

**EVERYDAY OTHERNESS: THE EDITED AND
UNEDITED RAYMOND CARVER**

By Catherine Humble

Student no. 22097227

Goldsmiths College

PhD English

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Catherine Humble

Abstract

This thesis is a reading of Raymond Carver's edited and unedited writing with respect to unsymbolised mental spaces. Carver's edited writing is characterized by clipped sentences and solid silences and is often defined as 'minimalist'. His unedited writing is more garrulous and sprawling, which has led critics to label it 'realist'. I consider how these different forms of language present different kinds of resistances to clear meaning. I read these resistances in terms of different mentally unsymbolised spaces: unconscious spaces that resist symbolisation. In doing so, I consider the psychoanalytic thought of Lacan, along with Laplanche and Green, as well as Blanchot and Attridge on literary otherness.

In the curt sentences juxtaposed with hard silences of Carver's edited, so-called minimalist writing, I consider how highly fixed meanings are split from radically unsymbolised spaces. Here I find a theoretical echo in my reading of Lacan's originary linguistic castration: his account of the first traumatic linguistic cut that is inflicted on the young infant, splitting the infant between a pre-linguistic state and a state of meaning. I suggest that Carver's edited, minimalist language stages this original cutting into being. His prose stages the very way in which everyday language inflicts a certain cut and his writing takes this cut to an extreme.

In the more sprawling so-called 'realist' language of the unedited Carver, the unsymbolised and meaning entwine rather than bifurcate. Bringing together Carver, Lacan, and Blanchot, in the unedited_ realist prose I conceive the unsymbolised as *held, sheltered*, even quietly hidden but not annulled by linguistic meaning. Carver's unedited writing stages psychical alterity as quietly imbricated_ in the texture of language, fostering a more bodily expression of the unsymbolised.

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Introduction: Reading Carver

Carver and the literary other

The 'other' can be an overworked term in academic discourse, used in a general way to refer to a variety of phenomena: the culturally excluded, the inexplicable, that which resists conventional rules, defies ideological models, or is outside reason. In the field of literary studies, 'the other' is predominantly used to refer to a form of linguistic expression that disrupts finite meaning, disturbing clear semantic reference. My examination of literary otherness in the edited and unedited Carver is informed by significant incursions in this field in the last 50 years, primarily by Maurice Blanchot and Derek Attridge.

In order to do justice to the uniqueness of Carver's writing it is not my intention to map theory onto his work. Instead, I try to show how theoretical writing brings out the alterity in Carver's writing, and also how Carver's literary prose brings out the otherness in the theory. In accordance with Paul de Man, who rebukes parasitic relations between theory and literature where 'we have a creative part' that is other and 'a reflective or critical part that feeds on this' (de Man 1983: 143), I see reading Carver's literature as productive of reading of the theory and the theory as immanent to the literature.

When describing the effect of his own writing, or of writing he admires, Carver is often drawn to terms that resound with otherness, with what is outside of clear meaning: the 'something else', the 'whatness', the 'heft' of writing (2001: 223-224).

Citing Joyce, Carver refers to an ambiguous ‘*whatness*’ of writing, which ‘leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance’ (2001: 223; my italics). He says, ‘The best of fiction ought to have, for want of a better word, *heft* to it . . . But whatever one wants to call it (it doesn’t even need naming), everyone recognises it when it declares itself’ (2001: 223). This indeterminate ‘heft’ of writing, which ‘declares itself’ (suggesting a performative dimension) is outside clear meaning – it doesn’t even need naming, says Carver.¹ Indeed, Carver’s widow Tess Gallagher speaks of the ‘transcendent’ quality of his writing, where this transcendence stems ‘from the whole, but also from the small things: phrasing and syntax, the recognition or surprise of characters, the-line-by-line play of the telling’ (Carver 2001: ix). For Carver himself, the power of his writing arises from ‘the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story’, but also from the unsaid, ‘the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things’ (Carver 2001: 92). Thus, in Carver’s own words, his writing works according to meaning and the other, with the two mobilised in tandem.

Maurice Blanchot

In thinking about the literary other in Carver this thesis draws on a number of Blanchot’s texts, such as *The Writing of the Disaster*, ‘The Gaze of Orpheus’ and ‘Everyday speech’ (Blanchot 1995b; Blanchot 1999; Blanchot, 1987). But my exploration of ‘realist’ otherness in the edited and unedited Carver is primarily a

¹ The term ‘heft’ has a particular meaning in American English that Raymond Carver used to connote the weight or gravity of writing (2001: 223). But the *weight* or *gravity* of writing suggests more than simply its linguistic content, something more indistinct. ‘Heft’ also has the etymology of ‘heave’, ‘force’, ‘stress’, and ‘pressure’ (OED online), again alluding to the indeterminate power of writing.

sustained response to Blanchot's provocative essay 'Literature and the Right to Death' (Blanchot 1995a), which I will outline here.

Literature is 'what I cannot grasp', writes Blanchot, 'in the face of which I shall be unable to remain the same, for this reason: in the presence of something other, I become other' (Blanchot 1995a: 314). In 'Literature and the Right to Death' Blanchot distinguishes between two slopes of literature (1995a: 300-349). The 'first slope is meaningful prose', what Blanchot calls 'common language' (1995a: 333): the type of language that conceals the gap between the word and thing. The second slope is 'literature [that] refuses to name anything, when it turns a name into something obscure and meaningless, witness to the primordial obscurity' (1995a: 329) – this indeterminacy of literature captures something of primordial being prior to its relation with symbolic meaning. Blanchot's conception of these slopes is based on the premise that 'common language' operates according to the Hegelian dialectical negation, where the word negates the 'real' thing to accede to meaning (1995a: 302-304). It is also based on the conception of a primordial otherness of existence ('primordial obscurity') that 'common' language negates and which certain forms of 'ambiguous' language ('literature is language turning into ambiguity'; 1995a: 314) can indicate.

This thesis will situate the prose of the edited and unedited Carver in relation to Blanchot's two slopes. Reading Blanchot alongside Carver's edited and unedited prose, I will go on to suggest that the distinction between the two slopes is more muddled than Blanchot, and dominant readings of Blanchot, explicitly suggest (Hill 1997; Critchley 2004: 57-71). 'Literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question', writes Blanchot (1995a: 300). Accordingly, I look at how the

edited and unedited Carver lead me to question Blanchot's own affiliation of 'common', more 'realist' language with the first slope and his association of more ambiguous prose with the second slope (1995a: 341).

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, in my close reading of Carver I locate his 'minimalist', more obviously ambiguous prose as close to Blanchot's first slope of literature, which to reiterate is the slope of meaningful prose and common language. I align Carver's unedited, supposedly 'realist prose' with Blanchot's second slope – the language of ambiguity. In so doing, I trouble the propensity of both Blanchot and his literary critics to distinguish the first and second slopes of literature with prose that is respectively more 'realist' and 'anti-realist' in orientation (Hill 1995: 53-69; Critchley 2004: 57-71).

For Blanchot, in the first slope of literature 'life endures death and maintains itself in it . . . in order to gain from death the possibility of speaking and the truth of speech' (1995a: 322). In other words, in Hegel's terms, the death of the thing gives rise to the possibility of meaning. When Blanchot says 'this woman' the 'simple referential word *announces death, signifying* the possibility of destruction' (1995a: 322). Carver also marvels at the capacity of simple words to conjure up powerful meanings:

It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring—with immense, even startling power. (Carver 2005: 33)

In the edited minimalist Carver I argue that a certain indeterminate 'power' is evoked not through ambiguity but through the very literality of words, through their

almost oversimplified precision of meaning. Of the first slope of literature, Blanchot writes

...when I speak, death speaks in me...My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address...Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain. (1995a: 323)

In this thesis, I argue that the language of the edited Carver is so starkly simple and commonplace that it draws attention to the death of primordial existence that speaks in 'everyday' language. This thesis considers how Carver's minimalist prose might be 'everyday language' taken to an extreme, such that it discloses its own operation of negating primordial existence through meaning. The linguistic cut can also form a kind of defence against excess alterity, I argue.

In Blanchot's second slope of literature, there are 'terms that are vague, more capable of adapting to the negative essence,' that is, to a posited extra-linguistic existence, there are 'no longer terms but the movement of terms, an endless sliding of turns of phrase, which do not lead anywhere' (Blanchot 1995a: 326). For Blanchot, every literary work partakes of the two slopes of language, but some forms of language rest more steadily on one slope and some on the other. I consider how Carver's *unedited* stories partake more than the edited in the experience of the *second slope*, not because the words are vague in their meaning, but because they can be susceptible to a kind of 'endless sliding'. Meandering lines and sprawling sentences gesture at what Blanchot calls the 'existence which remains below existence, like an inexorable affirmation, without beginning or end – death as the impossibility of dying' (1995a: 328). Through its pulsing rhythms Carver's unedited prose acquires a 'materiality of language' (1995a: 327), at times even reminiscent of the strange 'insect like buzzing in the margins' (1995a: 333) that Blanchot associates

with the second slope.

Writers on Blanchot have tended to align his second slope of literature with types of prose that are far removed from language usually labelled ‘common’ or ‘realist’. Simon Critchley and Leslie Hill have drawn on Blanchot to explore Beckett’s recondite prose (Critchley 2004: 202-207; Hill 1997:142-158), Thomas Carl Wall has read Blanchot in relation to the uncanny world of Kafka (Thomas Carl Wall: 53). However, despite Blanchot’s framing of the second slope of literature in terms of its ‘vague’ words, its ‘meaninglessness’ and ‘ambiguity’ (Blanchot 1995a: 326), towards the end of his essay he fleetingly considers this second slope in terms of its clarity:

A novelist writes in the most transparent kind of prose, he describes men we could have met ourselves and actions we could have performed...Doesn’t everyone think he understands these descriptions, written in perfectly meaningful prose? Doesn’t everyone think they belong to the clear and human side of literature? And yet they do not belong to the world, but to the underside of the world...these are clear only because they hide their lack of meaning. (1995a: 334-335)

Through my reading of the unedited ‘realist’ Carver, I develop Blanchot’s under elaborated suggestion that ostensibly clear, ‘realist’ prose can give rise to subtle forms of otherness. While most critical writing on literary alterity has tended to focus on the otherness of experimental prose, I am particularly interested in exploring how what appears to be ‘perfectly meaningful prose’ might partially hide but also quietly reveal its alterity.

Derek Attridge

In Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* the 'other' of literature is defined as the process by which literature disrupts the reader's habitual modes of thought, disturbing the reader's powers of reason. With the literary 'other', according to Attridge, 'I encounter the limits of my power to think' (Attridge 2004: 33). Attridge is interested in the way literature operates as an 'event' for the reader: something happens in the course of an attuned reading that moves the reader into the domain of the unknown, outside his/her familiar forms of comprehension (Attridge 2004: 55-63). Following Attridge, this thesis is concerned with the affect of literary otherness on the reader, in particular the different literary events that take place for the reader in encountering the different literary alterities of the edited and unedited Carver.

