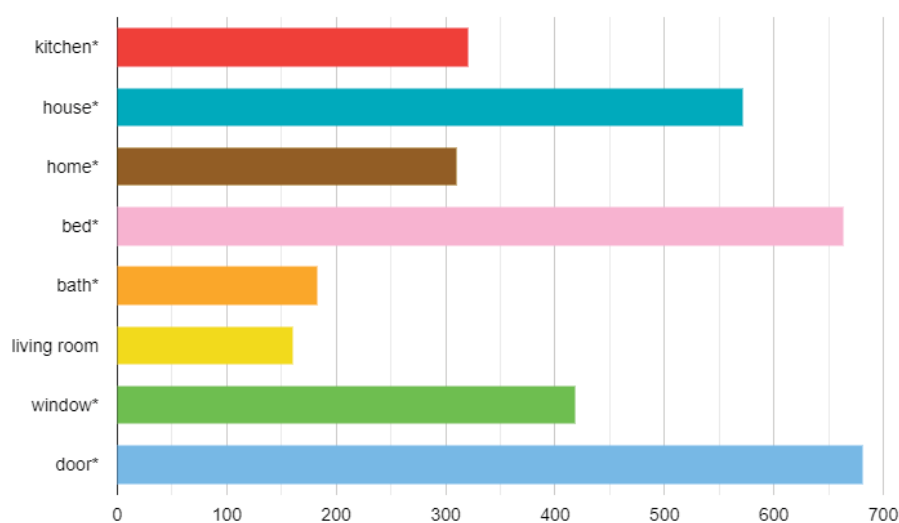
1.4. “If You Have a Solid Foundation...”: Decoding Domesticity in Raymond Carver

The majority of Raymond Carver’s stories take place indoors, usually in the residence of one or various characters. The geographical setting matters not in terms of the city in which the characters live, but in terms of how they navigate the physical space of the house, or what they have come to consider home. Although Carver’s stories are very much American, one would find it difficult to place them in a specific state or city. Not only do these characters move around often, but also Carver himself changed residences throughout his life countless times, to the point where he understood his identity was not rooted anywhere aside from the United States as a whole. In a 1983 interview with Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee, when asked about the importance of place in his work, Carver answered,

Once, it was important to see myself as a writer from a particular place. It was important for me to be a writer from the West. But that’s not true any longer, for better or worse. I think I’ve moved around too much, lived in too many places, felt dislocated and displaced, to now have any firmly rooted sense of ‘place.’ . . . the majority of my stories are not set in any specific locale. I mean, they could take place in just about any city or urban area . . . In any case, most of my stories are set indoors! (50-1)

Indeed, when reading his stories, the setting that seems to matter the most is the domestic one. Although sometimes names of cities are mentioned, generally the focus is on the house or home. This is made even more evident by looking at the lexicon employed by Carver. His volume *Collected Stories*, published by the Library of America in 2009, contains sixty-seven stories by the author as well as four essays. A word search in this collection of vocabulary related to the house shows how much the stories deal with the domestic. For instance, the word “house” (including its

derivations) appears 572 times, while the word “bed” (including its derivations, such as bedroom) appears 663 times. The graph below shows the search conducted for the purpose of this dissertation, with the number of times words related to the domestic appear. Interestingly, the word that appears most often (a total of 681 times) is “door,” a liminal point between inside and outside or, in other words, a threshold, which holds quite a notable significance for Carver, as we shall later see.



(Data collected from Raymond Carver’s *Collected Stories*, Library of America, 2009; words followed by an asterisk indicate compound words were also taken into account)

In light of the above, the goal of the present section is to explore domesticity in the stories of Raymond Carver. First, attention will be paid to the traditionally domestic elements present in the four main collections by the author, following the theories on domesticity proposed by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*. Then, the chapter will explore how Carver unsettles the domestic to suggest that the house adopts the qualities of a heterotopia or a non-place.

1.4.1. “His House, His Home”: Carverian Domestic Felicitous Spaces

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard defined what makes the house the center of our universe, defending his belief in its pleasing qualities. As we have previously seen, the different chapters of Bachelard’s work elucidate the topography of the house, including corners, drawers, doors and windows, among others. All these elements imbue the building with an oneirism that fosters the use of the resident’s imagination, so that memories can be created that will accord even more significance to that place. By closely following Bachelard’s theories as presented in his seminal work, the aim of this section is to show the parallels between Carver’s presentation of domesticity and Bachelard’s definition of a felicitous space.

1.4.1.1. The Childhood Home: House as Nest

The first two chapters of Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* focus on the house as a whole, and are titled “The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut” and “House and Universe.” In them, the author explores the ways in which the house encourages daydreaming, allowing the resident to create memories, whether real or imagined, that will make that space their universe. In Bachelard’s words, “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” (28) Those protective qualities permeate the house, so that it becomes our “original shell” (26) or “a large cradle.” (29) Thus, the house serves as a shelter that adopts maternal features from the moment we are born. Bachelard continues, “life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.” (29) The very use of the word “bosom” highlights the motherly qualities of the house, associating it with warmth and security. Although Bachelard’s position seems arguably one of optimism and privilege, the view of the home

as maternal and protective has seeped into our collective consciousness, so that those who do not experience these initial positive qualities of the house do look for it as they grow older.

In many of Carver's stories characters remember, or look for, their parents' house, longing to go back home. As Bachelard notes, "the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us" (36) and is "the entity that is most firmly fixed in our memories." (50) Bachelard specifically talks about the house we are born in, but it undoubtedly includes the first or most significant place in which we grew up, despite the possibility of having moved house at a very early age. As people move around from one place to another, from one residence to the next, they carry with them the memories they have made in their first house. For Bachelard, what matters most is the formation of memories and daydreams, which happens mostly in our childhood home. In his words,

beyond all the positive values of protection, the house we were born in becomes imbued with dream values which remain after the house is gone. Centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of daydream group together to constitute the oneiric house which is more lasting than the scattered memories of our birthplace. (38)

Thus, it is not so much about physical birth but rather about the birth of our identity and self; as the self grows and develops, so do our memories and our ability to daydream, which will allow us to experience joy. For this reason, individuals, including those portrayed in the stories of Raymond Carver, often seek to go back to their first house, or their parents' house; indeed, "beyond the recollections we continually hark back to, we should like to relive our suppressed impressions and the dreams that made us believe in happiness." (Bachelard 77) Therefore, according to Bachelard, the memories one recalls can be real or dreamt of, and when individuals can find happiness within

daydreams, the space that had once allowed them to enter that oneiric state becomes considerably significant for them.

The house one is born in features in some stories by Raymond Carver, including “How About This?”, a story included in Carver’s first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976). The story deals with a couple who decides to move house. Harry is an artist who “wanted to leave the city to try to start over again” (135) and wished to go to the countryside. His partner, Emily, suggests going to “her father’s deserted place in the northwestern part of Washington” (135) and when Harry seems incredulous, wondering if she could endure that lifestyle, she notes, “I was born there.” (135) As the story progresses, one can see how Harry begins to realize he might be the one incapable of feeling at ease in the country, while Emily looks comfortable.

Harry does not need to arrive at the house to know he has no intention of living in Emily’s childhood home; on the way, “all the optimism that had colored his flight from the city was gone now.” (134) The landscape before him foreshadows the scene he will find once they get to their destination, as they see “isolated farmhouses,” “the ancient burned-out foundation of a house,” “isolated stands of fir trees,” and “the occasional weathered house.” (134) All these elements speak to the seclusion and disrepair of the area, which will include Emily’s old house. This makes Harry feel increasingly uneasy, even though Emily had warned him “not to expect too much,” (136) and he begins withdrawing into himself. Meanwhile, Emily recounts her childhood memories, noting, for instance, how she “wanted to be in a circus when [she] grew up.” (138) The narration makes it clear that Emily feels comfortable there, while Harry seems overwhelmed by disappointment, understanding he does not want to settle there. He remains aloof whenever Emily asks him what he wants to do; on the other hand, and despite his unresponsiveness, she wanders through the house

comfortably, reliving her memories: “As he rounded a corner of the house, he saw her completing a cartwheel. She landed with a light thump, slightly crouched, and then she saw him. . . . She raised herself onto the balls of her feet, arms out to the sides over her head, and then pitched forward. She turned two more cartwheels while he watched, and then she called, ‘How about this!’” (140) Emily feels at ease because she finds herself in her childhood home—the house she was born in. There is an evident bond between this building and Emily; in the words of Bachelard, “our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.” (26) Having been born in this house, growing up, daydreaming and beginning to establish her own identity have allowed Emily to build a network of memories that now permeate that place, allowing her to feel comfort and security within its walls. All these memories take the form of images that are primal, which, as Bachelard explains,

are but so many invitations to start imagining again. They give us back areas of being, houses in which the human being’s certainty of being is concentrated, and we have the impression that, by living in such images as these, in images that are as stabilizing as these are, we could start a new life, a life that would be our own, that would belong to us in our very depths. (53)

As they prepare to start a new life, Emily’s relation to the house equips her for what is to come. The space around her stirs memories of childhood that allow her to imagine again and play like she did as a young girl. Because Harry lacks that connection with the house, he fails to become attached to it, as it does not fulfill his idealized expectations of a home in the countryside.

Another example of the importance of the first house, or maternal home, can be found in “Jerry and Molly and Sam.” (*WYPBQ?*) The story deals with Al, a married man who finds himself

unemployed and having an affair with a woman named Jill. Both circumstances make him increasingly anxious and restless, to the point where he decides that the best solution to his problems is to get rid of the family dog. As he drives around the neighborhood, looking for the perfect spot to drop the pet, he notices his previous house, which brings back memories of his mother's place. The story reads,

He cruised along, and when he came to his old house he slowed down almost to a stop and stared at the front door, the porch, the lighted windows. He felt even more insubstantial, looking at the house. He had lived there—how long? A year, sixteen months? Before that, Chico, Red Bluff, Tacoma, Portland—where he'd met Betty—Yakima... Toppenish, where he was born and went to high school. Not since he was a kid, it seemed to him, had he known what it was to be free from worry and worse. . . . He wished he could keep driving and driving tonight until he was driving onto the old bricked main street of Toppenish, turning left at the first light, then left again, stopping when he came to where his mother lived, and never, never, for any reason ever, ever leave again. (115-6)

In a few lines, the narrator notes how Al has lived in at least eight different places throughout his life, though the real number is probably higher than that. In addition, he is only thirty-one years old, which means he has moved places very often and thus has not been able to properly settle down and make a home out of the various residences he has dwelt in. Still, some of those houses have been significant to him, such as his “old house,” which he “hadn't really wanted to leave . . . He had been comfortable enough. Who could know that two weeks after he'd move they'd start laying off?” (Carver 111) The fact that the narrator uses the word “enough” to describe Al's comfort suggests the circumstances prevent him from feeling fully at ease, even though such

circumstances remain mysterious. Carver might not need to specify what they are, because his stories are permeated with a sense of malaise that has come to characterize his fiction, making most of his characters incapable of feeling comfortable even within their own homes. As previously noted, the twentieth century has seen an increase in the sense of alienation, anguish and discomfort as a response to the global events that have swept nations around the world as well as the fast-paced nature of capitalism. Therefore, not only does Al feel despondent by virtue of the society he lives in, but his unease has been emphasized by his being fired, which has forced him to leave the place he had just moved in, unable to weather his new economic situation. This, in turn, has prevented him from settling in and making a home out of his new place.

Despite Al's current troubles, both his previous house and his mother's place seem to hold considerable significance for him and follow the theories proposed by Bachelard surrounding the importance of the first or maternal home. The first, his "old house," makes him feel "insubstantial" after staring at it. He considers the "front door, the porch, the lighted windows," (115) taking in the house's façade, seeing in it what he believes he lacks, which makes him feel even more fragile. The image of the door, the porch and the windows allow for the anthropomorphization of the house, which, along with the protective values conferred to the building, contribute to highlighting the maternal qualities it possesses. Staring at the house that once provided comfort and that he had to leave due to his sudden lack of employment makes Al feel powerless and nostalgic, missing the potential of the house. What's more, the narrator notes how the windows are "lighted," (115) implying the presence of someone else within the dwelling place—someone who might be leading a more productive and successful life than Al's. Indeed, as Bachelard notes,

By means of the light in that far-off house, the house sees, keeps vigil, vigilantly waits. When I let myself drift into the intoxication of inverting daydreams and reality, that faraway house with its light becomes for me, before me, a house that is looking out—its turn now!—through the keyhole. Yes, there is someone in that house who is keeping watch, a man is working there while I dream away. He leads a dogged existence, whereas I am pursuing futile dreams. Through its light alone, the house becomes human. It sees like a man. It is an eye open to night. (54-5)

As Al looks at his old house, it looks back at him, reminding him of what could have been. The house shows him an alternative to his current life, one in which domesticity thrives and where, most likely, in Al's mind, someone "leads a dogged existence, whereas [he is] pursuing futile dreams." (Bachelard 55) Here, the house continues to be sacralized. Al had not wanted to leave his old house, and looking at it now instills into him a sense of nostalgia for what he could have achieved, which stands in stark contrast to his current situation and emotional response to it. Thus, Al feels increasingly "insubstantial" as he stares at this house, and the memories of the different places he once called home start taking hold of him.

The sight of his old house makes Al reminisce about the places he had lived in prior to this moment, leading him all the way back to his mother's house in Toppenish, Washington, where he had been "free from worry." (Carver 116) Since then, he has never felt the sense of security and calm that the house he was born in provided him, and he now longs to go back and "never, never, for any reason ever, ever leave again." (116) Such emphasis highlights Al's need for comfort and protection. He recognizes in his mother's house the qualities that a home should possess, which he has only been able to find there despite having moved countless times. According to Bachelard,

“the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme.” (36) Thus, Al harks back to the original house, that is, the one he was born in, which has served as a model for dwelling that he has continuously attempted to find throughout his adult years.

The return home Al yearns for appears in other stories by Raymond Carver, such as “The Ducks,” (*WYYPBQ?*) which follows the dynamics of a couple at home on a rainy night, after the unnamed male character has to stop working when the mill boss dies. After going to bed, he tells his partner, “I just want to leave. We been here a long time. I’d like to go back home and see my folks.” (132) In just a few sentences, this character refers to both the leaving of and the return home, although perhaps it would seem more appropriate to refer to the leaving of the house and the return home, since it appears neither this character nor Al consider their current residences a home. In addition, their longing to return to their original home does not take time into consideration. Time and space are intrinsically linked (Augé, 1995; Casey, 2009), thus the original home will inevitably change through time; upon returning to it, it will be “at once recognizably the same and yet disarmingly different each time [one] come[s] back.” (Casey 274) This leads us back to Bachelard: “the house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams.” (37) Despite the changes the house might experience through the years, it will still bear the marks of home and, by extension, dreams. Al, the unnamed character from “The Ducks,” as well as countless other characters dwelling in the stories of Raymond Carver, long to go back to the original house not because it remains the same as it was when they left, but because it encompasses the memories of a quieter time, devoid of worries. These characters feel “nostalgia for

the expressions of youth,” (Bachelard 53) as opposed to nostalgia for youth itself, because what they miss is the ability and space to daydream, to “flee *in thought* in search of a real refuge” (Bachelard 51; emphasis added) if a physical one cannot be found.

One last example that I wish to comment on appears in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”, the title story of Carver’s first collection (1976), which deals with the breakdown of the relationship between Ralph and Marian after he finds out she has had an affair. In an effort to deal with this revelation, Ralph leaves his home and wanders the city, venturing into unexplored territory, which we will discuss in the next section. With regards to the leaving and return back home, the first pages of the story provide the reader with some background information about Ralph that prove quite significant to understand how he will eventually navigate the outside world.

The first sentence of the story reads, “When he was eighteen and leaving home for the first time, Ralph was counseled by his father . . . that life was a very serious matter.” (Carver 164) From the opening lines, the narration shows how Ralph has enjoyed the protection of his childhood home as well as that of his father, who gives him some words of advice for the future. Once in the outside world, Ralph goes to college and meets Marian, who he will soon marry. On their honeymoon, they go to Mexico, which deeply unsettles Ralph. As the narrator notes, “Ralph was secretly appalled by the squalor and open lust he saw and was anxious to return to the safety of California.” (165) Here, the protective nature of Ralph’s home clearly overlaps with the distinction between the outside and the inside world, about which Bachelard devotes an entire chapter in *The Poetics of Space*, and which I will cover shortly. He notes how “outside and inside form a dialectic of division” that “has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*.” (227) Bachelard explains that oftentimes philosophers think about these two terms as oppositional and mutually exclusive, rather

than understanding how they might converse. In his words, “the dialectics of *here* and *there* has been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs of place are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determination.” (228) Ralph partakes in this myopic vision by seeing the outside world as exclusively threatening and disturbing, which he will soon realize not only happens in Guadalajara, Mexico, but also in California. He initially wishes to go back to the “safety of California,” which could refer to the whole state or only his house. Thus, in this case, home could be embodied in California, or he might be using that word as a metonymy for his house. Although we shall later see how Ralph begins to feel homeless even in California because of the breakdown of his marriage, during his honeymoon he does seek to go home, where he will feel protected from the “squalor and open lust” surrounding him in Mexico. For Ralph, at this moment, his house acts as a nest and, as Bachelard states, “a nest-house . . . is the natural habitat of the function of inhabiting. For not only do we *come back* to it, but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest, or a lamb to the fold. This sign of *return* marks an infinite number of daydreams.” (119) Therefore, like Al or the male character of “The Ducks,” Ralph longs to return home to his first house. For Ralph this might not be his childhood home, but he was born and raised in California, which, in his mind, symbolizes comfort and protection. These characters see their birthplace or first house as a shelter, or a nest, and view the return home as the only solution to their anxieties because “the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy.” (Bachelard 120)

1.4.1.2. Condensing Intimacy: The House's Center

Another characteristic and essential element of what Bachelard calls “felicitous space,” meaning the house, is its center. In *The Poetics of Space*, the philosopher does not focus on one particular center, although he devotes special attention to certain features of the house where he believes a “condensation of intimacy” (Bachelard 50) occurs. For Bachelard, this condensation can be found in the living room (50, 189), which he describes as “a center of magnetic force” and a “major zone of protection.” (51) In addition, he notes the importance of light, particularly that which is found in the ceiling, or “upper light,” which he calls the “principle of centrality.” (188) This suggests that for Bachelard, the center of the house provides warmth, safety and comfort. The living room brings together the house’s inhabitants, and the upper light, when turned on, provides heat and fosters intimacy among the people residing in the house. In order for intimacy to thrive, the house requires a center; as Bachelard notes, “intimacy needs the heart of a nest.” (85) In the stories of Raymond Carver, the center of the house takes the form of the living room, especially one that contains a fireplace, or the kitchen, where the reader’s attention is often drawn to the stove and/or the tablecloth. Carver’s stories are set in various places and show different parts of the house; however, the little intimacy that flourishes does so in its center. The places that form this center seem to allow for greater connection between the characters, who find a moment of respite while within them.

The kitchen and the living room seem to have similar importance in Carver’s stories. Characters gather, eat and/or converse around the kitchen table, or on the couch. Both rooms act as meeting places where the characters can communicate and potentially strengthen their bonds, although, as we shall see, this does not happen very often. One example of the importance of the

kitchen as an intimate setting and potential center of “condensation of intimacy” (Bachelard 50) can be found in “Menudo,” (*Elephant*) in which the first-person narrator talks about his different relationships with three women: his ex-wife, his current wife and the woman he is having an affair with. When he learns of his ex-wife’s mental breakdown, he begins having a panic attack at a friend’s house, in the kitchen. Soon, “Alfredo came over, took a chair and sat down beside me at the kitchen table. He put his big painter’s hand on my shoulder.” (67) The narrator’s friend, Alfredo, notices his state and goes over to help him. The kitchen fosters that intimacy and allows the narrator to feel comforted as Alfredo soon begins cooking *menudo*, a Mexican dish that he insists will make him feel better. Throughout the story, only in the kitchen do we find intimate moments that allow some characters to connect with others and assuage their worries. In the same story, the narrator watches his lover’s house late at night from his own house and comments on what she might be doing as he notices the kitchen light is on:

The light in Amanda’s kitchen is still on. It’s a bright light that spills out onto all those leaves. Maybe she’s like I am, and she’s scared. Maybe she left that light burning as a night-light. Or maybe she’s still awake and is at the kitchen table, under the light, writing me a letter. Amanda is writing me a letter, and somehow she’ll get it into my hands later on when the real day starts. (64)

Here, not only does the narrator mention the kitchen, but he also talks about light. According to Bachelard, “The evening lamp on the family table is also the center of a world. In fact, the lamp-lighted table is a little world in itself.” (189) The narrator imagines multiple scenarios to justify the presence of light in Amanda’s kitchen at such an hour; all of them emphasize the intimacy of the kitchen and its light. First, he wonders if fear has prompted her to leave the light

on, thus highlighting the protective and warm qualities that light possesses. Then, he pictures Amanda writing him a letter, suggesting connection, communication and intimacy. Therefore, the “lamp-lighted table” (Bachelard 189) in the kitchen stands for a microcosm where intimacy can bloom.

Another example of Carver’s use of the kitchen as an intimate place of the house and the importance of light can be seen in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” from his collection of the same name (1983), in which the narrator begins setting the story, noting how “the four of us were sitting around his kitchen table drinking gin. Sunlight filled the kitchen from the big window behind the sink.” (114) The story, which we shall analyze in greater detail in the second chapter, sees the characters discuss their thoughts on the topic of love, and ends with them still in the kitchen, as the room gets dark. Here, two important elements come into play: the kitchen itself, but also the sunlight. As previously mentioned, light carries considerable significance for Bachelard in strengthening a house’s potential for intimacy, and although Bachelard attaches particular importance to the “upper light,” (188) sunlight also provides warmth and comfort.

The kitchen and its upper light seem very significant for Carver, who also introduces various objects in the setting that symbolize a greater or lesser degree of intimacy, depending on the story. Carver has become known as the American Chekhov of the late twentieth century (Kemp 1) and, as such, he inherited many characteristics of the Russian writer, who once noted, “if in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act.” (qtd. in Rayfield 203) This concept has become known as Chekhov’s Gun, a dramatic principle that highlights the importance of each element that appears in a story or play. In a 1984 interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Carver commented on the central role that the setting has in his stories:

When I write about people I want them to be placed within a setting that must be made as palpable as possible. This might mean including as part of the setting a television or a table or a felt-tipped pen lying on a desk, but if these things are going to be introduced into the scene at all, they shouldn't be inert. . . . If you are going to describe a spoon or a chair or a TV set, you don't want simply to set these things into the scene and let them go. You want to give them weight, connecting these things to the lives around them. I see these objects as playing a role in the stories. (107)

Thus, in Carver's stories, each item that is mentioned plays a role in the unfolding of the story: the kitchen itself, the tablecloth, the light, a threshold—all of these and more inform the relationship of the characters to their environment and give the reader clues about what they are going through. For instance, in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?", the narrator notes how Ralph's "eyes skipped around the kitchen—stove, napkin-holder, stove, cupboards, toaster, back to her lips, back to the coach in the tablecloth." (171) The narrator mentions the stove—a quintessential element of the kitchen—twice in the same enumeration, highlighting the room's domestic elements. Still, Ralph's eyes go back to the pattern of the tablecloth and he chooses to escape there, not wanting to partake in the intimacy suggested by the previous objects as his marriage breaks down. The fact that the pattern of the tablecloth represents a black coach seems somewhat ironic, given the importance of the cloth as a domestic element that, according to Bachelard, "anchor[s] the house to its center." (72) So, when in the story "Neighbors," (*WYPBQ?*) the narrator notes how Arlene "stood in the kitchen doorway folding the handmade tablecloth that Harriet had bought for her last year in Santa Fe," (7) her position as well as the object she is holding should not go unnoticed.

The story deals with a couple who have been asked by their neighbors, the Stones, to house-sit for them, which rekindles their relationship as they begin to enact a fantasy in which they become their neighbors. As we shall further explore later on, both Bill and Arlene Miller, the protagonists of this story, feel disillusioned with their own lives and seem jealous of their neighbors, envying their apparent success and wishing to experience what it feels like to be in their shoes. Thus, Arlene's position towards the beginning of the story suggests that she does not feel fully comfortable at home: rather than standing inside of the kitchen, she stands in the doorway, neither in one room nor the other. In addition, the tablecloth she is folding was given to her by her neighbor, whose life she wishes she could have. It seems quite interesting that the one domestic object that is mentioned here—one that, according to Bachelard, “anchor[s] the house to its center” (72)—was not purchased by the Millers, but by the Stones. By depicting this particular scene before the rest of the story unfolds, Carver draws attention to the importance of domestic elements and slowly displaces and unsettles them.

Besides the kitchen, the living room also acts as a center of “condensation of intimacy.” (Bachelard 50) One example can be found in the story “The Ducks,” in which the living room serves as a setting for the fostering of intimacy. The narrator notes how the main characters “sat in the living room and held hands and watched television.” (130) While the story presents multiple examples of the couple's disconnection in the way they navigate their environment, which will be analyzed in chapter 3, this scene shows a brief moment of intimacy by placing the two characters in the center of the house and having them hold hands. This image stands in contrast to the rest of the story, which constantly emphasizes the character's distance—both physical and emotional—and shows the living room as an intimate center of the house.

What makes the living room particularly welcoming and essential to the development of intimacy is the presence of a fireplace or a stove. The following quotation by Harry, one of the two main characters of Carver's "How About This?" (*WYYPBQ?*) upon inspecting his partner's childhood home, suggests how important a fireplace is: "In the kitchen they found a woodstove and a mattress pushed against one wall. In the living room again, he looked around and said "I thought it'd have a fireplace." (137) From the moment the couple had reached the countryside, Harry's illusions started waning; as he saw Emily's house, he found it increasingly difficult to hide his disappointment. The absence of a fireplace increases Harry's unease, who cannot conceive a life in that house, where he believes intimacy cannot possibly thrive. Indeed, according to Bachelard, a fireplace greatly contributes to the making of a "felicitous space" (19); he states, "When the house is happy, soft smoke rises in gay rings above the roof." (92)

In "Put Yourself in My Shoes," (*WYYPBQ?*) the Myers decide to visit the Morgans, who had previously been their landlords. Although they have never met them, they decide to visit them during the Christmas holidays unannounced, unaware that the Morgans resent them for how they treated their house in their absence. Once in their house, Hilda Morgan says, "Sit down over there, you two . . . Over there by the fire." (106) Hilda ensures her guests are comfortable first before she and her husband proceed to tell them a story about two people who disregard rules and politeness as they rent a house, much like the Myers had done. Hilda might want to soften the blow, but it seems possible too that she needs that comfort herself before confronting these people. Alternatively, she may want to trick the unsuspecting Myers into believing they are going to enjoy a cozy evening at the Morgans, when in fact this will be far from the truth.

“The Ducks,” which I have previously mentioned when noting the importance of the living room, also features an instance that highlights the importance of the fireplace, or stove. The unnamed male character “walked over close to the oil stove and stood there warming his hands” as the “rain rushed against the house and slashed across the windows.” (129) Not only is the weather uninviting, but also the character has just come home from work after learning of his boss’s death. Thus, he finds comfort in the warmth of the stove as he narrates the events to his partner. The stove allows for the condensation of intimacy as the woman “ran her fingers through [his hair]” and “opened a beer for him and poured some into a cup for herself.” (130) The juxtaposition of the weather outside with the intimacy and warmth found—although briefly—within the center of the home is also noted by Bachelard, who sees in it a representation of the original nest:

He has only to give a few touches to the spectacle of the family sitting-room, only to listen to the stove roaring in the evening stillness, while an icy wind blows against the house, to know that at the house’s center, in the circle of light shed by the lamp, he is living in the round house, the primitive hut, of prehistoric man. (51)

As Bachelard suggests, the warmth provided by the center of the house, where intimacy condenses and flourishes, brings one back to the primal nest.

Although the fireplace appears often in the stories of Raymond Carver, I only wish to comment on one more example before moving on to the next element that showcases the author’s more traditional depictions of domesticity, according to Bachelard. In “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?,” while he wanders the city, “Ralph stopped in front of Jim’s Oyster House. He had never been here before . . . There was a fireplace with gas flames, behind a stack of metal logs.” (Carver 174) Throughout his journey, Ralph spends the longest time at Jim’s Oyster House. In it, he feels

quite comfortable, although there seem to be multiple elements that remind him of his troubles, which we shall explore later. What is particularly significant about this is that Ralph feels the need to escape his home to find comfort, and he does so at this restaurant, which includes an inviting fireplace, infusing the place with a sense of intimacy and contrasting with the inhospitable exterior world. Thus, even though Ralph feels comfort neither at home nor in the city, he finds momentary solace at Jim's Oyster House thanks to the flames roaring in the fireplace.

1.4.1.3. Protecting Intimacy: Inside vs. Outside

Throughout *The Poetics of Space*, after focusing on the house itself and the house's connection with the universe, Bachelard explores the significance of different objects and their contribution to imbuing space with meaning and intimacy. He talks of chests, drawers, wardrobes, among others, which appear often in the stories of Raymond Carver. However, in most cases, Carver's use of objects does not support Bachelard's theories, which will be analyzed in the next section. Bachelard also devotes a few chapters to the analysis of nests and shells, which I have briefly covered when talking about the childhood home and the protective qualities of the house. This I want to further examine by focusing on one of the last chapters of Bachelard's book, which he called "The Dialectics of Inside and Outside." In it, he studies concepts that he has anticipated throughout the book, namely the distinction between the interior of the home and the outside world, to support his belief in viewing the house as a shelter. Already towards the beginning of the book, Bachelard talks of protection as he states that "Space . . . concentrates being within limits that protect." (19) A house encloses its inhabitants with walls that separate them from a potentially hostile outside world. Such hostility can be physical or emotional. Bachelard spends more time

exploring the dichotomy between the warm interior and the cold weather outside than he does talking about the psychological effects that navigating the outdoors can have on the self, but he still notes how the house “maintains [man] through the storms of the heavens and through those of life.” (29) Indeed, in the way he presents the house as the epitome of intimacy, it stands to reason that such a place should defend, protect and shelter its inhabitants, providing them with the ideal space in which to find relief. If the house and its center, corners, and multiple objects all contribute to the creation and expansion of intimacy, then such intimacy is further highlighted when faced with inclement weather. In the words of Bachelard,

outside the occupied house, the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is a non-house . . . and between the house and the non-house it is easy to establish all sorts of contradictions. . . . The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, muffles every sound, conceals all colors. . . . The dreamer of houses senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity. (61)

According to Bachelard, the house stands in contrast to its surroundings, and everything that does not constitute it becomes by default its opposite: the outside world is a non-house. This seems particularly relevant during winter, especially in those places where it snows. The whiteness that permeates every aspect of the outdoors turns well-defined shapes into a single, indistinct mass, and affects other senses as it dulls sounds as well. The outside world becomes less clear and present, thus giving more prominence to the house and its intimate qualities; Bachelard adeptly speaks of the “increased intimacy of a house when it is besieged by winter.” (60)

Adverse weather features often in the stories of Raymond Carver, who does not only include what Bachelard called the “winter cosmos” (61) of snow but also frequent instances of rain and occasionally fog. These produce a similar effect to what Bachelard described when exploring the importance of snow in blurring the outside world, and stand in contrast to the interior of the house, where residents feel protected. Although, as we shall see in the next section, Carver unsettles domesticity in many ways, he still addresses the dichotomy between inside and outside. One such example can be found in the story “Sixty Acres,” (*WYPBQ?*) which follows Lee Waite, an indigenous person from the Yakama tribe, as he deals with some white intruders trespassing on his land. The whole landscape looks cold and uninviting as he looks for the men. As the narrator relates, “It was cold. An inch or two of grainy snow from three days past covered everything, made the ground lumpy, and gave a foolish look to the stripped rows of beanpoles in front of the house. . . . Not a sound anywhere, just the low ceiling of heavy clouds pressing down on everything. He’d thought there was a wind, but it was still.” (49) Much like Bachelard described in *The Poetics of Space*, in this story Carver shows the outside world to be hostile and undefined, devoid of sounds and colors. By contrast, Waite’s family waits at home, comforted by the warmth of the fire burning in the stove: “His mother was still sitting beside the stove, a blanket over her legs.” (54) Not only is Waite’s mother inside the house, but she is also near the stove, which functions as a center of condensation of intimacy, as we have previously seen. This emphasizes the distinction between inside and outside, since the snowed-in landscape directly opposes the fire that burns in the stove, at the center of the house. Similarly, in “The Ducks,” the heavy rain that pours over the main characters’ house contrasts with the interior, where the couple lies in bed: “He got out of bed and went to the window. It was black outside and he could see nothing, not even the rain. But he could

hear it, cascading off the roof and into a puddle under the window. He could hear it all over the house.” (132) As opposed to the previous example, which noted the oppressive silence of the white winter landscape, this passage focuses not only on the noise made by the rain but also on the vast darkness that virtually dissolves the outside world, thus turning it into an unquestionable non-house. Even though the sounds of the pouring rain invade the house, the water itself does not penetrate the building, which protects its residents.

Multiple examples can be found in the stories of Raymond Carver that support the dichotomy between inside and outside,⁷ but I wish to focus only on two more examples; one deals with the weather again, while the other deals with what Bachelard called the “storms” of “life.” (29) “Everything Stuck to Him” (*WWTA*) is a frame narrative in which a father tells his daughter how he met her mother. The story goes from past to present multiple times as the characters settle in the kitchen. Towards the beginning, the father “gets up from his chair and looks out the window. He sees the tile rooftops and the snow that is falling steadily on them.” (107) Thus, the setting of the story already places the kitchen, where the characters currently sit, and which serves as a center of the house, against the cold, wintery outside world. The father continues his story, and a few pages in, the narrator notes how “he stays by the window, remembering, they had laughed. They had leaned on each other and laughed until the tears had come, while everything else—the cold, and where he’d go in it—was outside, for a while anyway.” (113) Here Carver explicitly shows the distinction between inside and outside and the way the characters perceive it; the inside of the house fosters intimacy, while the outside world remains cold, hostile, and avoidable, if only for a while. As Bachelard explains, “A reminder of winter strengthens the happiness of inhabiting. In the

⁷ See, for instance, “Collectors” (*WYPBQ?*), “Put Yourself in My Shoes” (*WYPBQ?*) and “Blackbird Pie” (*Elephant*).

reign of the imagination alone, a reminder of winter increases the house's value as a place to live in." (61) Bachelard's quotation could be extrapolated to a metaphorical winter: arguments, accidents, or any other distressing event that occurs outside the house could be momentarily forgotten or more easily dealt with inside the house. In "The Bath," (*WWTA*) which tells the story of a couple whose child gets hit by a car and goes into a coma, Carver skillfully portrays a metaphorical winter and contrasts it with the soothing qualities of the home. The beginning of the story already reveals the dangers that lie outside the house; therefore, the narration initially places the house as a bulwark against a hazardous world. After the parents spend hours waiting in the hospital to see if their child's condition improves, the father decides to go home to take a bath: "The man drove home from the hospital. He drove the streets faster than he should. It had been a good life till now. There had been work, fatherhood, family. The man had been lucky and happy. But fear made him want a bath." (40) Much like the fireplace or the stove in other stories, the bath here provides warmth and comfort to a grieving father. It is "signaled as a powerful healing symbol" (Lehman 82) that can assuage his fears and allow him to find some respite from the harrowing situation he is experiencing. This, however, is where the similarities between Carver and Bachelard end in this story; although coming back home grants the father respite from his suffering, soon he will start receiving anonymous phone calls that cut his time in the bathtub short. Such an invasion from the outside world into the home destabilizes domesticity and prevents the father from soothing his anxiety; in the words of Bachelard, "outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility." (233) Indeed, as will be discussed in the next section, the home might not be as felicitous as Bachelard depicts it; oftentimes the threats and

dangers reside within it. Still, characters continue to associate the house with protection, and the outside world with insecurity.

1.4.1.4. Crossing the Threshold: Doors and Locks

Inside and outside always meet at the door, which both Bachelard and Carver depict as a very significant element. Bachelard devotes an entire section of his chapter on “The Dialectics of Inside and Outside” to doors, explaining,

The door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of a daydream that accumulates desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open. (237-8)

The door thus acts as a microcosm that encompasses opposites: inside and outside, safety and danger, confidence and uncertainty. As we shall see, these different concepts do not always represent the same elements; sometimes, danger and uncertainty lie inside. The door is thus a decidedly complex object that separates two locations; one cannot overlook its role as a physical threshold that can be opened or closed.

Thresholds denote connection and, at the same time, distance, for they act as boundaries between two different places; their role is to connect and separate them. Bachelard notes their ambivalence as he wonders, “onto what, toward what, do doors open? Do they open for the world of men, or for the world of solitude?” (239) He does not specify whether these worlds lie outside or inside; despite the fact that at first it might seem as though the world of men can be found outside,

so can solitude. Thus, inside and outside can stand for connection and isolation interchangeably. Interestingly, Bachelard mostly focuses on the openness of thresholds and what might be found beyond them, paying little attention to what one leaves behind when closing a door. He considers the significance of thresholds as sites of possibility, closely connected to daydreaming. Despite their seemingly atopic quality, “thresholds also create spaces” (Boettger 10) by anticipating what is to come, both physically and psychologically. Therefore, one cannot simply dismiss thresholds as in-between places; instead, they must be understood as independent, complex, and complete spaces that enclose meaning, possibility, opportunity, and mystery, among others. As Bachelard writes, “How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect.” (239) Along the same lines, philosopher Byung-Chul Han states, “thresholds and transitions are zones of mystery and riddle,” (41) where sameness can be momentarily discarded and uncertainty prevails.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard focused mostly on the possibilities that doors can lead to, describing them as “half-open” (237) rather than closed. He argues,

the door-knob could hardly be drawn in scale with the house, its function taking precedence over any question of size. For it expresses the function of opening . . . In the domain of values, on the other hand, a key closes more often than it opens, whereas the door-knob opens more often than it closes. And the gesture of closing is always sharper, firmer and briefer than that of opening. (93)

By contrast, locked or closed doors abound in Carver’s stories, a testament to a more predominant reality in the United States where thresholds no longer signal freedom or opportunities, instead evoking danger and foreign threat. As opposed to Bachelard’s claim that “the door-knob opens

more often than it closes,” (93) Carver presents characters who shut doors most of the time, purposefully creating walls between themselves and others. Still, there exist a few instances in which doors can awaken hope, connection or desire, thus showing the complexity of thresholds. I shall start with these more positive depictions of doors, then will move on to the portrayal of closed or locked doors.

“A Small, Good Thing” is a story published in Carver’s third major collection, *Cathedral* (1983). After having parted ways with his editor Gordon Lish, Carver chose to publish the original version of “The Bath,” which appeared in his collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981). Interestingly, in many interviews, such as one with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Carver explained how he had rewritten the story because he wanted “to see what aspects of it needed to be enhanced, redrawn, reimagined.” (102) In reality, “A Small, Good Thing” is Carver’s story as he had originally envisioned it, while “The Bath” was born out of a collaboration between Lish and Carver, although perhaps it might seem more reasonable to call it a one-sided decision by Lish that Carver could not change, since he had signed the contract before seeing the final edit. When telling the story of the publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and the changes made to “A Small, Good Thing,” Carver’s biographer Carol Sklenicka explains, “Carver was shocked. He had urged Lish to take a pencil to the stories. He had not expected him to take a meat cleaver to them.” (357) Indeed, a quick comparison of both versions shows how Lish cut “A Small, Good Thing” by a third and retitled it “The Bath.” In the former, the child dies and the story ends on a hopeful note as the parents meet the baker who had been calling them since the accident happened, and who in the end offers them some warm rolls and words of consolation. In the latter, the story ends abruptly when the mother receives an

anonymous call; the narrator never reveals who the caller is and the child's fate remains unknown. "The Bath" and "A Small, Good Thing" both have their supporters and detractors, mostly because they differ vastly and should be seen as two different stories.

Doors hardly feature in "The Bath," the first published version of the story, while they abound in "A Small, Good Thing," in which they often signify hope and tend to be opened rather than closed. As previously mentioned, the story deals with a couple whose child gets hit by a car on his birthday; shortly after, he goes into a coma. The parents must deal with the child's worsening condition while they receive anonymous calls from someone whose intentions remain unclear during the majority of the story, which takes place at the hospital and in their house. While waiting for the child's condition to improve, "A nurse pushed the door open. She nodded at them as she went to the bedside. She took the left arm out from under the covers and put her fingers on the wrist, found the pulse, then consulted her watch." (60) Later, "The door opened and Dr. Francis came in. . . . He went straight to the bed and examined the boy." (66) Nurses and doctors come to check up on the boy multiple times throughout the story. Thus, in this context, the act of opening a door indicates that help is coming and that the boy is being taken care of; it suggests possibility, opportunity, "welcome and respect." (Bachelard 239) When the walls of the hospital room become too oppressive under the weight of potential loss, a door opening rouses a glimmer of hope in the parents, who are understandably desperate for favorable news.

As the hours pass, the doctor recommends they go home for a while to get some rest and eat something. For the father, Howard, it seems more feasible, but the mother, Ann, finds it more difficult to allow herself to leave her son's side. When faced with doors, especially inside the hospital, she hesitates and seeks permission to cross the threshold: "She went to the door, where she

turned and looked back. She looked at the child, and then she looked at the father. Howard nodded. She stepped out of the room and pulled the door closed behind her.” (68) Moving beyond the boundary set by the door not only implies entering a different space, but also leaving behind a situation. Ann fears something will happen to her child while she goes home and vacillates between staying or leaving. When Howard wordlessly encourages her to go home, she crosses the threshold, but on her way encounters others that slow her journey as her indecisiveness lingers: “She went down the corridor the man had indicated and found the elevator. She waited a minute in front of the closed doors, still wondering if she was doing the right thing.” (70) For Ann especially, doors opening provide hope when someone else does it, but in her case, opening a door signifies abandoning her child. In the words of Edward S. Casey, “A threshold is the concrete inter-place of an important transition.” (342) Crossing that threshold terrifies Ann because she would much rather deal with the somewhat familiar pain she feels at the hospital than with the uncertainty of what lies beyond. Still, she manages to step out into the outside world and eventually makes it home, where “She went to the front door, which was unlocked.” (70) Although the door is not physically open, it has remained unlocked from the moment the parents took their son to the hospital; therefore, Ann can easily access her home without having to deal with any form of resistance. As Bachelard claims, “A lock is a psychological threshold.” (102) Had the front door been locked, Ann’s misgivings might have prevented her from entering her house, because she would have had to deal with two distinct elements of the door: the lock and the door-knob. The door’s openness suggests permission and crossing the threshold enables Ann to soothe her pain momentarily.

Later on, back at the hospital, Ann and Howard's child passes away. Their son's doctor leads them to the doctor's lounge, where "Howard went into the bathroom, but he left the door open." (75) As we shall see, oftentimes characters choose to lock themselves in rooms, including bathrooms, to avoid dealing with other people or the outside world. In this case, however, Howard leaves the door open while he grieves the loss of his son and washes his face. This brief moment of semi-open vulnerability proves rare in the stories of Raymond Carver. Instead of erecting walls around himself, he lets himself mourn openly albeit at a distance from the doctor and his wife. At the same time, closing the door might make it difficult for Howard to come back to the lounge, similarly to Ann's previous misgivings about crossing closed doors. The only time he decisively closes a door is when they get back home and he "closed the door to the child's room." (77) The story shows us the threshold's duality. As architect and lecturer Till Boettger notes, "The phenomenon of the threshold thrives on spatial ambivalence. Thresholds open up spaces and organize transitions. At the same time they are read as part of the boundary and can be perceived as a barrier." (10) Howard chooses to establish a border between his late son's room and the rest of the house to protect himself and his wife from the pain of having to revisit his belongings and the memories inscribed in the room's furniture.

Doors can also become sites of bonding. Approaching, knocking on or opening a door can signify connection, especially when that door separates the outside world with the interior of a home. The movement from the outside to the inside, to a potentially intimate setting, can generate closeness. In the stories of Raymond Carver, some characters either intend to go to someone's door or wish to live in a place that would look inviting, so that people would do the same when coming to their house. One example of the first appears in "Put Yourself in My Shoes," (*WYPBQ?*) in

which Paula, Myers's partner, suggests they go visit the Morgans, saying, "Let's just go knock on the door, and say hello, we used to live here." (99) Paula argues that because it is the holiday season, they should spend time with other people. Knocking on somebody else's door implies intention and the desire for intimacy. This is further supported by a line uttered by Holly in "Gazebo" (*WWTA*) who, along with her husband Duane, manages and lives in a motel; the story sees them discuss their deteriorating marriage. Holly recalls a time when she and Duane were driving and stopped at a house in the countryside to ask the residents for a drink. She describes the setting, noting "there was this gazebo there out back" and adding, "I thought we'd be like that too when we got old enough. Dignified. And in a place. And people would come to our door." (24) Interestingly, Holly says this while both she and Duane live in a motel, where people come to their door everyday. However, these people do not matter in "Holly's vision of the gazebo [, which] is one of civility, accord, and permanence that may eventually be reached." (Jansen 397) They are clients and thus simply part of a commercial transaction. What Holly longs for is that chance connection that can be created with strangers in a more intimate setting—a setting they can call their own, where a door does not stand for business but for prospective bonding.

Such bonding can only happen if the door is opened. Although open doors do not abound in the stories of Raymond Carver, they do feature occasionally and tend to symbolize possibility, but also uncertainty. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard claimed "when so many doors are closed, there is one that is just barely ajar. We have only to give it a very slight push! The hinges have been well oiled. And our fate becomes visible." (238) Closed doors can imply stagnancy and the safety of the familiar, but an open door, even if "barely ajar," allows one to step into their future and, if crossed, leads to opportunity and mobility. In "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," towards the

end, Ralph “stopped at the partially open door to their bedroom. Everything seemed to him open. For an instant he resisted the wish to look in at her, and then with his finger he pushed the door open a little bit more.” (179) His wife is sleeping and he wonders whether he should enter the room or leave. He remains motionless for a while, slowly coming to the realization that his “tidy life has come open.” (Sklenicka 101) No longer able to hold on to the purported security he had always believed characterized his relationship, Ralph looks at his wife’s “secret body” (179) and cannot bring himself to go into the bedroom, as it would mean giving in to the uncertainty inherent to opportunity. Likewise, in “Intimacy,” from *Elephant* (1988), the first-person narrator visits his ex-wife and has a lengthy conversation with her, after which “she walks me to the front door, which has been standing open all this while.” (53) For the entirety of the exchange, neither the narrator nor his ex-wife has closed the door of the house; she only closes it once he has left. The reasons why she may have made this decision are manifold, but following the theories of Bachelard, for whom a door, especially an open one, “reveals the promise of life beyond the home,” (Andrews 470) it seems that the door was left open because the ex-wife, who has already moved on, wants the static narrator to do the same and explore the possibilities awaiting him outside of that house and that relationship.

The opposite happens in “How About This?,” which involves Harry inspecting Emily’s childhood home with increasing disillusionment. The narrator states, “The door opened at an angle. The top hinge was loose: nothing much, Harry judged. They moved slowly from room to room. He tried to cover his disappointment.” (136) As opposed to Bachelard’s quotation, which speaks of hinges that “have been well oiled,” (238) here the hinges do not properly work, a sign of the decay permeating the house and, by extension, Harry and Emily’s relationship. However, in a

way, even though the door does not open correctly, Harry's fate seems more and more "visible." (Bachelard 238) He finds it physically difficult to hide his discontent, and does not seem to have the intention to work on the house to make it more inhabitable, just like he does not appear to contemplate making an effort to keep his relationship with Emily afloat. The parallel between the house and the relationship will be explored in the next section.

I shall finish this analysis of doors and thresholds by exploring locked or closed doors, which appear quite often in the stories of Raymond Carver. As we have seen, inside and outside symbolize opposing concepts as evidenced by *The Poetics of Space*, where Bachelard highlights the protective and intimate qualities of the house, which contrast with a hostile outside world. Still, opening a door suggests possibility, opportunity and hope, and the uncertainty that comes with the crossing of a threshold can eventually be rewarding. By closing a door, such potential disappears. Indeed, creating a boundary between the inside and the outside keeps one immobile, especially when a door is purposefully locked. Nevertheless, "The lock doesn't exist that could resist absolute violence, and all locks are an invitation to thieves." (Bachelard 102) The closed or locked door can be forced open, but when this happens the perpetrator comes from the outside, not the inside. Sometimes, however, that violence comes not from the desire to trespass on private property and damage the interior of the house, but from a familiar person whose intentions might be different. Carver's "A Serious Talk" (*WWTA*) revolves around an estranged couple who no longer live together. Burt decides to go to Vera's house to have the title "serious talk" (Carver 95) with her, realizing they need to address some unresolved issues. Unsurprisingly, he does not call or let Vera know that he plans on going. When he arrives at Vera's house, "The front door was permanently locked since the night his key had broken off inside it. He went around to the back."

(90) Burt inadvertently locked the front door, preventing his direct entrance into the house; even though he can find another way in, this action symbolizes the end of his relationship and the impossibility of reconciling. A locked door precludes possibility or opportunity, and by having broken the key inside the lock, Burt has also affected the residents of the house. Unable to move on, he seems intent on ensuring that no one else will, either: he steals food and objects, and at one point prior to the story tried to burn the house down, or at least cause some serious damage to the property, which he vehemently denies. Thus, in this case, the locked door has become an obstacle and a boundary both physically and psychologically.

A closed door also keeps one protected from any foreign threat. When the threat turns familiar, one must seek shelter from within the house and find solace in a room. One such example appears in “Why, Honey?” (*WYYPBQ?*), in which a mother writes a letter to an anonymous man about her now adult son, who has become a politician. Throughout the letter, she recounts their relationship as he grew up and notes his constant lying and her increasing fear of him. In this story, the act of closing a door acts as protection for both characters. On the one hand, the son needs shelter from prying eyes in order to maintain his lies. As the mother narrates, “Two nights after that I was in bed ... I listened as he put the key in the lock and came through the kitchen and down the hall to his room and he shut the door after him.” (125) When she goes to his room to ask if he wants something to drink, he “slammed a drawer and turned on me, get out he screamed, get out of here.” (125) On the other hand, the mother needs protection from her son, who she fears might be a murderer. After the angry outburst from the night before, she tries to have a conversation with him and manages to show a level of honesty and directness uncommon in Carver’s stories. The son initially keeps quiet, but ends up saying “Kneel is what I say, kneel down is what I say,” (126) a

sentence that has puzzled multiple scholars (Runyon 59; Bethea 34⁸), who wonder whether the son intends to hurt her or to pray with her. Regardless of the son's actual purpose, his words scare his mother so much that she "ran to [her] room and locked the door." (126) Here, not only does she close the door, but she also locks it, ensuring that her son will be unable to get in. Thus, closing the door physically protects her from a possible threat existing within her own home.

