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THE CARVER CANARD: TEXTUAL RESTORATION AS AUTHORIAL EFFACER

A Thesis Presented

by

John Yngve Flanagan

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Specializing in English

May, 2012

Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, specializing in English.

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ABSTRACT

On July 8th, 1980, Raymond Carver wrote an impassioned letter to his editor, Gordon Lish, begging him to cancel the publication of what would soon become Carver's minimalist masterpiece, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Carver argues in his letter that Lish's heavily-edited versions of his original stories were bound to cause Carver's death. Despite his anxieties, Carver's authorial demise didn't come until 2009, 21 years following his physical death, when the unedited versions of the *What We Talk About* stories appeared in a posthumous collection called *Beginners*. *Beginners* excises Lish's excisions, exposing a Raymond Carver at odds with his minimalist identity. The "restored" text also displaces Carver as the sole author of his work. We learn from Carver's effacement that any cultural construction of an author is an erroneous effigy. *Beginners* exemplifies how textual restorations deflate cultural myths as they work with original texts to enrich our understanding of literature and writers.

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Of course, thanks to my friends and family for understanding my social absences during my study of authorial absences.

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INTRODUCTION: THERE AND NOT THERE

They're still my stories...I'll change them back, or use original titles if I want to, after they've served their purpose.

— Raymond Carver to Gordon Lish¹

Bernardo, Francisco, and Shakespeare's audience all seek the same information upon *Hamlet's* opening. "Who's there?" the officers ask, echoing their viewers' initial thoughts on the path towards meaning.² While Bernardo and Francisco may establish a satisfying, if temporary, answer (only themselves) modern readers continue to wonder exactly whose voice speaks from the stage, page, film, or computer screen.

The frail ghost of the absent author accompanies any literary output, tagging along after the printed words as a mere fabrication based upon a subjective reader's expectations and prior knowledge. Often, as this study attempts to show, fabrications transcend their subjects to exist over and beyond the real thoughts and abilities of their diminished antecedents.

One popular literary ware, however, has begun to affect this phenomenon. Textual restorations, designed to offer readers the unadulterated voice of their revered heroes of poetry and prose, appear en masse alongside the old originals, often replacing them as newer, truer counterparts. Publishers of such editions, however, overlook the power these restorations wield in crumbling the cultural constructions attached to the author's name.

On August 9th, 1998, *The New York Times* featured writer D.T. Max's analysis of the disparities between Raymond Carver's published stories and his discarded drafts. Carver's editor, Gordon Lish, had given the drafts to the Lilly Library at Indiana

University. In his article, Max uncovers for the first time to a large audience the impact Lish had on Carver's early short story collections. Max further reveals how Carver's pre-edited work doesn't match the standards set by the Carver name. "I wanted Carver to win," Max writes, though he soon succumbs:

Overall, Lish's editorial changes generally struck me for the better. Some of the cuts were brilliant, like the expert cropping of a picture. His additions gave the stories new dimensions, bringing out moments that I was sure Carver must have loved to see...Lish was redirecting Carver's vision in the service of his own fictional goals.³

Despite Lish's editorial bullying, a restored edition of Carver's short story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, called *Beginners*, reveals the extent and necessity of the editor's contributions. Thus, what we talk about when we talk about Raymond Carver the author appears at odds with Raymond Carver the writer. Rather than *restore* authors to a higher cultural consideration, restored editions instead deflate their mythical fabrications.

While a focus on Raymond Carver and the disintegration of his "minimalist" appellation fills the majority of these pages, the poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida offer a perspective from which to analyze Carver and his work. Other writers, projected to mythical proportions as victims of their own work, appear as evidence. Along with Carver, Ernest Hemingway pairs aptly with Foucault's author-function, and William Faulkner helps exemplify Barthes' treatise in "The Death of the Author." Present-day theorist Seán Burke's response to Barthes, *The Death and Return of the Author*, offers apposite leverage for a closer assessment of authorial disappearances. Jack Kerouac's tribulations

with *On the Road* illuminate Derrida's theory of "differance" and underscore the impossibility of locating an empirical and unmythologized author.

While restored editions fail to offer readers an authoritative voice, the destruction of fallacy is their success. Comparing two drafts of one work not only supports a more honest account of a writer's process and ability, but simultaneously opens literature to a new interpretation regarding what has been removed and what has been sustained.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CARVER CONTROVERSY

Lish thought of himself as Carver's ventriloquist. "I could not believe no one had stumbled on what was going on," he says. A collision was inevitable.

— D.T. Max, "The Carver Chronicles"¹

1.1 The Lone Reader

Deaths disappear in Raymond Carver's minimalist masterpiece, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. We do not see Larry, the cuckolded husband of Sally Wain the Stanley products saleswoman, die "two to three" days after stabbing himself "thirty or forty" times with a paring knife.² We do not see Scotty, the car-stricken birthday boy, part his lips and exhale his last breath "gently though the clenched teeth," nor do we read about the girl that Jerry murders "rolling her tongue thickly in her mouth" as she tries to "spit out blood and splinters of teeth."³ Because of the passages' absence, *What We Talk About* instead portends a lonesome suburban terror by forcing its readers to construct the death and violence missing from the terse text. The textual horror has been left behind in the initial drafts of Carver's famous work, unable to debase the far deeper pangs the void of their absence leads readers to endure. The edited version leaves readers to either effect or prevent Scotty's ambiguous death, though the contextual evidence persuades us to carry out the execution. The unblinking narrator of "Tell the Women We're Going" only reveals that Jerry "used the same rock on both girls," urging readers to conjure the ghastly details alone.⁴

Though the textual deaths and violence disappear in the 1981 collection, Carver fans can now consider these esteemed stories with *Beginners*, an unedited incarnation of *What We Talk About*, released in 2009. *The New Yorker's* publication of correspondences

between Carver and Gordon Lish further illuminates the disparity between the two editions.

1.2 A Letter

At 8 A.M on July 8th of 1980, Raymond Carver sat at his typewriter to compose an impassioned letter to Lish at Alfred A. Knopf. “Dearest Gordon,” he starts, “I’ve got to pull out of this one. Please hear me.”⁵ Carver’s pleading tone marks an abrupt shift in what had been a congenial exchange between him and Lish. Published in *The New Yorker* on Christmas Eve in 2007, their collected letters reveal Carver had last advised Lish to “open the throttle” on his work; “Ramming speed.”⁶

What took place between exchanges was ramming speed indeed. Lish pared Carver’s stories so significantly, they were hardly the beginners Carver had last seen. Aside from excisions, Lish changed most of the titles and added his own material, both extensive and slight. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* is Lish’s title, not Carver’s. And while Jerry’s victim may not endure the tortuous death Carver puts her through in his first draft, Lish humanizes the girl, Sharon, with an eerie and delicate touch: naming her. The editor slashed Carver’s story “A Small Good Thing” more severely than any other in the collection, altering its title to “The Bath” and deleting an endearing scene where Scotty’s grieving parents reconcile with a malicious baker following their son’s death.

“Editing takes a variety of forms,” says a *New Yorker* editorial essay that accompanies the Carver/Lish letters.⁷ “Once faced with a manuscript, an editor ordinarily tries to facilitate a writer’s vision, to recommend changes...that best serve the work.”⁸

Upon *Beginners'* release, controversy has stirred over the publicity of Lish and Carver's professional relationship. Carver readers now find themselves asking whether Lish facilitated Carver's vision or his own. The editor's voice in *What We Talk About* buries the author's voice, hence, the violence that manifests in *What We Talk About* wafts into readers' sensibilities not only from the vacant spaces where Lish had carved away Carver's text, but from the real-life death of Carver as the lone authoritative voice of his work.

1.3 Rebirth, Fanfare, and Fallacy

When published in 1981, *What We Talk About* earned significant literary and cultural praise. "One of Mr. Carver's great gifts is to make audible the eloquence of the apparently inarticulate," wrote Michael Wood for *The New York Times* following the book's release.⁹ David Newlove wrote in *Saturday Review* that Carver had created "Seventeen tales of Hoplessville...told in a prose as sparingly clear as a fifth of iced Smirnoff."¹⁰ Though Carver had already published a well-regarded set of stories, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* – edited primarily by Lish – *What We Talk About* was his first release to capture a wide and attentive audience. Carver earned comparisons to Hemingway and Chekov, both of whom he idolized. The terse voice of "dirty realism," or famously, "post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue collar neo-early Hemingwayism" remains highly mimicked among novice writers today.¹¹ Writer Leonard Michaels notices, with astute attention to the absence of content in the minimalist collection, how

Certain moments in Ray's stories, where he focuses very hard on virtually nothing, are reminiscent of an inebriated struggle to see the immediate

environment. There is a kind of rage that is held in check or suddenly expressed in a brutal or mindless way by the story's action as a whole, or by the narrator.¹²

Of course, only through Lish's influence of restraint are Carver's narrators able to portend such brutal and silent rage.