As we have seen, Carver once said:

What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things. (2001: 92)

Following Attridge, I attend to the different forms of the unsaid in Carver's edited and unedited prose, to the different ways of breaching clear meanings, and the different impacts these have on the reader.

For Attridge the otherness of literature stems from the precise use of words. He locates precise moments of literary alterity through scrupulous close readings of literary texts (Attridge 2004a: 111-118). Similarly, in Carver I look at how the concealed 'landscape', the otherness that is 'left out' of finite meaning, is evoked through his use of 'specific language' (2001: 90). In other words, my methodology

involves locating moments of literary alterity through close reading. If the literary other is so singular that it cannot be accommodated in conventional modes of thought then the reader's attunement to otherness must be as specific.

The literary other resides in 'the impossibilities, the exclusions, and prohibitions, that have sustained but also limited 'linguistic meaning,' writes Attridge (2004a: 20-21); this is how Attridge defines all modes of literary alterity. Refining Attridge's wider definition, I see the edited, minimalist Carver as more of an aesthetic of impossibility, exclusion and prohibition (the terms 'minimalism' and 'realism' will be discussed in what follows). I will look at how Carver's so-called minimalist prose homes in on the minimal exclusions that are necessary to support linguistic meaning; the minimalist prose is unique in that it amplifies these exclusions, such that their otherness overrides the meaning of the words. Departing from Attridge, I argue that in the laconic, clipped sentences of the minimalist edit, impossibility arises *from* the very possibility of meaning: the radically excluded stems from over-determination of meaning. In Carver's work, as he says himself, 'The words can be so precise they may even sound flat, but they can still carry' (2001: 92): the very literality of meaning, the excessive precision of Carver's edited prose, leads it to 'carry' its particular form of otherness.

Attridge's focus is on the 'ethics' of literary otherness: the way literary alterity resists an instrumental mode of thought; that is, the kind of thinking that assimilates otherness into the 'same', into the most dominant mode of discourse (2004a: 118-123). In the final chapter of this thesis I similarly explore the ethical demand of Carver's prose. However, Attridge's sustained close reading of the ethics of literary alterity is carried out on the 'modernist' or 'formally inventive' prose of J.M.

Coetzee, attending to what Attridge calls the ‘nonrealist or antirealist devices’ (Attridge 2004b: 2). In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Attridge writes, ‘there is also a sense in which the formally innovative text, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, makes the strongest ethical demand’ (2004b: 11). In a footnote he makes the following, salient remark:

This may sound like a devaluation of the realist tradition, but it is a critique only of a certain way of reading that tradition – a reading, it is true, which realist authors often invited, but not one that is inevitable. To respond with full responsibility to the act of a realist work is to respond to its unique stating of meaning, and therefore to its otherness. It could even be said that that the realist work is more, not less, demanding than the modernist work, in that its otherness is often disguised, and requires even more scrupulous responsiveness on the part of the reader. (2004b: 11)

In responding to the subtle, quiet form of alterity that is embedded in Carver’s supposedly ‘realist’, early unedited prose and his late unedited work, I take my lead from Attridge’s suggestion that the otherness of ‘realist’ prose is overlooked in criticism in this field. I ask what is the form of otherness that is produced by writing that appears to operate according to regular rules and models of discourse? Is there a form of otherness that doesn’t so much *breakdown* but *resides with* the familiar?

In attending to Carver’s unedited prose, my methodology of reading is also informed by Attridge’s reference to the *relation* between linguistic meaning and the other. In Attridge the literary other isn’t absolute, as in situated in an absolutely different domain from determinate linguistic meaning. Instead, otherness always arises *from* and *relates to* finite linguistic sense: ‘otherness is always otherness *to* a particular self or situation. In order to be readable at all, otherness must turn into sameness, and it is this experience of transformation...that constitutes the event of the literary work’ (2004b: 11). In *The Singularity of Literature* Attridge states that the ‘other is that which is not knowable until by a creative act it is brought into the

field of the same' (2004a: 30). Yet Attridge does not elaborate on the *different relations* between linguistic meaning and alterity. In reading Carver's edited and unedited writings, I examine the *different relations* between linguistic meaning and alterity in the edited and unedited prose, the specific structurings of these relations, and how they might present different psychological structurings of alterity. In reading the edited and unedited Carver I therefore ask: how does the other *relate* to referential language? What is the *causal or logical relation* between literary otherness and semantic reference? How might otherness exert pressure on meaning? How might otherness be registered not in obvious rupture but in quiet recastings of the familiar?

In summary, my ways of reading literary otherness in Carver will be concerned with the following: 1) I will question the affiliation of ostensibly clear, meaningful prose with concealment of alterity; as such, I will examine the quiet otherness of Carver's so-called realist writing. 2) I will consider the affect of literary otherness on the reader, exploring the different events that take place in the reader in encountering the literary alterities of Carver's edited and unedited prose. 3) I will explore the *different relations* between linguistic meaning and otherness in the edited and unedited prose. 4) Rather than form generalized accounts of otherness, I will carry out close readings of Carver's unedited and edited writing in order to discern their singular modes of presenting the unsymbolised; this might mean discerning propensities of literary otherness in each – the specific otherness of what Carver calls the different 'worlds' of writings (Carver speaks of 'the writer's particular and unmistakable signature on everything. It is his world and no other'; Carver, 87: 2001).

Carver, literature and the mind

How and why am I interested in literary presentations of the mentally unsymbolised (psychical otherness)? Why is it important to forge a relationship between Carver and Lacan, and more broadly between literature and psychoanalysis? I think these are crucial questions to address straight up for two reasons. Firstly, because we are at a moment in literary studies when the question of what role psychoanalysis can play in criticism is up for grabs. I am keen to stress the kinds of value that I think psychoanalytic thinking has for our reading of literary texts. Secondly, because I have often encountered a perceived tension between the singularity of literature and so-called generality of psychoanalysis – where psychoanalysis is understood as positing general laws and so only reducing the uniqueness of literature. This project is an attempt to bring a new psychoanalytic orientation to literary otherness. In bringing together Carver and Lacan, I am interested in how Lacan's theory brings out the psychical resonance of Carver's literary alterity.

It is my hope that my close rereading of Lacan through Carver constitutes a worthwhile contribution to psychoanalytic literary criticism, which these days I see as saturated with an over-reliance on Žižek, resulting in unquestioning and at times formulaic versions of Lacan. In what follows, I also broaden literary engagements with psychoanalysis, turning to Laplanche, a thinker who is under examined in literary criticism. Bringing together Lacan and Laplanche, I explore how Laplanche's concepts of 'translation', 'de-translation' and 'the enigmatic message' help renew theoretical ideas about the reader's capacity (or incapacity) to translate literary meaning. I hope my conception of the enigmatic address to the reader also

forms an important intervention in contemporary debates on literary affect. In my chapter 3 on madness, I turn to Darian Leader's concept of 'everyday madness' which is a defence against excessive alterity; I consider how Carver's edited, minimalist prose can stage a similar defensive shell.

As with the literary theory, I read Lacan in relation to Carver and Carver in relation to Lacan, treating Lacan's psychoanalytic theories less as conceptual tools and more as specific texts that can be read for their indeterminacies, and so I carry out close readings of Lacan's texts as well as Carver's. In addition, just as I am wary of talking about the author as existential creator, so I avoid the propensity of some psychoanalytical literary criticism towards psychobiographical reductionism: treating the author and/or literary character as if they are human individuals, ready to be psychoanalytically interpreted. Instead, my primary focus will be on the literary presentations of mentally unsymbolised spaces – the literary other as staging the psychical other.

In the following section, I will start by defining the key concepts of Lacan's theoretical edifice, along with those of Laplanche and Leader, briefly explaining how I think through these concepts in relation to Carver's stagings of literary otherness. I will then turn to the question of the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature – how I work through this relation in my reading of Carver.

Jacques Lacan: key concepts

Lacan defines the 'imaginary' as the fantasy of complete, total, and unified meaning which is based on a concealment of alienation and fragmentation. In Lacan's

developmental model known as the ‘imaginary’ or ‘mirror phase’, the infant consists of a primitive bundle of chaotic pulsions and acquires an imaginary sense of totality and self-unity by identifying with the unified image of the mother/other (Lacan 2002: 1-9). However, this sense of coherent self-presence arises from a relation with the other who is not the self and, moreover, has her own indeterminate desires. Thus, in the mirror phase, recognition of meaning is also misrecognition (Lacan 2002: 4). Moreover, the other/mother has its own enigmatic, incoherent desires. Totalised meaning is, in short, an imaginary function, based on a false illusion of coherence and mastery. Literary and visual art critics have aligned Lacan’s imaginary with the ‘realist’ aesthetic. For Martin Jay and Teresa Brennan, the realist aesthetic accords with Lacan’s imaginary in that it conceals otherness through a false depiction of complete and unified meaning (Jay 1996: 1-15; Brennan 1996: 217-231). In discerning quiet modes of otherness embedded in ‘realist’ prose, the argument of this thesis departs from this dominant Lacanian approach to realism.

Now let us outline Lacan’s symbolic. Lacan’s ‘symbolic’ refers to the stage at which the ‘Name of the Father’, the paternal function, intervenes as a third term in the mirroring dyad of infant and mother/other (Lacan 2002: 189, 201-207). In Lacan’s linguistic reformulation of the Freudian Oedipal complex, through the symbolic stage the infant acquires a position within the order of language and thereby learns to signify the other’s difference; this marks a shift from a relation with the other based on mirroring and alienation to a relation based on separation (Lacan 1988b: 145). Informed by Benveniste’s, Jakobson’s, and Saussure’s structural linguistics, Lacan associates the symbolic with the differential system of signification in which two modes of negation inhere. First, on a vertical level, the thing is negated in the word. Second, on a horizontal plane, negations are instituted

through the differential chain of signification, where one word acquires its meaning via its negation of another word, ad infinitum (cat is cat because it is *not* bat, bat is bat because it is *not* bag, etc.; Lacan 1988).

For Lacan, the subject is split from originary, unmediated self-presence by the word (Fink 1995: 24-31). Instituted in the symbolic order, the subject lacks in the sense that it lacks its primordial non-linguistic being. In this respect, the symbolic order of signification can be said to divide the subject from the 'Real' - the hard kernel of (psychical) reality that is outside of symbolic meaning (Lacan 1999: 57). But at the same time, the differential order of signification harbours gaps of meaning in the differences between the words. Thus, imbricated within the differential order of signification, in which *absences are structured* in the *gaps* between different words, the subject is also exposed to alterity, brought up against the limits of language and thus the otherness of the Real (Lacan 1988: 258-263). In other words, the symbolic structures the Real in the subject. Thus, in the imaginary phase, the Real that consists of non-sematic pulsions is primordially repressed for the sake of imaginary perceptions of unified meaning. But in the symbolic phase, in which the subject is instituted in the differential order of signification, the Real becomes structured through chains of signification, marking a shift from the fixity of the imaginary to the mobility of symbolic desire (Lacan 1988: 83-93).

