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**The Picture of the world in**

**raYmond carver’s work**

**Martin Tatíček**

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Jméno Příjmení

ABSTRACT

Tatíček Martin. University of West Bohemia. June, 2012. The Picture of the World in Raymond Carver’s Work.

Supervisor: Brad Vice, Ph.D.

The object of this thesis is to answer the questions concerning the literary contribution of Raymond Carver’s work. To achieve this purpose an analysis of his work based on the search and exploration of the writer’s predecessors is provided. The chief inspiration is found in Ernest Hemingway whose work offered to Carver economical treatment with words and importance of some facts omission in the text. Next, Anton Chekhov that was most appreciated by Carver offered him an example regarding art of observation of common things, everyday life, poor people. The third influence came from Carver’s university teacher and friend, John Gardner who instilled him the need to search for and highlight in text all the incentives that drives the human conduct. Carver’s own merit consists in skilful combination of these sources together with his own exploration of human relationships, especially between man and women, and reasons for their erosion. He manifests the dangers of passive living, shows the threats of false identities, and substitute ways of existence displaying in excessive consummation of television, food, sex, and the like. A method of sudden astonishment, comprehension or stiffness when one is getting lost often appears in his texts. Further, Carver’s collections are analyzed in order to state if there is any significant evolution of his writings. The reply is negative as the narrative control, use of language, themes and points stay more or less the same. Though, the late period of his work is slightly more optimistic. An important finding of the thesis is that Carver falls into the current of modern literary realism accentuating the symbolic significance of words. Hence, a reader is given the key to the interpretation of his stories.

# TABLE OF CONTENS

[I. BIOGRAPHICAL PART 3](#_Toc328747592)

[i) CITIZEN CARVER: “VITA BREVIS, ARS LONGA” 3](#_Toc328747593)

[II. THEORETICAL PART 11](#_Toc328747594)

[i) CARVER’S THOUGHT BACKGROUND: LITERARY INFLUENCES ON HIS WRITINGS 11](#_Toc328747595)

[ii) CARVER’S LITERARY DEBT TO HEMINGWAY 14](#_Toc328747596)

[iii) CHEKHOVIAN INSPIRATION 18](#_Toc328747597)

[iv) FATAL MEETING: GARDENER AND LISH 20](#_Toc328747598)

[III. “PRACTICAL PART”: ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES 24](#_Toc328747599)

[i) *WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUITE, PLEASE?* 24](#_Toc328747600)

[ii) *WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE &* 38](#_Toc328747601)

[*FURIOUS SEASONS AND OTHER STORIES* 38](#_Toc328747602)

[iii) *CATHEDRAL & NEW STORIES FROM WHERE I’M CALLING FROM* 44](#_Toc328747603)

[CONCLUSION 48](#_Toc328747604)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY 54](#_Toc328747605)

**INTRODUCTION**

In one of her essays Flannery O’Connore says about writing that it is a process of revealing (Carver I 200). And adds that in the moment when she starts writing she never knows where she will finish and what path will be taken to achieve her goal. In her opinion, this is a common thing to most of the writers. According to her, hardly any of them really knows it since the very begging. When Raymond Carver read about in the essay, he was struck by the fact that anyone else might be working in the same was as he does. He considered that to be a kind of his personal unpleasant secret that reveals his incapacity when writing the stories. Now, it is necessary to admit that this holds into some extent for the author of this diploma work. Nevertheless, as this signifies a lack of readiness and might be an obstacle for the correct progress of the thesis, it will be better to announce the plan for this introduction. At first, the author will be shortly presented; then, the account of thesis’ aim and its method will be provided; followed by the note about the accessibility of Carver’s work and secondary literature in the Czech Republic; at the end, the structure of the diploma work itself will be foreshadowed.

Raymond Carver, the person in question in thesis, said that he would be pleased if his tombstone bear an inscription “poet”, and somewhere lower in the brackets might be written “short story writer”, “eventual editor (of anthologies) and somewhere down “ teacher” (Carver III 232). For majority of Carver’s readers must be surprising the designation “poet”. As they do not know he wrote the poetry or would not attribute such an important role to it in his life. Furthermore, of the same opinion is the literary critique: Raymond Carver, who was born in the beginning of the Second World War in the end of the eighties, is mainly considered to be one of the word greatest short story writer, recognized as a man who initiated the revival of a short story literary form at least in the United States; if not in the “world-stage” (the whole Euro-Atlantic literary scene). Then, it is remembered he was also editor of story anthologies, university teacher and poet. Now, the following questions rise: Why is it so? Why is there such a discrepancy between the researchers’ opinion and Carver’s statement?

First, to find an answer on this question will be one of the goals of this thesis. Together with the effort to say how it happened Carver met with such a success. Thus, second aim of the work will be to describe what constituted his literary contribution and in what manner his oeuvre differs from that of his predecessors and fellow writers. In other words, the aim of this thesis is to give an account of Carver’s style, i.e. show the material, use of language, structures, possibly, symbolism; and then reveal the most often employed themes and motives. In order to attain that, a method of analysis together with comparative one will be largely applied. These will provide a possibility to interpret Carver’s short stories, as well as recognize the potential stylistic or thematic changes in the course of author’s carrier. Put it another, the third objective of the diploma work will be to analyse the selected stories from the individual collections, characterize the story books and determine any possible evolution in the matter. Doing so, more attention will be paid to the first collection *Will You Please Be Quite, Please?* which seems to be most obscure of the five, and thus most difficult to interpret. The other story books will be explained in the contrast to it.

Raymond Carver is quite often considered to be representative of so called literary minimalism, dirty, or gritty realism; nevertheless many others names implying consumerism or smallness, such as Coke-fiction, Freeze-dried Fiction, Postliterate Literature and the like, were given to his literary style (Saltzman 5). Some critics even state he is a postmodern author (Lehman 75). So, fourthly, try to find a suitable category for the author should be another purpose of this inquiry.

Actually, Raymond Carver is an author that might be, from a certain point of view, considered as a representative of contemporary literature, from the other, he might grasped already as a classical author. As an evidence for the latter serves the fact there can be found secondary literature on his work, as well as films about him and the ones based on his stories, his popularity proves the opinion too. Nonetheless, it is almost impossible to find a good monograph analyzing and interpreting Carver’s work as a whole or the individual story collections; the only one is Carver’s guide written by Arthur M. Saltzman. Majority of this books are biographies, such as Carol Sklenicka’s, on the other hand, the studies provided in the articles explore just a few themes appearing in his short stories; lot of papers speak about the influence of his editor on him, some of them compare the different stories’ versions (in connection with the editing). And still, the information are scattered all over the literary magazines and web sites archives. The language of the essays is predominantly, perhaps, merely English. Thus, to offer a new interpretation to fill some of these gaps is also one of the purposes of this diploma work.

Next, the accessibility of Carver’s book in English original in the Czech Republic is not very well either. For example, library of English departure in Charles University, which is one of the most specialized for Anglophone literature in our republic, has only “Where I’m Calling From” summarizing collection – latest version of chosen older stories edited by Carver, then, one or two collections of short stories and one of poems. This mean one cannot find there all short story collections and read all the stories. There is no possibility of reading the poems and essays in their totality or find the secondary literature there. Thus, the reader in this republic can accept to the following solution: either order the books abroad and let them ship here or read some of the stories and poems included in the above mentioned collections in the Czech translations, part of the stories then in original language. This is fine, but not always, especially if there is a need of working with the originals.

Now, anyone who reads this inquiry should know its structure, for the sake of better orientation. This introduction is followed by the theoretical part treating the author’s life in the historical context, the literary influences on his work and the ones caused by meeting with extraordinary people. Afterwards, the practical part will present more specific analysis of selected short stories, alongside with the analysis of author’s style. Finally, a summary of the main features of Carver’s work will be provided.

# I. BIOGRAPHICAL PART

## i) CITIZEN CARVER: “VITA BREVIS, ARS LONGA”

Even with this Latin citation might start curriculum vitae of the great short story writer. Raymond Carver’s life was not so short, but was not too long either. Especially, when considering the course of the events together with the circumstances in which they appeared, one will probably get to the conclusion that the life he may enjoy and profit from was very short. Even though, looking on it from the perspective of the number and variety of the events that must have came out from the occupations he exercised, alongside with places he lived in, Carver had to have an immense experience. And this is what is sometimes considered as a chronometer to human life: the memory of the past experience, its vividness, quality and richness. Taking the first point of view that claims Carver did not have much time to enjoy his life and to do in tranquillity he was most suited for, there are a lot of facts to prove it. Carver’s childhood actually ended when he was twenty years old; by that time he was married and had two children. In his twenties, back then, he had to struggle for the survival of his family by doing not very attractive jobs and part time jobs. In his thirties, he was caught by the daemon of alcohol and was not yet very well known to have enough energy and support for writing. Later on, in his forties, Carver finally had a room of his own, harmonious relationship with his love and sufficient amount of money, so he could fully devote himself to the fiction (and poetry) writing and live according to his wishes.

The following paragraphs will be consecrated to the description of decades Carver went through, from his birth to the death; further, in meantime, an account of his work will be provided. First, let’s begin with his childhood. Raymond Clevie Carver, nicknamed Junior (or sometimes Frog and Doc), commonly called Raymond Carver and by his friends and family just Raymond or Ray, was born on 25 May 1938 in Clatskanie in the State of Oregon (USA). He was a child of Clevie Carver and Ella Casey (Carver) who had him in the age of twenty five. Raymond, as three years old boy, moved with his parents to Washington in a city called Yakima where he stayed until his graduation. Two years later, James, the only Raymond’s brother was born (ha had no sister).[[1]](#footnote-1) His father worked as saw filler in the lumber mills in Yakima. Ella was employed as an occasional waitress, retail clerk, or else she stayed at home. “But she didn’t keep any job for very long”, mentions Carver in the interview with M. Simpson and L. Buzbee (2).[[2]](#footnote-2) And further concerning his parents’ habits he says:

I remember talk concerning her ‘nerves’. In the cabinet under the kitchen sink, she kept a bottle of patent ‘nerve medicine,’ and she’d take a couple of tablespoons of this every morning. My dad’s nerve medicine was whiskey. Most often he kept a bottle of it under that same sink, or else outside in the woodshed. (Simpson and Buzbee 2)

Carver as a small boy “used to wait at the bus stop” for his father, but as he recalls, “every two weeks or so he wouldn’t be [there], while else regular as clockwork. … It meant he’d gone drinking with friends of his from the sawmill” (Simpson and Buzbee 2).

The pastimes of small Raymond used to consist of listening to the father’s stories about their ancestors; hunting and fishing; further, reading the sports and wild life magazines; in addition to it, time to time he wrote a story about his fishing experience. About the first and last activity will be treated later on. As for the second one, Carver says (Simpson and Buzbee 3): “In those days, I went fishing in this creek that was not too far from our house. A little later, I started hunting ducks and geese and upland game. That’s what excited me in those days ... [and] what made a dent in my emotional life, and that’s I wanted to write about.”

Now, concerning Raymond and the learning process as he himself expressed in the conversation with Simpson and Buzbee, he was rather an average student in Yakima high school. He was exceptional only for his first writing experiences. Except the hobby in reading the mentioned magazines, he would take historical novel or mystery book. But his overall school evaluation was not best. For that reason, Raymond was all the time during the high school studies assumed to work at the sawmill. So, graduated in the age of eighteen, it was in June 1956, he moved with her mother to Chester in California to join his father (who he had the same occupation as in Yakima before). Even though Carver thought he would like the kind of work as his father did, he understood since the first day this is not the right job for him (3).

Half a year later, he went back to Yakima. And after a few months, in the spring, Carver found out his only sixteen years old girlfriend – which met for the first time working behind the cash desk in the age of fourteen (King 3) –, Maryann Burke, was pregnant. She just graduated from a private school at that time. Thus, she could finish her college and university studies many years later (14 years after their wedding). Carver commented this event in the interview with these words: “She was seventeen when the first child was born [Christine], eighteen when the second was born [Vance]. What shall I say at this point? We didn’t have any youth. We found ourselves in roles we didn’t know how play. But we did the best we could. Better than that, I want to think” (Simpson and Buzbee 3). Nonetheless, Carver decided to continue in his studies, first at Yakima, and then at Chico (State) College in California. He moved there with Maryann and her family. And this was the place where he met John Gardener, a teacher who had a huge influence on him (as will be shown in later). During this time, Carver used to earn the money, when not being at the school, for his family as pharmacy deliveryman. Here ends great writer’s childhood and adolescent time.

Second, Carver stepped into his twenties - as have been already said – by studying a Chico and then at Humboldt State College where he obtained his B.A. in the age of twenty five. These years, Raymond with his family lived nearby Eureka. It is worth to say that the former institution offered him to become an editor of a school literary magazine *Selection*. Studying at the latter, Carver published his first two stories, “The Furious Seasons” and “The Father”, in local periodicals (*Selection 2* and *Toyon*). He turned twenty three back at that time. Soon afterwards, his first play *Carnations* was also presented on the college stage. Subsequently, first poem “The Brass Ring” was printed in *Targets*. On his thirties birthday, the world had seen his early poem collection called *Near Klamath*. Even one year before in 1967, the story “Will You Please Be Quiet Please” was published; it was third in order, but first in importance for the time being. And its publication in the Anthology of the best years American Short Story serves as a proof.

In a short time, Raymond obtained his grade and was given $500 year fellowship for studying at Iowa’s Writer’s Workshop (Graver 1). He also attended the poet’s workshop in Sacramento. As was already said, Carver struggled for the life of his family at ht the time. To ensure them money, he did different menial jobs: for a short time he did the sawmill worker again; he was a library assistant; then, day and later night custodian in a hospital. Yet his family went bankrupt shortly afterwards. Eventually, Carver executed more serious and stable position of a textbook editor in Science Research Associates (SRA) for nearly 12 months. This was interrupted by a break, they move with Maryann to Israel due to her fellowship though leaving it prematurely after six months. Their return was marked by Carver’s becoming promotion director in the company for more than one and half a year. And it was just meeting with Gordon Lish, unsuccessful writer and editor in that corporation, that had a great impact on Carver’s (not only) professional life in the time when he turned thirty.