One last example I wish to comment on occurs in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" As we have previously seen, the end of the story follows Ralph as he notes the openness around him, including the bedroom door. Overcome with uncertainty and the breakdown of what had looked like a perfect relationship between two people who "considered themselves a happy couple," (166) Ralph feels the urge to distance himself from his surroundings and his family. As a consequence, he "stepped quickly into the bathroom and locked the door." (179) As opposed to the narrator of "Why, Honey?", Ralph does not need to run away from the likelihood of physical harm. However, locking the bathroom door does give him protection from what lies beyond the safety of that room. At this point in his journey, he cannot bear to confront his wife any longer and seeks shelter from the discomfort and uncertainty that has come to permeate his entire life. Therefore, "the bathroom . . . provides Ralph with temporary though necessary isolation, along with the baptismal effects of water." (Neset 25)⁹ Having locked the door as opposed to just closing it proves effective as Ralph "heard [Marian] waiting at the door, he saw the knob turn again." (180) Despite her repeated attempts at entering the bathroom, unable or unwilling to understand Ralph's desire for solitude, Marian cannot get inside because of Ralph's decision to lock the door. Her insistence is

⁸ Quotations by Arthur Bethea, except where noted, come from *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (2001).

⁹ Quotations by Kirk Neset, except where noted, come from *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study* (1995).

also linguistic, for she continuously tries to get him to talk, which will eventually prompt him to utter the now-famous “Will you please be quiet, please?” (180).

Doors appear extremely often in Carver’s stories, and as has been shown, they can suggest opportunity, protection, and confinement, among others. Carver understood the complexity of such an architectural element and portrayed its many possibilities, whether positive or negative, restorative or damaging.

1.4.2. “A Certain Terrible Kind of Domesticity”: The Making of a Carverian Non-Place

Although Raymond Carver’s stories contain several traditionally domestic elements that mirror many of Gaston Bachelard’s theories on “fêlicitous space,” (Bachelard 19) I suggest that Carver presents such domesticity only to subvert it by unsettling the very foundations that form it, thus challenging the meaning of home. The present section seeks to show how Carver destabilizes domesticity by portraying the house as a space that can be invaded or damaged, either on purpose or due to neglect, as a reflection of the character’s psyches and crumbling relationships. Carver himself talked about the oppressiveness and discomfort permeating the home in a 1986 interview with Nicholas O’Connell, saying, “the stories have something to do with the engagement or involvement between men and women, and these moments or little dramas are better played-out indoors than outdoors. It’s healthy out-of-doors, and there are always some vapors hanging around indoors—fetid air.” (134) Even though the house is traditionally presented as a space that can shelter one from the dangers existing outside, Carver inverts that dichotomy by noting how its interior can become saturated with unspoken tension, to the point where it becomes a non-place. As Augé notes, “The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.” (103) Non-places preclude the development of the self through connections with the Other, instead fostering isolation. Despite the “universal need for a house form in which the self and family unit can be seen as separate, unique, private and protected,” (Cooper Marcus, “The House as Symbol” 134) the nature of the non-place makes it impossible for the uniqueness of each individual to be honored and respected, for it acts essentially as a place of transit and “creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers.” (Augé 101) As

opposed to anthropological places, non-places are devoid of identity and connection but they do generate a collective self defined by movement.

Because of “the spatial overabundance of the present,” (Augé 34) the self finds itself in constant motion while also struggling to move at all. It persistently looks for meaning and answers to its ever-present sense of malaise, yet fails to confront itself when the possibility of solving its worries and the difficulty this entails arise. This is very much a contemporary dilemma. As previously noted, Augé speaks of the “accelerated transformations” of the “contemporary world,” (24) which include time, space and the ego. With reference to the latter, Augé argues that “in Western societies, at least, the individual wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to him by himself and for himself.” (37) Such solipsistic individualism proves problematic, for our existence is relational and the production of meaning necessitates connection. However, in a time in which the “reference points for collective identification [have become] unstable” (Augé 37) and in which supermodernity has produced a “crisis of meaning,” (Augé 31) such a need for meaning, whether individual or relational, seems necessary. The problem lies in the difficulty of accessing it. Because it is in a state of crisis, meaning proves elusive; what’s more, individuals lack the tools to decipher it, which in turn makes them exist in a state of crisis as well. This informs the way they navigate the spaces around them, and has transformed their relation to the house, which has slowly acquired the characteristics of a non-place and a heterotopia. Carver skillfully portrays such a change, and his stories feature houses that have slowly lost their domestic, intimate and protective qualities, resembling instead what Foucault called “crisis heterotopias,” which he defined as “spaces reserved for individuals who are . . . in a state of crisis.” (4)

The stories of Raymond Carver include a wide array of elements that contribute to the depiction of the house as a non-place or a heterotopia. First, I will talk about the eeriness permeating the residences of many characters: objects, animals, and weather conditions, among others, unsettle the domesticity that traditionally characterizes the house. Secondly, I will talk about the way the house mirrors the characters' psyches. Because they find themselves in a state of crisis, the houses they inhabit show signs of decay, slowly becoming inhospitable. Finally, attention will be paid to the many characters who either move house or yearn to do so, always searching for the perfect place to call home. Such constant moving makes the house a place of transit or, in other words, a non-place.

1.4.2.1. Unsettling the House: Eeriness in the Ordinary

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard notes how “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.” (38) The different elements that form the house generate a sense of security in its residents, regardless of whether that security is real or imagined. Certain rooms, as we have seen, serve to condense intimacy, while some elements provide warmth or security, like the fireplace, the light or the door. Objects hold considerable significance in the making of a home, for they contribute to the intimacy that, according to Bachelard, permeates the place. Indeed,

Objects that are cherished . . . really are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality. For they produce a new reality of being, and they take their place not only in an order but in a community of order. From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the

ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep. (Bachelard 88)

Appreciation, memory and care intersect to imbue objects with qualities that will contribute to the overall intimacy of the house. In the stories of Raymond Carver, however, there exist multiple instances in which different objects, as well as pets and weather conditions, disturb and unsettle such intimacy, generating a sense of eeriness instead. To support this argument, I shall look at four stories by Carver, one from each collection.

The first story appears in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* and is titled “What’s in Alaska?” It revolves around a couple, Jack and Mary, whose relationship seems strained, as evidenced by the way they communicate, which shall be explored in the second chapter. They spend the evening smoking, eating and talking with two friends, Carl and Helen. Although the houses depicted in the story seem innocuous at first, there are several elements that disturb the characters, particularly Jack, whom the narrator follows throughout the story. After spending some time at their friends’ house, apparently having a good time, Carl and Helen’s cat scratches at the door multiple times, until Carl lets her in. As he opens the door, “the cat carried a mouse into the living room, stopped to look at them, then carried the mouse down the hall.” (65-6) Rather than displaying the qualities of a domesticated cat, this pet seems feral, bringing home its prey and exposing it to view. As the four friends enjoy different foods and cannabis, “The cat dragged the mouse under the coffee table. She lay down under the table and licked the mouse. She held the mouse in her paws and licked slowly, from head to tail.” (66) The cat’s presence and attitude unsettle everyone and steer the conversation of the friends, who can only talk about the animal. It seems as though the living room, which should represent the center of the house, according to Bachelard, has become a

hunting ground for the pet, who looks less like a pet and more like a wild animal. Therefore, because the cat is losing its domestic qualities, its very presence challenges the domesticity of the house, threatening its intimacy.

This scene particularly upsets Jack, whose lack of confidence and weak sense of self have made him feel observed and unwanted, both at his friends' house and his own. As the story ends, the last paragraph reads: "Just as he started to turn off the lamp, he thought he saw something in the hall. He kept staring and thought he saw it again, a pair of small eyes. His heart turned. He blinked and kept staring. . . . He waited. He waited for it to move once more, to make the slightest noise." (69) The discomfort felt at Carl and Helen's house due to the cat's behavior has followed Jack to his own place, and he now feels as though a small animal is watching him as he prepares to go to sleep. Although what Jack sees may be a figment of his imagination, the eeriness that surrounds him in his own house is enough to disturb whatever domesticity existed there. The house no longer protects Jack; instead, threatening visions prevent him from sleeping and force him to stay alert, ready to defend himself as "[h]e picked up one of his shoes. He sat up straight and held the shoe with both hands." (69) Domesticity crumbles around Jack, whose insecurity "takes the shape of a pair of eyes . . . that, embodying his paranoias about the future and about his girlfriend's fidelity, stalk him in a darkened hallway." (Nesset 17) Because he is too consumed by his fears, he cannot feel at home in the world. Neither the outdoors nor his own house can protect him from the intrusive thoughts that dwell in his mind but, like many of Carver's characters, Jack seems incapable of dealing with them head on, instead choosing to focus on apparent external dangers. Therefore, both the cat and Jack's thoughts contribute to the eeriness and discomfort permeating the houses that appear in this story.

“A Serious Talk” (*WWTA*) features two elements that add to the eeriness and decay already present in the house; the latter aspect shall be discussed later in more detail. After Burt finally manages to get inside the house, he goes to the kitchen to talk to Vera. He observes his surroundings, noticing how “a turkey carcass sat on a platter in the center of the dining-room table, the leathery remains in a bed of parsley as if in a horrible nest.” (91) Such a scene conjures up an image of a mortuary. The dining room, a place where intimacy is supposed to condense, bears the traces of a past familiarity shared during Thanksgiving dinner; now, however, such intimacy has passed, and what remains represents death, which is further symbolized by the presence of an ashtray on the kitchen table. Burt “pulled a chair out and sat down at the kitchen table in front of the big ashtray.” (91) Again, the ashtray lies at the center of the kitchen table, a place that, according to Bachelard, fosters intimacy. Here, the only object on the table is an ashtray full of cigarette butts and ashes, a symbol of Burt and Vera’s marriage, which has been reduced to ashes. Even more interesting is the fact that, in Burt’s words, “the ashtray was not really an ashtray. It was a big dish of stoneware they’d bought from a bearded potter on the mall in Santa Clara.” (93) What was meant to be used as decoration, or as a plate for food, now serves as a receptacle for garbage. Vera has taken a once-meaningful object that she bought with Burt on a trip together, when their relationship had not crumbled yet, and desacralized it. In the words of Amir Ayala, the ashtray is “an everyday object which succeeds in capturing the essence of the relationship of a couple who have crossed the border beyond which love fever becomes a consuming fire.” (154) The house that Burt and Vera once shared is now saturated with elements that symbolize death, signifying the end of a relationship that Burt cannot seem to let go of.

In “Feathers” (*Cathedral*), three main elements disturb the intimacy of the house: a bird, a dental impression, and a baby. The story follows Jack, the first-person narrator, who reminisces about an evening when he and his partner Fran visited their friends Bud and Olla in the countryside. He notes how that day seemed to have changed their lives and comments on the disintegration of his and Fran’s relationship. This is a peculiar tale of “grotesque yet real domestic bliss” (Bethea 149) in which domesticity is unsettled but also reshaped. Indeed, what Jack and Fran encounter at Bud and Olla’s house makes them extremely uneasy, but it seems as though the house’s owners thrive in that eerie environment.

From the outside, the house seems idyllic. On their way there, Jack and Fran have seen “pastures, rail fences, milk cows moving slowly toward old barns” and “gardens and . . . wildflowers in bloom,” (4) among other pastoral views. The house has a “front porch” and a “chimney,” (4) a postcard-perfect picture that makes Jack wish he lived in the country, too. However, this picturesque scene soon fades the moment they “heard an awful squall. There was a baby in the house, right, but this cry was too loud for a baby . . . Then something as big as a vulture flapped heavily down from one of the trees and landed just in front of the car.” (5) The bird turns out to be a peacock, but neither Jack nor Fran dare “say the word out loud.” (5) The vision baffles them so much they cannot utter a single word except “Goddamn” (5) multiple times, and such a disruption of what they had considered a dreamy atmosphere unnerves them to such a degree that the bird’s presence will prevent them from enjoying their stay at Bud and Olla’s place. Much like in “A Serious Talk,” Jack’s narration draws parallels between the bird and death. First, he compares it to a “vulture,” a bird known to feed on carrion. Then, as the story progresses, Jack will mention, on multiple occasions, how invasive the bird’s squawks are, saying, “If it’d been something I was

hearing late at night and for the first time, I'd have thought it was somebody dying, or else something wild and dangerous." (5-6) At first sight, Jack thought the bird was a vulture; now that he hears it, he once again draws a connection between the animal and death. Every word that Jack uses when talking about the peacock has negative connotations, contrasting with the traditionally majestic image of the bird. In addition, its presence proves overwhelming, for it makes constant noise, either by "wail[ing]" (17) or by walking on the roof and making "a ticking sound as it walked back and forth on the shingles." (15) This, in turn, prevents both hosts and guests from talking, thus reducing them to silence at a time that is supposed to foster communication. The bird's cries deeply frighten Jack, who "could feel the hair on the back of [his] neck." (17) Interestingly, Bud and Olla seem very comfortable with the bird, who they have named Joey, and, even though Bud is not too keen on letting it into the house, he knows his wife enjoys the peacock's presence, so he simply complains, saying, "She lets the goddamn thing in the house. Before long, it'll be wanting to eat at the goddamn table and sleep in the goddamn bed." (7) Carver thus subverts traditional depictions of domesticity by portraying a couple who owns an unconventional and invasive pet that deeply disturbs the couple's guests. Matthew Shipe explains, "The narrative ostensibly centers on Jack and Fran's reactions to this strange pet, but it's not until the end of the story that Jack confesses that his marriage had failed in some fundamental, yet indefinable way after the encounter with [the] bird." (119) However, there are two more elements in the story that contribute to the eeriness permeating Bud and Olla's house and that, by extension, further agitate Jack.

As Jack and Fran move around the house, Jack sees an object that bewilders him: "Next to the vase, on the doily, sat an old plaster-of-Paris cast of the most crooked, jaggedy teeth in the world. There were no lips to the awful-looking thing, and no jaw either, just these old plaster teeth

packed into something that resembled thick yellow gums.” (9-10) Once again, what Jack and Fran find disturbing has very different connotations for Bud and especially for Olla, for whom the teeth stand as a reminder of what she owes Bud, who encouraged her to get hers fixed. In the words of Vasiliki Fachard, “Fran deems this object a bizarre consumer’s knick-knack because she does not endow it with a symbolic significance. But to Olla, it is a powerful, evocative reminder of her whole life, from her childhood to her relationships with men. . . . Having infused the mold with her experience, Olla has transformed it from a hideous into a meaningful object.” (86-7) Therefore, Carver reshapes intimacy and domesticity by allowing some of his characters to invest meaning into bizarre, non-traditional objects. Indeed, for Bud and Olla “the home can constitute a positive, life-affirming space, but only if the characters who dwell within it are willing and able to communicate with each other. Olla draws her strength from the memories and meanings inscribed in her surroundings and is, as a result, more present in the world than the narrator and his wife.” (Ní Éigearthaigh 46-7) They are an exception, however; like many of Carver’s characters, Fran and Jack have reveled in the surroundings of the house and immediately projected their fantasies onto the building itself, only to be deeply unsettled by what they find within.

The last element that adds to the creepiness in Bud and Olla’s house is their baby, which Jack describes as follows:

Bar none, it was the ugliest baby I’d ever seen. It was so ugly I couldn’t say anything. No words would come out of my mouth. I don’t mean it was diseased or disfigured. Nothing like that. It was just ugly. It had a big red face, pop eyes, a broad forehead, and these big fat lips. It had no neck to speak of, and it had three or four fat chins. Its chins rolled right up

under its ears, and its ears stuck out from its bald head. Fat hung over its wrists. Its arms and fingers were fat. Even calling it ugly does it credit. (17-8)

Jack's descriptions throughout the story underscore the grotesqueness running through the house, from the vulture-like peacock whose squawks made Jack "feel the hair on the back of [his] neck," (17) to the "awful-looking" (9) dental impression, to the ugly baby. When Jack first sees him, he notes, "I looked at the baby and drew a breath." (17) The vocabulary used to characterize the baby along with the eerie objects makes it seem as though Jack and Fran were in a haunted house. Indeed, "The staging out of these three objects in the course of the narrative designates them as privileged objects for the crystallisation of the uncanny. . . . The story . . . stages an experience of the abject." (Fabre-Clark, "Lack and Leftovers" 100-1) Carver takes the familiar and destabilizes it, stripping something ordinary, like a child, of its domestic qualities and endowing it with disquieting traits.

The last story that I wish to analyze with regards to the eeriness present in Carver's stories, challenging traditional understandings of domesticity, appears in Carver's last collection, *Elephant* (1988). "Blackbird Pie" follows a first-person narrator who tries to analyze a letter supposedly sent to him by his wife in which she tells him she is leaving him. The letter itself contributes to the eeriness permeating the story, as it was slipped under the door while the narrator worked; once he opens it, he questions its validity, convincing himself his wife could not have authored it. As we shall see in the second chapter, this character is highly unreliable, but this is precisely what invests the story with such mystery and confusion. Indeed, upon receiving the letter he finds himself perplexed and tries to find multiple ways to support his belief that his wife cannot have written it. The majority of the story revolves around his interpretation of the document, but his words

constantly betray him, proving his hermeneutical inability. The letter has unsettled the narrator's domestic life, who now feels threatened within his own house:

Before reading further in the letter, I got up and went over to the door, unlocked it, and checked the corridor. It was dark at this end of the house. But when I cautiously put my head out I could see light from the living room at the end of the hallway. . . . At that moment I found myself afraid—afraid, if you can believe it, in my own house!—to walk down the hall and satisfy myself that all was well. (98)

Even the narrator himself notes how odd it seems that he should feel fear within his house. The initial anger that the letter caused him wanes as terror grows, and he writes, “In place of anger, I began to feel panic. I grew afraid as I looked down the corridor.” (99) The narrator's obscure recounting of the contents of the letter as well as his own interpretation make it difficult to get a clear picture of its purpose, but it does seem that the marriage is falling apart and the wife has decided to put an end to it. Rather than have a face-to-face conversation—which might prove complicated, considering the narrator locks himself in his office—, the wife decides to communicate with him through a physical object that will deeply affect the narrator and upset the dwindling intimacy of the house. In addition, the narrative unreliability emphasizes the ambiguity and eeriness present throughout the story.

When the narrator finally ventures outside of his room and into the corridor, he realizes his wife has left the house. He decides to go to the front porch, where a heavy fog mirrors the darkness invading the corridor “at [the narrator's] end of the house” (98) and symbolizes the writer's inability to understand that his wife did write the letter, as she confirms later on (102), and that his marriage's breakdown should not have come as a surprise. As the wife navigates the house and the

outdoors rather comfortably, the narrator seems nonplussed both inside and outside the house, which makes sense, considering he spends most of his time locked inside what he calls his room, or his office. Therefore, the eerie elements that he finds both indoors and outdoors greatly trouble him and undermine the domesticity and intimacy of his house.

1.4.2.2. Disturbing the House: The Desacralization of Furniture and Cherished Objects

Other objects that might not be characterized as eerie but that contribute to the transformation of the house into a non-place also feature in Carver's stories quite often. As previously seen, according to Bachelard, "Objects that are cherished . . . really are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality." (88) Sometimes, objects are cherished by one member of the family while the others reject it, or they are valued because they can be used to show others the owner's status; other times, they allow momentary escapism to some characters. Most of the time, however, objects—including highly intimate ones, such as beds—have lost their value or have barely had it to begin with.

"Nobody Said Anything" (*WYPBQ?*) tells the coming-of-age story of a young teenage boy who skips school one day to go fishing. He and a boy he meets at a creek manage to catch what they view as an enormous fish, but because they cannot agree on who will keep it, they decide to split it in two. The first-person narrator proudly keeps the head, unable to stop staring at it: "I washed my half in the creek. I held his big head under water and opened his mouth. The stream poured into his mouth and out the other end of what was left of him." (45) This image may seem grotesque to many, not just because the boy is holding a butchered fish, but also because "Such a fish appears as

an abomination against nature . . . This fish is a mutant, a specimen, its colors mark it as a product of an unhealthy environment.” (Lainsbury 50) However, to the boy it represents conquest and heroism, for he struggled to catch the animal. It has become a “cherished” object (Bachelard 88) that the boy sees as a physical reminder of his experience at the creek. In other words, he considers it a prize that he cannot wait to show his parents, who happen to be having an argument at home. As the narrator approaches his house, “I heard their voices and looked through the window. They were sitting at the table. Smoke was all over the kitchen. I saw it was coming from a pan on the burner. But neither of them paid any attention.” (45) Here, the narration introduces another significant object that, though traditionally viewed as part of the domestic makeup of the home, has now turned into “a powerful symbol of familial discord.” (Bethea 227) Because the parents are so consumed by their conflicts, they neglect the pan, the contents of which are now burning and engulfing the kitchen in smoke. If “housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch,” (Bachelard 88) bringing the house to life and promoting the buildout of intimacy, housewifely neglect, as we shall explore in depth soon, can potentially annihilate the physical and psychological reality of the home. Here, the breakdown of intimacy is not merely abstract; it has a concrete effect on the couple’s surroundings. The father tells the mother the pan is burning up and offers no further help. The mother “looked at the pan. She pushed her chair back and grabbed the pan by its handle and threw it against the wall over the sink.” (45) The sight of the burning pan elicits two very different responses. The father passively looks at the scene and comments on it, while the mother assumes control and actively damages the pan and possibly the wall. Therefore, whereas before the pan threatened to destroy the house through the parents’ neglect, now the latter’s actions deliberately cause the deterioration of the home and, by extension, intimacy.

The narrator's excitement at having caught a fish makes him almost impervious to the scene he encounters as he arrives home. He enters the house and proudly shows off his trophy, expecting praise and admiration. However, he fails to understand that what he considers valuable is nothing but refuse to the parents, who, upon seeing the fish, shout in horror. The mother yells, "Oh, oh, my God! What is it? A snake! What is it? Please, please take it out before I throw up." (45) The boy tries to get his father's approval, but he responds in a similar manner to his wife: "He looked into the creel and his mouth fell open. He screamed, 'Take that goddamn thing out of here! What in the hell is the matter with you? Take it the hell out of the kitchen and throw it in the goddamn garbage!'" (45) The father's insistence that the boy take the fish out of the kitchen, as though he were desacralizing that space, seems ironic, considering how he had remained immobile when he realized the pan was burning up. This might be because the family has grown used to conflict and objects that once contributed to the domesticity of the home have lost their meaning now that intimacy has broken down. By contrast, the boy brings a foreign element into the home that only he can appreciate by virtue of his experience. The fish is "tied to family disintegration," (Neset 44) especially considering the polluted waters it came from. Not only that, but cutting the fish in half could stand as a "metaphor for the splitting up of the narrator's family." (Fabre-Clark, "Feminist Perspectives" 136) Therefore, "Nobody Said Anything" presents two objects, a foreign and a domestic one, and strips them of their value and intimate qualities. Both participate in the family's collapse and, as a consequence, the home's.

In "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" Ralph spends most of the story escaping his wife and his own turbulent thoughts after learning that she once had an affair. Ralph journeys through the city only to return home and lock himself in the bathroom. Although the story ends on a

hopeful note, the pervading atmosphere of the story is one of escapism. The moment he starts talking to his wife about the night she slept with another man, he finds ways to flee the conflict and the consequences it might entail. While at home, two objects allow him to psychologically remove himself from the scene; interestingly, in both cases he focuses on the patterns represented in them, which are miniatures of real-life objects. First, while talking to his wife, Marian, he starts looking at the tablecloth, which has patterns of black coaches, noticing how “Four tiny white prancing horses pulled each of the black coaches and the figure driving the horses had his arms up and wore a tall hat, and suitcases were strapped down atop the coach, and what looked like a kerosene lamp hung from the side, and if he were listening at all it was from inside the black coach.” (170) Paradoxically, the object that is supposed to “anchor the house to its center” (Bachelard 72) contains images of a means of transportation, and Ralph’s fixation on the coach contributes to the destabilization of the domestic. Here, the tablecloth does not foster intimacy; rather, it promotes distance and isolation as Ralph detaches himself from his wife. His fixation continues as “His eyes skipped around the kitchen—stove, napkin-holder, stove, cupboards, toaster, back to her lips, back to the coach in the tablecloth.” (171) After looking at various domestic elements within his household as well as his wife’s lips, an obvious symbol of intimacy, Ralph escapes to the coach once again.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard devotes an entire chapter to the study of miniatures, arguing that they both “attract and interest many dreamers” (167) and that “values become condensed and enriched in miniature.” (169) However, Ralph’s values have been shattered, and what he thought he knew about his marriage has disintegrated. Likewise, the situation he finds himself in prevents him from daydreaming, a quality Bachelard considered essential. Although the author believed that “The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it,” (169)

Ralph's focus on the coach stems from a desire to escape, but "this imagined journey, prefiguring calamity to come on the streets of Eureka" (Nesset 24) fails at anchoring him to the world in any way, because Marian's confession has psychologically uprooted him from his own home, his own city, and the world. Indeed, when he returns from his journey to the outside, defeated and lost, he locks himself in the bathroom to avoid talking to Marian, where he "looked at the clipper ships making their way across the wide blue sea of the plastic shower curtain. He thought of the little black coaches in the tablecloth." (180) Once again, Ralph is drawn to a miniature representation of a mode of transportation; what's more, both the clipper ships and the black coaches have now mostly become obsolete. Thus, not only does Ralph wish to escape to another place, but also another time. In this way, domestic objects that might otherwise further the intimacy of the home serve to allow Ralph to escape his own house, if only momentarily.

Traditionally, furniture contributes to the intimacy of the house, especially wardrobes, chests of drawers and beds. According to Bachelard,

Wardrobes with their shelves . . . and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these objects and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy. (99)

These spaces enclose and condense intimacy and highlight the importance of privacy. In the stories of Carver, however, wardrobes and chests rarely fulfill this purpose. Often, characters neglect, empty or disturb them, thus unsettling the domestic qualities they should emit. Bachelard also argued that "In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder. Here order reigns, or rather, this is the reign of order." (100) By emptying,

neglecting or invading it, Carver's characters challenge that order, which inevitably affects the home itself. While these pieces of furniture may act as a "model of intimacy," (Bachelard 99) they also reflect the owner's psyche; wardrobes, chests and people mirror each other. A closet, whether cluttered or empty, simultaneously serves as a model for and echoes a person's state of mind.

In "Collectors" (*WYPBQ?*), the unnamed first-person narrator waits for the mail to arrive in hopes of receiving a letter confirming he has been hired while also hiding from the title collectors. Soon, a salesman arrives and convinces the narrator to let him in. The story begins as follows: "I was out of work. But any day I expected to hear from up north. I lay on the sofa and listened to the rain. Now and then I'd lift up and look through the curtain for the mailman. There was no one on the street, nothing." (76) The first thing we learn from the narrator is his joblessness, a recurrence in Carver's stories (see, for instance, "They're Not Your Husband" [*WYPBQ?*] and "Are These Actual Miles?"), which naturally affects the character's self-esteem and sense of self. Without employment, these characters feel useless and usually emasculated, because their partners do have jobs. It is rare to find unemployed women in Carver's stories, unless by choice. In "Collectors," however, it appears as though the narrator does not have a partner. He lives on his own, and he soon notes how he also does not have a car, and that the mattress in the house does not belong to him. The narration constantly insists on what the main character lacks, going as far as withholding his name: when a letter arrives, addressed to a Mr. Slater, the narrator neither confirms nor denies whether that is his name. This proves considerably significant, for "anonymity is synonymous with powerlessness." (Bethea 174) Therefore, the story presents a character whose identity has slowly become effaced. Not only that, but his surroundings mirror his disintegrating self, both outside and inside the home. As the first few lines of the story show, it rained outside and

nobody walked the streets; in fact, in the narrator's own words, there was "nothing." (76) Such a description points to the suburbs' heterotopic quality. Indeed, when noting the differences between inside and outside, Gaston Bachelard stated that "the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is a non-house." (61) Although "Collectors" might not be set in winter, the rain does blur the landscape, turning it into a "simplified cosmos." (Bachelard 61) However, as opposed to Bachelard's belief that the house stands in contrast to the outside world, protecting its residents, the house in "Collectors" challenges this view. Because the narrator's identity has grown increasingly indistinct, the house he inhabits has adopted similar characteristics.

As Aubrey Bell, the man trying to sell the narrator a vacuum cleaner, inspects the house, "he opened the closet door. He looked inside but there was only a box of Mouse-Be-Gone." (80) The closet and its interior thus mirror the main character's empty life. This nameless, jobless, wife-less and car-less man fails to fulfill the expectations of the American Dream, which makes him feel invisible and worthless. What's more, his joblessness might end up making him actually homeless, although the current house he lives in already lacks any of the qualities of a home. When the salesman picks up the letter slipped through the mail slot, he effectively "'collects' from the narrator his remaining dregs of self, much as the miraculous vacuum cleaner the salesman demonstrates 'collects' the 'bits and pieces' of a person's body." (Boxer and Phillips 86) The salesman's conscientious cleaning removes any remainder of the narrator's humanity and physicality, rendering him increasingly indefinite. Bell soon moves on to the bedroom, which, according to Bachelard, "bear[s] the mark of an unforgettable intimacy." (45) In this bedroom, however, "there was a bed, a window. The covers were heaped on the floor. One pillow, one sheet over the mattress." (79) The narrator suggests his bedroom is as empty as the rest of the house,

containing only a bed and one pillow, evidencing his lack of company. In addition, there appear no signs of “housewifely care.” (Bachelard 88) As noted by the narrator, the covers lay on the floor. Furthermore, when the salesman moves on to the mattress, he claims, “You’ll be surprised to see what can collect in a mattress over the months, over the years. Every day, every night of our lives, we’re leaving little bits of ourselves, flakes of this and that, behind.” (78) The same can be said about the rest of the house, where Aubrey Bell thoroughly removes any trace of the narrator’s past, showing in the process that the house had not been cared for nor cleaned in a long time. Thus, the lack of “housewifely care” precludes the development of intimacy and domesticity. Once done with the mattress, Bell explains, “This filter is just for demonstration purposes. In normal use, all of this, this *material*, would go into your bag, here, he said. He pinched some of the dusty stuff between his fingers. There must have been a cup of it.” (79) Carver’s decision to emphasize the word “material” draws attention to the fact that “all traces of [the narrator’s] materiality are being removed from the environment. Aubrey Bell is cleaning up after him, cleaning him out.” (Lainsbury 87) Therefore, “Collectors” exemplifies once more how Carver challenges the domestic.

Empty furniture also features in “Why Don’t You Dance?” (*WWTA*) This story portrays one of the most glaring examples of subverted domesticity in Raymond Carver’s work. It revolves around a man who is having a yard sale of all the items that used to be in his house, set in the same way they were set indoors, so that passers-by can look at the bedroom or living room, among other spaces, if they wish to. The first page of the story reads as follows:

In the kitchen, he poured another drink and looked at the bedroom suite in his front yard.

The mattress was stripped and the candy-striped sheets lay beside two pillows on the chiffonier. Except for that, things looked much the way they had in the

bedroom—nightstand and reading lamp on his side of the bed, nightstand and reading lamp on her side.

His side, her side.

He considered this as he sipped the whiskey.

The chiffonier stood a few feet from the foot of the bed. He had emptied the drawers into cartons that morning, and the cartons were in the living room. A portable heater was next to the chiffonier. A rattan chair with a decorator pillow stood at the foot of the bed . . . That morning he had cleared out the closets, and except for the three cartons in the living room, all the stuff was out of the house. He had run an extension cord on out there and everything was connected. Things worked, no different from how it was when they were inside. (3-4)

Twice the narrator insists on the disposition of the objects in the yard mirroring the way they used to look inside, although they now lay bare: “the mattress lay stripped . . . he had emptied the drawers” and “cleared out the closets,” so that “all the stuff was out of the house.” (3) So, much like the furniture in the yard, the house itself is empty. Though the narrator never makes it explicit, it appears as though the main character has gone through a divorce or a breakup, leading him to let go of all the possessions that remind him of his previous partner in hopes of starting a new life. His extreme approach, however, underscores his own psychological condition. Indeed, “The space . . . reflects some aspect of the self, from which the character is now detached.” (Ayala 58) If closets and chiffoniers are supposedly “organs of the secret psychological life,” (Bachelard 99) which aid in the development of intimacy, such privacy shatters the moment they are emptied, especially in this context. Moreover, removing the furniture from the house and placing it in the yard further

dissolves whatever privacy had remained. Thus, as Amir Ayala notes, “The main impression left by the opening . . . is of a decontextualization which creates defamiliarization.” (Ayala 54) The home has become displaced, and in the process, it has turned into a non-place.

Marc Augé defines non-places as transit spaces that impede the development of a unique identity, instead fostering sameness. In his words, “‘Anthropological place’ is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers.” (Augé 101) The transformation of the main character’s house into a non-place becomes final the moment he decides to place all the furniture outside to sell it. Now, his connection to the furniture is merely commercial. When a couple soon approaches this makeshift house, they become customers, and the main character turns into a salesman. The yard, part of the man’s house, acts as a store. Although at the very end of the story the man and the girl briefly dance together, spurred on by alcohol, the majority of the narration shows connection through transaction. As stated by Augé, “as anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality.” (94) This setting is anything but organic; instead, it demands an unspoken contract between seller and buyer whereby both parties will agree on a price and see the transaction through. Thus, the first interaction between the couple and the man includes haggling. The man quickly agrees to the lower prices suggested by the couple, insisting that “everything goes,” (7) further emphasizing his detachment from the furniture and his willingness to part with it.

The language of bargaining and the naming of prices also characterizes non-places, since “the real non-places of supermodernity . . . have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their ‘instructions for use’, which may be prescriptive (“Take

right-hand lane'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the Beaujolais region')." (Augé 96) The yard sale bears no signs nor does the furniture include any price tags, but the dialogues support Augé's claim. As previously noted, they mostly have to do with a transaction process, thus prices are named and negotiated.¹⁰ Therefore, the house in "Why Don't You Dance" epitomizes the Carverian non-place, for it has been dislocated and commodified.

One last element that I wish to comment on regarding furniture and its connection to intimacy (or lack thereof) in the stories of Raymond Carver has to do with the invasion of chests, closets and cupboards. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard claims that "a wardrobe's inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody." (99) However, oftentimes characters in Carver's work betray the trust placed on them by others and invade their privacy by opening and frequently disturbing these pieces of furniture and their contents, going as far as stealing items or using them to damage the house.

In "Nobody Said Anything," for instance, the boy goes to his parents' room the moment they leave the house to inspect the contents of their drawers. He seeks to find evidence of their sexual life, and notes, "Once I found a jar of vaseline at the back of a drawer." (35) He continues, "I went through a few drawers, not really expecting to find anything." (35) Despite his invasion of privacy, he cannot find anything conclusive, perhaps because his parents' relationship lacks any intimacy at this point. In this case, however, the boy simply looks through his parents' belongings, but his actions do show that even though the wardrobe's insides are "not open to just anybody,"

¹⁰ The language used by the narrator holds considerable significance as well; as Kirk Nessel argues, "the rhetoric of this story evokes here more than anywhere else the chilly, hardened state of its protagonist's mind, and does so relentlessly, beginning with an extensive survey of the man's belongings outside on the driveway and lawn; the cool blankness of the description, in all its inventoring factuality, reflects the emotional denial of the objects' owner, who had until recently viewed the objects as shared property." (36-7)

(Bachelard 99) they *can* be opened by practically anybody.

Such intrusion becomes even more invasive in stories like “A Serious Talk,” “Put Yourself in My Shoes” or “Neighbors,” where characters actively disturb or even steal from the items they find inside closets and drawers. In “A Serious Talk,” for example, Burt “opened the silverware drawer and pushed things around inside. He opened another drawer.” (95) In an attempt to interrupt his wife’s phone conversation, he looks for a knife so he can cut the telephone cord and prevent further communication. Burt’s actions throughout the story constantly violate Vera’s privacy and disturb the house’s domestic qualities. Not only does he enter the house uninvited, effectively trespassing on the property, but he also vandalizes its interior. Because he still considers himself the owner of the house, unwilling to let it go, he gives himself permission to interfere with the spatial arrangements of the place he was once part of.

Similarly, in “Put Yourself in My Shoes,” the Myers listen to Mr. Morgan as he tells the tale of the Zs and Ys, who in reality stand for the Morgans and the Myers, respectively. Unable to directly voice his frustration to the Myers about their behavior when they were renting their house, Mr. Morgan resorts to a metafictional story that recounts what the Myers did. He explains,

Sleeping in the Zs’ bed is one thing, but unlocking the Zs’ private closet and using their linen, vandalizing the things found there, that was against the spirit and letter of the lease. And this *same* couple, the Zs, opened boxes of kitchen utensils marked ‘Don’t Open.’ And broke dishes when it was spelled out, *spelled out* in that same lease, that they were not to use the owners’, the Zs’ *personal*, I emphasize *personal*, possessions. (109)

The Myers have completely disregarded whatever rules they were supposed to follow, instead abusing the Morgans’ trust. One could argue that the Morgans put themselves in that position by

agreeing to lease their house to other people—and leaving their belongings inside—but they did meet the Myers through a mutual friend and therefore assumed they could trust them to respect their home. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard does not consider this contemporary reality in which houses and flats are rented rather than purchased, which makes it difficult for people to comfortably settle in, always fearing they might have to move at some point. Landlords who are emotionally attached to their house might also suffer the consequences of allowing strangers to occupy it, as they might have a different understanding of domesticity and what Bachelard called “housewifely care.” (88) It seems quite interesting that the scholars who have studied this story have focused exclusively on its literary and metafictional elements (see C. May, 2006; Miltner, 2009; Vasiliki, 2006), ignoring the other significant elements of the story, such as the unsettling of the domestic, which in this story has to do with the inability to see the Other and honor their requests. As we shall discuss in greater detail in chapter 2, Carver’s characters tend towards solipsism, focusing only on their wishes and worries without looking outwards, thus preventing connection and resolution. Even the language used by Mr. Morgan in this story shows this difficulty, as he resorts to a metafictional tale to indirectly vent his frustration instead of being straightforward. Such difficulty is exacerbated by the Myers, who do not seem to want to listen to the Morgans. This interaction shows that by disrupting and violating the Morgans’ house, the Myers have disturbed its domestic qualities, affecting the lives of its current residents and owners, the Morgans.

A more extreme example of invasion of privacy occurs in “Neighbors,” in which Bill and Arlene occupy the Stones’ house to enact fantasies of the life they wish they had, eventually making a serious mistake that will inevitably affect the house’s owners when they return: they forget the keys inside, thus locking themselves out and leaving the cat on its own until the Stones come home,

or until they get someone to change the lock. This will inevitably sour their relationship with their neighbors, who may not want to allow the Millers into their home ever again. Thus, much like the Myers, the Millers' stay at the Stones' house has a negative impact on the home and its residents.

Throughout the story, both Bill and Arlene go to the Stones' apartment on different occasions. They utilize their alone time to explore the apartment, fantasizing about the life they would have if they were the Stones. In doing so, they invade the Stones' privacy by opening, using, and even stealing the items they find. Bill, for instance, "opened the medicine chest. He found a container of pills and read the label—*Harriet Stone. One each day as directed*—and slipped it into his pocket." (7) Bill's decision proves quite odd, as he would not gain anything from taking one of those pills. One possibility could be that the bottle contains antidepressants, which Bill might find interesting, since "he seems to be searching for the secret of the Stones' success." (Harker 722) Indeed, every minute spent at the Stones' house appears as an opportunity for the Millers to understand what makes their neighbors' life so apparently perfect and enviable, in an effort to emulate and eventually become them. Academic Gareth Cornwell analyzes this story through a very interesting lens. He follows the theories of historian and philosopher René Girard, who, in the words of Cornwell, suggested that "in modern times, the desire of the human subject is mediated by a 'model' or 'rival' whose desiring presence (actual or imagined) is needed so as to authorize the subject's desire." (344) This concept of mediated desire appears in many of Carver's stories, with characters longing for a different life, motivated by promises and models created by cultural standards and, sometimes, embodied by people around them. As Cornwell argues, in Carver's characters "the sense of a model unmistakably survives, usually a model of ordinary stability and decency whose existence reveals to them the shame of their own failure and abjection." (347) Thus,

in “Neighbors,” the narration continuously shows the Millers—especially Bill—disregarding the Stones’ privacy. Bill “reached in back for the bottle of Chivas Regal. He took two drinks from the bottle, wiped his lips on his sleeve, and replaced the bottle in the cabinet.” (7) Later, “He pulled out a nightstand drawer, found a half-empty package of cigarettes and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he stepped to the closet and was opening it when the knock sounded at the front door.” (8) Arlene interrupts him before he can select and put on some of the Stones’ clothes, but Bill has had enough time to disturb the domesticity of the house. Soon enough, however, he returns and “He open[s] the closet and select[s] a Hawaiian shirt” (9) then “rummage[s] through the top drawers until he f[inds] a pair of panties and a brassiere,” (9) which he proceeds to try on. The unsettling of domesticity is twofold: the Millers abandon their own home, unable to find intimacy within it, and occupy the Stones’ house, where they manage to become more intimate. This, however, has a negative impact on the Stones’ house, who, upon returning, will not only find that their pet might be dead, but also that their house has been vandalized. As previously noted, Bachelard wrote that “In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder.” (100) In these stories, however, wardrobes, as well as chests of drawers and cupboards, are encroached on, throwing the house into disorder and destabilizing its intimate qualities.

1.4.2.3. Undoing the House: Physical and Psychological Decay

Many houses in the stories of Raymond Carver show signs of decay, usually brought on by the characters’ neglect or direct damage. Gaston Bachelard argued that “there is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul,” (21) in line with Clare Cooper Marcus’ belief that the house is an archetypal image of the self. If the self leads a quiet life, the house will mirror

that peaceful state; in the words of Cooper Marcus, “As we become accustomed to, and lay claim to, this little niche in the world, we project something of ourselves onto its physical fabric.” (“The House as Symbol” 131) Bachelard did not write about the destabilization of the domestic that occurs when characters do not feel at home even in their own house; similarly, although Cooper Marcus does acknowledge it (*The House as Mirror*, 121-2), she mostly focuses on the nurturing qualities of the home and how it reflects its inhabitants’ warmth and intimacy. However, their arguments still stand and can be applied to the stories of Raymond Carver: as Bachelard claimed, “The house acquires the physical and moral energy of the human body.” (67) When his characters grieve a loss (of a relationship, an aspiration or intimacy, among others), such distress becomes imprinted in the house. For most people, the self develops partly in the home, thus it stands to reason that the building should bear marks of the psyche, mirroring its state. Because the majority of the characters populating the stories of Raymond Carver feel isolated and lost, they often neglect their place of residence, slowly turning it into a non-place—a place that precludes intimacy and connection. Indeed, their connection to the house, if there ever was one, becomes severed as they project their insecurities onto their surroundings, removing the domestic qualities these sites may have had.

“Gazebo” seems like the best story to begin this analysis because its protagonists, Holly and Duane, live in a motel, an actual non-place as defined by Augé, and a heterotopia of “compensation.” (Foucault 8) To describe these heterotopias, Foucault used the example of colonies, places created to offset the disorder present in parent countries. Hotels act similarly as places that supposedly present a perfected version of a residence, where everything looks clean and organized and guests can simply relax and escape housework. In this story, however, the motel fails

to compensate for the sometimes “messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 8) space of the house. Instead, it turns into a heterotopia of crisis.

The motel’s heterotopic qualities already foreshadow some of the tensions that will permeate the story, since non-places limit the possibility of connection, instead creating “only solitude.” (Augé 106) This does not mean that intimacy is non-existent in such places, since this story sees Holly and Duane discuss their crumbling marriage after she finds out he has had an affair at the motel. However, non-places create “similitude” (Augé 106) by their very nature, thus making intimacy transient. Indeed,

The flattening of affect in non-places does not, it must be emphasized, mean low intensity or lack of affect. Rather, it means that very few modulations of affective tone can occur in these non-places, indicating a kind of sameness and homogeneity. The freeway, roadside motels, and strip malls all induce feelings of numbness due to their homogenous design and function. Identity, history, and relation evaporate precisely because there is only room for the incessant, continuous drone of the same. (Ledet Christiansen 141)

Thus, in that sense, one could argue that in this story, “the house remodels man.” (Bachelard 68) While technically not a house, the motel serves as a residence for Holly and Duane, and its reality as a non-place influences their relationship. Not only do they live there, but they also work there, which further complicates their quest for intimacy. Throughout their story, they attempt to work out their marriage, but their surroundings fail to provide them the comfort and intimacy such an exercise requires.

Though the motel may have changed Holly and Duane’s relationship, their subsequent actions have in turn affected the motel. Duane, the first-person narrator, provides context for their

current situation and notes how his behavior has upset their marriage and, by extension, their place of residence. He states, “I stopped cleaning the pool. It filled up with green gick so that the guests wouldn’t use it anymore. I didn’t fix any more faucets or lay any more tile or do any of the touch-up painting.” (22) The motel slowly falls into disrepair, which could potentially make it uninhabitable and eventually abandoned. A more logical possibility is that Duane and Holly might lose their job and, as a consequence, their dwelling place. Thus, the motel’s heterotopic qualities have damaged the couple’s relationship, who in turn will damage the building through neglect brought on by their distress. Holly plays her part in this, too. As Duane notes,

Holly wasn’t registering the guests right, either. She was charging too much or else not collecting what she should. Sometimes she’d put three people to a room with only one bed in it, or else she’d put a single in where the bed was a king-size. I tell you, there were complaints, and sometimes there were words. Folks would load up and go somewhere else.

(22-3)

Holly’s errors drive customers away, which will inevitably affect the couple’s economy. Therefore, the motel’s impending dereliction might make Holly and Duane jobless, homeless, and poor. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argued that “a house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside.” (88) Duane and Holly, however, “had stopped caring.” (23) If the motel, as a non-place, already complicated the development of intimacy, the little connection that had survived slowly crumbles. Now, Holly seeks comfort in aspirations she once had of a future where they would be “dignified. And in a place.” (24), as opposed to where they are now: undignified, and in a non-place. Holly wishes to live in proximity to a gazebo, a place that suggests connection. As Kirk Nessel states, “As a symbolic

structure . . . the gazebo signifies (attached as it is to the ‘old farmhouse,’ as noted in the original text) a sort of solidity unrelated to the structure they occupy now.” (“Intimate Divisions” 93) Though they both remain stagnant and undecided at the end of the story, Holly turns inwards into her own desires and moves, albeit psychologically, to another space, even though she believes she will never realize said wishes for the future. Duane, however, can only look out the window, where he sees guests leaving. In that sense, their physical position within the room proves quite significant. Holly sits on the bed, a piece of furniture that traditionally indicates intimacy, while Duane stands, looking not inwards but outside at the parking lot, seeing the repercussions of their (in)actions.

“Gazebo” is an extreme case of heterotopic residences in Carver’s work because the residence itself is a quintessential non-place. In the majority of his stories, the characters dwell in houses or apartments, and these spaces slowly transform into non-places by virtue of the characters’ distress. Bachelard argued that “all great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a ‘psychic state,’ and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy.” (91) In these stories, however, the house no longer denotes intimacy but alienation; in that regard, it does reflect its residents’ psyche, as Bachelard suggested. In “The Ducks,” for instance, the unnamed male character “looked straight ahead at the wall. The lamplight picked up all of the tiny cracks and swells in the plaster. In a corner, up near the ceiling, there was a cobweb. He could hear the rain washing down off the roof.” (131) The story portrays numerous instances of isolation and disconnection between the two main characters, which will be analyzed in depth in chapter 3. In this particular moment, the man notices signs of decay on the wall: cracks and a cobweb. These subtle indicators of neglect mirror the man and his wife, whose

relationship also presents numerous cracks. Although the dissolution of such a relationship does not appear imminent, the characters' inability or unwillingness to work out their troubles manifests itself in their surroundings.

Similarly, in "Blackbird Pie," the first-person narrator notes how "in front of the house was a lawn that had grown shaggy, owing to lack of interest on my part." (94) Here, the lack of interest the narrator mentions echoes his marriage, which has fallen apart due to the couple's increasing failure to communicate, which will be explored in chapter 2. The narrator spends more and more time in his room, or his study, and goes as far as locking the door whenever he works. Although he appears surprised by his wife's letter, letting him know she is leaving, his narration evidences his responsibility in causing a rift between him and his wife. In the words of Kirk Nasset, "the signs of this man's decay lie at his feet. The lawn . . . suggests that . . . their marriage . . . has fallen victim to neglect, vulnerable now to strange men and horses who arrive in the night." (86) Neglected lawns appear in other stories, especially the collection *Elephant* (1988), such as "Intimacy" and "Menudo." The first, which will be studied in the second chapter of this dissertation, sees the first-person narrator go back to his ex-wife's house to talk to her, seemingly in search of material for a prospective story he wants to write. She does most of the talking, and by the end, he seems to have managed to get some materials, but the conversation has left him in a state of distress. Upon leaving his ex-wife's house, the narrator notices how the front lawn of his wife's house as well as the neighborhood are filled with leaves. He finishes his story by writing, "There are these leaves everywhere, even in the gutters. Piles of leaves wherever I look. They're falling off the limbs as I walk. I can't take a step without putting my shoe into leaves. Somebody ought to make an effort here. Somebody ought to get a rake and take care of this." (53) The narrator's emotions seem

psychologically displaced as he appears unable to analyze his feelings after such an experience. Like Al in “Jerry and Molly and Sam,” for whom “there was only one solution. He had to get rid of the dog without Betty or the kids finding out about it . . . He felt relieved making the decision. Any action was better than no action at all, he was becoming convinced,” (153) the narrator of “Intimacy” is incapable of facing the actual source of his distress and can only cope by focusing on something that appears more manageable. Interestingly, however, he does not intend to solve the issue himself, and is in fact very vague in his choice of words by referring to “somebody.” Moreover, the very last word of the story reads “this,” which makes his narration end on a rather ambiguous note, for he might be referring not to the leaves, but to his own life, or his relationship with his ex-wife. Kirk Nessel argues, “The disorderliness of the natural world . . . functions as a trope for the psychic state of the speaker. Estranged now from his wife and perhaps from his children, the accumulated debris at his feet represents both the tangible nature of familial ruin, . . . and the terribly natural degree of its inevitability.” (100) Therefore, the lawn of his ex-wife’s house as well as the outside world, which Bachelard already described as a hostile place when compared to the home, stand in disarray much like the narrator’s own life. By contrast, in “Menudo,” the narrator actually does something about the leaves he finds in his lawn. Unable to actually deal with the chaos he has brought into his own life, he decides to rake the leaves because it allows him to feel in control, if only momentarily. He writes,

I go outside to the garage and find the rake and some lawn bags. By the time I get around to the front of the house with the rake, ready to begin, I feel I don’t have a choice in the matter any longer. It’s light out—light enough at any rate for what I have to do. And then, without thinking about it any more, I start to rake. I rake our yard, every inch of it. It’s

important it be done right, too. I set the rake right down into the turf and pull hard. (69)

What makes this passage all the more significant is the fact that at the beginning of the story the narrator recounts how, two days prior, he had raked the lawn and had even considered doing the same at his neighbor's house, where the woman he is having an affair with lives. As he looks at their house and hesitates, he stops, writing, "I didn't follow through. It's my fault things are the way they are across the street." (55) Therefore, at the end, the narrator feels overwhelmed by what he believes to be the decaying state of his and his neighbor's lawns and chooses to get rid of the fallen leaves, a symbol of times past. Bachelard argued that "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or *illusions* of stability," (38; emphasis added) and this story shows how the narrator resorts to constructing a domestic pretense of stability to assuage his own feelings of loss. Indeed, the reality shows that his life is far from stable, and that within his home connection no longer occurs: his wife Vicky knows that he has been having an affair, which means that the intimacy they once shared has disintegrated. Therefore, their home now bears the marks of a non-place.