As we have seen, the three registers of the imaginary, symbolic and Real interrelate and overlap; what is more, they relate to each other in different ways in different psychical constellations. In summary, in the unconscious Lacan's imaginary consists of calcified fantasies of fixed meanings; the symbolic of the unconscious operates according to more mobile patterns of signification; the Real is constituted by kernels of psychical reality that resist meaning in different ways.

In attending to the relationship between determinate meaning and what exceeds it in Carver's edited and unedited writings, this thesis will consider Carver's literary stagings of the imaginary and the symbolic (of which there is some overlap) in their different relations to the unsymbolised Real. In a brief summary, I forge a formal correspondence between Carver's edited alterity and a calcified version of Lacan's Real. I draw a formal correlation between the unedited otherness and that which is held or contained in the materiality of Lacan's symbolic order (in my reading of it).

Lacan et al

There is some dissent among critics over Lacan's status of the Real. Is the Real pre-symbolic or post-symbolic? In other words, is psychical otherness a primordial, undifferentiated state, or is it only that which can be posited after signification? For Alain Badiou, the Lacanian Real is prelinguistic, coming before language (Badiou 2007: 68-75). In reading Lacan through Carver I reach an understanding of the Real that is more in line with Richard Boothby and Bruce Fink, who see the Real as outside language but only posited as such through the symbolic (Boothby 2001; Fink 1995); for Boothby and Fink, the Real comes after the symbolic order of language, as the experience of something missing from it. In this respect, my reading of psychical alterity, as it is staged in the edited and unedited prose, is also closer to de Man's and Attridge's account of literary alterity, as always already bound to symbolic meaning (1995: 327, 329).

Laplanche and Lacan

The immediate relevance of Laplanche in the context of my examination of psychical alterity, as it is presented in Carver's edited and unedited prose, is his theorization of the 'enigmatic message' in *Essays on Otherness*. Laplanche is concerned with re-orienting psychoanalysis towards a privileging of the other. Attempting to retrieve the otherness of the unconscious from what he sees as the 'autocentred' or subject centred mechanisms of psychoanalytical theory (foreclosure, projection, introjection, splitting, which he sees as operations of the individual), Laplanche insists on the primacy and agency of the other (the other person and other to comprehension) in the formation of the human subject's unconscious (Laplanche 2005: 138).

There is clearly a problem with assimilating Laplanche's metapsychological framework with Lacan's. In Laplanche's view, his own *refounding* of the psychoanalytic field marks a departure from the linguistic bedrock of Lacan's psychoanalytical edifice. For Laplanche, the Lacanian unconscious is linguistic and so Lacan fails to take account of the true strangeness of the human subject at the sexual and anthropological level. 'What maintains the alien-ness of the other? Can one affirm here, with Lacan, the priority of language?' (2005: 73), asks Laplanche: 'emphasizing 'language' effaces the alterity of the other in favour of trans-individual structures' (2005: 73). Apropos of the unconscious, Laplanche writes, 'in Lacan, we may detect in the guise of structuralism a derivative of the same exigency, something that would like to occupy the same position: "the symbolic"' (2005: 153).

In his account of the unconscious as structured by language, Lacan reduces the human alterity of the unconscious, Laplanche avers. However, I suggest this

overlooks Lacan's point that the unconscious is structured *like* language rather than by language (1988: 149, 203). That is, the Lacanian unconscious is structured by modes of symbolisation and what escapes symbolisation; and in this respect, the Lacanian unconscious has its roots in the Freudian unconscious, as constituted by ideational representatives. For Freud, what is repressed in the unconscious is ideational representatives and Lacan's intervention lies in equating these ideational representatives with signifiers (not necessarily linguistic). In Lacan, when repression takes place a signifier or some part of a signifier sinks down under and, as repressed, that signifier begins to take on a different role, establishing relations with other repressed signifiers and developing a complex set of connections. Thus, the unconscious isn't *simply language*, it is made of repressed forms of symbolisation along with what escapes symbolisation. Moreover, the Lacanian unconscious is not removed from sexuality. Sexuality is inscribed in the unconscious symbolisations and resistances to symbolisation: desire is formed by the gaps in symbolisation, and libidinal drive is what circulates inside these gaps, outside of symbolic bindings (Lacan 1988; 187-203). Furthermore, for Laplanche the Lacanian unconscious is wholly determined by the structuralist account of language, that is, constituted by the differential order of linguistic signs; however, through a close look at Lacan I will suggest that the unconscious is made up of different forms of binding and unbinding of psychical alterities (as seen in my reading of Lacan's *whole* and *not whole*), so that the structuring of the unconscious is not simply differential. Thus, I see Laplanche's attempt to distance himself from Lacan as based in part on a reading of Lacan's unconscious that is overly structuralist.

In addition, I see a strong structural correlation between Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifier' and Lacan's 'desire of the other' (Lacan 1988: 235-6; 251-2).

In Laplanche, the ‘enigmatic signifier’ refers to that which is untranslatable in the other (the primary caregiver), which is absorbed by the infant and constitutes his/her unconscious (2005: 127). The infant is on the receiving end of the parent’s enigmatic unconscious, but the codes that would elicit its translation into meaning are missing, and so the parent’s unknown unconscious desires are internalised in the enigmatic unconscious. As with Laplanche’s enigmatic signifier, Lacan’s ‘desire of the other’ refers to the m/other’s desires that are unknown to herself and that give rise to the infant’s own desire: the mother’s own lack or unknown desires trigger the infant’s desires (‘Man’s desire is the desire of the other’; Lacan 2004: 235). As in Laplanche’s account of the formation of the infant’s unconscious, for Lacan primal repression is the process whereby the infant assimilates and represses the mother’s unknown desires (1988: 236). Internalised in the infant, the mother’s unknown desire takes the form of ‘lack’ (1988: 236). Thus, I see greater structural correlation between Laplanche’s enigmatic signifier and Lacan’s desire of the other than Laplanche concedes.

However, where Laplanche diverges from Lacan, and where Laplanche’s thought becomes particularly useful for my psychoanalytic readings of literary alterity, is in his conception of the enigmatic signifier as a ‘message *to*’ that has an interpellating dimension: ‘that it ‘signifies to’ the subject—this is my understanding of a ‘message’ (Laplanche 2005: 91-92, 97). This notion of the message that’s inherent to the enigmatic otherness is not so apparent in Lacan’s desire of the other. While some messages are easily ‘understood’ by the infant, what can fail to be integrated harmoniously is a surplus, a communication ‘noise’, says Dominique Scarfone (Scarfone 2013). The theorisation of psychical alterity as enigmatic *message* forms a valuable resource for my examination of the different interpellating

powers of literary alterity in Carver – the way the unsymbolised in Carver’s writing interpellates the reader, making demands on us.

For Laplanche, the enigmatic message resides not only in the human subject, it is also instilled in ‘culture’ or art: ‘The poet’s work is an address to another who is out of reach’ which ‘is by definition intrusive’ (Laplanche 2005: 225). In accounting for the enigmatic message inscribed in art Laplanche offers a useful connection between the field of clinical psychoanalysis and literature. In what follows (in my chapter 4 on the Carver Lish correspondence) I will be interested in the way Carver’s literary alterity can work as an *enigmatic message to the reader*. The literary alterities can form interpellating, enigmatic pulls on the reader, which I read as forms of transference between text and reader.

For Laplanche, the enigmatic message is both intrusive and seductive, ‘libidinally invested’. The other’s messages are ‘seductive only because they are not transparent . . . because they convey something enigmatic’ (Laplanche 2005: 128). Drawing on Laplanche, I will consider how the different literary alterities of Carver’s edited and unedited prose ‘seduce’ the reader in different ways – as inassimilable excitations and as more bound forms of pleasure.

Darian Leader and Lacan

Leader’s reflections on ‘madness’ in *What is Madness?* (Leader 2011) help refine my reading of Carver’s edited, minimalist alterity with respect to madness that forms the focus of my chapter 3.

In line with Lacan's structure of paranoia and psychosis, Leader conceives of 'madness' as the subject's over-proximity to the 'desire of the other', to the other's unsymbolised Real. This results from the failure in the subject of the proper integration and functioning of the symbolic order, or more specifically, from the inadequate anchoring of the first 'paternal metaphor': the first signifier that institutes the subject within the mediating form of language (Leader 2011: 57-62, 68, 147). The human being who fails to properly incorporate symbolisation remains over-exposed to the m/other's unmediated desires, and this gives rise to overwhelming otherness in the form of madness.

Leader is thus in accord with Blanchot in ascribing 'madness' to absolute alterity; however, unlike Blanchot, Leader understands the symbolic less as problematically nullifying alterity and more as imposing important prohibitions and limits on the absolute otherness of the Real: 'the defining feature of the symbolic order is this negativity it introduces, this distance from the supposed immediacy of experience' (2011: 51).

Leader conceives *everyday madness* as a co-existence of 'madness' and 'normalcy': *everyday madness* is a kind of prosthetic or imaginary symbolic order that functions in place of the properly integrated symbolic order. In other words, *everyday madness* is an imaginary mode of stabilising and structuring the subject's relation to overwhelming excessive alterity. For example, *everyday madness* can take the form of extremely rigid ways of thinking that tame excess alterity: in everyday madness, 'thinking is not really disordered, just more ordered than everyday thinking . . . [it] follows a rigour that may indeed be absent in the sane' (2011: 34).

In my reading of Carver's edited prose I examine his restrained language – the solid silences juxtaposed with chiselled meanings and nascent rhythm of under-determined and over-determined meanings – in relation to Leader's *everyday madness*. I suggest that at times the taut clipped sentences of Carver's edited, minimalist prose is staged as a way of keeping excessive otherness at bay. While more obviously experimental prose rejoices in disruption of meaning, Carver's edited writing fosters a kind of 'everyday madness' in its quiet ordering and splitting that forms a kind of stability or defence against overwhelming otherness. In Carver's unedited writing, literary alterity appears to produce movement and dialectic, but in his edited prose it procures more stagnation; in this way, drawing on Leader's 'everyday madness', I read Carver's edited and unedited language in terms of different ways of opening up and contracting reality.

Bordering literature and psychoanalysis

Just as I am exploring the border between meaning and otherness in Carver's writing, so I am interested in the border of the literary and the psychoanalytical. What happens at the frontier between literature and psychoanalysis? How might one cross that border? How can I avoid keeping the theory outside the literature? If, as Eagleton suggests, 'an aesthetic thought is one true to the opacity of the object' (Eagleton 1990: 341), how do I use the psychoanalytic theory to preserve the unique quality of Carver's writing, without succeeding in pushing it away?