Third, the next decade is distinguished by Carver’s first official success in regard to his career, by the good university teaching offers for him. And unfortunately, also very significantly by the daemon of alcohol that hung over him for the whole time and caused a split of his marital relationship. As it concerns Carver’s literary success, there must not be omitted he wrote two stories and five poems which appeared in well known anthologies. “Sixty Acres” in the 1970’s one called *The Best Little Magazine fiction*; “What is it?” in *O. Henry Awards: Prize Stories 1973*; together with the five poems being selected for *New Voices in American Poetry*. The same holds for two short stories published in famous magazines; “Neighbours” in Esquire (1971) thanks to Gordon Lish and then “Fat” in Harper’s Bazaar the very same year. He also managed to find already established editors for his second and third collection of poems: *Winter Insomnia* (1970); *At Night the Salmon Move* (1973). Sure, as the most important literary event could be counted publishing of his first short story book *Will You Please Be Quite, Please?*, which was already quite influenced by Lish, in spring 1976.

Raymond Carver claims there had been one crucial reason for his success at least so far it concerns the story book. After the period of low-paid jobs he worked, as was previously -stated, as an editor and then – having a year break – promoter in SRA. During the pause he returned for the last time to the blue-collar job when selling out the cinemas programmes. Nevertheless, the very important thing happened when Carver wanted to leave RSA. As he says in his own words in the interview with Monica Simpson and Lewis Buzbee:

It was back in 1970 or 1971. ... I planned to quit, I was writing my letter of resignation, but then suddenly – I was fired. It was just wonderful the way it turned out. We invited all our friends that weekend and had a firing party! For a year I didn’t had to work. I drew unemployment and had my severance pay to live on. ... That was a turning point, that time. ... It was a very important year for me... I wrote most of the stories in *Will You Please Be Quite, Please?* in that year. (14)

Briefly, as he notes, it was the only time off he did not have to earn a living. Not even with writing; he had been writing only because he wanted to do so or needed it for its own sake (Simpson and Buzbee 14).

As another sign of Carver increasing prestige served the fact that several universities offered him to become a hosting lecturer of literary and creative writing courses. The teaching period began in winter semester 1971 and lasted no longer than to 1974. He taught at three Californian campuses, in Santa Cruz, Berkeley and Santa Barbara. It is remarkable that not only was Carver a fellow at the very prestigious university of Berkeley, but he also obtained fellowship for Stanford at that time. Meanwhile, in the academic year 1973-74, he assisted once again in Iowa’s Writer’s Workshop, this time as a teacher. Unfortunately, Iowa’s campus, which was also inhabited by Raymond’s friend, writer John Cheever, was the place where Carver started to drink more heavily. He himself comments it as follows: “When we were teaching in Iowa Writer’s Workshop in the fall semester of 1973, he and I did nothing *but* drink” (Simpson and Buzbee 8).

Carver was thirty five years old then, nevertheless the first marks of alcoholism might had been observed when he was thirty or maybe even earlier. One of the consequences was, for example, he had to leave Santa Barbara University prematurely since he could not, actually, handle the situation. Additionally, the climax of these problems appeared two years later, in 1976 and 1977, when Carver was not capable, as a matter of fact, to write anything. Even though the first story book publishing (in spring 1976) brought him fame, he could not go on. In consequence, he had to be hospitalized four times. He spent some time in Californian hospitals and recovery centers Alcoholics Anonymous. When Carver recalls how bad it did get, he says: “I made a wasteland out of everything I touched”. And he admits when talk with Simpson and Buzbee that “occasionally the police were involved, as well as emergency rooms and courtrooms” (6). What happens with an addicted person depicts by his own case:

Toward the end of my drinking career I was completely out of control and in a very grave place. Blackouts, the whole business – points where you can’t remember anything you say or so during a certain period of time. You might drive a car, give a reading, teaching a class, set a broken leg, go to bed with someone, and not have any memory of it later. … You are on kind of some automatic pilot. … Crazy! (Simpson and Buzbee 7)

Carver concludes it for the interviewers Simpson and Buzbee: “I was dying from it, plain and simple, I am not exaggerating” (7). This meant also, more or less, the end of relationship with Maryann. In those days, she sold out their house and then they lived separately. When Raymond took the alcoholic drink for the last time on 2 June 1977, they make up, though Carver lived for eight months on his own. After a short try to share their home again, they split up for good (but were divorced later in 1982). Few days later, Carver went to Texas for literary conference where he met the poet Tess Galagher. Another comfort could have provided him the issue of collection *Furious Seasons and Other Stories*, alongside with nomination for National Book Award for the story “Will You Please Be Quite, Please?”.

Fourth, the last decade of Carver’s life war rewarding for him, very likely for the fact he made himself to stop drinking. Due to it he finally lived in peaceful and for him enriching relationship, wrote two most important short story books and won the most appreciated literary awards and fellowship. If one turned forty and was told he had only ten years ahead of him, it would be hard to believe and tackle with it. Fortunately, that was not Carver’s case for he suspected it not earlier than one year before his decease. Thus, he could live meanwhile calmly, creatively and happily. Carver himself referred to it as his “second life” (Stull 11). He stepped into this life shortly after his forties birthday. It was actually one month after his break-up with his wife; the next month he got in contact with Tess Galagher for second time and half a year later they lived together in one house in Texas.

Maryann, who spent with Raymond more than 20 – not very easy – years , was not so much appreciated for her care, help and striving, for sure not as she could had been; regrettably, it was rather the opposite. She was a wife of not very well paid and acknowledged artist, witness of occasional infidelities, alcoholic seizures and even destructive home violence. (King 2-3). On the contrary, Tess Galagher became very soon beloved and darling person for Raymond. Nonetheless, this is the way the “vis maior”, or the fate had arrange it for these people. Moreover, one thing is sure: though Marryan was probably sharp and eventually obtained university education, Tess as a poet was closely related to his literary work. She served him as a first reader, editor and advisor, the person with whom you can share your feelings, ideas about recent writings including its problems, equally as prospects to the future work. And sometimes, it functioned vice versa.

They spent the first year in Texas, but after Carver’s appointing professor of English in Syracuse University in New York, they moved to their house in Syracuse, a place where Carver finally found “a room of his own” intended for writing in tranquillity. Exception being summer school vacations, when they stayed near Port Angeles in Washington, there Galagher also lived after Raymond’s death. This applied as well on their travels. Raymond accompanied Tess to Suisse where she taught. For a few months, they have been in Brazil and Argentina both giving some reading there. Then, for short while England and Alaska.

The fact that last ten years was Carver’s most fruitful period proved the published books. In the spring 1981, already under heavy influence of G. Lish, collection called *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* appeared. Then, the publication of immensely important *Cathedral* was realized in cooperation with a new editor in 1983 (he was forty five at that time). Finally, shortly before his death Carver accomplished a compilation of his revised old stories together with the seven new ones (altogether 37 stories). Next, it is worth to point out that Carver at the very end of his life concentrated much more on writing poetry. The following poem collections were printed in his last three years: *Where Waters Comes Together with Other Waters*; *Ultramarine*; *A New Path to the Waterfall*. The latter partially presented work of other poets whom Carver admired (like Chekhov, C. Milosz, J. Seifert).[[3]](#footnote-3) Likewise, critiques on Carver’s books were included in literary magazines. In 1981, one of the most famous ones called *New Yorker* accepted short story “Chef ’s House”, since then he became a regular contributor for it. Further, the story “Cathedral” was selected for the Anthology of Best American Short Story for 1982. The book of the same was nominated for the National Prize of Literary Criticism and for Pulitzer Prize. As it concerns other fame benefits, Carver was Guggenheim Fellow. He also received the very prestigious Mildred and Harold Strauss “Living” Award in 1983 and thus procured quite a big amount of money[[4]](#footnote-4); and *Poetry* magazine’s Levinson Prize in 1985. These successes were crowned by Carver’s election to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (Carver 527).

Had not he had health problems, Carver could have continue, and could have work out to the different form of short story or, perhaps, write a novel. Nevertheless, the hypothetical situations do not actually have its place in history. And thus Carver ended at his best (and most prolific) moments. In the age of forty nine, he started to have problems with lungs and doctors discovered his lung cancer. After an operation he got better, nevertheless as relapse appeared soon afterwards he had to undergo special treatment. The following summer was more intensive than one can bear. In the month – May 25 – when he had his fifties birthday, Carver’s collection of revised stories was published, he was appointed to the American Academy. A month after his birthday, Raymond and Tess got married, and they edited together Carver’s last poem collection. They went also fishing to Alaska in July. His breathing got worse again there. 2 August 6:20 am, month and half after their wedding, Carver dies on lung cancer while sleeping in their Port Angeles house.

Carver was a proof that quality is preferable over quantity, equally as that one does not have to live for ages to be inscribed in the memory of the humankind; and that immortality is reachable trough the piece of art. In other word: “vita brevis, ars longa”.

# II. THEORETICAL PART

## i) CARVER’S THOUGHT BACKGROUND: LITERARY INFLUENCES ON HIS WRITINGS

It is largely affirmed by experience that all of the great man who excelled in various disciplines of human effort had acquired their position, because they were given a talent. Put differently, this is not nevertheless sufficient, usually there is a need of hard work and inspiration; motivation, alongside with support are important as well. Raymond Carver must have been talented although this fact has been rather hiding at first sight. In combination with a lack of any greater support from his parents’ side and due to the financial matters, it caused that he published his first story collection no earlier than nearly in the age of forty, as has been already mentioned. Either the motivation was not strong before the start of his career. At the time of graduation he had no idea of becoming a writer. The vision of working in the sawmill inherited from his father, who toiled at one, turned - in fact - into a negative motivation soon after he tried to be employed in there. For Carver understood he will never do the manual job.

As it concerns the inspiration same holds here again. No one ever becomes a great artist “out of blue”, just on his own. Copying the style of others authors seems to be the condition for growth of creative skills. Mimetic activity of art thus lies not only in an imitation of the world around us, but also in a copying of an expressive manner of preceding artists. The writer’s deal is to reproduce the iconic authors and gradually try to surpass them. It has to do with one saying: A good teacher can be recognised according to student’s who surpass him. And it could not have been otherwise in Carver’s case. Let’s have a look what literary sources inspired him.

The first “literature”, small Raymond got in contact, was the narratives about his ancestors told by his father; such as the heroic and less heroic deeds in Civil war, stories about boyish foolishness and pastimes. Thus, it was a form of oral history. When Raymond grew up a little bit, he would do the same things or the things the boys like in that age of fourteen fifteen: playing sports, hunting and fishing and the like. A difference is to remark there in comparison to his fellows, Carver used to read about his hobbies in the magazines like *Sports Afield* and *Outdoor life* and *Field & Stream* (Simpson and Buzbee 3). In addition to it, under the influence of these experiences, it would happen that Raymond write a story about it. As he remembers: “I wrote a longish thing about the fish that got away, or the fish I caught, one or the other, and asked my mother if she would type it for me (Simpson and Buzbee 3). Otherwise, his literary skills were rather hidden, especially after the pubescence period. Among the rank of his interests fell also reading of Zane Grey’ cowboy novels from Wild West, favorite matter of his father, occasionally a historical novel.

Looking upon the hitherto mentioned facts, one can observe that Carver’s literary taste in his childhood was formed, first, by storytelling, i.e. the kind of literature that is typically distinguished by: familiar and emotional language use, employ of common words and repetition; with rather plane syntax employing short simple phrases, sometimes not finished or logically incorrect. Next, magazine articles Carver encountered present foremost shorter texts written in scientifically popular language, critiques, reportages, practical advices, but also short stories full of excitement and detail descriptions. Then, adventurous fiction provides his reader text based on foreshowing, tension and action, it means succession of events, that comes from unexpected situations. Regarding historic novels, they are more descriptive and fact-based. In addition, when his family is considered, Carver had not any predispositions to be a young intellectual. In sum, occasionally he read what have found; the prevailing part of the texts he encountered was marked by brevity, excitement and realistic simple language figured by ordinary characters, it means neutral or even bad ones. It is not by hazard, all of these features appeared in his later stories, probably except the visible excitement, which is in his tales more hidden and comes up from the relations between the characters.

When, in the interview for Paris review in 1981, Carver recalls what literature nourished his souls in the time of his adolescence and adulthood he says: “Ernest Hemingway is one. The early stories. ... Chekhov I suppose he’s the writer whose work I most admire. But who doesn’t like Chekov? I’m talking about his stories now, not the plays. His plays move too slowly for me” (Simpson Buzbee 13). And he continues in this list. Nevertheless, the fact that he mentions Hemingway on Chekhov several times in the interview and adds some information about his opinion on the and explains in what ways they inspired him, makes clear Carver was influenced by them and their work more then by others. Apart them – as he mentions in the same talk with Simpson and Buzbee – there are basically two groups of writers Raymond Carver admires and is inspired by. First, these are the Russian (into which the two above mentioned fit in) classical authors, later romantic and realistic one, except Chekhov: Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki, Isaac Babel. Secondly, the group of modern American writers such as Flannery O’Connor, John Updike, Jack Kerouac, Tobias Wolf, Bobbie Ann Mason, John Cheever, Ann Beattie, Barry Hannah, Richard Ford, Anne Tyler, Phillip Roth; and English writing (mostly British) authors such as V. S. Pritchett, Harold Pinter, Lawrence Durrell, Frank O’Connor, James Joyce (for his Dubliners); but also Louis-Ferdinand Céline or Joseph Conrad (13-14).