What We Talk About was most significant for Carver as proof of his newfound stability and rebirth. After a life of alcohol-induced turbulence, Carver regained confidence in himself not only as an author, but also as a functional human being.

Carol Sklenicka, Carver's most recent biographer, recounts her subject's relationship with John Cheever while the two writers taught at the University of Iowa's esteemed fiction workshop. Sklenicka quotes Carver as saying, "[Cheever] and I did nothing but drink...I mean, we met our classes in a manner of speaking, but the entire time we were there...I don't think either of us ever took the covers off our typewriters."¹³ While Carver and Cheever's drunken bonhomie seems the typical storied fare of spirited writers, Carver's drinking frequently tore his family apart. He reeled them back and forth between bankruptcy and barely scraping by. Sklenicka recounts a story told by Carver's first and longstanding wife, Maryann Burk Carver, in which an enraged Carver loses control after another man's ambiguous come-on to his wife. "[He] pulled me down and half out of the car," Maryann remembers. "[He] banged my head on the pavement. I begged him to stop...Three or four hard blows, then he let me go. Somehow I dragged myself up inside the car, and he drove us home."¹⁴ After years of the couple's attempts and failures at sobriety and fidelity, Carver took his last drink in 1977. A year later he and Maryanne separated; four years later they divorced.

A \$16,000 Guggenheim Fellowship in 1978 bolstered Carver's stability, and his introduction to poet Tess Gallagher, with whom he would spend the rest of his life, helped him remain sober. With Gallagher, he convalesced back into the kind-spirited man with the deep laugh he was known for. Following a move to Tucson, Carver found himself with "four months of straight and clear road ahead."¹⁵ He used the time to pen *Beginners*. He pored over the disasters of his past, gleaning moments of his life as an alcoholic and churning them through his typewriter. Soon, his reality became his fiction. "Ray brought along only those things which were going to be useful to him and guilt was not going to be one of them," writer Tobias Wolff, one of Carver's best friends, says.¹⁶ "He put the transgressions of the past to use in his fiction, but I don't think that he felt much guilt about things that had gone bad. He was boyish, and one of the features of that boyishness, I think, was that he had a talent for forgiving himself."¹⁷ This forgiveness also came through Carver's comfort in knowing he could write again, and in his reunion with the confidence he lost in his dark and booze-addled days. Regarding the characters that appear in his stories, Carver says "they'd like to set things right, but they can't. And usually they do know it, I think, and after that they just do the best they can."¹⁸

Carver's plea that Lish stop the presses emerges at the inception of his stability. The edits threaten his resolution with himself and his burgeoning self-esteem. Upon reading what Lish had done, Carver feared losing control of not only his stories, but of his rehabilitated self as well. In that notorious letter, Carver tells Lish that before writing *Beginners*, he had "given up entirely" and "was looking forward to dying."¹⁹ He writes, "I've come back from the grave here to start writing stories once more...I feel if the book were to be published as it is in its present edited form, I may never write another story,

that's how closely, God Forbid, some of those stories are to my sense of regaining my health and mental well being."²⁰

Because *What We Talk About* remained significant as a symbol of his stability, a subsequent and more terrifying awareness irritated the issue. "You've made so many of the stories in this collection better, far better than they were before," he writes to Lish. "Maybe if I were alone, by myself, and no one had ever seen these stories, maybe then, knowing that your versions are better than some of the ones I had sent, maybe I could get into this and go with it. But Tess has seen all of these and gone over them closely."²¹

History shows Lish went through with his edits despite the writer's pleas, though neither Gallagher nor any other Carver insider sounded the alarm on his secret. Carver recognized his inability to claim sole autonomy of his celebrated literary exhumation as a defeat over the confidence he'd found. Because he could not expose the truth of Lish's significance to his work, he was forced to debase his regained self-esteem by pretending to be a writer whom he was not. Raymond Carver thus became a myth unto himself and his readers, donning the mask of the laconic minimalist it was most natural for him to be.

In the July 1985 issue of *Literary Review*, following the publication of Carver's *Cathedral* – the Lish-less follow-up to *What We Talk About* – David Sexton asks Carver, "Your style has changed, hasn't it?" Carver's response is a lie. "That's true," he says before going on to discuss Lish's minimalism as if it was his own. "Everything I thought I could live without I just got rid of, I cut it out."²² His lies continue throughout the interview, often couched in language that simultaneously confesses to the artifice he's responsible for while burying the truth deeper. Responding to what Sexton calls "the extreme clipped precision of the earlier work," Carver says, "It was some arena, some

place on the map where I could exercise complete and total control. Also I'm obsessive about saying exactly what I wanted to say."²³ Of course, it is his inability to claim "complete and total control" that torments Carver; his use of such rhetoric betrays his true concerns. Carver lies again, later in the interview, when he says he "left out unnecessary movements" and wanted the stories to "work without the author intruding."²⁴ Once more his language manifests in a Raskolnikovian plea of guilt; for after Lish's edits, the author could only wish to intrude.

Following the publication of *What We Talk About*, three of the unedited "Beginners" stories appeared in a collection of Carver's work called *Fires*. The truth behind their source was covered here as well. Instead of admitting them to be the original versions of their minimal counterparts, the longer stories were published as "expansions." Carver pretends he went back to create what Lish had already cut away. In that same interview with Sexton, Carver plays along with his questioner's observation that "Some of [the stories] are actually expanded as if the character had remembered more about the story."²⁵ "Yes," Carver says, "I started looking at those differently. Some of the stories I went back to seemed like unfinished business to me. This is nothing too amazing."²⁶ What's amazing is Tess Gallagher's persistence in sustaining the fabrication, 20 years after her husband's physical death.

The Library of America published *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories* in 2009; the entirety of *Beginners* closes the omnibus. In an interview with Rich Kelley, celebrating the anthology's release, Gallagher says, "Never once in his many interviews did [Carver] voice the least animus or regret about the editing of the stories in *Beginners*."²⁷ Her statement, while technically true, eschews a deep reserve of problems

and fallacy. First, Gallagher denies Carver's embarrassment over Lish's influence despite *The New Yorker's* publication of his letters. Secondly, Carver was unable to voice animus or regret because neither his interviewers nor his readers knew Lish had sliced the stories so severely. Most importantly, however, is that Carver had no reason to express contempt for the edits because, as he confesses to Lish, they made the stories better. Carver feared the edits because they threatened his recovery as a person, but he loved them because they supported his success as an author.

1.4 Don't Shoot the Editor

In his interview with Gallagher, Kelley expresses his preference for Lish's edited version of "Why Don't You Dance?" to Carver's original. He asks Gallagher which versions she likes best. Though she neglects making a choice, she addresses what two versions of Carver's stories actually offer: "To read both *What We Talk About* and *Beginners* is to see that in our culture books are not just written but are also manufactured."²⁸ Here Carver's widow not only reveals how books are constructed, but how their authors are as well. In her scheme to debunk Carver as a minimalist, Gallagher shows the new collection's readership that the epithet Raymond Carver is merely a placeholder for a collaboration between Raymond Carver and Gordon Lish.

As *The New Yorker's* former fiction editor, Charles McGrath edited a number of Carver's stories that appeared in the magazine. "Mr. Lish was a famous slasher who is sometimes said to have created with his red pencil Mr. Carver's reputation as a minimalist," he says in an article for *The New York Times*, "I, Editor, Nay – Author." He goes on to poke fun at the "fodder" that the Carver/Lish issue provides for graduate

study. One could write “Carver Carved: The Corpus Exhumed,” he jokes, or perhaps, “What We Talk About When We Talk About ‘What We Talk About’: The Text as Message.”²⁹ Playfulness aside, McGrath agrees Gallagher’s attempt to “prove that the maximalist was there all along, suppressed by Gordon Lish,” can leave readers “disappointed.”³⁰ He refutes the assumption that a sacred presence haunts the first draft of a writer’s work, and he coarsens against the idea that editors are “uncomprehending people paid to spoil what was perfect to begin with.”³¹ Gallagher’s desire to expose the “real” voice of Raymond Carver with *Beginners* speaks to a cultural obsession to locate a fixed original. However, the “real” Raymond Carver lies not within the pages of *What We Talk About* or *Beginners*. His reality stands somewhere between mythical minimalism and sober prolix. To call Lish Carver or Carver Lish is untrue, but equally wrong is to consider Carver Carver alone.

When D.T. Max first unveiled the Carver schism in “The Carver Chronicles,” he wrote how Gallagher had initially blocked an investigative scholar from exposing the Carver/Lish disparities. Max notes readers’ blinded assumptions accounting for the difference between early Carver (Lish-edited Carver) and late Carver (Carver writing out of and against Lish-edited Carver).