The alliance between Carver and Lacan might appear surprising. The gritty plain speaking American and recondite French theorist might seem like strange bedfellows. So why read Carver with Lacan? While Carver never speaks directly about psychoanalysis, his writing on writing has interesting psychical resonance. He describes 1980s America as ‘a traumatic period’ (Carver 2001: 75) and he speaks of the unnameable ‘shock of recognition as the human significance of the work is realized and made manifest’ (Carver 2001: 223); redolent of psychoanalytic shifts in perspectives, Carver speaks of writing as seeing what ‘others have not seen’ as well as ‘seeing what everyone else has seen’ but ‘seeing it from all sides’ (2001: 224). In his collections of essays, Carver repeatedly comes back to a nebulous ‘something’ that resists language and consciousness: in truthful writing, ‘something is imminent, certain things are in relentless motion’ (2001: 92), and along with the ‘familiar we think that something else is just as often at work’ (2001: 224). As we have seen, for Carver this ‘something else’ that has ‘human significance’ is outside of linguistic meaning (‘it doesn’t even need naming’; 2001: 223).

I turn to Lacan because I think his model of the Real – the hard kernel of psychical reality that resists symbolic meaning – has an interesting and overlooked common formal structure with the unsymbolised spaces in Carver’s writing. In bringing together Carver and Lacan I am therefore interested in how Lacan’s psychoanalytic categories challenge, clarify, and bring out the psychical resonance of what is going on in the unsignified spaces of Carver’s writing – in the hard silences of his edited writing and the sprawling indeterminacy of his unedited prose. In what follows, I will thus use the term ‘other’ or ‘otherness’ to refer to the literary stagings of the psychically unsymbolised.

Along with the formal correlations between Carver and Lacan at times I confront the departures, and most significantly I consider how reading the writers alongside each other leads to an othering of critical conceptions of them. At points I read Lacan's presentations of the unsymbolised Real against the grain of dominant critical readings (I see Lacan's Real as split from but also entwined with linguistic meaning, as we shall see), and thus I address the lacunae of Lacan's own thinking.

For Aulagnier, any activity of the psychic apparatus has the function of building the representation of whatever is to be represented, and also the representation of the functioning of the psychic apparatus itself: that is, the psychic apparatus represents mental content but it represents the form of the psychic apparatus itself (Green 2012: 75). Elaborating on this distinction in relation to literature, André Green suggests that literature *represents* meaning, but it also presents literary *bindings and unbindings* of meaning. Green draws a formal correlation between literary bindings and the binding processes of the psychic apparatus, suggesting that literary bindings stage mental bindings of meaning. My reading of Carver will be informed by Green's structural correlation, as I explore Carver's literary stagings of mental bindings and unbindings of psychical alterity.

I will be particularly interested in the reader's modes of binding and unbinding literary meanings in reading Carver's edited and unedited writings. Writing is 'not simply an act of self-expression', says Carver:

. . . [writing is] an act of communication between the writer and reader . . . The need is always to translate one's thoughts and deepest concerns into language which casts these thoughts into a form – fictional or poetic – in the hope that a reader might understand and experience those same feelings and concerns. (2001: 195)

Green aligns the analyst with the literary reader and says, ‘the analyst . . . does not ‘read’ the text, he unbinds it’ (2012: 339): ‘He breaks open the secondarity in order to retrieve, upstream from the binding process, the state of boundlessness which the binding process has covered up’, writes Green: ‘The analyst unbinds the text and frees its ‘delirium’’(2012: 339). Accordingly, I will be interested in the ways in which the reader binds and unbinds meanings through the act of reading Carver.

In Laplanche’s hollowed out transference, the analyst is open to the analysand’s otherness by being open to his/her own alterity (Laplanche 2005: 214-234); drawing a structural correlation between Laplanche’s account of transference and the literary reader’s transference, Green claims that it is through the reader’s own ‘delirium’ that she attends to the otherness of the literary text: ‘The psychoanalytic interpretation as delirium – which some will prefer to call delirious psychoanalytic interpretation – uncovers in the text a nucleus of truths’ (2012: 339). Informed by Laplanche and Green, my reading of Carver will explore the literary alterity of Carver’s writing in relation to the reader’s alterity: the way the reader’s psychical alterity leads to openness to textual otherness, which in turn opens up the reader’s psychical alterity. The transference of reading literary alterities will be examined particularly with respect to Carver and his editor as readers of each other’s work and letters (in my chapter 4).

Thus, in summary, in exploring the relationship between literature and the mind my reading of Carver will attend to the following: 1) the common formal structure between Lacan’s theorisations of the Real and unsymbolised spaces in Carver, and thus more generally the formal correlation between psychical structures and literary structures of meaning/ resistances to meaning; 2) following Green, I

draw a correlation between literary and mental bindings and unbindings of meaning, paying special attention to the reader's unbindings; 3) informed by Laplanche and Green, I attend to the reader's transference: the otherness that is provoked in the reader through the textual alterities. The heterogeneity of this psychoanalytical reading of Carver arises from what I see as the inherent complexity of the relationship between mind and literature, and how this is staged in Carver's writings.

Furthermore, in turning to Lacan *and* other psychoanalytic writers and other thinkers (particularly in the final chapter of this thesis), I attempt to avoid a unilateral theoretical reading of Carver's stories, where Carver's prose is used to support a single supposedly consistent theory, like a kind of 'portable methodology' for literary criticism (Jarvis 1998: 91). Wary of projecting a single unified theory onto the literary texts, I aim to remain close to the complexity of Carver's writings, avoiding the tendency of some theoretical criticism to use 'imaginative literary' texts in an instrumental way to really speak about theory. Thus, as the thesis progresses, I embrace a lighter, more heterogeneous use of theory, letting the literature evoke and probe different strands of theoretical thought and allowing these theories to probe Carver's literature. In avoiding a single conceptual theorization of Carver's work, my mode of reading Carver in relation to the theoretical material is inspired by what Adorno calls a 'constellation' of concepts, drawing on different lines of conceptual thought and considering the relations between them (Jarvis 1998: 110).

Finally, I will say a few words about reading Carver's stories with respect to narrative content and form. Rather than quarantine performative aspects of language into a realm of pure form outside of semantic content, taking this as the unsymbolised, I explore the intersections between form and content. In reading Carver's literary presentations of otherness at the level of representational content

and linguistic/visual stagings, my reading practise is inspired by Carver's own account of the intersection of narrative content and the formally unsaid (2001: 92), as well as by Lacan's account of the interconnection of symbolic meaning and the Real. I thus attempt to read Carver's stories at the level of its many literary dimensions – as narrative, as imaginative meaning, as literary genre, where these all intersect with semantic alterity.

Thus, in line with Peter Brooks, I will consider how reading representations of character and narrative infect reading literary stagings of psychical otherness, and vice versa. I will consider how the different literary stagings of psychical alterities constitute dynamic forces which intersect with the text's characters and plot, just as the characters and plot infect the literary otherness. I will also explore the tension between literary stagings of psychical otherness and narrative content, where at times literary otherness moves the plot forward, forging the desire of the narrative, but also halt the narrative. As such, I will see the stagings of psychical alterities as forming what Peter Brooks calls the 'dynamic aspect of narrative' (Brooks 1992: xiv), or in Green's model of psychical and textual processes, the 'dynamic effectiveness of the text' (2012: 340). Thus, I will see the different textual stagings of the mentally unsymbolised as consisting of energies, tensions, compulsions, resistances, and desires – forces, in Brooks's sense – which are always in relation to meaning (thus to character and plot), and in relation to the reader.

Chapters

Chapter 1, ‘Literary Historical Context’, is a brief introductory chapter, establishing the author editor relationship and examining the historical traditions of American minimalism and realism. In this chapter, I outline the history of Carver’s troubled relationship with his editor Lish and raise theoretical questions about authorship. I then situate Carver’s edited writing in the tradition of American minimalism, and his unedited prose as more rooted in American realism; the chapter also raises questions about the usefulness of these different stylistic designations.

Chapter 2, ‘Talking About Love in Carver and Lacan’, compares Carver’s edited version of the story ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ with the unedited version ‘Beginners’, published respectively in 1981 and 2009 (Carver 2003; Carver 2009). Here I consider the different presentations of love in the ‘minimalist’ and ‘realist’ prose, drawing on Lacan’s distinction between the *whole* and the *not-whole* relation to language in *Encore* (Lacan 1999). Reading Lacan through Carver and Carver through Lacan, I argue that the structuring of the language of the edited ‘minimalist’ prose bears some correspondence with the structuring of Lacan’s *whole* in which, I suggest, linguistic meaning is bifurcated from otherness; at times this leads to stuck idealisations of love. The ‘realist’ prose of the unedited story shares what I discern as the structures of Lacan’s *not-whole*: a corporeal form of expression, in which otherness resides in ‘signifierness’, the material substance of language. Here, love is presented as particularly receptive to otherness.

Chapter 3, ‘The Mad Outside of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’’ is a critical, comparative reading of Carver’s edited and unedited versions of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’, published respectively in the 1981 collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (Carver 2003), and the 2009 publication of *Beginners* (Carver 2009). In my reading of the edited, minimalist story I engage with Lacan’s ‘desire of the other’ and ‘paternal signifier’ in *The Psychoses* and ‘On a Question Prior to Any Treatment of Psychosis’ (Lacan 1997; Lacan 2002), Leader’s *everyday madness* in *What is Madness?*, and Green’s category of the borderline concept in ‘The borderline concept’. I suggest that at times Carver’s minimalist language forms split structures that cut off a more radical alterity from finite meaning, where the splitting creates a minimalist shell or protective defence against excess alterity. Drawing on Shoshana Felman’s *Writing and Madness* in my reading of the unedited story, I suggest that the unedited prose performs more the delirium of the symbolic delirium, a mad inhabiting of the materiality of language.

Chapter 4, ‘Speaking From the Heart: The Carver Lish Correspondence’, examines the correspondence between Carver and Lish, written between 1969 and 1983; some of this correspondence was first published in 1998 by D.T. Max in *The New York Times Magazine* (Max 1998), and more extensive versions of the letters appeared in 2007 in *The New Yorker* (Anon 2007). All except one of the published letters are written from Carver to Lish. I identify some affinity between the form of Carver’s personal writing and his unedited, realist prose. In this chapter I examine the prose of Carver’s correspondence in relation to Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts* (Lacan 1988), in which Lacan distinguishes between a form of transference that is closed and another that is open to otherness. I also draw on Laplanche’s

‘Transference: Its Provocation by the Analyst’ in *Essays on Otherness*, reading Carver’s openness to the other addressee in relation to Laplanche’s ‘enigmatic message’ and his notion of ‘hollowed out transference’. Attending to the epistolary form, I draw on Derrida’s *The Postcard* (1987), which explores the epistle with respect to the relation between the self and other, regarding intimacy, exchange, distance, and separation. In Carver’s letters to Lish I trace a relation with the other that is first based on closed off idealisation and then openness to the other that accords with the more capacious structuring of his ‘realist’ prose.