Now, if the following claim is taken seriously, then it confirms the idea that R. Carver was not only influence by the above mentioned authors, but that he, possibly, wanted to honour them and make them a tribute by his own work. He says:

Any writer worth his salt writes as well and as truly as he can and hopes for as large and perceptive a readership as possible. So you write as well as you can hope for good readers. But I think you’re also writing for other writers to an extent – the dead writers whose work you greatly admire, as well as the living writers you like to read. (Simpson and Buzbee 12)

What can be derived from all that? Well, Raymond Carver obviously loved American modern prose, probably, because he himself was an American and because some of the mentioned people were his friends or fellow writers. Other reasons could be that a lot of them continued in the tradition of Hemingway’s short story, they liked and they share the same cultural background, their books were easily accessible, or simply he just liked them. Further, as it concerns the stated Russian authors, they must had been discovered by Carver through Chekhov’s writings; again as they were his contemporaries or the successors. Chekhov, then, was also favourite writer of Hemingway (Hemingway II 471). Thus, it finishes where it started. Everything, as it is usually, seems to be connected. To support it, few common points shall be revealed.

First, the prevailing part of the enumerated literature oeuvres is marked by lives of its authors. And that is what Carver prefers as can be seen from what he says in the discussion with M. Simpson and L. Buzbee: “The fiction I’m most interested in, whether it’s Tolstoy’s fiction, Chekov, Barry Hannah, … Hemingway…, strikes me as autobiographical to some extent. At the very least it’s referential” (10). Second, it seems that he preferred socially and politically concerned writers as were Chekhov, Céline, Kerouac, Tolstoy, Babel. Third, Carver did not like slow, too descriptive fiction. He would prefer action and excitement for which he was use to from his childhood. Fourth, he was neither very amused by a lengthy fiction. That is why most of the enumerated persons wrote short stories, long short-stories (novellas), or shorter novels; basically, it holds except Tolstoy’s and Céline’s novels. Further, what binds reliably majority of these people is that they wrote good short stories, and some of them are considered the world most excellent short fiction writers of all times. This applies, for sure, to A. P. Chekhov, E. Hemingway, I. Babel’s *Red Cavalry*, or J. Joyce’s *Dubliners*. These men shaped the form of modern short story. Joseph Conrad, for example, is an author whose work relates many of the above listed literary qualities: excitement, language and stylistic economy, brevity, social matters, etc. He could have been an ideal writer for Carver, nevertheless he was more concerned with novels.

## ii) CARVER’S LITERARY DEBT TO HEMINGWAY

Let’s go back to the Hemingway. Carver’s admiration for him is, beside others things, expressed by the fact he dedicated him a poem[[5]](#footnote-5) in his fourth poem collection. Moreover, he was named between the two most influential writers as it concerns the impact on Carver’s work. And there is no wonder as he is definitely the millstone in history of literature, especially the modern literature, more specifically the history of modern short story. Hemingway just deepened what the art and literature – as its part – of twentieth century already been working with, what they included in its programs. Among them pertains: passage from the objective point of view to the maximization of individual perspective, the grasp of various states of mental life and certain emotions. Then, there are shifts in the subject matter, from the depiction of higher society to the noble and heroic to the lover classes, ordinary people, everyday life; the greater emphasis not on the overall schemes but on the details description and intensity of short moments; change of the narrative structures such as chronology disruption, i.e. switching the order of storytelling; next, canceling of one objective omnipotent narrator or employing several of them. Noticeable are also: puns with the stylistic variety of language – using the plurality of registers; and employ of different stylistic modes depending on the function of communication. Finally, the overall intellectualistic approach could be observed, which is demanding for the percipient, thus demands training and readiness.

All of these features apply on Hemingway’s writing. Possibly, except the stylistic play with the registers, as well as he did not expel the heroes from his stories. His heroes are nevertheless not the classical princes and knights, but tough hunters, fishermen, soldiers or bull fighters. In other words, the occupations which have much to do with bravery, courage and fear; and these are often revealed in some kind of fight. These emotions Hemingway examined most often. Nonetheless, Hemingway’s crucial contribution to the modern short story lies in language economy and – above mentioned – intellectualism, or intellectual claims on reader. This means, in its form. In doing so, he avoided employing the qualifying adjectives in the position of attributes, verbs with emotional character, unnecessary adverbs (Hemingway II 474); and he preferred short simple declarative sentences.

According to R. Nenadál, during the writing process, Hemingway tried not to convey to the reader direct evaluation of the situations, their accomplishment or interpretations, but let the reader to cooperate with the writer (Hemingway II 471). Likewise, Hemingway himself in the interview for the *Paris Review* explains to the interviewer G. Plimpton that he wanted to make him to find his own interpretation on the ground of his experience and factual knowledge. For the reader’s activity of figuring out the missing information can provoke the feeling that the story is part of his own life and experience (Plimpton 17).[[6]](#footnote-6) This Hemingway’s own technique is what is called an iceberg theory. He further described it for George Plimpton in spring 1958 thus:

If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show. If a writer omits something

because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story. (17)

Or else, he explains it for Plimpton (together with its purpose) more simply and clearly:

You do not have to write ... down ... anything you can omit that you know you still have in the writing and its quality will show. When a writer omits things he does not know, they show like holes in his writing. (11)

Nonetheless, one can imagine this method can also let the reader to be found in a state of secret, even sacral uncertainty about the author’s intentions. Or, if the percipient do not cooperate, let him think the fiction is banal.

When Carver talks about Hemingway’s literary influence on his writing, he recalls especially his early stories from the 1925’s collection *In Our Time* (the much expended one).

It is the “Cat in the Rain”, to name the first of them (Simpson and Buzbee 12). The story deals with an American couple staying on holidays somewhere in Italy. The woman is discontent with herself, so she decides she would like to have at least a cat she saw from the window, but she cannot find it on the street by her own. The story on the surface illustrates the state of outer world which, actually, mirrors mood in woman’s soul. She is missing something but she does not know what it is. A kind of inexpressible state of mind caught in a very short moment – slice of time – that, nevertheless, presents certain grater period of life. The experience is unspeakable because emotions are in play and the outside atmosphere go proxy for these feelings, just like in impressionistic painting. That’s why this method is sometimes called a slice-of-life technique (Hemingway II 475).

“Soldier’s Home” is another Carver’s favorite story (Simpson and Buzbee 12). Indifference in soldier’s behavior after his return home from the War reveals the changes his personality went through. The shift of the values; the loss of life enthusiasm, energy and capacity to love the way he did before. Strong traits of Hemingway’s own destiny could be seen here as well as in the other places of this collection. These traits are inserted in Nick Adams character. It was one of the reasons of Carver’s appreciation of this book. Even though lot of people would think the tough men from Hemingway’s stories are absolutely insensitivity merely selfish *macho*s, it is not in fact the case. At first sight, one could judge this way Krebs, the soldier from that story, shortly afterward he said his mother he did not like her. The reader here sympathizes with Krebs knowing the whole war tragedy lies behind it. One famous Czech translator from English, R. Nenadál, points out in his essay that:

Underneath the Hemingway’s dense telegraphic style a deeply humanistic message is hidden. While a lot of authors counting themselves among the ‘hard-boiled school’ followers, use these means only for an external effect where one cannot feel the intrinsic emotional potency and behind which a cheap manifestation of so called virile toughness can be revealed. (Hemingway II 475; translation mine)

Carver directly suggested, in the talk with Simpson and Buzbee, “The Three Day Blow” for the next candidate (12). Typical Hemingway’s conversational story based on short replicas, mysterious gloomy atmosphere due to the weather put in contrast to the warm irradiating from the fireplace where discusses two young men. Story’s main contribution reside in the skillfulness with which is grasped the drunkenness in its stages, together with the demonstration of difficulties man have when talking about love. The short stories, in the order as were named, grow into the higher rate of density concentrating more on the direct speech in a dialogic form; their length being from four to ten pages.

The same applies to the following story that could create an imaginary peak o these features, although Carver does not explicitly mention it in among his literary influences in the interview[[7]](#footnote-7), it could be his own story; so close Carver sometimes got with his style – especially in the earlier stories – to Hemingway. “Hills Like White Elephants”, story from the subsequent collection, narrates about young American couple who have a conversation in front of a some Spanish train station in a dessert like landscape during a hot summer day. The woman says and unimportant jolly thing to distress her which makes the man angry or angrily insistent. To make it short, the summarizing sentence of the story could be: The man offensively persuades her companion that he does not (want to) force her into anything. As this is repeated a dozen times a reader cannot get free from the feeling of the acute absurd and the minimalism. He has to infer what is going on by analyzing the symbolism of the text. Thereof, he gets the key words: waiting, loneliness, insecurity, temporariness, homelessness, erotic relationship, alcohol, disharmony, etc. Only when having similar clues, one can join them with words “operation” and “It’s just to let the air in” to derive it is an abortion in question (Hemingway I 200). Further, after the reader realizes the man in fact claims: I love you and will love you only if we have no child, he can understand that not only the maintenance of the relationship is in play. Actually, this story is a perfect exposition of the iceberg technique, it carries the traits later on employed by Carver in his fiction: language economy, dialogic narration; concentration on theme of lovers, couples and their problems; obstacles in communication; sense for the absurd; atmosphere full of mysterious insecurity.

## iii) CHEKHOVIAN INSPIRATION

As stated above, Raymond Carver said about Chekhov that his work was the one he most admired and that many others did so. He probably was not far from truth. One example for all: Ernest Hemingway appreciated him as well, this is clear from his 1958’s talk with George Plimpton (9). One of the things which influenced Carver concerns the subject matter as he recalls in the interview for Paris Review:

Years ago I read something in a letter by Chekhov that impressed me. It was a piece of advice to one of his many correspondents, and it went something like this: Friend you don’t have to write about extraordinary people who accomplish extraordinary and memorable deeds. (Understand I was in college at the time and reading plays about princes and dukes and the overthrow of kingdoms. Quests and the like, large undertakings to establish heroes in their rightful places. Novels with larger-than-life heroes.) But reading what Chekhov had to say in that letter, and in other letters of his as well, and reading his stories, made me see things differently than I had before. (Simpson and Buzbee 14)

In sum, it is nothing less but the ideas that literature can talk about ordinary people, common situations and everyday life by currently spoken language, which was not usual at that time. Carver understood, then, the same functions in 20th century and could be applied on new phenomena of its reality. Chekhov, however, found that idea in the Maupassant’s short fiction. In one of his letters, Maupassant even express directly that it is important to write about details and new aspects of things when he says:

To see – that’s all, to see correctly. By seeing correctly I understand to see with our own eyes, not the eyes of our idols. The artist’s originality lies in details not, not in the main motif. The great works were written about insignificant details, common things. It is necessary to find on each thing the side which have not been discovered yet and to express it in a personal way. (qtd. in Čechov 254; translation mine)[[8]](#footnote-8)

The fact Chekhov himself came from rather working poor society, hence the material for his plays, stories and poems. Exception was that he even found the courage to try to write and become a writer. Since this role was traditionally reserved for aristocracy, or at least richer intellectuals. Yet, Chekhov’s strong will manage to get over the bankruptcy of his father’s grocery and to earn money for study of medicine by writing the reportages alongside with sketches full of humour and parody into the local newspaper’s. Them, he finished his studied in medical faculty. But he finally made his living as writer; and in fact become a very influential one (Čechov 251-263).

Carver’s destiny is sometimes put together with Chekhov’s one. Scholar William L. Stull asserts: “In life, art, and even death, Raymond Carver’s double, mentor, and companion soul was Anton Chekhov” (1). Sure, there are remarkable common points: social background, parent’s history, necessity of writing for earning their livings, way to the fame, premature death (Chekhov was six years younger then Carver when he died, he was forty four). Of course, the strongest connections concern the use of subject matter and genres. As has been already mentioned, Carver appreciated Chekhov’s short stories for their “commonness”, but he also liked his poems – fourteen of them were include in the Carver’s collection *A New Path to the Waterfall*[[9]](#footnote-9). On the contrary, Chekhov’s plays – his mature work – were too slow for him. Carver’s assessment of the Russian master confirms also Stull, in his opinion:

Before Chekhov, there were fables, tales, and sketches. But there were no short stories, not “plotless” evocations of human subjectivity on the threshold of perception. Chekhov created the modern story in the 1880s, partly out of journalistic necessity, by fussing realistic detail and romantic lyricism. The result was a lambent mode of fabulation that teases out the mysteries of “normal” life. ... Chekhov’s restrained yet resonant manner became standard practice for twentieth-century storytellers, including Carver’s American mentors Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and John Cheever. (1-2)

Though the statement about the origins of a modern short story is ascribed to Chekhov, Maupassant might come in question as well. Nonetheless, Maupassant was probably still more tied to the descriptive style of naturalistic realism and the importance of objective narration together with plot based storytelling. Chekhov was aware he lived in a time that required new conception of art. He insisted upon fact that the basic questions concerning human live do not necessarily need an answer (in comparison to the grasp of art by classical authors, such as Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky). Literary art – in his opinion – should rather explore circumstances, i.e. social or personal environment and life situations, under which the questions rise (Čechov 257). Reflecting the role of the writer, Chekhov adds that the author should not solve problems but observe them. He expresses it in such a way:

I consider that question concerning God, pessimism, etc. Do not belong to us, the fiction writers, to solve. The writer’s role is to depict who, how, and under which circumstances think or talk about God or permission. The artist should not be a judge of his characters or the things he talks about, but an unbiased witness. (Čechov 254)

Good example to illustrate this approach presents Chekhov’s story “A Horsey Name” (Koňské příjmení), where retired general god a toothache. Instead of developing the story, for example, as for the possible causes originating from “vis major”, from the person’s bad habits or, on the contrary, the consequences of his pain and anger, Chekhov simply places on the scene a steward recommending a healer who could help, nevertheless he cannot recall his surname. He only knows it has something to do with a horse. The story turns into madly search for his name, eventually the unexpected break out brings the doctor, though too late. In other tales, Chekhov, for example, occupies with the following themes. “Misery” (Tesknota) shows, indirectly, the grief and loneliness of a poor old man in very sensitive way. Still, the reader should decode that simplicity of the narration is an intended and premeditated act. The story “The Death of an Officer” (Smrt úředníka) deals with the excessive politeness and danger of exaggerated thoroughness; “Fat and Thin” (Tlustý a tenký) reveals the absurdity of hypocrisy, alongside with the problem of social classes. “Reading” (Četba – Povídka starého kosa) demonstrates that force somebody into anything does not prove to achieve its goal. Human vices and double moral standards are treated in stories “The Cook’s Wedding” (Kuchařka se vdává) and “At Sea: A Sailor’s Story” (Na moři – Vyprávění námořníkovo). As it clear from that list, Chekhov is concerned with the human acting including lies, pretension, hypocrisy; and the common human destinies; morality; smallness of the petit bourgeoisie, etc. He is employing quite often absurdity as a mean of underlying these human qualities (often vices). It can be easily recognised that the follower of Chekhov’s absurdity, in Stalinist times, was Daniel Charms.

