Introduction

When I told a colleague a few years back that I was starting an academic journal, his response at the time surprised me. The first two issues, he told me, are easy. But if you can get past the third issue, he added, it’ll be fine. After a lengthy delay, the third issue of The Raymond Carver Review is finally posting. Comprised of three peer reviewed essays, two bilingual poems—Spanish and Italian—and an interview, this miscellany offers a range of material and genre that expand the possibilities of the RCR.

Raymond Carver’s publishing history begins in 1961, with two stories, “The Furious Season” in Selection and “The Father” in Toyon. His first poem, “The Brass Ring,” followed in Targets in 1962. Yet that same year, he also had his only play produced, the one-act Carnations. Though he never wrote another single-authored play again, readers can see residual effects of his dramatic sense in early short fictions such as “Little Things” in which the characters move almost across a stage, from bedroom to living room to kitchen, as the action rises as the conflict escalates. In 1982, twenty years later, interestingly, Carver was contacted by director Michael Cimino to rework an existing screenplay by Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on the life of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, a project he accepted and co-wrote with Tess Gallagher. The huge screenplay—some 220 pages, nearly twice the length of an average screenplay Carver notes in his introduction to the 1985 Capra Press excerpt, was delivered to Cimino but never produced, nor was a second screenplay, Purple Lake, that he and Gallagher co-wrote in 1983, or the third unidentified screenplay mentioned by Gallagher in her essay.
“Two by Two” in *Tell It All*. Even more interestingly, also in 1982, to pass the time on their drive from Syracuse, New York to Port Angles, Washington, Carver and Gallagher co-wrote two one-act plays—*The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?*—for a playwriting contest sponsored by The Actors Theater in Louisville, Kentucky. Carver had returned to playwriting, co-authoring with his screenplay co-author Tess Gallagher.

Michael Hemmingson’s “‘Will we still be us?’: Raymond Carver’s Short Plays” offers a study of the three one-act plays in Carver’s career: *Carnations* when he was a student at Humboldt; *The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?* in collaboration with Tess Gallagher. The plays are not generally available for the general reader, published in limited, out-of-print and foreign editions. For Carver scholars, however, they shed necessary light on the writer’s evolution and life—as a student, and as a collaborator with his second spouse. Hemmingson examines the plays’ common themes also found in the short stories: infidelity, marriage dynamics, lies, a man’s deficit at being a husband, and a woman’s body image. Yet he also considers some of the weaknesses in the composition of the plays: Carver was influenced by the absurdist in *Carnations*, and while it incorporates the surreal imagery of absurdism, it lacks the political elements of the absurdist school of writing. *The Favor* and *Can I Get You Anything?* are scenes rather than complete works, written more as an experiment between the two writers rather than as a serious effort to compose a work of stagecraft. Nevertheless, all three works offer the potential of future Carver scholarship that go beyond his poems, essays, and stories.

When asked by Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee to name some writers he admired, Carver quickly identified James Joyce, and *Dubliners* especially. Kerry McSweeney, in his study of realist short stories, notes Carver’s use of the Joycean
epiphany, even if in what he calls a loose, generalized way. No wonder then that John A. McDermott, in “American Epicleti: Using James Joyce to Read Raymond Carver,” offers Joyce as a lens for sharpening readers’ focus as they read Carver. “I am writing a series of epicleti,” James Joyce wrote of *Dubliners*. Scholars have seen this as a variation of the Greek word, “epiclesis,” the invocation in the mass when “transubstantiation” occurs. But in 1995, Wolfhard Steppe argued that the word Joyce had actually written was “epiclets,” or little epics, a reasonable, but much less intriguing coinage. Even without “epicleti” as a term, the act of literary transubstantiation is still a pertinent tool for examining both Joyce’s work and that of his literary descendants. Raymond Carver’s stories seem particularly “epicletic.” Carver’s later stories have been studied with narrative theology in mind, but his early stories are also ripe with transformative “epicletic” moments. By examining Joyce, readers gain understanding of Carver’s technique, especially in “Nobody Said Anything” and “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”

While Carver’s work has long been viewed as working class writing, it is not often enough considered within the broader context of social class issues. “The Gift of Anonymity: Social Class and Property in ‘Why Don’t You Dance?’” by Keith Abbott reconsiders how the placement and exchange of property affirms or destroys standards of status correlative to social class. Abbott borrows basic principles from both Native American potlatches and American consumer culture to provide fresh perspectives on the subtext of a story which is too easily relegated to the realm of situation comedy in which a young couple misconstrue what is a man’s attempt at making a social statement as nothing more than a yard sale. In his essay, Abbott analyses the ways in which, systemically, both potlatch and American class status procedures confirm or deny
affluence and/or status through the distribution of names and titles, goods, delivery systems, and donors or recipients. For Carver’s story, it is anonymity that is distributed, instead of positive or negative validation, and Abbott examines how anonymity is generated for participants, goods, and their venue for distribution. By doing so, Abbott locates “Why Don’t You Dance?” in class structure, and, but using Native American potlatch and American consumer culture, he opens up new territory for the study of Carver’s work through a cultural studies lens.

In the first of what will hopefully be the inclusion of relevant interviews in The Raymond Carver Review, David Muldoon talks with Carver’s Italian translator, Riccardo Duranti, who is himself a poet. Duranti discusses how Carver crosses cultures to appeal to Italian readers because of his exploring issues of sexual politics, betrayal, and violence, but especially of his speaking in a common register that has been Duranti’s challenge as a translator. These challenges include translating both the fiction and poetry, in their varied registers, so as not to lose Carver’s voice, between those “two ways of telling a story”; too much minimalism, he suggests, and the Italian “will be like sandpaper.” He expresses his interest in translating the pre-Lish stories and the later post-Lish work, from “Cathedral” onward into what Duranti sees as Carver’s entering “a wider arena” of writing.

Supplemental to Duranti’s discussions of translation, two bilingual poems are included, each a homage to Carver’s life and his poetry. Alessandro Martini’s “Ortensie” (“Hydrangeas”), submitted in Italian and translated by Vasiliki Fachard, narrates the details of a relationship that could have been written by Carver had the story come to him first. Additionally, “Escupiendo sangre” (“Spitting Blood”), submitted in Spanish and
English by Robert Gurney, connects the poet to incidences in Carver’s life, evoking a lament for his own father. Each poem, an homage to Carver’s poetry, reminds readers that poetry was the “other language” with which he wrote. By including these pieces, *The Raymond Carver Review* enters a wider arena for the study of the body of Carver’s writing.

*The Raymond Carver Review* welcomes Robert Pope to its Advisory Board; a professor at the University of Akron, Bob heard Carver read when he was a student in the University of Iowa’s MFA in creative writing program, and he is familiar to Carver scholars for his “Raymond Carver Speaking” interview in Gentry and Stull’s *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Joining the Editorial Board is David Houseman, a doctoral student at the University of Alberta whose specialization is in the Beats but whose interest in Carver brings him to the *RCR*. This issue might not have been possible except for the dedication and immense talent of Vickie Fachard, who joined me as co-editor with this issue. Her astoundingly good eye for revision, her always brilliant insights, and her talent for locating the always necessary question, her excellent editorial instincts, and her unwavering support and friendship consistently inspire me. *The Raymond Carver Review* is doing fine. I dedicate this issue to her.

Robert Miltner

Editor, *The Raymond Carver Review*