Chapter 5, ‘Dwelling with the Other: Hospitality and Visuality in ‘Cathedral’’, examines Carver’s unedited prose, post-Lish, through a close reading of his story ‘Cathedral’, published in the titular collection in 1983 (Carver 2009). Here, I explore the ethics of hospitality in Carver’s late prose that has been labelled ‘realist’. In this chapter I focus on the linguistic *and* visual presentations of alterity, drawing on Lacan’s reflections on visuality in ‘The Split between the Eye and the *Gaze*’ (Lacan 1988) and Blanchot’s ‘The Gaze of Orpheus’ (Blanchot 1999). In Carver’s presentation of the blind man and the cathedral, I argue that visual and linguistic alterity (Lacan’s gaze) is mediated through the symbolic (the Lacanian screen); considering the ethical implications of this, I bring together Lévinas’s responsibility for the other in *Totality and Infinity* and Lacan (Attridge 2004b). In this chapter, I introduce the theoretical voice of Lévinas in order to make sense of how the landscape of the late Carver undergoes a kind of ethical transformation. Attending to some of the socio-political implications of the presentation of the other, I also refer to Arendt’s *The Human Condition*. Contrary to dominant critical accounts, in this chapter I argue that Carver’s late ‘realist’ writing also displays aspects of his edited

‘minimalist’ structuring, suggesting that the two structures are not mutually exclusive: this new form of writing gives rise to a specific mode of ethical openness to alterity – a linguistic binding which also points to a more radical space of alterity

1. Literary Historical Context

Cut to the linguistic bone: the Carver Lish controversy

‘You, my friend, are my idea of an ideal reader, always have been, always, that is, forever, will be,’ wrote Carver in a letter to his editor Gordon Lish, dated September 1977 (Anon 2007). But three years later, having received the edit of his second collection *Beginners*, Carver’s tone was strikingly different: ‘I’ve got to pull out of this one. Please hear me... ‘If I don’t speak now, and speak from the heart, and halt things now, I forsee a terrible time ahead of me’ (Anon 2007). Carver wrote this letter at 8am on the morning of July 8, 1980. He had been up all night going through the edits to his latest manuscript (Anon 2007). Lish had always been a hands-on editor, but this time he’d inflicted the cruellest of cuts, as Carver perceived it. Almost all of the stories had been slashed by 50 percent, several as much as 70 percent (Anon 2007; Wood 2009; Morrison 2009). Lish had retitled several stories, changed the names of characters, cut out backstories, created new endings, and radically altered the overall tone. As his inflamed tone suggests, Carver felt oppressed by the cut, editorially squeezed. But the edit also made Carver’s name. The collection was published in the Lished form to spectacular acclaim, retitled *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and it remains Carver’s most famous book (Carver 2003).

The substantial differences in the style of the edited and unedited Carver came to light in September 2009, when Carver’s widow and literary executor, Tess Gallagher, published the unedited work *Beginners* (Carver 2009). While the edited stories were so lean and spare that Carver was seen as the master of minimalism, the unedited collection reveals a more expansive, meandering voice that critics have

called ‘realist’ (Leypoldt 2002: 317-341).

This thesis examines the different modes of literary alterity in the ‘minimalist’ edit and the unedited ‘realist’ prose, arguing that these different forms of otherness — as that which is other to finite, transparent meaning — gesture at different modes of psychical alterity.

The 2009 publication of the unedited *Beginners* has given rise to much controversy surrounding authorship. Who is the real Raymond Carver, critics have asked. While this thesis is not centrally concerned with questions of authorship, in order to frame my examination of the edited and unedited alterities it is necessary to review some of the historical and critical context surrounding the Carver Lish controversy. So far, there has been relatively little secondary criticism on the 2009 publication of *Beginners*, and where it does occur it is mostly in the form of literary journalism (Campbell 2009; Wood 2009; Morrison 2009).

It was in 1967 while working for a textbook publisher in Palo Alto that Carver met his editor to be (Max 1998). Gordon Lish saw something fresh in Carver and encouraged him. No one had written about ‘the hillbillies of the shopping mall’, as Lish later referred to Carver’s blue-collar Midwest America (Anon 2007). When Lish secured a job as literary editor at *Esquire* magazine, he published Carver’s story ‘Neighbours’ in 1971 and throughout the 1970s he began to publish more of Carver’s writing and sent his stories off to other publishers, including ‘Fat’ and ‘Are You a Doctor’ (Anon 2007; Sklenicka 2010). Lish later wrote of Carver: ‘He was not known, not known at all, to the persons I would be delivering stories for approval’ (Max 1998). As Blake Morrison has argued, the editor was crucial to

Carver's early recognition (Morrison 2009). From the start, Lish played a heavy editorial role, honing the clipped lines and bald, desolate statements that Carver was later famous for.

In 1977 Lish edited Carver's first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet Please?* (Carver 2009b), published by McGraw-Hill and nominated for a National Book Award. Carver emerged as the laconic new voice of the American working class, his prose uniquely suggestive, taut with desire and menace (Wood 2009). In a letter to his editor Carver wrote, 'You know, old bean, just what an influence you've exercised on my life' (Anon 2007). Soon after the publication, Lish left *Esquire* to join the publishing house Knopf. Around the same time, in 1977, Carver quit drinking for life, separated from his wife and began to lead what he later called 'his second life' with the poet Tess Gallagher (Anon 2007).

So at the time that Lish returned the controversial edit of his second collection, the most extensive cut so far, Carver's circumstances had changed considerably. He was by then a known literary figure. In 1978 he had won a Guggenheim Fellowship. And he had the unwavering support of his second wife Gallagher, also a respected literary figure (Sklenicka 2010). Carver had grown bolder, suggests Wood (Wood 2009). Soon after the acquisition of Lish's papers by the Lilly Library at Indiana University in 1991 (Hamilton 2013), Carol Polsgrove's *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, but Didn't We Have Fun? Surviving the '60s with Esquire's Harold Hayes* (Polsgrove 1995) provoked questions surrounding Lish's editorial influence on Carver's prose. The controversy was heightened when extracts of Carver's correspondence to Lish was first published by D.T. Max in 1998 in *The New York Times Magazine* (Max 1998; Carver's correspondence is analysed in depth in my chapter 4).

In 1980, the letter Carver wrote to Lish in response to the cut of *Beginners* takes up five pages – longer than several of his short stories. It is written in a garrulous, meandering prose that is much closer to the so-called realist writing of the unedited manuscripts. ‘I’m just nearly crazy with this. I’m getting into a state over it’, he writes, concluding the letter, ‘Please do the necessary things to stop the production of the book. Please try and forgive me, this breach’ (Anon 2007).

Yet only two days later Carver appeared to have a dramatic change of heart. ‘Please look through the enclosed copy of “What We Talk About”, the entire collection. You’ll see that nearly all of the changes I suggest are small enough,’ he writes (Anon 2007), succumbing to Lish’s cut (this 1981 collection forms the focus of my chapters 2 and 3).

In public, Lish has mostly kept quiet about his Carver years. But in 1998, in an interview with D.T. Max in the *New York Times Magazine*, he recalls his response to Carver’s agonised letter: ‘My sense of it was that there was a letter, and that I just went ahead’ (Max 1998). Critics have suggested that Carver’s decision to stick with the edit was tactical: Lish had been so instrumental in bringing Carver acclaim that the writer was scared to part ways (Campbell 2009; Wood 2009; Meyer 1994: 75). But after the publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981, which finally secured Carver’s reputation and remains his best selling book, Carver curtailed his working relationship with Lish (Meyer 1995). With his following collection *Cathedral* (considered in my chapter 5), published in 1983 and written in a prose style close to the early, unedited work, but with the mark of minimalism, Carver asked Lish to do only a light edit.

In public Carver was never explicitly vocal about Lish’s edits. But in

interviews later in his writing career he appears to distance himself from the clipped language of the Lish years. In *The Paris Review* in 1983, he wrote:

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. (Carver 1983)

The author-editor question

Speaking of the debate surrounding the real Raymond Carver, a top editor at Knopf once said, 'I never met an author so many people claimed a piece of' (Max 1998). In light of the much theorised death of the author, Wood asks: 'Does it matter whose work it is at all, as long as the work exists?' (Wood 2009). Rich Motoko asks whether there is really such a thing as the 'real' Carver, implying as this does a kind of pure, unsullied original text (Motoko 2007). Others dispute the controversy, maintaining that authorship is always collaborative. Michael A. Hemmingson writes:

Carver's original is 'neither improved' nor 'better' it shows where Carver once was...the publication of the original merely serves as the blueprint. Carver was the architect with the designs, Lish was the construction foreman with the tools and means to build. (Hemmingson 2008: 150)

Campbell believes that the collection *What We Talk About* exists at the extreme edge of editing, but it is not exceptional (Campbell 2009). In her biography, *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*, Carol Sklenicka (Sklenicka 1989: 45) sees the

Carver Lish relationship as just a more extreme version of any author editor collaboration. Wood points out that most writers will turn to loyal friends or loved ones to cast an eye over their first drafts (Wood 2009). Indeed, for William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and for F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda, the first reader's input was extensive (Stillinger 1991: 37).

As Stillinger suggests (Stillinger 1991: 29), the question of literary property is heavily tied up with how we define 'the author' and the meanings we have come to attribute to this term are historically rooted. For Stillinger in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century the author is still conceived as a solitary creative genius, and this stems from the Romantic period, in particular from Wordsworth's writing on authorship (1991: 22-43); there remains a cherished notion of Romantic ideology, in which writing is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (Wordsworth 1932: 263). In light of this legacy, Stillinger argues that any sort of interference with a text has been considered a violation (1991: 22-43). Mark Rose has claimed that the notion of the author as an individual owner of his or her work, as opposed to authorship as collaborative, arises from the copyright laws that were introduced at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century: with the introduction of copyright, writing became a question of individual property and ownership (Rose 1993: 31-54).

But is there, or has there ever been, such a thing as a 'normal' author-editor relationship? As Wood argues, perhaps the relationship is more like a marriage or long-term partnership: it is whatever works for the individuals concerned (Wood 2009). Henry James called editing 'the butcher's trade' and Updike said, 'It's like going to the barber', adding, 'I never liked haircuts' (Morrison 2005). While Eliot was all gratitude to Pound, Thomas Wolfe famously fell out with Maxwell Perkins

over his severe edits. (Maxwell Perkins slashed 90,000 words from Wolfe's first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, 1929; McGrath 2007.) In the more extreme cases, the distinction between author and editor certainly becomes blurred; Eliot encapsulates this overlap when, asked if editors are failed writers, he replied, 'Perhaps, but so are most writers' (Morrison 2005).

Some of those who were close to Carver have rejected the idea that his unedited works are truer to him. Richard Ford, a fellow writer and good friend of Carver during his life, said he feared the discussion of the unedited works would 'inadvertently diminish Ray'; he said, 'I have absolute confidence that Ray wrote everything in his stories according to my understanding of how writers write what they write' (Max 1998). For several years Carver's publisher, Knopf, who controls the rights to his work, obstructed publication of the earlier manuscript on the grounds that the collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* requires no explanation. It is what it is, they claimed, it is not standing in for some other pure text (Campbell 2009).