## iv) FATAL MEETING: GARDENER AND LISH

After reading Carver’s biography as illustrated above, one may conceive the idea this American writer, just like anyone else whoever it will be, could not have been influenced exclusively by the preceding literary tradition. Of course not, everyone’s character is shaped by many factors in the course of life. Among the most important are: the surroundings one gets in contact and people and things encountered, and the like. Raymond Carver is not an exception to it. When looking at his curriculum vitae, it is easy to imagine the whole complex of these agents must have act upon him strongly. This brings a difference in its manifestation regarding artists: they often reflect it perceptibly in their work. Put it in a different way, one of the greatest literary schools and inspirations for Carver was his life itself (Carver III 236). For that reason so much space in the thesis has been devoted to the biography; it helps to explain author’s commitment to the blue-collars’ stuff, use of short story genre, to the couples disharmonic relation themes, etc.

Hence, talking about the influence on Carver, besides the effect of environment and situations, there should be remembered the most important people as for his career with whom he got in contact. Let’s name at least three of them. His father with a story-telling pastime has been already mentioned and so have been his children, the daughter and son who did not let Carver to have enough time to concentrate continuously on his work and thus caused the fragmentariness that characterizes his oeuvre (Carver III 237). First, John Gardner was his university teacher at Chico State College, mentor and later on a friend.[[10]](#footnote-10) As Jařab reminds, Gardner taught him how to read and write literature, how to economize with words and to find the right expression for the author’s own ideas; he also made him to listen to the common spoken language and to use it in his own production; and showed him the necessity of the recurrent revision of the writings. Finally, he inculcated him with the idea that writing is bound with moral responsibility regarding the language and principles of the writer’s craft (Carver III 237).

The ethical approach to literary criticism was the matter Gardner has become famous for. In his probably most famous and most controversial book *On Moral Fiction*, he presents the concept that all the existing fiction can be put into two groups: moral or immoral. John Gardener defines the first one in an interview for Paris Review as followed:

[By moral fiction] I certainly don't mean fiction that preaches. I'm talking mainly—though not exclusively—about works of fiction that are moral in their process. That is to say, the way they work is moral. Good works of fiction study values by testing them in imagined/real situations, testing them hard, being absolutely fair to both sides. (Ferguson et al. 18).

Further, Gardener explains there that, generally, by moral he understands a non-manipulative and non profit-seeking literature, i.e. the one which is not showy, pompous, spectacular, superficial, shallow, but the one which rather in neutral, unbiased way explores the characters and the values they represent and force the reader to think about it and search for the very same. Thus, the literature that ultimately made the reader look for the right thing to do, something which is not destructive, but life affirming, the good. What does not fulfil these conditions is immoral fiction, that one is typically “indifferent to real issues”, according to Gardner, these are author’s like [Mailer](http://everything2.com/title/Norman+Mailer), [Updike](http://everything2.com/title/John+Updike), [Pynchon](http://everything2.com/title/Thomas+Pynchon), [Heller](http://everything2.com/title/Joseph+Heller), [Vonnegut](http://everything2.com/title/Kurt+Vonnegut), [Barth](http://everything2.com/title/John+Barth). Nonetheless, reading for pure entertainment does not belong to either group (Ferguson et al. 18-22).

Additionally, in Gardner’s point of view, the moral fiction can be divided into three categories (Ferguson et al. 21): 1) the one that gives the idea how to life – uplifting (Jesus in New Testament, Levin in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina); 2) the one, where you want to be different than the evil protagonist (character of Shakespeare’s Macbeth), 3) the one without any alternatives, where the terrible things happen but you understand the motives of the acting person, it’s morally useful (like Ernest Finney fiction). Gardener claims that, unfortunately, predominant literature bears these traits:

Mostly what we get, it seems to me, is “serious” fiction not in any of those three categories. People kill people, we don't understand why they did it, we don't care why they did it, we read it because it’s cheaply thrilling, an escape from the common decency we sometimes feel trapped in. Blood drips, people piss on people or live their boring “lives of quiet desperation.” It’s at worst a kind of sick daydream, at best useless actuality, not morally worth reading. (Ferguson et al. 21)

To summarize, the following Gardener’s assertion can be provided:

I guess the morality of the fiction is the seriousness of the question and the seriousness of the concern with imaginary people's lives and feelings—a reflection of real people’s lives and feelings—not the seriousness or logicality of the answer. (Ferguson et al. 19)

It is worth noticing this statement get close to the Chekhovian opinion regarding the question what should be the main focus of literature, and thus ultimately to the Maupassant’s point of view as well. It means render an insight into the inner land of people manifesting the incentives and motives that explains their particular behaviour in concrete situations.

Gardener’s influence on Carver’s work confirms the fact they were friends, though they had “not seen each other for nearly twenty years and had only renewed [their] friendship after [Carver] moved to Syracuse” (Simpson and Buzbee 14-15). Carver’s s relation to the writings of Gardner demonstrates his interest in writing an introduction to *On Becoming a Novelist*. This Gardener’s book was issued in 1983. Even though that *On Moral Fiction* including the most part of above mentioned ideas about author’s responsibility appeared four years earlier, by this time already first two story collections of Carver have been published, they imprinted in Carver’s mind in their initial oral form as early as the two met at the university. In conversation with Simpson and Buzbee, Carver says: “His influence, the things he stood for in my life when I was his student, were still so strong that for a long while I didn't want to read the book. I was afraid to find out that what I'd been writing all these years was immoral!” (14). Nevertheless, after its reading, Carver appreciated it thus:

I think *On Moral Fiction* is a wonderfully smart book. I don’t agree with all of it, by any means, but generally he's right. Not so much in his assessments of living writers as in the aims, the aspirations of the book. It’s a book that wants to affirm life rather than trash it. Gardner’s definition of morality is life affirming. And in that regard he believes good fiction is moral fiction. It’s a book to argue with, if you like to argue. It’s brilliant, in any case. … I happen to think it’s a remarkable piece of work. (Simpson and Buzbee 14-15).

According to D. T. Max and Stephen King, Gordon Lish, an unsuccessful writer and editor at Esquire and Alfred A. Knopf, is to be considered rather a controversial person and the same effect he had on Carver’s career. On one hand, it was G. Lish who enabled Carver to publish some of his stories in Esquire and who as an editor helped him to publish his three major story collections: *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*; *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*; and *Cathedral*. So, Lish help consisted in the fact Carver become famous and Gordon Lish maybe accelerate it. His share was in offering Carver’s work to the world and making it more visible.

On the other hand, in regard to Carver’s creative freedom his aid was not aid, but rather damage. Lish’s services ultimately turned out to be censorship. At first he changed titles of Carver’s stories (as well as collections), crossed out words, sentences or even more extensive stretches of text, often endings. Definitely it was more deleting than adding. Consequently, it is often claimed Carver was a minimalist writer, but a question is to what degree this is asserted due to Lish. The most affected were his first two major story books, especially *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Carver initially tolerated his comments, but as they manifested as crucial interventions, he was not content (and sometimes was even angry). Nevertheless, he was not able to revolt against his oppressor unless he got more self-esteem when he lived together with Tess Galagher who also supported him. Thus, the stories from Cathedral were eventually according to the Carver’s image (Max 1-6; King 1-7).

The most visible changes were included, for example, in such stories:”A Small Good Thing”, “If It Please You”, “They Are Not Your Husband”. C. Sklenicka says to the theme about the latter story that “Lish version is ‘meaner, coarser and somewhat diminishing to both characters’” (qtd. in King 7). King contends that: “[Lish] imposed his own style on Carver’s stories, and the so-called minimalism with which Carver is actually credited was actually Lish deal” (6). As Max reveals, the direct evidence brings the two piece of Carver’s letter sent to G. Lish in 1982 before the publication of Cathedral: “I can’t undergo [that] kind of surgical amputation and transplantation” (6). Or, in next letter: “Please help me with this book as a good editor... not as my ghost” (Max 6).

Hence, it is clear that Gordon Lish had really heavy impact on at least first half of Carver’s oeuvre for sure. What is less obvious what was the influence on the success and readers acceptance of this edited work. Would have been better, if Carver had had free hands when writing first two major collections? Picture of his early work would have been, at least, slightly different. And according to the Cathedral’s achievement it seems he would have reached no less than the same attainment.

Tess Gallagher might be another person to figure in this section as she often gave impulses regarding the material for the stories - she gave some narrative elements for “Cathedral” and “Errand” - , nonetheless her contributions were already mentioned in biographical part (Max 7-8).

# III. “PRACTICAL PART”: ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES

## i) *WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUITE, PLEASE?*

The title of Carver’s first story book, published in major press at Mc-Graw-Hill in New York, bears name of his story from 1967. This 1976’s collection includes 22 short-stories written in the period from early 1960’s up to the time of publication. Stories titles, as Saltzman remarks, are often taken from the dialogues contained in them, such as: “They’re Not Your Husband”; “Are You a Doctor?”; “What’s in Alaska?”; “What Is It?; etc (21). Their length is from 5 to 12 pages (the shortest has only 2 and longest 17 pages), the 7 pages stories are most common. This collection is often considered as the most gloomy, hostile, desperate, severe, full of hopelessness toward its characters and in its overall tone; and at the same time the most minimalistic, e.g., according to A. Saltzman, J. Barth (Saltzman 21-23). Saltzman’s following words introducing the collection illustrates it quite well: “Carver’s characters are victims of anguishes [,] they can neither brave nor name, only suffer” (21).

Actually, when one reads the stories from this collection for the first time, he has a feeling of emptiness, sadness, confusion. He would tend to say either: Well, OK, this is not a very optimistic perspective; it is a tough stuff. Or there might be this reaction: What am I supposed to do with it? Is there any sense at all? Perhaps, one of these two reactions would occur after the first reading of any of the stories included in the book. Nevertheless, second reading can prove that the stories which seemed only desperate are not such, while with the ones totally incomprehensible (or just intuitively understandable) a key to confirm or refute their pessimistic view can be found. To attain this stage, one has to know what elements of the text are worth to be observed. The information cannot be revealed without having in mind what the author during the creative process considered to be (the most) important. Put another, these information concerning the main writer’s theory underlying his writing or his approach to it can significantly help the reader to concentrate on the most relevant in the story, find the clues to interpret the text (or observer that is not unequivocally possible to do so).

Scholars usually put Carver into many different intellectual currents (Lehman 75); exception being G. Leypoldt who contends that there is not purely one category into which Carver could be fitted (541). First, some researchers – such as Chrénetier, German, Bedell, Saltzman – are persuaded that Carver represents a postmodernist author. Saltzman, for example, term Carver “the [less] notorious desecrator of literary realism” (10). And with regard to Carver´s style, he asserts: “Closer to the mark, however, is a definition of minimalism that treats it as another postmodern tributary in the multifarious progress of American literary history” (Saltzman 9). Actually, Saltzman holds the idea that Carver’s minimalism is just another pole of language experimenting postmodern writers, such as John Barth, William Gaddis, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, who play with the discourse expansiveness (10-11).

Next, he states that Carver and “the minimalists share their suspicion of the referential adequacy of words” (Saltzman 10); and together with mentioning M. Zavardeh implicates Carver as a minimalist agrees with the suggestion that: “facts are not used to establish or unveil an order bur are allowed to enact, in their totality and entirety, the ambiguity, unpredictability and disorder – in short, the entropy – of the actual” (qtd. in Lehman 75-76). In sum, scholars seeing Carver’s oeuvre as postmodern must have inferred so because, according to them, it suspects the referential significance of language. Scholars holding the same view points as Saltzman found for the minimalism grasped within postmodernism a new label “post-postmodernism” (Leypoldt 540).

Next, a second strain of the criticism – represented by Stull, Facknitz or Shut – claims that Carver first occupied the place of a postmodernist using the minimalistic vehicle, but with writing *Cathedral*, he shifted to new humanist realism (Lehman 75). Though, to understand the assertion properly, one should ask if the term is joined more with the aesthetics or moral doctrine. Finally, the third group put Carver into the realistic movement right away. Among these scholars are, e.g., J. Jařab who points out that Carver with his Hemingwayesque style was a counterweight to modernist represented by S. Bellow, W. Styron, or J. Updike, on the one hand; and the postmodern authors experimenting with language, such as J. Barth, T. Pynchon, W. Gaddise, W. Gasse, on the other (Carver III 234). As well as D. Lehman who on account of entropy argument says:

Carver’s characters might on occasion face facts that way, but their creator never does. With virtually no exception, even the most minimally developed fiction of Carver reveal a meticulously crafted order in which facts offer reliable symbolic guideposts for the reader. In fact, his symbolic strategy resolves ambiguity rather than creating it. (76)

Lehman’s opinion thus agrees with Jařab’s one in regard to the Carver’s realistic nature, might it be minimalism, but within the realistic framework as Jařab asserts. For Hemingway – to whom Carver is compared (not only) by Jařab as have already been observed – created work that is undoubtedly, according to himself and his iceberg theory, realistic because the text is based on the correspondence between language and the hidden facts the reader have to discover.