"A Serious Talk" also shows how a failed relationship affects the fabric of the house, to the point where it almost burns down. In this story, one character neglects the house while the other actively seeks to make the house uninhabitable. Although the story is told from Burt's point of view, his description of the house shows glimpses of Vera's attitude towards it. The first few lines follow Burt as he "pulled into the drive and stopped beside the pie he'd dropped the night before. It was still there, the aluminum pan upside down, a halo of pumpkin filling on the pavement." (89) This sentence shows both Burt's action and Vera's inaction. Burt dropped a pie the day before because he was stealing the six pies that Vera had laid outside to cool, justifying his action by saying,

“one for every ten times she had ever betrayed him.” (90) The story does not delve into the reason why the couple no longer lives together, and it soon becomes apparent that Vera is seeing someone else. Her ability to move on in some way deeply unsettles Burt, who continuously wants to make his presence felt. This may explain why Vera has not looked after the house; it seems this is not the first time Burt has acted this way, and his constant incursions into what he considers “his house, his home” (90) prove damaging to the point where Vera sees no point in caring for her place of residence until Burt leaves for good. After realizing he can no longer enter the house through the front door, Burt goes to the backyard, where he sees “a bicycle without a front wheel standing upside down. He saw weeds growing along the redwood fence.” (91) If, as I noted in the previous section, the locked door prevented opportunity and movement forward, the bicycle’s state of disrepair implies lack of mobility, which reflects Burt’s stagnant self. Burt cannot conceive of the fact that his wife no longer needs him and resorts to doing anything he can to stay relevant—except for having the title “serious talk.” He has stolen pies and an ashtray, cut the phone cord, broken his key inside the front door, and even attempted to burn down the house. All of these destabilize domesticity: the warm pies left to cool outside convey intimacy; the front door allows for mobility and the welcoming return home; the phone allows people to socialize and connect. Now, the front door cannot be opened and the phone no longer works, in a way imprisoning its residents, who are now cut off from the outside world. Burt goes as far as approaching the fireplace, a symbol of comfort, warmth, and intimacy (Bachelard 92), to stoke the fire, to the point where it becomes dangerous: “A small wax and sawdust log burned on the grate. A carton of five more sat ready on the hearth. He got up from the sofa and put them all in the fireplace. He watched until they flamed.” (90) When Vera confronts him later, he denies responsibility, but she sees through him.

Burt's actions leave scars on the house—a broken key in a lock, a broken phone cable, and “a trail of smoke stains [that] rose up the bricks to the mantel, where the wood that stopped them was scorched black.” (91) His destructive behavior towards others is a sign of his need to be validated and desired. Because he lacks any self-awareness, he fails at talking to Vera, who seems willing to listen to him, and instead brings chaos into the house.

Burt's displaced and destructive proactivity stands in stark contrast to the passive husband in “Preservation,” (*Cathedral*) whose behavior throughout the story contributes to the disintegration of domesticity. The narration follows a couple as they deal with the man's unemployment and the breakdown of their refrigerator, two seemingly unrelated events that actually mirror each other. The moment the unnamed husband tells his wife Sandy that he has been fired, he stops working literally and figuratively. He no longer has a job, which affects him so much that he becomes physically and emotionally immobile. The first line of the story reads, “Sandy's husband had been on the sofa ever since he'd been terminated three months ago.” (31) His introduction as somebody's husband underscores his dependence on her. In addition, the omission of his name emphasizes his dehumanization, which will continue throughout the story as he becomes an indistinct figure made up of separate body parts.

Upon arriving home after having been laid off, the husband tells Sandy, “I got canned today.” (31) The use of this expression is certainly not coincidental, for it echoes the title of the story. Now that he sees himself as an unproductive member of society, the husband slowly fades into nothingness, distancing himself from his wife, himself, and the world. As Sandy notes, “He made his bed on the sofa that night, and that's where he'd slept every night since it had happened.” (31) Three months have passed and, though the husband occasionally reads the newspapers in

hopes of finding a job, he remains otherwise motionless. His joblessness has left him feeling insecure and worthless, which prompts him to detach himself from his wife, withdrawing into himself. This inevitably brings about an end to whatever intimacy they might have enjoyed. His unwillingness to leave the sofa upsets Sandy, who thinks, “It’s like he *lives* there . . . He *lives* in the living room.” (32) The irony here is that, although he has moved there, thus *living* in the *living* room, the narration constantly highlights “the husband’s movement toward isolation and emotional death.” (Bethea 140) Thus, not much living happens in that room, which is traditionally considered the center of the house and a “major zone of protection.” (Bachelard 51) Adam Meyer argues that “the sofa has become a kind of island to him, and he retreats to its security, fearing that if he ventures out he will only be swamped.” (130-1) In a way, however, he cannot really find protection, because what has led him to this lethargic state are his own insecurities and his inability to face them; these will follow him wherever he goes. In this sense, Carver destabilizes traditional understandings of domesticity; regardless of the features of this living room, characters find no actual consolation or comfort within it.

The husband’s behavior deeply troubles Sandy, who feels increasingly put off. As she watches him while he lays on the sofa, she thinks, “That goddamn sofa! As far as she was concerned, she didn’t even want to sit on it again. She couldn’t imagine them ever having lain down there in the past to make love.” (32) The husband’s decision to move from the couple’s bed to the sofa and stay there permanently begins to affect their relationship, as well as their connection to the house. Sandy even rejects her own memories, unable to conceive that an intimate life was led in this house at some point. Therefore, intimacy and connection dwindles, and only solitude prevails, making this house a prospective non-place.

Such solitude is magnified when Sandy is forced to deal with the broken fridge alone. After she arrives home, seeing her husband in his usual place, she heads to the kitchen. There, “She put her purse on the table and went over to the fridge to get herself some yogurt. But when she opened the door, warm, boxed-in air came out at her. She couldn’t believe the mess inside. The ice cream from the freezer had melted and run down into the leftover fish sticks and cole slaw.” (35) The following lines continue describing in great detail all the food that has been affected by the fridge’s breakdown. This thorough description accentuates the decay surrounding the couple. In the words of Arthur M. Saltzman, “when their freezer gives out, they are surrounded by perishables on all sides—a precise image of their own domestic entropy.” (122) Sandy finds herself faced with unpleasant smells and varying textures, and when her husband sees what has happened, he offers no solutions or help. Instead, he goes back to the sofa, and Sandy gets to work, cleaning and cooking. As the story progresses, the husband’s stagnancy becomes linguistic too; he says less and less words, and when Sandy tells him food is ready and he sees the cooked pork chops, “his mouth dropped open, but he didn’t say anything. She waited for him to say something, anything, but he didn’t.” (41) Sandy must now deal with a broken refrigerator, but also with a broken partner; the house becomes a space that harbors unspoken tension and no longer serves its purpose as an intimate and safe place.

As the story ends, Sandy notices the thawing food has created puddles of water dripping from the table onto the linoleum floor, further damaging the house. However, her attention shifts to her husband, particularly his feet:

She looked down at her husband’s bare feet. She stared at his feet next to the pool of water.

She knew she’d never again in her life see anything so unusual. But she didn’t know what to

make of it yet. She thought she'd better put on some lipstick, get her coat, and go ahead to the auction. But she couldn't take her eyes from her husband's feet. She put her plate on the table and watched until the feet left the kitchen and went back into the living room.

(52)

Like the thawing food, their intimate life melts away as Sandy's husband becomes increasingly effaced. Sandy no longer sees him as a whole, but as broken parts like "feet," (52) "head," (40) or "arms." (40) The breakdown of the fridge along with her husband's behavior have disturbed Sandy to the point where she finds it hard to recognize him anymore. In this sense, both the house and one of its residents show signs of decay.

Sometimes, the house's decay is not only seen but also imagined. The discomfort and disconnection felt indoors might lead one to have overwhelming, intrusive thoughts that can end up feeling like visions. In "The Idea," (*WYPBQ?*) for instance, a woman sees her house physically and psychologically infested by ants. The story follows a couple who watches how their neighbors engage in voyeuristic behaviors; while they sit "at the kitchen table with the light out," (12) they stare outside as their neighbor gazes into his room from the outside, where his partner is. The contrast between the neighbors and the couple watching them is made increasingly evident throughout the story. The wife, who narrates the events, shows signs of disgust and anger at her neighbor's actions, although the story suggests that somehow, she yearns for that intimacy, which she clearly lacks at home. As Alan Davis puts it, "The Idea" and several other stories in Carver's first collection "chronicle isolation and breakdown, as well as the ache, often acted out in voyeuristic terms, to connect with another life, however perverse or futile the connection might be." (655) Because the wife cannot unearth her own desire, she becomes increasingly frustrated, telling her

husband, "Someday I'm going to tell that trash what I think of her." (13) At the end of the story, while she clears the table, she notices some ants in the kitchen:

I was scraping plates into the garbage can when I saw the ants. I looked closer. They came from somewhere beneath the pipes under the sink, a steady stream of them, up one side of the can and down the other, coming and going. I found the spray in one of the drawers and sprayed the outside and the inside of the garbage can, and I sprayed as far back under the sink as I could reach. (15)

It seems ironic that she would find ants in her garbage can, when she had previously called her neighbor "trash." The wife sees herself as morally superior to her neighbor and such an invasion serves as a reminder that she might be lying to herself, unwilling to acknowledge her own sexual desire and her longing for connection. In fact, she admits that she would call the police if anybody looked at her through her window, "except maybe Cary Grant." (14) This humorous touch underscores her unacknowledged yearning, but she fails to understand it. Instead, she obsesses over the ants: "I started thinking about the ants again. Pretty soon I imagined them all over the house. I wondered if I should wake Vern and tell him I was having a bad dream. Instead, I got up and went for the can of spray. I looked under the sink again. But there was no ants left. I turned on every light in the house until I had the house blazing. I kept spraying." (15) Faced with such anxiety, rather than leaning on her husband, she decides to ensure she has managed to rid the house of ants. Therefore, she is projecting her own insecurities onto the house, obsessing over and re-imagining an infestation that renders the space she inhabits unsafe and unhomely and that "intimate[s] a pervasive emotional and moral squalor." (Bethea 16) As opposed to the first lines, where she noted she had been sitting in the dark while staring at her neighbors, at the end she lights every room in

order to find any remaining ants; such a decision ironically makes her now visible to her neighbors. The use of the word “blazing” proves significant, for its association with fire implies destruction, further pointing to the destabilization of the domestic and the transformation of this house into a non-place, brought on by the narrator’s insecurities and actions.

In “How About This?”, the house already shows signs of neglect and decay when Harry and Emily, who intend to move there, arrive. Although Emily had warned him of what he might encounter, he seems utterly disappointed by the state of the house and its surroundings. As previously mentioned, the beginning of the story foreshadows what is to come by portraying a derelict landscape that almost looks like a battleground: it appears “isolated,” with a “country dirt road,” an “ancient burned-out foundation of a house” and the “occasional weathered house.” (134) Such a description suggests that the house Harry and Emily plan on moving into will look similar to the ones they have seen throughout their journey. Indeed, when they arrive, the narration presents the house as a “deserted place” (135) with “no outlets,” “no electricity,” no “fireplace,” and no “toilet.” (137) Outside, Harry can see “withered apple trees.” (137) The house is thus described by what it lacks, including the lack of life, which mirrors Harry, who also seems somewhat lifeless. Some of these details should be expected from a house that has not been occupied for a long time, but Harry, who had pictured himself “coming out of the house with a wicker basket and pulling down large red apples, still wet with the morning’s dew,” (137) feels increasingly disillusioned as he inspects each room. His idealized version of a country house, away from the busy city, clashes with the reality he faces at Emily’s childhood home, however much he was warned about it. Although the house looks unappealing, it becomes a non-place by virtue of Harry’s attitude. Even before he steps foot in the house, he starts making up his mind to abandon his plans to live here and seems

unable to let go of his romanticized expectations, eventually seeing this place as transitory.

Incapable of coping with the uncertainty inherent in life, initially Harry “thought it pleasant to feel that something permanent, really permanent, might belong to him.” (137) Similarly, when he inspects the house, he notes how the foundation is “solid” and repeats said word two more times in the following sentences (136). The description of the house barely supports this view, for it seems everything is falling apart. Harry hangs on to his poorly fabricated hope and continues fantasizing about an ideal future characterized by stability and comfort. However, his behavior indicates he might never find the perfect home or perfect relationship he so desperately craves, because that would require an effort from his part that he does not seem willing to make. While Emily tries to comfort him and offers solutions to the problems they encounter, Harry remains evasive and withdraws into himself. This suggests that the “solid foundation” (136) he talks about echoes his relationship with Emily, which is slowly crumbling. Harry seems to forget that in order for a relationship to have a solid foundation, such a basis must be built and worked on. In *The Art of Loving* (1959), Erich Fromm explores what he calls the pathology of love, including the symptom of “The illusion . . . that love means necessarily the absence of conflict.” (80)¹¹ The same can be said about the domestic environment. Harry feels displaced everywhere he goes not because of the nature of his surroundings, but because of his own failure to accept that uncertainty and discomfort are woven into the fabric of the ordinary. His inability to settle down is not related to a lifestyle choice but rather to the belief that the solution to his problems lies in the next place he will move to. He has lived in various cities, where houses simply become transient sites while he prepares for his next move; although he now has decided to go to the countryside, the

¹¹ This shall be further explored in chapter 2.

story suggests this change will not offer him what he needs either. In fact, the very first line of the story reads, “All the optimism that had colored his flight from the city was gone now,” (134) indicating that, like many other characters in Carver’s stories, Harry seems bent on escaping, not on resolving.

1.4.2.4. Leaving the House: The Flight from and Mythification of the Domestic

Harry’s belief that moving to a new place will improve his situation is not unique. Many characters in the stories of Carver seek to move house in hopes of starting a new life, but they fail to understand that the main reason for their discontent lies in the accelerated pace of the modern world, or what Marc Augé calls “supermodernity” (29) as well as their inability to adjust to it. In these stories, houses “reflect a sense of identity to the characters themselves, but one that becomes confining, and that characters aspire to transcend.” (Siebert 3) Such confinement occurs when the characters realize they cannot find what they are looking for in their current location. Therefore, they seek another place, engaging in a never-ending cycle wherein the house loses its domestic qualities and turns into a non-place by virtue of its transience. In this sense, the house has become mythological. As Marc Augé argued, “certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather, imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés.” (95) In the stories of Raymond Carver, homes generally exist in the character’s imagination; in practice, they are simply stopovers that the characters temporarily inhabit. This seems particularly paradoxical considering that people dwelling in these stories “are often somewhat paralyzed when facing a movement or a change in their life or surroundings.” (Ayala 12) In reality, rather than being characterized by paralysis, these characters are defined by avoidance and flight. Like Al in “Jerry and

Molly and Sam,” who decides to get rid of the family dog to solve his problems, many of these characters misidentify the source of their distress, turning outwards rather than inwards. Critic Hilary Siebert claims that “Most characters . . . don’t see the serious limitations of their ‘housing’,” (4) but I argue that they do in fact believe their discomfort stems from the house or city they dwell in, and decide to move to another location, trusting that this will improve their situation. As we have seen, their inner turmoil is reflected in the places they inhabit, rendering the house heterotopic and unwelcoming, but the house itself did not necessarily possess those qualities before being occupied. This means that wherever these characters go, the houses they move into will inevitably acquire these characteristics.

Examples of this wish to leave and move somewhere else abound in the stories of Raymond Carver. Each collection features numerous instances and conversations related to the desire or the act of moving, or to the characters’ past, revealing they have dwelt in many places throughout their lives. In *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, several characters mention having lived elsewhere, generally multiple times (“The Student’s Wife,” “Jerry and Molly and Sam,” “What’s in Alaska?”) but their discontent lives on, as well as their intention to move again. In *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, characters once again talk of moving house, especially after a conflict (“Gazebo”), but also acknowledging their wish to change their life for the better. For instance, “The Calm,” (*WWTA*) in which the first-person narrator reminisces about a day when he had his hair cut, ends with the following paragraph:

That was in Crescent City, California, up near the Oregon border. I left soon after. But today I was thinking of that place, of Crescent City, and of how I was trying out a new life there with my wife, and how, in the barber’s chair that morning, I had made up my mind to

go. I was thinking today about the calm I felt when I closed my eyes and let the barber's fingers move through my hair, the sweetness of those fingers, the hair already starting to grow. (102)

Here, the narrator verbalizes the reason for moving, disclosing what many other characters in these stories long to do: "trying out a new life." (102) The newness and possibilities associated with a new place, including a new house, give hope to these characters, who attach their illusions to a physical location. In "The Calm," the narrator's words suggest that he has not found what he was looking for, because he has decided to leave Crescent City. Thus, as he was "trying out a new life" in California, he had soon "made up [his] mind to go." (102) Such a feeling of haste is mirrored by the last phrase, in which, while getting his hair cut, the narrator ends his story by noting how his hair was "already starting to grow" (102); this underscores the ephemeral nature of life. Although critics argue that this story ends on a positive note (Bethea 120), the last paragraph could also be interpreted as conveying the futility inherent in life. The narrator's hair grows as he gets it cut; the new life he seeks ages as he experiences it. Therefore, in the same way that he will soon need another haircut, he will also move again, continuously looking for a better life.

In *Cathedral*, the story "Vitamins" sees the three main female characters (Sheila, Patti and Donna) voicing their wish to move somewhere else. One believes she would be "better off if we moved to Arizona, someplace like that," (90) alluding to the possibilities intrinsic to change, while another confidently proclaims that she is "leaving town." (101) Donna says "Maybe I could go up to Portland . . . There must be something in Portland. Portland's on everybody's mind these days. Portland's a drawing card, Portland this Portland that. Portland is as good a place as any. It's all the same." (101) Although she understands many people seem interested in going to Portland, making

it a potential destination for her, she also asserts that “it’s all the same,” (101) suggesting, in a rare moment of lucidity for a Carverian character, that the place itself might not necessarily foster change. At the same time, by saying that such a city “is as good a place as any” (101) she endorses the common conviction that moving to another place will prove positive and will help her ease her pain. Similarly, in “The Bridle,” the first-person narrator, Marge, who manages an apartment building, sees a family leave and states, “I don’t think they’re going back to Minnesota. I think they’re going someplace else to try their luck.” (193) Again, these characters believe life might get easier if they leave, but as many stories show, this is often not the case. Multiple characters have lived in different houses and continue to move, but their suffering follows them because it is rarely anchored to a physical place.

Elephant, Carver’s last collection, includes a story whose title already indicates one of its main themes: “Boxes.” In it, the narrator’s mother feels the need to move house all the time. Thus, like many characters in these stories, she “represents a facet of American life in the way people use up ‘place’ and depend upon . . . the possibility of a ‘next’ or a ‘new’ place as remedy and comfort.” (Gallagher 14) Indeed, according to the narrator, moving was “her own way of solving things.” (13) For this reason, her home, like many in Carver’s stories, has become a non-place—a transitory space that lacks the qualities that foster intimacy. Because the narrator’s mother needs to change residence so often, she has come to a point in which her belongings remain in boxes. The furniture therefore lies empty, which, as we have previously seen, prevents the development of emotional closeness. The narrator explains, “Within a day or two of deciding to move, she’d packed her things into boxes. That was last January. Or maybe it was February. Anyway, last winter sometime. Now it’s the end of June. Boxes have been sitting around inside her house for months. You have to walk

around them or step over them to get from one room to another.” (13) The mother cannot seem to settle down, which prevents her from creating a home at all. This story, along with “Gazebo,” features one of the most obvious examples of the heterotopic Carverian house. Many elements turned the motel in “Gazebo” into a non-place, the first and most obvious of which was the building’s purpose. In “Boxes,” although the mother resides in a house, the space itself bears no traces of a home. Instead, it has become a stopover while she pauses her journey. In fact, the mother moves so often that her son notes, “Other people take vacations in the summer, but my mother moves.” (16) Her goal, like that of the characters in “The Bridle,” “Vitamins” or “The Calm,” among others, is to find “a house and a town to live in that will make [her] happy,” (20) but her past actions and current behavior suggest she will never achieve such a dream.

Moving thus allows the characters dwelling in the stories of Raymond Carver to feel hopeful, if only momentarily, but by doing so the places they live in become heterotopic and adopt the characteristics of a non-place. Seen as transitory sites in a quest for happiness, these houses do not contain any domestic qualities, because its residents do not plan on staying there long enough to imbue the space with a sense of comfort. Within these places, the characters continuously look without. They do not see their houses as homes, turning them instead into liminal spaces that preclude connection. In doing so, they disturb the traditional connotations associated with the house while also emphasizing their own homelessness.

CHAPTER II



“We Have to Love Each Other”: Remapping the Language of the Loss of Love

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2.1. Social Being: The Search for Connection

In 1989, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Carver's last collection of poems, was published. In it was included his famous “Late Fragment,” which reads as follows:

And did you get what
 you wanted from this life, even so?
 I did.
 And what did you want?
 To call myself beloved, to feel myself
 beloved on the earth. (122)

These words are inscribed on his tombstone, but the poem remains popular because it presents an affirmation of love that many can connect with. What is particularly interesting about this text is the way it talks about love. The speaker argues that what they¹² wanted out of the life they lived was primarily two things: first, “to call [themselves] beloved,” second, “to feel [themselves] / beloved on the earth.” The former draws attention to the importance of language and perception; the latter emphasizes the speaker's desire to receive love but omits any mention of providing it. By noting the yearning to “call [themselves] beloved,” the speaker places more importance on being perceived as beloved than the actual reality of being loved, even if the first probably implies the second. In

¹² I use “they” here as a gender-neutral term to refer to the speaker.

addition, these last two lines form two dependent clauses, which mirror the status of the speaker, who depends on others to receive the love they have always longed for.

Carver's "Late Fragment" concisely presents an essential human desire, namely, the need for connection. Humans are inherently social, finding in others protection and affiliation (Baumeister and Tice 550). In *The Art of Loving* (1956), philosopher Erich Fromm posits that "The deepest need of man . . . is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness." (8) He argues that such separateness seems less obvious during childhood, a time when people generally have a closer connection with their parents, nature, and other elements that alleviate the state of being separate. When adulthood arrives, such a state becomes exacerbated, prompting individuals to look for ways to assuage the anxiety of separateness. This, according to Fromm, can be done in three ways: through what he calls "orgiastic states," (9) such as drugs or loveless sex, which provide ephemeral relief; through "conformity," (10) that is, trying to fit in within a large group; and finally, through "creative activity," (14) which allows the creator to connect with his work, "which represents the world outside of himself." (14) However, Fromm contends, none of these are enough to overcome the state of separateness:

The unity achieved in productive work is not interpersonal; the unity achieved in orgiastic fusion is transitory; the unity achieved by conformity is only pseudo-unity. Hence, they are only partial answers to the problem of existence. The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in love. (14)

Thus, to prevail over separateness is to love and be loved. Erich Fromm's arguments speak of the general mindset of his era, namely, the heteronormative belief that the ultimate form of love is romantic love, and that such a union can only be achieved between a man and a woman.

Love, however, can take many forms, including platonic, familial, and romantic, among others, and they all serve to connect individuals with each other, so that, precisely, that individuality fades in favor of union. This is not to say that through the act of loving uniqueness disappears; instead, this suggests that the separateness inherent in the individual leads to connection. Indeed, as David Shumway states, “the traditional meaning of *love* is not romance but social solidarity; it corresponds to the capacity for bonding rather than the capacity for infatuation.” (12) Love today is usually associated with romance, but to love is simply to connect with the other.

Love suggests that “we can encounter and experience the world other than through a solitary consciousness.” (Badiou 39) Any kind of love can provide one with the means of engaging with the world in a more complex way, through the multiplicity of perspectives offered by others. Indeed, to love means to continuously experience a “(re)-birth of the world via the mediation of the difference in [the loved one’s] gazes.” (Badiou 41) Therefore, socializing with others and establishing a connection proves essential for the growth of individuals; it allows them to navigate the world more comfortably and safely.

2.2. Romantic Being: The Search for the One

In the Western world, romantic love is ubiquitous. It permeates our society and has been mythologized by popular culture, thus becoming inevitably ingrained in our psyche. Love stories—those depicting epic tales of romance—have become unavoidable, appearing in one way or another in most forms of media and influencing the way we relate to others, so much so that “perceptions and expectations of romantic love are developed long before the actual experience of romance starts.” (Bachen and Illouz 279-80) Romantic love seems exciting, expansive and fulfilling, but it is also constructed, ephemeral and unfathomable. Though countless scholars across a multitude of fields have attempted to define love (see Swidler, 2001 and Kenrick, 2006, for concise overviews), the reality is that the concept remains ungraspable. Often, scholars have tried to answer the question “What is love?” but perhaps, as Karen and Kenneth Dion suggest, the question should be, “How is love understood?” (298) This, of course, varies across cultures (see Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992; Lindholm, 1998; Karandashev, 2015), but it seems the Western understanding of romantic love has become globally more prominent and influential in the last century. To think about romantic love means going beyond feelings and considering the culture surrounding it. Indeed, according to David Shumway, romantic love is a

way of writing, thinking about, and experiencing love that is distinctive to the cultures of Western Europe. ‘Romantic love’ in this sense is best understood as a culturally specific discourse. The point is not that humans elsewhere lack the capacity to experience what we typically call romance or that they never do so. Rather, it is that the place that passionate love is given in Western culture and the specific form it has taken there are not universal.

Shumway's first few words are key to understanding the hold romantic love has on the Western world: it was written and thought about before it was experienced on the scale it is today. In Europe, it was an ideal rather than a reality that troubadours in the Middle Ages would sing about, mythifying not only the figure of the beloved but also the experience itself. Thus, romantic love was, and continues to be, both idealized and aspirational. In the Middle Ages, romantic love remained idealized and was rarely, if ever, consummated. That people experienced attraction and fondness is unquestionable, but the discourses surrounding romantic love, particularly within art, slowly turned those feelings of desire and bonding into a, or rather, the formula for establishing intimate connections with another. It seems quite telling that the word "romance" comes from the Old French "romans," which generally referred to the chivalric works of fiction produced at the time, thereby highlighting the fictional nature of romantic love as a concept. In the words of Shumway, "It is no coincidence that the name *romance* means, in addition to a kind of love, a kind of story. These two definitions stem from the fact that romantic love was originally disseminated most widely in the extended narratives we call medieval romances." (14) Therefore, romantic love, both as theory and praxis, is "learned." (Wherry 1) As the centuries have passed and this belief has spread throughout the Western world, romantic love has been ritualized by art, which has infused it with mystic qualities; if in the Middle Ages it stood as the antithesis to marriage (De Rougemont 110; Shumway 13) in modern times it has paradoxically become its basis.

Romantic love, usually realized through marriage, is now supposed to fulfill all of one's needs, thus combining both passionate and companionate love. However, as Anthony Giddens argues, "passionate love is marked by an urgency which sets it apart from the routines of everyday life with which, indeed, it tends to come into conflict." (Giddens 37) Passion is sudden and

ephemeral; even if a marriage is born out of passion, this feeling eventually wanes so that only companionship is left (Illouz, “The Lost Innocence” 174). The problem comes when companionship is not seen as enough. In the search for “the one,” individuals look for someone who can inspire both passion and camaraderie, expecting these two states to last forever. Denis de Rougemont claims that “the glorification of passion . . . is precisely that feature of the Romance which we find moving.” (60) Indeed, companionship, though desirable, is considered second to passion; when it no longer exists between two individuals, regardless of their bond, the relationship is seen as tedious and uninteresting, prompting many to find someone else who will awaken those feelings of excitement. This proves impossible: passion and routine are opposites, and yet romantic love is understood as possibly “the chief example in our culture of what is natural, uncontested, obvious, as in the cliché ‘Love makes the world go ’round.’” (Shumway 2) The belief that romantic love is natural leads individuals to engage in the Sisyphean task of finding a lover that will fulfill all their expectations, but in order to achieve that “individuals are required to engage in an ongoing effort of introspection to establish their preferences, to evaluate their options, and to ascertain their sentiments.” (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 91) Popular culture depicts a love that comes easily and organically, that does not require any effort and that does not vary in intensity. When reality proves more challenging, people lament their inability to find the ideal person, often blaming themselves and questioning their own worth (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 130; Carter 25). The romantic being thus continues to look for “the one,” placing in that idolized figure the recognition and worth that they believe they cannot find elsewhere. In the words of Eva Illouz,

Because the experience of love anchors the question of worth, love in modernity has the capacity to produce and stabilize *social* value. Neither really private or public, the modern

self establishes its value through processes that are at once psychological and sociological, private and public, emotional and ritualistic. Clearly, then, in modern erotic/romantic relationships what is at stake are the self, its emotions, interiority, and, mostly, the way these are recognized (or failed to be recognized) by others. (*Why Love Hurts* 121)

This modern paradigm of romantic love sees people constantly seeking to “call [themselves] beloved,” as Carver wrote, giving romance a quasi-religious status through which the self will be recognized and contained. However, the individual sets themselves up for failure when it places on the romantic other the onus of securing their lover’s “self,” “emotions,” and “interiority.” This is precisely the reality that Carver presents: his characters long for love, just like they search for a home, in the hopes that it will solve all their problems and endow them with the recognition they so desperately want. They are unable to see that the other cannot carry that burden alone and fail to take responsibility for addressing their own fears and insecurities. In Carver’s stories, individuals retreat into themselves yet rarely look inwards to try to identify the source of their broken relationship; instead, they keep looking for the house and the love that will provide them with all the solutions.

2.3. Now I Do, Now I Don't: Postmodern Romantic Love

If the previous sections have focused on the nature of love, the present one seeks to explore the sociological approach to love in the Western world, focusing particularly on the United States and its middle- to lower-class white population during the twentieth century. In other words, the following paragraphs aim at elucidating the way people understood love and what they believed its role to be. As mentioned in the previous chapter, an overview of the entire history of romantic love falls beyond the scope of the present dissertation, so this section specifically looks at the late twentieth century.

The evolution of capitalism in the twentieth century as well as the rise of psychoanalysis transformed the way love was understood (Bellah et al. 89; Fraser 43; Shumway 133). After World War II, there paradoxically arose, on the one hand, a belief that romantic love could be a haven, and on the other, a growing suspicion of mainstream romantic discourses. As popular media capitalized on the appeal of romantic love, more people began to acknowledge its illusory nature, but they also inevitably absorbed many of the ideals displayed in fiction. According to Catherine Belsey,

To the degree that the postmodern condition implies an unbridled consumerism, the cultural logic of late capitalism, pleasure for cash, and a product to gratify every possible impulse—if not, indeed, to construct the impulse in the first place—love is a value that remains beyond the market. While sex is a commodity, love becomes the condition of a happiness that cannot be bought, the one remaining object of a desire that cannot be sure of purchasing fulfillment. Love thus becomes more precious than before because it is beyond price, and in consequence its metaphysical character is intensified. More than ever,

love has come to represent presence, transcendence, immortality . . . everything, in short, that the market is unable to provide or fails to guarantee. (683)

In a culture in which capital holds the most power, the elusiveness of love proves continuously appealing, for its inaccessibility generates a need for those who have grown accustomed to the immediate. Love cannot be purchased, but the excitement it promises makes individuals yearn for it. The postwar return home placed particular emphasis on the nuclear family and portrayed it as the quintessential manifestation of romantic love. At the same time, however, changing attitudes towards such a concept by virtue of the increasing challenge to the status quo that emerged throughout the sixties questioned the sincerity of love. Belsey continues,

To the degree, however, that postmodernity . . . also represents a skeptical attitude to metaphysics, a radical questioning of presence, transcendence, certainty, and all absolutes, the postmodern condition brings with it an incredulity toward true love. Where, we might ask, in the light of our experience, the statistics, our philosophy, or any documentary evidence outside popular romance, are *its* guarantees, its continuities, proof of its ability to fulfill its undertakings? (683)

Indeed, the postmodern is anything but certain. It embraces doubt and unpredictability and eschews categorization. Within this context, the idea of true romantic love is placed under constant scrutiny by a plethora of artists and scholars, but also the general population.

In addition, the popularization of psychoanalysis made many question the mythologized view of romantic love, slowly demystifying it. Eva Illouz explains,

Throughout the twentieth century, first psychoanalysis and psychology, and later biology, evolutionary psychology, and neuroscience, deployed their scientific infrastructure by

subsuming “love” under some of their key scientific concepts, as “the unconscious,” “the sex drive,” “hormones,” “species survival,” or “brain chemistry.” Under the aegis of scientific modes of explanation, these frameworks undermined the view of love as an ineffable, unique, quasi-mystical experience and selfless sentiment. (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 163)

The rationalization of love stands in stark contrast to the individualization of society because the first establishes universal romantic precepts while the second fosters emancipation from such doctrines, encouraging people to make their own individual decisions. Freedom “represents an enduring, deep, and widespread cultural frame organizing modern people’s self-definition and relationship to others.” (Illouz, *The End of Love* 12) In a culture where capitalism has come to dominate all areas of society, including the private sphere, it is no wonder that the vocabulary of romantic relations resembles that of the economic realm. According to Eva Illouz, “self-entrepreneurship . . . is central in order to enter a relationship.” (*The End of Love* 175) As entrepreneurs, individuals take risks when entering unions, but they also reap the rewards of their labor, assuming that the people involved in the relationship agree on the terms of their emotional contract. However, to view romance as a market that can be controlled undermines its ineffability. Indeed, using the lens of economy as well as that of psychology or psychiatry to provide a logical explanation for the experience of love seems futile, yet such a discourse prevails in late twentieth- and twenty-first century Western societies. Indeed, “late twentieth-century middle-class Americans are heirs of Victorian family culture and are in some respects still Victorian.” (Lystra 6) The central role of the nuclear family in the United States as well as the general belief that romantic relationships should lead to marriage mean that many of the ideals present during the Victorian era

persisted in the twentieth century and still do today. Therefore, love “occupies a paradoxical position in postmodern culture: it is at once infinitely and uniquely desirable on the one hand, and conspicuously naive on the other.” (Belsey 683) The setting for Carver’s stories is thus a time and a place in which individuals find themselves questioning the preconceived ideals prevalent in society while also yearning for absolutes, which psychiatry seemed to strive for at the time: the self should know itself, its beliefs and its needs, and, provided it could find someone who had come to the same self-awareness, together they could build a perfect relationship. However, “this search for a perfect relationship cannot succeed because it comes from a self that is not full and self-sustaining.” (Bellah et al. 98) The incessant growth of capitalism complicates the endeavor of achieving such a state, since the commodification of individuals and emotions has alienated the self from itself and others. Bellah et al. further add that “in a world of independent individuals who have no necessary obligations to one another, and whose needs may or may not mesh, the central virtue of love—indeed the virtue that sometimes replaces the ideal of love—is communication.” (101) The rise of psychiatry and later psychology advanced the belief that communication was key to the success of relationships, particularly those of a romantic nature. As the twentieth century progressed, psychology became increasingly popular, especially among the middle classes, so much so that “by the 1960s, [it] had become fully institutionalized and had become an intrinsic aspect of American popular culture.” (Illouz, *Cold Intimacies* 25) Though not everybody could access therapy, the slow democratization of psychology encouraged an almost clinical language that sought to forgo uncertainty. Eva Illouz explains,

If we have been told since post-structuralism that meanings are unintended, undecidable, and loaded with emotional inflections, by contrast, the therapeutic techniques of

communication decree that ambiguity is the archenemy of intimacy and dictate that we purge everyday language of unclear and ambivalent statements and of its possible negative emotional inflections and that we reduce communication to its denotated meaning only.

(Cold Intimacies 35)

The quest for complete clarity and positivism seems antithetical to the experience and the expectations of love, which place mystery and fantasy at the forefront. Mainstream media presents love stories in which desire and romance rely on mystery, while at the same time the therapeutic discourse surrounding intimacy and romantic love insists on viewing these through the lens of rationalism only. According to Byung-Chul Han, “in the course of a positivization of all spheres of life, [love] is being domesticated into a consumer formula devoid of risk and daring.” (18) He further argues that this process of positivization inevitably erases the Other and instead elevates sameness (18-9). Mystery no longer evokes desire but rather fear, hence the pursuit of absolute transparency.

The dichotomy between the drive for sameness and the quest for adventure and excitement defines postmodern love, which still values marriage but sees an increase in extra-marital affairs or short-lived relationships. In fact, “postmodern romance has seen the collapse of overarching, life-long romantic narratives, which it has compressed into the briefer and repeatable form of the affair.” (Illouz, “The Lost Innocence” 175) The progressive increase in freedom, including the freedom of choice, along with a growing flexibility regarding sexuality, raises the expectations of both marriages and relationships, whether long or short-term. In addition, consumerism fosters newness, prompting individuals to seek new connections constantly rather than working on the ones they have already established. Postmodern love has inherited the romantic traditions of

Victorian and modern times, but it has also come to question many of them, resulting in a liminal period in which people long for the experiences depicted in the stories they consume while also suspecting them. In the words of Eva Illouz,

The contemporary romantic self is marked by its persistent, sisyphus-style attempt to conjure up the local and fleeting intensity of the love affair within long-term global narratives of love (such as marriage), to reconcile an overarching narrative of enduring love with the fragmentary intensity of affairs. This splitting of the romantic self into incompatible narrative structures, the patching of self-contained, discontinuous affairs into narratives of life-long love, breaks the coherent, heroic self of modernity into a 'collage' of conflicting narrative selves. ("The Lost Innocence" 179)

This is precisely what defines the postmodern self: it is conflicted, fragmented and without a clear sense of its identity. The perpetual uncertainty plaguing the self informs the way it relates to the world, with connections becoming temporary so that houses turn into brief stopovers and romantic relationships become transient. Thus, the self never finds itself satisfied and continuously longs for a better place and relationship, among others. This is the predicament that Carver's characters attempt to overcome, often in vain. Confused and alienated from themselves and each other, they seek in others a solution to their woes, but the latter also struggle to find meaning in an increasingly fragmented world, so connection appears almost unattainable. In Carver's stories, characters generally look for solace in marriage but come to see it does not solve their anxiety, and their attempts at communicating their needs, as shall be later seen, are generally ignored. In this sense, Carver skillfully represents the complex status of the marriage institution in the late

twentieth century, which was perceived as a bulwark against oppressive loneliness while also, paradoxically, heightening the self's sense of isolation. According to David Shumway,

Marriage, increasingly freed from its social obligations, also came increasingly under the pressure of ever-greater personal expectations. The discourse of romance narrated these expectations, but it was not by itself responsible for their rise. Rather, increasing social fragmentation meant that marriage had to fill in the emotional gap left by the demise of other relations. As individuals found themselves ever more alienated from each other and from their work, they made marriage the refuge of human connection. (24)

This proved futile, for the behavior that led to the “demise of other relations” equally affected romantic relationships, including marriages.

Postmodern romantic love finds itself at a liminal point in which individuals both desire and reject tradition. As Belsey claims, “Love is thus at once endlessly pursued and ceaselessly suspected.” (685) Yearning for love, individuals expect romantic relationships to cure their ontological insecurity and provide long-term excitement; when this fails, they move on to another relationship in search of the same. Such an experience of romance is therefore “characterized by the increasing distance between reality and aspiration, which in turn generates disappointment and makes it a chronic feature of modern lives.” (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 215) This succinctly describes Carver's characters, particularly the men who appear in his stories, which shall be discussed later. They seem continuously disillusioned with their lives and know only how to escape or displace their anxiety, blaming others for their inability to process their disappointment. Such disappointment describes specifically that of a man “who feels cheated of something, of everything; a man whose life seems prematurely drained of passion, purpose, and intensity; a man with nothing

to look forward to but more of the same: a lifetime's work at the Mart, a lifetime of routine cares and responsibilities." (Cornwell 354) Incessant, repetitive work hours that provide them with little money coupled with the myriad social and cultural changes taking place throughout the twentieth century have overwhelmed these characters. However, although Carver's women seek appropriate solutions to their ailments and manage to rebuild their lives for the most part, Carver's men usually remain stagnant, unable to escape the loneliness that plagues them. In both cases, their attitudes inform the way they communicate with their partners and how they make use of the language of love. Belsey contends, "Desired as the ultimate good, feared as constraint, doubted as an illusion, postmodern love is both silent and garrulous. It cannot speak, and yet it seems that it never ceases to speak in late twentieth-century Western culture." (685) Carver might appear to favor silence, but oftentimes the choice of words his characters make when talking to their partners verge on the "garrulous," rather than the "silent," as the next section shall explore. Indeed, the individuals that he writes about resort to redundant language that does not serve its intended purpose, and they often repeat words to the point of exhausting their meaning, revealing in the process their complex relationship with love.

2.4. Beyond the Spoken Word: The Language of the Loss of Love

“Intimacy,” a short story included in Carver’s last collection *Elephant* (1988), sees the first-person narrator visit his ex-wife to seemingly find inspiration for his writing. Throughout the visit, she does most of the talking, while he essentially remains silent. Towards the end of the conversation, the story reads:

She says, Honey, no offence, but sometimes I think I could shoot you and watch you kick.

She says, You can’t look me in the eyes, can you?

She says, and this is exactly what she says, You can’t even look me in the eyes when I’m talking to you.

So, OK, I look her in the eyes.

She says, Right. OK, she says. Now we’re getting someplace, maybe. That’s better. You can tell a lot about the person you’re talking to from his eyes. (50)

Several elements of this exchange anticipate key aspects of the present section, which aims to discuss the representation of the language of the loss of love in Carver’s short stories. These include the subversion of terms of endearment, such as “honey,” and the use of the spoken word, gestures, the written word, and silence. As we shall later explore, in “Intimacy” the ex-wife uses terms of endearment as well as insults in unconventional ways, unsettling their traditional connotations of warmth and anger, respectively. The narrator, on the other hand, relies on gestures and the written word to get his meaning across. In the presence of his ex-wife, he seems unable to utter more than a few words, but his gestures are quite eloquent. In addition, as he narrates their encounter, creating a story that he will most likely send to his ex-wife in the near future, he makes use of dialogue tags

to insert himself in the conversation more explicitly, attempting to establish dominance by interrupting her monologue.

This example, which will be elaborated on in the coming subsections, serves to illustrate some of the many ways in which Carver makes his characters communicate. These have often been touted as inarticulate (Abrahams 1; Gearhart 439; McCaffery and Gregory 98, to name a few), but such a belief has been challenged by more recent criticism (Fabre-Clark, “The Poetics of the Banal” 174; Ayala 35), as shall be developed later. The example above shows the many ways in which the individuals populating Carver’s stories attempt to communicate with each other, and it would do the writer a disservice to only see them as incapable of adequately expressing themselves. This somewhat reductionist approach seems similar to the one used to describe Carver’s writing. Considered by many the “godfather of minimalism” (Neset, “Intimate Divisions” 103), Carver actually rejected the label and found it “diminishing and trivializing.” (Sklenicka 405) In a 1987 interview with David Applefield, Carver elaborated on his opinion regarding minimalism:

I feel awkward being called a “godfather.” I don’t like being called a minimalist writer, either. Nor do I like the appellation “minimalism.” It’s useless. It was a French critic, in fact, in his review of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* for the *Partisan Review*, who called my work “minimalist.” He meant it as a compliment, but certain critics and reviewers picked it up and used it to start hammering on some writers. I think the sooner such labels go away the better. Writers should be talked about in terms of what they write and how they write, as individuals, instead of being lumped together in groups. (206)

It seems that Carver believed this label to be quite simplistic, lamenting how critics conflated the style of various writers who did not adhere to other prominent forms of the time such as

metafiction¹³ into what became known as “minimalism.” Granted, Gordon Lish was the main reason why the writer received such an epithet. As Wells Addington points out, “minimalism, as it emerges from Lish’s editorial practices, reflects Lish’s aesthetic concerns more so than Carver’s.” (1)

The label itself can actually prove quite expansive, as critic John Barth showed in his 1986 *New York Times* article “A Few Words About Minimalism,”¹⁴ but it was often used derisively to define Carver’s work. Writer James Atlas, for instance, claimed that Carver’s “characters are hardly garrulous; their talk is groping, rudimentary” (97) and that “the vapid dialogue of these characters insists that the writer’s responsibility is only to register what is true in a literal, documentary sense.” (97) Atlas failed to see that while Carver’s characters may not speak very often, they do communicate in a multiplicity of ways. Even the dialogues that Atlas considered “vapid” (97) serve to elucidate much about each character, and to dismiss them as simply “rudimentary” (97) disregards the complexity of Carverian communication. To call Carver a minimalist as a way of belittling his work sounds as superficial as describing his characters as simply inarticulate. William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, both Carver scholars, wonder if Carver was “ever in fact a minimalist” (40) particularly in light of Lish’s harsh edits. Still, stories published after Carver cut ties with his notorious editor have also led critics to continue labeling his characters as inarticulate. In the aforementioned interview, Carver explained, “The people I’m writing about often have

¹³ See, for instance, works by John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon, among others.

¹⁴ In his article, Barth defined “minimalism” as follows:

Old or new, fiction can be minimalist in any or all of several ways. There are minimalisms of unit, form and scale: short words, short sentences and paragraphs, super-short stories, those three-eighth-inch thin novels aforementioned, and even minimal bibliographics . . . There are minimalisms of style: a stripped-down vocabulary; a stripped-down syntax that avoids periodic sentences, serial predications and complex subordinating constructions; a stripped-down rhetoric that may eschew figurative language altogether; a stripped-down, non-emotive tone. And there are minimalisms of material: minimal characters, minimal exposition . . . , minimal mises en scene, minimal action, minimal plot.

difficulty communicating head-on. But, things *do* get done, things *do* get said in the stories. Sometimes, the meanings are a little askew, but things do transpire. I don't think there's ever any wasted dialogue, or anything else wasted, for that matter." (208) Here, Carver acknowledges that his characters struggle to speak directly, but this does not result in stagnancy nor does it suggest their communication is "rudimentary" (Atlas 97); in fact, it highlights the many other ways in which they express themselves. As this section shall show, Carver's characters not only use the spoken word, but a wide array of different tools in order to talk to each other. Some use the written word, as is the case of the ex-wife in "Intimacy," while others resort to gestures or silences. Moreover, sometimes the seeming inefficacy of communication lies not solely in the meaning conveyed, but in the reception; these solipsistic characters are so consumed by their own worries and identity crises that, for the most part, they cannot fully comprehend what they are told.

Other critics who have spoken of Carver's characters' inability to fruitfully communicate note that the writer is "famous for the passivity with which his characters confront, or fail to confront, their experience." (Gorra 155) While this may be true in some cases, oftentimes they actively try to confront their problems, but they do not always do it "head-on," as Carver said, leading critics to believe they are passive. As seen in the previous section, significant changes in both relational and individual conduct took place throughout the twentieth century, which prompted people to seek new ways to communicate with each other—in other words, to use language in different ways to better convey meaning and to attempt to put into words feelings that proved complicated to externalize. The new therapeutic communicative approach influenced by psychology, which self-help books aided to popularize (Dolby 23), focused on literal language to the detriment of linguistic connotations, essential to interpersonal communication. This meant

that individuals had to understand their own insecurities, worries and emotions before attempting to convey them; then, the exercise of trying to word them would follow. To put it another way, this newfound psychological consciousness “required that one overcome a number of emotions—fear, shame, or guilt—which were most often unknown to the person in question and which required a new skill in the use of language.” (Illouz, *Cold Intimacies* 28) It is no wonder then that most of the individuals present in Carver’s stories struggle to find precise and straightforward words to describe their needs. If the language—let alone their emotions—remains uncertain and practically unattainable, then communication becomes all the more complicated. In this environment, the idealized model of communication proposed by counselors cannot thrive. Illouz continues,

[The] rationalization of emotional bonds has given rise to an “emotional ontology,” or the idea that emotions can be detached from the subject for control and clarification. Such emotional ontology has made intimate relationships commensurate, that is, susceptible to depersonalization, or likely to be emptied of their particularity and to be evaluated according to abstract criteria. (*Cold Intimacies* 36)

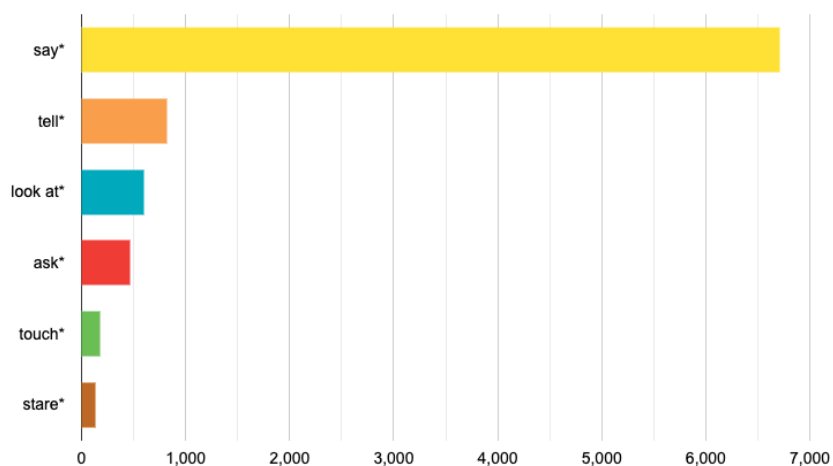
Each individual responds to different inputs and utilizes different methods to get their meaning across. For some, as has been previously noted, the spoken word can adequately transmit their thoughts; others, however, might find more comfort in the written word or other forms of nonverbal communication. In “Intimacy,” the ex-wife speaks often and resorts to a language that may seem banal, including clichés, stereotypes, idioms and repetitions. This also happens throughout Carver’s work, and though some may see it as yet another example of how inarticulate Carver’s characters seem, it can prove quite powerful. As Claire Fabre-Clark states, “Triviality, clichés and banality are represented extensively; however, they can also carry the poeticity of the

story and not be exempt from both irony and empathy.” (“The Poetics of the Banal” 174) Similarly, Amir Ayala argues that “Sometimes, it is precisely [clichés] one-dimensionality and flat generalizations that allow characters to express themselves in situations of crisis, when suddenly clichés become meaningful, personal, and concrete.” (35) When confronted with a potentially uncomfortable situation, these characters resort to whatever language they can find in order to convey their needs or worries. Thus, the allegedly objective and impersonal “therapeutic techniques of communication” (Illouz, *Cold Intimacies* 35) do not work for many, including Carver’s characters, but this does not mean they do not try to discuss their experience, emotions and expectations.