In Wood's 2009 interview of Gallagher, she notes that Carver's widow saw the process as a 'restoration', exhuming Carver's true words from under Lish's hand (Wood 2009). Campbell states that 'In Gallagher's view, *Beginners* represents the authentic Carver' (Campbell 2009). But critics have also questioned whether the process of resuscitating the 'original' manuscript isn't itself a form of adulteration. Campbell notes that three tales included in the 2009 volume *Carver: Collected Stories* were 'found in March 1999 by Tess Gallagher and Jay Woodruff', who transcribed them from 'typescripts and handwritten drafts', without the benefit of the late author's guidance (Campbell 2009). Who is to say their transcripts are absolutely accurate replicas of the originals, Campbell asks. He writes, 'In restoring

Beginners, Stull and Carroll have transcribed Carver's typewritten words that lie beneath Lish's alterations in ink on the typescripts – itself a form of distortion, in the absence of the author's validation' (Campbell 2009).

In what follows, I take as my lead Blanchot's rejection of the idea of any clearly determined author. For Blanchot, 'A writer is not an idealistic dreamer. He does not contemplate himself in the intimacy of his soul' (Blanchot 1995a: 303). The question of the impulse to identify authorship goes beyond the scope of this thesis. For Blanchot, literature isn't located in the author's self-presence, rather the author's 'work exists only when it has become his public' (Blanchot 1995a: 306). Accordingly, this thesis is more interested in considering the reception of Carver's edited and unedited prose than in identifying the 'true Carver'.

I explore why the public has branded the edited prose 'minimalist' and the unedited 'realist'. What is it about the specificity of each form of writing, as well as the historical contexts in which they are received, that gives rise to these different stylistic tags? As with Adorno, whose interest lies not in rejecting conceptual categories, but in showing the non-identical that resides within the identical, rather than doing away with the designations 'realism' and 'minimalism', my project is interested in probing the important and unexamined question of the different alterities of writings that have received these labels. I am concerned with the alterity of these different forms and how readers experience them: how do the distinctly different edited and unedited prose forms provoke different experiences of psychological alterity (and how might these have specific ethical implications)? For Hal Foster, the otherness of art can give rise to 'a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts, a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, original and repetition' (Foster 1996: 207). Accordingly,

I will ask whether the different alterities of Carver's edited and unedited writings disturb any simple demarcation between the original and the edit.

The minimalist other

Carver on minimalism

In *The Paris Review* interview in 1983, Carver rejected the label for which he had become famous. 'There's something about 'minimalist' that smacks of smallness of vision', he said (Carver 1983). Yet throughout his writing career and to this day Carver has been branded 'minimalist' by numerous critics, including Frank Kermode, Morris Dickstein, Randolph Runyon, and Cynthia W. Hallett (Buford 1983: 5; Dickstein 1991: 507; Runyon 1994: 1-4, 14; Hallett 1999: 43-66).

It is not the intention of this thesis to reach a comprehensive definition of the term 'minimalism'. Taking my lead from Derrida, who questions the value of so-called literary 'styles', what he calls 'isms', I am wary of the appropriative act involved in subsuming singular writing to generalized literary movements (Derrida 1990: 79). Taking heed of Ford's claim that 'minimalism' is 'a critical term foreign to the work . . . It's at best a convenience for a reviewer too lazy to deal with the good work on its own terms' (Herzinger: 8-9), I intend to examine the specific modes of literary alterity in the edited and unedited Carver, while taking into account the forms that critics have designated to them.

It might be argued that the terms ‘minimalism’ and ‘realism’ are unhelpful in exploring Carver’s alterity, particularly given the variety and disagreement concerning their definitions; perhaps there would have been less controversy surrounding the edited and unedited Carver if there wasn’t such a liking, amongst critics, for totalized categorisations. Nonetheless, I believe that the question of the alterity of Carver’s form of writing that has so often been labelled ‘minimalist’ remains an important and unexamined one. As such, it is necessary to consider how Carver’s edited prose is situated in relation to the historical development and theorisations of minimalism and then realism. Whether my specific readings of the edited and unedited Carver might lead to wider reaching theories about the otherness of ‘minimalist’ and ‘realist’ prose goes beyond the scope of this thesis. But it is my hope that my reflections might shed some new light on the different orientations of alterity in other forms of writing that have been labelled ‘realist’ and ‘minimalist’.

What is minimalism?

One problem with the term minimalism is that it has come to refer to diverse phenomena. In his 1986 *New York Times* article, ‘A Few Words About Minimalism’, the American fiction writer and critic John Barth suggests that that there are as many definitions of minimalism as there are critics: minimalism is elided with ‘K-Mart Realism’, ‘hick chic’, ‘Diet-Pepsi Minimalism’, ‘post- Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early- Hemingwayism’ (Barth 1985: 18). Indeed, ‘minimalism’ not only accrues diverse meanings within literature, it has been used across other art forms; it has been used not only to designate a ‘style’ but to refer to a historical artistic phenomenon. Given the broad usage of the term, my

survey of criticism will be limited firstly to reflections on the ‘minimalist’ writing that came to dominate North American literature in the 1960s and 1970s – the ‘less is more’ dictum that became something of a *sine qua non* in American fiction, and secondly to Carver criticism.

Herzinger suggests that criticism of literary minimalism should develop beyond its definition and instead move towards an analysis of its aesthetic effects (Herzinger 1985: 11); in focusing on the form of Carver’s so-called minimalism, this thesis is in part a response to Herzinger. Most critics concur in defining 1960s and 1970s American literary minimalism as a form of prose dependent upon omission, absence and economy, focusing on the ‘extrospective’, reducing, paring down, and condensing meaning. James Meyer suggests that the wave of minimalism in America in the 1970s arose in response to the postmodern or metafiction trend of the 1960s, such as the works of John Barth, Robert Coover, and William H. Gass (Meyer 2010: 78-79). Characterised by anti-realism and textual play, postmodern short stories were highly self-conscious linguistic operations. Rick Crownshaw claims that minimalism shares postmodernism’s unwillingness to order reality into a coherent whole, via a progressive and linear plot (Crownshaw: 2009). But in place of excess meaning, minimalism is characterised by its deficit. Instead of rejoicing in the surplus of sense, minimalism shows up the lack and limits in representation. According to Lohafer, minimalism shows the holes that the preceding writers would have ‘stopped up with more language’ (Lohafer 1983: 65).

For Hal Foster, minimalism undercuts the subject. The existentialism of the expressionist ‘I express’ is substituted with ‘I perceive’, contradicting the idealist model of consciousness, which according to Foster dominates traditional realism (Foster 1996: 42). Minimalism deploys metonym, says Cynthia W. Hallett, in which

the part stands in for the whole: the slice of life (Hallet 1999: 32). Hassan defines minimalism as an anti-style, an 'opaque' 'transparency' that interrogates the assumed knowledge of the realist text, challenging realism's assumed ability to denote precisely (Hassan 1967: 34-35).

Minimalism has also been understood as an ideological critique; while this topic stretches beyond the central focus of this thesis, it is central to theorisations of minimalism and thus deserves acknowledgement. In *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Minimal Times*, Christopher Lasch claims that minimalism reflects the desolate, minimal modern condition of the post war American; minimalism is an aesthetic of exclusion that underlines social exclusions (Lasch 1985: 11). Likewise, for Foster, in undermining the idealist model of consciousness, minimalism avoids the illusionism and conservative ideology of traditional realism. For Foster, the American minimalism of the 1960s and 1970s reflected late capitalist reification of subjectivity and critiqued it, foregrounding the externality, seriality and superficiality of experiences in advanced capitalism (Foster 1996: 24).

However, others have been more sceptical about minimalism's role as social critique. Rather than undermine ideology, says Klinkowitz, the minimalism of the 1960s and 1970s was banal, trivial and inconsequential, preoccupied with the 'most mundane concerns of superficial life' (Klinkowitz 1993: 364). According to Kauffman, minimalism denies affect, it 'destroys a story's pathos, encouraging readers to view the sorrows of others as a kind of aesthetic or as an epistemological problem' (Kauffman 1991: 101-102). For Miriam Marty Clark minimalism 'reduces polyphony', the heteroglossia of diverse voices; it is curtailment to the point of solipsism' (Clark 1991: 240, 245).

Carver, minimalism and alterity

Does the edited Carver sit squarely in the minimalist camp? Not according to Stephen King. In an interview in *The New York Times*, King claims that Carver wrote ‘stories that a generation of critics and teachers would miscategorize as “minimalism”’ (King 2009). For King, Carver’s economic prose is merely a continuation of the American hardboiled detective tradition (King 2009). According to Leypoldt, the term ‘minimalism’ is too restrictive in its application to Carver; for Leypoldt, Carver’s edited and unedited prose resists any neat aesthetic categorization (Leypoldt 2002: 327). Campbell describes Carver as the ‘most influential but least representative of minimalists’, implying that he both formed and broke the minimalist mould (Campbell 2009). Some trace the edited minimalism to Hemingway (Campbell 2009; Bennett 2010). Carver is ‘blue color... Hemingwayism’, says Barth (Barth 1986). Speaking of the edited Carver, Warren Carlin notes the inaction in his minimalism: ‘on the surface, nothing, or almost nothing happens’ (Carlin 1988: 49). For Dickstein, Carver’s minimalism is characterized by ‘spare disjunctive details’ (Dickstein 1991: 46). Frank Kermode remarks on Carver’s minimalist use of metonym: the edited Carver evokes ‘a whole culture and a whole moral condition [in] the most seemingly slight sketch’ (Buford 1983: 5).

In arguing that otherness is always already bound to meaning in Carver’s edit, my position departs from Peter Burger, who assigns absolute alterity to minimalism (Burger 1984: 53). Instead, my theorisation accords with Foster, who claims that minimalist alterity is always already in relation to representation (Foster 1996: 56-

58). I argue that Carver's prose problematizes those values of authenticity and originality that Walter Benjamin held in suspicion. Through my reading of the edited Carver, I show that Berger's absolute enigmatic origin of minimalism suggests an evacuation of meaning that is simply the flipside of self-presence: the opposite, but pertaining to the same logic. Undermining the notion of an immediate experience of otherness, I argue that Carver's edited prose tends to conform to a different linguistic structuring in which alterity is divorced from yet forged by linguistic meaning.

In defining the minimalist aesthetic, critics often allude to its underlying fixed structure or system. Critics have identified a subtle structure that underlies minimalism and Carver's particular modulation of it. In minimalism, says Foster, 'seriality is integral to the technical production of the work, to the objects in their everydayness, in their systematic' (1996: 40); moreover, minimalism creates limited, insular spaces, 'determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on and inside of it' (1996: 44). For Judd, minimalism is 'built on a-priori systems, systems built beforehand' (Judd 1995: 148-165). Alluding to Carver's covert minimalist design, Meredith Marsh says, 'The first impact of all the stories is sharp and visceral. Only afterwards, as the skeleton of each one keeps rattling in the mind, does the painstaking intelligence of their designer become apparent' (Marsh 1981: 38-40). Just as these critics characterize the minimalist aesthetic in terms of rigid, demarcating, even dividing structures, so I theorise the language of Carver's edit as pertaining to a linguistic binding in which alterity is cut off from meaning, pertaining to a more split structuring. In Carver's minimalist aesthetic of exclusion, otherness is in conjunction with yet cut off from meaning. Lending this aesthetic theorisation a psychoanalytic slant, I conceptualise Carver's split minimalist language as performing the structuring of the originary linguistic cut (note Marsh's

‘sharp and visceral’). Indeed, this also accords with Leader’s quiet madness, where the defensive demarcation between meaning and alterity is rigid and immobile.