Furthermore, Lehman not only ascribes words representational function, but also symbolic signification, of course only to some of them. (That implies, it is a realistic approach within which a place for symbolism is admitted.) Again, neither this attitude will be in contradiction with Hemingway’s work. Though, he spoke about the use of symbols in his own writings carefully; according to him, symbolism is something that appear in the work unintentionally (as a side effect) and something Hemingway did not have need to analyse (Plimpton 11). Yet, he definitely used them, for example in his Nobel Prize awarded novella The Old Man and the Sea, and they took part of his theory as has been shown when examining “Hills Like White Elephants”.

However, if the hypothesis about non-arbitrary and non-ambiguous placement of the words supporting the symbolic theory in Carver’s literary texts is to be confirmed, then it is better to seek for a proof at the Carver’s materials reflection his own work. So finally, the judge of the dispute will be the inquired author itself. There are three textual records that serve as witnesses regarding the matter. As Lehman remarks, in the year 1981 when second collection was published: “Carver spoke in ‘A Storyteller Shoptalk’ of how he tried to use objects and details in his fiction” (78). Carver than expressed that:

The correct uses of facts … bring to life the detail that will light up the story for the reader. For the derails to be concrete convey meaning, the language muse be accurate and precisely give. The words can be so precise they may even sound flat, but they can still carry; if used right, the can hit all the notes. (qtd. in Lehman 78)

In the essay “On Writing” from 1983, he expresses the same point thus:

It’s possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those – a character, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring – with immense, even startling, power. (qtd. in Lehman 78)

Finally, in the foreword to the anthology of *The Best American Short Stories 1986*, Carver “reveals his predilection for the unambiguous, referential fact:”

I’m drawn to traditional (some would call it old-fashioned) methods of storytelling: ... I believe in the efficacy of the concrete word, be it noun or verb, as opposed to the abstract or arbitrary or slippery word. ... I tried to steer away from...stories where the words seemed to slide into one another and the meaning. (qtd. in Lehman 79)

On the base of what have been stated above, it is possible to confirm Lehman’s claims regarding not only Carver’s story called “Preservation”, whose theme is dealing with entropy and to which the following citation belongs, but Carver’s stories in their entirety. Thus, it can be validate that: “Carver’s symbolic structure in the stor[ies] is unambiguous and carefully developed. Symbolic facts have fixed referents; their use is consistent and reliable. The characters may not understand their significance, but Carver expect his ideal reader to make sense of those symbols” (Lehman 76). At the same time, a reader should have in mind symbol is “something that means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story but suggests or represents other meanings as well” (Perrine and Arp 194).

To conclude, the use of symbols is largely applied by R. Carver in his stories and thus their revealing should be a good device to unfold the stories and understand their meaning, in other words to interpret them.

Having obtained the key to the interpretation of Carver’s short stories, the inquiry can continue with the specific analysis of particular stories from *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* The stories will be selected – since not all of them can be analysed – according to the frequency of their citation in secondary literature, their importance or role in the whole collection, in order to characterize the whole book.

The opening story of the collection is **“Fat”**. The narrator-protagonist, a waitress, is having a coffee at her friend Rita’s. She tells her about one working day in the restaurant where she works together with Rudy, her partner, who is a cook there. That day, by the end of shift, appears a customer, the very obese man. The rest of the story – except few last paragraphs – is describing the dishes he gradually orders concentrating mainly on the way he does it, i.e. how e behaves. When the fat man finishes his food, Rudy and the narrator-protagonist go home. Back there, some comments about the fat man are added. She takes a shower, touches her belly while imagining what it will be like to have such a fat child. Rudy is watching TV. Then, they go to bed; Rudy forces her to have a sex with him. At that moment she imagines that she is enormously fat, so Rudy is “tiny thing and hardly there at all” in comparison to her (Carver 69). When the narrator ends, Rita just laughs at it, but the main protagonists is fed up with her seeing she did not get it. The narrator adds the declaration that she feels her life “is going to change” (Carver 69). Is it only Rita who does not see the point? Or, is the author who has the narrative control laughing at the reader? Such proposition will attach rather to the postmodern aesthetics theory which has been eliminated in regard to Carver’s writings. So, necessarily, a closer look is demanded here.

Having an idea about the plot is not sufficient because in this phase it seems there are several possibilities. It might be the case, but as will be shown, one is very likely. One may think of such interpretations: a) narrator might be pregnant – in connection to the theme of fatness and the shower and bed episode; b) or the she is, perhaps, little bit heavier than she would like to be and hence her restlessness; c) alternatively, she might think it is Rudy who should lose some weight. Anyway, some of these suggestions will be rather rejected after a more derailed reading because they do not give sense when compared to certain intentions of the text.

First, there is a difference between the grasp of the fat man by Rudy (and other restaurant staff) and by the narrator. This man is just funny for Rudy, whereas the main protagonist is somehow fascinated by him; there is some positive admiration as it is clear from the following narrator’s thoughts and replicas: “Anyway, I am so keyed up or something. I knock over his glass of water” (Carver 65). / “Rudy, he is fat, I say, but that is not the whole story. Rudy just laughs.” / “Some fatty, Rudy says, stretching like he does when he’s tired. Then he just laughs and goes back to watching the TV” (Carver 68). Her hardly articulated attraction for the man is contained in the sentence: “I know now I was after something. But I don’t know what” (Carver 67).

Second, it should be considered that the waitress is not content in her relationship (or even marriage) for Rudy is cheating, at least flirting, with other waitresses: “Margo – I’ve told you about Margo? The one who chases Rudy?” (Carver 65); then, he is lazy at work; at home, he does nothing but watch TV, or wants to have fun with her, even if she does not want to. On the other hand, the obese customer represents for the narrator all that Rudy lacks (Nesset 4).[[11]](#footnote-11) The customer is very well dressed; he listens to her and behaves like nobleman having even signs of regality. Thus, he embodies the very opposite to the mundane and vulgar Rudy’s world. Even though, the obese man, very likely, is not sexually appealing for the narrator, she appreciates his character, moral and manner qualities. Maybe, the identification with these traits is even stronger for she is not disturbed by his physical appearance as one of a potential partner. She is but fascinated by the rest. These qualities come to her mind when she has to make love with Rudy against her will. The narrator describes it thus: “But here is the thing. When he gets on me, I suddenly feel I am fat” (Carver 69).

In addition to it, the narrator-protagonist is depicted as someone who does not have enough self-confidence to change anything in the relationship. Hence, as Kirk Nesset suggests, the “fatness” in that scene could go proxy for the growth of her ego the self- expansion, kind of a rebellion in the moment of oppression (5). That is what Rita did not get. The narrator, first, tried to express her unhappiness in the relationship. And, second, since the “fatness” in the story is primarily a symbol, and its significance is not meant to be apprehended literary (concerning the message of the story) as has been proposed, it is possible to conclude that a new interpretation she will abandon her partner comes into consideration; or the one that their relationship, and perhaps Rudy’s behaviour, will be radically changed by the birth of a child. The latter being the more accurate interpretation for the closing sentence of the story is in passive voice: “My life is going to change” (Carver 69); active voice would rather suggest the sufficiency of her self-assurance and hint her leaving, her active conduct (Nesset 6). A reader can observe that although the overall atmosphere of the story is not optimistic, there is a certain positive prospect at the end, an indication of hope.

**“They Are Not Your Husband”** deals with the similar problematic. Instead of positive identification with somebody else’s qualities as have been illustrated above, the identification with someone’s negative view is in play here. Except the fact the starting point is the very opposite to the “Fat”. At the beginning there is a happy marriage of meddle-aged couple, nevertheless with young children. The unemployed man, Earl, comes to the fast-food where is working his wife, Doreen. He just wanted to see her, so he sits there and orders a meal. After a moment, he notices two men sitting nearby who start to comment on Doreen’s thighs and butt in a grossly manner. Being taken aback, he sits for a while and then suddenly leaves. The assertion regarding his wife’s appearance starts to corrupt Earl’s mind and his view on Doreen. From now on, he forces her to lose weight; he regularly controls her weight, as well as what she eats. Subsequently, reaching some subtle progress, Earl tries to persuade himself by asking others about their opinion that Doreen has put off. Nonetheless, he is not given any real confirmation regarding the claim.

The story reveals how dangerous could be statement of others if not put under a critical inquiry. As for the relationships matter, people are more sensitive for the like assertions. Moreover, the “self” is more vulnerable, and exposed to the negative influence, in that case as Earl does have no occupation. Having no self credit, his self-esteem is lessen and Earl doubts about himself projecting it into their relationship. Finally, he doubts about his love to Doreen. From this perspective, the overweight issue seems to be only a pretext for his strange comportment, a substitute problem (for the trouble with his “self”).

Next, the story **“Are You a Doctor”** presents a well-ordered, decent, frail and obedient man, Arnold, who sits at home ready to answer a phone in case his wife calls him. We are told his wife is often away on business where she is having fun (as hinted), such as drinking and, maybe, sleeping with other men (Carver I 31). It’s worth noticing that sometimes, just like in this story, Carver as if takes a role of feminist writer, or at least he does not stick to Hemingway’s “macho” model. Nevertheless, Arnold’s safe world full of stereotype is disturbed one day. Expecting his wife, Arnold answers to the phone call of an unknown woman. They talk together for a short while. When she calls next time she persuades him to come and see her as she needs some help. Arnold feels the possibility of some love adventure, so he goes there. Actually, nothing like that happens and he returns home taking back his role of pure man.

But this is hardly possible for he is not anymore the same. He cannot feel so comfortable at his role as he did before. Attracted by the possibility of sexual intercourse he might have made use of to step away from himself – his Self (Nesset 7), and become somebody else alongside with possibility to pay it back to his wife. He did not do it because his fear did not allow him to undertake it. His self is now even less certain than before: he did not reach his goal and is afraid of give himself away to his wife. Pondering about these things, telephone rings. Arnold’s self-esteem seems to be on zero level since he is uncertain who it is. Confused, he replies, but his wife’s question if it is really him makes him so disordered that he is not able to reply. The protagonist is found speechless as the title of the collection alludes (Saltzman 21). Instead, Arnold touches his chest searching for his heart beat, thus becomes a doctor to his “self” (Nesset 7).

**“What’s in Alaska”** could be put into the category of merrier, more relaxed stories. It tells us about a couple, Jack and Marry, who are invited for party at their friends’, Carl and Helen. Their party is getting to be very cheerful and easy as they smoke marijuana from Carl’s new water pipe. Carver with exceptional skilfulness captures the atmosphere, the dialogs which are based on loose associations and use of colloquial language. Some authors, such as Boxer and Phillips, labels Carver’s art as voyeuristic, just as if Carver sat there at the very moment of conversation among Jack, Carl, Marry, Helen and recorded their talk (2).[[12]](#footnote-12) During the evening, Carl begins chasing Mary. Carl acts insensitively as if Jack was not there. Jack pretends he does not see it. Then, they go home and soon into bed. Jack cannot sleep, after some time he sees something in the darkness. However strange it might seem, it is very likely that the appearance “of a pair of small eyes“ in the dark hall (Carver 85) has – on the symbolic level – to do with “paranoias about the future and about his girlfriend’s fidelity” (Nesset 6).

**“The Student’s Wife”** climax provides similar “vision”. The narrator-protagonist, Nan, who suffers insomnia is awaken all night; in the morning, she perceives the sunrise to be “terrible” while her husband seems desperate in his sleep, everything “white[n] grossly before her eyes”, she kneels and “put her hands out on the bed” as if in prayer and says “God, will you help us, God?” (Carver 42-43). Nan and the reader feel there is a sort of “revelation [alongside with] his or her lack of understanding of what sort of insight the revelation is supposed to provide” (Leypoldt 535). If it was in real life, one would tend to interpret Nan’s husband reluctance to do her all the favours she asks for as excusable because of the night time, usually consecrated to the sleeping. Since it is not the case here, the unwillingness symbolizes husband’s estrangement to Nan.

She realizes this existential situation, everything happens during the night (just like the narrator from “Fat”) in her bed where she has plenty of time to meditate about it, and where she is physically so close, but mentally so far from her husband. The vision is kind of a transcendental experience suddenly appearing, the epiphany, (Leypoldt 535) that bears traits of the paradox which might be confusing: the dawn has usually positive connotations, but not in this case. Carver deliberately uses the aesthetics of opposition disrupting the expectation of a percipient. In addition to the symbolic meaning, the reader has to accept there are poets in this world (and Carver was one); and, still, besides them some people have an increased sensibility.

**“What Is It?”**, later on published by Carver in *Where I’m Calling From* as **“Are These Actual Miles?”**, one of the two stories of this collection dealing with “infidelity” almost in a direct way. Even though, the things are not named straightforwardly in the text, but that is part of Carver’s trademark. Leo and Toni are couple in a bankruptcy. Since they might face an execution, they want to sell their convertible. Again, on the surface level there is just that, but certain signs tell us that more is involved in it. Actually, it is “Leo [who] sends Toni out to do it”; she “takes her time dressing” and “puts on a new white blouse, wide lacy cuffs, the new two-piece suit, new heels” as well as she has “ new patent-leather handbag” (Carver 128).