Language is crucial in Carver, not just simply—and obviously—because he is a writer, but because of the central role it takes within his stories as he describes conversations and communication in a very visual and detailed way, to the point where “even the most ordinary gestures and exchanges have transformed meanings, hidden tension, emotional depths.” (McCaffery and Gregory 98) In fact, the titles of his short story collections allude to central themes in this dissertation, such as communication, love and space. The first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* echoes Ernest Hemingway’s similar line in his story “Hills Like White Elephants,” as noted in the first chapter. Both questions come from an individual asking their partner to cease talking while using the adverb “please” more than once. In both cases, this repetition suggests irritation from the speakers, whose partners do not seem to fully understand their current plight, prompting them to request silence in an overly polite manner. In Carver’s second collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, the title alludes to what happens when people discuss love, which is what the main characters of the title story do, but it also reflects the major themes of

the collection itself. Carver's third collection, *Cathedral*, also takes its title from a short story that sees two men bond over the drawing of a cathedral. In this case, the title has more to do with the importance of spaces and buildings, which can also be connected to the author's last collection, published in the United Kingdom as *Elephant*. Like his previous collections, the title comes from a short story included in the book. "Elephant" refers to the idiom "the elephant in the room" and it suggests that there is an important issue that a group of people are not willing to discuss. While the metaphor ultimately has to do with communication—or the lack thereof—it also uses space to convey its meaning. In the United States, this collection bears the title *Where I'm Calling From*, which also connects space and communication.

Carver's obsession with communication is also visible in his narrative choices, particularly his use of dialogue tags, also known as dialogue attribution. Whether there is a third- or a first-person narrator, tags such as "he said" or "she said," for instance, abound in these stories. In fact, the word "say" (or a variation such as "says" or "said") appears more than six thousand times throughout all of Carver's short stories, and it is the dialogue tag that he resorts to the most, as can be seen in the following chart:



(Data collected from Raymond Carver's *Collected Stories*, Library of America, 2009; words followed by an asterisk indicate other forms and tenses were also taken into account.)

While Carver often makes use of tags such as “tell” or “ask” and its different conjugations, he generally favors “say.” The effect may confuse some, as it combines the usage of a simple and unobtrusive tag with constant repetition, but the point precisely is to mold dialogues without ever appearing to. Take, for instance, the following line from “Fat,” the first story from *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, which reads as follows: “Good evening, he says. Hello. Yes, he says. I think we’re ready to order now, he says.” (1) The first-person narrator tells of her experience meeting a peculiar customer at the diner where she works and employs numerous dialogue tags to emphasize the words and pace used by the man. In addition, since she tells her story to a friend, she might use dialogue tags to remind the listener that these words come from the same person. Because of the simplicity of the verb “say,” it becomes a sort of punctuation that disappears behind the story while still accentuating essential elements the narrator finds fascinating—in this case, the customer’s speech. The importance of this particular dialogue tag will be further studied in section 2.4.3., but this analysis, along with the above chart, shows how often Carver used the verb “say” compared to other verbs, and how important dialogues were for him. The chart also includes other forms of communication, such as gestures like touching or looking at someone, which also appear quite often in his stories, and will be studied in section 2.4.2.

The present section thus aims to explore communication in the stories of Raymond Carver to show how he conveyed the modern breakdown of intimacy. To that end, the analysis focuses on the couples who are together or who have recently separated in order to study the way they communicate with each other. This section first looks at the utterance of love, observing how characters use terms of endearment, insults, and the expression “I love you.” Second, it delves into the many gestures employed by Carver’s characters, such as touching, and looking, and sex. Finally,

it focuses on the use of writing as another mode of communication to converse with a previous partner in an attempt to gain the upper hand by resignifying the relationship. Although multiple scholars are referenced throughout the chapter, two notable ones are mentioned to support the arguments present in this chapter, namely, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and Julia Kristeva (1941-), two critics whose celebrated work on semiotics I have found particularly relevant to the present dissertation. Roland Barthes has been nicknamed “Kristeva’s Parisian mother” (Lechte 66) because of his influence on her works. Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (1977) proves particularly useful for the first part of this section. As the title indicates, the book is a collection of fragments in which the author muses about a variety of words, expressions or figures of speech related to love, from the point of view of a lover. The book proved immensely successful upon its release and “mark[ed] the great moment of the cultural resonance of Barthes’ writing.” (Heath 100) Julia Kristeva’s *Language. The Unknown: an Initiation into Linguistics* (1969) traces the history of language through different cultures and times, and also studies language’s multiple iterations, including gestures and writing, which will be primarily used to support the second and third parts of this section.

2.4.1. “I Love You, You Bitch”: The Utterance of Love

I will not go when she calls
 even if she says I love you,
 especially that,
 even though she swears
 and promises nothing
 but love love. (44)

Thus begins “This Word Love,” the closing poem of Carver’s 1976 chapbook *At Night the Salmon Move*. This first stanza is particularly fitting for the present section, as it calls attention to the power of the expression “I love you.” In this poem, the speaker notes how not even such an expression will make them change their mind, further emphasizing its importance by saying “especially that.” (l. 3)

Love has a central role in the stories of Raymond Carver, and for the many people who populate his tales it remains, much like the home, aspirational. Although the phrase only appears eleven times in his four major collections, when it does, it is because the characters in and out of relationships long for love and resort to saying “I love you” when desperate. In most of these stories, this expression becomes a cry for help—a last attempt to preserve whatever intimacy remains—uttered by characters whose actions do not necessarily reflect these words. When confronted with the possibility of divorce or separation, many of these characters would rather exploit this phrase before seeking tangible solutions to the issue at hand.

2.4.1.1. “A Socially Irresponsible Word”: The Exhaustion of “I Love You”

“I love you” has become ubiquitous in our society, amplified by the media and the commodification of romance. Though the expression is undoubtedly significant in a romantic setting, its overuse can lead to the emptying out of its meaning. Before writing *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, which will be discussed later, Roland Barthes published his autobiography, *Roland Barthes* (1975). In it, he discussed the expression “I love you,” saying, “Welling up from the body, irrepressible, repeated, does not this whole paroxysm of love’s declaration conceal some lack? We would not need to speak this word, if it were not to obscure . . . the failure of desire under the excess of its affirmation.” (112) The expression is thus used to compensate for an absence; Carver’s characters seem to expect that the repetition of the signifier “I love you” will somehow generate the fading signified but, as the present section will show, it is often in vain.

The phrase “I love you” is both trite and unique. Its singularity lies in the fact that each individual that utters it gives it a different and distinctive meaning resulting from their own experience and relation to the other. At the same time, its constant repetition can efface its strength. This is precisely “the contradictory status of ‘I love you’: its simultaneous circulation as both a confession and a cliché.” (Fletcher 17) Carver’s original version of “This Word Love” ends thus:

But this word *love*—
 this word grows dark, grows
 heavy and shakes itself
 and begins to eat
 through this paper.
 Listen. (44)

If the first stanza could be understood as presenting love in a positive light, the end of the poem introduces a contrast by showing the dark side of the word. Interestingly, the speaker draws attention to the fact that they are talking about the word itself, that is, the signifier, and not what it means. What consumes the paper is not love as an emotion, but the word itself. Therein lies the problem of the phrase: its constant repetition strips its depth and power away. In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Barthes elaborated on his understanding of this expression. In his entry regarding the expression "I love you," Barthes argued that "Once the first avowal has been made, "I love you" has no meaning whatever; it merely repeats in an enigmatic mode—so blank does it appear—the old message (which may not have been transmitted in these words). I repeat it exclusive of any pertinence; it comes out of the language, it divagates—where?" (147) Barthes shows the contradiction in the utterance: while the first time the words come out of the lover's mouth they can have lasting significance, afterwards they can become practically empty. Indeed, "I love you' does not conceal its contradictions with ease. Instead its compulsive reiteration is symptomatic of its inability to do so in any lasting way: anxiety engenders reiteration." (Fletcher 18) It seems as though, for those who find themselves in distress, like Carver's characters, the expression has an ephemeral quality to it; it needs to be repeated often in order for it to retain its intensity, but in doing so, its power paradoxically gets lost. While for many people the phrase serves as a celebration of their love—which they also show through their actions—others say "I love you" to atone for their inactions or the ways in which they have damaged the relationship.

Carver skillfully shows this in his own version of "One More Thing." First published in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and heavily edited by Gordon Lish, it saw the light as Carver had originally intended in *Beginners* (2009). The story features a character desperate

to hold on to his wife, who repeatedly asks him to leave the house for good. He wants to talk to her, but does not know how. The ending of the edited version reads as follows:

L.D. put the shaving bag under his arm and picked up the suitcase.

He said, "I just want to say one more thing."

But then he could not think what it could possibly be. (134)

The ending leaves L.D. in suspension, as he holds his suitcase and waits to find words that might never arrive. This character is aware that he wants to stay, or at least does not want to move on, perhaps for fear of the unknown. Thus, he hopes he can say something to put off his departure for as long as possible, but he ultimately cannot find the words, and the story ends in this way.

In Carver's original version, the ending appears much lengthier as the author allows L.D. to find the words:

L.D. put the shaving bag under his arm again and once more picked up the suitcase. "I just want to say one more thing, Maxine. Listen to me. Remember this," he said. "I love you. I love you no matter what happens. I love you too, Bea. I love you both." He stood there at the door and felt his lips begin to tingle as he looked at them for what, he believed, might be the last time. "Good-bye," he said.

"You call this love, L.D.?" Maxine said. She let go of Bea's hand. She made a fist. Then she shook her head and jammed her hands into her coat pockets. She stared at him and then dropped her eyes to something on the floor near his shoes. . . .

"Maxine!" he cried. "Maxine!"

"Is this what love is, L.D.?" she said, fixing her eyes on him. Her eyes were terrible and deep, and he held them as long as he could. (952-3)

In this case, the first difference one can notice is that Carver insists on the fact that L.D. picks up the suitcase again, implying that he has tried to pick it up before and thus denoting his unwillingness to leave. In contrast to Lish's version, this time L.D. knows what he wants to say, namely, that he loves his family, but he repeats it four times, so much so that the expression starts losing its meaning and thus becomes empty. In this sense, the emotions conveyed by both Carver and Lish are quasi-identical, with one overusing words and the other favoring silence. While Lish's version demands more reading between the lines from the reader, it is not "devoid of possible empathy for the character. We are encouraged to make inferences about L.D. wanting to say something and not being able to think of anything." (B. Clark 169) Carver eventually also chooses silence to close the story, but takes longer to get there. He allows Maxine to be inquisitive and give L.D. a chance to explain himself by asking him about love, but he remains quiet. In the end, the only words that come out of his mouth are her name, which he again repeats twice. L.D. resorts to a cliché to implore his wife to let him stay, but the expression has now become devoid of meaning and thus fails to move Maxine, who seems aware that L.D.'s actions do not support his words. At this point, "I love you" has simply become a bargaining chip. Lisa Fletcher argues that

The desire to say "I love you" is both banal and uniquely compelling. These three little words are inscribed across our culture in bold pink letters: on greeting cards, heart-shaped balloons and cuddly toys; in song lyrics ("I just called, to say ..."), literature and poetry; on film and television; in postcards and letters; in conversations imagined and actual. They are both tacky and profound. Further, [there is a] fine line between the desire to make our words match our experience and the fear that the opposite happens—that we are somehow *compelled to make our experience match the available words.* (19; emphasis added)

The only words L.D. can find are “I love you,” which he hopes will alter his and Maxine’s experience in an effort to recuperate their lost intimacy. When he sees that reiteration will not elicit any positive response from Maxine, he cries for help by calling out her name, but he is still unable to answer her as she asks, one last time, what love is. Maxine shows an awareness of their situation and of the significance of love that L.D. struggles to see. Everything he has done to disturb the house, Maxine, and their daughter negates whatever romantic language he tries to use; his words eventually fail him once he realizes the outcome of his actions. Like many other stories by Carver (both edited and unedited by Lish), the characters become silent at the end, trying to hold on to something that is long gone. Although Carver’s version is wordier and verges on the sentimental, there is a thematic continuity in his and Lish’s versions set apart mostly by a change in style.

L.D.’s words in the *Beginners* version serve as an example of Barthes’ argument that “I-love-you . . . is a socially irresponsible word” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 148) because it “is without nuance. It suppresses explanations, adjustments, degrees, scruples.” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 148) Hence the contradictory nature of language, namely the spoken word: it proves fastidiously complex yet quite simple at the same time. To communicate does not only entail uttering words. Instead, it involves a myriad of subtle—and, at times, overt—actions that, along with the spoken word, will form a cohesive whole. To say “I love you” without embodying its full meaning cannot compensate for past and present negative experiences.

The use of “I love you” as compensation for a wrong appears in another story from *Beginners* called “So Much Water So Close to Home.” Both the edited and unedited versions follow Claire, the first-person narrator of the story, who recounts how her husband Stuart and some of his friends found the body of a girl in a creek. Instead of calling the police immediately, the

men decide to enjoy their trip, since “the girl wasn’t going anywhere.” (*WWTA* 68) What seems natural to Stuart deeply unsettles Claire, who appears to begin to suspect that her husband might have played a part in the murder. In the edited version, the expression “I love you” is never uttered, but the word “love” is written twice to close a note. The first time, it comes from Stuart. Upon seeing the note, Claire narrates, “I sit in the breakfast nook and drink coffee and leave a ring on the note.” (71) Because of her discomfort with Stuart, the note, with its supposedly affectionate greeting, has become a coaster for Claire. The word “love,” coming from Stuart, is now meaningless to her. By contrast, when she writes a note for her son, she signs it “Love, Mommy” (72) and then “look[s] at the word *Love* and then [she] underline[s] it,” (72) making a point to differentiate her closing greeting from that of Stuart in order to emphasize the fact that her love for her son is real. This also appears in the unedited version. After finishing her note, she “see[s] the word *backyard*. Is it one word or two?” (72) Her sudden attention to language suggests that “the words are drained of meaning for her; she does not trust their significance; they are merely conglomerations of lines and curves, and she has no confidence that they will be meaningful to anyone else, either.” (Downes 57) Thus, since the word “love” itself might not sound genuine enough, she adds a symbol that highlights its importance.

Where the stories really differ is their ending. In the edited version, the ending reads as follows:

Back home, Stuart sits at the table with a drink of whiskey in front of him. For a crazy instant I think something’s happened to Dean.

“Where is he?” I say. “Where is Dean?”

“Outside,” my husband says.

He drains his glass and stands up. He says, "I think I know what you need."

He reaches an arm around my waist and with his other hand he begins to unbutton my jacket and then he goes on to the buttons of my blouse.

"First things first," he says.

He says something else. But I don't need to listen. I can't hear a thing with so much water going.

"That's right," I say, finishing the buttons myself. "Before Dean comes. Hurry." (74)

Here, Claire first wonders about the whereabouts of her son, worried that her husband might have done something to hurt him. The story has continuously suggested that, after learning of Stuart and his friends' (in)actions, Claire has begun to suspect him and has become terrified of him and what he might be capable of. On the other hand, the story has also shown how unaware Stuart is of the severity of the situation and the discomfort of his wife, so much so that, instead of asking her how he might help her, he assumes what she needs is sex. Defeated, and understanding that her husband's lack of self-awareness will not allow her to have a meaningful conversation with him, "Claire submits to quasi rape, bringing her identification with the deceased rape victim to its apex." (Bethea 125-6) Indeed, throughout the story, Claire has empathized with the victim to the point where she figuratively hears "so much water going," (74) the distress numbing her senses and disorienting her. In an article on Carver's minimalism in which he discusses some stories from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Daniel Just states, "Using almost exclusively very short descriptive sentences, Carver arranges these into unusually short paragraphs. Moreover, because these sentences depict only mundane trivia, their meaning and purpose . . . remain unclear." (304) Just describes Carver's style as "banal" (313) multiple times and laments that, in

some cases, “as the story closes with no sentiments or explanations supplied, the meaning or ‘message’ of the story remain unclear.” (313) However, meanings do not always have to be clear, and explanations do not have to be provided for a story to have significance. In addition, “So Much Water So Close to Home,” like many of the stories in the same collection, does have a clear meaning. It draws a poignant portrait of solitude and violence, presenting the harrowing story of a woman who feels abandoned, misunderstood, and lost in her marriage.

In the *Beginners* version, the ending allows Claire to have more agency over her body as she rejects Stuart’s advances, saying “Not now, please” first and then insisting by adding “Stop, stop, stop . . . I stamp on his toes.” (882) While Stuart becomes violent at first, he eventually “sobs” (882) and leaves the house. The next day, he calls and says “Honey, how are you? I’ll be home early, I love you. Did you hear me? I love you, I’m sorry, I’ll make it up to you. Good-bye, I have to run now.” (882) At home, once again, he says “I love you.” (883) Claire does not respond nor does she seem to be moved by his words, understanding that they do not make up for his actions. In this case, “I love you” becomes a vapid apology; Stuart has also sent Claire “flowers, red and yellow chrysanthemums.” (882) The combination of both almost feels like a tacky romantic comedy cliché, where Stuart attempts to win back Claire by using formulaic gestures of love instead of trying to address her discomfort, which would prove a more genuine demonstration of love. In fact, the last words of the story read, “He says something else and I listen and nod slowly. I feel sleepy. Then I wake up and say, For God’s sake, Stuart, she was only a child.” (883) Stuart’s words have done nothing to assuage Claire’s pain, because his actions have not reflected his words. Roland Barthes argued that “the very task of love and of language is to give to one and the same phrase inflections which will be forever new, thereby creating an unheard-of speech in which the sign’s

form is repeated but never is signified; in which the speaker and the lover finally triumph over the dreadful *reduction* which language . . . transmit to all our affects.” (Roland Barthes 114) Stuart fails at this task. Here, he does not create anything new; “the sign’s form is repeated” *and* signified, the speech having been heard of many times before. Language here *is* reduced to the point where it becomes empty by turning into a cliché—one that, as opposed to Amir Ayala’s contention that clichés can “become meaningful, personal, and concrete,” (35) does not carry any significance beyond an apology, but even this seems pointless when Stuart has already uttered “I’m sorry.” (882) Although sometimes clichés “allow characters to express themselves in situations of crisis,” (Ayala 35) which can be seen in “Intimacy,” Stuart’s words fall flat. Perhaps he does not know what else to do to make Claire feel better, but the story shows that she has tried to talk to him repeatedly while he has been evasive or in disagreement with her views. Thus, Stuart’s use of the phrase “I love you” negates its alleged intended meaning.

In the *Beginners* version of “Gazebo,” Carver grants Duane more linguistic awareness. While in the edited version, after discussing his and his wife’s future together, he says “Holly, honey, I love you,” (21) the unedited version reads, “I go, ‘Holly, honey, I love you.’ But I don’t know what else to say or what else I can offer under the circumstances.” (774) In both versions, right before he utters these words, Duane admits to the reader that he is still thinking about the woman that he has had an affair with. Like Stuart, Duane uses this formula as a form of apology, but his actions have not shown the love he professes; still, the original version allows him to show how he understands he might need to add more, but he does not know how. “I love you” becomes a plea for Holly to stay, but using such a traditionally potent phrase in this context verges on the insult, considering how, once again, the actions do not match the words. In fact, Holly replies that

she is “moving to Nevada” (21) more than once, believing that the only other option for her is to “kill [her]self.” (21) When Duane is taken aback by her words, he says her name, to which she answers “Holly *nothing!*” (21) Like the examples mentioned above, Holly does not seem moved by Duane’s words because she recognizes the emptiness behind them. In all these cases, and when confronted with an uncertain future, these men can only resort to a formula whose significance gets lost through overuse. They turn to platitudes or clichés, which are essentially “a ritual expression.” (Haiman 139) The problem is, as previously noted, that “an often repeated ritual . . . can pall. With staleness very often comes a reduction of the ritual’s formal manifestation and . . . a diminution of its meaning.” (Haiman 139) Carver thus destabilizes the traditionally romantic expression “I love you,” which no longer offers solace or comfort.

In “Fever,” a story from *Cathedral*, Eileen has left Carlyle, who now finds himself alone with their children. As he wanders around the house, he thinks about her and admits that if she came back “he would say, ‘I never want to see your face again. I’ll never forgive you for this, you crazy bitch.’ Then, a minute later, ‘Come back, sweetheart, please. I love you and need you. The kids need you, too.’” (150) In this case, “I love you” stands for “I need you,” thus its utterance feels redundant. This, like the previous examples, stands in stark contrast to Barthes argument that “[I-love-you] has a meaning only at the moment I utter it; there is no other information in it but its immediate saying: no reservoir, no armory of meaning. Everything is in the speaking of it: it is a “formula,” but this formula corresponds to no ritual; the situations in which I say I-love-you cannot be classified: I-love-you is irrepressible and unforeseeable.” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 148-9) In the majority of Carver’s stories, whenever “I love you” is said, it has become a formula that corresponds to a ritual and one can easily discern the intention with which the phrase is uttered.

Most of the time, it is a man who uses the expression in a context that suggests desperation; whether the man has hurt his partner or feels like he has been wronged, as is Carlyle's case, ultimately they utilize these words to convey their terror in the face of uncertainty. "I love you" no longer denotes a love of the other, but a preservation of the self. L.D., Stuart, and Duane, among others, cannot conceive of a life without the security their partners offer and do not want to venture out into the world, much less on their own.

One final example of relevance appears in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," the title story of the 1983 collection. The story follows a group of friends who spend the evening drinking and trying to define love. One of them, Terri, has previously been in an abusive relationship with a man named Ed that she considers an example of love. The story reads,

Terri said the man she lived with before she lived with Mel loved her so much he tried to kill her. Then Terri said, "He beat me up one night. He dragged me around the living room by my ankles. He kept saying, 'I love you, I love you, you bitch.' He went on dragging me around the living room. My head kept knocking on things." Terri looked around the table.

"What do you do with love like that?" (114)

Here, the use of "I love you" does not follow an injury to the relationship; instead, the harm—in this case, physical and emotional—and the phrase occur simultaneously. Terri notes how Ed repeatedly said "I love you" while hurting her. In addition, he adds "bitch" to the expression, thus forming a paradoxical utterance. Not only is there violence taking place while love is allegedly professed, but the repetition of "I love you" along with the addition of the insult "bitch" invalidates its meaning. However, Terri seems to believe the utterance to be genuine and spends a significant portion of the story trying to convince the others that her relationship with Ed was a

valid example of romantic love. Terri has embraced a narrative of romance in which love and violence coexist, a coping mechanism adopted by many people—particularly women—who experience domestic violence. According to Julia T. Wood, this can happen for a variety of reasons, including the way romance is presented in media: “As the media and other cultural institutions reproduce the gender and romance narratives, women and men learn the roles culture prescribes, or allows, for them. Women are taught to be accommodating and to seek and please men; men are taught to be dominating and to regard women as inferior.” (Wood 242) Though her lived reality proves violent, Terri seeks to normalize it by seeing it as an obvious—but also extreme—example of love. She does this not only by invoking traditional gender norms but also by attempting to rationalize chaos. Indeed, “when our experiences do not readily make sense, when chaos intrudes in our lives, we are compelled to find some way to generate coherence—or the illusion of it.” (Wood 242) Therefore, while the other characters of the story may disagree with her, Terri continues to defend her belief that Ed’s violence was proof of his love, especially considering the fact that he repeats “I love you.” Instead of seeing the emptiness in his words, she convinces herself that it was an act of love, and even tries to convince the others. She tells Mel, “He did love me though, Mel. Grant me that. . . . That’s all I’m asking. He didn’t love me the way you love me. I’m not saying that, but he loved me. You can grant me that, can’t you?” (116) If Terri and the others can agree that Ed’s behavior resulted from love, then she might be able to more readily accept or find meaning in her experience. It will also allow her to feel worthy in a social and individual context, since “in modernity, love has become central to the constitution of worth.” (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 119) Feeling as though she has been loved despite the violent nature of her and Ed’s relationship and receiving external validation proves essential for Terri’s sense of self.

“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” is perhaps the only story by Carver in which a character responds positively to an empty utterance of love. While the other women ignore or refuse their partners’ vapid declarations of love, Terri clings to it in order to confirm the romantic nature of her relationship. None of the other characters in the story agree with her, but they also do not openly disagree, except for Mel, who says “That’s not love, and you know it.” (115) Nick and Laura avoid positioning themselves by arguing that they would have to know more about the story, even though Terri’s description was quite clear, and by stating that it is not their place to judge. Arthur Bethea suggests,

With Laura’s remark “But who can judge anyone else’s situation?,” the text suggests that no one can know “the particulars” of another’s experience because experience is inextricably bound to consciousness, which is unique and, to some extent, unknowable. To judge Ed and Terri’s situation, we would have to know their experience, but to know this, we would have to possess their consciousnesses, which, of course, we cannot; hence the complete truth of their experience, and of anyone’s, is unknowable. (94-5)

Indeed, no one can ever fully understand what someone else is going through, but Terri’s account of her experience gives enough details that could allow them to question its connection to romantic love, like Mel does. What Laura’s remark does suggest is that, first, she does not dare position herself, and second, that the notion of love proves decidedly difficult to define, as the title of the story suggests. Carver’s characters tell each other stories about what they consider examples of romantic love, but never fully manage to agree on or reach a conclusion. The story “speaks less of love than of the inadequacy of language to convey those monumental abstractions that spring from ‘unbridled emotions.’ Even the title suggests a practice of displacement.” (Hathcock 32) “I love

you” cannot fully convey the intense and complex emotions one feels while in love, but, when uttered with intention and when it does not contradict the speaker’s actions, it can prove undoubtedly significant. In Carver’s stories, however, characters generally employ this phrase—often in vain—in an attempt to mitigate the pain they have caused. Carver thus unsettles the most traditional utterance of love in order to act as a parallel for the progressive breakdown or end of these character’s relationships. This story is, therefore,

a narrative about unsuccessful narratives—about the uselessness of striving to know ourselves better through talking about love or through telling stories about love. The two married couples who attempt to converse throughout the story lack the support of shared mythological context; they lack the confidence of traditional symbols or meanings and the belief that dialogue, though difficult, is possible. Their words, their physical touches, their terms of endearment simply do not get through. (Downes 58)

Downes separates “terms of endearment” from “words,” thereby emphasizing their significance, particularly within the context of intimate relationships. Aside from saying “I love you,” another traditional utterance of love is the term of endearment, which Carver’s characters use very frequently, especially towards their partners or ex-partners. These words commonly suggest “tenderness and intimacy,” (Morton 49) but they are subverted in these stories so that they lose their original meaning.

2.4.1.2. From “Honey” to “Son of a Bitch”: The Reconfiguration of Terms of Endearment

Terms of endearment, also known as hypocorisms or pet names, are vocatives that generally express fondness. They are rarely used with this intention in the stories of Carver; when they are, it

is often because the characters are trying to recall a dwindling intimacy and reestablish a faltering bond. Thus, they utilize hypocorisms as tools to reconnect with their partners, not necessarily as an expression of their love. Although they might still love their partners, they use terms of endearment not out of affection but out of necessity. Their attempts to reconcile with their spouses have to do with the fact that, most of the time, these are individuals whose relationships are crumbling and who cannot fathom becoming single because they associate it with loneliness, uncertainty and worthlessness. In “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” Ralph finally gets home with a bruise on his face after a long night out. He locks himself in the bathroom and does not want to come out. Thus, his wife Marian, who seems quite agitated after learning from her children that he looks hurt, tries to open the door and asks him to do it when she fails. She says, “Ralph! . . . Ralph, let me in, please, darling. Ralph? Please let me in, darling. I want to see you. Ralph? Please!” (179) She switches between using his first name and a term of endearment throughout the exchange; interestingly, Ralph only replies after hearing his name, not after a term of endearment. Perhaps the word does not get through after what he has experienced and the feeling of betrayal overcoming him. Now, “darling” no longer denotes affection for him. Marian uses this hypocorism to appeal to their waning intimacy, trying to recall the apparent domestic bliss introduced at the beginning of the story. Thus, neither of them understand “darling” as a term of endearment because it is no longer endearing; it denotes either desperation for Marian or betrayal for Ralph. After Ralph tells Marian to “go away,” (180) she insists: “I can’t go away. Please, Ralph, open the door for a minute, darling. I just want to see you. Ralph. Ralph? The children said you were hurt. What’s wrong, darling? Ralph?” (180) This does not move him; instead it motivates him to utter the title question, the repetition of “please” emphasizing his attempts to stay calm and his need for silence. Like “I love

you,” “please,” “darling” and “Ralph” are repeated so often that their meaning becomes blurry and their strength diminishes. Michael Dango argues that “the repetitions not only fill up rather than prepare quiet, they are also designed to support and sustain the domesticity of the scene, pushing out the memory of the outside world.” (80-1) Ralph’s venture into the outside has proven traumatic and violent, thus he returns home in search of tranquility. However, his domestic environment has also been destabilized by virtue of Marian’s past actions and Ralph’s violence towards her. The use of “darling” in this context cannot promote intimacy nor domesticity, especially given the uncertain future of these two individuals; although Ralph forced Marian to confess, they have not yet discussed where to go from there. Therefore, these repetitions do not necessarily “sustain the domesticity of the scene,” as Dango suggests. However, it is true that the repetitions prevent that which Ralph is asking for, namely, silence. Marian fails to honor his wishes. Although she leaves after he utters “Will you please be quiet, please?” (180), she eventually comes back and says, “I have a nice breakfast on the stove for you, darling, when you’re through with your bath. Ralph?” (180) Again, Ralph asks for silence: “Just be quiet, please.” (180) As Dango explains, “by ‘quiet,’ Ralph really means a cleansing of noise and a purification of space.” (81) Ralph needs to be alone, in silence, to process everything that has happened to him throughout the previous day and night. The destabilization of his intimate and domestic environment has prompted him to reconsider his life and to journey into the outside world, which has proven too overwhelming and hostile. Eventually, Marian abandons the spoken word, and the story finishes with them communicating through the physical touch, which seems much more purifying for Ralph, as shall be discussed in the following section.

“Are These Actual Miles?” follows Leo as he waits for his wife Toni to come home from selling their car, since they need the money. The story depicts Toni as assertive and confident, quite the opposite of Leo, which is why she carries out the transaction. The first line of the story, narrated through Leo’s point of view, suggests that he is in control by noting that “the car needs to be sold in a hurry, and Leo sends Toni out to do it.” (150) However, soon the narration reveals that Toni makes the decisions; her demeanor and the way she talks to Leo shows the unbalanced nature of the relationship. Leo’s insecurity overwhelms him as Toni spends the evening at a restaurant with a man, trying to sell him their car, and does not come back until dawn. He drinks incessantly while he waits for her to come back, fearful that she will sleep with the man in order to guarantee the sale. This is ironic, since he himself once brought a woman home while Toni and their kids were away. His insecurity and sense of inadequacy does not only have to do with Toni’s actions but with his own; he understands he has failed his family and quite possibly himself. As Kirk Nessel notes, “Leo’s failure underscores his feelings of impotence, his sense of himself as a zero in both the sexual and the material realm.” (22) The dynamics between Toni and him highlight his need to be seen and recognized as worthy, but both his past and present actions prevent that from happening. This increases his insecurity and leaves him lost and confused. According to Eva Illouz,

In modern romantic relations, recognition is both crucial and complex because worth is performatively established, because this process has become highly individualized, and because of the ensuing multiplication, and thus unpredictability, of criteria for choosing a mate. This in turn makes love the terrain par excellence of ontological insecurity and uncertainty at the very same time that it becomes one of the main sites for the experience of (and the demand for) recognition. (*Why Love Hurts* 123)

As Leo drinks and contemplates his life, he becomes increasingly agitated but does not act. Instead, he waits restlessly. At one point, “He listens to the traffic on the highway and considers whether he should go to the basement, stand on the utility sink, and hang himself with his belt. He understands he is willing to be dead.” (153) Myles Weber considers this an “overwrought, melodramatic passage” (66) but many characters in the stories of Raymond Carver find themselves in depressive states that they can rarely identify. Leo knows he is miserable and the narration suggests some causes, such as the family’s bankruptcy and his relationship with Toni. His use of terms of endearment to attempt to gain Toni’s attention and his inability to do so underscore his sense of worthlessness. The following conversation shows Leo’s increased desperation and desire for Toni to recognize him:

“Where are you, honey?” he says slowly, gently.

“We’re at this restaurant,” she says, her voice strong, bright.

“Honey, which restaurant?” he says. He puts the heel of his hand against his eye and pushes.

“Downtown someplace . . . Everything is all right, we’re almost finished, then he’s going to bring me home.”

“Honey?” he says. He holds the receiver against his ear and rocks back and forth, eyes closed. “Honey?”

“I have to go . . . I wanted to call. Anyway, guess how much?”

“Honey,” he says.

“Six and a quarter . . . I told him everything. I think I had to.”

“Honey,” Leo says.

“What?” she says.

“Please, honey,” Leo says. (154-5)

Everytime Leo speaks, he uses the hypocorism “honey” to try to appeal to his and Toni’s lost intimacy. It also seems as though he is attempting to control his distress, so he speaks “slowly, gently” and moves in ways that soothe him. The term of endearment might serve to abate his anxiety as well, thus its purpose is twofold: it acts as a reminder of Leo and Toni’s once loving relationship, and it prevents Leo from losing his temper. By saying “honey,” Leo hopes to make Toni notice him and recognize him, but its constant repetition, much like in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” divests the word from its endearing function. Toni ignores Leo’s pleas, which shows the inefficacy of the term when used in such a context.

In *The Lover’s Tongue: A Merry Romp Through the Language of Love and Sex* (2003), Mark Morton claims that terms of endearment are mostly “verbal precursors of sex,” (49) often being uttered before or during intercourse. This happens only once in the stories of Raymond Carver, namely, in “Neighbors.” After Bill spends longer than usual at the neighbors’ flat, Arlene asks him what happened. He answers evasively and “went over to her and touched her breasts. ‘Let’s go to bed, honey.’” (7) This utterance conveys intimacy in a fairly straightforward way, and acts as a way for Bill to appeal to Arlene’s desire. A similar occurrence seems to happen in “Jerry and Molly and Sam.” The main character, Al, goes to Jill’s place, with whom he is having an affair. Their initial interaction and language suggests that they are going to have sex. As he arrives there, “They embraced clumsily and he kissed her on the cheek.” (117) She tells him, “Sit down, honey” and asks, “What would you like, honey?” (117) When he does not answer, she repeats the question, this time prefacing it by a somewhat belittling form of address, particularly in this context: “Poor baby,

what would you like?” (117-8) Eventually, she sits on his lap and says “You come on over to the bed, baby. I’ll give you what you like.” (118) Her use of “poor baby” clashes with the other terms of endearment used in this situation because they all signal to the intimacy these two characters share. What is more, their actions support that connection, as “She pulled his face to hers and kissed him on the forehead and then the lips. She turned slightly on his lap.” (118) However, here Carver breaks the reader’s expectations—even though the use of “poor baby” might have subtly foreshadowed it—by completely changing the direction of the scene. The moment Jill shifts in her place, “She held his head in place in her strong fingers. With her thumbnails she was squeezing out a blackhead to the side of his nose.” (118) Now, what seemed like a potentially sexual encounter turns to one in which Jill belittles Al by treating him like a child. The fact that Jill feels comfortable enough to do this does denote a kind of intimacy, but the way she talks to Al shows how she infantilizes him. Al does not seem particularly responsive to Jill’s advances when she first offers him drinks and uses “honey,” thus she stops using it and turns to “baby” instead. Although this term of endearment is favored by many people in relationships to address their partner, in this context it does not indicate any kind of romantic intimacy. Thus, in “Jerry and Molly and Sam” Carver “displaces the expectation of sexual activity with a marvelously grotesque, absurd reversal,” (Bethea 76) and he cleverly uses terms of endearment to guide the reader towards this outcome.

To say that the use of terms of endearment almost always leads to sex (Morton 49) seems quite reductive; in general, these words can be used in different situations between people who have intimate relationships (Hill 90). In his stories, Carver often takes the familiarity of these terms and renders it uncanny. Instead of using hypocorisms to denote affection, Carver’s characters sometimes use them as a way of hedging the potentially violent outcome of the various situations

they find themselves in. When a situation seems uncomfortable or might lead to a confrontation, they preface or end their statements with words like “honey,” “sweetie” or “dear,” among others, to lessen the blow. This is not necessarily done to protect the other but to protect the self; this is evident in the dynamics displayed by Mel and Terri in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.” The story presents two distinct couples: Mel and Terri, and Nick and Laura. The first couple has dated for much longer than the second, which shows in the way they interact with each other. Mel and Terri dominate the conversation, speaking much more than Nick and Laura, and tend to bicker as well. The first couple can thus be linked to the spoken word, while “Nick and Laura, who do not quarrel and seem more in love, are conversely associated with touch and human warmth.” (Bethea 95) Indeed, Nick and Laura never utter “I love you” nor do they use terms of endearment to refer to each other, but their gestures draw attention to their intimacy. At one point, Nick “touched the back of Laura’s hand. She gave [him] a quick smile. [He] picked up Laura’s hand . . . [He] held her.” (116) By contrast, Mel and Terri rarely touch, but they use terms of endearment often and say “I love you” only to mitigate their words and the tension between them. For instance, Terri tells Mel, “sometimes you’re just too much. But I love you, hon.” (123) She combines both the phrase “I love you” and the hypocoristic “hon” in order to palliate her previous statement. This occurs often throughout the story as Mel, who could be described as “cacophonous,” (Monti, “From ‘Beginners’” 40) takes over the conversation, which exasperates Terri. It begins when he berates her after she recounts her experience with Ed, using it as an example of romantic love. Mel says, “My God, don’t be silly. That’s not love, and you know it.” (115) Upon noticing Terri’s expression, he adds, “Terri, hon, don’t look that way.” (115) and keeps insisting on the fact that what Terri and Ed experienced was not love, adding, “That’s all I’m saying, honey.” (115) Mel

seems to have realized how his words have affected Terri, and avoids confrontation by using the term of endearment “honey” and playing down his previous rudeness. However, by this point Terri has become frustrated with Mel and uses the same technique as him. She interrupts one of his tirades to ask him, “Are you getting drunk? Honey? Are you drunk?” (121) to which Mel replies, “Honey, I’m just talking.” (121) Anytime Terri makes a remark that seems to upset Mel, she uses a term of endearment to abate the tension. Throughout the story, she says, “Sweetie, I’m not criticizing,” (121) “Go on with your story, hon. I was only kidding,” (125) and “Don’t always be so serious, sweetie. Can’t you take a joke?” (126) Whenever either Terri or Mel disparage the other’s arguments or beliefs, they use terms of endearment to minimize both their words and intentions, thereby managing to be critical of the other while preventing open confrontation.

In the same way that Carver changed the meaning of “I love you” to signify, for instance, “I’m sorry,” he unsettles traditional meanings of hypocorisms to the point where they no longer denote intimacy or fondness. This is why Nick and Laura do not need to use them, since their relationship is quite new and loving, from what the story suggests. Terri and Mel, on the other hand, use them constantly to counteract the increasing tension and hostility between them. Similar instances appear in other stories, such as “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” In it, Ralph asks Marian about an extra-marital relationship he suspects she has had. When she tries to evade Ralph’s questions, he insists by saying, “Look, honey, it *has* been brought up now . . . and it *was* four years ago, so there’s no reason at all I can think of that we *can’t* talk about it now if we *want* to.” (168) The use of italics to add emphasis underscores Ralph’s urgency and the general sense of menace that pervades the scene. The words themselves point to his apparent nonchalance, and the use of “honey” to preface the disguised request portrays him as calm, collected and reasonable. In reality,

however, he can barely contain his rage, and despite Marian's initial refusal to discuss the matter, he eventually forces her to confess. Thus, Ralph uses "honey" to downplay his anxiety and anger.

One final example of the use of terms of endearment to hedge hostile statements appears in "What's in Alaska?" (*WYPBQ?*) This story also shows how sometimes Carver's characters employ these words in order to express annoyance at the other, and it brings forth the issue of reciprocity, or the lack thereof. Throughout the story, Mary infantilizes Jack from the very beginning, and uses hypocorisms in a condescending way; Jack, on the other hand, seems uncomfortable around Mary and never uses any terms of endearment, nor does he speak much. Alette Hill posits,

Even in intimate relationships, terms of endearment are not necessarily used in a reciprocal fashion. Some men use "dear" and "darling" only when angry or irritated, that is, with a sarcastic tone of voice. It is quite possible to have an intimate relationship . . . that is neither reciprocal nor mutual, where the man remains a Self and the woman, an Other. (Hill 94)

In "What's in Alaska?" the opposite happens. Mary, the woman, others Jack, the man, and seems quite paternalistic and controlling. When Jack arrives home after having bought a new pair of shoes, Mary tells him, "You bought some new shoes . . . Let me see." (58) After giving him an order, she notes how she does not "like the color" and eventually "looked at his shoes again and sucked her cheeks." (58) She finishes with one more command: "Take your bath." (58) At no point has Mary acted kindly towards Jack; instead, she has treated him like a child that has misbehaved. Although her attitude improves later, her initial remarks have dampened Jack's mood, who will not look particularly comfortable at their friends Helen and Carl's place later. Overall, the story emphasizes the distance between Jack and Mary, and hints at the fact that she and Carl are having an affair. Jack has become an Other and a stranger to Mary. It is no wonder then that when terms of endearment

are used by Mary, they suggest annoyance from her part. Hill further explains that “Between strangers . . . terms of endearment imply a judgment of incompetence on the part of the target.” (Hill 90-91) Indeed, most of the times Mary uses a hypocorism when addressing Jack, it conveys exasperation and highlights the tension between them. For instance, at one point Mary says, “Isn’t it funny . . . You start with the desserts first and then you move on to the main course.” (64) Jack agrees, saying, “It’s funny,” (64) to which Mary replies, “Are you being sarcastic, honey?” (64) Mary knows Jack is, in her words, “on a little bumner tonight,” (60) and her words do not help him feel better. In fact, when he asks her why she said that, she replies, “I was just teasing, honey.” (60) Instead of apologizing, she palliates her statement by using a term of endearment, but its use also suggests sarcasm from her part. The exchanges between Jack and Mary highlight their discomfort with each other as well as their lack of intimacy. Interestingly, Carver often shows couples struggling to have a natural and fluent conversation; by contrast, conversations between strangers tend to seem more thoughtful and productive. In the words of Amir Ayala,

Paradoxically, talks between strangers show occasional flickers of inexplicable, deep understanding, while talks between couples are often stiff and polite, or the speakers talk past each other. This may lead to the conclusion that a spouse is often a stranger and a stranger might be more understanding than a spouse. (Ayala 26)

Ayala’s statement aptly describes Carver’s rendition of intimacy. Throughout his collections, houses become non-places, couples become strangers, and communication often leaves matters open, failing to bring about resolution.

The only time Mary utters a hypocorism endearingly is when she addresses Carl. When Helen asks her husband for a popsicle, Mary says, “I’ll have one too, honey.” (65) Although she

immediately corrects her alleged mistake, her attitude towards Carl throughout the evening suggests she does have genuine feelings for him. Similarly, in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” Mel tells Laura, “Laura, if I didn’t have Terri and if I didn’t love her so much, and if Nick wasn’t my best friend, I’d fall in love with you. I’d carry you off, honey.” (126) The circumstances are different, and this story does not hint at the possibility of Mel and Laura having an affair, but in both cases the word “honey” conveys affection and intimacy, which it rarely, if ever, does between Mary and Jack or Terri and Mel. Therefore, Carver unsettles intimate language that no longer expresses love. In these stories, terms of endearment have lost their connotations of fondness and warmth, especially between couples, and now function only to appease tension, to recall a dying connection, or to belittle the other.

The last story I wish to discuss regarding the remapping of terms of endearment is “Intimacy,” from Carver’s final collection. In this story, the use of vocatives and hypocorisms from the ex-wife’s part accentuates the ambiguity and complexity of their relationship, and the introduction of insults to signal affection further subverts the language of love. Interestingly, the ex-wife never refers to the first-person narrator by his name, which remains unknown to the reader, thereby increasing the pervading ambiguity in the text. She first calls him “buster,” (46) a disrespectful and condescending form of address. Her monologue is initially hostile, so it is not surprising that she uses aggressive terms that highlight the distance between them, namely “son of a bitch,” (46) “mister,” (47, 49) “brother” (48) and “buddy boy.” (50) All of these insults belittle the narrator, who quietly listens to her tirade. Although she speaks most of the time, using idioms and repetitions often, she seems more straightforward than many other characters in Carver’s stories, particularly from previous collections. She initially employs a myriad of “insults and criticisms,”

which, “when they are directed at the other, are typically treated as a special, and potentially more aggressive (than, say, sarcasm or irony) form of disparagement.” (Korobov 279) Her most violent line, however, is preceded by a prototypically romantic term of endearment: “Honey, no offence, but sometimes I think I could shoot you and watch you kick.” (50) In this context, using a pet name instead of an insult sounds even more condescending and insulting than her previous forms of address, and shows the distance between these two characters. No longer together and no longer intimate, they have now become strangers. Thus, the ex-wife uses “honey” like Mary does in “What’s in Alaska?”, namely, in a way that suggests she views her ex-husband as utterly inept. The only time she uses “honey” in a more endearing way happens towards the end of the story, when, after listening to her in silence, the narrator suddenly gets on his knees and holds the hem of her dress without saying a word. This gesture, which shall be examined in the next section, softens his ex-wife, whose language becomes kinder, including the vocatives she employs. Interestingly, the first few words she uses to address him are insults: “She is still for a minute. But in a minute she says, Hey, it’s all right, stupid. You’re so dumb, sometimes. Get up now. I’m telling you to get up. Listen, it’s okay. I’m over it now.” (51) They share a brief intimate moment in which both of them seem more vulnerable than before, which allows the woman to let go of her justified anger and understand what her ex-husband means to her now: nothing. Upon seeing the narrator’s immobility, she continues: “She says, Did you hear what I said? You have to go now. Hey, stupid. Honey, I said I forgive you. And I even reminded you about the knife thing. I can’t think what else I can do now. You got it made in the shade, baby. Come on now, you have to get out of here. Get up. That’s right. You’re still a big guy, aren’t you.” (52) The ex-wife repeats the insult “stupid” but uses it, like the first time, as a term of endearment. It conveys the tenderness and pity the narrator’s

gesture has roused in his ex-wife, who now sees him almost like a helpless child. Indeed, insults can sometimes be used to express affection within intimate relationships, and even though these two characters are no longer together and have become strangers, this brief moment has momentarily rekindled their intimacy. Thus, the ex-wife uses “conventionalized (ritualized) insults as a mechanism for stressing solidarity.” (Brown and Levenson 229) She no longer says “son of a bitch,” and instead switches to a lighter, more playful insult like “stupid,” and it is the only one she uses in this context. As opposed to the insults used at the beginning, the two uses of the word “stupid” “(counterintuitively) function as discursive resources for creating affiliation.” (Korobov 280) In this particular story, terms of endearment and insults are quite malleable and can swap meaning depending on the context, with the first no longer conveying fondness and the second suggesting complicity. Most of the time, however, Carver’s stories subvert the intimate quality of hypocorisms by stripping them of their positive and affectionate connotations.

Mark Morton argues that “the difference in attitude that underlies the distinction between terms of endearment and terms of objectification is perhaps best represented by the words that precede them: if terms of endearment are usually preceded by *oh* or *my*, then terms of objectification are usually preceded by *a* or *you*.” (55) In Carver’s stories, hypocorisms are never preceded by “oh”; this only happens with exclamations that convey worry and frustration, such as “oh God.” In addition, the possessive “my” only appears with a hypocorism in “Signals,” (*WYYPBQ?*) in which one character calls her partner “my darling,” (160) and in “Cathedral,” from the collection of the same title. In it, Robert, a friend of the narrator’s wife, addresses her as “my dear” multiple times (202, 205, 206) while she insists on using his name: “You look distinguished, Robert,’ she said. ‘Robert,’ she said. ‘Robert, it’s just so good to see you.’” (202) Her insistence on

calling him by his name instead of using a term of endearment could suggest that there is an imbalance in their relationship. Indeed, “when address forms are used non-reciprocally, the implication is that the speaker and addressee are not equals.” (Wolfson and Manes 90) Still, the wife wants him to feel comfortable and seems to have a bond with him, which frustrates the narrator, who is initially jealous and prejudiced. In any case, this is one of the few instances in Carver’s stories in which a term of endearment expresses affection, and it happens between two people who are just friends.

On the other hand, insults appear often in Carver’s work, and they are generally preceded by “you,” as Morton suggested. The most common ones are “bitch,” uttered by men when referring to women, and, conversely, “son of a bitch.” In “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” Ed called Terri “you bitch,” (114) while in “Fever,” Carlyle called his ex-partner “you crazy bitch.” (150) Women call their partners or ex-partners “you son of a bitch” in “Are These Actual Miles?” (156), “Gazebo” (21) and “Intimacy.” (46) Insults therefore retain their hostile meaning, with a few exceptions, while terms of endearment and other traditional expressions of love, such as “I love you,” are stripped of their original meaning and become instilled with tension. Kirk Nessel argued that “in Carver’s early stories . . . love is a darkly unknowable and irreversible force, a form of sickness not only complicating but dominating the lives of characters. Characters are alternately bewildered, enraged, suffocated, diminished, isolated, and entrapped by love, though . . . rarely do they actually recognize their individual circumstances as such.” (Nessel 10) However, a more fitting explanation would perhaps be that Carver’s characters are negatively affected not by love itself but by their perception of what love should be, much like they do with the idea of home. The divide between what they have and what they think they need taints their experience. They

look for a place to call home, ignoring their own house, and look for lovers outside of marriage in hopes that this time it will work out. They think the solution to their troubles lies outside of themselves, like Al, the narrator of “Jerry and Molly and Sam,” who abandons the family dog assuming that it will improve his relationship with his wife. Alternatively, they believe that they can force such a complex emotion like love itself, like Emily in “How About This?”, who tells her partner, “Harry, we have to love each other . . . We’ll just have to love each other,” she said. (140) As Eva Illouz explains, “imagination has changed and raised the thresholds of women’s and men’s expectations about the desirable attributes of a partner and/or about the prospects of shared life. It has therefore become aligned to the experience of disappointment, a notorious handmaid of imagination and, especially in the realm of love, a major source of suffering.” (*Why Love Hurts* 215) In Carver’s stories, terms of endearment are vehicles for such disappointment. No longer carrying their original meaning, they now express the individual discontent about failing relationships. Therefore, Carver remaps traditional romantic expressions in order to convey the contemporary breakdown of intimacy.