The unedited prose: Carver the realist?

In an introductory essay to a 1987 collection of American short stories, Carver writes:

...the bias of this collection...is towards the lifelike—that is to say, towards realistically fashioned stories that may even in some cases approximate the outlines of our own lives. Or if not our own, at least the lives of our fellow human beings—grown up men and women engaged in the ordinary but sometimes remarkable business of living and, like ourselves, in full awareness of their mortality. (Carver 2001: 221)

In this essay Carver says he hopes the anthology will participate in a ‘resurgence’ of ‘realist fiction’ (2001: 221). These reflections come towards the end of Carver’s writing career, a year before his final collection *Elephant* (Carver 1988), when he was writing in the softer, more meandering style of the unedited *Beginners*. In Carver’s essay, ‘realistically fashioned stories’ are both ‘lifelike’ and ‘remarkable’, recognizable and strange, ordinary yet tied to ‘awareness of mortality’ – to the inexplicable. Realist prose is unique because it has ‘heft to it’ (2001: 223), Carver avers –an opaque term, signalling the quiet alterity of realism, the something one apprehends in it but cannot define (‘it doesn’t even need naming’; 2001: 223).

It is this ‘heft’ of realism, the unrecognizable amidst the recognizable and the *relation* between the two, which I attend to in Carver’s unedited prose. A year later, in an essay entitled ‘On Longer Stories’, Carver says that there needs to be something of consequence in good writing, ‘something important working itself from sentence to sentence’ (2001: 229). In stark contrast to the heavy silences and clipped, hard lines that characterize his early edited work, Carver writes that ‘I prefer the light touch in this matter of how consequence is delivered’ (2002: 229). This thesis explores the lighter form of alterity embedded in the unedited prose, the quieter ‘heft’ at work in his so-called ‘realist’ sentences.

The realist attack

Realism is clearly a broad category and as with ‘minimalism’ it is not my intention to debate the definitions of the term. But given the frequency with which Carver’s unedited work has been described as ‘realist’ in distinction from the ‘minimalist’ edit, I believe it is necessary to carry out some delimitation and historical contextualisation of the term, before turning to the form of realism associated with the unedited Carver of both the 1980s and 2009.

Literary realism has been said to reach its acme in 19th century writing, with two dominant and divergent strands in France and America. French realism has been associated with the works of Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant, stretching from the early to late 19th century and characterized by simple observation and recording of reality, unadorned, factual documentation, and the everyday lives of the bourgeoisie (Bowlby 2007: xi-xviii). American realism emerged later in the century. Mark Twain has been seen as the key writer of this tendency, with William Dean Howells

and Theodor Dreiser as the 'naturalist' offshoots. According to Berthoff, American realism displays greater focus on narrative and everyday dialect and arose in response to the Civil War; its objectivity was a reaction against Romanticism and idealism (Berthoff: 1965: 1-47). While the picture is clearly more complicated, the dominant critical conception is that classical 'realist' writing is governed by the 'reality effect', the illusion of a real referent. Rather than draw attention to its artifice, the language of realism presents itself as having transparent access to reality (Brooks 2005: 2).

By the 1960s and 1970s, when Carver started writing, American literature had undergone a backlash against realism. Classical realism was accused of supporting conservative ideology and foreclosing otherness. Realism reproduced the political and economic status quo, its critics averred. It is 'reassuring' for readers because it 'offers itself as transparent' and dependent on recognisable forms of causality, relationships and values, writes Catherine Belsey in 1980 (Belsey 1980: 9). Natoli views literary realism as an ideological tool that offers a reassuring picture of middle class reality (Natoli 1997: 21, 37). In a famous polemic against realism, Colin MacCabe claims that classic realism naturalizes ideologically constructed reality by concealing the gap between words and their referents (MacCabe 2000: 9). The classic realist text is occupied with 'denying its own status as writing - as marks of material difference distributed through time and space', so that 'the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation' (MacCabe 2000: 9). In this way realism projects a picture of reality as a given harmonious state rather than as complex and constructed. Fredric Jameson concurs. Linking realism to the 'embourgeoisification' of consciousness during the 19th century, Jameson sees the realist text as re-enforcing a narrow notion of reality based

on middle class power and influence (Jameson: 2002: 138).

In defence of realism

In considering the realist techniques by which Carver's unedited writing opens up spaces of alterity, this thesis is situated in opposition to those critics who see realism as foreclosing otherness (Jameson 2002; MacCabe 1997; Belsey 1980; Natoli 1997). The central argument of this thesis – that Carver's so-called 'realist' and 'minimalist' prose opens up different modes of alterity which are always already dependent on meaning – is thus in agreement with de Man, who claims that all 'literature', whether obviously experimental or not, depends on ambiguity but also an assumed relationship between words and 'reality'.

De Man writes:

This realism (in the scholastic sense of the word)... conceives of names as the 'copy' of the ideas... But one might ask – isn't it more or less consciously present in all writing – and whether it is possible to be a writer without some sort of belief in the natural relationship between names and essences. (1986: 9)

De Man questions whether it is helpful to talk about the 'ancient' versus the 'modern', and by implication, realism versus experimentation (de Man 1971: 142-166). He argues that all *literature* (worthy of the name) has a constitutive 'impulse to modernity': that is, to semantic alterity (1971: 147). 'When the autonomous potential of language is revealed by analysis – we are dealing with literariness,' he writes (1986: 10). This 'literariness' is not characteristic of one so-called style more

than another. In de Man's claim that all literature relies on 'some belief in the natural relationship between names and essences' (1986: 10), as well as on its own ambiguity, he attacks those who naively oppose realism: 'naïve oppositions between fiction and reality' are merely 'offspring of an uncritically mimetic conception of art' (1986: 11).

Like de Man, Peter Brooks rejects the naïve opposition between 'experimentalism' and realism. 'Language is all we have' (2005: 45), writes Brooks, and anti-realist texts are as much, if not more, dependent on assumed convergence between words and non-verbal reality than realism:

for all the radical innovation of *Ulysses*, there are certainly perspectives in which it is not a repudiation of realism but its further development. It develops techniques for a better matching of writing to experience of the world, to the transitory but crucial sense perceptions that more traditional forms of writing tended to censor or summarize. (2005: 210)

Abrams traces the split between so-called 'realism' and more experimental prose back to the division between Aristotle and Plato. While Aristotle understood art in terms of mimesis, Plato rejected poetry because it feigned immediate access to truth, which he saw as inherently inaccessible (Abrams 1971: 31-42). Contemporary rejections of realism can thus be seen to have their roots in Platonism; if art is merely an imitation of appearances, then any art that is faithful to the external world is of least value (1971: 31-42).

While Foster occupies a complicated position with respect to realism, since he also joins the chorus of its critics, he questions the primacy accorded to experimentalism in disturbing meaning. 'Does experimentation have a patent on

criticality', he asks (Foster 1996: xvi); and is there even such a possibility as sheer disruption of meaning: 'it is a cliché to talk about transgression pure and simple' (Foster 1996: xvi).

Carver and realism

Carver's relationship with realism is far from simple. Indeed, Carver expressed his own scepticism about categorising literature as 'realism'. In the past, he said, we 'didn't used to have to talk about 'postmodernism' or any of the other 'isms' – including 'realism' (Carver 2001: 222). 'Realism' is clearly a labile term, open to negotiation and redefinition, but that's not to say that Carver didn't deploy the word, or that one shouldn't attempt to delimit his particular position with respect to dominant accounts of realism.

Carver has been associated with a wider resurgence of realist writing in the 1980s labelled 'dirty realism'. Bill Buford coined the term 'dirty realism' in the 1983 editorial of *Granta*, which he described as 'a fiction of a different scope – devoted to the local details, the nuances, the little disturbances in language and gestures' (Buford 1983: 5). One of the problems with using the term 'dirty realism' is that it has sometimes been deployed interchangeably with American 'minimalism' in the 1960s and 1970s. However, 'dirty realism' is also used in a way that is distinct from minimalism to emphasise the social climate of this writing: 'the belly-side of contemporary life' (Buford 1983: 6). Dirty realism was considered a form of 'neo-realism', distinct from the bourgeois subject matter of classical realism. When the collective promise of a new world appeared to be failing, and when the expansion of the American economy after World War II seemed to be declining, the literature was

marked by a 'return to realism and regionalism. A rediscovery of "ordinary" life and ordinary people', says Cynthia Whitney Hallett (1999: 49).

The writers associated with this movement, including Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff, and Jayne Anne Phillips, were, like minimalists, characterized by an economy with words and a focus on surface description, but their prose wasn't as taut and clipped. In Carver, the term 'dirty realism' tends to be used for his later, unedited writing.

While there has been relatively little critical writing on the recently published *Beginners* (Carver 2009), the majority of it has noted the distinction between the edited 'minimalism' and unedited 'realism'. Matthew Price writes, 'Carver achieved with "Beginners" what any writer would want to achieve. He has demonstrated a unique ability for holding up a reflection of reality that at once maintains the essence of the realistic world in which the writer exists, and also conveys the emotional truth of the characters that lived the story' (Price 2010). Critics also note the affinity between Carver's late prose, *Cathedral* and *Elephant*, written post-Lish, and the earlier unedited version of *Beginners* (Campbell 2009). Some critics have been keen to distinguish the 'realist' prose of *Beginners* from classic realism: 'You might call this realism', says Matthew Price, 'but it's pushing at something else altogether, toward a dizzying void' (Price 2010). Richard Eder describes *Beginners* as 'the husk of realism' (Eder 1972). And for G.P. Lainsbury, the power of the unedited prose is that it doesn't fit neatly into one single genre: 'he works within two genres, which are, within the context of late twentieth century literature, assuredly minor artistic genres' (Lainsbury 2004: 1).