While the deal is being done, Leo stays at home extremely nervous, frustrate considering suicide. Unsuccessful telephone communication between the two signalizes the violation of their relationship. Eventually, Toni returns in the morning “bumps the wall”, “her face is puffy”, “she stands… swaying” and screams: “Bankrupt!” (Carver 135-136). Then, Leo puts her into bed, “he takes off her underpants, looks at them closely under the light, and throws them into a corner” (Carver 136). These hints prove the assumption the deal included sex with the man who runs the lot. The story thus shows an image of an insolvent man who has to prostitute (or at least agree with his wife’s infidelity) his wife and is tormented by this idea while sitting at home all alone; he is emotionally and mentally bankrupted. As well as one can imagine that underwent his wife. The “actual miles” refer then not only to the car’s tale, but also their common past life. This is manifested when Leo “runs his fingers over her hip and feels the stretch marks [that] are like roads” (Carver 137-138).

Boxer and Phillips declare that **“Father”** render homage to Kafka. And it seems very plausible. The story can be read literary, but its message will be dull and will not fit in well. The plot is as follows: five females discuss who the new born boy resembles. One of them says he looks like father. The other nevertheless states that father “does not look like anybody” (qtd. in Nesset 7). Father sitting in a kitchen in an aloof style turns to his family with a face “white and without expression” (Nesset 7). Rational explanation claiming that mother had three daughters with another man seems to be beaten by the existential image of father’s estrangement to the family. Again, the story deals with separation, dissociation, of the self; he is somebody else than he and the others thought. Though, this interpretation of the weird narrative is not very logical.

**“Collectors”** seems to be probably the most enigmatic, mysterious and scaring story in the collection. The theme of “turning into nothingness” is already announced in the second paragraph: “There was no one on the street, nothing” (Carver 113). A “very pushy and talkative vacuum cleaner salesman” comes to Mr. Slater demonstrate a miraculous machine that can collect everything (Boxer and Phillips 4). As “every day, every night of our lives, we’re leaving little bits of ourselves, flakes of this and that behind” (Carver 116), the salesman collects the last bits of the self from the narrator, Mr. Slater. After losing job, his wife and almost everything, he is expecting a letter announcing him he could start to work somewhere in North. Event though, a mailman brings some letter, the “collector” do not let Slater to take it. The intruder is gone having taken not only the bits of his body, but also his chance to get a new job, as well as the last reminder of his identity – his name which was written on the letter’s envelope (Nesset 7).

**“Neighbors”** is one of the most often cited and commented Carver’s short stories (Nesset 1). Together with the fact it concerns – in most distinctive way – with the problematic of personal identity and contains a lot of symbols. Bill and Arlene Miller are quite happy couple, but they miss something. They feel to be little bit aside among the circle of their acquaintances, and they think their existence is somewhat mousy in comparison to the “fuller and brighter” life of their neighbours, the Stones (Carver 86). So they gladly invite the neighbour’s proposition to look for their flat while they are on vacations as it is a chance for Millers to get closer to that brighter life.

Watering the flowers and feeding the cat is not nevertheless Miller’s only occupation when being in the Stone’s apartment. The emptiness of their life starts to be filled with the life of Stones. Bill is the first to yield to the temptation. At the beginning he takes objects of their daily life, pills of Mrs. Stone, cigarettes, saps from whiskey, cheese, apple, etc. Then, he starts to get in contact with more intimate stuff: he lies in their bed; puts on Mr. Stone’s clothes; he also tries on Mrs. Stone’s underwear, blouses and skirts while looking into the mirror. Later on, Arlene puts herself in the role of a visitor and “carer” as well. Eventually, both want to share Stone’s life; they set to go there, but standing in front of the Stone’s door they could not get in since they find out Arlene has “left the key inside” (Carver 93).

It is clear that all this symbolizes a desire to make full the emptiness of their lives. They are “affected by over-intimacy” and “they look outward, imagining themselves as other, seeking more attractive selves” (Nesset 3). These visitations are supposed to be secret (the partner should not be aware of it) as both feel they do something weird and wrong. Each of them is leaving its own identity, becoming a kind of non-self, thus somebody else. However, the problem is they are neither themselves nor the Stones; their souls are malnourished (Nesset 3). This declares the sentence: “He could not remember their faces or the way they talked or dressed” (Carver 90) since Bill cannot recall them because he now (partially) represents the Stones. And he cannot remember them as Bill Miller, their neighbour, for he is out of this person identity. Further, Bill and Arlene comportment has to do with fetishism and voyeurism (Boxer and Phillips 1-2). Regarding the voyeurism, Bill is often looking in the mirror when dressed up in their clothes – dissociating from “self” as if observing somebody else there, or looking from the window – he is safely observing others as somebody who is not recognizable as Bill because of the guise.

The symbolism of the key shows not only the loss of source of their otherness, but also the fact they will be locked in themselves from now on. However, there is a hope their life will get the right direction as they cannot repeat the same thing after the experience. Bill and Arlene do not need to be doubled into other-self anymore, they can know fill the gap by their partner’s self. That is why they embrace each other at the end as if woken from a bad dream, and – as remarks Nesset – invoke God’s authority (4) asking him for protection. Of course, plays with the identity are but a dream...

It is remarkable to notice the story’s (stories’) issue resembles to Kundera’s “theory of imagology” at least as employed in his novel *Immortality*, and chiefly *Identity* (however both written after Carver’s death), nonetheless the roots of the theory are probably already included in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* from 1984. Actually, Carver by the end of his life knew some Kundera’s work as he chosen a piece of text as a motto for *Where I’m Calling From* collection (Carver XI).

**“Idea”** has something in common with the previous tale. The narrator-protagonist and her husband, Verne, every evening secretly observes their neighbour who every two days or so gets out from his house, stands in front of his own bedroom window and looks at his wife while undressing. The story records one pair intimate life getting tired while the other couple at least enriches their sexuality. It is a redoubling of the voyeuristic view, voyeurism of voyeurism. Interesting point is the Vern’s neighbour act: he takes off the role of a husband for a moment to become a secret observer that is not secret at all. Voyeur is usually hidden somewhere without anybody knowing about, but it is not true here. However, more important than that is attitude of Verne and mainly of his wife, the narrator: they are scandalized by their neighbour’s moral. The narrator even calls her names for it and her manners (daring to accept her husband’s game), though she with Verne still continue curiously watching them, actually are eager to do so. Had she stood in front of a mirror, the narrator would have realized that she actually calls names to herself. This story with its theme of hypocritical moral reminds of some Chekhov’s stories, hence probably the influence.

As quite a lot papers is devoted to the **“Will You Please Be Quite, Please?”**, only a few ideas will be mentioned in the following. The collection’s last story represents more complex and longer text. It consists of three parts; dialogues between the figures are lessen; the description of principal character’s background is richer, and more space for the “inner dialog” (stream of consciousness) is provided here. The first part tells us about – in this case – initially really content and happy couple, Ralph and Marian, and the details from their first meeting at the university up to the family life with children are provided. Nevertheless, an evil need suddenly emerges in Ralph’s mind to ask Marian about details of one old party. Ralph forces Marian to confess to her infidelity. Whereas for Marian it has rather a purification effect, it is a disaster for Ralph. He turns into himself and starts to torment his mind. Though the reader can feel he somehow enjoys it; it is a strange kind of narcissistic self-harming.

Second part takes place on the street, in a bar and a harbour where he meditates how he should feel and what he should do with it. These places and activities run there symbolize the typical male entertainment since Ralph tries to get rid of Marian: the pub, the strip bar, a play of poker, the harbour as a place of departures. But the sex symbols he encounter on his way horrifies Ralph as they remind him of the act. The erosion of the relationship is reflected by the depiction of Ralph’s drunkenness and homelessness and the feeling of impotence is intensified by the fact he is beaten up to unconsciousness in the harbour by a black man. V. Hall contends that this is the turning point of the story for the go proxy confrontation with another man who is probably living even in more miserable conditions, and the loss of memory must have help him to recover from his hurt. And thus Hall attributes (the rare) meetings of Carver’s characters with other cultures, especially Afro-American, special positive signification (11-12).

In the last part, Ralph eventually decides to go home. He speaks only with children there; then locks himself in a bathroom, a place where one can be only with himself in silence. The unwillingness to communicate is emphasised by the story’s and collection’s title: the meaning of Will You Please Be Quite, Please? is that silence can be sometimes better remedy than explaining, justifications, apologies, excuses, persuasions, and all that speaking. Moreover, this heading is a hint on Hemingway’s replica: “Would you please, please, please, please, please, please, please stop talking”, from story “Hills Like White Elephants” where its intentions are similar (Hemingway I, 202). Then, Ralph leaves the bathroom and goes to bed. After a short hesitation, he surrenders to the making up act of his wife that turns out to move from mere caressing to sexual intercourse (as alluded). It is worth to note that what the relationship spoiled is now supposed to remedy it. Further, as K. Nesset states, what makes this story different is final explicit mention of forgiving, or at least acceptance and understanding (11).

To sum up, Carver’s first collection is, generally, marked by brevity of the short stories based on dialogues with short replicas conversations where minimum of description and background information is provided. The narratives are often in third person singular – though sometimes they are told from the narrator’s perspective in the first person singular (narrator-protagonist) – , nonetheless the frequent use of dialogues with short replicas and sentences make the telling life and enables to get closer to the percipient (imagination). The colloquial language is employed to support this effect alongside with dialog’s real life dimensions. There are practically no author’s additional comments to what the protagonists say. To complete it with the Boxer and Phillips opinion:

“The words in the stories are by and large those of the characters, we think, until we look a little closer: humour, irony and glimmers of the absurd affirm the writer’s authority. Carver has perfected a style precisely calibrated with the emotional movement, or stasis, as the case may be, of his singularly ordinary characters. Nor, with few exceptions, does he choose to interpret the thoughts or actions of his subjects. (2-3)

Thus, here the reader has to serve himself. This thesis has already offered the suggestion that as a clue can server him the stick to the symbolic significance of Carver’s ordered referential language. Reader’s task is to find the appropriate passages and grasp them in the context of the fiction’s plot.

As the material are often employed erotic relationships between young or middle aged man and women; the marriages that have lost its freshness and those who crates them are not willing, at the moment, to do more to restore them. Usually the lack of the self-consciousness of one of the partners, or the indifference of the other causes the corruption of their relationships. As these individuals try to escape from the situations by means of identification with somebody else, their life or possession, they actually dissolve from their own selves. Thus, they – instead of enriching themselves – eventually deprive their life of authenticity, for it is not possible to really live other’s lives. To get closer to others they use various sorts of voyeurism. For these reasons the stories often provide us with mirrors and windows serving as tool for step out of one’s personality or even a transgression. Even though, the characters feed their souls by a foul sort of love – which is not real love anymore – and their acts make them sometimes silent, it is not true they “can neither brave nor name, only suffer” (Saltzman 21).

On contrary, this inability catches the protagonists in the moment of “coming to terms”, thus in a time when they become aware of their troubles. So, they (still) have a chance to act and remedy things. “Despite what many characters sense to be a built-in system of failure - Carver’s is not a despairing world,” says Nesset (2). And he continues: “‘It is a place of survivors and a place of stories.’ The survivors who people these stories as Carver say in a an interview, ‘do the best they can’ given the nature of their circumstances” (Nesset 2). To support the thesis that Carver’s protagonist do not only “suffer”, the writer’s answer on a question if his “characters try to do what matters” can be reproduced: “I think they are trying. But trying and succeeding are two different matters. In some lives, people always succeed; and I think it’s grand when that happens. In other lives, people don’t succeed at what they try to do... the large or small things that support the life” (Simpson and Buzbee 9-10).

The best summarization offers Carver himself: “There are certain obsessions that I have and try to give voice to: the relationship between men and women, why we oftentimes lose the things we put the most value on, the mismanagement of our inner resources. I’m also interested in survival, what people can do to raise themselves up when they’ve been laid low” (qtd in. Nesset 12).

## ii) *WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE &*

## *FURIOUS SEASONS AND OTHER STORIES*

Actually the later of the books was published first as for the chronological order, in autumn 1977, half a year after Carver definitely stopped drinking. This collection is sometimes overlooked or forgotten by reviewers as it appeared at a less important publishing house, and, majorly, because the half of the stories was republished later on in other collections. The ultimate reason must be the fact there are only eight stories, and considering their length it is not many to make a book to be sold individually with success. Basically, the stories included in this collection can be divided into two groups. The first consist of “Dummy”, “Distance and “Pastoral”. Saltzman emphasizes that “these stories display... a simple respect for marvels of nature” (76). Whereas the setting differs dramatically from the neutral urban-like presented in the preceding collection, the characters are still the middle class or lower middle class people. As well as Carver’s obsession (theme)[[13]](#footnote-13) concerning the people’s obsessions is still present under the stream of narration and sometimes springs out, nonetheless the stories are not chiefly based on a particular vice, or a sin (of a conjugal life).

The nature descriptions full of admiring in longer lyrical passages have a calming effect on the reader and evoke in him the images of tranquillity, gentleness and sometimes roughness. Further, strong autobiographical traits can be found there, such as Carver’s memories of his childhood, the landscape of Pacific Northwest and events experienced with his father in Yakima. Instead of dialogues which are minimized the stories are based on narrative framework, thus in third persona, rendered by child or parent storyteller. Moreover, they have definitive closure. For these autobiographical traits and believe in nature’s power these stories more than others refer to E. Hemingway’s, mostly to Nick Adam’s tales. Probably, the best representative of these stories is **“Dummy”** , later appeared in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* under the name The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off. This story is narrated by twelve year boy about the adventures that happened to him, his father and Dummy, father’s friend or acquaintance; as well as about the tragic end of Dummy. This nickname the person obtained in Yakima’s sawmill from his colleagues, who mock him, for he was dumb and probably deaf. One of the colleagues is also the narrator’s father who sympathizes with Dummy. The occasional fishing trips the three go for time to time are completed by the Dummy’s purchase of bass fish for breeding. He keeps them in the three ponds in his property. Nevertheless, the three protagonists fish there only once. As the floods take away most of his fish, Dummy starts to behave strangely and at the end kills his wife who is cheating on him with other men, then drowns himself.