2.4.2. “Searching the Other’s Body”: The Discourse of Gestures

In the book *Scenes of Intimacy: Reading, Writing and Theorizing Contemporary Literature* (2013), Jennifer Cooke explains how

popular discourses seek to rationalize, simplify, categorize and “manage” complex emotions and intimacies, often within a moral paradigm which stresses responsibility to oneself and communication with others. While this may initially sound a boon, critics have stressed how such an approach can lead to relational calcification, where intimacy adheres to set but stultifying patterns. (4)

As previously seen, the therapeutic approach to romantic communication has placed a particularly high value on the spoken word and the clarification of meaning. This, as Cooke suggests, may sound beneficial, but it inevitably brings about the paradoxical standardization of intimacy, to which very few can conform. If each individual behaves in a unique way, then it follows that their approach to intimacy and romantic love should be unique as well. To expect them to communicate clearly and by using only the spoken word negates the many other ways in which humans express themselves, and assumes a complete understanding of the self and of one’s own needs from each person’s part.

To communicate encompasses much more than the use of the spoken word. As semiotician Julia Kristeva puts it, “language is a chain of articulated *sounds* but also a network of written *marks* (a writing), or a play of *gestures* (a gesturality).” (6) The study of gestural semiotics gained prominence throughout the 1970s (Nöth 387), with kinesics in particular rapidly becoming a transdisciplinary field that explores the significance of nonverbal communication in linguistics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, literature, and many other disciplines. It is divided into

different branches that analyze distinct forms of body language, including, for instance, haptics (the study of touching), oculusics (the study of eye behavior), or proxemics (the study of how space and distance affect communication). Research into this field shows how “gesturality is a communication system that transmits a message, and . . . it can be considered a language or a signifying system.” (Kristeva 303) Such a field proves complicated to study due to its wide array of branches, inevitably compounded by the fact that gestures are polysemic. However, there exist culturally accepted forms of nonverbal communication that most people in any given society employ and understand in similar ways (Guerrero and Floyd 87). For instance, in many places, “several forms of touch serve to convey affection, including hugging, kissing, caressing another’s face, engaging in other adaptors such as grooming behaviors, holding hands, touching another’s arm or leg, and even engaging in sexual intercourse.” (Guerrero and Floyd 88-9) Thus, despite the gesture’s possible lexical ambiguity, in many cases its meaning can be ascertained fairly successfully.

The purpose of this section is to explore how Carver’s characters attempt to communicate their needs or feelings through gestures, focusing particularly on looking and touching. Although literary criticism on Carver would benefit from a thorough analysis of all the forms of nonverbal communication present in his stories, that is beyond the scope of the present section, as that would require more space than this chapter allows. Still, the following paragraphs aim to suggest that, despite the difficulty of expressing themselves through the spoken word, Carver’s characters do manage to show the way they feel about their partners or ex-partners by using a variety of gestures. As previously noted, the main hurdle they face is their partner’s detachment and their own failure to see that the relationship has, in most cases, a bleak future. Although gestures are “less fixed” and “more fluid” (Iriskhanova and Cienki 26) than the spoken word, they “may be enacted with less

conscious control than verbal behaviors and might, therefore, be presumed to reflect more accurately the emotional status of the sender.” (Guerrero and Floyd 85) Sometimes, Carver’s characters use the spoken word deceptively, as the previous section has shown. This does not necessarily mean they intentionally mislead their partners; they resort to cliché utterances of love because they do not know what other words to use to face the situation. Their gestures, however, might paint a more accurate portrait of how they feel because, as Guerrero and Floyd point out, they tend to be unconscious.

2.4.2.1. “Where Their Eyes Fall”: The Intricacies of Looking

In an interview with Sam Halpert, author of *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*, novelist Geoffrey Wolff argued that Carver “knew more than anyone where his characters should look. I don’t mean point of view. I mean where their eyes fall—what they see and what they don’t see.” (111) Carver’s dialogues, which abound in his stories, are usually interspersed with instances of nonverbal communication, particularly looking; characters look at, stare at, gaze at, observe and fix their eyes on others, expressing interest, frustration, annoyance, anger and judgment, among others. Of equal importance is the fact that many characters also tend to avoid their partner’s gaze, fearing the latter might read something from their eyes. For instance, in “Intimacy,” the narrator’s ex-wife is well aware of this:

She says, you can’t look me in the eyes, can you?

She says, and this is exactly what she says, You can’t even look me in the eyes when I’m talking to you.

So, OK, I look her in the eyes.

She says, Right. OK, she says. Now we're getting someplace, maybe. That's better. You can tell a lot about the person you're talking to from his eyes. (50)

The narrator of this story has not seen his ex-wife in four years, although he sends her clippings of his writings or pieces about him from magazines or newspapers. This, as we shall see in section 2.4.3, is his way of communicating with her. He seems unable to let go of her, so he continuously makes sure she does not forget about him, while at the same time he avoids talking to her directly. When they finally see each other in person, she does most of the talking, while he sits quietly, often avoiding her eyes, which prompts the ex-wife to utter the words above. She actively tries to explain how he has made her feel, but he engages in “low-involvement behaviors, such as head down, head turn[ed] away, and lack of gaze, [which] reflect a tendency to avoid dealing with relationship issues.” (Feeney et al. 353) His silence allows his ex-wife to vent her frustrations and, ultimately, she seems able to forgive him and move on. The narrator, on the other hand, has not resolved his own issues regarding his ex-wife, which shows in the way he fixates on the leaves outside of her house at the end of the story. As he walks outside, he notes, “There are these leaves everywhere, even in the gutters. Piles of leaves wherever I look. I can't take a step without putting my shoe into leaves. Somebody ought to make an effort here. Somebody ought to get a rake and take care of this.” (53) Aside from symbolizing the “reduction to residue of the couple's former intimacy,” (McSweeney 104) the fallen leaves stand as a metaphor for the narrator's feelings, which remain scattered at his feet. As seen in the first chapter, the hyperbole underscores his distress, and his inability to deal with the problem himself highlights his continuous avoidance of conflict resolution. Although the narrator eventually does look at his ex-wife while she talks, for the most part he does not; this inevitably “minimizes the importance of the conflict and denies relational partners the opportunity

to try to resolve—or at least manage—the issues that led to disagreement. Thus, these issues are likely to resurface and create more problems in the future.” (Guerrero and Floyd 205) Indeed, the ex-wife has been assertive and fairly direct, voicing her indignation about the way the narrator has treated her. She repeatedly asks the narrator to show his involvement in the conversation by ensuring he is listening (46, 52) and looking at her (50), trying to prevent his avoidance, but it is to no avail. She has already shown her ability to move on; she has a new partner and has never replied to the narrator’s letters. The latter, on the other hand, cannot let her go and thus avoids interacting with her for the majority of the one-sided conversation. His reply will come in written format when he sends her the story itself, namely, “Intimacy,” as an answer to her tirade¹⁵.

In “Blackbird Pie,” the narrator’s wife avoids her partner’s gaze as she contemplates leaving him. As discussed in the previous chapter, they spend a significant amount of time apart within the house because he usually locks himself in his studio, and they eat together “rather silently but not unpleasantly, as was [their] custom.” (96) Thus, the few moments they spend together do not seem to encourage verbal communication, but the way they look at each other shows the distance between them. For instance, instead of uttering the words “thank you,” the narrator “looked up and smiled across the table as a way of showing [his] gratitude for the delicious meal,” (96) two gestures that, indeed, traditionally convey fondness and affiliation (Guerrero and Floyd 87). The wife, on the other hand, is more evasive. After asking him if he plans to be in his studio later, “she picked up her cup and drank some coffee. But she avoided looking at [him], even though [he] tried to catch her eye.” (97) Although he tries to connect with her, even if for a brief moment, she does not want to look at him because she has probably made up her mind about their future. In fact, a

¹⁵ This shall be analyzed in depth in section 2.4.3.

little while later, “she glanced up and held [his] eyes for a moment. Then she nodded, as if [they] had agreed on something.” (97) Considering the narrator’s personality, which shall be studied in the next section, it appears evident that the wife wishes to avoid a direct confrontation with him, understanding that it would be useless, since he spends most of the story in denial about his wife’s letter. Therefore, she has made the decision to leave him and confirms the way to do it to herself by nodding after staring at him.

Examples of avoiding the other’s gaze abound in Carver’s stories, including “Preservation,” “How About This?” and “So Much Water So Close To Home,” among others. The latter’s opening lines already show the discomfort between the husband and the wife:

My husband eats with a good appetite. But I don’t think he’s really hungry. He chews, arms on the table, and stares at something across the room. He looks at me and looks away. He wipes his mouth on the napkin. He shrugs, and goes on eating.

“What are you staring at me for?” he says. “What is it?” he says and lays down his fork.

“Was I staring?” I say, and shake my head. (67)

Claire’s description of Stuart’s attitude evidences that she has been looking at him, but she pretends she has not when he asks her about it. This suggests that nonverbal forms of expression “might . . . entail less risk for the sender than verbal expressions because their intended meanings may be easier to deny if, for instance, the sentiment is not reciprocated.” (Guerrero and Floyd 85) As the story will show, Claire grows increasingly uneasy around her husband, fearing that he might do something to hurt her. Thus, she feigns innocence when he asks her why she is looking at him, pretending she had not realized she was staring. In this story, both the act of looking and the avoidance of the other’s gaze serve to communicate these two characters’ discomfort. The wife

studies her husband, possibly wondering how the man she married has become a stranger to her. As Barthes wrote in *A Lover's Discourse*, "I catch myself carefully scrutinizing the loved body . . . To scrutinize means to search: I am searching the other's body, as if I wanted to see what was inside it." (71) Claire wants to understand what led her husband to ignore the corpse for a few days in favor of spending time with his friends, with the body close by. In addition, she begins to question the extent to which Stuart is still her loved one instead of someone she no longer knows. On the other hand, he averts his eyes to avoid having to face her. As Amir Ayala argues, "the absence of sight in looking is indeed crucial to this story, where a deflected gaze is as powerful as a direct look." (70) Paradoxically, although Stuart seems to want to avoid any kind of confrontation, he asks Claire about her behavior in a fairly aggressive manner. Understanding what a stare could mean, he adds, "I won't have you passing judgment. Do you hear?" (67) Although she has barely uttered a word, much less one of judgment, her eyes have told a different story. Thus, the spoken word was not needed in order to convey her feelings about him and his actions. When he tells her "I don't know anything except one thing. . . . She was dead," she replies, "That's the point." (67) He "raises his hands" (68) and leaves. This story's characters are not necessarily inarticulate; Stuart simply avoids talking at all costs. While she tries different methods of expressing her distress to him, he gets increasingly exasperated, to the point where the narrator admits, "There is nothing I can say to him." (71) Christof Decker states,

The inadequacy of spoken language is a recurrent theme in Carver's stories. Characters groping for words, not knowing what to say, or being unable to express themselves are a common feature of his blue-collar settings and serve a trope for the larger crisis of verbal communication. . . . Language is seen to be insufficient for a genuine and intimate form of

communication. Talking creates distance, and those who talk self-assuredly are looked upon with suspicion. Consequently, Carver's characters are often portrayed as inarticulate, at a loss for the right word, while the act of looking produces a kind of knowledge on which the sense of their interiority can build. (37)

Sometimes, however, characters do know what to say but refuse to. Every time Claire tries to have a conversation about what happened at the creek, Stuart either avoids looking at her, leaves, or says, "Don't rile me." (70) The only way he thinks he can comfort her, as shall be discussed later, is through sex. Stuart's gestures are evasive and hostile, while Claire's both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication suggest she wants to understand him and resolve the conflict.

Claire's judgmental gaze is not unique in Carver's stories. In "They're Not Your Husband," for instance, Earl "had Doreen take off all her clothes and get on the scale. He frowned when he saw the veins." (18) This story, which shall be analyzed in depth in the third chapter, follows Earl, who does not have a job, as he tries to change his wife Doreen's body to show her off to some men who had mocked her physique at her workplace. Upon noticing the men criticizing her, he becomes obsessed with making her desirable to them instead of defending her. Throughout the story, Earl "is wholly incapable of seeing [Doreen] without the mediation of the objectifying gaze he experienced at the coffee shop." (Lainsbury 83) He sees Doreen not merely through his own eyes but through the eyes of those men who have scorned her, and when he looks at her, he communicates their contempt as well as his own. His constant examination of Doreen's body, along with his frowning, does not necessitate the spoken word to show how he views his wife. Earl is a businessman, thus his job is to sell. He internalizes the men's derision and turns Doreen into an object he can sell to reaffirm his own self-worth, while making her feel worthless. Earl's desire is

mediated; what he wants is precisely “for his desire to be authenticated by the desire of another; his desire is to be confirmed in his husbandly possession of an object authoritatively desired by another. Without appropriate mediation, it seems, he is himself unable to desire.” (Cornwell 349) Nonetheless, the end of the story will show how he has failed. Doreen, another waitress, and a customer “all stared at Earl” (22) after he had tried to get the latter to compliment Doreen’s body. Now, he is the one being looked at, judged by the others because of his behavior.

Earl and Doreen’s way of communicating with each other suggests that their relationship does not have a strong future, like many of the other couples from Carver’s stories. This is in part because “even subtle nonverbal behaviors that show disgust and contempt can trigger a negative cycle of destructive communication in relationships. Specifically, expressions of disgust and contempt can lead to stonewalling or withdrawal. If stonewalling persists, . . . relationships will stagnate and conflict will become increasingly futile and destructive.” (Guerrero and Floyd 119) This is, evidently, not the root of the couple’s unhappiness, but rather a symptom that can further complicate any possibility of reconciliation. Earl’s mediated desire prevents him from seeing Doreen as a person; Stuart’s reluctance to address Claire’s worry pushes her further away; the narrator of “Blackbird Pie” locks himself in his studio, building physical walls between himself and his wife. There exist behaviors in these stories that warrant these looks, including Stuart’s actions at the creek, or L.D.’s unwillingness to leave in “One More Thing,” which prompts Maxine to hold him “in a fierce and disquieting gaze.” (130) This suggests that communication, whether spoken or nonverbal, is useless in these cases. When one of the two people in the relationship tries to express their discomfort to the other, it is to no avail; oftentimes their partners do not want to talk, like Stuart or the narrator of “Blackbird Pie,” or refuse to listen, like L.D. Interestingly, most of the

time it is the men who avoid directly addressing the issues affecting the relationship, whereas the women are more open to communicating their needs and resolving any conflict. When they notice they will not get anywhere, they find the courage to leave the relationship faster than the men. Even though many stories see characters perform traditionally masculine actions, such as fishing or hunting, Carver portrays men who are struggling with the crisis of masculinity that arose throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The author allows women more agency over their own lives while he depicts men as confused and alienated, unable to recognize, address and resolve the source of their distress. As Vanessa Hall postulates, “Carver’s stories both participate in and critique narratives of wounded white masculinity.” (176) While his work showed how women were victims of a patriarchal system by including instances of domestic violence (for instance, in “So Much Water So Close To Home” and “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”) and murder (“Tell The Women We’re Going”) he also portrayed them as being generally more resilient, resolute and proactive than men.¹⁶

Kelly et al. argue that nonverbal communication is more telling of the status of a couple than the way they speak to each other (729). Feelings can be distorted by the spoken word, and individuals may lie when they speak, but gestures often convey more faithfully what takes place under the surface. Before moving on to touching, I wish to comment on one more relevant instance of looking that emphasizes its importance. Amir Ayala argues that, in the stories of Raymond Carver, “verbs indicating vision—to see, to watch, and to look—seem to underscore the presence of the observer, the clinging of his gaze, and the continuity of perception.” (11) She focuses on the story “Signals,” but another significant example appears in “What’s in Alaska?”. As

¹⁶ Although the topic undoubtedly deserves attention, it falls beyond the scope of the present dissertation. For a more thorough analysis of gender in Carver’s stories, see Gentry 1993; Bullock 1994; Kleppe 2006 and the Spring 2009 issue of *The Raymond Carver Review*, focused on Carver and feminism.

previously mentioned, the story suggests that Mary is having an affair with Carl, and the reader learns this through Jack's gaze: "Jack watched them walk to the kitchen. He settled back against the cushion and watched them walk. Then he leaned forward very slowly. He squinted. He saw Carl reach up to a shelf in the cupboard. He saw Mary move against Carl from behind and put her arms around his waist." (64) All of these sentences but one include a verb related to the act of looking, which emphasizes Jack's status as an observer, and, by extension, as an outsider in his own marriage. This is further highlighted a while later, when "Jack stared at Mary, who was staring at Carl. Carl stared at something on the rug near his feet." (67) Jack seeks his wife's attention and support, but she has little interest in him. This somewhat comical second sentence could suggest that Carl and Mary's affair will not last long, since, throughout the story, she is the one who looks at him, touches him, and calls him "honey," even if supposedly by mistake. Mary's body language thus conveys her disinterest in Jack, which he becomes painfully aware of. Carver's depiction of observation and gazing is therefore instrumental to his overall portrayal of communication, as it adds nuance that the spoken word cannot always provide.

2.4.2.2. "The Body Proper": The Intricacies of Touching

Touching also says much about the way individuals in Carver's stories communicate with each other. Indeed, "touch is a signal in the communication process that, above all other communication channels, most directly and immediately escalates the balance of intimacy . . . to let another touch us is to drop that final and most formidable barrier to intimacy." (Thayer 8) There are a number of stories in Carver's work that show couples touching each other to convey affection, such as "Neighbors," "The Ducks," "Chef's House" (*Cathedral*), "Whoever Was Using This Bed"

(*Elephant*) or “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.” In the latter, for instance, Mel and Terri barely touch, but Nick and Laura are more physically affectionate with each other. At one point, Nick notes, “I touched the back of Laura’s hand. She gave me a quick smile. I picked up Laura’s hand. . . . I encircled the broad wrist with my fingers, and I held her.” (116) They have been together for approximately a year and a half, which Mel calls the “honeymoon” phase. (119) Their relationship still stands strong, and their love for each other seems quite evident. Although Nick touches Laura often to convey affection, when asked to demonstrate his love for Laura, he resorts to parody and uses nonverbal communication theatrically:

“Well, Nick and I know what love is,” Laura said. “For us, I mean,” Laura said. She bumped my knee with her knee. “You’re supposed to say something now,” Laura said, and turned her smile on me.

For an answer, I took Laura’s hand and raised it to my lips. I made a big production out of kissing her hand. Everyone was amused. (119)

Arthur Bethea argues that “the description of Laura’s smile conveys a subtle threat and the narrator’s response, his gesture of affection, seems contrived and false, yet Nick prefers a phony gesture to saying ‘I love you.’” (96) However, as previously seen, saying “I love you” could sound as artificial as Nick’s gesture. His behavior might actually stem from being put on the spot, since, throughout the story, he mostly stays quiet and acts as an observer, silently showing Laura support but participating very little in the conversation. Although in this particular instance Nick’s gesture seems artificial, it still illustrates his love language, which is that of touching.

“A Small, Good Thing” (*Cathedral*) is one of the few stories by Carver that portrays a couple who support each other through unspeakable tragedy. It was previously published as “The

Bath” in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, heavily edited by Gordon Lish; the original version is more expansive and hopeful, even in the face of loss. This story follows Howard and Ann as they wait at the hospital to hear whether their child, who has been hit by a car, will wake up from a coma or not. After waiting for a long time, Howard goes home to take a bath. Before leaving, “he kissed her on the forehead, and they touched hands.” (57) These small gestures embody the fondness between these two characters, who support each other through the ordeal. Later, Ann agrees to go home and take a bath herself, and the nonverbal communication between her and Howard underscores their intimacy:

“I’ll be right here,” he said. . . . His eyes were bloodshot and small, as if he’d been drinking for a long time. His clothes were rumpled. His beard had come out again. She touched his face, and then she took her hand back. She understood he wanted to be by himself for a while, not have to talk or share his worry for a time. She picked her purse up from the nightstand, and he helped her into her coat. (68)

Ann observes Howard and notices his tiredness and preoccupation. By touching his face she tries to convey comfort, but she also realizes he needs some space. Her understanding of his unspoken needs indicates their connection, and even though Howard wants to be on his own for a while, he does help her put on her coat, which also signals fondness for his partner. This behavior might have less obvious significance than a kiss, but it still carries meaning, as Guerrero and Floyd remark: “indirect affectionate expressions . . . convey affectionate sentiments through the use of helpful, supportive behaviors—doing favors for someone or helping someone with a project, for instance.” (86) A similar example happens in “The Ducks,” in which the woman caresses her partner and gives him a beer (130). Like Howard did with Ann, the unnamed woman tries to comfort her

significant other by helping him. The difference, however, is that in this story the man does not seem to reciprocate her displays of affection, possibly due to the shock of having learned that his boss has suddenly died after having a heart attack, coupled with the fact that their relationship seems somewhat strained. Faced with the arbitrariness of death, he reconsiders his marriage and future, even wondering whether he loves his wife while they share an intimate moment: “She moved a little and took his hand and put it on her breast. . . . He took the nipple and began working it in his mouth. He tried to think how much he loved her or if he loved her.” (132) In this case, there is a disconnection between what he does and what he feels. Likewise, in “Gazebo” Duane notes, “I get down on my knees and I start to beg. But I am thinking of Juanita. This is awful. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me or to anyone else in the world.” (21) Confronted with life-altering circumstances, such as a sudden death or a potential divorce, these characters find themselves grappling with existential crises that they cannot resolve. They attempt to connect with their partners by using certain formulas such as gestures that typically convey affection or utterances of love, but they cannot let go of their dread and start wondering about their future. Sometimes, “it is this awakening, this sense of the absurd—the realization of our existential loneliness, the ephemeral quality of human life, and our powerlessness and insignificance in the face of an enormous indifferent universe—that can bring about a true change of reaction to the shock of the absurd.” (Taub 108) In Carver’s stories, however, this is rarely the case. Characters become numb and stagnant when realizing the absurdity of life, overwhelmed by uncertainty. As Taub argues, “Carver’s stories do not challenge such a formidable force as fate, at least not self-consciously.” (109) Instead, they show characters retreat into themselves, unable to

deal with the meaninglessness they see in their lives¹⁷. Despite their gestures, their partners tend to understand the lack of genuineness in these actions. In “The Ducks,” for instance, the woman can feel that the man might not want to have sex, saying, “If you don’t want to, it’s all right.” (132) He replies, “It’s not that,” the narrator adding, “not knowing what he meant.” (132) He cannot possibly articulate his distress when he cannot identify it. This seems the norm in Carver’s stories; characters cannot be inarticulate if they do not know why they feel the way they do nor what they want to say. Sometimes, they try to pinpoint the source of their anxiety but miss, like Al in “Jerry and Molly and Sam,” who believes getting rid of the family dog will make everything better, or like the narrator of “Intimacy,” who focuses his attention on the piles of leaves scattered around the street.

Another significant illustration of the eloquence of nonverbal communication appears in “Intimacy.” As previously noted, the narrator barely speaks throughout the story, which exasperates his ex-wife, who berates him and reminds him of all the pain he has caused her. Towards the end of the story, however, he acts in a way that moves her:

And then I do something. I reach over and take the sleeve of her blouse between my thumb and forefinger. That’s all. I just touch it that way, and then I just bring my hand back. She doesn’t draw away. She doesn’t move.

Then here’s the thing I do next. I get down on my knees, a big guy like me, and I take the hem of her dress. What am I doing on the floor? I wish I could say. But I know it’s where I ought to be, and I’m there on my knees holding on to the hem of her dress. (51)

¹⁷ For further discussion on Carver and existentialism, see Paquereau 2020 and Seemann 2007.

Although they are no longer together, and their intimacy has vanished, this gesture rekindles a sense of fondness from the ex-wife towards the narrator. This example shows how, as Thayer argued, “to let another touch us is to drop that final and most formidable barrier to intimacy.” (8) Such a moment of vulnerability softens the ex-wife in ways that the spoken word could not, and stands in stark contrast to Duane’s similar gesture in “Gazebo.” The latter gets down on his knees as a formulaic way to get his wife’s forgiveness while he thinks about his lover, whereas the narrator of “Intimacy” cannot fully understand his actions but instinctively understands this is what he needs to do. He, unlike Duane, acts in a way that “seems more associated with moral restoration,” (Pountney 56) which was more common in Carver’s later stories, particularly *Elephant*. Along with the examples mentioned above, this is one of the few times in Carver’s work that depict touching as intimate; when intimacy has broken down, as is the case in most of these stories, touch can rarely break through the barrier.

“The Student’s Wife” (*WYPBQ?*) revolves around Nan and her distant husband, who seems more interested in himself than in her. Throughout the story, Nan often tries to talk to him but he appears exasperated. For instance, when she asks him for some food, “he did nothing and he said nothing because he wanted to go to sleep.” (90) She insists, so “he groaned extravagantly as he rolled out of bed” (90) and later turned “over onto his side [of the bed] away from her.” (91) His gestures, both physical and auditory, clearly communicate his indifference towards his wife, who states her needs multiple times and seems distraught, unable to fall asleep. She tells him,

“Well, don’t go to sleep before me,” she said. “I don’t want to be awake by myself.”

He didn't answer, but he inched a little closer to her on his side. When she put her arm over him and planted her hand flat against his chest, he took her fingers and squeezed them lightly. But in moments his hand dropped away to the bed, and he sighed. (92-3)

Considering his actions throughout the story, this gesture seems nothing short of performative—a way for him to comfort his wife so she will leave him alone. He moves closer to her, but remains on “his side” of the bed, in itself a significant picture of their distance, and he holds her hand but quickly lets go, thus doing the bare minimum in order to get some silence. The husband's gestures therefore communicate his frustration and desire to be left alone, but they do not work, for Nan's feeling of malaise persists until the very end of the story, when, feeling abandoned by her partner, she can only think of asking God for help, saying “God, will you help us, God?” (96) The story ends this way, so “her plea remains unanswered, and the silence that follows, illustrated by the blank space at the bottom of the page, is deafening.” (Paquereau, par. 13) Therefore, the husband's gestures point to his unwillingness to listen to his wife, who repeatedly reaches out to him in vain.

In “Are These Actual Miles?” Leo uses terms of endearment to attempt to reestablish a waning intimacy with her, as previously noted, but it does not work. Similarly, he touches Toni in order to communicate his desire to connect with her, but her gesture denotes detachment, which he understands:

“Good luck,” he says and touches her elbow.

She nods. He sees she is already gone, already negotiating.

“Things are going to be different!” he calls to her as she reaches the driveway. “We start over Monday. I mean it.” (152)

Along with his words of encouragement, Leo uses nonverbal communication to offer his support. The first pages of the story have already shown their distance, particularly from Toni towards Leo, so these efforts from Leo's part indicate his yearning for connection, but it is to no avail. Toni simply "nods," her mind already at the restaurant with her client. Despite his communication, she has no interest in him; this persists throughout the story, which ends in the following way:

Presently he reaches out his hand and touches her hip. She does not move. He turns on his side and puts his hand on her hip. He runs his fingers over her hip and feels the stretch marks there. They are like roads, and he traces them in her flesh. He runs his fingers back and forth, first one, then another. They run everywhere in her flesh, dozens, perhaps hundreds of them. He remembers waking up the morning after they bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, in the sun, gleaming. (157)

Once again, Leo resorts to touch to convey his loneliness. Although he does not directly say it through words, his repetition of "honey" and his gestures towards Toni indicate his need for attention, but at this point in the story, she is both drunk and asleep. As he touches her, her stretch marks remind him of roads on which their car—a symbol of their previous comfortable lifestyle that they have just sold and lost—now moves, driven by someone else. As Andrew Warnes suggests, "Leo feels unworthy, not just of his lover Toni, but of the equally fragile objects of commodification with whom he seems to associate her." (127) The final lines thus draw a parallel between the convertible and Toni's body, which have both presumably been sold that night.

Finally, in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?", the attempt to communicate through touching fails even before the act itself takes place. Ralph manages to get a confession out of Marian, which prompts her to say, "'God!' she said, getting up, holding out her hands, 'Are we

crazy, Ralph? Have we lost our minds? Ralph? Forgive me, Ralph. Forgive-” (171-2) As she tries to touch him, he screams, “Don’t touch me! Get away from me!” (172) In spite of Marian’s attempts to generate intimacy and connection in order to minimize her husband’s anger, Ralph orders her to stay away and refuses to talk any further, effectively withdrawing from the conversation. He has pushed Marian to confess, but once he hears what he already suspected, he does not want to discuss their relationship. This attitude persists throughout the story, as he leaves the house in hopes of finding comfort but finds violence instead; once back at the house, he locks himself in the bathroom and continues to ignore Marian. According to Guerrero and Floyd, “withdrawal behaviors may serve as markers that indicate a conflict, or even the relationship itself, is in danger of becoming increasingly destructive and unsustainable.” (211) Although this may be the case in this story, the ending suggests the possibility of reconciliation, not through the spoken word, but through a form of nonverbal communication: sex.¹⁸

According to Guerrero and Floyd, “nonverbal behaviors found to communicate love include facial expressions that convey warmth and caring, smiling, . . . touch, [and] sex.” (111) Although sex seems to convey love in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”, most of the time it appears in Carver’s stories it does not. As previously seen, in “Neighbors,” both Bill and Arlene get aroused at their neighbors’ flat and become more sexually intimate than usual. However, this is not necessarily an expression of their love for each other but rather an embodiment of their fascination with their neighbors’ lives. Likewise, in “Feathers,” Fran and Jack have sex after spending the evening at Bud and Olla’s place, where they meet and are engrossed by their baby. In their case, sex is a means to an end, for Fran decides she wants a baby to experience what she felt at their friends’

¹⁸ This shall be analyzed in 3.3.1.

house, but attempting to replicate their family dynamic proves futile. Jack, the first-person narrator, says, “Sitting there at the table, I closed my eyes for a minute and thought hard. What I wished for was that I’d never forget or otherwise let go of that evening. That’s one wish of mine that came true. And it was bad luck for me that it did.” (22) Indeed, Jack believes their child has affected the marriage negatively, claiming “my kid has a conniving streak about him. But I don’t talk about it. Not even with his mother. Especially her. She and I talk less and less as it is.” (23) Instead of invigorating the relationship, the changes that have taken place in Jack and Fran’s marriage after visiting Bud and Olla have brought them apart.

In “Fat” (*WYYPBQ?*) and “So Much Water So Close To Home,” sex does not express love. Instead, the men’s attitudes towards their partners emphasize the distance between them as well as their complete disinterest in their wellbeing. In the first story, the first-person narrator is a waitress who becomes enthralled by a fat customer at the diner where she works. She acts affectionately towards him, while other members of the staff show disgust, including her partner Rudy, the cook at the restaurant, who does not care for the narrator’s story and fascination with the customer. At home, after telling her about how he mocked fat children at school, and showing no interest in her feelings, he initiates sex with her. The narrator says, “I get into bed and move clear over to the edge and lie there on my stomach. But right away, as soon as he turns off the light and gets into bed, Rudy begins. I turn on my back and relax some, though it is against my will.” (4) These sentences are very telling of their relationship. First, when she gets into bed, she stays at the very edge of the bed, ensuring there exists as much distance as possible between her and Rudy. In addition, she lies on her stomach, thus closing her body off to him. When he “begins,” she tries to calm herself, but she notes how she does not want to be intimate with Rudy. Her body language either goes

unnoticed or is ignored by him, who essentially rapes her; even though she does not utter the word “no,” her nonverbal communication already anticipates her unwillingness to have sex with Rudy. This again shows how Carver’s characters do communicate their needs but do not always opt for the spoken word. As previously suggested, one of the main reasons why conflict is hardly resolved in these stories is because characters “are so wrapped up in their own needs, neuroses, and self-deceptive lies that they miss each others’ meanings or simply do not care about what other people have to say.” (Aarons 148) Similarly, in “So Much Water So Close To Home,” Stuart ignores Claire’s distress and uses her body, which increases her fear. Indeed, the day he came back from the creek, where he and his friends had found the body of a dead girl and waited until they had to leave to call the authorities, instead of talking to Claire, he had sex with her. In Claire’s words, “In bed he put his hands on me again and then waited as if thinking of something else. I turned and opened my legs. Afterwards, I think he stayed awake.” (69) Stuart’s behavior deeply unsettles Claire, who, throughout the story, and as previously mentioned, identifies with the dead girl, noting how, while in the car with Stuart, “I look at the creek. I’m right in it, eyes open, face down, staring at the moss on the bottom, dead.” (71) For Stuart to come home after such an experience and to immediately want to have sex tells Claire that he either has not been affected by what he has seen or, worse, that he feels aroused by it. Both possibilities disturb Claire to the point where she does not recognize her husband anymore, prompting her to stare at him at the beginning of the story. In both of these stories, therefore, the men seem either oblivious or indifferent to the women’s discomfort, which causes them to ignore their body language.

Sometimes, characters in Carver’s stories show an explicit understanding of the significance of nonverbal communication and act accordingly by engaging with or avoiding their partners. For

instance, in “How About This?” Harry does not want to look at Emily when exploring her childhood home for fear that she will notice his disappointment. The story reads, “He avoided looking at her. She was shrewd and might have read something from his eyes.” (136) Despite his efforts, she immediately says, “I told you not to expect too much,” (136) demonstrating that she can see how he feels. In this case, Harry knows Emily will understand what he thinks just by looking at her, so he acknowledges the importance of nonverbal communication; however, he does not comprehend that many other behaviors contribute to expressing how he feels. This is further emphasized by the fact that “she kept looking at him. . . . He felt lately that she was always looking at him.” (135-6) His words do not match his emotions, since he keeps trying to pretend that he can see himself living in that place, but his body language gives away his apprehension, which Emily is quick to notice. Even though she seems sympathetic and reassures him that they do not have to stay, he never openly tells her that he wants to leave; instead, she concludes that from his averted eyes (136), his forced smiles (136), and his silence (140). Similarly, in “Chef’s House” Edna and Wes reunite when he rents a house from a recovered alcoholic named Chef. Their stay at the house seems idyllic, and Wes appears to keep his sobriety, until Chef tells them his daughter will need the place soon. Edna knows that their rekindled relationship does not hinge on staying at Chef’s house, but Wes’s body language tells a different story, which Edna understands:

Wes had this look about him. I knew that look. He kept touching his lips with his tongue. He kept thumbing his shirt under his waistband. He got up from the chair and went to the window. He stood looking out at the ocean and at the clouds, which were building up. He patted his chin with his fingers like he was thinking about something. And he *was* thinking.

(28)

Though not directed at Edna, nor at anyone in particular, Wes's gestures and silence convey his anxiety about the future. In his mind, losing the house means losing Edna as well as his sobriety. She is able to read this from Wes's behavior and understands that he will most likely start drinking again as well as end their relationship, which her final words stand as a metaphor for: "I went in to start supper. We still had some fish in the icebox. There wasn't much else. We'll clean it up tonight, I thought, and that will be the end of it." (30) This signals "the end of their visit, the end of their hopes, the end of their marriage." (Pacht 105) If the refrigerator symbolizes their current state, the fact that "there wasn't much else" besides the fish already shows that there was not much to sustain the relationship from the beginning because for Wes, as shall be further analyzed in the third chapter, the house is the only thing keeping him afloat. In the same way that there remains little food in the fridge, conversation withers, and Wes "closed his eyes" and "didn't say anything else. He didn't have to." (30) His nonverbal communication is therefore enough to show Edna what their future holds.

In "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Terri shows her exasperation with Mel through facial expressions, whereas he uses the spoken word. After disagreeing with her, he notices the way she is looking at him and tells her, "Terri, hon, don't look that way." (115) In order to appease her and to avoid a confrontation, "Mel reached across the table and touched Terri's cheek with his fingers. He grinned at her," to which Terri says, "Now he wants to make up." (115) Mel uses two gestures that traditionally convey affiliation with the other, namely, touching—particularly the face—and smiling. However, Terri understands the performativity of his gesture and sounds sarcastic when she addresses the others; she is not fooled by his actions and continues to be upset by Mel's earlier dismissive words. By contrast, in "Whoever Was Using This

Bed,” (*Elephant*) Jack seems more caring towards Iris and his body language denotes affection. The story sees Jack and Iris suddenly get woken up at three in the morning by the phone ringing. A drunk woman calls multiple times asking for Bud, which scares and frustrates the couple. They seem to have a difficult time falling asleep, so they start conversing about a variety of topics, focusing on death. At different times in the story Jack shows his awareness of the significance of gestures. For example, although Iris seems preoccupied, Jack notes how “then she grins, so I’ll know she’s all right.” (36) Although the story hints at the possibility of their marriage struggling, this particular instance conveys intimacy as they lay in bed with his leg “hooked over her leg, at the ankle” (36) while listening to each other. Unlike Mel’s, Iris’s smile seems more genuine and does denote affection. Likewise, as opposed to Mel’s touching of Terri’s cheek, which, considering her anger, could transmit condescension, Jack notes, “I nod. I touch her arm to show her it’s okay. I don’t really mind.” (33) Jack shows clear awareness of the significance of nonverbal communication as he explains the reason behind his touch, and Iris continues her story, apparently having understood him. These examples further support the present dissertation’s contention that Carver’s characters are not inarticulate; instead, they use a variety of tools in order to communicate with their partners, including gestures, which convey their needs, desires and anxieties. According to Kirk Nessel,

The survivors who people these stories . . . talk, however unsuccessfully; they have sex, or avoid it. They employ both their bodies and tongues in efforts to find themselves again, struggling to reassemble the bits and pieces of their tattered identities—and they continue struggling, even as their bodies get them into trouble, and as their tongues, taking them forever in circles, fall silent. (11)

Carver's characters struggle in the sense that they have difficulty to succeed, but also in the sense that they continue to try. Even in silence many of them reach out for the other and use their "bodies and tongues" to communicate that which they otherwise cannot. There exists a certain stubbornness in many of these individuals as they navigate a hostile world that offers little hope; despite their circumstances, many of them still try to articulate their distress to their partners. However, constrained by their environment, they become increasingly estranged from each other. Indeed, "the more Carver moves into interior spaces, the greater the estrangement within and between people." (Kenyo 98) Therefore, communication, whether verbal or not, often leads these characters nowhere because most of the time they do not know what they want and can only express anguish without knowing its source. This, coupled with the fact that they have become increasingly alienated from their partners, hinders the betterment of their situations.

2.4.3. “There Where You Are Not”: Written Communication

In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes devotes a fragment to writing, titled “Inexpressible Love,” in which he argues for the inefficacy of writing within a romantic context. In his words, “To know that one does not write for the other, to know that these things I am going to write will never cause me to be loved by the one I love (the other), to know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, that it is precisely there where you are not—this is the beginning of writing.” (100) This type of writing occurs in the absence of the lover, and more often than not displays the desires of the lover rather than those of the loved one. It serves the writer insofar as it allows them to express their needs and frustrations, but it “compensates for nothing,” rarely achieving the connection the writer longs for. While the act of writing may allow one to elaborate and muse in depth on their thoughts and emotions, it still retains many of the qualities associated with the spoken word. Indeed, “writing is considered to be a representation of the spoken, its fixative double, and not a particular material whose combinative nature leads one to think of a linguistic operation different from that of phonetics.” (Kristeva 29) As previously noted, the spoken word does not exist in a vacuum; it necessitates nonverbal cues to add to its meaning. Though the written word is rarely subject to the same immediacy as the spoken word, thus welcoming more precision and detail, it can still read ambiguous and unclear, particularly within a romantic context. Not only can the writing be obscure, but also, when attempting to pen one’s emotions and despite the writer’s abilities, these can turn one-dimensional, as Eva Illouz argues:

The locking of emotions into written language gives rise to the idea of “pure emotion,” the idea that emotions are definite discrete entities and that they are somehow locked and trapped inside the self, and that they can be inscribed in texts and apprehended as fixed

entities, to be detached from the self, observed, manipulated, and controlled. (*Cold Intimacies* 33)

When lovers—or individuals who have once shared intimacy—communicate through the written word, they increase the potential for miscommunication, not only because of their words, but also because of how these may be understood or interpreted by the addressee.

Writing is “there where you are not” (Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* 100) and therefore signals “a type of operation in which the subject differentiates himself from his surroundings.” (Kristeva 24) Written communication is atopic and removes the writer from their context, resulting in a displaced and delayed conversation that might complicate rather than resolve emotional quandaries. This is the case of two stories by Raymond Carver, namely “Intimacy” and “Blackbird Pie,” both from his last collection, *Elephant*. Although other stories by Carver are written by first-person narrators and at times are actual letters, as is the case with “Why, Honey?” (*WYYPBQ?*), these are the two most notable examples of written communication between individuals who have been in a romantic relationship. In these two stories, the first-person narrators attempt to regain control over their failed romantic relationships through writing by depicting themselves as aware, articulate and authoritative. Despite the fact that the characters populating *Elephant* have been described as “newly articulate” and “increasingly self-aware” (Nesset 74), these two narrators’ words betray them by revealing their unreliability. They may be wordier than others, but their words fall flat while exposing their lack of self-awareness.

In “Intimacy,” the narrator begins his tale with what little information he has—or wants—to offer. What we learn in the first paragraph is that he is a divorced writer who has not seen his ex-wife in four years, and is now on his way to her house. When he gets there, he sits down

and she begins a monologue that will go on until the last page, effectively making this now her story. Carver's story thus serves as a frame for the narrator's story, which in turn frames that of the ex-wife. In this way, the ex-husband's and the ex-wife's narrations are distinct and separate, thereby increasing the distance that already exists between them. This distance is further enhanced by virtue of the displaced conversations they have as they utilize different modes of communication.

Before he arrives at his ex-wife's house, the narrator tells the reader that, although they have not seen each other in a long time, "from time to time, when something of mine appeared, or was written about me in the magazines or papers . . . I sent her these things. . . . She never responded." (45) Despite not having physically seen each other, there has been a conversation going on, albeit one-sided. The narrator has thus begun a dialogue by sending her some of his materials, but his ex-wife initially declined to take part in it. However, when he visits her, the first thing she says is that the narrator has "caused her anguish, made her feel exposed and humiliated," (45) implying that he has written about her in his stories, and so acknowledging that she has read them, participating in the dialogue. What is interesting is that their conversation is never synchronized; now that he is physically next to her, he remains mostly silent while she rants on about their marriage. His silence is very meaningful, too. As Frank Bramlett and David Raabe put it,

His four-year "domination" of the Conversational floor has bottled up and intensified the betrayal she felt before and after the bad marriage and subsequent divorce. Since one of the primary tenets of verbal exchange is that conversations are cooperative, in remaining silent .

. . the ex-husband pushes her to continue her turn in the current conversation. (189)

The power dynamics at play here suggest that although the ex-wife seems in command of the current conversation, the ex-husband is actually guiding her by avoiding to actively engage in it.

Amir Ayala proposes that “remaining silent, ‘forgetting’ and stimulating his ex-wife’s memories, are then a tactic of sorts, which serves this writer’s hunt for ‘material.’” (49) While it is true that he has in fact prompted her speech not only by going out of his way to visit her, but also by having sent her his works for her to read, and that he is interested in some details more than others—for instance, when he says, “Tell me about the knife.” (48)—his silence is not merely a strategy. He has initiated a conversation that he is now unable to follow, because the language he speaks is different from hers. Towards the end of the story—of all three—the narrator, as previously noted, gets on his knees and touches his ex-wife’s dress. Whatever the reasons for this gesture, it surely marks a turning point in the current conversation, for the ex-wife seems to find some level of closure and forgives the narrator for his past actions. Even though she seems calmer and more at ease, the narrator remains stuck: “It’s crazy, but I’m still on my knees holding the hem of her dress. I won’t let it go. I’m like a terrier, and it’s like I’m stuck to the floor. It’s like I can’t move.” (51-2) His vulnerability becomes visible now as he likens himself to an animal, specifically one known to be dependent on humans, further indicating that his language is not simply a “tactic.” He is, therefore, not as controlling as he might have initially appeared.

The narrator’s critical gesture thus emphasizes how the ex-husband and the ex-wife express themselves and communicate in very different ways. While she speaks, he remains silent; when he moves, “she doesn’t.” (51) Their dialogue is in constant motion but never at the same time or in the same way. She is most comfortable when she talks, especially face to face, and this is made even more apparent by the way her monologue is introduced at the beginning of the story: “As soon as I sit down she brings me some coffee. Then she comes out with what’s on her mind.” (45) This quasi-zeugma intensifies the physicality of her language as she comes out with thoughts, that is,

utters them, but also as she physically comes out of the kitchen with his coffee and her words. By contrast, the narrator is at ease with the written word, which is why he remains silent during her diatribe and only answers as he writes the present story, when she is not able to respond directly. Indeed, what we read is a posterior account of what happened on the day he visited his wife, and through it the ex-husband regains some of the control he lost towards the end of her tirade by interspersing and interrupting the story through the use of dialogue tags, particularly with “she says” at the beginning of most paragraphs, therefore inserting himself in her monologue, “reminding the reader of his presence.” (Ayala 49) He attempts to reclaim his power by amplifying his presence in the story. Perhaps he will send her this story, just like he did with most of his other materials, as a tentative response to her monologue. As Kirk Nessel explains, “for one character potential release resides in a single word; for another it lies in a nonverbal sign; for others it comes of . . . the self-enriching acts of reading and writing.” (74) In this case, however, the act of writing does not appear to be “self-enriching,” for the narrator finishes the story by drawing the reader’s attention to the piles of leaves lying on the ground, expecting someone—but not himself—to take care of them. His writing is “indifferent to the infantile ego which solicits it.” (Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse* 98) It does not get him closer to his ex-wife, does not provide him closure and, as Barthes stated, “compensates for nothing.” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 100) Carver plays with the language of love, or rather, the lack thereof, by emphasizing the physical and emotional distance between the ex-lovers through their divergent uses of language.

In “Blackbird Pie,”¹⁹ a couple separates through writing. The story follows a first-person narrator as he attempts to deal with the news that his wife wants a divorce, which he learns about after reading a letter she slides under his studio’s door. Although they briefly speak face to face, the narrator’s story could serve as a response to his wife’s letter. He avoids confronting his wife directly and instead tries to discredit her by analyzing what he remembers of the letter in which she reveals her desire to separate in an attempt to gain the upper hand and ensure his vindication. The story begins like this: “I was in my room one night when I heard something in the corridor,” (91) that “something” being his wife, approaching his studio to give him the letter. Soon, the narrator “saw an envelope slide under the door,” (91) once again refusing to acknowledge that a concrete person sent him this envelope, thus distancing himself from her. When he reads it, he claims that it “purported to be a letter from my wife. I say ‘purported’ because . . . the charges were outrageous and completely out of keeping with my wife’s character. Most important, however, the handwriting was not my wife’s handwriting.” (91) The narrator cannot believe his wife has sent him this letter because, first, he disagrees with her arguments, and second, because he cannot accept that the handwriting is hers; that would mean the contents of the letter are true. Thus, he places more importance on the appearance of the letter to more easily ignore its contents.

In the second paragraph, he admits he does not have the letter anymore, his excuse suggesting it was no accident: “I wish now I’d kept the letter . . . But I didn’t keep it, I’m sorry to say. I lost it, or else misplaced it. Later, after the sorry business I’m about to relate, I was cleaning out my desk and may have accidentally thrown it away—which is uncharacteristic of me, since I

¹⁹ A revised version of this analysis of “Blackbird Pie” (98-104) has been published as “‘No Other Word Will Do’: Language and Narrative Unreliability in Raymond Carver’s ‘Blackbird Pie’” in the volume *Persistence and Resistance in English Studies: New Research*, edited by Elisabet Pladevall-Ballester, Sara Martín and David Owen (2018).

usually don't throw anything away." (91) He ironically hedges his statement by coupling the verb "throw away," which indicates intent, with modals ("may") and adverbs ("accidentally") to evade blame and then highlights how atypical this is of him so as to remain reliable to the reader. The notion of narrative unreliability was first detailed by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Most criticism dealing with this issue acknowledges Booth as the first formal proponent of this concept (see Olson 2003; Köppe and Kindt 2011; and Murphy 2012, among others) and while many scholars follow his definition, others have taken issue with or expanded it, professor Ansgar Nünning among them. Nünning argues that Booth's "canonized definition does not really make for clarity . . . since it falls back on the ill-defined and elusive notion of the implied author, which hardly provides a reliable basis for determining a narrator's unreliability." (85) Consequently, Nünning establishes his own set of rules to identify an unreliable narrator, which Carver's character in this story seems to fit. Indeed, in contrast to Booth's "implied author," Nünning holds that "the recognition of a narrator's unreliability . . . does not depend solely or even primarily on the critic's intuition." (85) Instead, he argues that "signals such as textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader's world-knowledge and standards of normality provide the basis for establishing a narrator's unreliability." (85) "Blackbird Pie" is saturated with such signals. From the very beginning, the narrator sounds unreliable. He admits he does not have the letter anymore but he hedges his words, later conveniently stating that such things are "uncharacteristic of" (91) him, although he again qualifies his statement by saying that he "usually do[es]n't throw anything away." (91) In order to increase his credibility, he devotes more than a page to his allegedly fantastic memory (92), highlighting how easily he remembers facts so that he can faithfully recreate the letter his wife sent

him and avoid making the reader suspicious, though to no avail. Martin Scofield notes that there is in this character a “tendency to overdetermine the factual accuracy of his narration by unnecessary repetition.” (272) Indeed, one can find many instances of such repetition in the text: “The moment was there, but I hesitated. Suddenly it was too late for any decisive action. The moment had come and gone, and could not be called back. Just so did Darius hesitate and then fail to act at the Battle of Granicus, and the day was lost, Alexander the Great rolling him up on every side and giving him a real wallop.” (100) While the narrator acknowledges that he could have done something about the situation but hesitated, he resorts to ancient and dubiously-sourced (and thus perhaps unreliable) historical facts to divert the reader’s attention.

What is more, tautology riddled with historical facts also appears in the narrator’s transcription of his wife’s letter. Part of it reads “the time has come and gone for us—us, you and me—to put all our cards on the table. Thee and me. Lancelot and Guinevere. Abélard and Héloïse. Troilus and Cressida. Pyramus and Thisbe. JAJ and Nora Barnacle, etc.” (98-9) Arthur Saltzman suggested that the reader could initially believe the narrator himself might have written the letter, though it is later proven that the wife did in fact write it (102). However, even though she wrote the document itself, what the reader is presented with is the narrator’s transcription of it; that is, in a certain sense, he did actually write it, and he appears to have distorted the original to suit his needs. As much as he wants to believe his memory is as precise as can be, and given his propensity to lie and to decorate the truth, a word-for-word transcription from memory is bound to be somewhat inaccurate. Thus, similarities between the narrator’s language and that of the wife draw our attention to the narrator’s unreliability.