The Carver of the early stories, it has been said, was in despair. As he grew successful, however, the writer learned about hopefulness and love, and it soaked into his fiction. This redemptive story was burnished through countless retellings by Tess Gallagher. Most critics seemed satisfied by this literal-minded explanation: happy writers write happy stories.³²

Max packs his feature with clever observations of the ordeal. Regarding Lish’s own fiction, which the editor began writing following his expulsion from Knopf in 1994,

Max writes, “Reading his stories is like looking at the gears of a clock that’s missing the face.” He adds that “Lish was the one doing the carving.”³³

Carver purists insist against placing too much emphasis on Lish. “Max builds a conspiracy theory worthy of a Kennedy-assassination buff,” William Stull and Maureen Carroll write in their essay “Prolegomena to Any Future Carver Studies.”³⁴ These research partners from the University of Hartford in Connecticut have written about Carver for over twenty years. “Future Carver studies, insofar as they address the issues raised by the Carver controversy, must redirect their attention from the editor to the writer,” they declare. “The Copernican revolution in Carver studies has begun.”³⁵

Stull and Carroll subscribe to the cultural myth McGrath speaks of: that the unalloyed origins of a work of art hold the most truth. Stull and Carroll’s dismissal of an editor’s importance, however, speaks beyond the working relationship of Raymond Carver and Gordon Lish and into literary history.

Appropriately, D.T. Max introduces Maxwell Perkins into his discussion of an editor’s role. Perkins crafted many modernist voices revered today, such as Faulkner and Hemingway, though the modest artist preferred his edits go unaccredited. According to Thomas Wolfe, Perkins turned *Look Homeward Angel* from a 330,000-word manuscript with no clear plot into a famous work of art.³⁶ Perkins also helped shape *The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms*. Following the release of Wolfe’s unedited drafts, Harold Bloom wrote, “We have been threatened with scholarly publication of Wolfe’s original manuscripts, and doubtless the threats will be fulfilled.”³⁷ Though what these “originals” threaten is not the work of art, but the myth of an authoritative voice behind the work of art. Perkins’ *Look Homeward Angel* remains, just as Lish’s *What We Talk About* will

most likely continue to outsell *Beginners*. Carver predicted just as much in his letter to Lish. “Even though [the edited versions] may be closer to works of art than the original[s] and people [will] be reading them 50 years from now, they’re still apt to cause my demise,” he writes. “I’m serious, they’re so intimately hooked up with my getting well, recovering, gaining back some little self-esteem and feeling of worth as a writer and a human being.”³⁸ Comparing originally published and originally written works brings readers closer to the authenticity of what constitutes an author. More importantly, comparing restored editions with their edited counterparts teaches what it means to write.

CHAPTER TWO: DISAPPEARER

Which has the greater value? The document as it issues from the writer or the thing of beauty that was made? What remains is an artifact of power.

— *Gordon Lish*¹

2.1 Finding Ray

For Foucault, the point of writing is “not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language.”² Instead, it is “a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.”³ Tess Gallagher’s speculation that “readers can watch the son of a small-town-saw-filer become Raymond Carver” can be reworded to say that “Raymond Carver” consumed the young man from Clatskanie, Oregon, Ray.⁴ The all-encompassing title likewise consumes the ambitious janitor with a young family who bought a candy-apple-red Pontiac Catalina, and the nervous professor who brought Charles Bukowski to UC Santa Cruz and “saw his credibility slipping with his superiors at the university with every insult Bukowski growled.”⁵ Most notably absorbed into “Raymond Carver” is the reflective voice of sobriety, proud and autonomous for the first time in his adult life. The assimilation of the “real” Carver into the authorial identity of Carver is nothing to be mourned or sought in extensive reconstructions of his original drafts however. Carver himself submitted to his mythical image as America’s literary minimalist; upon acceptance of these terms, he became a better writer and outgrew the necessity of Lish’s intervention.

Gallagher mistakes what she and Carver find important about Carver’s stories with what readers find important about Carver’s stories. In her interview with Rich Kelley, Gallagher recalls Carver’s “bafflement” at Lish’s suggestion he remove drinking

references from the stories. “I remember responding that his editor must not realize what Ray had been through, that he had nearly died from alcoholism and that alcohol was practically a character in the stories.”⁶ Certainly Lish realizes the trauma alcohol caused for Carver and his family. The two men were friends before they were literary partners, and Lish knew the writer’s vices well. His suggestion to cut drinking from the stories, however, does not concern the Raymond Carver he knew and watched suffer through the disease; his advice is founded in the interest of the story alone. Assuming a writer’s work should include an aspect of confessional prose confuses the reality of the writer for the myth of the author. Carver’s stories are not intentionally about himself, though his disappearing act into the figure Lish helped build manifests eerily in the stories.

2.2 Speaking Monster

In his brilliant essay “Texts in Search of an Editor: Reflections on *The Frankenstein Notebooks* and on Editorial Authority,” Charles E. Robinson analyzes a phenomenon surrounding Mary Shelly’s fictional encounter with reality while penning *Frankenstein*. Similar to the Carver excavation that produced *Beginners*, Robinson examines the plurality of *Frankenstein* drafts to find the text itself to be a monster comprised of many parts, brought to life by its author. Robinson observes that Shelly’s fictional persona in the novel, Robert Walton, assembles “his discrete notes about Victor [Frankenstein] into a narrative, and that both these creative acts may be compared to Mary Shelly’s esemplastic fusing of words and images and symbols and punctuation into the text of her novel.”⁷ Furthermore, Shelly pursues the literary manifestation of reality via the reader of Walton’s letters, Margaret Walton Saville, Robert Walton’s sister. To

follow the metaphor, Walton transcribes Victor's words to his sister; hence, Walton represents an editor, Victor an author, and Margaret a reader. Shelly adds a telling and subtle twist via Margaret's initials, MWS, which correspond to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's own. By associating herself with the reader in her novel, Shelly states the reader is the true author of the work. Barthes' famous mantra, "the birth of the reader is the death of the author," analyzed later in this study, speaks to Shelly's metaphorical gymnastics.⁸

2.3 Yard Sale Mimesis

The *Frankenstein* detective work reveals the real Mary Shelly as the silent counterpart to her fictional manifestation; she disappears within her text. "All these interventions should help to dispel the still-persistent myth of the solitary author who has total control over a text," Robinson writes.⁹ A close reading of Carver's manipulated voice in *What We Talk About*, considered against the fuller narration of *Beginners*, signifies equally interesting connections regarding the author's disappearance. Sklenicka writes in her biography that

As a drunk, Ray had often laughed and told stories on himself and Maryann. As a sober man, he continued the genre with stories about a practicing alcoholic he called "Bad Ray" or "Bad Raymond" while he worked at living his new persona, the one he called "Good Raymond." Thus, his fascination with double characters – his tendency to see himself double – took new form.¹⁰

Doubles appear in *What We Talk About* with more frequency than in *Beginners*. The duality Sklenicka observes isn't Carver using a device he's particularly interested in, but more so the manifestation of the authorial doubling happening behind the scenes. Aside from Ray's new life acting as counterpart to his old one, the myth of *What We Talk*

About relies heavily upon its author being not one person, but two. Though most of Lish's work involves cropping Carver, he also adds content as he sees fit. Lish adds repeating lines of text and folds the stories inward, often manipulating Carver's characters to contemplate their interior selves by interacting with their exterior doubles.

Lish's import of doubling into Carver's stories appears in the collections' first story, "Why Don't You Dance." In it, a young couple ambles across a suburban yard in which the interior of the house has been moved outside. The young couple interprets the scenario hastily as a yard sale. "Things worked," Carver writes about the appliances in his first draft.¹¹ Lish adds they were "no different from how it was when they were inside," employing one of his editorial trademarks of accentuating metaphors latent within the text.¹²

Doubling becomes Lish's vehicle for harvesting Carver's dormant metaphors. After the boy sits on the furniture left outside, Carver writes in *Beginners*, "He laughed. He switched on the reading lamp."¹³ Lish augments this staccato pair of sentences to, "The boy laughed, but for no good reason. For no good reason, he switched the reading lamp on."¹⁴ The idiosyncratic doubling of the language reflects the significance Lish imbues into the story. Carver's original story is more about a man, Max, who has suffered a traumatic domestic experience; the possessions of his former life are moved outside and hocked away to children who don't comprehend their significance. The original draft states that as the girl danced with the distraught man, she "looked at the bed and could not understand what it was doing in the yard. She looked over Max's shoulder at the sky. She held herself to Max. She was filled with an unbearable happiness."¹⁵ Her happiness makes no such appearance in Lish's version. "You must be desperate or something," she

says to the weebegone Max as they dance.¹⁶ Lish spins the story to be less about Max's unorthodox expression of grief over the loss of his family and more about the inevitability that the couple shares his gloomy fate. "Will you look at all this shit?" Lish has the young girl say after surveying what she's inherited from Max.¹⁷ This line doesn't occur in Carver's original, and thus the first draft fails to convey the couple's position as next in line for inevitable suburban disaster. Lish's story suggests the futility of optimism, portended by Max and his misfortunes. The kids have no chance to become the individuals they expect to grow into; their future is Max's present. Through the use of doubling in "Why Don't You Dance," Lish not only signifies the authoritative voice of the text being split in two, but he simultaneously pantomimes Carver's own consumption into his role as an author that squanders his individuality.