The story is interesting for its autobiographical traits: sawmill, Yakima, fishing, the time of Second World War, his father’s move away. The text includes nice lyrical descriptions of the river and riverside landscape. Thus, the language is richer using more adjectives. The sentence structures employ more often coordination of elements. Next, the symbol of fish is worth to observe. As the fish can swim as the want they are free, so Dummy became independent on the (sinful life) of his wife after he got his basses. Nevertheless, soon afterwards he is so tied to them and so protective it brings him a great restraint and ultimately death. Although the story provides with mournful ending, the compassion as one of the main motives is obviously present in the text all the time (it let us think of J. Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Man*). Here the humanistic message can be found. These three stories are palpably different, more in the overall intentions then in theme and motives (infidelity), from those of first collection.

The second group of the stories is, on the contrary, very similar to those of *Will You Please Be Quiet Please?* The **“Lie”** with its theme, action and form present a good example. It tells us about a man whose girlfriend tries to camouflage her infidelity with a small talk and by her offer of sexual intercourse. And he accepts “refuge of sexual consolation and infantile oblivion” (Saltzman 84). Though, the longer passage containing stream of consciousness makes the story different. **“Mine”** (in subsequent story book edited as “Popular Mechanics”), the two page story, describes partners who have just split up arguing over their child. The last line of the narration indicates the actual point, nevertheless to support it one should observe the symbolism of the weather and time (gloomy day in its turning to nigh time). The story aggressiveness escalates as the time goes on. Title “Popular Mechanics” is another symbol to facilitate the interpretation: the baby becomes but an object for which apply the laws of physics as for any other. There is no doubt about the result then. As for the world popular – the two are involved in a kind of a (post) partnership play, even though a life is literally at stake. **“Furious Seasons”** do not pertain into either group, it employs the stream of consciousness and is said to bear the traits of W. Faulkner (Saltzman 96).

*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* contains seventeen stories having from four to fifteen pages. Most of them are dealing with discontentment, misunderstandings, communicational breakdowns, deceit between the partners, just like in the first collection, nevertheless instead of silence or substitute ways of living the direct conflicts between people are preferred by the author. A reader becomes, most of the time, a witness of aggressiveness, violence and vulgarity. This Carver’s most harsh collection brings also very terse language style containing ellipsis that do not let the protagonists to accomplish their activities, or on the contrary pushes them forward, so they skip certain steps in their doings. It is very likely the most prominent representative of Carver’s telegraphic language (Saltzman 100). Still, it is important to claim exceptions to that can be found even in this collection, concerning both, themes and form. Nonetheless, the heavy stories’ editing of Gordon Lish as, definitely, one cause of that should not be forgotten.

The most brutal story of the collection is **“Tell the Women We’re Going”**. It tells us about the life of two very good friends, Bill and Jerry, since their puberty. The reader is said they shared time of schooling, the girls they used to go with, clothes, working hours of part-time jobs, and a dream of buying a fancy car. Eventually, by the age of twenty two both were married and had children. On one of the regular weekend visits, Bill notices Jerry seems to be distant with his thoughts having mysterious look (Carver III 53). Then Jerry proposes to get out (Carver III 54). On their car ride they meet two girls on bikes. They slow down and start to talk with them as they want to reach some sexual success (Saltzman 111). As the girls are not really willing to play the game with them, Bill and Jerry pursue them to the rock where the females are going. Bill and Jerry separate to cut them off. When they meet again the reader is told Jerry use one stone to kill both girls. This atrocious violent impacts the reader with absolute inexplicability, except for the allusion of Jerry’s strange look which is not a sufficient explanation. Whereas in *Will You Please...* the inexplicability enacts in impressions or comes from feelings, this collection set it directly to the actions and the deeds. Though it could have been Carver’s intent, yet it seems to be typically trimmed story with cut off end, done chiefly for surface effect, caused by editing of G. Lish.

**“So Much Water So Close to Home”** contains the violent aspect as well though more implicitly, indirectly. Again, as have been already observed, the story narrates about two people’s estrangement observed only by one of the protagonists. Stuart is saying good bye to his wife, Claire, as he leaves to camp with friend to a remote nature reserve by a riverside. During the prolonged weekend they are supposed to have fishing, drinking, cards playing entrainment. Even though they are a bit scared by a dead body discovery, they do not want to spoil the weekend by it, so they decide to tight up the dead girl to a tree ready to call police on their way back and continue in their amusement. Everything is done according the plan, but when Stuart comes home and retells the event to Claire she is repelled by their doings. Here begins her alienation to him as she identifies with the dead girl who was raped, as she finds out later on. Claire partially recompenses Stuart’s disgusting behaviour by a visit of burial ceremony. Since Stuart realizes their behaviour was weird he becomes to behave more humbly, then the two reconcile. Actually, the overall impression is rather positive as the conclusion is such. But the motive of the body and the crime behind it, plus the subsequent behaviour turns out to be violent and cruel. Noteworthy seems to be As Clair had sex with Stuart, who got in contact with the terrible crime, shortly before his departure for the fishing trip, she identifies with the victim, hence her feeling of disgust and vulnerability.

**“Why Don’t You Dance?”** might have been included into the twenty two stories of Carver’s first short story book for it displays – in a manner that invites others to unwanted voyeurism – the emotions of devastated lonely some man after the breakup. Nevertheless, there is a sign of a slight shift placing the story in this collection – the matter is pushed to the extremity. The plot is very simple: a man arranges furniture and thinks from his bedroom, in the like manner as they were there, in front of a houses’s garden even using an extension cord to plug the lamp, radio, television etc. After some time the men notices from the house window a young couple moving closer to his bedroom as they think the owner wants to sell it. They even start to try it out. The man descends, has conversation with them and, when they ask, sells them some of the pieces for a very low price. He plugs in the gramophone and invites the lovers to have a dance. But they just do not know what to think about it.

This story is a paradigmatic example of Carver’s use of symbolism. As the reader can derive, the man’s conduct is a consequence of his breakup with his girlfriend or wife. The sadness and the absence of his self – that is disconnected from his personality – are manifested by the missing of the bedroom in his house. Or as Lehman puts it: “Without a meaningful home to surround them, the domestic items arranged in the driveway lose their significance and disintegrate” (77). One may add: so as lose it the man without his partner.

Besides, the bedroom is an obvious symbol of his past sexual life that often personificates – at least in the first memories - the relationship itself. Obviously, according to the text, the girl was confused: “there was more to it, and she was trying to get it talked out. After a time, she quit trying” (Carver 161). This confusion is in opposition to the main protagonist’s one, as if the couple’s feelings about the meeting reflected the man’s feelings about his love. It is an epiphany, a moment that transcendents their actual knowledge or experience with like situations (Leypoldt 1-2). Nevertheless, reader can understand it, if he has the key regarding the search for the symbolic meaning.

**“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”** shows two couples visiting each other and having a weekend talk. They start drinking early in the day and after some time suggest discuss the theme of love. Every speaker mentions something else: kind love of elderly couple confirmed by an accident, an aggressive love proving itself as home violence, romantic love in example of knights courtesy, sensual love, or just the present love between Nick and Laura that is defined by ostensive act. Eventually, they do not really agree on one account. And no wonder, first, it is not a simple task at all, since the word might be used in many ways. Second, they are becoming too drunk. Their decrease of communicative skills is also signalised by the weather worsening (Lehman 78). As Saltzman points out the story is written according to the pattern of Plato’s Symposion (117). Nevertheless, they do not have any Socrates, nor Diotima who could initiate them into the mystery of love matters.

**“Viewfinder”** shows a man who reacts positively when has just encountered the same situations as the person in the latter story. The impulse for overcome it brings the man without arms who takes pictures of houses and sells them to the people to earn money for his living. The relief arrives just after the ruined character realizes the handicapped man must have even much more difficult live. The progress is confirmed by the man’s climb on the roof – this having again symbolic significance - where he can see the thing from better perspective. This motive brings the story close to that of “Cathedral”.

**“Bath”**, reedited by Carver several times under the name **“A Small Good Thing”** narrates about the suffering of parents whose little boy, Scotty, is hit by a car in the day of his birthday. Scotty walks home, instead of school, and there after some time with her mother looses consciousness. He is taken to hospital where after a day or two dies. Nevertheless, before this happens, the mother’s trauma is even intensified by calls of strange man who asks about Scotty. She tells everything to her husband who stays with Scotty in hospital. After the son’s pass away the mother realizes it must have been the baker who was supposed to make a birthday cake. Though it is midnight, they go to see him. Eventually, a rapprochement is set in since they explain what happened. The baker offers them some rolls which are a small good thing in the situations like that (Carver II 139).

Even though the most of elements in the story are marked by evil, such as the driver’s flight after the collision, the accident itself followed by the death, baker’s biting phone calls, the end and the message of the story is full of human warmth, and even of some hope or promise. As it concerns the form, the story is rather lengthy with richer language and more description. Author entirely avoids the ellipses. Then, the story is more complex as the regular alternation of scenes appears.

As at least the last two stories manifests also the kinder side of human character, it makes one think about the – above mentioned – collection description. And warn us about the too quick generalisations in regard to the nature of Carver’s work and his evolution (if any). This, again, puts in question the impact of Gordon Lish on this work. Carver was not for sure only a fun of violence, shortcuts and negativism.

## iii) *CATHEDRAL & NEW STORIES FROM WHERE I’M CALLING FROM*

The title story **“Cathedral”** can be actually divided into three part. In the first, the narrator – who is at the same time the main character – tells us about a blind man, Robert, who is supposed to visit him and his wife, as well as stay overnight in their house. Robert uses the opportunity to see the two as he was not so far away while visiting family of his deceased wife. Narrator – protagonist comments the situation in a way that he is not very happy as he does not know him and has not any experience with blind people. Then he continues with description of the meeting of Robert and his wife. They have met each other ten years ago when she answered for newspaper’s advertisement searching for assistance to a blind man. She had served him as a reader in his office. At that time she used to be with her childhood love, an officer. As he moved quite often, the narrator’s wife stopped working for Robert and was in touch with him only through telephone and post mailing each other the audio tapes. Since that they are friends sharing worries and joys of their private lives, such as information about Robert’s marriage with his subsequent assistant; her new love and current partner – the narrator, etc. Then, the narrator mentions poem she wrote in which she described her last encounter with Robert when he “run his hand over her face” to feel how she looks like (Carver 357). Writing poems about important things in her life was one of her customs. Then he continues with confession that his wife once played him the tape where she described him for Robert, nevertheless they were soon interrupted so he did not hear it. This part is closed with the talk about Robert’s wife Beluah.

Robert’s arrival is for the main protagonist just something new and awkward as his ideas about blind people were different. Robert had no cane, no dark glasses and had a full beard. His wife introduces them to each other; they sit and have a talk about Robert’s train journey while drinking whiskey. Robert is also smoking a cigarette. For the dinner they have several courses, lot of food. Robert has obviously good appetite. Afterwards, the blind man talks about himself, the jobs he had, his interests, etc. The main protagonist offers Robert some marihuana and as he accepts all the three smoke out two joints. Whereas the narrator’s wife is asleep and want to have a rest, he and Robert continue in talking. The blind wants to get to know him better.

Nevertheless, as they do not have many themes in common they finally prefer watching, and in Robert’s case listening to, TV. The narrator-protagonist tries to find any good program, but there is nothing better on than a documentary about European Middle Ages heritage: cathedrals. After some time, the narrator comments some of the pictures in TV, and then he asks Robert if he has any idea about what it is a cathedral. The blind man recounts what he has just heard in TV, nonetheless has to admit he “really do[esn’t] have a good idea” about cathedrals (Carver 371). Narrator gives his account about it, but it is not very helping since he compares the cathedral to other visual elements. Eventually, Robert asks him to find some heavy paper and a pen, he suggests to draw their own cathedral. Then, Robert closes his hand over the narrator’s one and follows his movements. Roberts supports him, then he proposes him to draw the people inside of the cathedral, and asks him to continue with his eyes closed. The narrator has to admit for himself “it was like nothing else in [his] life up to now”, and comments it with these words: “It’s really something” (Carver 374-375). However, his wife is confusingly asking what is going on, the narrator is just astonished and uplifted by this experience.

This story actually reveals an inner transformation of a man. A possibility to witness a character’s evolution is more likely enabled in some novels. In short stories it is not so common, especially in Carver’s one, although allusions of the mental state change alongside with Carver’s epiphanies quite often. Nevertheless, very rarely – or even not at all – are accomplished as it is done in “Cathedral” (on the half through was, e.g., the protagonist in “Viewfinder”). That is first thing that makes it different.

The narrator was initially reluctant to welcome the blind man in his house. He thought that blind man has to have cane together with dark glasses; and has to be a serious, non smoker, ascetic person with decent appearance. All these prejudices are broken gradually through the story. Thus his selfishness step by step fades away as he begins to be interested in a talk with Robert and he does not have to pretend he is. Obviously, the narrator is not bad man; he is just unaware or ignorant of some things. He just fears what he does not know, the otherness. Nevertheless, this applies on most of us, most of us is just afraid of new, inexperienced matters. This is especially true with disabled people where the border between the feel of awkwardness, even shame and attempts to help is very indeterminate.

This story brings its readers a lesson concerning: understanding, mutuality, sympathy, togetherness, love, self-transcendence, help, joy of present moment, mutual learning, art of seeing, overcoming the barriers, self-denial, belief, spirituality, aesthetic, beauty of everyday life, and the like. The narrator feels at the beginning less worth in comparison to his wife; he has no friends, no experience with help to disabled people, writes no poems, just mundane life. And as such, partially, perceives him also his wife. His relation to the wife is symbolised by the physical love, whereas the relationship between her and Robert symbolizes the spiritual love; finally, the latter relationship arises between Robert and the narrator.