The narrator's approach to the letter also shows signs of unreliability. As previously mentioned, he no longer has the letter, but he is adamant that he can replicate it. However, just as he is about to do so, he admits that he can only "re-create . . . the portion that I read," later stating "*In part*, the letter went as follows," (93; emphasis added) thus admitting he has not read the text in its entirety. Like the many characters who do not listen to their partners, this narrator refuses to read his wife's words, making her endeavor futile: he has proven he is as closed off to having a spoken conversation as he is to having a written one. Not only has he not read the whole letter, but also he continuously misinterprets it. The original contents of the letter are polite and attenuated, with the wife apparently stating, "It happens. . . . In any case, no blame," (93) hence contradicting the narrator's initial comments on it being "outrageous." (91) He stops reading the letter after about one page and, even though he initially refused to accept that the letter came from his wife, he now states "The sentiments expressed in the letter may have belonged to my wife. Maybe they did. Say they did," (94) still hedging the sentences to try to maintain his credibility. After several unsuccessful attempts to get out of his room to find and confront his wife, he returns to the letter, this time reading it in a non-linear way until it "took on quite another character—one more acceptable." (100) The narrator transforms reality to suit his needs, unwilling to face the truth of the situation and move on. This statement becomes even more ironic and unreliable if we take into account that it is suggested that the narrator is a historian, yet his hermeneutical process is far from proficient. Not only does he refuse to analyze the letter as a professional, but his obsession with the letter itself and the handwriting also denotes an avoidance and displacement of his emotions, as he obsesses over the text instead of attempting to come to terms with the fact that his wife is leaving him. He is, in the words of Barthes, "performing a denial of separation." (*A Lover's Discourse* 109)

In this sense, it is interesting to observe Nünning's "distinction between an unreliable narrator and an untrustworthy one." (89) Nünning quotes Renate Hof, who argues that "a narrator may be quite trustworthy in reporting events but not competent in interpreting them." (89) In "Blackbird Pie," however, the narrator appears both unreliable and untrustworthy, as his statements prove contradictory and he inadequately decodes the situation for fear of acknowledging the truth. His inability to communicate with his wife, and his apprehension about confronting her, suggests that—in opposition to what Nessel postulated—Carver's collection *Elephant* does not necessarily feature "newly articulate" (74) characters. As we have seen, the narrator in "Blackbird Pie" saturates his account with repetitions, irrelevant facts, and contradictions. At one point, contradicting his initial remarks, he acknowledges that his wife's letter may contain some truth: "I would go so far as to say that every word of this entire letter . . . is utterly false. I don't mean false in the sense of 'untrue,' necessarily. There is some truth, perhaps, to the charges. I don't want to quibble." (96) His lack of self-awareness highlights his inability to cope with the situation; and the fact that he spends so much time trying to analyze the letter reveals his unwillingness to have a conversation with his wife. It seems, however, that his wife also struggled to find a way to confront him. Instead of straightforwardly talking to him, she slides an envelope under the door and explains the situation through written words. This could mean that she is more comfortable with the written word, although it is later revealed that the narrator locks himself in his room when he works (98), thereby physically building a barrier to prevent direct communication and thus probably forcing the wife to send him the letter as her only means of breaking up with him.

Throughout the story, and especially during the first part, the narrator—though apparently not possessed of an obvious articulateness—nevertheless demonstrates a deeper awareness of the spoken language and an understanding of his feelings that few characters in Carver’s stories have previously shown. Unable to get out of his studio to talk to his wife, he acknowledges that “perhaps [he] wanted to avoid a frontal attack,” admitting that upon going out he immediately “drew back and shut and locked the door,” (98) thereby shutting himself in emotionally. He also mentions that he “was beginning to feel *uneasy*. (No other word will do.)” (98) This time he finds the right word instead of using repetitions or hedging, but these insightful remarks are ephemeral; the reality demonstrates that no matter how much he pretends to master language, he is ultimately unable to use words to either save his marriage or find relief.

When he finally goes outside to find his wife observing some horses wandering in the fog, he asks her what is happening (although if he had read the letter he would probably know), but she initially does not answer (101). When he asks again, she resorts to metafiction, much like Edgar in “Put Yourself in My Shoes,” (*WYPBQ?*) avoiding a direct confrontation with the narrator: “there was this girl, you see. Are you listening? And this girl loved this boy so much. . . . But the boy—well, he grew up. I don’t know what happened to him.” (102) It seems as though these characters, in spite of being more aware of language, are still unable to make use of it successfully. Ironically, just before his wife leaves, the narrator states that “for the first time in [his] life, [he] felt at a loss for words,” (107) but it is clear that he has been feeling that way for a long time, as his wife’s letter evidenced.

History is precisely what the narrator resorts to in order to cope with the situation. Throughout the story, he historicizes his wife and their relationship, referring to its beginning as

their “prehistory days” and defining his wife’s frustration as her “decline.” (95) According to Eva Illouz, “emotional literacy makes one extract oneself from the flow and unreflexive character of experience and transform emotional experience into emotional words and into a set of observable and manipulable entities.” (*Cold Intimacies* 33) The narrator carries out an exhaustive but misguided analysis of his wife’s letter through which he objectifies her emotions instead of seeing them in all their complexity. Similarly, he objectifies his wife. In the last paragraph of the story, he states that “to take a wife is to take a history. And if that’s so, then I understand that I’m outside history now.” (109) The narrator can try to understand and study the situation only if his wife becomes a concept, thereby detaching himself once again from the physicality and reality of the situation. He fails to accept his wife’s Otherness, instead needing to dissect her emotions while physically and emotionally distancing himself from her. In *A Lover’s Discourse*, Barthes wrote, “The other whom I love and who fascinates me is *atopos*. I cannot classify the other, for the other is, precisely, Unique, the singular Image which has miraculously come to correspond to the specialty of my desire.” (34) The narrator of this story, however, seeks to “classify” his wife, failing to see her atopic quality.

After having spoken to her outside in the fog, he understands and seems to accept that she is forever gone. As Scofield points out, “that experience of something mysterious is an essential part of the process by which the pedantic, literal-minded, history buff narrator comes to a deeper realization of his own state and of the real nature of history.” (275) Although Carver finally grants this character the privilege of understanding—if only for a moment—it comes too late. Moreover, his decision to write the story suggests he wants to get the last word in and reassess his own feelings about the whole experience. Although ultimately he “seems to find some comfort in silence,”

(Bethea 179) he does so after having written down his account of the separation, so the story acts as a response to his wife's letter and farewell in front of their house, where he was unable to say much. Like "Intimacy," this story follows a narrator who is in denial about his separation and who seeks vindication through the act of writing; though neither of the stories makes it clear, both narrators might send their texts to their ex-wives as a way to establish their authority in the face of perceived wrongs.

The narrator in "Blackbird Pie," in contrast to what Kirk Nessel claimed, is not particularly articulate and is hardly self-aware; he is wordy when writing and quiet when speaking, but both instances of communication produce the same effect. This story does not "embody on Carver's part [an] . . . opening up of hopeful possibility." (Nessel 74). While the narrators of both "Intimacy" and "Blackbird Pie" use language more freely and abundantly than many of Carver's early characters, they still do not know how to make use of that language in a constructive manner. These stories show characters who seem unable to open themselves to the Other and to accept their otherness. They feel the need to write their stories to the very end, but this does not bring them any closure, for it is not up to them to carry out this task, as Barthes pointed out: "I myself cannot . . . construct my love story to the end: I am its poet (its bard) only for the beginning; the end, like my own death, belongs to others." (*A Lover's Discourse* 101) In Carver's stories, therefore, written communication does not seem to allow characters to communicate more easily or profoundly; instead, it stands as another testament to their inability to assess and express their worries.

CHAPTER III



“Zones of Familiarity and Comfort”: The Resignification of Intimacy

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3.1. Intimate Being: The Connection Between Love and Domesticity

When the domestic and the romantic come together, they give way to intimacy, which entails a connection between love and a sense of place, or, more specifically, of feeling at home. Indeed, intimate beings connect through a “close familiarity” (Shumway 25) that is built both relationally and spatially. It is through our relationships with others that we can generate intimacy, which tends to locate itself in “zones of familiarity and comfort.” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 281) These can range from the house to the workplace or any other location where an individual feels at home.

The word “intimacy” is polysemous, as has been noted by a variety of scholars (Cooke 3; Klagsbrun 20; Shumway 140). For some, it has to do with sex (see Dimen, 2003; Gross, 2005). In fact, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the word was mostly seen as a euphemism for sexual relations (Shumway 25). Gradually, however, this word’s meaning began to expand, particularly as romantic love took center stage with regards to marriages and relationships in general. As noted in the second chapter, if at first marriage had been mostly seen as a useful union between two people, with time it came to be conceived as a loving partnership based on intimacy and closeness. Intimacy thus became “a quality by which a marriage could be measured.” (Shumway 25) It presupposed the ability to communicate with one’s partner openly and exhibit a receptive attitude to the other’s words. According to Karen Lystra, who conducted an analysis of the correspondence between nineteenth-century American middle-class couples, for these

individuals the “concept of intimacy was an ideal of the fullest, most natural self-expression.” (38)

Not only should one have the ability to transmit their feelings and thoughts, but, as previously stated, they should also manage to understand the other’s. Lystra continues,

There was a concentrated effort in middle-class courtship to comprehend the loved one.

This most often involved an attempt by both parties to unmask, to abandon all outward forms of propriety, and to shed all normative social roles except the romantic self. Courting couples pressured each other to greater self-awareness and self-definition in their efforts to know someone else as they sought to know themselves. Middle-class courtship by the 1830s or 1840s claimed this ideal of intimacy. (38)

The goal was thus for partners to *know* each other and share something unique that others might not be privy to. From this knowledge, individuals could learn about their partner’s needs and worries, allowing them to offer support and serve as a buttress against anxiety or discomfort. This is what sociologist David Morgan called “emotional intimacy,” (2) which, together with “embodied intimacy” (also known as physical intimacy, which includes sex but also other forms of touch) and “intimate knowledge,” (2) constitutes the triad of modern intimacy.

This triad was central to marriage in the twentieth century, especially during Carver’s time. However, this was also a time of change. As mentioned in the second chapter, after World War II, the popularization of therapy, the development of the feminist movement and the spread of capitalist practices led to the centrality of intimacy both inside and outside of marriages. Many felt disillusioned with marriage (Giddens 53-8) but still sought the comfort of a partnership, or, in other words, a “pure relationship.” (Giddens 58) Such a relationship refers to “a situation where a social relation is entered into . . . for what can be derived by each person from a sustained

association with another; and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.” (Giddens 58) The pure relationship is not limited by the constraints and expectations of marriage and instead is based on a more equal, or, as Giddens calls it, “democratic” (188) partnership where intimacy lies at its center. Still, it remains an ideal. Like its name indicates, this relationship is “pure,” thus unpolluted. It expects both partners to be equals as well as autonomous enough to preserve the partnership, but this is quite complicated, for the multiple transformations that have occurred throughout the twentieth century have not only positively impacted the lives of many, but also alienated and confused them, thus making relationships and the sustenance of intimacy difficult. In the words of Lauren Berlant, “Romance and friendship inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation, and exhaustion, producing, at the extreme, moral dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures.” (281) While some of these struggles lie outside of each individual by virtue of the pressures of capitalism, many others have to do with the way each person navigates the world.

The increased autonomy and individualization seen throughout the twentieth century has allowed people to choose what they want and how they can achieve it but, in practice, the abundance of choice results in disorientation and ontological insecurities, which negatively impact the cultivation of intimacy. Sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim argue that “[t]he ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time.” (22-3) Uncertainty, however, is also central to our time. To author one’s life requires agency, but the rapid

changes observed throughout the twentieth century have made many lack the ability or the tools to achieve their desires, rendering them incapable of writing their own story. As a result, intimacy struggles to blossom. When individuals are strangers to each other, but also to themselves, they occupy a space that cannot foster intimacy. What's more, a society that values individualism over everything else prevents deep closeness and connection from forming. According to David Shumway, "The discourse of intimacy . . . needs to be understood as a reaction against the individualism of the larger culture and the overvaluing of autonomy it fosters." (137) Shumway's use of the word "overvaluing" proves essential to his argument, because autonomy is valuable, if not vital, to intimacy. Defined by Anthony Giddens as "the successful realisation of the reflexive project of self—the condition of relating to others in an egalitarian way," (189) autonomy relies on the ability of the individual to know themselves in order to establish a democratic relationship with the other. Giddens posits autonomy as crucial to intimacy. To be intimate with another, one must also be intimate with oneself. In other words, to know the other, one must first know oneself. When this happens, "The autonomous individual is able to treat others as such and to recognise that the development of their separate potentialities is not a threat." (Giddens 189) That is when comfort and familiarity can fully develop, leading to an intimate and deep connection with someone else.

The connection between intimacy and autonomy necessitates balance for it to lead to a successful relationship. According to Eva Illouz,

Modern selves expect each other to be emotionally naked and intimate, but independent.

In a modern marriage, it is two highly individuated and differentiated selves that come together; it is the fine-tuned compatibility of two constituted selves that makes up a

successful marriage, not the display of roles. The fine-tuning of the emotional makeup of two persons becomes the basis for intimacy. (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 39)

Self-sufficiency is thus essential; each person must be a fully-fledged individual before they can become intimate with the other. This, however, can prove extremely difficult, making intimacy an ideal rather than a practice and complicating the attainment of the aforementioned balance. In fact, oftentimes one partner seems more comfortable within the realm of the intimate, while the other has less difficulty being autonomous (Shumway 145). The conflict between these two elements of relationships is one of the main reasons why most couples separate or struggle to remain together, which can be seen in many of Carver's stories, as the examples of the second chapter demonstrate. Still, autonomy "helps to provide the personal boundaries needed for the successful management of relationships." (Giddens 189) It allows individuals to experience not just a relationship, but an actual partnership, in which both parties are independent and work for the benefit of each other. Indeed, working is key when it comes to the development of intimacy. The mythologization of romantic love has made many create numerous expectations surrounding relationships, believing words to be unnecessary and communication to come organically. Couples see disagreements as conflict instead of a natural relational element, and associate boundaries with constraints. However, to be intimate and to love is, as Erich Fromm argued, an art, and it requires practice (84). He outlines four main elements that he considers vital to the practice of love: "discipline," (84) "concentration," "patience," (85) and a "supreme concern" (86) for the art itself. This seems precisely, to give an example, what Harry lacks in Carver's "How About This?" As noted in the previous chapters, Harry expects things to fall into place naturally without putting in the work. The minute he steps into Emily's old house, he cannot fathom making a life there, for the building

itself does not meet his expectations. Although she offers solutions and suggests ways to improve on the foundations of the house, his mind immediately becomes inundated with disillusionment. The same happens with his relationship. The foundations might be there, but he is unwilling to practice “discipline,” “concentration,” “patience,” and a “supreme concern” for it. This is the reality of a vast number of couples, who cannot seem to find the right balance between intimacy and autonomy within their relationships—mostly because they struggle to see the connection between love, intimacy, and practice. However, as Anthony Giddens observes, “rights and obligations” (190) are essential to the maintenance of a healthy partnership. He believes that “these define what intimacy actually is. Intimacy should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity.” (190) For intimacy to be fully present within a relationship, individuals need to become autonomous and self-contained, and establish a clear set of boundaries as well as express their desires and needs, which may shift with time as people evolve and circumstances change. This can prove complicated. First, because it demands from individuals a complete understanding of themselves and the ability to vocalize their desires. Secondly, because it removes the mystique surrounding love that many hesitate to abandon; in other words, it dissolves “the old association of love with transcendence, a force above the individual’s particular needs and will.” (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 164) Doing this presupposes accepting that love can be dissected and studied, and that it is, in a way, tangible. It can be felt, observed, and molded, provided that individuals have the tools to do so and the willingness to understand their role in shaping their romantic experiences. The shift from seeing love as other-worldly to seeing it as something that can be regulated has given way to the discourse of intimacy. As Illouz claims, through the modern rationalization of romance “[l]ove became

‘intimacy,’ and intimacy meant that emotional life could be submitted to rules of conduct, the purpose of which was to preserve and carve maximum individual autonomy within the romantic bond.” (Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* 164) Illouz does not praise such rationalization, however, believing instead that the scientific study of romantic love can make the experience even more confusing. (*Why Love Hurts* 169) Still, it seems undeniable that the ability to regulate relationships and to voice one’s needs is imperative to the development of intimacy. The exercise of intimacy requires time and effort, and a willingness to navigate the complexities of love. In the words of Erich Fromm, “Love . . . is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together; even whether there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary to the fundamental fact that two people experience themselves from the essence of their existence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves, rather than by fleeing from themselves.” (80) Indeed, most of Carver’s characters find themselves in flight mode: from themselves, their houses, and their partners. They reflect a modern malaise that sees many struggle to face the challenges that life throws at them, and who romanticize relationships, intimacy and domesticity, believing these to appear naturally. Because working seems associated with uncertainty and exhaustion, people are often reluctant to make an effort elsewhere, limiting it only to their workplace. This attitude appears as a “reaction against the routinization of life,” (Fromm 85) a product of capitalistic practices, but it is also a result of the grand narratives of love that tout romance and intimacy as something that happens to people, instead of something that people make happen. The latter occurs mostly through linguistic openness.

Stabilizing the delicate balance between intimacy and autonomy within relationships is made possible, in part, through adequate communication (Shumway 145). Countless scholars

share this belief, though not all in the same way. For Lauren Berlant, for instance, intimacy involves communicating “with the sparest of signs and gestures.” (“Intimacy” 281) Likewise, writer Francine Klagsbrun argues that, in an intimate situation, words are not necessary because partners trust and know each other very well (20). As argued in the second chapter, communication goes beyond the spoken word, and much can be conveyed through gestures, looks and touch. These, however, cannot sustain a relationship on their own. While individuals communicate an array of emotions through a multiplicity of signs, when problems arise, or changes occur to individuals, these cannot always adequately convey the issue; in this case, words are often needed. To believe that they are not necessary, as Klagsbrun argues, undermines the importance of language and romanticizes intimacy. Gestures are thus not always enough, because “our intimate relationships with others are . . . messy and incoherent” as well as “unanticipated and unscripted.” (Cooke 7) The uncertainty of the relationship, coupled with the enigma of the other, makes open and clear communication a requirement of a successful partnership and the basis of intimacy. This is precisely Giddens’ claim: namely, that “[t]he imperative of free and open communication is the *sine qua non* of the pure relationship; the relationship is its own forum.” (194) True intimacy takes place when partners understand each other’s body language, but also when they feel safe enough to clearly discuss their issues. For Eva Illouz, modern intimacy involves “emotional communication” and the “centrality of linguistic self-expression.” (*Cold Intimacies* 27) Similarly, Professor Francesca Cancian describes it as the “emotional expression and verbal disclosure of personal experience.” (17) It is therefore evident that communication is essential, even though these different scholars have varying opinions on the way meaning is transmitted. What most of them fail to mention, however, is that communication is a two-way street. It has to do not only with the expression of

one's feelings, but also the reception of the other's, and the ability to respond adequately. Writer and lecturer Maggie Scarf emphasizes this argument by defining intimacy as "an individual's ability to talk about who he really is, and to say what he wants and needs, and *to be heard by the intimate partner.*" (109; emphasis added) To be intimate with someone is to create a set of dynamics through which both parties engage in conversation, listen to and support each other. A person might struggle to find the exact words they need to communicate their troubles, but their partner could offer enough support for the exchange to be successful. The onus of communication should not fall only on the person speaking. Eva Illouz addresses this as well, noting that "[m]odern intimacy includes verbal disclosure of emotions, but also . . . the act of sharing such emotions with a partner, with an expectation that the emotional self be revealed and laid bare, in order to get 'support' and recognition." (*Why Love Hurts* 38) Despite the fact that autonomy and independence carry substantial weight for the proper development of a relationship, the way the couple works together and their ability to create a safe space for an ongoing dialogue proves crucial to the establishment and preservation of intimacy. For Scarf, this means being heard, while for Illouz, it comes down to being recognized; in other words, intimacy encourages the possibility of being known. Therefore, while "individual self-fulfillment and growth [have] become the primary standards by which intimate relationships are judged," (Gross 289) intimacy itself encompasses much more than that. It "exists between isolation and fusion, between talk and the conditions for talk, as interest, caring, and understanding." (Shumway 143) It requires autonomy, but also the ability to generate togetherness. This does not only have to do with the people involved in the relationship, but also with the setting: the "conditions for talk" must be, as mentioned above, safe. Eva Illouz contends,

Intimacy is produced by a number of linguistic strategies, all of which aim at reducing the distance between two persons: revealing the deeper layers of the self; telling each other one's innermost secrets; revealing and baring one's psyche; sharing the same bedroom and bed; and, mostly, using the sphere of leisure as common ground to spend time together and share the same space. (*Why Love Hurts* 221)

These words adeptly summarize the importance of communication in generating intimacy while also establishing the relevance of the setting. Although Illouz focuses on spaces devoted to leisure, closeness and familiarity can emerge in other places too, especially given that for certain people, centers of leisure are inaccessible for lack of time, money, or proximity. Thus, intimacy may be found or even created in different, less traditional places, as shall be later seen.

Intimacy happens when love—of any kind—and domesticity come together. The latter tends to be associated with the house but, as argued in the first chapter, such a place can become heterotopic and lose its comforting qualities. Therefore, the home might turn momentarily atopic, forcing individuals to find another location that will welcome them again. Intimacy does not occur in a vacuum; it requires space to hold it. According to Jennifer Cooke,

Our intimacies are so often facilitated—negatively and positively—by the spaces we inhabit and frequent, the home and the workplace being the most universal, with leisure and public spaces also being formative. Intimacies are contextual so they fall under the mark of generic nomenclature . . . yet simultaneously they are textured by the singular experience that one person has of another. They do not happen in blank space. (6)

The environment in which one finds oneself is thus essential to the production of intimacy. Cooke conflates house and home but, as seen in the first chapter, they should not be considered synonyms.

A house can easily become a non-place by virtue of the experiences of its inhabitants and thus lose its homely qualities; the home can exist virtually anywhere. This, in part, occurs through intimacy. The relationships that one builds with the other can foster intimacy, and this can happen in traditional non-places, such as a motel, or in more familiar locations, like the workplace. What is fundamental is that, much like domesticity, intimacy “can be portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices.” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 284) Indeed, it can generate domesticity and transform places that might not have originally been designed for this type of connection. This emerges, as Berlant states, “through practices,” that is, through the way individuals form connections and establish close bonds with one another. In this sense, the discourse of intimacy challenges the “prevalent US discourse on the proper relation between public and private These categories are . . . legacies of a Victorian fantasy that the world can be divided into a controllable space (the private-affective) and an uncontrollable one (the public-instrumental).” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 283) Intimacy blurs the dichotomy between inside and outside because it can cause the values associated with the first to easily crumble, and those assigned to the second to rapidly shift. The private space, as Carver’s stories show, is anything but “controllable.” The same happens with the outside world. Key to Carver’s work is the understanding that uncertainty permeates it all and that the desire to control one’s environment may lead to frustration. His stories question Gaston Bachelard’s contention that “outside and inside are . . . always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility.” (233) They dispute the deep-seated belief that the two are polar opposites, showing instead that both have the capacity to sustain intimacy and hostility—sometimes simultaneously—and to hold more nuance than previously afforded them.

Because of their complexity, intimate spaces are “liable to change and to replace one another as much as to become routine backdrops.” (Cooke 6) Their mutability derives from a variety of external and internal factors. Relationships and the development of familiarity can imbue a place with comfortable qualities, but they can also deprive it of them. Places can be trespassed on and destroyed. Whatever the connection one has with a physical space, it can rapidly change by virtue of one’s relationship to the other, the self, and the outside world. The same happens with intimacy. In the words of Berlant, “intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress ‘a life’ seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability.” (“Intimacy” 282) Indeed, although spaces can build and sustain intimacy, what is fundamental is that intimacy itself can generate spaces through its capacity to endow different environments with new meanings. When an individual feels close to another, whether in a romantic setting or not, the space they occupy or inhabit can acquire a new significance. Such closeness has the potential to dissolve any unwelcoming or threatening qualities a place may have. In practice, however, intimacy proves fairly elusive (Klagsbrun 21; Shumway 143) but this is precisely why it remains so attractive to many. Carver’s characters, for instance, long for intimacy but often find the spaces they occupy hostile; they explore a variety of environments in the hope of securing that sense of familiarity but often fail in their endeavor. This may happen because they mainly focus on their surroundings instead of on themselves. As argued in the first chapter, most individuals populating Carver’s stories believe their dwellings to be at fault for their distress and seldom rely on their partners for support, let alone turn inwards to try to improve the way they individually navigate the world.

The entrenchment of intimacy into the collective consciousness can have the opposite effect of what this concept originally entailed. Eva Illouz argues,

Familiarity and closeness are the main goals of couplehood and intimacy. Combined with the rationalization of everyday life, familiarity institutionalizes selves in such a way that it abolishes the distant, the unfamiliar, or the unpredictable in another person. But familiarity and closeness, I argue, counter-intuitively, are actually conducive to greater gripes. . . . the institutionalization of intimacy and closeness produces irritations and disappointments, making partners ongoingly focus on each other and less able to focus on the cultural shape of their emotions. (*Why Love Hurts* 221-2)

Indeed, the institutionalization of intimacy generates a series of expectations that can prove difficult to meet. In addition, it seeks to remove much of the mystery inherent to the connection with the other. To experience intimacy requires knowledge of the other, but this does not mean that all uncertainty should disappear; instead, it means that individuals should feel confident and safe enough with each other. However, the routinization of intimacy erases otherness in favor of sameness. Ultimately, intimacy flourishes through self-reliance, that is, when individuals find comfort in their own selves. The following sections aim to show instances in Carver's stories in which characters attempt to find themselves, home, and the ability to communicate more openly with their partners in an attempt to build intimacy both relationally and individually, namely, through the way they connect with the other and themselves.

3.2. Between Walls: Shielded Communication

Although Carver's characters struggle to articulate their needs and worries through the spoken word, choosing instead to use other forms of communication, as noted in the second chapter, there are times in which they exploit their surroundings to facilitate speech. Space and communication come together when these individuals attempt to be more straightforward while seeking protection in the places they inhabit. In these stories, different areas of the house serve as walls that shield the characters from potential pain, whether physical or psychological, or as spaces that promote openness and possibility. It is in these places that some characters become more direct, even if this does not make conversations succeed. While it grants them the ability, however briefly, to be clearer about their desires or fears, their partners may not respond adequately or even listen to them. Nevertheless, these instances show the connection between domesticity and love, for they support the characters in their endeavors to generate intimacy, gain confidence or set boundaries. Indeed, while linguistic openness may not lead to intimacy with the other, it might do so with oneself through the way some characters attempt to enact change and move forward instead of remaining stagnant, a quality that defines most of Carver's characters.

3.2.1. "Space that is Undefined": Thresholds

Thresholds and doors are "expressions of social transformation, boundaries, and liminality." (Eriksen 187) As argued in section 1.4.1.4., thresholds are in-between places that hold an entire cosmos; they embrace uncertainty and, by extension, possibility. If the aforementioned section focused on the act of opening and closing doors, the aim of this one is to explore how characters express themselves when they stand in a doorway. This architectural feature proves

particularly relevant in Carver's stories because for many of his characters "the threshold can offer an illusory security." (Mukherji xxiii) It relieves them from having to occupy a space that is fully defined—at least traditionally—such as the living room or the kitchen, where their words might carry finality, and where power dynamics are already established. Mukherji suggests that the safety provided by doorways might be misleading, but the threshold is "the fine line where no one and no one thing rules, where all sovereignty is undermined, where incompatible spaces, epistemes, and modes of discourse struggle for dominance." (Carroll 62-3) Still, Mukherji's contention speaks to the impermanence inherent to thresholds. Sooner or later, individuals dwelling in such spaces must cross the boundary and step into a different area, where the promise of possibility may grow dim. However, even if for a brief moment, doorways "are dynamic spaces of inhabitation . . .; they offer possibilities of survival and adaptation and the hope of self-transformation." (Silberman et al. 5) Indeed, standing in a threshold engenders the potentiality of change. This is precisely what Carver's characters long for, and the nature of doorways welcomes this prospect.

As a liminal space, the threshold is all-encompassing: its role is "to divide and connect, to exclude and include, to shield and constrain," (Silberman et al. 1) and it lies "poised between the explicit and the implicit, between external and internal, and by extension, between familiar and alien." (Mukherji xix) Because it does not carry the expectations of other, more fixed spaces, the threshold might allow individuals to be more assertive. Indeed, it does not follow the norms of the places that lie beyond the threshold, nor does it have its own set of regulations. It exists between other spaces, as Marianne Eriksen asserts: "While creating axes (connections) and oppositions (boundaries), door and threshold also materialize a space between. Standing in a doorway one is neither here nor there, but between spaces, or outside space. In short, the power of the doorway lies

in its ability to effect and affect our embodied, sensory experience of space and relations.” (189) I would argue, however, that the threshold is a space in itself—a space that differs from all others in its uniqueness and complexity, and that has the capacity to shape the way individuals relate to themselves and to others.

Doorways hold a particular significance in Carver’s stories, for they signal hope, as we shall soon see, but also alienation: they can highlight the distance between characters. “Careful” (*Cathedral*), for instance, shows the disconnect between Lloyd and his wife Inez, who are separated, in the threshold. The story deals with the literal and figurative inability to hear: Lloyd has awakened to find his ear “stopped up with wax. He couldn’t hear anything clearly.” (105) Later, Inez “acted as if she hadn’t heard him.” (106) Although both Lloyd and Inez “have things to talk about” (107) and “things to discuss,” (111) they spend most of the time trying to fix his blocked ear. When they succeed, Inez has to leave, so, much like in “A Serious Talk,” the conversation never takes place, in part because Lloyd cannot—and refuses to—hear what she has to say. Lloyd, an alcoholic, “has cut himself off from the world, severely limiting the likelihood for opening a dialogue to counter the repressive denial of his disease.” (Donahue 59) His ear is blocked, he has no telephone, and he lives in a small confining apartment. When Inez arrives, their distance is made apparent as she waits in the threshold: “She stood in the doorway in a bright spring outfit. He hadn’t seen these clothes before. She was holding a canvas handbag that had sunflowers stitched onto its sides. He hadn’t seen the handbag before, either.” (105-6) While she stands at the door, Lloyd observes his wife and notices her new clothes, a sign that she might have renewed her wardrobe and that, unlike him, she is taking care of herself by putting thought into her appearance. Her outfit contrasts with his oppressive apartment, where “the roof slanted down sharply,” forcing him to “duck his head,”

“stoop” (103) and “bend over” (104) to navigate the space. The description of her clothes emphasizes their distance, for it serves as a reminder of what is lacking in Lloyd’s place: joy (“bright”) and life (“spring,” “sunflowers”). If “the entrance [is] a means . . . of establishing the identity of the inhabitant,” (Hillier and Hanson 19) Inez’s position demarcates her life and self from Lloyd’s and suggests she has been able to move on, as opposed to him. In short, she has created “a life which appears to exclude him.” (Ayala 107) Throughout the story, she seems resolute as she attempts to find a variety of solutions to help Lloyd, while he either repeatedly hits his head or catastrophizes the situation by saying, “If this doesn’t work, I’ll find a gun and shoot myself.” (112) Lloyd resorts to isolation through alcohol, loneliness, and the prospect of death. By contrast, Inez actively tries to solve Lloyd’s problem, saying, “Anyway, we need to try *something*. We’ll try this first. If it doesn’t work, we’ll try something else. That’s life, isn’t it?” (108) Upon hearing this, Lloyd asks, “Does that have a hidden meaning or something?” (108) Natural banter turns hostile for him when her words remind him of his inability to improve his life, as he remains trapped in his suffocating apartment and debilitating alcoholism. In reality, “[t]he not-so-hidden meaning is that Inez . . . believes in engaging life, while Lloyd lives in drunken retreat from living.” (Bethea 141) Her appearance at the threshold emphasizes this difference, and the story comes full circle as their distance becomes evident when she prepares to leave and stands in the doorway once more. There, “she turned and said something else to him. He didn’t listen. He didn’t want to. He watched her lips move until she’d said what she had to say.” (114) If at the beginning he had trouble listening to her because his ear was blocked, at the end his inability to hear stems from his refusal to confront and dialogue with Inez, and her position at the threshold makes the distance between them all the more pronounced. In *The Logic of Practice* (1980), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues,

Boundaries are where battles take place: boundaries between fields, which are the sites or the causes of very real struggles . . . ; boundaries between the seasons, with, for example, the fight between winter and spring; the threshold of the house, where the antagonistic forces meet and all the changes of state occur that are linked to the transition from inside to outside . . . or from outside to inside. (228)

Lloyd and Inez embody these antagonistic forces, with Lloyd representing winter and Inez spring, that is to say, stagnancy and mobility. He refuses to socialize, believing that “being alone was the thing he needed most,” (105) which might not be particularly sound given his condition, while Inez comes to visit him and converses with his landlady, demonstrating an ability to interact with others. While she talks to Mrs. Matthews, Lloyd goes “to the door. He opened it and stood there, listening.” (114) In the following lines, the verb “heard” is repeated seven times while he stands in the doorway, listening to Inez and Mrs. Matthews’ conversation. Once alone, Lloyd does listen, but instead of crossing the threshold and opening up to change, he “shut[s] the door,” (115) gets dressed, and goes back to bed.

“The Ducks” highlights yet another couple’s detachment from each other in the way they move through the house, including the threshold. Said detachment is made evident from the very beginning of the story: “he was at the back of the house splitting firewood,” while she was in “the kitchen.” (128) Soon, the narrator notes how “*her* sheets,” hanging from “*his wife’s* clothes-line,” (128; emphasis added) were flapping in the wind, but the man “carried all the wood onto the porch before it started to rain,” (128) later telling his wife, “*your things* are going to get wet.” (128; emphasis added) The narration makes it clear that there is a distinction between what belongs to the wife and what belongs to the husband, thereby insisting on their detachment. As the story

progresses, it seems he finds more comfort outside, whereas she spends more time inside. In addition, his unwillingness to help her with the sheets—which they both share—exemplifies how “[s]ince the beginnings of the transformations affecting marriage and personal life, men by and large have excluded themselves from the developing domain of the intimate.” (Giddens 60)

Although the study of gender in Carver’s stories falls beyond the scope of the present dissertation, “The Ducks,” to which critics have not paid much attention, adeptly shows the different ways in which men and women have traditionally dwelt in the house. In this particular story, from the beginning to the end, these characters seem to move in two different planes, sharing a house but finding comfort in very different areas; the way they make use of the threshold accentuates their detachment. After having had dinner, he “went out onto the porch . . . she came out. She stood there in the doorway,” (128) not daring to step out, instead standing where she feels safer. The same sentence is repeated later when he comes home at night and tells his wife that the mill boss has died: “He stood there in the doorway.” (129) Even though it is pouring outside, the husband remains at the door and tells her the news. In both of these instances, “[c]rossing the threshold means abandoning one space and entering the next, a bodily practice recognized both in ritual and in language as a transition from one social role to another.” (Eriksen 188) Neither of them wishes to make this change, fearful of the transformation that might follow. Instead, they remain in their self- and socially-designated places to avoid altering their reality. The threshold thus offers them protection from what may lie beyond, but it also clearly demarcates their roles and positions. As they settle in bed towards the end of the story, their detachment and separation becomes more apparent as the narrator notes how “she came around to *his side* of the bed,” (132; emphasis added) where they stay quietly for a while. Although she attempts to move closer to him, which, as shown

in the second chapter, rarely works, the fact that the narrator insists on the bed's division further shows their estrangement. The husband later "turned over to *his own side*" (132; emphasis added) but cannot go to sleep. He tries to awaken his wife, "but she only shuddered and moved over farther to *her own side*." (133; emphasis added) Not only are they distant within their own home, with each character finding comfort in different rooms, but their separation grows more accentuated in the very bed they share. The story ends in this way, with the wife sleeping while her husband remains awake, thus once again existing in different planes, namely sleep and wakefulness.

Thresholds can also give the characters confidence to speak their minds or try to assert dominance over the other. They act as "the boundary between two spaces, where the antagonistic principles confront one another and the world is reversed." (Bourdieu 228) Even if for a brief moment, roles may switch, giving characters the courage to say what they otherwise would not.²⁰ This is true for Leo in "Are These Actual Miles?" Although he spends most of the story in silence or speaking very little, unable to understand and thus voice his frustration, he does appear more commanding at the beginning, especially as he stands in a threshold. While Toni gets ready to leave the house in order to sell their car, she criticizes and emasculates him. However, because of his physical position, he manages to question her abuse. The story reads, "Leo stands in the bedroom doorway and taps his lips with his knuckles, watching. . . . 'Jesus,' Leo says, 'did you have to say that?'" (150-1) Minutes later, he stands at the front door and, again, speaks more authoritatively as he says, "Open at nine hundred, . . . Then come down. Nine hundred is low bluebook, even on a

²⁰ This also happens with alcohol. When they are drunk, Carver's characters become more straightforward and manage to communicate their needs. In "Gazebo," Duane states, "When I look back on it, all of our important decisions have been figured out when we were drinking." (21) While this may not be the wisest option, for many of these individuals it remains the only choice, for it allows them to open up in a way that their sober selves cannot. Examples of drunken honesty feature in "What's in Alaska?" or "Are These Actual Miles?" among others.

cash deal.” (151) Not only that, but he also seems more hopeful when he says goodbye, telling her, “Things are going to be different! . . . We start over Monday. I mean it.” (152) Because thresholds are “defined by a sense of contingency,” (Mukherji xvii) the act of standing in the doorway makes Leo briefly forget his bleak circumstances and see the chance of success and opportunity in his future. Once he closes the door and waits for Toni to come back home, however, he resorts to drinking, downing a minimum of six drinks throughout the afternoon. Confronted by a devastating future, “Leo faces . . . the most authentic terror of all Carver characters, a dread produced by his total loss of dignity, a paralyzing effect that stems from alcoholism, bankruptcy, and an inadequate marriage.” (Bethea 66) Such paralysis is linguistic as well, for within the home he holds no power. As noted in the second chapter, when attempting to communicate with Toni through the phone he resorts to the term of endearment “honey” in the hope of recalling a past intimacy with his wife, but to no avail. He can barely utter any words beyond that. At the end, when he meets the buyer, he can only say, “I want to tell you. . . . Monday.” (156) One could argue that his inability to form full sentences stems from the distressing suspicion that Toni has slept with the buyer in order to secure the sale. While this may be the case, the story does suggest, from the very beginning, that Toni will do whatever is necessary to get the money. Arthur Bethea explains, “the story’s first sentence contains an ironic sexual pun foreshadowing the most significant event.” (208) When the narrator says that “Leo sends Toni out to do it,” (150) the verb “do” could have two meanings: first, it is a reference to the act of selling the car, and second, it is a euphemism for sexual relations. This does not mean that Leo will easily accept Toni’s actions and can thus account for his behavior, but the story makes it clear that he has been struggling with an array of issues well before this day, as has Toni. When she arrives home at dawn, visibly drunk, she

stands at the entrance of the house and tries to physically attack Leo while also insulting him, as she says “bankrupt” twice and calls him “son of a bitch.” (156) Again, the threshold allows an individual to express themselves more freely and to gain a modicum of confidence. Even though she appears more confident than Leo, Toni also shields her words through the use of walls, as shall be studied in the following section. Thus, in this case, the entrance of the house allows her to become forthright and voice her true feelings about Leo.

The threshold is thus quite significant in the spatial configuration of Carver’s stories. It appears as a “productive space” (Mukherji xviii) that can effect change or offer protection. Two more examples that I wish to comment on occur briefly in “A Serious Talk” and “Popular Mechanics” (*WFTA*). In the first, Burt knocks on the glass door to attract Vera’s attention. When she sees him, she “frown[s]” and “open[s] the door a little.” (90) Her unwillingness to fully open it mirrors her relationship with Burt; she does not want to welcome him into her life or her house anymore. After he tells her he would like to apologize for his actions, she “stood in the doorway and [Burt] stood on the patio next to the philodendron plant. . . . She said, ‘I can’t take any more. You tried to burn the house down.’” (91) Vera does not engage in any exchange of courtesies and gets straight to the point, clearly stating what he has done wrong and how much his behavior has exhausted her. Therefore, like Leo in “A Serious Talk,” the threshold allows Vera to remain firm in her desire to see Burt go.²¹ Similarly, in “Popular Mechanics,” the woman explicitly articulates her feelings when she stands in the doorway. The story, undoubtedly inspired by the Judgment of Solomon, sees a couple on the verge of separating fighting to keep their baby until the

²¹ Vera is also assertive inside of her house. Unlike Burt, who has destabilized the space and cannot find comfort within it, Vera has resignified the place by building intimacy through her relationship with another person. Houses or apartments can also be used as walls to communicate more effectively or to generate intimacy, as shall be studied in 3.2.3.

baby—though never made explicit—is either harmed or killed. Towards the beginning of the story, “[h]e was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door.” (103) There, the woman starts screaming at her partner, saying, “I’m glad you’re leaving! I’m glad you’re leaving! . . . Do you hear? . . . Son of a bitch! I’m so glad you’re leaving! . . . You can’t even look me in the face, can you?” (103) In the threshold, she seeks direct confrontation, while he remains aloof. In this story, according to Amir Ayala, “The interior space is delineated from an external point of view in the opening, which refers to the street outside the house, and in the terrifying finale which concludes the event. . . . The text thus demarcates its own boundaries, creating a frame that illustrates the entrance into and exit from the room that has turned into a boxing ring.” (105-6) Indeed, the story’s opening paragraph draws attention to the darkness permeating both outside, where “the snow was melting into dirty water” (103) and inside, where “[t]he kitchen window gave no light.” (103) The environment proves increasingly oppressive, with the threshold the only space that welcomes “the uncertain” (Mukherji xvii) and thus potentially change and a less grim ending. However, the woman is eventually forced to enter the kitchen where, in the near-dark, “the issue was decided.” (105) Despite the threshold’s potential and ability to engender change, it remains “transitory.” (Mukherji xvii) Sooner or later, individuals will need to cross it and find new places that might allow them to communicate more directly, such as mirrors, windows, and reflections.

3.2.2. “A Stranger to Oneself”: Mirrors, Windows and Reflections

In the spring of 1961 Carver published his first story, “Furious Seasons.” The story follows the incestuous affair between Lew Farrell and his sister Iris and its gruesome consequences. Although the plot and structure differ from what Carver would go on to write, the narrative does

feature domestic elements that appear often throughout his work, such as the window or the mirror. In fact, it clearly establishes the parallel between both elements, noting the first can easily turn into the second. The story reads, “It is dark outside and the air smells of rain. Iris asks if he will close the window. He looks up at the window, now a mirror, seeing himself and, behind, Iris sitting at the dresser watching him, with another, darker Farrell staring into another window beside her.” (*Collected Stories* 205) As light fades, the window no longer shows what lies outside, instead reflecting the interior of the place, thus doubling it. Lew sees a “darker” version of himself, both literally and figuratively, which stands as a reminder of his reprehensible behavior; he becomes a spectator of his own life, with his double revealing his own self. As Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, author of *The Mirror: A History* (1994), indicates, “By simulating resemblance, the mirror dissimulates another truth, one that can emerge only surreptitiously, in a fearsome difference and obliquity: ‘dubious resemblance’ or troubling strangeness, the mirror is a mirror of otherness.” (224) The “darker Farrell” in the window is simply Lew himself, but the reflection highlights his alterity.

Windows and mirrors feature quite often in Carver’s stories. In fact, “[i]t is hardly gratuitous that Carver places a great number of his characters before mirrors and windows. . . . If the mirror is an emblem of Carverian dissociation, the window, appropriately, is a complementary symbol of voyeurism.” (Boxer and Phillips 77) As we shall soon see, the mirror is not merely a symbol of “dissociation.” Likewise, the window allows characters to do much more than observe those who lie outside: it can act as a threshold, offering protection and opportunity, or it can turn into a mirror, reflecting the observer and their surroundings. Windows can lead to understanding, connection, and realization, but they can also highlight the distance between individuals.

According to Gillian Beer, “The window registers connection and difference between interior and exterior. It allows us to be in two scenes at once. It affirms the presence of other ways of being, other patterns of objects, just beyond the concentrated space of the observer.” (Beer 5) Like doorways, windows are liminal spaces that can connect or separate; their transparency allows people to experience inside and outside simultaneously. Sometimes, this can lead to an epiphany, as is the case of Carlyle in “Fever,” who looks at his neighbors from within his house:

The old couple went carefully along the walk and got into their truck. Jim Webster bent down under the dashboard. Mrs. Webster looked at Carlyle and waved. It was then, as he stood at the window, that he felt something come to an end. It had to do with Eileen and the life before this. Had he ever waved at her? He must have, of course, he knew he had, yet he could not remember just now. But he understood it was over, and he felt able to let her go. (173)

Seeing his neighbors outside, seemingly content with their lives, makes Carlyle turn inward and reminisce about his relationship with Eileen. Upon acknowledging that some memories of their time together have faded, he comes to the realization that this might indicate their romantic story has come to an end.²² This might also have to do with his connection with Mrs. Webster, one of the few characters—if not the only one—in the stories of Raymond Carver who openly praises the act of listening. As he battles a fever, Carlyle speaks endlessly, saying “all he knew to say” (172) in an effort to strip his body from his illness and his mind from his distress. At one point he stops to “wipe his forehead,” (171) to which she says, “Go on . . . I know what you’re saying. You just keep

²² Some characters, however, never manage to make a realization, and their lives see no transformation. This happens, for instance, in “Boxes,” in which the frustrated narrator states, “I hang up the phone and stand at the window for a minute longer, wishing I could figure this thing out. But I can’t.” (11) While the majority of Carver’s characters remain immobile, both physically and psychologically, there are instances—as this section aims to show—in which change does occur, and this is sometimes facilitated by their surroundings.

talking, Mr. Carlyle. Sometimes it's good to talk about it. Sometimes it has to be talked about. Besides, I want to hear it. And you're going to feel better afterwards." (171-2) Mrs. Webster's compassion and kindness help heal Carlyle, who, upon seeing her through his window later, finally opens up to change. In this case, the window reveals possibility and allows Carlyle to see a future where intimacy can grow, even if it is without his partner.

In "A Small, Good Thing," Ann also has a realization while standing at the window and observing the parking lot outside. Instead of finding hope, she finds the certainty that her son will not make it through: "She stood at the window with her hands gripping the sill, and knew in her heart that they were into something now, something hard." (65-6) Nonetheless, she and her husband also experience a moment of intimacy while at the window—one that briefly illustrates Francine Klagsbrun's claim that the spoken word is not always necessary within partnerships, because of their trust and connection. In the story, "Howard . . . went over to stand beside her at the window. They both stared out at the parking lot. They didn't say anything. But they seemed to feel each other's insides now, as though the worry had made them transparent in a perfectly natural way." (66) As they experience the potential (and eventual) loss of their child, they share similar emotions of grief and despair, even though they externalize them differently. At this moment, however, their own bodies also become windows that allow them to see each other fully, existing as "a kind of threshold to [their] secret anxieties and desires." (Ayala 108) Ann and Howard are one of the few couples in the stories of Carver that seem to care for each other deeply and who support each other as they experience a devastating event. The window shows them what lies beyond and in the hospital itself, but it also allows them to see within themselves. Gillian Beer argues, "The window affords sight, but not the intimacy of touch or taste." (8) While this is often the case, it can

actually promote intimacy. In this story, for instance, the window overlooks the parking lot, where cars pass by, a reminder of the reason why Scotty lies comatose in bed. The window separates her from that world and grants her some momentary solace next to her husband. This story shows how “[t]he window may affirm connection but equally it may assert exclusion,” (Beer 3) because it excludes Ann from the threatening outdoors but connects her to her husband.

The window’s glass “represents the first gradation of opacity” in that it “is both medium and barrier.” (I. Armstrong 7) It is a space in itself, and it can also obstruct. An obvious example of this happens in “So Much Water So Close to Home,” when Claire is driving down a road and is followed by a green pick-up truck whose driver makes her stop the car. The exchange goes as follows:

I lock the doors and roll up the windows.

“You all right?” the man says. He raps on the glass. “You okay?” He leans his arms on the door and brings his face to the window.

I stare at him. I can’t think what else to do.

“Is everything all right in there? How come you’re all locked up?”

I shake my head.

“Roll down your window.” He shakes his head and looks at the highway and then back at me. “Roll it down now.”

“Please,” I say, “I have to go.” (73)

Stuart’s action—and inaction—have made her distrustful of men, which this exchange seems to justify. The windows allow her to see what the man is doing, but they also protect her from

impending harm. A more relevant example that I wish to discuss takes place in “The Ducks.” In this case, the wife uses her surroundings to her advantage in order to be more direct:

“What’s the matter? Don’t you feel good?” he said.

“I feel all right.” She went back into the kitchen and shut the door and looked at him through the window. “I just hate to have you gone all the time. It seems like you’re gone all the time,” she said *to the window*. (128; emphasis added)

She uses the home to protect her, finding shelter behind the window so she can freely communicate her wishes, but to no avail: he does not reply, only lightly touching her hip as he goes to work. Such an instance of intimacy from his part is ephemeral, however. In fact, their communicative exchanges further support the idea that these two characters are distant from each other—they deflect questions or requests, or avoid answering altogether. When she asks him if he is going hunting the following morning, he “looked away from her and out toward the lake” (128); when she tells him to kiss her goodbye, “he hugged her.” (129) There is an obvious need on her part to connect to him more strongly, but he remains evasive and distant. She actually dares to explain how she feels to him instead of choosing silence, which he seems to favor, but she makes use of the house to protect her while she voices her needs. Throughout the story, the wife often appears physically affectionate towards her husband, holding his hands, stroking his hair, or even suggesting they have intercourse later on, but he remains evasive—he does not rebuke her advances, but neither does he seem to want to return them. It seems as though, aware of his mounting detachment, the wife is trying to hold on to him not only by verbally letting him know she wants him to be home more often, but also by attempting to keep him physically tied to her: “She fastened her arms around his neck and held him.” (129) It soon becomes apparent that she is doing whatever is in her power to

salvage her marriage. As Eva Illouz states, “‘emotional survival’ has become the main vocation of modern families who must maintain the dense emotional fabric of intimacy in everyday life.” (“The Lost Innocence” 169) In spite of her efforts, she still fails to convince him to become more physically intimate, as evidenced by the following exchange:

“Maybe we’ll have a little tonight. We never hardly get a chance to have a little.” She touched her other hand to his thigh, leaned over and kissed him. “What do you think about that?”