2.4 The Author-Function

Foucault writes in "What Is an Author?" that the "work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer."¹⁸ In that same essay, Foucault also introduces his famous "author-function" theory, which suggests the "author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture."¹⁹ Raymond Carver is thus an appellation exterior to the reality of the individual who wrote Carver's stories. The writer cancels his individuality at the inception of writing *Beginners*. Even the "restored" text fails to offer Carver's "real" voice. Of course, Foucault insists that an individual's disappearance into this role deserves further speculation. "We must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and

breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers,” he writes.²⁰ To do so, Foucault sets out four distinct characteristics of the author-function:

- (1) The author-function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourse;
- (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization;
- (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations;
- (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects – positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals.²¹

The first attribute most obviously relates to Carver’s helplessness in choosing what Lish published on his behalf. Despite his pleas, Carver’s whittled stories are the stories that entered what Foucault calls “the bipolar field of discourse.”²² In a letter following Carver’s anguished correspondence, which he ended by requesting Lish “Please do the necessary things to stop production of the book. Please try and forgive me, this breach,” Carver begins, “I’m thrilled about the book and its impending publication. I’m stoked about it, and I’m already starting to think about the next one.”²³ The drastic tone change reflects Carver overcoming his fear of exposure. Interestingly, it remains unknown what took place between the drafts to entice Carver’s change of heart. To speculate through the lens of Foucault, the author simply had no choice. The publication of his stories outweighs the truth that he shared the task of writing with Lish. To survive, Carver depends, as all authors must, on submission to a cultural discourse. The stories belong to neither him nor Lish, but to the greater cultural system in which “discourses are objects of appropriation.”²⁴

Foucault adds the caveat that not all discourses are affected equally by the author-function. To explain, he discusses how our society once marked the truthfulness of

a discourse by attributing it to a particular name. “‘Hippocrates said,’ ‘Pliny recounts,’ were not really formulas of an argument based on authority,” Foucault writes, “they were the markers inserted in discourses that were supposed to be received as statements of demonstrated truth.”²⁵ However, Foucault marks that the author-function fades in the “seventeenth or eighteenth century” and gives way to texts being received with anonymity. The author’s name here tags along only as a classifier for the greater “systematic ensemble.”²⁶ This shift leaves behind a society that now marks the value of discourse depending on the success or failure in reconstituting the myth surrounding the anonymous text. “The inventor’s name served only to christen a theorem, proposition, particular effect, property, body, group of elements, or pathological syndrome,” Foucault writes.²⁷ Thus attributing tags such as “Diet-Pepsi minimalism” and “K-Mart realism” to Carver correlates directly to the process of branding society uses to absorb literature.²⁸ *Beginners* exposes the “minimalist” fallacy Carver is enclosed within.

Foucault’s third characteristic insists the branding of a writer does not occur spontaneously. Labels are merely the projections of the critical apparatuses used to read the work. For example, “minimalism” signifies a coherence under which Carver’s work is judged not by its inherent value, but against the entire corporation of Carver’s author-function. The mechanical use of the author’s name here ensures that anomalies within the systematic discourse are resolved.

Proper names also offer an avenue through which readers can consider a writer’s “evolution, maturation, or influence.”²⁹ Foucault writes how “incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized” by the author-function.³⁰ The transition from *What We Talk About* into *Cathedral* marks such a cultural assimilation of incompatibility. The

longer stories and less idiosyncratic language falsely suggest not an abrupt change of editorial input behind-the-scenes, but a maturation of Carver's voice. The audience dreams up a pseudo-biographical evolution in order to make sense of the disjoint in tone. Collectively, readers fabricate America's minimalist; his biography evolves via a cultural imagination that Carver leaves truth behind for. Following the publication of *Cathedral*, Carver told the *Paris Review*, "I knew I'd gone as far the other way as I could or wanted to go, cutting everything down to the marrow, not just to the bone. Any farther in that direction and I'd be at a dead end – writing stuff and publishing stuff I wouldn't want to read myself, and that's the truth."³¹ Of course only the second half of that statement is the truth. He cuts nothing to the marrow himself, and perhaps he doesn't want to read the pared stories because they might remind him that he is not the Raymond Carver he pretends to be.

Foucault's last characteristic of the author-function regards the "I" who speaks and constitutes the "several selves" amalgamated beneath the encompassing name of the author. When Gallagher mourns the absence of her husband's drinking in his stories, she confuses the "I" who drinks in the story with the Carver who drank in reality. Lish frequently excises any reference in Carver's stories that seem too close to the real thing. "I never told these things at AA," the narrator of the unedited story "Where Is Everyone?" says. "I never said much at the meetings. I'd 'pass,' as they called it: when it came your turn to speak, and you didn't say anything except, 'I'll pass tonight, thanks.' But I would listen and shake my head and laugh in recognition at the awful stories I heard."³² Perhaps Lish cuts this confessional excerpt because of its proximity to autobiography, thus threatening the image of the myth. "To the extent that my stories

have to do with drinking,” Carver says in a 1984 interview, “they all pretty much have some starting point in my own experience rather than in the funny, crazy, sad stories I heard at AA.”³³ Unbeknownst to the author, even the starting points of his actual life have been filched and recast as the biography of the imagined “I” who tells his stories. “It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker,” Foucault says.³⁴

2.5 Papa and the Bull

Loren Glass offers a more contemporary view of the author-function with *Authors Inc: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980*. In it, Glass spends a chapter analyzing Hemingway and the impact his mythical “Papa” image has on his writing. Like Robinson’s consideration of how Mary Shelly’s writing process appears in *Frankenstein*, and Carver’s authorial duplicity manifesting in *What We Talk About*, Glass observes how Hemingway’s attempts to break free from the constraints of the author-function appear thinly-veiled in metaphor in his 1932 classic, *Death in the Afternoon*.

The bull stumbled and went to his knees and the others were past when he got to his feet...The man who had been tossed in the doorway came in with a shotgun to protect his wife who was already lying where the bull had tossed her into the corner of the room. He fired point blank at the bull but only tore up his shoulder. The bull caught the man, killed him, saw a mirror, charged that, charged and smashed a tall, old-fashioned armoire and then went out into the street...The herders...drove out two steers that picked the bull up and, as soon as there was a steer on each side of him, his crest lowered, he dropped his head and trotted, between the two steers, back to the herd.³⁵

Glass relates the story of the bull as an obvious metaphor for Hemingway himself. The writer rebels violently when confronted with the boundaries of cultural confinement,

though after his burst, he assimilates into captivity. Carver's stories don't have the same overt self-reflective insight into the demise of his individuality that Hemingway has, though his aggressive letter to Lish could be read as equivalent to the raging of the bull before submitting to the herd.

Glass focuses much of his chapter "Being Ernest" on Hemingway's masculine identity. The role of "modernist author as a model of masculinity" was appealing to the market at large, Glass says, and it became an easy vehicle for marketing and supporting Hemingway's image.³⁶ This image was considered Hemingway's "own worst-invented character" by critics.³⁷ His veneer of masculinity is a mere, if pathetic, compensation for the loss of the authority and control projected in his image as "U.S. sportsman and aficionado."³⁸ Leonard Leff writes in *Hemingway and His Conspirators* that "he had understood that he could no longer supply the vast audience of the twentieth century with work that was quick, honest, and controlled."³⁹ Instead, Hemingway creates a costume of himself with these masculine attributes and disappears within.

A particular disagreement between Hemingway and Max Perkins over content in *The Sun Also Rises* offers another telling use of metaphor as an appearance of the author/editor paradigm. Perkins wanted the word "balls" edited out of a line in which character Mike Campbell wishes to insult a bullfighter by saying "bulls have no balls."⁴⁰ According to Glass, Hemingway opted for the line "bulls have no horns" because it continues the phallic symbolism.⁴¹ Perkins later responds to Hemingway that he "unfitted the bulls for a reproductive function."⁴² The literary manifestation of the editing process via metaphor becomes obvious. Glass writes,

Hemingway has metaphorically castrated the bulls by excising a phrase in which they are literally designated as such. In other words, the castration is really of the text, not the bulls, as would become clear when, in negotiations over later texts, Hemingway would refer to censorship as a form of emasculation.⁴³

John Raeburn weighs in on Hemingway in his refreshing book, *Fame Became Him: Hemingway as Public Writer*. Raeburn attributes the decline of the author and the rise of the author-function to the increase of magazines and publications intent on filling their pages with images and stories that cover, literally, the personal lives of writers. Of course, these pages needed to maintain readers' interests, so dramatic aspects of reality were often stretched to conform to more appealing and marketable narratives. According to Raeburn, "the number of magazines in circulation had increased from two hundred in 1860 to over one thousand eight hundred every year."⁴⁴ The writer was no longer a writer alone, but a public entertainer whose readership depended largely on how the audience responded to the images and stories they saw in magazines. The artifice here clearly dominates the reality. "Of course [Hemingway] was recognized as a distinguished novelist," Raeburn writes,

but the mass media which lionized him and were ultimately responsible for his reputation as the American writer had a keener interest in his personality. They purveyed Hemingway the warrior, Hemingway the sportsman, Hemingway the bon vivant, and all the other public Hemingways; the master of modern prose was of secondary interest.⁴⁵

Raeburn's list of multiple personalities speaks to Foucault's fourth consideration of the author-function. The title "Ernest Hemingway" encapsulates these fictional personalities that consume the real man.