It is worth note that the two undergo not only process of rapprochement, but also of mutual learning. They teach each other how to see. The narrator “teaches” Robert how to see a sensual object (though with spiritual connotations) with the movement of his hand – using the palpable means, whereas Robert teaches him to see with his inner sight the important things of this world by means of word, conversation. It is seems like paradox. At first look, somebody who is weaker – handicapped and has lost wife – helps somebody who is healthy, has everything and lives quite normal, “happy” life. (Though, this happen quite often in our lives.) The old Greeks use to say, at least in Plato’s dialogs, that the spiritual sight begins to see properly when the sensual one ceases to do so. Robert teaches the narrator how to believe (that is why he asks him, prior to the, to the drawing if he is religious), not necessarily in religious terms, but to believe in meaningfulness of interpersonal relationships and mutual help. This belief can help him to be back in “real” life.

Actually, lot of symbols is hidden in the meaning of cathedral. Not necessarily only the Christian ones. These are: solidity, height (good prospect), remaining, place of people’s meeting, share of the same values, transcendence, collective experience, confirmation of belief, etc. As Robert participates on the “construction” of the cathedral, he can thus symbolically burry his wife, or his grief for her. Ultimately, cathedral is a very complex and –in a sense – frail construction that holds together only thanks to the system of its support elements and cross braces that are joint together or intertwined in a manner to make it stable. All these elements creates together something more, an amazing totality. In parallel, only if people are jointed together, something more can originate (and they can achieve more).

Even though “Cathedral” is very promising regarding its ultimate intentions and the theme, a reader cannot foreshadow it until the very end. In other words, its starting point and even development (if one does not know the end) is very similar to that of preceding collections. Moreover, it is really exceptional when considering the whole book. **“Feathers”** presents rather annoyed pair without children, Jack and Fran. One day they are invited for a dinner to his friend and his wife’s place. Only thanks to their nice relationship, Olla’s problems with teeth, their ugly baby, joys and hardships with peacock they breed, Jack and Fran begins to appreciate their everyday life and thinks in it. Their life journey is described even to the point when they have children – perhaps due to the visit –, thus a sign of optimistic prospective in the context of Carver’s stories. Nevertheless, a reader can still feel Jack and Fran are somehow still bothered by the ordinariness of life.

**“Where I’m Calling From”** is rather positive, but not evidently. It is a narration with autobiographical traits set in Alcoholic Anonymous. Hinting on the events connected to his ride to the rehabilitation centre. Than continues show how the narrator persuaded his fellow alcoholic, nicknamed J. P., to retell his drinking past instead of him. Thus he recounts about his fortunes and misfortunes with his life love causing him his troubles. The story concludes with narrator’s effort to call home his partner and ex-wife on New Year’s Eve. A promise of resolve to stop drinking can be guessed here.

**“Compartment”** provides us with selfish and self-centred man who, on his vacations, travels by train to Europe to see his son he has not see for a long time as he lives with mother. Nevertheless, a sudden and urge thought that the separation was his son’s fault make him change his mind. Instead of getting off, he stays in train. Though, he is partially punished by a loss of the watch (originally intended as a gift for his son) and by staying at the wrong car, nothing actually happens in his character. Saltzman rightly remarks that the title represents a metaphor of protagonist’s isolation and self-sufficiency (131).

**“Vitamins”** is another story demonstrating that Carver did not actually change with *Cathedral* his subject matter. The story illustrates how sexual desires can be spoiled by another stronger stimulus, in this case fear. It tells us about a man who is cheating on his girlfriend with her friend and colleague. Yet, their rendezvous in one music bar run by a one Afro-American that seems to be promising is interrupted by the two intruders who want to talk to them. Then, they start to be pushy, and one of them, a black man, even draws up from his pocket a case with cut off ear. The two run away as soon as possible. Their evening and any possible continuation is ended up by this horrible experience. For the girl it is a definitive sign for leaving her job consisting in selling vitamins door to door, and the city as well. Even in this story, as Hall mentions, the black man can have a special significance, rendering a confrontation to the conscience of the unfaithful man (11).

**“Errand**”, one of the seven stories published in literary magazines and later on included in *Where I’m Calling From* anthology collection, renders homage to Chekhov and is a good representative of these stories. Its narration is based on autobiographical information from Chekhov’s last moments before his death on tuberculosis. The story sticks to the historical facts. It describes his hospital stay and visits of famous people, such as Tolstoy, the special treatments his relatives tried to find for him and his sojourn in Germy sanatorium. There he was with his wife, Olga, he had married three years before his death. The second part of the story depicts the atmosphere in the room of dying person; and it shows how Olga managed with dignity and grace to arrange the last things of the master of literature. Even the servant’s errand can be respectable matter. It is a true ode to the great writer.

The fact that Carver, unfortunately, found himself in a similar situation two month later gives the story even more seriousness. As if he had had some kind of premonition.

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the following questions: Why Carver considered himself to be predominantly a poet? What is his contribution to the literature? Are there observable any significant changes in the course of his writing career? Obviously, respond to these issues was not the sole object of the diploma work for they are related to other questions.

As it concerns the first one, during his early writing career, Carver was forced to do several menial jobs since he had to ensure the living for his first wife and children which came still in his “teens” years. Moreover, it was when his time was occupied by studies at the university. Thus, all he could afford was write time to time, only pieces of texts. These early fragments together with brevity of Hemingway’s and Chekhovian short stories he adored eventually caused that Raymond Carver remained faithful to that style. Besides, he wrote poetry as well, even though with very irregular intensity. Even though, he did not achieve a real success with his poems, he still considered himself a poet, for he created verses. Another, more important, reason is that writing a poetry or prose he tried to get the essence, heart, of the things into his oeuvre and awaken reader to certain vigilance. And that is what poets are supposed to do, grasp the substantial and offer another perspective on the world. Additionally, Carver abided by the poet’s common rule of using the less material as possible.

Second, Carver’s contribution consists – as it is with many other authors – in both, his style and material. As for the form, here he owes much to Ernest Hemingway. For Carver started where the latter ended. This concerns chiefly the telegraphic style crossing out the unnecessary descriptive adjectives, adverbs and verbs expressing emotions. From the fact Carver in his stories “impels” reader to interpret it without facilitating his task by saying everything, it can be derived he took inspiration also from Hemingway’s iceberg method. In his stories, would it be narrative in third of first persona, Carver mostly uses dialogs where appear short sentences and short replicas. The dialog between the protagonists makes – even the narratives in third person singular – the text more present and live to its percipient than anything else. Nonetheless, the overuse of word ellipsis and above all the cut off endings proves to be, quite often, the work of his editor Gordon Lish.

The content of Carver’s stories demonstrates his to Anton Chekhov whom he highly admired for his life and work. Thanks to him he based his stories on everyday life matters, observation of details and human mental states, exploration of the moral, and sometimes even the absurd. The demand of his university mentor and friend, John Gardner, to search for the real incentives driving the human conduct adds up to it. Also Hemingway’s theme of fear related to combat is melted in Carver’s stories into a fear regarding the determination being the Self. This is the typical theme Carver is dealing with. His own original – into extent as it a can be-, and eternal subject is matter of erotic relationships, especially in its decline and possibility of its recovery.

Thus, the answer on the second question is as follows. Carver’s contribution to literature resides in the fact he ceaselessly reminds us that the human relationships – especially between the couples – must be based on the permanent effort of both sides and belief in one’s abilities. Otherwise the people are exposed to threaten of their partnerships erosion, dreads of ordinariness, and problems of identity. He also demonstrates that yield to temptations of substitute ways of existence, such as icons imitation, voyeurism, delight from food, television, or even mere sensual love – i.e. sex – are ways to even more intensive isolation and suffering. Even though, his characters present these vices, Carver’s message is the one that has been mentioned before. Besides that, his stories are marked by epiphanies, mysterious moments of sudden astonishment, getting lost, or comprehension. All these features are hidden in language that employs economical style, short real life-like dialogs and plain, colloquial language. Moreover, Carver brought his realistic short stories into the time when rather postmodern experiments were in fashion.

To reply to the third question, the answer will be rather no. Of course, it is not unequivocal, but from what has been observed this response is more likely. At least, this concerns any crucial, diametric changes. As for this, it is worth to note the thesis exploration revealed that Carver was from the very begging till the end of his career an author who stuck to the rules of literary realism. He thus falls into the category of modern literary realism conveyed majorly through short stories. This claim is based on the thesis investigation asserting that Carver established his writing on the grounds of belief in referential and even symbolic significance of words. This position makes, in consequence, impossible to categorize his work into postmodernist aesthetic current, neither any variant of it, nor contend any transition to that movement. On the contrary, Carver’s stories can be interpreted on the fundament of key words referring to key matters in the story. Due to it, Carver can be fitted into a kind of symbolic realism, or just modernistic realism. Minimalism is a good expression so far it regards form of his short stories, not so good as for their content and meaning.

The writer’s collections have been characterized as follows. First one deals mostly with problems related to a searching of personal identity and communicational breakdowns between the couples, some of the stories provide only few clues, so it is not easy to interpret them, but in a manner they are very alike to each other. Next, *Furious Seasons* and *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* bring a greater variety of themes and perspectives. The former provides a reader also with autobiographical sketches full of nature lyricism. The latter uses for solving conflicts between partner more violence though the kind tales can be found there as well. Generally, most ellipsis and short cuts is used in the language and narrative; greater variety of different stories is to be found there. *Cathedral* and the new short fiction from *Where I’m Calling From*, offer few stories where the overall impression is very positive, nevertheless the theme, setting and language rest mostly the same as in the previous collections. The stories are longer, sometimes more descriptive. The difference is that character’s have better outlook, and sometimes prospect. Nonetheless, the narrative control of the author rests actually the same throughout the stories, as well as the themes he deals with, i.e. those that has been mentioned above. Ultimately, the name of Gordon Lish should not be forgotten as he very likely had changed some of the Carver’s texts, especially from the book *Will You Please Be Quite, Please?*

Carver is definitely one of the greatest short story writers ever, perhaps not only for the above stated reasons, and his oeuvre is, for sure, worth reading. Since his short fiction is marked by brevity and its interpretation sometimes requires higher intellectual effort, it could be useful for English (as second) language courses.

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7

RÉSUMÉ IN CZECH

Předmětem této diplomové práce je odpovědět na otázku týkající se literního přínosu povídek Raymonda Carvera. Za tímto účelem rozbor je rozebráno jeho dílo na podkladě průzkumu Carverových literárních předchůdců. Hlavním inspirace je spatřována v díle Ernesta Hemingwaye, jehož dílo nabídlo Carverovi ekonomické zacházení s jazykovými prostředky a důležitost vynechávání určitých faktů v textu samotném. Dále Anton Čechov, který byl samotným Carverem oceňován nejvíce, mu nabídl příklad, který se týkal umění pozorovat obyčejné věci, každodenní život, chudé lidi a podobně. Třetí vliv přišel od Carverova vysokoškolského učitele a přítele Johna Gardnera, který mu vštípil potřebu hledat a v textu zdůrazňovat všechny pohnutky řídící lidské chování. Carverovou vlastní zásluha spočívá v dovedné kombinaci těchto zdrojů společně s jeho vlastním prozkoumáváním lidských vztahů, zvláště mezi mužem a ženou, a důvodem jejich upadání. Předvádí nebezpečí pasivního života, ukazuje hrozby přijímání falešné identity a zástupných způsobů existence projevujících se v nadměrné konzumaci televize, jídla, sexu apod. V jeho textech se často objevuje metoda ukazující náhlé ohromení, porozumění nebo naopak strnulost někoho kdo tápe. Dále jsou rozebrány Carverovy sbírky povídek se záměrem rozhodnout, zda nějaké se objevuje v jeho spisech nějaký zásadní posun. Odpověď na tuto otázku je záporná, neboť autorova kontrola narativu, použití jazyka, témata a vyznění povídek zůstává víceméně stejné. Byť jeho pozdní dílo je trochu optimističtější. Důležitým zjištěním této práce je to, že Carver spadá do proudu takzvaného moderního literárního realismu, který zdůrazňuje symbolický význam slov. Na základě toho, je čtenáři poskytnut klíč k výkladu jeho povídek.

1. If not indicated otherwise, all the biographical information is taken from the introduction to poems anthology (Carver IV 7-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The pagination corresponds to that of original text’s copy as displayed in document Word. For, the original text on the websites does not provide any numbering. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Concerning the poem selection of other authors, he had been working on it together with Tess Gallagher, who introduced him new poets, especially the European ones from the post-war period, like P. Celane, C. Milosz, Seamus Heaney, etc. (Carver IV 244). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This award provides the winner with $50,000 every year for the five year period to enable him devote his time merely to writing. In the 1983, the jury consisted for example of P. Roth and D. Bartheleme (Carver III 238). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is called “Poem for Hemingway & W. C. Williams”, it can be found in collection *Fires* from 1983 (Carver IV 42). As can be seen the admiration is also for Williams whose insistence of employing plain colloquial everyday language was constant. There is the influence for Carver’s poems, but obviously short stories as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The pagination corresponds to that of original text’s copy as displayed in document Word. For, original text on the websites does not provide any numbering. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nonetheless, Carver paid a homage to “Hills Like White Elephant” when made an allusion on it in the story “Will You Please Be Quite, Please?” and when named the whole collection with that name as suggests Saltzman (21). More about will be provided later it in the integral text. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The citation is actually included in epilogue to Chekov’s story collection written by J. Svatoňová. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This poem collection includes a mixture of author’s poems and selected ones from other authors. Chekhov’s poems take approximately one fifth of the whole collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Do not confuse this American writer and literary theoretic with the British thriller and spy novelist of the same name. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The paging corresponds to that of original text’s copy as displayed in document Word. For, original text on the literary source websites does not provide any numbering. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The pagination corresponds to that of original text’s copy as displayed in document Word. For, original text on the literary source websites does not provide any numbering. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Carver did not like the word “theme” and instead of it spoke about his obsessions, i.e. his themes (Nesset 12). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)