“That sounds all right,” he said. He got up and walked over to the window. Against the trees outside he could see her reflection standing behind him and a little to the side. “Hon, why don’t you go ahead and take your bath and we’ll turn in.” he said. (130)

If at first he seems interested in the offer, he soon demonstrates he was simply pretending. Just like she did at the beginning, physically distancing herself from her husband by placing a wall between them to tell him how she felt, the husband now talks to her wife’s reflection instead of to her face and refuses her suggestion by implying they should go to sleep after she takes her bath. He uses the window as a mirror in order to avoid addressing her directly; by doing so, he enters a different space where he speaks to a version of her that resembles his wife but is not her real self. Thus, he circumvents direct confrontation by increasing the distance—both literal and figurative—between himself and his wife. In this story, by “reengaging the subject in a dialectic of being and seeming, the mirror appeals to the imagination, introducing new perspectives and anticipating other truths.” (Melchior-Bonnet 157) The reflection, a form of mirror, enables the husband to see his wife differently, thereby granting him the ability to answer her question more honestly. This, along with

the wife's use of the window as a shield, shows how these characters interact with the space around them in order to communicate more openly and attempt to generate intimacy.

In "They're Not Your Husband," Earl gets straight down to business—literally—as he begins working on his new project, that is, Doreen and her appearance. When she enters their bedroom and opens the curtains, Earl says,

"Look at yourself in the mirror," he said.

"What?" she said. "What are you talking about?"

"Just look at yourself in the mirror," he said.

"What am I supposed to see?" she said. But she looked in the mirror over the dresser and pushed the hair away from her shoulders.

"Well?" he said.

"Well, what?" she said.

"I hate to say anything," Earl said, "but I think you better give a diet some thought. I mean it. I'm serious. I think you could lose a few pounds. Don't get mad." (17)

Instead of telling her what he thinks directly, that is, namely, to her face, he asks her to look at the mirror, expecting her to see what he sees, and it is through that medium that he begins stating his intentions. Interestingly, he fails to be fully straightforward while speaking to her reflection, saying "I hate to say anything," "I think" multiple times and asking her not to "get mad." This further highlights his insecurity, already worsened by the businessmen's attitude at the diner. Still, he does use the mirror to speak to her more honestly, when most of the time he uses gestures that Doreen has to interpret, at one point answering "[n]othing" (18) when she asks him what he is doing. For Earl, "in the depth of sheer observation, in the present, there lurks another eye . . . taken from a

different time.” (Ayala 74) His experience with the other men at the diner follows him home and dictates his desire and ensuing actions. In other words, Earl looks at Doreen’s in the mirror, but so do the businessmen, and together they instruct Doreen to become more agreeable to their eyes. Therefore, in this story, Earl uses his environment to communicate more directly and convince his wife of his plan. In this case, however, Earl seeks to build intimacy and complicity with the men at the diner, rather than with Doreen.

“Are These Actual Miles?” also sees Toni communicate openly and bluntly through a mirror, much like she does when she comes home drunk. While she gets ready to leave, she tells Leo,

“So tell me how I look.”

“You look fine,” he says. “You look great. I’d buy a car from you anytime.”

“But you don’t have money,” she says, peering into the mirror. She pats her hair, frowns.

“And your credit’s lousy. You’re nothing,” she says. “Teasing,” she says and looks at him in the mirror. “Don’t be serious,” she says. “It has to be done, so I’ll do it. You take it out, you’d be lucky to get three, four hundred and we both know it. Honey, you’d be lucky if you didn’t have to pay *them*.” (150)

Toni orders Leo to compliment her, then proceeds to belittle and emasculate him, further exacerbating his self-doubt and anxiety about their circumstances. Her words worsen “the disappointment of a man who feels cheated of something, of everything; a man whose life seems prematurely drained of passion, purpose, and intensity; a man with nothing to look forward to but more of the same: . . . a lifetime of routine cares and responsibilities.” (Cornwell 354) Although they are trying to improve their economic situation, she does nothing to ameliorate their

relationship. Her openness does not contribute to the development of intimacy; instead, it makes Leo retreat into himself and fall silent. At the same time, Toni resents Leo's immobility and perceived incompetence. Throughout the night, she remains evasive and gives Leo vague answers to his questions that further accentuate his insecurity—the very insecurity that keeps him stagnant. By contrast, the mirror allows her to distance herself from her surroundings, but particularly from Leo, to voice her frustration. In this sense, the mirror's transformative qualities give Toni the ability to become assertive.

In “The Calm,” however, the mirror does promote intimacy, although not between a couple. The main character listens to three clients at the barbershop talking, with one of them recounting a rather upsetting hunting story and the barber having a confrontation with another man later on. At the end,

The barber turned me in the chair to face the mirror. He put a hand to either side of my head. He positioned me a last time, and then he brought his head down next to mine.

We looked into the mirror together, his hands still framing my head.

I was looking at myself, and he was looking at me too. But if the barber saw something, he didn't offer comment.

He ran his fingers through my hair. He did it slowly, as if thinking about something else. He ran his fingers through my hair. He did it tenderly, as a lover would.

That was in Crescent City, California, up near the Oregon border. I left soon after. But today I was thinking of that place, of Crescent City, and of how I was trying out a new life there with my wife, and how, in the barber's chair that morning, I had made up my mind to go. I was thinking today about the calm I felt when I closed my eyes and let the

barber's fingers move through my hair, the sweetness of those fingers, the hair already starting to grow. (102)²³

Like Carlyle in "Fever," who comes to a realization about his wife while staring out the window, the narrator of "The Calm" makes a decision while he looks at himself in the mirror. Amir Ayala argues, "The title focuses on the feeling of calm, which is absent from this rather disquieting story." (121) However, I would argue that the end of this story, like that of "Fever," suggests connection and shows scattered moments of intimacy and peace that alleviate the pain of being alive. Although the narrator experiences some discomfort while witnessing what happens at the shop, the closeness he shares with the barber as they stare into the mirror brings him some solace. As Melchior-Bonnet maintains,

The face-to-face encounter, a space of intimacy wrested from the gaze of an other, is not only the passive perception of an appearance, but a projection, a circling from desire to reflection and from reflection to desire. To observe oneself, to measure oneself, to dream oneself and to transform oneself: these are the diverse functions brought into play by an encounter with the mirror. (157)

The barber invites the narrator to look at himself in the mirror, and accompanies him through the process, which proves transformative. In this moment, the main character faces himself, but this "space of intimacy" is not "wrested from the gaze of an other"; instead, the barber contributes to that intimacy by looking as well. The mirror, like the window, offers sight, but not touch; nevertheless, like Ann and Howard in "A Small, Good Thing," the narrator and the barber of "The

²³ Although this last paragraph has already been quoted and briefly analyzed on page 129 (section 1.4.2.4.), I believe it is relevant to include it in this section as well to support my arguments.

Calm” stand together in front of the mirror and generate togetherness both within the mirror and without.

3.2.3. “A World of Potential Unconflictedness”: The Domestic Environment

Sometimes, the house itself sustains intimacy, even if for a brief moment, because “[d]omestic privacy can feel like a controllable space, a world of potential unconflictedness . . . It may seem of a manageable scale and spacing; at best, it makes visible the effects of one’s agency, consciousness, and intention.” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 286) Against the potentially threatening or simply monotonous world, the domestic environment can help characters feel more connected or communicate more easily. One example, as noted in the first chapter, appears in “How About This?” In this story, Emily seems more confident within the house because she grew up there. Another example occurs in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” In this case, and particularly at the beginning of the story, Ralph feels safer at home than in the outside world, which the first part of the story shows. His trip to Mexico disturbs him and he longs for the safety of California, and particularly his house, where he has built a comfortable life with Marian. Although a suspicion of her unfaithfulness lurks beneath the surface, Ralph and Marian share one of the most traditionally intimate moments in Carver’s work. The story reads,

. . . it was a Sunday night in November and the children were asleep and Ralph was sleepy and he sat on the couch grading papers and could hear the radio playing softly in the kitchen, where Marian was ironing, and he felt enormously happy. He stared a while longer at the papers in front of him, then gathered them all up and turned off the lamp. (166)

The repetition of “and” highlights all the elements that contribute to the domesticity of this scene, with the sentence finishing by noting Ralph’s joy. Such delight derives from the domestic scene itself, which comforts Ralph, and it contrasts with “the squalor and open lust” (165) that he witnessed abroad, and that he will experience again as he explores the city later on. At this moment, his house protects him from the outside world, supporting Laura Miller’s contention that “[t]he residential suburb . . . encouraged continuous contact with godly nature and sheltered the family from the evils of the city.” (Miller 399) Within the house, Ralph feels safe. Once he finishes working, Marian talks to him:

“Finished, love?” Marian said with a smile when he appeared in the doorway. She was sitting on a tall stool, and she stood the iron up on its end as if she had been waiting for him.

“Damn it, no,” he said with an exaggerated grimace, tossing the papers on the kitchen table.

She laughed—bright, pleasant—and held up her face to be kissed, and he gave her a little peck on the cheek. He pulled out a chair from the table and sat down, leaned back on the legs and looked at her. She smiled again and then lowered her eyes.

“I’m already half asleep,” he said.

“Coffee?” she said, reaching over and laying the back of her hand against the percolator.

He shook his head.

She took up the cigarette she had burning in the ashtray, smoked it while she stared at the floor, and then put it back in the ashtray. She looked at him, and a warm expression moved across her face. (166-7)

The way they communicate, namely, their small talk, gestures and looks further show the familiarity of the scene. Interestingly, Marian initiates the conversation and appears more loving to Ralph than he does. She “laughed” and “smiled” multiple times, is described as “bright, pleasant,” and stares at Ralph with a “warm expression.” It seems as though she feels more comfortable than him, even though the narrator points out his happiness. This might be due to his limited way of seeing the world, “a view about the morally and physically healthful influences of rural living, and a concomitant view of the city as sinful and providing temptations that can lure individuals away from familial pursuits.” (Miller 396-7) In addition, and perhaps most importantly, “he had taken it into his head that his wife had once betrayed him with a man named Mitchell Anderson.” (166) This suspicion has been with him since the day it happened—for Marian later does confess that she did sleep with Mitchell—as evidenced by his violence towards her. In a flashback, Ralph stands over Marian, “fist drawn back to hit again.” (167) Although she does not admit what she has done, Ralph’s fear leads him to violence, but the story suggests the topic has never been brought up since that day. On this particular Sunday night, however, the domestic environment prompts Marian to ask Ralph, “Do you ever think about that party?” (167) She seems to believe that the intimacy they share will allow them to have a pleasant conversation, despite the delicate subject, because her surroundings will shield her from pain. Ralph cannot reciprocate, for the comfort he thinks his house provides him is deceptive. His myopic worldview prevents him from seeing the complex nature of the world, instead making him think in binaries that leave no room for nuance. This, for instance, is how he sees Marian, who “is first idealized until she becomes an agent of fear and abjection.” (García Zarranz 73) Even though Libe García Zarranz further argues that “when the woman confesses her adultery, the constructed ideal image of woman vanishes and the fetish

collapses, giving way to fear and abjection,” (74) Ralph’s binary view of Marian is already anticipated at the beginning of the story, when they go to Mexico for their honeymoon. There, he saw something that “he would always remember and which disturbed him most of all.” (165) What he is referring to is his wife’s body. One evening,

Marian was leaning motionless on her arms over the ironwork balustrade of their rented *casita* as Ralph came up the dusty road below. Her hair was long and hung down in front over her shoulders, and she was looking away from him, staring at something in the distance. She wore a white blouse with a bright red scarf at her throat, and he could see her breasts pushing against the white cloth. He had a bottle of dark, unlabeled wine under his arm, and the whole incident put Ralph in mind of something from a film, an intensely dramatic moment into which Marian could be fitted but he could not. (165-6)

Ralph’s cinematic view of Marian accentuates the distance between them, because he cannot see her as a corporeal person; instead, “motionless,” she appears as “something from a film” in which he cannot participate. In reality, the aforementioned distance happens due to the fact that “Marian has a place in the world of carnal knowledge from which Ralph appears excluded.” (Bethea 56) What Ralph lacks is a connection with his own body and sexuality, which in turn prevents him from feeling at home anywhere. His repression of desire informs the way he sees the world, rendering him effectively homeless. By contrast, Marian feels at home in her body and her house, which allows her to bring up sensitive topics and engender intimacy.

In “Chef’s House,” the house itself creates togetherness and keeps the relationship afloat; leaving it means ending the relationship. The story is a first-person narrative told by Edna, a woman who gets called by her ex-husband, Wes, to come and stay at the house he has rented in summer

from a man named Chef. The house is furnished and “you can see the ocean from the front window. You can smell salt in the air.” (25) What stands out from the very beginning is the temporality of the residence; not only is the space rented but, also, they will live in it for the duration of the summer. In the words of Kirk Nasset, “Wes knew from the start that his borrowed house was exactly that: borrowed, a temporary shelter, a brief respite from the nightmare of drinking.” (“Intimate Divisions” 96) Similarly, G.P. Lainsbury suggests that they will experience “a brief interlude of peace and sobriety in the country.” (130) At the same time, rather than being an intermission, their time at Chef’s house allows them to act out new roles in which they become intimate, confident and carefree, that is, everything they are not. Edna’s description of their time together makes it look idyllic: rent was cheap, they did not have to work and would often go fishing (26). Moreover, at the house, Wes seems to be able to quit drinking. Once he is there, he calls Edna and says he “was on the wagon” (25) and she notices how he “didn’t slur his words.” (25) When she moves in with him, they “drank coffee, pop, and all kinds of fruit juice that summer.” (26) The house grants Wes the willpower to remain sober, perhaps because it does not bear the memories of his own place. This residence allows him to start anew and build a new life in it, where the mistakes and troubles of the past cannot reach him.

All this changes when one day Chef goes back to the house to tell Wes and Edna that they have to move out because his daughter is going to move in. Wes “was in the yard pulling weeds when Chef drove up in front of the house.” (27) Chef arrives just when Wes is shown taking care of the house; more specifically, he is getting rid of unwanted wild plants in order to keep the house as welcoming as possible. After receiving the news, “Wes came inside the house. He dropped his hat and gloves on the carpet and sat down in the big chair. *Chef’s chair*, it occurred to me. *Chef’s carpet*,

even. Wes looked pale.” (27; emphasis added) The moment they are told they need to leave the house, it becomes alien to them. Edna starts realizing that they do not own it—it belongs to Chef, as she continues: “I sat down on *Chef’s sofa* with my coffee.” (27; emphasis added) Such insistence on possession emphasizes Wes and Edna’s foreignness, which prompts Wes to start distancing himself from it. He notes that “this has been a happy house *up to now*,” (28; emphasis added) indicating that from the moment Chef has delivered the news, everything has turned sour and their idyllic summer now lies in the past. Wes’ negativity will continue until the literal and figurative end of the story. Carver’s story ends at the same time as that of Edna and Wes’, who conclude their relationship. Even though Edna tries to reason with him, seeking solutions, Wes has attached all of his recent successes to Chef’s house, and leaving it will mean revisiting and possibly repeating his failures. Edna tells Wes, “We’ll get another house,” (28) but he is utterly hopeless: “Not like this one . . . It wouldn’t be the same, anyway. This house has been a good house for us. This house has good memories to it.” (28) Domesticity is built on memories, and Chef’s house contains those of a halcyon summer. Wes assumes that such bliss will continue forever because of the house, not because of the people who inhabit it. In other words, “Wes is not ready to see that change comes from within, not without—not thanks to a house, bordering the ocean or otherwise.” (Nesset, “Intimate Divisions” 96) Now that they must leave, he chooses to understand their time is over. Even Edna, who tries to reason with Wes, starts talking about the summer “like it was something that had happened in the past. Maybe years back. At any rate, like something that was over.” (28) Perhaps she sees that the Wes she separated herself from has returned, and thus arguing with him will lead her nowhere. Wes’ recovery depends on the house, both in terms of his drinking and his relationship with Edna. As a consequence, he shows a complete unwillingness to change; the hope

that pervaded the story at the beginning has turned into denial, and Wes seems to be preparing himself to go off the wagon again. Edna still has some hope in her, which she tries to pass onto Wes:

Then I said something. I said, Suppose, just suppose, nothing had ever happened. Suppose this was for the first time. Just suppose. It doesn't hurt to suppose. Say none of the other had ever happened. You know what I mean? Then what? I said.

Wes fixed his eyes on me. He said, Then I suppose we'd have to be somebody else if that was the case. Somebody we're not. I don't have that kind of supposing left in me. We were born who we are. Don't you see what I'm saying?

I said I hadn't thrown away a good thing and come six hundred miles to hear him talk like this.

He said, I'm sorry, but I can't talk like somebody I'm not. I'm not somebody else. If I was somebody else, I sure as hell wouldn't be here. If I was somebody else, I wouldn't be me. But I'm who I am. Don't you see? (29)

Edna starts talking hypothetically, which does not have any effect on Wes. Consequently, she decides to be direct and notes how she left her partner and moved a long distance to be with Wes only to be faced with such negativity. Wes responds by actually hypothesizing too, but his words are obvious and saturated with despondency: "If I was somebody else, I wouldn't be me." (29) When faced with the reality of having to leave the house, Wes becomes paralyzed. As he denies himself and, by extension, Edna, the possibility of change, he becomes progressively quieter. As Arthur Bethea states, "The house is just a house for Edna; for Wes, however, it possesses talismanic qualities." (147) Wes believes his life has improved by occupying someone else's house. The moment he cannot stay there any longer, his newfound joy vanishes.

Communication wanes as it dawns on Edna that Wes is steering away from “the Wes [she] used to know. The old Wes. The Wes [she] married.” (25) However, as opposed to Wes, she keeps trying to fight and try to find a solution to this problem. She looks “around Chef’s living room at Chef’s things,” (30) another reminder of their own foreignness in this space, and thinks, “We have to do something now and do it quick.” (30) By contrast, Wes “was in no hurry” (30) because he has already made the unilateral decision to end this relationship. In fact, while processing Chef’s news, he starts saying his goodbyes to Edna: “I’m glad you came up here. I won’t forget you did it. . . . I’m glad you wore your ring. I’m glad we had us this time together.” (29) After Edna tries to persuade him to continue moving forward, Wes shuts himself off physically and verbally: “Having made up his mind, he was in no hurry. He leaned back on the sofa, folded his hands in his lap, and *closed his eyes. He didn’t say anything else.* He didn’t have to.” (30; emphasis added) Words are no longer necessary because both understand what the future entails. Edna sees that Wes does not want to change, while Wes believes he cannot. In a final attempt to plead with Wes, Edna calls him, which prompts him to open his eyes, “but he didn’t look at [her].” (30) Instead, he makes his final decision known by using the space around him: “Wes got up and pulled the drapes and the ocean was gone just like that.” (30) Like the end of a play or a movie at the theater, the curtains close signifying its denouement. Wes uses the house as a stage on which to perform bliss, and so “[h]is actions . . . reflect a measure of theatricality: he has effectively ended the ‘act,’ signifying that another, less fulfilling experience awaits.” (R. Clark 59) He does not need to say anything else because his actions convey his choice. In the same way he had convinced Edna to come to Chef’s house because “you can see the ocean from the front window,” (25) now he deliberately blocks the view to make it clear that their idyllic time together has come to an end.

Similarly, in “Neighbors,” the Stones’ house allows the Millers to enact their fantasies of success. The first sentence reads, “Bill and Arlene Miller were a happy couple” but is immediately followed by a contrastive conjunction: “But now and then they felt they alone among their circle had been passed by somehow.” (6) This solipsistic view prevents them from finding joy in their own lives, which they believe oppose that of the Stones, who they think “lived a fuller and brighter life.” (6) The entire story revolves around the transformation experienced by the Millers as they enter the Stones apartment and take more and more liberties with what they find inside their place. Their relationship strengthens and their libido increases; every time Bill goes to the Stones’ home, he comes back aroused and tells Arlene to go to bed with him (7-8). In this new space, both Bill and Arlene begin to role-play, which brings excitement into their lives and allows them to communicate more freely and reawaken sexually. They become so invested in their new personas that they both wonder, at different times, if the Stones’ will ever return from their holidays: Bill, laying in bed at the Stones’ apartment, “wondered if they would ever return” (9); Arlene, at the end of the story, tells Bill, “maybe they won’t come back.” (10) After only three days spent escaping their own house and occupying somebody else’s, the Millers have already built a fantasy and reveled in the possibilities that this new space brings.

Bill goes back to his house with a newfound sense of self because the apartment allows him to live out his fantasies of a better life. For Bill, his neighbors’ home acts as fuel for his fantasies and lets him escape his daily routine. In the words of Cornwell, “as Bill continues to visit the Stones’ apartment, the thrill of invading their privacy intensifies, and he becomes obsessed with taking illicit intimacies with their things.” (350) Not only does Bill rejoice in the “thrill of invading their privacy” but also in the illusion that he is becoming that which he envied. Spending time at the

Stones' apartment grants him the freedom to be whoever he might have previously denied himself to be. It seems as though his own house has become too familiar for him to consider the possibility of change; by contrast, the Stones' house represents the apparent success of its owners, which makes the Millers believe that occupying it will bring success to them as well. Indeed, "the apartment and its contents have become a metonymy for the Stones themselves." (Cornwell 350) Thus, spending time inside the flat turns the Millers into the rightful residents of the place: the Stones. The apartment allows them to generate intimacy and to reconnect; it sustains togetherness. As French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep explained, "to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world." (20) To the Millers, who believe their life is simply ordinary, entering the Stones' apartment equals entering a new, foreign world where their insecurities and mediocrity wane and they can become who they have always wanted to be.

The end of the story repeats a spatial reference found at the beginning. The first person to go to the Stones' apartment was Bill; meanwhile, Arlene "stood in the kitchen doorway." (7) The last person to go is Arlene, while Bill "stood in the kitchen doorway" (10) watching her go. Both wait between rooms, in thresholds. They already have one foot set in the foreign, waiting to leave the space they inhabit to enact their fantasies somewhere else. The Stones' apartment gives new strength to the Millers' relationship, and the more time they spend there, the more they are able to communicate. While at the beginning they were more secretive about their time spent at their neighbors', they are slowly recognizing in each other the desires born of their fantasies in this new space. Towards the end of the story, Arlene reveals she "really and truly forgot to do what [she] went there to do," (10) asking Bill "isn't that stupid?" (10) to which he replies, "I don't think so." (10) Bill understands Arlene because he has felt the same way at the Stones' apartment. Although

they have gone there separately, their experiences at their neighbors' flat have united them more, and they decide to go back there together. Later, Arlene confesses to Bill that she "found some pictures" (10) at their neighbors' place, hinting at the possibility of them being of an erotic nature, which piques his curiosity.

When they return to their own apartment, Arlene "let him use her key to open the door. He looked at the door across the hall before following her inside." (7-8) Right before he enters his own apartment, he glances at the Stones' front door, as if yearning for the life he has made inside and wishing he could go in there instead of his own house. In the words of Gareth Cornwell, "in Carver's . . . characters the sense of a model unmistakably survives, usually a model of ordinary stability and decency whose existence reveals to them the shame of their own failure and abjection." (347) Setting foot in his own apartment serves as a reminder of his feelings of inadequacy, so when, at the end of the story, Arlene forgets the Stones' key inside of their apartment and cannot go in anymore, the Millers' world crumbles before their eyes. The last words of the story read, "They leaned into the door as if against a wind, and braced themselves." (11) They have inadvertently built a wall between their reality and their fantasy and must steel themselves for the disintegration of their newfound confidence, which only existed when mediated by the Stones' apartment. As Abigail L. Bowers suggests, "The Millers brace themselves for more than just an explanation to their neighbors about why the cat has gone unfed: thanks to their own carelessness and excitement, they are preparing themselves for a future that converts into one just as previously bleak as it had looked." (99) If the act of entering the Stones' apartment had initially seemed to reveal to the Millers their "fate," (Bachelard 238) allowing them to escape the stagnancy that seemed to

characterize their life, their sudden inability to go in reverts any changes made and brings them back to their previous life, devoid of intimacy and connection.

3.3. “I’d Like to Go Back Home”: Towards a Restitution of Intimacy

According to Lauren Berlant, “Love approximates a space to which people can return, becoming as different as they can be from themselves without being traumatically shattered; it is a scene of optimism for change, for a transformational environment.” (“Love” 448) In the stories of Raymond Carver, romance and connection prove quite elusive, despite the characters’ desire to find them. Houses become non-places, and romantic communication is unsettled. Still, there appear glimmers of hope at times, as some individuals are offered the chance to begin the process of building intimacy by experiencing togetherness with their partners, other people that give them comfort, or themselves, however briefly. After struggling with their partners and their environment, some of these characters get the opportunity to find their place in the world and to understand that there is room for change in their present and future. This, I argue, happens in two ways: through the connection with one’s and/or the other’s body, and through the discovery of home in places that might not traditionally be considered as such.

3.3.1. “Her Secret Body”: The Corporeal Home

Subha Mukherji argues that “the body itself can act as a threshold between the self and the material world.” (xix) However, the body actually houses the self and can thus become home. Many individuals do not feel comfortable in their own minds, and, by extension, their own bodies, too consumed by expectations and insecurities. Nevertheless, the body indicates one’s presence and existence in the world. To reject one’s self and body is to reject one’s existence and thus become invisible, which is the reality of many characters in Carver’s stories, like Sandy’s husband in “Preservation,” who is nameless and whose body is reduced to separate parts. Edward S. Casey

posits, “it is by my body—my lived body—that I am here. My own body . . . is at once the necessary and the sufficient condition of my being . . . here. When it comes to the here, my body has plenipotentiary power: a fully invested power to situate my embodied subjectivity here.” (51) Carver’s characters, however, are seldom “here,” but rather elsewhere, focused on their past, like Ralph in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” or their future, like Harry in “How About This?” Their inability to be present prevents them from experiencing the “implicit corporeal equation ‘here = body = place’” (Casey 52) Beyond the connections formed with others, the connection formed with oneself is essential to one’s well-being and ability to dwell in the world. By opening up to and experiencing one’s body, it seems less challenging to navigate one’s environment, to create a home, and to build intimacy. As Bernd Jäger postulates, “The house, body and city do not so much occupy space and time as generate them. It is only as inhabiting, embodied beings that we find access to a world. The house, body and city are the places where we are born or reborn and from which we step out into a larger world.” (215) Dwelling—whether in a house, a city, or a body—allows individuals the ability to change or be “reborn.” This is what happens in “Fat” and “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” The first story opens the collection, while the second closes it, and both explore the themes of embodiment, change, and connection. It is through their exploration of their own bodies that both the narrator of “Fat” and Ralph can begin to overcome their distress and look forward to a brighter, more intimate future.

“Fat” features three main settings—the restaurant, the place the narrator lives in with Rudy, and Rita’s house—that stand out for their lack of domesticity, because in them the narrator can find no intimacy or effective communication. It seems as though none of the characters present, except for the fat man, listens to or understands her. Through the description the narrator

makes of the other people featured in the story, one can see how little care they show for her, and how unwelcoming her environment is. For instance, as she tends to various tables, she notes how “a party of four businessmen [is] very demanding,” (1) a comment she repeats later (2). In addition, most of the people who work with her make derisive remarks about the fat man. Rudy tells her, “Harriet says you got a fat man from the circus out there. That true?” (3), the aforementioned Harriet asks her, “How is the old tub-of-guts doing? He’s going to run your legs off,” (3) and Leander exclaims, “God, he’s fat.” (2) These characters can only see him for his physical appearance, thus he remains nameless for the entirety of the story, much like the narrator. In fact, at some point Rudy tells the narrator about two fat children he used to know, and phrases the story as follows:

I knew a fat guy once, a couple of fat guys, really fat guys, when I was a kid. They were tubbies, my God. I don’t remember their names. Fat, that’s the only name this one kid had. We called him Fat, the kid who lived next door to me. He was a neighbor. The other kid came along later. His name was Wobbly. Everybody called him Wobbly except the teachers. Wobbly and Fat. Wish I had their pictures. (4)

His assertion that he does not “remember their names” seems misleading, for it appears quite possible that even at the time he never learned them. His story suggests that, much like the fat customer, these children were only seen for their difference and nobody ever cared to see beyond that. Rudy even wishes he “had their pictures” in order to further dehumanize them. According to Bethea, “in Carver, to be without a name is to lack identity and power. By omitting their names, Carver indicates the protagonists’ shared helplessness.” (12-3) Although this is not exclusive to Carver, despite Bethea’s contention, these two characters’ namelessness does appear extremely

telling, considering that all the people who work at the restaurant are named. Therefore, “We might call these persons ‘the fat man’ and ‘the heterosexual woman,’ for these are the public, embodied identities that mobilize their crises in the text, and indeed their anonymity both to each other and to the reader would suggest that their embodied exemplarity is the point of their characterization.” (Berlant 157) The narrator’s main source of sadness stems from her invisibility. None of her co-workers take her seriously, and it is implied that her partner, Rudy, uses her body without her consent whenever he sees fit. The fat man, by contrast, is hypervisible. Nevertheless, both of them are seen synecdochically; in other words, their physical appearance (his fatness and her female body) stands for who they are, and no one considers their actions, personalities, and selves.

The narrator of “Fat” identifies with the fat customer because she sees in him what she is not and admires his expansiveness. Therefore, she understands that he is much more than his fatness, which she tells Rudy: “he is fat, . . . but that is not the whole story.” (3) As expected, Rudy just “laughs,” (3) unable to take her—and the fat man—seriously. Similarly, when a coworker draws attention to the customer’s fatness, the narrator says “He can’t help it . . . so shut up.” (2) Again, she understands that, much like herself, the fat man cannot change his body—or at least not as easily as people may think. When he tells her, “Believe it or not, . . . we have not always eaten like this,” (4) she answers “Me, I eat and I eat and I can’t gain. . . . I’d like to gain.” (4) Her omission of the word “weight” suggests that she would like to gain much more than that, including agency and respect, hence why her relationship with the fat man appears as an oasis in her otherwise bleak life. From the moment he enters the restaurant, she can see beyond his fatness: “This fat man is the fattest person I have ever seen, though he is neat-appearing and well dressed enough.” (1) This,

coupled with their polite exchanges and his odd mannerisms, intensifies her fascination for him. For instance, the first thing he says is “Good evening . . . Hello. Yes . . . I think we’re ready to order now, he says.” (1) His use of the royal *we*, traditionally a pronoun used by monarchs or those among the nobility, seems out of place in this situation. However, it could indicate his desire to see himself as more than just his fatness, as a way to highlight his personhood. Arthur Bethea believes this is simply “a fat joke told by the fat man on himself,” (11) although his analysis of the story lacks all the empathy that the narrator shows (12). He gives no chance to either the waitress, who he considers inarticulate and unintelligent (10), or the fat man, who, like the narrator’s coworkers, he sees as “merely a fat man.” (11) Regardless, what matters in this story is not how they perceive the fat man but how the narrator does, for it allows her to reconsider her circumstances and begin changing them. As Abigail L. Bowers puts forward, “The indication of variation, of something different coming into the narrator’s life, illustrates itself through her relationship, and subsequent identification, with the fat man.” (96) Through her association with him, she unknowingly welcomes the possibility of transformation, as she says, “I know now I was after something. But I don’t know what.” (3) His body and presence awaken in her the desire to take up more space, both physically and socially, which she will only realize when in bed with Rudy. G.P. Lainsbury claims, “Joanne’s meeting with the fat man seems to have initiated a crisis in her life, but she is unable to make clear to herself just what this crisis might be.” (80) Lainsbury erroneously believes that Joanne is the narrator, but she is actually another coworker: the person recounting the events, as mentioned before, remains nameless throughout the story. In addition, this crisis was not “initiated” by this particular experience; it was already there. The narrator’s encounter with the fat man has given her the tools to begin addressing her invisibility; she has found a model of what she

lacks: expansiveness, embodiment, and presence. She might not be able to name the source of her crisis, but she slowly comes to understand that change can come through being at home in her body.

At the restaurant, Margo says “he’s really a fatty,” (1) and the narrator tells the readers, “Now that’s part of it. I think that is really part of it.” (2) She finds his body fascinating because he takes up space in a way that she does not, but, as she says, that is only “part of it.” His behavior also captivates her, for he treats her with kindness, unlike the other characters. From the very beginning, the narrator describes him as polite and kind, and shows him continuously giving thanks and appreciating the waitress. In the same way that she wishes she could become larger, thus envying the customer’s body, she also wishes Rudy could behave more kindly towards her. Indeed, “the waitress is being suffocated by her husband Rudy, with whom she both lives and works, and . . . the fat man represents to her everything Rudy lacks.” (Nesset 14) This duality shows the narrator what she does not have and further reveals that the customer contains more than just his fat. Because the narrator sees more in him than the others, she can open up to his transformative influence and wonder about a different future. The fat customer, “through no direct agency of his own, changes her life by changing her relation to her body, her work, her domestic life, her sexuality, fantasy, and narrative. That is to say, he changes her mentally. He makes her think and fantasize about change.” (Berlant, “America” 157) His presence and very being is the catalyst that allows the narrator to inhabit a different plane, one that brims with imagination and possibility. For instance, at one point, the narrator states, “I put my hand on my middle and wonder what would happen if I had children and one of them turned out to look like that, so fat.” (4) Through this daydream, she can imagine a different version of herself, one that would occupy more space and that would contain

more than just herself, thus potentially allowing her to also use “we” when speaking to others. In the words of Lauren Berlant,

Her hand is on her skinny belly, but still from that belly she imagines producing a child without her debility: infinite thinness. Such an event would force *something* to happen in her life . . . [T]he transposition of the fat customer to a fat fantasy child reproduces the action of thinking about change, about emigrating to a semiotic field outside of that in which she currently lives. Thus follows the second fantasy, in which Rudy becomes shockingly a “tiny thing,” while the waitress herself becomes terrific and terrifying in her fatness. (Berlant, “America” 162)

It is through her imagination and the mental transformation of her body that she can objectify Rudy and establish a clear difference between them: while he becomes “tiny” and a “thing,” she grows in size and sees herself, no longer invisible. The narrator can thus embody the fat man’s “body of knowledge, an opportunity for a kind of magical thinking about corporeality, sensation, scale, and change.” (Berlant, “America” 159) She takes refuge within her own body to escape Rudy’s actions, thereby turning it into a protective space—a home.

Her imaginative bodily transformation ends her story, but she notices that Rita “doesn’t know what to make of it.” (5) Rita also says, “that’s a funny story,” (5) even when the narrator has explained what Rudy has done to her. This frustrates her, as she says, “I feel depressed. But I won’t go into it with her. I’ve already told her too much.” (5) Her change has prompted her to open up linguistically and tell her story, but neither Rudy nor Rita seem to understand what it means because they fail to see the fat man as anything other than that. The narrator, on the other hand, grasps the significance of her experience, as she finishes the story by saying, “My life is going to

change. I feel it.” (5) She might not know how or when, but her encounter with the customer has fundamentally altered her. Kirk Nasset disagrees with this, noting that “visions, after all, are not escape routes, and just as Carver rarely affords his characters visions, he never affords them routes of escape.” (16) Similarly, Bowers argues that “although she is cognizant of the need for change, the actual ability to do so will evade her.” (94) However, the fact that she has met him, told his story, identified with him, and found ways to inhabit her body in ways previously foreign to her suggests the change is already happening and offers her a tentative itinerary. Imagination is action, and to even consider the possibility of transformation is a step in the right direction. Adam Meyer does believe this change takes place, but seems perhaps too optimistic. He claims that the “sense of power in the image of being so much bigger than Rudy . . . clearly indicates a positive change for the narrator, who has been empowered by the fat man to break off her relationship with the insensitive cook.” (34) Nothing in the story indicates that she has broken or will break off the relationship with Rudy, but her newfound corporeality proves significant enough, and her ability to fantasize about different futures gives her hope. Her life has already changed because “her identity has been unsettled, opening her consciousness to unfamiliar feelings and desires.” (Ellmann 68) The same can be said about Ralph in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” The ending of the story also introduces change through connecting with the other and one’s own body, and it comes from his tentative openness to the uncertain. The narrator of “Fat,” the customer who gives name to that story, and, as we shall see, Ralph, all come to “recognise the fact that we really do not have much control over our bodies.” (Ellmann 68) In both of the stories, the main characters generate intimacy with others and their own selves through the body.

In “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”, after a long journey through the city, which will be discussed shortly, Ralph returns home and enters the bedroom, where he gets into bed. Soon, Marian comes and joins him. There, they have intercourse, and in the process, Ralph begins “marveling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him.” (181) Not only does he find comfort in the body of Marian, which, after his exploration of a variety of places, becomes the closest thing to home he can find, but he also allows himself to experience his own corporeality in a way he had never done before, much like the narrator of “Fat.” In this story, “the body and other items in the scene—[in this case] other human beings . . .—co-participate in creating a place.” (Casey 141) Through physical and emotional intimacy, both Ralph and Marian contribute to the formation of the home, and Ralph finally turns into “a man embracing, not running from, carnal knowledge.” (Bethea 56-7) Marian’s body becomes home for him, and he begins to inhabit his own body and appreciate its value. This, however, happens because of his experiences in the world after he learns of Marian’s unfaithfulness.

Chapter II begins with Ralph stopping and leaning “against a car before going on.” (172) Ralph’s journey into the city is riddled with symbols, and Carver wastes no time introducing them. Ralph’s leaning against a car is no coincidence; it is reminiscent of Marian and Mitchell’s affair, which took place in a car, and foreshadows Ralph’s oppressive experience in the outside world. The first people he encounters are “couples,” “shadowy figures of men and women” or a “dark cutout of a man,” (172) none of which seem tangible enough; Ralph describes the couples as if they were a single entity, thus erasing the individuality of the people he meets. As Bauman states, “strangers tend to appear even more frightening as they become increasingly alien, unfamiliar and incomprehensible, and as the dialogue and interaction which could eventually assimilate their

‘otherness’ to one’s own lifeworld fade, or never take off in the first place.” (111) As Marian becomes a stranger to Ralph, who thought he understood her perfectly, actual strangers turn shapeless and blurred, highlighting Ralph’s loneliness and that “insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always results when human separateness cannot be overcome.” (Fromm 86) Ralph’s cinematic approach to life continues as he counts his cash “as if there were a code to be uncovered.” (173) It seems as though Ralph wishes to escape everyday life, seeking adventure and mystery in the quotidian, waiting for it to miraculously happen. According to Eva Illouz, “the romantic self ‘authors’ its most memorable romantic memories by mimicking the intensely ritualized temporal structure of mass-media love stories.” (“The Lost Innocence” 173) In Ralph’s case, this is also applicable to his everyday life, not just romance; he views his surroundings as if he were inside of a movie, constantly expecting epiphanies without actually putting in the effort to aid their emergence. Byung-Chul Han claims that “higher expectations . . . are responsible for the mounting disappointment experienced in contemporary society.” (38) Ralph’s discontent with his life makes him wish something mysterious happened to him that would turn his life around but, because it never happens, said discontent keeps rising. He became a teacher not because of vocation, since his goals at college were “hazy,” (164) but because he admired his teacher. He knew Marian had betrayed him but it was not until she brought it up that he confronted her; otherwise, he might never have addressed his suspicions. Ralph systematically waits for his problems to solve themselves as if by chance, but at no point does he try to tackle them. By going to the city and temporarily leaving his home, he expects to magically find a solution to his conflict with Marian but, in the words of Erich Fromm,

Just as it is customary for people to believe that pain and sadness should be avoided under all circumstances, they believe that love means the absence of any conflict . . . The ‘conflicts’ of most people are actually attempts to avoid the real conflicts. . . . Real conflicts between two people, those which do not serve to cover up or to project, but which are experienced on the deep level of inner reality to which they belong, are not destructive. They lead to clarification, they produce a catharsis from which both persons emerge with more knowledge and more strength. (102-3)

Ralph initially seemed to have embraced conflict once Marian had begun the conversation; he sought answers and paid attention. However, when she confirms his conviction, he cannot handle it and escapes.

Once outside the bar, Ralph’s nightmare continues as he sees “a man and a woman . . . [who] got into a car parked at the curb and Ralph saw the woman toss her hair as she got into the car: He had never seen anything so frightening.” (173) Some scholars argue that this recalls the myth of Medusa (García Zarranz 74; Runyon 80-3), but Amir Ayala contends, “The very isolation of a detail from a continuum of space and movement—via the glimpse—is sufficient for this angst. It exposes the observer, stripped of all defenses and denials, to immediate contact with raw reality, with no context to mitigate its influence.” (83) Through this particular gesture, Ralph is reminded of Marian’s femininity and, by extension, her affair with Mitchell, and the familiarity and horror of what surrounds him makes him think “it impossible that this was where he lived.” (173) Even though he initially saw California as a safe place, he now feels threatened and begins dissociating from his own city, coming to see it as foreign and intimidating. This is because “home, like any other space, is shaped by conflicts and power struggles.” (Felski 87) The associations his home and

city hold after his argument with Marian inform his newfound relationship to his hometown. Consequently, the apparently comfortable domesticity that once characterized his home life dwindles as these dwellings become increasingly distant and inexplicable. Carver's prose further highlights Ralph's inner turmoil by presenting a series of paradoxes. On his way downtown, Ralph "tried to imagine how all this would seem twenty years from now. But he could not imagine anything. And then he imagined snatching up a note being passed among his students . . . Then he could not think . . . Then he thought of Marian." (173) Ralph's world has become extremely confusing, and his surroundings have turned extremely hostile. The "squalor and open lust" (165) that he witnessed in Mexico has traveled to his own city, manifesting itself in his home. That which terrified him has become reality, confusing him. As he wanders through the city, Ralph cannot bear to think of the future; instead, he sinks deeper into fictional thoughts of Marian's past and her affair with Mitchell.

Coming to Second Street, Ralph notes how he "had never been to any of these places before." (174) He now enters an unfamiliar area, and the signs and sounds that he notices remind him of his plight. First, he enters a liquor store; as he does, "a bell over the door tinkled. Ralph almost wept from the sound of it." (174) The association of the liquor store with Marian's affair, which took place in a car on the way to a liquor store, proves too overwhelming to Ralph, who is on the verge of tears. Then, he stops in front of Jim's Oyster House: "Above the door the name was spelled out in yellow lightbulbs: JIM'S OYSTER HOUSE. Above this, fixed to an iron grill, there was a huge neon-lighted clam shell with a man's legs sticking out. The torso was hidden in the shell and the legs flashed red, on and off, up and down, so that they seemed to be kicking." (174) Carver is not particularly subtle with this imagery, which parallels how Ralph has come to think about

Marian, seeing her as a lustful, predatory man-eater. Ralph might also be interpreting the sign to suit his feelings. He can only see legs sticking out of the clam shell, and yet he assumes they are a man's. Likewise, he believes the legs are kicking, when they might also suggest the person is willingly trying to get inside the clam shell, especially considering the fact that this is an oyster house, where people will go in to eat seafood. Finally, once inside the place, he goes to the toilet. On his way, he sees that "over one of the doors was a rack of antlers. He saw a man go in and he saw another man catch the door and go out." (175) Again, the narration introduces an obvious reference to Marian's betrayal of Ralph.

Ralph has a rather Victorian understanding of the world around him. Indeed, in the nineteenth century "the cities were not only crowded, dirty, noisy, and populated by the poor and immigrants, but they were also filled with the temptations of saloons, gambling dens, dance halls, and other amusements considered immoral to the proper 19th-century white, middle-class Christian." (Miller 399) Although this view changed throughout the twentieth century, Ralph seems bent on navigating the world through that lens. The following lines highlight the sinful aspect of the city, which brings more discomfort and fear to Ralph: "inside, in line behind three other men, he found himself staring at opened thighs and vulva drawn on the wall over a pocket-comb machine." (175) Ralph can no longer find comfort in his city because Marian's actions have effectively transformed his relationship with his hometown. In a not-so-distant past, "the home was organized as the antithesis of the urban centers, which were thought to be threatening and sinful." (Spigel 12) Now, both the home and city have become intimidating to Ralph by virtue of his experiences, which he is now trying to come to terms with: "His life had changed, he was willing to understand. Were there other men, he wondered drunkenly, who could

look at one event in their lives and perceive in it the tiny makings of the catastrophe that thereafter set their lives on a different course?" (175) Ralph's musings underscore his loneliness, as he feels like the only man to see his life in such a way. Moreover, although one might assume he is referring to Marian's affair as the event that changed their lives, his question remains ambiguous. His life has indeed changed, which, in his words, he is "*willing* to understand," (175; emphasis added) but his wording suggests an intention rather than a result.

On the street, he stayed "out of the path of the loud groups of men and women streaming up and down the sidewalk," (177) once again trying to evade noise, which reminds him of his argument with Marian, when, at one point, he thought "that it would be silent somewhere if he had not married." (170) Silence has positive connotations for Ralph because it conveys safety; he would much rather avoid the strident sounds that confrontation brings. Silence seems harmless because he believes it cannot surprise him. By contrast, for Ralph, words carry uncertainty and the possibility of rage; they can explicitly confirm his worst fears and emphasize Marian's otherness, which he had refused to acknowledge ever since they went to Guadalajara. Such otherness, present also in the outside world, continually confuses Ralph, who is incapable of accepting difference. As Bauman notes, "The drive towards a 'community of similarity' is a sign of withdrawal not just from the otherness outside, but also from commitment to the lively yet turbulent, invigorating yet cumbersome interaction inside. The attraction of a 'community of sameness' is that of an insurance policy against the risks with which daily life in a polyvocal world is fraught." (110) While in college, Ralph had decided to become a teacher not because of vocation or a particular interest in the field but because of his admiration towards his professor, Dr. Maxwell. After his marriage, seeing Marian's body pushing against her clothes in Guadalajara shocked Ralph, despite having

seen it before. Ralph's constant pursuit of sameness makes him unable to accept the Other. This is what Byung-Chul Han calls the "agony of Eros": the "disappearance of the other." (41) Intimacy can only thrive when otherness is acknowledged. Ralph's obsession with control and sameness precludes the development of intimacy, for he continuously avoids confrontation and open communication.

Chapter III begins with Ralph finally going back to his house. As he opens the door, it "opened quietly and the house was quiet." (178) The paragraph ends with the narrator repeating, "The house was very quiet." (179) The home appears more welcoming than at the beginning as silence permeates every corner. Marian is asleep, thus quiet, the traces of the argument now apparently gone. However, neither silence nor the memory of domesticity bring Ralph any comfort or revelation: "he understood things had been done. He did not understand what things now were to be done." (179) Ralph seeks revelations and understanding because he cannot bear the reality of the uncertain. For Ralph, such uncertainty is manifested first in the mystery of the future; as Han puts it, "the future lies open to the event, which is absolutely surprising." (15) Ralph's inability to embrace the uncertain erases the possibility of action. Instead of facing the future, he escapes that which troubles him. He observes the house and notices every detail as if he was seeing it for the first time, and looks into their bedroom only to see Marian's "secret body" (179) lying in bed; here, uncertainty manifests itself in his wife's body. In acknowledging her otherness, Ralph begins his path to resolution. He wonders whether he should leave, but sits at the table instead. For a moment, it seems as though he might be waiting for Marian to wake up as he talks to his children, who ask him, "What did you do to your face, Daddy?" (179) On his way home, a man beat him up; Ralph's face has unintentionally become extraordinary to his children. The moment Marian wakes

up, Ralph “stepped quickly into the bathroom and locked the door.” (179) Because his home is no longer a source of comfort, but neither is the outside world, Ralph ends up finding refuge and escaping by locking himself in a room within his own house. Not only is he physically sheltering his body and self from Marian, but he is also sheltering his mind. Seeking silence, he wants to be fully alone, physically and emotionally, to deal with his thoughts. In this sense, the body metaphorically becomes a home for Ralph, where he can find some rest. As Ioana Boghian notes,

The personal space of the body represents a socio-psychological, invisible and yet physical space around each individual, which others may not enter without consent; the innermost part of a conscious human being is the mind, which is the house of thoughts, feelings and desires, and it may play the role of a refuge from the outside world or that of a trap. (3)

In the bathroom, before taking a bath, Ralph “studied his face again in the clouded mirror. He started in fear when Marian called his name.” (180) The foggy mirror makes Ralph’s features, already altered due to his injuries, blurred and indistinct, symbolizing his insecurities and ongoing identity crisis. Like his home, his body has changed as a consequence to what he is going through. Although Ralph seems unaware of it, Marian’s affair and the subsequent ordeal have given him answers he did not know he was looking for: that his constant need for understanding has proven unnecessary and that, instead, embracing uncertainty might ease his anxiety far better.

Once outside the bathroom, Ralph “went through the house and into the bedroom, where he shut the door.” (180) Again, he uses the house to his advantage by locking himself in a different room, escaping from Marian and thus preventing the possibility of openness and communication with her. Even though when they got married they had “pledged to preserve forever the excitement and the mystery of marriage,” (165) Ralph cannot bear to accept the unknown. His journey into

the outside world, however, might be considered cathartic, as the ending of the story suggests an awakening from his part and newfound understanding of himself. As opposed to the majority of the characters inhabiting the stories of Carver, Ralph physically and emotionally shows signs of rage, which, according to Han, is “thumotic [courageous]: it radically breaks with convention and inaugurates a new state of affairs. But now it is increasingly yielding to annoyance, or dissatisfaction, which lacks the negativity of rupture and instead allows circumstances to persist.” (43) In most of Carver’s stories, frustrated characters fail to express their anguish in a productive manner. By contrast, Ralph’s foray into the city and ensuing return home allow both him and Marian to start reconciling through that which seemed to terrify Ralph at first: sexuality. The last paragraphs see Marian joining Ralph in bed, where

She put her hand under the covers and began stroking the lower part of his back.

“Ralph,” she said.