In 1950, *New Yorker* staff writer Lillian Ross wrote a profile on Hemingway for the magazine. Being a close friend of the author, she had free range to follow him on a

few-day romp around New York City. Her access included personal hotel room conversations with his wife, Mary, as well as his ruminations with his son Jack over Cézanne and Degas at the Metropolitan Museum. Reflecting on her work, Ross writes how

A certain number of readers reacted violently, and in a very complicated fashion. Among these were people who objected strongly to Hemingway's personality, assumed I did the same, and admired the piece for the wrong reasons; that is, they thought that in describing that personality accurately I was ridiculing or attacking it. Other people didn't like the way Hemingway talked...they didn't like his freedom; they didn't like his not taking himself seriously...In fact, they didn't like Hemingway to be Hemingway. They wanted him to be somebody else – probably themselves.⁴⁶

Her brilliant introspection resounds as loudly as both Glass' and Raeburn's considerations of the author. Ross' profile, because it is honest, bursts the mythical image of Hemingway. The violent reaction against the piece derives from reality coursing against what readers expect to be true. Instead of finding Ross' profile illuminating, they rage against the truth and cling firmly to their fabrication.

The authorial myth of "Papa" received further blows following the posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden*. Like *Beginners*, Hemingway's anomalous book exposes the fallacy surrounding his identity by presenting readers with a novel at odds with how the revered author was thought to regard sexuality and homosexuality. According to Glass,

The Garden of Eden unfolds along a private-public access that determines the primary roles of David Bourne's writerly practice and literary career. The main narrative as published concerns the intimate sexual life of Bourne and his new wife, Catherine, in which the wife initiates a series of transgender experiments that threaten her husband's masculine identity.⁴⁷

Glass argues that the novel's focus on androgyny upsets the cultural myth of Hemingway and allows for a greater introspection into his childhood, in which his mother dressed him as a girl, and into his "series of marriages to boyish, short-haired women."⁴⁸

Once again, examination of a literary pariah against the author's canonized image reveals fiction's ability to echo its own story. David, in *The Garden of Eden*, keeps a secret journal documenting his experimental sex life. As the lost novel itself is a document long-hidden from the public eye, released only after its posthumous discovery, connections must be drawn between *The Garden of Eden* and the fictitious ribald journal – which David's wife, Catherine, eventually publishes. Similarly to Hemingway, David writes masculine stories about Africa to appease his readership as he simultaneously scribbles documentation of his hidden and decreasing individuality. Hemingway's literary acknowledgment of his status as author-function is captivating in that it reveals he can see his constraints, but even the patriarch of American modernism can do nothing but loathe his cage in private moans.

CHAPTER THREE: A VOID

In any case,
try not to mourn for me too much. I want you to know
I was happy when I was here.

— Raymond Carver, *My Death*¹

3.1 A Necessary Death

Because Foucault's dismissal of the author offers no substitution for the absent source of authority, the question "Who speaks?" continues to necessitate an answer. In 1968, before Foucault's "What Is an Author?," Roland Barthes approached the author's demise by introducing a theory more drastic than Foucault's. For Barthes, the author does not disappear within the author-function, but dies altogether. In Barthes' version of the author's death, the reader becomes the one who speaks, though not necessarily the one who writes. While Foucault argues that the author-function came into being over time and is bound to change, Barthes maintains, "no doubt it has always been that way."² For Barthes, the author's voice loses its origin at the moment of writing. Hence, an author is never more than the instance of writing.³

In *The Death and Return of the Author*, Seán Burke courses against Barthes' approach first by drawing the obvious connection between Barthes' death of the author to Nietzsche's death of God. The association is unavoidable, and certainly Barthes assumes his readers will draw parallels between the German philosopher's announcement and his own. Burke finds this platform untenable:

The attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, of being the first uncaused cause, purpose and end of the world are affirmed a priori of the Christian God: they inhere in his definition, without them He is not God. Not so for the author though: we can, without contradiction, conceive of authors who do not issue "single theological messages," who do not hold a univocal

mastery over their texts. There are indeed even conceptions of authorship that are determinately anti-theological.⁴

Burke believes Barthes argues against a condition that need not be argued against, finding no literary or critical evidence in the twentieth century to suggest Barthes' understanding that readers consider writers autonomous. Burke suggests Wimsatt and Beardsley succeeded in 1946 when they cautioned against "the danger of confusing personal and poetic studies" in "The Intentional Fallacy."⁵ But is Barthes really "aimed at a target that [has] long since retreated out of range," as Burke suggests?⁶ If so, why does Burke, elsewhere in his study, admit "The Death of the Author" to be "the single most influential meditation on the question of authorship in modern times?"⁷ Barthes proves "The Death of the Author" to be necessary when he writes, "capitalist ideology...has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author."⁸ Also, Barthes recognizes the limits the New Critics constrained themselves within in their approach to the author: "the new criticism has done no more than consolidate [the author's power]" he writes.⁹ Clearly, Barthes imbues his theory with more drastic measures than a New Critical approach. Wimsatt and Beardsley entice their readers to focus on the poem and not the intention of the poet, while Barthes' argument goes beyond authorial intention. The New Critics cautioned, "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle"; the poststructuralist approach excises the possibility of the oracle's existence altogether.¹⁰ Burke's analysis of Barthes remains insensitive to the subtleties constituting the differences between theories.

Burke's own assertions often negate his argument. His thesis on what constitutes an author speaks directly to Foucault's author-function, a topic glaringly absent from his analysis. "In absolutely minimalist terms," Burke writes, "the author is that principle

which unites its objects – whether collusive or discrete – that gather under his proper name.”¹¹ Burke’s focus on Foucault centers on *The Order of Things*, not “What Is an Author?” Clearly, the former neglects to acknowledge his poststructuralist approach in his attempt to denounce poststructuralism.

3.2 Deliverance

The author’s demise is the mere premise of Barthes’ essay, not his principal concern. “There is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him,” Barthes writes – “this someone being precisely the reader.”¹² “The Death of the Author” is more about its conclusion, that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author,” than its title.¹³ Before “The Death of the Author,” Barthes writes in 1960 about “a bastard type” produced by literature: “the author-writer.”¹⁴ The theorist’s later ideas, however, denounce the participatory relationship between author and reader:

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and [enter] into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.¹⁵

Carver’s later work suggests his own consolation with Barthes’ theory. His last story, “Errand,” deals distinctly with three authorial deaths. The story relates the death of Anton Chekov, whom Carver kept a portrait of above his desk. In the biographical short story, Chekov enters with a jovial demeanor into a restaurant, but soon begins to cough up blood. Carver then jumps seven years into the future, moments before the Russian writer’s death. Chekov is surrounded by his wife, Olga, and a doctor, who after realizing Chekov’s final minutes are at hand, orders the most expensive bottle of champagne from

the kitchen of the hotel where the writer has come to die. A recently awoken errand boy brings the champagne and glasses on a tray. After receiving a sizable tip, he leaves. Without a toast (“What on earth was there to drink to? To death?”), Chekov, Olga, and the doctor drink their champagne.¹⁶ Moments later, the writer dies. Olga is left alone with her husband’s corpse. Later, the errand boy comes back to collect the champagne bottle and empty glasses. This time he is clean-shaven, well dressed, and wide-awake. He notices the cork has fallen on the floor, but feels too awkward about picking it up. In fact, he feels awkward about everything; he knows not what to do with the situation and stands idly by. The young man is not used to having no one tell him what to do. Olga instructs him to find the best mortician in the city. Carver’s story then turns into a hypothetical scenario dreamt by the boy. When the narrative comes back to the present, Olga asks if he understands. The errand boy doesn’t say anything, but picks up the champagne bottle’s cork and restores what has been out of order.

