McGill University professor Kerry McSweeney’s *The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse* should be well received by Carver scholars. While the book includes chapters on the merits of realist fiction writers Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Flannery O’Connor, it reads, in some ways, as a book on Carver’s influences.

The chapter on Chekhov distinguishes between aesthetic and interpretive meanings of Chekhov’s stories, relative to his realist presentation of experience, and McSweeney connects Carver’s idea of realist short fiction, as “something glimpsed from the corner of the eye, in passing,” to Chekhov’s idea of compactness. McSweeney’s focus on Joyce’s “stories of my childhood,” that is, the first three stories in *Dubliners*, uses a cultural studies approach to consider how Joyce’s urban settings require realist prose fiction to present the cultural milieu of the stories; his analysis of this “trilogy” of childhood stories will be popular with anyone using *Dubliners* when teaching Joyce. An excellent chapter on Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories, and “the dynamics of interrelationships among stories in a sequence,” offers a close textual reading of the Adams pieces by analyzing drafts and deleted passages of the stories; scholars who work in the area of short story sequences and composites will find this chapter of special interest. McSweeney’s discussion of Flannery O’Connor, as a writer of the realist short story in the tradition of Chekhov and Joyce, is centered on her writing both within the realm of dramatic Christian realism and the reigning principles of New Criticism.

“Carver’s Dark View of Things,” the fifth and final chapter, recaps much of the
prevailing view of Carver’s stories as tales of the working poor, shaped by “the limitations of his subject matter, the minimalist means and the bleak vision” that he adapted from Hemingway’s fatalistic code. Through this lens, McSweeney discusses “Chef’s House,” “Menudo,” “Neighbors,” and, of course, “Cathderal,” while he offers a fine brief analysis on “Intimacy.” But his greater focus is on three longer stories, “What’s in Alaska?” “What We Talk About When We Talk about Love,” and “Feathers.” Regarding the latter, McSweeney offers an interesting discussion concerning how, had Carver not included the “retrospective comment on what happened” to the narrator and Fran, then “the close of ‘Feathers’ would have been as affirmative” as that of “Cathedral.” In addition to discussions of middle and late Carver stories, McSweeney’s notes G. P. Lainsbury’s argument that the early story “The Cabin” is both a corrupted version of Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories and a cultural commentary on the late 20th century American quest of “something heroic.” All in all, the chapter engages in detailed and interesting discussions of a diverse selection of Carver’s fiction.

While The Realist Short Story of the Powerful Glimpse examines the work of five important realists, it is a valuable book for other reasons as well. Fiction writing teachers will find the opening chapter, which is stitched together with statements from Carver on fiction writing, an effective introduction to short story theory, or at least the ideas of one of the 20th centuries most important practitioners. Moreover, by ending its study with Raymond Carver, McSweeney’s book becomes a useful reference for anyone interested in tracing Carver’s literary influences. All in all, McSweeney’s book makes an excellent contribution to Carver studies.