He tensed at her fingers, and then he let go a little. It was easier to let go a little. Her hand moved over his hip and over his stomach and she was pressing her body over his now and moving over him and back and forth over him. He held himself, he later considered, as long as he could. And then he turned to her. He turned and turned in what might have been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marveling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him. (180-1)

In the end, Ralph gets the silence he asked for, and in it, he finds solace. Kirk Nessel argues that “Carver’s title, and Ralph’s repetition of it, reinforces the notion that ‘quiet,’ like sex, is a powerful restorative, counteracting to an extent the machinations of body and tongue.” (25) However, in this story body and tongue are still at work, still communicating, just not in the same way. After his

terrifying journey through the city, Ralph eventually finds comfort in his wife's body, despite his initial tension. Ralph begins to understand that, as Giddens postulates, "In the realm of sexuality, emotion as a means of communication, as commitment to and cooperation with others, is especially important. . . . Eroticism is the cultivation of feeling, expressed through bodily sensation, in a communicative context; an art of giving and receiving pleasure." (Giddens 202) No longer shocked by Marian's body and her sexuality, as the beginning of the story suggests, he allows himself to embrace her corporeality and welcomes change, something that he had avoided from the start. Ralph separates Marian's voice from her body, much like Barthes does in *A Lover's Discourse*: "the other's body was divided: on one side, the body proper—skin, eyes—tender, warm; and on the other side, the voice—abrupt, reserved, subject to fits of remoteness, a voice which did not give what the body gave." (71) It seems that Marian feels the same way. They forgo using the spoken word, which has failed them so far, in favor of nonverbal communication, and find relief and hope in physical connection. Although "each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space," (Lefebvre 170) here, both bodies breach the distance that separates them as they physically become one. In this way, Ralph begins to accept the Other, and the story ends on a positive note, with him admiring the changes he sees taking place in his life. This stands in contrast to Winfried Fluck's claim that in the stories of Carver, "crises and catastrophes are not heroic moments valued for their potential to reveal an existential truth but accidental occurrences in a dehierarchized sequence of daily events. Consequently, the characters that experience them are not transformed or deeply affected by them, but continue to live on as before." (71) In this case, however, although the end of the story remains open, the positive words associated with Ralph's experience ("stupendous," "marveling") hint at the possibility of healing.

In the words of William Stull, “Even a glance at the final paragraph of [this story] . . . points toward a place beyond Hopelessville, a place where love can soothe us after the talking stops.” (2) Ralph’s excursion into the uncontrollable city and his subsequent return home allows him to tear down the walls he had built and begin to find comfort in his own body and that of Marian, which turn into a home for him and allow him to experience intimacy and transformation.

3.3.2. A Portable Intimacy: Finding the Home

In their essay titled “Intimacy,” Lauren Berlant wonders, “What happens to the energy of attachment when it has no designated place?” (285) When individuals long for connection and closeness but their environments do not foster such desires, they might unexpectedly find new locations that generate intimacy by virtue of their relations with others or even themselves. As previously noted, “intimacy creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation.” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 282) Carver’s characters sometimes build togetherness outside of their houses because they no longer feel like homes; therefore, they manage to find the home elsewhere. Most of the time, this occurs after they have experienced a significant event that has forced them to confront themselves or their lives. According to Michael Vander Weele,

We can summarise the requirements that Carver finds necessary for negotiating the move from event to significance, from individual initiative to general usefulness. First, it requires recognition or confession that one’s own language or narration is insufficient to the task. Second, the effort to find a larger language and a larger meaning for experience requires a complementary, not a single, effort. Third, it often requires a new view of social enclosures.

(115)

Many of the characters in Carver's stories understand that their present lives require change but do not know how to enact it; they lack the tools and the "language" to move forward. Even though sometimes they do not recognize the inadequacy of their words, the way they relate to others allows them to transform their "view of social enclosures." Intimate spaces "are produced relationally," (Berlant, "Intimacy" 285) that is, through one's connection to the other, but also—and by extension—to one's surroundings. Carver's open endings may offer hope to his characters, as well as to his readers, but the reality is that the first—and arguably, the second—remain confined in one way or another. This, however, does not negate the presence of possibility and opportunity, because "while confinement may be the precondition of many lives there is still a good deal of freedom available within it." (Nesset, "Insularity" 107) Carver's characters might continue working jobs that bring them little joy, grieving the loss of loved ones, or entering relationships that seem devoid of any real intimacy, among others. Sometimes, however, by connecting with others, they can see "beyond the narrow enclosure of self that larger, more expansive enclosure of society" (Nesset, "Insularity" 127) and find spaces of comfort that embody, however briefly, home. Although "talk of intimacy, it is often assumed, is best conducted with those who are our intimates," (Cooke 6) Carver often unsettles this assumption by making his characters open up to strangers, who generally listen to them more than their partners do. Sometimes, even if the relationship itself works well, such as that of Ann and Howard in "A Small, Good Thing," talking to, and more importantly, being listened to by someone they do not know allows them to deal with their pain more easily, and the places where this happens slowly begin to bear the traces of home. Many of Carver's stories, therefore, subvert the "fantasy that private life is the real in contrast to collective life: the surreal, the elsewhere, the fallen, the irrelevant." (Berlant, "Intimacy" 283) They

show that intimacy is mobile and that real connection does not necessarily have to take place within the house. For instance, in “Blackbird Pie,” the most significant exchange between the narrator and his wife happens outside, where the first is faced with a fairly “surreal” scene:

A heavy fog lay outside the windows, a fog so dense I could scarcely see the driveway. The porch light was on and a suitcase stood outside on the porch. It was my wife’s suitcase, the one she’d brought packed full of her things when we moved here. What on earth was going on? I opened the door. Suddenly—I don’t know how to say this other than how it was—a horse stepped out of the fog, and then, an instant later, as I watched, dumbfounded, another horse. These horses were grazing in our front yard. I saw my wife alongside one of the horses, and I called her name. (101)

The “surreal . . . sense of nonhuman mystery” (Scofield 274) that this moment evokes has been compared by some to Kafka’s works (Nesset 3; Lainsbury 64; Shipe 120) for the way it exudes “a strange, dreamlike indefiniteness, which gives the narrative an uncanny effect.” (Campbell 79) “Blackbird Pie” is one of the few stories by Raymond Carver that leans into the supernatural. While elements of the uncanny appear often in the way he subverts the familiar, these tend to be framed in a markedly realistic setting. In this story, however, Carver dabbles with what the aforementioned scholars have named “surreal,” “nonhuman,” and “dreamlike.” Such unearthliness is compounded by the wife’s outfit and her interaction with the horses: “She was standing beside this big horse, patting its flank. She was dressed in her best clothes and had on heels and was wearing a hat. (I hadn’t seen her in a hat since her mother’s funeral, three years before.) Then she moved forward and put her face against the horse’s mane.” (101) The narrator’s wife finds solace in this eerie environment, feeling much safer than at home, where her husband, as previously seen,

locks himself in his office and eschews communication. Here, she can finally tell him, “I’m leaving you . . . That’s what’s happening. I’m heading for town tonight. I’m striking out on my own.”

(103) Her talk is one-sided, because the narrator refuses to listen to her, but she manages to say what she needs to say. Other characters have more meaningful conversations in the “elsewhere” (Berlant, “Intimacy” 283) by virtue of the exchanges that take place; that is, they feel cared for and listened to, and this brings them a respite from their bleak lives. Sometimes, in “the surreal, the elsewhere, the fallen, the irrelevant” and, in short, the public sphere, Carver’s characters can find intimacy, connection, and a sense of home.

Sometimes such connection and domesticity occurs through the imagination. In “Fat,” as previously noted, the narrator finds home within her own body owing to her relation with the fat customer. Although she remains in bed with Rudy, she moves to a different space within her mind that allows her to transform, and this transformation proves quite significant, for it signals the arrival of change in her life. Similarly, the narrator of “Cathedral” alters the way he thinks about life by bonding with a stranger through a drawing of the title building. He is presented as a self-centered and prejudiced man who feels uncomfortable with the prospect of meeting Robert, his wife’s friend, who happens to be blind. In his words, “I wasn’t enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me.” (196) Before he actually meets Robert, he spends some time recounting how his wife met him, and in the process, shows his jealousy and sexist attitude. For instance, when talking about his wife’s first love, he refuses to mention his name, saying “why should he have a name? He was the childhood sweetheart, and what more does he want?” (198) Later, while having a conversation with his wife, he tells her, “Maybe I could take him bowling.” (199) This prompts her to stop cooking and make a request: “If you love me, . . .

you can do this for me. If you don't love me, okay. But if you had a friend, any friend, and the friend came to visit, I'd make him feel comfortable." (199) Unable to take her seriously, he continues, "I don't have any blind friends," to which she again answers, exasperated, "You don't have *any* friends . . . Period. Besides, . . . goddamn it, his wife's just died! Don't you understand that? The man's lost his wife!" (199) This exchange shows the narrator's lack of sensitivity, but also his way of dealing with discomfort. Rather than trying to discuss it with his wife, or spend some time considering why he might feel this way, he resorts to humor, even when the situation might not warrant it. Even after his wife draws attention to Robert's current situation as a widower, when the narrator learns about her friend's wife's name, one that he seems unfamiliar with, he asks her if she was Black. Shocked by his racism, she reprimands him. She asks him, "Are you crazy? . . . Have you just flipped or something? . . . What's wrong with you? . . . Are you drunk?" (199) Again, the narrator simply says, "I'm just asking." (199) His interior monologue as well as the way he talks to his wife and Robert highlights his insecurity and inability to cope with unease, and suggests he has trouble opening up. In fact, he does acknowledge that "[his] wife and [him] hardly ever went to bed at the same time" and that he is "glad for the company." (208) It seems as though they are not particularly intimate—either sexually or emotionally—but he does not appear to realize this, because he pities Robert's ex-wife, "whose husband could never read the expression on her face, be it misery or something better." (200) First, the point is not just to be able to understand someone's gestures, but, most importantly, to adequately react to them by acknowledging said understanding. Second, the narrator continuously focuses on the superficial. He believes that, because Robert could not see his wife, he could not build intimacy, trust, and understanding with her, but his account of his wife's friendship with him shows that they had a myriad of ways to become close

and know each other well. While judging Robert, the narrator actually displays his own figurative blindness. This changes at the end of the night, when the narrator's wife has fallen asleep and he is watching TV with Robert while smoking some cannabis. As cathedrals appear on the screen, the narrator eventually feels like he "had to say something" (209) and he attempts to describe the buildings to Robert. They listen to and ask each other questions, and they both seem interested in the conversation. Robert encourages the narrator to continue talking and, after a while, kindly suggests that they draw a cathedral together, which will prove immensely transformative for him. After Robert "closed his hand over [the narrator's] hand," (213) they begin: "First I drew a box that looked like a house. It could have been the house I lived in. Then I put a roof on it." (213) That a simple cube-like or square-like shape makes him think of his house speaks to the little connection he has with his own place of residence, which is understandable, considering the apparent lack of intimacy within its walls. For this reason, the narrator's experience with Robert changes not only him but also his connection to the idea of home. Although he seems insecure at first, Robert continuously encourages him, which enables the narrator to let go and consider other ways of seeing the world:

So we kept on with it. His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now.

Then he said, "I think that's it. I think you got it," he said. "Take a look. What do you think?"

But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do.

"Well?" he said. "Are you looking?"

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.

"It's really something," I said. (214)

Thus finishes the story. Through this drawing, the narrator can let go of some of the prejudices he held and generate intimacy with Robert, by experiencing the world in a different way, and slowly understanding the importance of connection and empathy. As Vander Weele puts it, "the performance or action of the story makes clear that the reversal of this prejudice opens his house, lets it take on the airiness, the larger enclosure, of a cathedral. This kind of work has made his initiative meaningful, has led this 'homeless' worker toward more responsible citizenship." (113-4) As the story draws to a close, the narrator keeps his eyes closed, considering the changes resulting from this shared experience. The physical drawing of a cathedral, the closeness he has enjoyed with Robert and the process of communication have all allowed him to expand the confines of his house and to find home in his imagination. Indeed, "The coming out of hardened insularity involves intensive listening. . . . For this narrator, significantly, the process of coming out involves going into the narrative of another, involves entering imaginatively into a discourse which, arising [out] of the communal act of storytelling, is at once familiar and unfamiliar." (Neset, "Insularity" 127) The narrator has opened up to the unknown that so terrified him at the beginning when he admitted Robert's blindness "bothered" him. Now, however, he refuses to open his eyes and revels in a newfound sense of place, one that is anything but restrictive. The ending therefore "suggests a redemption of sorts in which the boundaries of the 'house' of identity are at least temporarily transcended." (Groenland 68) In fact, at this point, the narrator's wife is asleep; therefore, all three characters share in their sightlessness. Nevertheless, it is the narrator who stands to gain the most,

for his prejudices have prevented him from maintaining and forming healthy relationships. His relationship with Robert has allowed him to inhabit a different realm where he can begin to accept that which is different and build intimacy and, by extension, the prospect of home.

Carver's characters also find home in concrete, physical spaces. As they grapple with unexpected changes in their lives, they look for places to call home and find them—if only momentarily—in locations that bring them the comfort they need. This is what happens to Ralph in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” who finds home in Marian's body. In the process, however, he encounters spaces that bring him some solace and bear the qualities of what he longs for in a home, namely, silence. As he journeys through the city, he decides to enter a bar and feels, again, like he is “making a momentous discovery,” (172) but it does not come. Instead, he orders a beer and the bartender, David Parks, offers to buy it for him, nodding in “assurance.” (172) Ralph's time at the bar shows how comfort can be found in a multitude of places. Back at home, Ralph and Marian “screamed,” “pleaded,” “shrieked” and cried “noisily” (171) but, at the bar, Parks was “smiling,” straightening the glass of beer “smoothly,” and coughing, but “faintly.” (172) Meanwhile, Ralph “nodded” or “shook his head,” (172) uttering a few short sentences. Ralph's initial foray into the outside world seems far more welcoming and calming than his experiences at home with Marian, in part because he has come to this bar many times before, thus endowing the place with a sense of familiarity that his home does not provide for him anymore, but also because in this place he has found the quiet he so desperately needs. In the city, “Ralph is on the road to silence, where words, and the potential horror behind words, can do him no harm.” (Nesset 25) When he enters Jim's Oyster House, Ralph continues his quest for silence and rest. He notices a room where some men are playing cards, and “it seemed to Ralph immensely still and restful inside,

the silent movements of the men languorous and heavy with meaning.” (175) As previously noted, Ralph’s argument with Marian was loud. At Jim’s Oyster house, signs and sounds converge and build up, pushing Ralph to seek solace with the card players. Indeed, before he enters, Carver highlights the sounds surrounding Ralph: “Back at the bar there was a *flourish of guitars* and people began *whistling* and *clapping* . . . The people *whistled* and *stamped* their feet.” (176; emphasis added) Such a variety of noises proves too intimidating to Ralph, who finally comes to a somewhat misplaced revelation, noting how “suddenly he knew that nothing could save him but to be in the same room with the card players, watching.” (176) Again, Ralph keeps trying to find hidden meaning in the mundane, hoping to decipher secret codes and have an epiphany. Instead of working towards a solution to his conflict with Marian, he hopes it will be given to him. So far, the only revelation he has confirmed that night is Marian’s affair, but also perhaps a newfound understanding of her. When the men inside the room ask him “What did you find out tonight?” he answers “my wife . . . I found out.” (177) By putting it that way—by stating he has “found out” his wife—he implies he has gained a new understanding of her and by extension an acknowledgement of her otherness. Contrary to his initial belief that “he and Marian understood each other perfectly,” (166) Ralph is slowly learning it might not be the case. Carver challenges the familiarity and domesticity associated with one’s lover, suggesting one can never fully know the Other. In the words of Byung-Chul Han, “the desire for the Other is giving way to the comfort of the Same. The aim is to procure the comfortable and, ultimately, dull immanence of the wholly identical. Modern love lacks all transcendence and transgression.” (18–9) Ralph’s sudden confrontation with the Other destabilizes him and makes him wish for silence, which, to his mind, lacks any “transcendence” or “transgression” and thus provides comfort. For this reason, he is drawn to the

room where some men are quietly playing cards, and in there “Ralph confesses Marian’s adultery and experiences a cathartic release.” (Bethea 54) Their conversation is sparse and seems to calm Ralph down, but this proves temporary, since he must eventually leave to continue his journey in the outside world. His experience, however, has shown him that silence can be found even in the threatening outside world, allowing him to slowly open up to uncertainty and understand that the public sphere can also be welcoming and homely.

Similarly, in “A Small, Good Thing,” Ann and Howard experience a devastating loss that turns their world upside down. Their house has been unsettled, with their deceased son’s room now uninhabited, destabilizing the domesticity that permeated the place. At home, Howard “had thought to pick up some of the child’s things that were scattered around the living room. But instead he sat down beside her on the sofa, pushed the box to one side, and leaned forward, arms between his knees. He began to weep.” (77) In a way, their house no longer feels like home, because Scotty’s absence now permeates the place; they have become figuratively homeless, with their house a reminder of what they have lost. When Ann realizes who has been calling them, she demands Howard drive her “down to the shopping center” to confront “the baker, the son-of-a-bitch baker, . . . who has the number and keeps calling us. To harass us about that cake. The baker, that bastard.” (79) Ann’s animosity towards the baker, coupled with the loss of her son, prompts her to seek confrontation as a way to regain control over something. Therefore, they drive to the bakery, where the baker is working while the other shops are closed. As they get there, the setting already foreshadows the peacefulness they will feel inside: “The bakery windows were dark, but when they looked through the glass they could see a light in the back room and, now and then, a big man in an apron moving in and out of the white, even light.” (79) The obvious symbol of light in the dark

anticipates the calm that Ann and Howard will experience as they rest inside the bakery. After knocking on the door, “She stepped into the light that fell through the open door.” (80) Although the initial exchange with the baker is understandably hostile, once Ann reveals what has happened to Scotty, thus explaining why they did not come to pick up the cake, she lets go of her anger, which “dwindled, gave way to something else, a dizzy feeling of nausea . . . and [she] began to cry.” (81) She understands her anger has been misplaced, because the baker had no means of knowing what had happened to them. Her impotence overwhelms her, but what follows is a scene of communion, not only in the sense that all three experience a moment of connection and intimacy but also in that they eat bread. Indeed, the baker says, “I hope you’ll eat some of my hot rolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this.” (83) The rolls are “warm and sweet,” (83) which comforts Ann and Howard. Later, he “break[s] open a dark loaf.” (84) This exchange can call to mind the Christian worship service, an interpretation supported by Christina Bieber Lake (297), Amir Ayala (154) and William L. Stull (12); the latter states that “the story is concerned with the two most basic Christian sacraments, baptism and communion.” (12) Indeed, both Ann and Howard go home to take a bath at different points of the story and share bread with the baker at the very end. Other scholars have refuted this interpretation (Runyon 149-51; Facknitz, ““The Calm”” 295-6; Wriglesworth 133), suggesting instead that the ending of the story “is not designed to elicit a sense of Christian communion but rather is a self-generated *human* communion that is genuine but also godless.” (Wriglesworth 133) Although such a reading of “A Small, Good Thing” seems reasonable, the symbols utilized by Carver in this story could easily elicit a religious interpretation in that we see the characters approaching the light, theoretically connecting with the divine, and engaging in the breaking of bread. What seems evident, whether

one chooses to see this scene as Christian or not, is that crossing the threshold outlined by the door of the bakery suggests that both Ann and Howard have stepped into a new, more hopeful world, where life continues despite their child's death, and connection, intimacy and healing can occur. The baker feeds them rolls and stories, and Ann and Howard "listened carefully" (83) as they bond with him. The very end of the story reads as follows: "They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving." (84) Time no longer matters, because "the plentitude of their meal intimates a newly attained temporality where waiting is no more endured, where time is no longer. Ann's desperate projection of a time before its divisions into life and death, or mother and child, has here, in Carver's tenderly implicit style, come true—if only for a time." (Schweizer par. 17) Within the bakery, Ann and Howard have found a home, a place where they can confront not the baker, but their pain, while generating intimacy and hope.

"So Much Water So Close to Home" also follows a character who, after an unsettling discovery, finds comfort and care in the public sphere. Upon learning of what her husband and his friends did, Claire is shaken and begins to feel alienated from him. As time passes, she feels increasingly uncomfortable, to the point where discomfort turns into terror. In this story, domesticity is broken by the memory and fear of Stuart's negligence, to the point where, for Claire, fear not only permeates her home but also its surroundings; her body, her home, her city and nature lose any connotation of safety and become saturated with the possibility of male violence. Only the hairdresser's where she goes to prepare for the deceased girl's funeral, as shall be later seen, feels welcoming. In the story, both Stuart's and Claire's communicative ways, one lengthy and

aggressive, the other brief and quiet, seem to fuel the other's exasperation. Stuart, on the one hand, decides to avoid Claire altogether and "goes out to the back" where he sits "in the lawn chair" (68); Claire, on the other hand, "rake[s her] arm across the drainboard and send[s] the dishes to the floor." (68) He escapes, whereas she resorts to violence and destruction. While Stuart seeks to get away from the house, she seeks to destroy domestic items that constitute it. In both cases, the house grows oppressive for them by virtue of the conflict that Stuart's actions (or rather, inaction) have caused. After Claire throws the dishes to the floor, she comments on Stuart's evasiveness: "He doesn't move. I know he's heard. He lifts his head as if still listening. But he doesn't move otherwise. He doesn't turn around." (68) Her insistence on his stillness foreshadows the reasons for the tension that has infiltrated the house: Stuart and three other friends went fishing to the Naches River, where they found a dead girl without clothes on floating in the water, indicating sexual abuse as well as murder, and they left her there while they enjoyed their retreat instead of immediately notifying the police. These men went to the Naches River "every spring and early summer before visiting relatives can get in the way," (68) which suggests that this is a time they take for themselves, when they can relax in nature. However, finding a corpse disrupts the peacefulness of the environment. In the words of John Armstrong, "Carver's situating of the raped, dead woman within the desired virgin landscape of the men's primitive fantasies mocks idealistic constructions of nature." (132) Indeed, by placing the body of a murdered woman in nature, Carver shows the desecration of the environment in two ways: first, the body has been abused and disrespected; second, nature has been soiled by the presence of a murdered woman, a death that challenges nature's cycles. What generates the tension that pervades the story is the men's reaction to their finding. One of them "said they should start back at once. The others stirred the sand with

their shoes, said they didn't feel inclined that way. They pleaded fatigue, the late hour, the fact that the girl wasn't going anywhere." (68) To prevent the body from floating away, one of them "got some nylon cord and tied it to her wrist and then looped the rest around a tree." (69) The men continue fishing, playing cards and drinking for two more days, until they finally leave and call the police. Such disregard for the body of a raped and murdered woman stands as further abuse and violence, which Stuart fails to understand but which profoundly affects Claire. She becomes more and more estranged from her own husband, perplexed at his indifference and anger. As Armstrong notes, "alerted by the horror of the sexually murdered woman . . . Carver's reader sees also the quotidian male monster, the husband living inside the house." (132) Claire no longer feels at home within her house by virtue of his husband's choices. The memory of Stuart's decisions and attitude destabilize the quotidian to the point where "domestic, suburban, and rural spaces are all permeated with an overpowering sense of male sexual violence." (Armstrong 133) Any place where Claire might encounter a man has become too menacing for Claire.

On a drive with Stuart, Claire notices a creek, which "runs under the bridge and into a large pond a few hundred yards away" (70); there, she can see men fishing, which makes her notice how there is "so much water so close to home." (70) This suggests that if the men had gone fishing closer to home, they probably would not have had to deal with the body of a dead woman. More importantly, it also brings forward Claire's newfound relationship with water. If it previously held either neutral or positive connotations for her, it now reminds her of male violence towards the female body. Indeed, as she and Stuart sit on a bench looking out at the creek, after Stuart refuses to talk to Claire, she thinks: "I look at the creek. I'm right in it, eyes open, face down, staring at the moss on the bottom, dead." (71) The discovery of the dead woman's body and Stuart and his

friends' subsequent handling of the situation traumatize Claire so much that she begins to notice the water around her more and more. For instance, on her way to the dead woman's funeral, she drives through "farm country, through fields of oats and sugar beets and past apple orchards, cattle grazing in pastures." but "then everything changes": "on the right, far below, I sometimes see the Naches River." (72) The discovery of the corpse in the Naches River has reshaped Claire's experience of her surroundings; she identifies with the murdered woman so much that she has become aware that she could be next. Indeed, the dead woman's body "is at the centre of rife misogyny and sexual violence which permeates the story's representation of American suburban and rural society." (J. Armstrong 131) It stands as a symbol of violence against women and it reminds Claire of the reality and proximity of danger. Even within her own house, she physically distances herself from Stuart more and more. First, she begins "lying on the far side of the bed away from his hairy legs" (71); the next day, she "make[s her] bed on the sofa," (72) this time moving to another room to increase the distance between them.

One morning, she reads about the murdered woman in the newspaper. It reads,

The body has been identified, claimed. But it took some examining it, some putting things into it, some cutting, some weighing, some measuring, some putting things back again and sewing them in.

I sit for a long time holding the newspaper and thinking. Then I call up to get a chair at the hairdresser's. (71)

Claire's recounting of the details of the autopsy reveals how, in death, the body of the woman has continued to be violated and invaded. Her words also accentuate the body's dehumanization as it is probed and analyzed coldly, becoming nothing more than an object. Claire's decision to go to the

hairdresser's after reading this news is not arbitrary; she needs to escape her house as it has been tarnished by the actions of Stuart and his friends. Her time at the salon turns out to be one of the most peaceful ones in the story. There,

I sit under the dryer with a magazine on my lap and let Marnie do my nails.

"I am going to a funeral tomorrow," I say.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Marnie says.

"It was a murder," I say.

"That's the worst kind," Marnie says.

"We weren't all that close," I say. "But you know."

"We'll get you fixed up for it," Marnie says. (71-2)

Claire's body is shown warmth as well as respect. Like the narrator of "The Calm," who finds solace at the barber's after experiencing hostility, Claire can momentarily feel at home. This is a space devoid of men, where she can safely talk to the hairdresser and meet compassion and empathy, which she has not been able to find anywhere else. Moreover, as opposed to the dead woman's body, here her body is taken care of. Similarly, at the woman's funeral, Claire notices how "the casket is closed and covered with floral sprays." (73) The woman has finally been granted the privacy and respect she deserved; not only is this a closed-casket funeral, so that the body can no longer be examined and objectified, but also the casket has been decorated in order to pay tribute to the deceased woman, or, in the respectful words of Claire, "the soul of the departed." (74) The woman now rests in a safe environment. The funeral home now seems more peaceful than the natural landscape of the Naches River, where the woman's body was dumped, only to be found later and ignored. Although the woman is dead, and Claire will have to navigate the threatening

world again, they both find a home in the care and respect they are shown at the funeral home and the hairdresser's, respectively.

The last story I wish to analyze is "They're Not Your Husband." In it, the home is "an investment of meaning in space." (Silverstone 28). The story starts by not only using a euphemism to address Earl's state of joblessness but also by contrasting his position to that of his wife: "Earl Ober was *between jobs* as a salesman. But Doreen, his wife, had gone to work nights as a waitress at a twenty-four-hour coffee shop at the edge of town." (16; emphasis added). As opposed to Earl, Doreen has a job and the way it has been worded suggests she did not have trouble getting it. The narrator notes that she "had gone to work" as if to say that she had simply decided to *go* to this diner and was immediately hired.

One night, Earl decides to go see Doreen at the coffee shop and perhaps get a free meal. The first thing she does when she sees him is to ask him what he is doing there—no salutation, only a query. When he implies that he would like his meal to be on the house—an appropriate idiom that emphasizes the domestic environment of a restaurant—she refuses and adds "Don't talk to me now. I'm busy." (16) From the very beginning, it is possible to see that Doreen feels in control at the coffee shop. She has agency over herself, rapidly dismissing Earl's requests and proving to be very efficient at her job. By contrast, Earl is more evasive at the diner, but the moment he is in his house the power changes hands. Here, when Doreen comes home, the first thing Earl says upon seeing her is, "Look at yourself in the mirror." (17) a direct order. Earl feels humiliated because at the diner two men have criticized Doreen's body. Interestingly, as Gareth Cornwell explains, "to the extent that Earl's sense of himself, of his self-worth, is embodied in the object of his desire . . . , discovering that others—'successful' men and, therefore, appropriate models or rivals—do not value that

object empties it of value and makes him feel valueless.” (348) Because Earl feels worthless without his job, he now focuses more on Doreen and tries to get her to become desirable to these men he considers to be better than him. Earl is insistent and persuades his wife to go on a diet. She accepts without hardly questioning his motives, and seems much less assertive than at the coffee shop. As soon as they finish the conversation and agree on the procedure, Earl states, “I’m a closer,” (18) revealing how Doreen has indeed become an “object” (Cornwell 348) and thus one of his projects, as he will later try to figuratively sell her to the men at the coffee house. Abigail L. Bowers states,

In Carver’s dismal blue-collar world, being out of work is synonymous with being out of control. Consequently, when people are unemployed, they feel the need to have power over something. Earl feels inadequate in his own life, so Carver paints this inadequacy through Earl’s need to dominate Doreen in some way. (97)

Over the course of the following weeks, Earl insults, undermines and is condescending towards Doreen—always from the comfort of his own house, where he feels in control. He measures and weighs her, putting her on the scale every day, then writing down each number. When she notes that people at work say she does not look well, he says, “Tell them to mind their own *business*” (20; emphasis added); here again, Earl inadvertently uses an idiom that proves quite revealing given his intentions. He continues, “You don’t have to live with them,” to which she replies, “I have to work with them,” (20) further supporting the idea that Doreen feels more at home at the coffee shop, where her coworkers actually worry about her. Already in the 1950s, when women were becoming part of the workforce in increasing numbers, Lillian Gilberth noted, in *Management in the Home*, “We no longer say, ‘Woman’s place is in the home,’ because many women have their places outside the home.” (1) For Doreen, in the house she shares with Earl she is subjected to his constant

scrutiny and objectification, thus slowly removing any value or meaning that might be attached to that place.

Earl's dehumanization of Doreen continues as he goes to less and less job interviews, instead becoming obsessed with Doreen's diet, and culminates when, after she has lost a substantial amount of weight, he goes to the coffee shop to see the results of his work. He waits for other men to look at Doreen, but after no one makes remarks about her body, he initiates a conversation with another man by saying "What do you think of *that*?" (21; emphasis added), referring to Doreen in that way twice more. The man has nothing to say. At this point, Earl sees his wife merely as an object he can sell. He "looks at his wife through a public eye," seeing her "in an extremely partial vision, which erases her dynamic, multi-faceted presence." (Ayala 117) For Earl,

[Doreen's] body—with its display value—has become a commodity. At the same time, the Other [in this case, Doreen] is being sexualized into an object for procuring arousal. When otherness is stripped from the Other, one cannot love—one can only consume. To this extent, the Other is no longer a person; instead, he or she has fragmented into sexual-part-objects. (Han 12)

Earl's joblessness has prompted him to displace his efforts to find a job by focusing on his wife. By seeking to control her, to monitor her at the coffee shop, and to regulate her body, he has effectively erased her otherness. He does not care about Doreen; instead, his focus is on selling her body and attractiveness to the men who go to the restaurant in order to feed his own ego. In spite of the fact that he might have previously been comfortable around Doreen as she was before, seeing how other men look at her now has brought him shame. He has become a "homo consumens" (Bauman 69), a "lonely, self-concerned and self-centered shopper who has adopted the search for the best bargain as

a cure for loneliness and knows of no other therapy” (Bauman 69). While Earl wants Doreen’s body to be looked at with desire and consumed by others, he also tries to buy their acceptance. By this point, however, we are no longer in Earl’s house, but in the coffee shop, where Doreen regains ownership over her own body and self and shows contempt for Earl. When asked who “this character” and “this joker” (21) is, Doreen looks at him with exasperation. Doreen’s coworkers share her frustration. They support her and mock him. Here, Earl loses all sense of confidence and his forced smile quickly turns into an indefinite grimace. Doreen answers, “He’s a salesman. He’s my husband,” (22) describing him by the way he is related to her: he is, first and foremost, a salesman; additionally, he is her relative. The story finishes as Doreen goes “to total up his check.” (22) Not only has Earl failed to get a free meal like he initially wanted; he has also failed to sell his wife, and by extension, failed in his endeavors as a businessman in all respects. Therefore, in this story domesticity seems realized in multiple ways as the characters choose their main residences; for Doreen, the coffee shop is her home, where she feels more respected, comfortable and in control than where she lives, whereas for Earl, their house is where he spends most of his time and where he becomes more confident. The house is thus manifested as two different locations where autonomy and comfort change hands, and where the characters communicate with more confidence depending on where they feel more at ease. In this way, therefore, home is realized beyond the house, and the workplace can sometimes welcome intimacy by virtue of the relations one has there, which sometimes seem more productive and comforting than those within the house.

CONCLUSIONS



Conclusions

1. General Conclusions

The main purpose of this thesis was to explore the representation of intimacy in the stories of Raymond Carver. Understood as the relationship between domesticity and love, intimacy in Carver's work finds itself destabilized because the house has become a non-place and individuals barely connect with each other. However, I contend that many of his stories offer glimmers of hope that allow the characters to envisage a future where possibility and transformation can occur. My research is based on three claims that each chapter has sought to address: first, that despite the domestic setting of Carver's stories, the houses featured in them have become heterotopic, seen as places of transit that afford no comfort to those who dwell in them; second, that Carver's characters are not as inarticulate as many critics have argued but that, instead, the problem resides in their solipsism and inability to confront their problems; third, that despite their rootlessness, some of these characters manage to resignify intimacy by virtue of the way they use the spaces around them, and through the connections they create in the public sphere, traditionally seen as threatening and standing in stark opposition to the private one. Therefore, Carver's stories call for a reappraisal of our understanding of home, communication, and intimacy. According to Lauren Berlant, whose work has proven essential to the third chapter of the present dissertation,

Rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects while, at the same time, attachments are developing that might redirect the different routes taken by history and biography. To rethink intimacy

is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living. (“Intimacy” 286)

Carver’s characters long to “go back home” (Carver, *WYYPBQ?* 132) and spend their lives looking for a house that will free them from the discomfort that plagues them, transforming their own dwellings into non-places that preclude connection. They believe they “have to love each other,” (Carver, *WYYPBQ?* 140) as if love could be forced upon the self and/or the other, and even if they try, they lack the tools—and sometimes the will—to do so. They yearn for a utopian future but, by doing so, render their present heterotopic; they are othered and other themselves by virtue of their inability to see the present for what it is: complex, confusing and chaotic. Carver questions these “hegemonic fantasies” inscribed within his characters and offers a tentative itinerary to reframe the concept of intimacy and show it as flexible and, most importantly, possible. His stories might appear contained, enclosed by the gates of the suburban landscapes he writes about, but the way he presents intimacy is, in the words of Berlant, “transformative.” (“Intimacy” 286) His is a view that posits intimacy as expansive and without borders. In an accelerated world in which individuals struggle to develop closeness with others in traditional ways, too consumed by their and others’ expectations, they sometimes learn to see their surroundings and their own bodies in new ways and generate connection within, by finding peace in their own bodies, and without, by building intimacy with other bodies and other places beyond the house.

Because little attention has been paid to the way Carver presents spaces, and since the majority of his stories are set indoors, the first chapter has proven key in filling a gap in the literary criticism by presenting a thorough analysis of the house in Carver’s stories and suggesting that it has come to lose connotations of warmth and safety by virtue of its inhabitants’ experiences and

actions. House and home are thus no longer synonyms. This is compounded by the fact that Carver's houses are situated in suburbia, which promote "placelessness" (Beuka 2) as well as "dislocation and purposelessness" (Beuka 151) and lead to estrangement. The suburbs are inherently heterotopic owing to their location, confinement and preclusion of socialization; thus, the houses that make up these so-called communities do very little to abate the insecurities that their inhabitants carry with them. The malaise that torments Carver's characters follows them to their houses and becomes inscribed in the very walls that surround them, preventing them from ever truly feeling at home. Drawing from the theories proposed by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, I first showed how Carver's stories fit into the tradition of the domestic by featuring a variety of quintessentially familiar elements: childhood memories, the hearth, the contrast between the inside and the outside and, finally, doors. The second part of the chapter, however, suggests that Carver subverts domesticity by transforming houses into non-places and heterotopias, following the works of Marc Augé and Michel Foucault, respectively. Carver questions Bachelard's optimism. The philosopher described the house as a "felicitous space" (19) that allows one to reminisce about a joyful childhood, ignoring the many individuals for whom the house does not have such connotations, but also the fact that houses are not stagnant: their meaning and qualities shift as their inhabitants navigate an increasingly complicated world. Carver skillfully portrays this reality by presenting houses that bear the traces of their inhabitants' pain; these characters neglect, actively damage, or seek to leave their places of residence. Therefore, they find it more and more difficult to feel safe in an environment that does not carry any warmth and that has lost all its meaning. Houses are thus places of transition; by transforming them into non-places, Carver undoes the domestic.

The second chapter has explored the language of the loss of love in the stories of Carver, studying a variety of ways in which characters communicate and challenging the belief that they are inarticulate. As previously seen, scholars have argued that these individuals do not know how to communicate their troubles, but often fail to see the depiction of nonverbal language that Carver so adeptly produced. According to Eva Illouz,

The control of emotions, the clarification of one's values and goals, the use of the technique of calculation, and the decontextualization and objectification of emotions all entail an *intellectualization* of intimate bonds, for the sake of a broader moral project: to create equality and fair exchange by engaging in a relentless verbal communication about one's needs, emotions, and goals. (*Cold Intimacies* 34)

The constant rationalization and psychologization of romantic love requires a complete self-awareness from each individual in order for them to understand their “needs, emotions, and goals.” Only then can they use the spoken word, as Illouz points out, to express their desires. This assumes that people are or can be fully cognizant of their wants and worries, and know how to employ the spoken word to express them. Carver, however, deftly showed the inherent uncertainty pervading individuals and embraced his characters' insecurities. He saw their humanity and demonstrated that communication is not only verbal, but a nuanced interplay between words, gestures, and sounds, among other forms of expression. For a writer who so desperately sought to find “the right word for what [he] wanted to say,” (Lawler 173) Carver allowed his characters to fumble for words, looking for the right way to express emotions they could not even comprehend. Sometimes they used words or phrases so much that they rendered them meaningless, as is the case of “I love you.” In the same way that he undoes the domestic, Carver undoes the traditional

language of love, turning the phrase void through his characters' overuse. Similarly, he subverts the classic understanding of terms of endearment, which feature heavily in his stories, though in unexpected ways: "honey" no longer conveys affection but instead fear or longing, while "brother" or "stupid" can actually denote fondness. Hypocorisms abound in Carver's stories, but they are almost always used to preface a violent remark or to get something from another individual. Carver's characters, therefore, resignify these terms by endowing them with new meanings. This is something that has never been studied with regards to Carver's stories and that, in general, has received little attention in fiction, particularly of the twentieth century. This shall be elaborated on further in the next section, when discussing the implications of this dissertation.

Eva Illouz has also claimed that "Communication' is . . . a technology of self-management relying extensively on language and on the proper management of emotions but with the aim of engineering inter- and intra-emotional coordination." (*Cold Intimacies* 19) Her use of words such as "technology" and "engineering" point to the scientific nature of the therapeutic mode of communication that took hold in the 1970s and sought to absolutize and positivize emotions, a mode that critics still invoke when lamenting the inability of Carver's characters to communicate. This precisely contradicts Carver's refusal to systematize emotions. He saw the difficulty of understanding, handling and expressing one's emotions, particularly for individuals navigating an accelerated world that continuously exalted the unattainable American Dream, and showed the infinite possibilities for communication. His portrayal of language goes beyond the spoken word as he painstakingly describes gestures, looks and other forms of nonverbal communication, showing that his characters articulate their emotions in a myriad ways. Although many manage to convey meaning, however obscure, much of the struggle in these relationships resides in the partner's

inability to listen to, process and address what they are told: different forms of communication are often misunderstood or simply ignored for fear of engaging with the present and facing discomfort. Thus, these characters constantly grapple with the reception of meaning even more than with its production.

The third and last chapter started from the premise that, as suggested in the previous two, neither the house nor communication works for the characters: they no longer find comfort within their dwellings, and their conversations lead them nowhere. I wondered what was left once these two elements were unsettled, and noticed that some of Carver's characters, particularly those that have gone through a significant change or who have had a realization, seek out new ways to generate intimacy and to find their place in the world. By connecting domesticity and closeness, this chapter sought to explore the reconstitution of intimacy in the stories of Raymond Carver, studying the way his characters utilize the spaces around them to voice their needs or opinions more directly, thereby welcoming open communication. The first part focuses on what I have termed "walls" to refer to different areas in the house that shield the characters when they attempt to communicate more openly: thresholds feature often in Carver's stories and show his characters finding the courage to open up, if only momentarily. Similarly, windows and reflections give temporary solace to individuals who attempt to voice their needs but are too afraid to be straightforward. Although the house itself has become a non-place, the different areas that constitute it can still offer support to their inhabitants as they try to navigate a hostile environment and generate intimacy. Sometimes, however, the houses of others awaken in Carver's characters dreams of a more hopeful future and permits them to find comfort during their stay in those places. In these cases, Carver shows a connection to the house much different than that suggested

by Bachelard: rather than reminiscing about the childhood home and feeling comfortable in their environment because of the positive memories they established there, these individuals revel in the memories they wish to create, supported by a house that has, in their eyes, made others successful. Therefore, characters begin to view their surroundings in new ways, which informs their understanding of home. This is what the second part of the chapter focuses on. Carver undoes grand narratives of love and domesticity by portraying a world that, albeit complicated and confusing, still promotes connection, though perhaps in unconventional ways. His characters remap the home by detaching it from the house and looking for it elsewhere. Comfort may no longer be found within the house, but the idea of home, like communication, is malleable and, most importantly, mobile. It can be found in a myriad of places through the connection and intimacy one generates with the Other, but also with the self. Some of Carver's characters find themselves at home in their own bodies, which houses and protects the self, or the body of their partner, which offers warmth and security. Others make their home in unconventional places, such as the workplace, or in places where, for once, real connection occurs, such as bars, salons and bakeries. Intimacy thrives when care, closeness and comfort meet. Sometimes, to generate intimacy means leaving the house and considering what lies beyond. In his stories, Carver hints at a more hopeful future, one in which the door is, as Bachelard claimed, "an entire cosmos of the Half-open," (237) where the possibility of transformation stands within reach.

In *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Raymond Carver's last collection of poems, he included a piece that would become particularly celebrated and often anthologized. "Late Fragment," which appears at the very end of the collection and which would later become an epitaph in Carver's own tombstone, reads as follows:

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth. (122)

First mentioned in this dissertation's title, as well as the beginning of the second chapter, I believe it relevant to return to this poem, for it connects the three main elements of my research: language, love, and place. Carver grants the second speaker of this poem the agency to "call [themselves] beloved" and the ability to "feel" such love within the world. This newfound self-awareness proves rare in the writer's stories, but it occasionally appears. It usually happens when the characters come face to face with a conflict and try to address it, allowing them to explore the world in different ways and potentially finding the possibility of intimacy in new places, including some that they might have previously ignored in favor of the traditional house, despite its evident inhospitality. Although critics such as Kirk Nisset have argued that Carver's later stories seemed more hopeful (74), the present research suggests that, regardless of Gordon Lish's heavy editing, and in line with Fabre-Clark's contention that "Carver's writing can . . . be placed under the sign of continuity," ("The Poetics of the Banal" 173) even some stories in Carver's first collection end with the promise of change and the generation of intimacy. Therefore, despite the destabilization of the domestic sphere as well as the traditional language of love, Carver's work shows the possibility of a restitution and resignification of intimacy.

2. Implications

The main implications of these conclusions point towards the extension of lines of research on Carver's work that remain heavily understudied. As mentioned in the introduction, very little attention has been paid to the writer's geography and the way his characters relate to their environment and, so far, the transformation of the house into a non-place has never been explored. However, spaces are fundamental to our lived experiences and inform our relations with ourselves and others, which Carver masterfully depicts in his work. The suburban setting as well as his choice to focus on what happens indoors provide a fascinating portrait of the postmodern North-American topography, which requires more attention. Therefore, the present research opens up new avenues for the analysis of not only the house, but also the treatment of other spaces in Carver's stories. It would also prove extremely enlightening to study a variety of authors that lived and published during Carver's time, such as Richard Ford, Ann Beattie, Tobias Wolff and Richard Yates, among others, and see how they explored these themes.

In addition, the conclusions of this dissertation demand a renewed interest in the representation of language in Carver's stories and a move beyond the commonly held and potentially erroneous belief that his characters are inarticulate. My focus resided in Carver's resignification of the language of love through the subversion of terms of endearment and the emptying of meaning from the expression "I love you," which have not been studied so far. The study of terms of endearment undoubtedly deserves more attention in Carver's work, not only with regards to romantic relationships but also with platonic or familial ones, for it continues to evidence the way in which Carver experimented with and subverted language. Thus, it might be interesting to look at how Carver uses hypocorisms in stories like "Why, Honey?" or expand on his

use of terms of endearment in “Cathedral,” among many other stories. Beyond this, I also studied the many forms of communication that these individuals employ and highlighted the numerous ways in which Carver portrays language, whether spoken, kinetic or written. Despite paying attention only to couples, the implications of my conclusions highlight the need for further analysis of the way characters—whether in romantic relationships or not—use a variety of tools to communicate with one another to move away from the view that Carver’s characters are inarticulate.

One final implication has to do with what I argue is a reconstitution of intimacy in Carver’s stories. These need to be seen in a more expansive and sympathetic way. Though critics agree on the bleakness and discomfort present in the writer’s work, the need to move beyond “Hopelessville” (Newlove 77) cannot be overstated, something that William Stull already began to tackle in his comparative analysis of “The Bath” and “A Small, Good Thing” (1985) but that has not been explored in depth often. This is not to say that one should ignore the obvious desolation pervading Carver’s work, but looking beneath the surface allows one to see the many hints of hope and connection interspersed throughout the stories.

3. Further Research

It would undoubtedly prove relevant to further study some of the arguments that I have put forward throughout the dissertation. The present section aims to outline some suggestions for further research.

First, Carver’s approach to spaces deserves more attention and there are several aspects that have fallen beyond the scope of the present study that should be explored in depth. For instance,

the gendered use of spaces in the writer's work is very significant, and attempting to understand how and why women and men navigate a variety of places differently would elucidate much about their relationship to each other but also to space itself. While it is true that some stories, such as "The Ducks," show them moving in very traditional ways, with the wife staying at home and the husband outside, many others invert this tradition and allow the woman to spend more time in the public sphere while the man stays at home, like "Are These Actual Miles?" or "They're Not Your Husband," among others. Another aspect related to spatial studies that would shed light on a relatively new field within Carver's criticism is the comparison between Raymond Carver and Gordon Lish's depiction of spaces. Although the present dissertation has sometimes compared aspects of edited and unedited stories, the publication of *Beginners* in 2009 offers sufficient material to conduct a more thorough comparative study with *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, and consulting the manuscripts of both writers (Carver's can be found at Ohio State University, while Lish's are located at Indiana University) could further support this endeavor.

It would also be productive to compare Carver's stories with visual adaptations such as the movies *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993) or *Birdman* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014) to note their portrayal of space and analyze whether the arguments suggested here are reflected in them as well. Adaptations always take liberties to fit stories to the big screen and the analysis of those changes with regards to the presentation of space could elucidate much not only about these movies but also about Carver's work. With regards to visual media that is related to the writer's stories, I suggest as well that, in the same way that Edward Hopper's (1882–1967) paintings could easily be set in Carver country, the photographs of Gregory Crewdson (1962) also belong in the same world. Known for his elaborate productions and his collaboration with actors such as

Julianne Moore, who also stars in *Short Cuts*, Crewdson himself has acknowledged Carver's influence in his work. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, he explained,

I think with Carver in particular it's the idea that you can find this sense of drama in a small domestic event, and it can be magnified and made transformative in some way. I see my pictures as being very much aligned with that, taking a familiar situation and making it dramatic, in my case through gesture and color and light. And then, of course, giving the impression that everyday life is unsettled in some way, or made mysterious or wondrous somehow.

Crewdson's photographs deal with "interior life and the uncanny" (McInnes 92) and thus visually mirror Carver's stories. His productions, use of lighting, choice of actors and their body language as well as position within the frame, among many other elements, make for an eerie and ominous presentation of the domestic that nevertheless sometimes suggests intimacy, as Fig.1 at the beginning of this dissertation shows. For this reason, and because criticism comparing the two artists does not abound, an analysis of the way they represent space could be quite thought-provoking.

In addition, much more can be said about the way Carver portrays language and communication in his stories. It would prove undoubtedly fruitful to explore the way Carver depicts, on the one hand, silences and, on the other, a reference to nothingness. Many of his characters fall silent or demand it, such as Ralph in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" As Erik Nakjavani notes, "[t]he unsaid as well as the unsayable, the utterance as well as the unutterable remain in silence as potentialities to be said or uttered, or to be hinted at or implied. Silence always offers the possibility of speech and meaning." (42) Silence is another form of communication and

not because of the gestures that might be used to compensate for it. It can convey meaning by itself, which can be seen in Carver's work. Moreover, characters resort to vagueness when talking to others by saying "It's nothing" or "It's no place," among other phrases or sentences, paradoxically conveying much more than what they believe. This can be seen, for instance, in stories like "What's in Alaska?", "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?", and "They're Not Your Husband," among many others. Choosing to refer to nothingness instead of resorting to honesty shows how these individuals do not feel safe in their relationships and are terrified of confrontation while also being incapable of escaping, thus emphasizing a sense of entrapment within these partnerships.

Furthermore, the use of alcohol as a psychological wall that shields the characters from potential pain or embarrassment should be paid attention to, for it allows them to communicate more openly, much like the physical walls mentioned in the third chapter. In her analysis of "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Margaret J. Downes states,

The more they talk, the more confused they get. The more desperate they become to communicate about love, or to communicate love, the more they depend on alcohol to give themselves courage and a sense of identity. 'Gin's gone,' Mel says. 'Now what?' says his wife. And no one moves. That's the end of the story. *Sans* cultural context, *sans* alcoholic context, these people fail to exist; they know nothing. They share no vital myth to alter, and the bottle which altered them is empty. (58)

Although it is well known that many stories by Carver feature alcoholics, or people who drink fairly often, I believe the use of alcohol to favor communication should be explored in depth.

Other interesting lines of research include that of viewing Carver's stories through the theory of affect, both in terms of the stories themselves but also related to the intimacy built

between narrator and reader through the study of “representations of intimacy and the literary techniques of intimate writing” which “can produce intimate reading encounters.” (Cooke 3) The scope of the present dissertation has not allowed me to delve into this particular topic, but further research on the intimacy within and without the stories would certainly prove valuable. In line with affect theory, but with a focus on the texts themselves, Carver’s work could also be explored through the lens of boredom studies. Although boredom has been a subject of study for a long time, the past few decades have witnessed an increase in the criticism devoted to the topic, including the 2017 publication of the *Boredom Studies Reader*, edited by Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn. Carver’s characters struggle with a boredom derived from modern alienation and a desire, yet inability, to find meaning in their lives. Boredom informs their lives and influences the way they relate to their environment, including people and spaces, and it prevents many of them from forming meaningful connections. It is only when they embrace uncertainty that they welcome change, opportunity, and the prospect of intimacy. The many approaches to Carver’s work are thus a testament to his timelessness as a writer as well as his striking ability to convey the modern destabilization and resignification of intimacy.

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