Perhaps only Chekov’s death is obvious in the story. While using reality to illuminate literature can be limited in its ability to reveal significance, biographical information is instructive here. Carver wrote “Errand” in 1986, two years before lung cancer would claim his life. His own looming death plays an inevitable character foregrounded in “Errand.” The third death is perhaps the subtlest, though it certainly endows the story with its allegorical strength and significance concerning the Carver controversy. This death, of course, is the death of the author; not Chekov nor Carver, but the author who narrates, the authorial voice Carver learned was not his own. The clues permeate throughout the story, and this introspection and acceptance of the death of the author is perhaps what inspired Charles McGrath, who bought the story for *The New*

Yorker, to write, “he had somehow broken through” with “Errand.” He had “refashioned himself as an even greater writer.”¹⁷

Carver’s swan song layers these three deaths in what becomes a delicate and moving acceptance of the authoritative voice’s demise. Chekov represents Carver. “He was not allowed to speak,” Carver writes, referring directly to the author’s physical voice as well as his authorial voice.¹⁸ When Leo Tolstoy visits the ailing Chekov in the story, the two men disagree on perspectives of the afterlife. While Carver writes how Chekov doesn’t “believe in anything that couldn’t be apprehended by one or more of his five senses,” Tolstoy, the more established of the two Russian authors at the time, assumes “that all of us (humans and animals alike) will live on in a principle.”¹⁹ Tolstoy’s perspective includes an assurance that the physicality of the author is the mere supplement to the voice recorded in the work. The principle through which life continues is the author-function. Tolstoy worries not about his own death because the literary body congregated beneath his title will continue to exist, grow, and speak through his readers. Carver adds a line later in the story that further considers the boundaries of death and literary celebrity: “...he was clearly beyond help and was in his last days. He was also very famous.”²⁰ The last line falls completely aberrant unless considered with the understanding that Chekov’s fame will sustain him. Carver’s assertion that Chekov “was able to manage only six or seven lines a day” earns poignancy considering Carver himself wrote mostly poems towards the end of his life, pieces he had strength enough to complete in one sitting.

A significant gap appears in the physical text of “Errand,” four or five spaces, before the young man carrying the champagne enters Chekov’s room. The errand boy’s

arrival announces a transition. The narrator introduces him as “a tired-looking young man whose blond hair was standing up.”²¹ Carver ensures readers register the errand boy’s unkempt appearance to suggest he is not yet ready for the tasks before him. When he returns after Chekov’s demise, the boy “[seems] quite another person. Not only was he wide awake, but his plump cheeks were smooth-shaven, his hair was in place, and he appeared anxious to please.”²² Most interesting about the return of the errand boy is that readers now see from his perspective as he glances around the room. Before Chekov’s death, the boy had “stared out the open window toward the darkened city,” but no further description of what he saw is offered.²³ Now, however, readers see what the young man sees as he “[takes] in the details of the room. Bright sunlight [floods] through the open windows. The room [is] tidy and [seems] undisturbed, almost untouched. No garments [are] flung over chairs, no shoes, stockings, braces, or stays [are] in evidence, no open suitcases. In short, there [is] no clutter, nothing but the usual heavy pieces of hotel room furniture.”²⁴ As the reader’s glance had not followed the boy’s glance earlier, Carver’s decision to have the boy’s vision dictate the narrative after Chekov dies must be accounted for. Clearly, a transfer in the vein of Barthes’ assertion regarding the birth of the reader has occurred. Readers now follow the errand boy’s thoughts and visions because the latter is their representative. The story becomes less concerned with Chekov and his actions and more about the boy’s settling into a position he does not yet comprehend. As the author has died, the errand boy, like the reader, must now control the story. Carver relates that at first, the boy “[doesn’t] understand” and simply stands awaiting instructions from Olga. He then steers the narrative through his reverie:

The mortician would be in his forties, no doubt, or maybe early fifties – bald, solidly built, wearing steel-frame spectacles set very low on his nose. He would be modest, unassuming, a man who would ask only the most direct and necessary questions. An apron. Probably he would be wearing an apron. He might even be wiping his hands on a dark towel while he listened to what was being said. There'd be a faint whiff of formaldehyde on his clothes. But it was all right, and the young man shouldn't worry. He was a grown up now and shouldn't be frightened or repelled by any of this.²⁵

Farther into the boy's imagined narrative, Carver writes that when he "mentions the name of the deceased, the mortician's eyebrows rise just a little."²⁶ Thus Chekov's name still functions with effect beyond the author's demise; the story continues, but it is the reader who must convey significance from the fragments left behind by the missing author. Throughout his ruminations, the boy/reader continues to hold the vase he had brought up to the room. The vase becomes an obvious symbol for the story itself. Following the death of the author, the reader is left with the form of the story; the shape and empty vessel with which they must decide what to do. The "errand" is the task of announcing the author's death and reestablishing order and continuity to the narrative. The young man proves himself autonomous by picking up the champagne cork on the floor while "still gripping the vase"; he finishes Carver's final story completely on his own.²⁷

Also of interest with "Errand" is Carver's neglect towards plagiarism. The biographical information about Chekov comes directly from *Chekov*, a biography by Henri Troyat, translated by Michael Henry Heim. Apparently, Carver gave Charles McGrath at *The New Yorker* "about a dozen sentences closely paraphrased from Heim's translation."²⁸ His lack of consideration for the other writers' text as property further suggests Carver's move away from considering literature as the autonomous creation of an author in lieu of approaching *Chekov* as public discourse.

3.3 All Work and No Play

In *Image – Music – Text*, where “The Death of the Author,” appears, Barthes includes an essay titled “From Work to Text.” In it, he outlines the difference between what constitutes a *work*, “a fragment of substance, occupying the space of books (in a library for example)” and a *text*, “a methodological field.”²⁹ The work can thus be associated in relation to the author-function as it constrains the text within physical boundaries, a presentation congenial to social and economic consumption. The text remains a fluid and indeterminate process that cuts across several works and has no determined author. Restoration of an authors’ published writing thus helps to expose the myth of an author and his or her work. As *Beginners* decenters *What We Talk About* as a definitive text, and as *The Garden of Eden* decenters Hemingway’s masculine image, an analysis of William Faulkner’s *Sartoris* and its restored counterpart, *Flags in the Dust*, exemplifies how restored texts expose literary fallacy.

Faulkner sent *Flags in the Dust* to his New York publisher, Horace Liveright, in 1927. According to Douglas Day, who edited the restored edition of Faulkner’s novel in 1973, Liveright told Faulkner his manuscript was “too diffuse, too lacking in plot and structure,” and that “no amount of revision would be able to salvage it.”³⁰ After failed attempts to edit the text himself, Faulkner sent his draft to Ben Wasson, his agent in New York, to “please try and sell it for [him],” while Faulkner switched his attention to *The Sound and the Fury*.³¹ Eventually, Harcourt, Brace & Company “agreed to publish it, provided that someone other than Faulkner perform the extensive cutting job that Harcourt felt was necessary.”³² Wasson took the task upon himself, and *Sartoris* was

published in January of 1929. However, Faulkner kept his original draft of *Flags in the Dust*, which his daughter posthumously escorted to publication via Random House.

Like Carver, Faulkner preferred his first draft to the edited version. “A cabbage has grown, matured,” Faulkner says in metaphor. “You look at that cabbage; it is not symmetrical; you say, I will trim this cabbage off and make it art; I will make it resemble a peacock or a pagoda or three doughnuts. Very good, I say: you do that, then the cabbage will be dead.”³³ While an argument over which of Faulkner’s two works is better remains of no interest here, examining the restored edition against its initially published form exposes the disparity between work and text. As Philip Cohen writes in “William Faulkner, the Crisis of Masculinity, and Textual Instability,”

Literary scholars and teachers ought to make use of the recently reconceptualized discipline of textual scholarship – the study of the genesis, transmission, and editing of texts – because the entire textual process of a work can be an important body of evidence for critical readers, regardless of their theoretical orientation.³⁴

While Cohen aims to examine Faulkner’s masculinity, he does so by playing one work against another, thus revealing the “text” in Barthes’ use of the term: something held not in hand, but in concept and abstraction.³⁵ By following Faulkner’s excised material, Cohen argues, readers and critics can discern “anxieties about masculinity” essential to Faulkner’s “artistic development.”³⁶ To get there, however, “we need to examine multiple editions of evolving works in order to be able to comment on the works more judiciously.”³⁷

Considering the excised material between *Beginners* and *What We Talk About* rewards readers with a closer understanding of the text as well. A single “work” alone fails to offer the same depth available in an analysis of Carver’s ephemeral “text.” Alone,

Beginners and *What We Talk About* are the mere “fragment[s] of substance.” Each represents “an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign,” rather than the “passage” or “overcrossing” that Barthes seeks in texts.³⁸ Each in its independence supports the myth of Carver by assuming him as the “owner of his work,” while comparing the two opens a Barthesian “social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor decoder.”³⁹ Hence, collecting the fragments left between *Beginners* and *What We Talk About* simultaneously erodes the fabricated image of Carver and shows readers they’ve been writing all along.

CHAPTER FOUR: JACQUES, JACK, AND RAY

That boyfriend of hers is a biker. Mike. What's going to happen to Mike? What's going to happen to us all? "My God," she'd say. But God wasn't having any of it. He'd washed his hands of us.

— Raymond Carver, "Where Is Everyone?" in *Beginners*¹

4.1 Jacques

Derrida names a work's signals of its underlying text *traces*. In his lecture-turned pivotal deconstructionist essay, "Differance," Derrida delivers a theory to support the open-endedness of literature. As with Foucault and Barthes, Derrida rejects the idea of a static text with an absolute meaning and fixed confines. The text contains not the presence of meaning, but traces, or signs pointing to the absence of signification. The term differance is employed with the intentional misspelling to refer "to differing, *both* as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation."² This most difficult term thus serves similarly to the author-function in that it acts as a placeholder for the absent primal meaning. Simultaneously, the term denotes the differences between differences, though Derrida insists differance is "neither a *word* nor a *concept*."³ It resists all meaning while referring to "the closure of the conceptual order and denomination, a closure that is effected in the functioning of traces" and the entire system of complex and irreducible signs that stand-in for the presence of determinable meaning.⁴

Derrida's theory of traces reveals both works of principal concern here, *What We Talk About* and *Beginners*, as secondary significations in pursuit of a concrete meaning never to be caught. The works are systems of language that simulate their own absences; they are in fact, to use Derrida's terminology, "the trace of traces...a trace, and

a trace of the effacement of a trace.”⁵ Thus Barthes’ notion of a text can never be conceived in total form, but only referred to by the fragmented works that represent an inability to signify. When reading, the reader is only tracking down traces, not locating meaning.

4.2 Jack

In his essay “The Straight Line Will Take You Only to Death: The Scroll Manuscript and Contemporary Literary Theory,” Joshua Kupetz explains exactly how *On the Road* proves, anachronistically, Derrida’s deflection of fixed meaning. Examining Kupetz’s identification of Derridian clues in Kerouac’s American anthem of youth and rebellion prepares a final deconstructive consideration of Raymond Carver and his signifying short stories. In his analysis, Kupetz considers *On the Road* as it was published in 1957 against the recently released edition, *On the Road: The Original Scroll*, which reproduces Kerouac’s first draft word-for-word.

Carl Solomon at A.A. Wyn publishing firm rejected Kerouac’s first draft because, according to Kupetz, Solomon believed “that a publishable novel should demonstrate unity among its verbal structures in order to communicate clearly its meaning.”⁶ In its scroll manifestation, *On the Road* presents nothing of a coherent meaning. In fact, the work suggests as its founding principle the rejection of meaning’s possibility. The first line of the original scroll reads, “I first met Neal not long after my father died...I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won’t bother to talk about except that it really had something to do with my father’s death and my awful feeling that everything was dead.”⁷ Here Kerouac states the thread of apathetic futility that recurs

throughout the draft. Continually, the scroll references the absence of the father, the missing authoritative figure who can provide order and coherence to a vast landscape where God and structure have gone missing. “I looked everywhere for the father of Neal Cassady,” Kerouac later writes. “Nowhere to be found. Either you find someone who looks like your father in places like Montana, or you look for a friend’s father where he is no more, that’s what you do.”⁸ Interestingly, the 1957 originally published novel excises references to the absence of fathers, opting more for a plot surrounding a young man and his pursuit of love. “I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up,” the revised first line reads.⁹

Kupetz says the revisions drew influence from the New Critical approach editors were taking in the late fifties. They designed books for readers to locate meaning within via internal qualities and verbal structures. Kupetz argues part of the danger of this approach lies in the tendency for New Critics to extract valuable clues from the text and ignore the less significant prose. Kerouac’s proximity to Derrida comes from his rejection of a New Critical approach and of the novel’s confining form altogether. Instead of filling a prefabricated form with his own words, the chief Beat set to “bust out from the European narrative into Mood Chapters of an American poetic ‘sprawl’ – if you can call careful chapters and careful prose a sprawl.”¹⁰ Kerouac wished to mimic in language what he observed in his country: a post-war disparity where mechanical approaches to an absent referent come up short. With his method, Kerouac translated the futility of attempting to locate lost meaning, the absent father or God. The original scroll directs readers towards the impossibility of a fixed meaning by becoming an empty referent itself; a sign, or a trace. The published edition erects an artifice over this Derridian

phenomenon. As with *Beginners* and *What We Talk About*, the former deconstructs the latter.

Most directly in the vein of Derrida, Kupetz relates how Kerouac meant to capture his belief that “the experience of life is a regular series of deflections” via “the circle of despair.”¹¹ This circle of despair, for Kerouac, always suggests something immediately unattainable. In Derrida, the circle of despair translates as “differance.” Derrida writes, “Differance can refer to the whole complex of its meanings at once, for it is immediately and irreducibly multivalent...It refers to this whole complex of meanings not only when it is supported by a language or interpretative context (like any signification), but it already does so somehow of itself.”¹² Employing Derrida’s language without referencing the theorist directly, Kupetz writes that “traces of the circle of despair” appear in the scroll manuscript and in *On the Road* as the characters “attempt to find purpose in their perpetual movements and thwarted plans.”¹³ The characters in Kerouac’s novel are not alone in succumbing to this chain of empty signifiers. Referring to the scroll, which has no paragraph breaks, Kupetz writes,

Kerouac’s readers find themselves equally stranded if they approach his mountain of unbroken text anticipating that it will offer an inherent meaning, if their expectations and interpretive strategies are based upon linearity and predetermined by novelistic conventions. However, if a reader approaches Kerouac’s sprawling prose and allows the narrative to turn, to reverse, to be set back upon itself in a series of deflections, and accepts that the shifting *horizon* of signification is part of the experience of meaning, the reader can proceed and be “headed there at last.”¹⁴

Once again, Kupetz appropriates Derrida’s language for his analysis. “We have not to deal with the *horizons*, of modified presents – past of future – ” Derrida writes in

“Differance,” “but with a ‘past’ that has never been nor will ever be present, whose ‘future’ will never be produced or reproduced in the form of presence.”¹⁵

Kupetz’s final statement, one most congenial to the arguments presented here, is that Kerouac’s original scroll enlists itself as a kamikaze casualty in debunking the myth of *On the Road*. Deconstructing the originally published edition via revealing the editorial strings likewise calls the idea of a fixed original into question altogether. As with *Beginners* and *What We Talk About*, Kerouac’s two editions work against one another to underscore the impossibility of inherent meaning existing in each version’s “original” counterpart.

For Derrida, the absence of meaning reflects a positive approach to literature and systems of language. Just as Kupetz identifies Kerouac’s goal as “the unknown center,” Derrida uses the absence of centers as the basis for another of his seminal essays, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.”¹⁶ This absence, for Derrida, is positive, as language becomes playful due to the disparities surrounding signs. The rupture opens what he calls “freeplay,” or the possibility of infinite substitutions acting as placeholders within a finite field of language; “the disruption of presence.”¹⁷

Derrida does, however, acknowledge the potential fear in accepting these terms. Working against structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida writes that for the structuralists, the absent center “is thus the sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay.”¹⁸ Lévi-Strauss and his team mourn the absence of inherent meaning rather than revel in the infinitum of possibilities at hand. Many stories in *What We Talk About* share this negative approach to the absent center. While Kerouac abides within the Derridian school of freeplay, where the vast and open country, like the

vast and open novel, can indeed instill fear but also offer a plane where creativity compensates for the missing center, Carver's work presents the missing center as always violent and terrifying. Kerouac and his characters abandon the fallacy of structure willfully in lieu of an existential plunge into empty space. Carver's literary plunges occur only after Lish propels the fictional characters, followed by the not-yet-fictional author, into the void. Unlike Kerouac, Carver didn't intend to incorporate deflections of meaning into his stories as representations of his writing process. He included numerous references to existential themes in his original drafts, though their absence from *What We Talk About* doesn't earn its self-reflective import until readers become aware Lish excised them. Then, they become potential references to their own absences as well as references to Carver's authoritative absence from his work. Similarly to how Lish's removal of violent description leads to terse signs of greater violence, Lish's manipulation of absences amplifies the stories' existential and decentralized qualities.

4.3 Ray

In "I Could See the Smallest Things," the fifth story of *What We Talk About*, Lish manipulates the narrator's final sentence to read, "I thought for a minute of the world outside my house, and then I didn't have any more thoughts except the thought that I had to hurry up and sleep."¹⁹ By revising Carver's original line, which concludes, "I didn't have any more thoughts except I thought maybe I could sleep," Lish increases the story's element of fear. Carver's version of the narrator, Nancy, depicts a banal scenario of a woman trying to fall asleep, though an unknown fear haunts Lish's Nancy as she turns to sleep for solace.

In the story, originally much lengthier and titled “Want To See Something?” Nancy wakes in the middle of the night and hears her garden gate unlatched and swinging. When she goes outside to close it, she finds her neighbor, Sam, a re-married widower who has fallen out of favor with Nancy’s husband, Cliff, killing slugs with a white powder. Carver’s draft has Nancy relate pages of Sam’s turbulent past. “Sometimes at night we’d hear a howling sound from over there that he must have been making,” she says. “I’d shiver. Cliff would fix himself another drink.”²⁰ She continues on about Sam’s “flower child” daughter and an albino baby born to Sam and his new wife.²¹ Lish abbreviates Nancy’s ruminations considerably.

Sam and Cliff used to be friends. Then one night they got to drinking. They had words. The next thing, Sam had built a fence and then Cliff built one too.

That was after Sam had lost Millie, gotten married again, and became a father again all in the space of no time at all. Millie had been a good friend to me up until she died. She was only forty-five when she did it. Heart failure. It hit her just as she was coming in the drive. The car kept going and went through the back of the carport.²²

Immediately Lish cuts back to the present, with Sam telling Nancy to observe the slugs. By crafting Nancy into a less familiar character, (Lish even excises her name in his version) “I Could See the Smallest Things” creates more gaps between which significance slips. Connecting Sam’s bizarre behavior and his personal tragedies becomes more difficult. Lish forces the reader to attempt finding significance between the character’s actions and their motives. The very inability to draw an encapsulating meaning from the story echoes Nancy’s fear of the blank exterior beyond her gate, which, in both versions, she still forgets to latch.

Carver's original draft includes references to existential themes, though none of them come across as strongly as when they're absent. Before trying to fall asleep, Carver's Nancy considers her regrets and feels the desire to voice her fears to the sleeping Cliff. "It didn't matter that he was someplace else and couldn't hear any of what I was saying," she says.²³ She tells Cliff that they are "going nowhere fast, and it was time to admit it, even though there was maybe no help for it."²⁴ She feels better after she confesses her fears. Lish's ending is predictably more strange.

I opened my eyes and lay there. I gave cliff a little shake. He cleared his throat. He swallowed. Something caught and dribbled in his chest.

I don't know. It made me think of those things that Sam Lawton was dumping powder on.

I thought for a minute of the world outside my house, and then I didn't have any more thoughts except the thought that I had to hurry up and sleep.²⁵

Instead of alleviating her fears by voicing them, Nancy says nothing to Cliff. She instead considers a slug, the disturbing symbol of the exterior's encroachment upon her life, as latent within her husband's sleeping body.

"I Could See the Smallest Things" achieves an existential quality superior to "Want to See Something?" not only because of Lish's stronger writing and expert delivery of fear, but also because, like Kerouac's circle of despair, the story becomes a comment about itself as literature. The story in *Beginners* leaves the reader with a calm, though fallacious, sense of order restored. *What We Talk About's* version sustains the reader's inability to form meaning and the resulting discomfort.

The same feat of decentralization occurs with the title story of each edition. In both "Beginners" and "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," a set of

couples chats idly before going to dinner. In the course of their conversation, a doctor named Herb, (or Mel, in Lish's version) attempts to relate to his friends "what real love is."²⁶ He tells a story of an elderly couple he was called in to operate on. They had been in a car accident and were not expected to live long. Regardless, the couple convalesces slowly over the course of two weeks, though their injuries prevent them from seeing one another. The old man, Henry, who recovers more quickly than his wife, Anna, tells Herb in "Beginners" about dancing to records with Anna in their youth, alone in their living room while snowed-in for the winter.

Both Henry and Anna recover in "Beginners." "I just had a card from Henry a few days ago," Herb says. "I guess that's one of the reasons they're on my mind right now. That, and what we were saying about love earlier."²⁷ For Herb, the old couple exemplifies love in their dedication to one another and their ability to weather disaster. "It ought to make us all feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we were talking about, when we talk about love," he says before finishing his story.²⁸ Herb insists that his friends and he are mere "beginners" at love compared to what Anna and Henry shared.²⁹

Lish's love is far less optimistic or concrete. Carver has Anna and Herb recover and move to El Paso, while Lish keeps them separated by body casts. For Mel, the nameless old man's state of misery, caused by his inability to see his wife, is what love is. "I mean, it was killing the old fart just because he couldn't *look* at the fucking woman," he says.³⁰

What Carver and Lish talk about when we talk about love thus varies significantly between the two stories. The latter never allows love to succeed as a healer. Mel ends his story and leaves the couple in misery, suspended in their bandage cocoons.

He promised his friends he would “tell [them] what real love is,” and for him, the story was adequate in doing so. Real love becomes a source of pain as the center is removed from each of the old victims' lives. As with “The Bath,” Lish excises Carver’s tender ending and leaves the reader with a vacant space denying resolution. Again, the editor has carved an existential void into the writer’s story, rendering it capable of a deconstructive self-analysis.

4.4 Upon Closing

Despite the fear and sadness mourned in the edited short stories of Raymond Carver, the intention of this consideration is not to reveal a burden placed on the reader to account for the author’s absent voice of authority, but an encouragement to resist constructing a fallacy upon the abysmal landscape of literature. The location of digestible coherence will forever remain an impossible task, and neither language nor its writer insists art can be anchored by a final interpretation or telling lucidity. Restored editions may not restore their author’s voice, as publishers or surviving spouses may intend, but they do succeed in dismantling the phantom edifices that cover the tracks of their literary endeavors. Qualitative assessment aside, the writer’s jagged fragments deflate the myth that mutes writing from telling its own story.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: THERE AND NOT THERE

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³ *Ibid.*, 73, 92.

⁴ Raymond Carver, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, "Letters to an Editor." *The New Yorker*, December 24, 2007. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/12/24/071224fa_fact_carver (accessed August 6, 2011), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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¹⁵ Ibid., 347.

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²⁰ Ibid.

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²² Raymond Carver, "Raymond Carver to David Sexton," July, 1985. In *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, ed. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 125.

²³ Ibid., 126

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²⁵ Ibid.

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²⁹ Charles McGrath, “I, Editor, Nay – Author,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/28/weekinreview/28mcgrath.html?_r=1&ref=raymondcarver (accessed August 6, 2011).

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³¹ Ibid., 2.

³² Max, 1.

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, “Prolegomena to Any Future Carver Studies.” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 46 (Spring 2006), 3.

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³⁶ Max, 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Carver, “Letters to an Editor,” 6.

CHAPTER TWO: DISAPPEARER

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² Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David. H. Richter, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 905.

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⁷ Robinson, Charles. E. "Texts in Search of an Editor: Reflections on *The Frankenstein Notebooks* and on Editorial Authority," in *Textual Studies and the Common Reader: Essays on Editing Novels and Novelists*, ed. Alexander Pettit (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 91-92.

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¹⁰ Sklenicka, 314.

¹¹ Carver, *Beginners*, 1.

¹² Carver, *What We Talk About*, 4.

¹³ Carver, *Beginners*, 2.

¹⁴ Carver, *What We Talk About*, 5.

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¹⁶ Carver, *What We Talk About*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ Foucault, "What Is an Author," 905.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* 910.

²² *Ibid.* 908.

²³ Carver, "Letters to an Editor," 6-7.

²⁴ Foucault, "What Is an Author," 908.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Barth, "A Few Words About Minimalism," 1.

²⁹ Foucault, "What Is an Author," 909.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Editorial, 4.

³² Carver, *Beginners*, 15.

³³ Carver, "Raymond Carver to David Sexton," 115.

³⁴ Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 910.

³⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 108-9.

³⁶ Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 140.

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³⁸ Ibid. 139.

³⁹ Ibid. 141.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 150.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ John Raeburn, *Fame Became Him: Hemingway as Public Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5.

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⁴⁶ Lillian Ross, *Portrait of Hemingway* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999),
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⁴⁷ Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 170.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

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⁷ Burke, 18.

⁸ Barthes, “Death of Author,” 143.

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¹² Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” 148.

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¹⁶ Raymond Carver, "Errand," in *Where I'm Calling From: Selected Stories* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1989), 520.

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¹⁸ Carver, "Errand," 513.

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²² *Ibid.*, 522.

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²⁶ *Ibid.*, 526.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

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²⁹ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

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³⁶ Cohen, 67.

³⁷ Cohen, 67.

³⁸ Barthes, "From Work to Text," 156, 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160, 164.

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⁴ *Ibid.*

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¹¹ Ibid., 89.

¹² Derrida, “Differance,” 936.

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¹⁵ Derrida, “Différance,” 945. My emphasis.

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²⁰ Carver, *Beginners*, 33.

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²² Carver, *What We Talk About*, 33.

²³ Carver, *Beginners*, 37.

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²⁵ Carver, *What We Talk About*, 36.

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