Carver's unedited so-called 'realist' prose has been subject to the same attack as 19th century classical realism: in failing to draw immediate attention to the medium of language Carver's unedited prose is a force of ideological conservatism. 'Those critics concerned with ideology and its propagation through literature' believe that Carver's writing serves to reinforce 'the hegemonic ideological discourse of late capitalism' rather than engage in a disruptive counter discourse, claims G. P. Lainsbury (2001: 1). While for Kauffman 'the solitary figures may critique the system they're in but they remain caught in it' (1991: 112). Diana Stevenson believes that Carver's realism 'presumes a consensus, a class code, a consumer code' (Lainsbury 2001: 3). In these critics, Carver's unedited realism is defined by its closure of alterity. The argument of this thesis is more in accord with James Atlas, who says that Carver's realist 'idiom is the refusal of the idea of greatness' (Atlas 1981: 98). Carver 'refuses to say more than he knows, and he does not profess to know much in the way that historians, philosophers, and literary critics do' (Atlas 1981: 98). Rather than form explicit ideological criticism, I argue that the language of Carver's late 'realist' prose implicitly critiques the psychical underpinnings of certain forms of late capitalism. Through fusing the public and the private, his writing exposes Arendt's loss of privacy proper in modern times (Arendt 1999: 155); at times, via the spatial merging of inside and outside domains, and the linguistic concealment of alterity, Carver's 'realist' prose *stages* late capitalist narcissistic assimilation of otherness – forming a critique of it. Likewise, in the presentation of 'housekeeping' that emerges in the later prose, along with the list-like language that's redolent of data collecting, in Carver's late 'realist' writing, the late-capitalist bureaucratisation of sheer existence is internalised in linguistic

expression, as characters are shown to treat themselves, and others, as objects of administration (Arendt: 1999: 38-40).

Realist alterity

This thesis argues that Carver's unedited prose isn't simply obedient to the well-documented, often overly simplified accounts of literary realist conventions. He isn't simply lumped with the 'classical realist' or with 'dirty realism', both of which have been accused of reducing literary otherness to verisimilitude. However, this is not to say that there isn't something distinctly 'realist' about his prose, in my refining of the term with respect to Carver.

For J. Hillis Miller it is the study of realism rather than realism itself that covers over what he calls the 'strangeness' of literary realism (Hillis Miller 2002: 17-18, 47-48). In attending to what I see as the subtle alterity of Carver's unedited 'realism', the corporeal otherness at play in the meandering, expansive sentences of his unedited writing, I aim to add a more nuanced contribution to the study of 'realist' texts. Just as Hillis Miller speaks of an irreducible, inexplicable 'matter' in Henry James's more realist language (2002: 58), so I show the quiet otherness that is embedded in Carver's unedited prose. In accordance with Miller's 'double effect' of reading, in which the referential and the 'wordless reality' interrelate (2002: 44-45), I locate the unedited alterity as that which is *held, sheltered*, perhaps even subtly hidden but not annulled by linguistic meaning. Like Carver's characters whose lives so often go on in a state of in between – between jobs, marriages, day and night, consciousness and sleep – in the 'realist' Carver meaning and alterity relate in a space of inbetweenness – rather than a strict severance, linguistic

reference and alterity interrelate without one dominating; the two intertwine within the corporeality, non-semantic substance of the language. This is where the psychical alterity lies in Carver's unedited, realist writing.

2. Talking About Love in Carver and Lacan

‘Beginners’ and ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’

Lish cut 50% of Carver’s story ‘Beginners’ for publication in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981. Note that in Lish’s first edit of ‘Beginners’ he deleted the last five pages of the story. In his second edit that formed the 1981 published version he changed the title to ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ and eliminated the names of the old couple Anna and Henry Gates. ‘Beginners’ was first published in the *New Yorker* in a version identical to the text published in 2009 in *Beginners*.²

In Carver’s ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’, a cardiologist named Mel McGinnes, his wife Terri, and their two friends, Laura and Nick, sit around a kitchen table, drinking gin and talking about love. Terri explains that her ex-boyfriend loved her so much he tried to kill her. Mel says he loved his ex-wife more than life itself; he asks, “‘What happened to that love?’” (Carver 2003: 120).

‘Well, Nick and I know what love is,’ says Laura, ‘You’re supposed to say something now.’ She turns a large smile on him. Mel says, ‘What do any of us really know about love?’ (2003: 120).

Published in 1981 in the titular volume, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, the story has become one of Carver’s most renowned. The collection received high acclaim, securing Carver’s reputation as the master of minimalism. However, *Beginners*, the unedited collection, reveals the extent to which Carver’s editor, Gordon Lish, transformed the original. Lish cut 50 percent of the story, changed or removed the names of characters, radically altered the ending, and excised Carver’s more expansive voice.

² Publication details taken from ‘Notes’ collated by Stull and Carroll in *Beginners* (Carver 2009: 211-212).

The story ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ and the unedited version, ‘Beginners’, both explore the inexpressibility of love, but through different forms of linguistic expression. In both stories love is what cannot be expressed through conventional linguistic meaning. But in the minimalist edit, the conjunction of highly literal language and gaps in meaning make love at once determined and unknown, fixed and void. In ‘Beginners’, however, the language is more expansive. Characters scuttle around the point: their stuttering, visceral expression captures an otherness of love. In his book *Encore*, Lacan draws a distinction between two modes of linguistic expression that have a formal correlation with Carver’s edited and unedited prose: the *whole* refers to a mode of language in which meaning is highly fixed but also empty, and the *not-whole* indicates a form of language which is corporeal and pulsating, making meaning opaque (Lacan 1999: 75–80). These different modes of language have different implications for love, as we shall see in my following reading of Carver and Lacan.

Lacan: language, otherness, love

This year I shall have to articulate what serves as the linchpin of everything that has been instituted on the basis of analytic experience: love (Lacan 1999: 39).

For Lacan, love stems from the impasses in structures of signification, the Real that resists linguistic definition. ‘To make love, as the expression indicates, is poetry’, says Lacan: ‘Love aims at being, namely, at what slips away most in language’ (Lacan 1999: 39). In Lacan, love aims at what cannot be identified in conventional language. In other words, love aims at *being*, that part of the human subject that escapes everyday linguistic meaning. In this way, love can be expressed through poetry, which dismantles conventional linguistic meaning and says something else. Lacan states: ‘the effects of those instances of saying can give a stumbling, bumbling shadow to the feeling known as love’ (1999: 46). As we shall see in my reading of Lacan, the *whole* and *not-whole* positions refer, loosely speaking, to different poetic forms of language that gesture at something which escapes everyday meaning — and so they gesture at love and being.

Taking my lead from Lacan’s suggestion that philosophical and analytic discourse is itself pervaded with ambiguities, I will read Lacan’s own writing not only for its manifest content but for its opacity, attending to the indefinite aspects of his prose (1999: 48). To this end, I will focus in detail on one of Lacan’s Seminars, *Encore*. Lacan rebukes those critics who ‘assume I have an ontology, or, what amounts to the same thing, a system’ (1999: 70). In paying close attention to Lacan’s own prose, at times my readings of his *whole* and *not-whole* positions will contravene critical interpretations of them, which have tended to systematize the different forms of language (Žižek 2002: 57–77; Soler 2002: 99–109; Salecl 2002: 94). Thus, in bringing together Carver and Lacan we will see how Carver’s prose helps us understand Lacan’s different linguistic positions, but also challenges dominant readings of them, so that rather than affirm prior knowledge of Lacan I reach my own distinctive readings. Lacan also enriches our reading of Carver, in

particular how the different structures of language bear formal correlation with different psychological structures, and the implications for love. But before turning to Carver let us take a brief detour through Lacan's *whole* and *not-whole* positions.

As we have seen, for Lacan, love arises from a relationship with the unnameable *real* of being – that part of the subject that escapes fixed linguistic meaning. But this indefinite dimension of the subject can be approached in different ways. The *whole* and *not-whole* refer to different ways in which the subject inhabits or relates to language.³ For Lacan, the *whole* position refers to the subject's *whole* relationship with what Lacan calls the symbolic (2006: 25–52). To backtrack a little, Lacan's symbolic is the differential system of signification which works along two axes. First, on a vertical axis, the word or signifier negates the actual thing by signifying it (something of the real thing is lost in the word). Second, on a horizontal plane, the word attains its meaning through its difference from and similarity to other words ('cat' is only 'cat' because it is not 'bat'; 'bat' is 'bat' because it is not 'bag', and so on) (Lacan 2002: 25–52). In this sense, the symbolic order is differential. In the symbolic, there is therefore no inherent or natural relationship between the word and the thing it signifies; the symbolic is a system of linguistic meaning that operates according to convention. Lacan's symbolic therefore functions according to two different logics of absence: first, the word's negation of the thing, or being, and so its absence, and second, the differential gaps, or absences, *between* words in the chain of signification (the differential gaps between 'cat' and 'bat' and 'bag' and so on). Thus, assigned to the symbolic order, subjectivity is

³ Note: The French terms *tout* and *pas-tout* are translated into the English *whole* and *not-whole* by Bruce Fink (1999), while other translators prefer 'all' and 'not all'. Leader, D. (1993), 'The not all', *Lacanian Ink*, [online] 11 January. Available at: <<http://www.lacan.com/frameVIII5.htm>> [accessed 7 July 2012].

exposed to alterity, outside itself (Lacan 2002).

The subject therefore always encounters a loss and division within language: part of *being* escapes symbolic meaning. For Lacan, the *whole* position is *wholly* defined by the symbolic order: by its operations of meaning and absence (Lacan 1999). Lacan refers to the vertical axis, by which the thing or being is negated and defined by the word, as ‘linguistic castration’ (1999: 44, 81–8). The word cuts into being, as something of being is severed from the word’s meaning, but at the same time the subject is determined by the word (i.e. we rely on meaning to operate as communicable subjects). Lacan identifies the first, ‘originary linguistic cut’ (1999: 44, 81–8, 108), which refers to the subject’s first acquisition of language; this is the infant’s first traumatic division between becoming the subject of meaning and the negation of its prelinguistic being. I read Lacan’s *whole* position in language as operating according to a more radically polarized logic of meaning and lack. Via a close reading of Lacan, I locate his *whole* position as pertaining to the first, traumatic ‘linguistic cut’, where the word negates being and we have an extreme polarity between meaning and lack (Lacan 1999: 81–8). This is distinct from full integration within the symbolic, where lack is inscribed in the differential gaps between signifiers that move along the horizontal chain of signification. Unlike the interrelated gaps of signification, the first linguistic cut, which negates being for the first signifier or acquisition of language, fosters a calcified form of alterity – in the first traumatic lack of being. There is thus a difference between the ‘love’ that arises from the linguistic negation of being and the ‘love’ that arises from the gaps between signifiers (Lacan 1999: 44, 81–8, 108).

The *not-whole*, on the other hand, is defined as not wholly castrated by

language and so not cut by it (Lacan 1999). Lacan states, ‘oddly enough (*singulièrement*) [the *not-whole* position] is intrinsically’ inside language (Lacan 1999: 40; my italics). The *not-whole* position inhabits the very materiality of language. Otherness as in the outside of meaning arises from the indefinite corporeal texture of language itself. Indeed, Lacan’s term *singulièrement* hints at a more ‘singular’ relation to language; invoking Attridge’s ‘singularity of literature’ (Attridge 2004a), in inhabiting the indefinite textuality of signifiers, the subject experiences contact with the singularity of *being*. Thus, I suggest the *not-whole* position appears closer to Attridge’s singularity and Derrida’s *différance* than to Badiou and those readers of set theory who attend to the universal ‘empty set’ or ‘void’ in language, and thus concord more with the *whole position* (Badiou 2007: 68-69). That is, in Lacan’s *not-whole* position, linguistic alterity resides in the indeterminate absences *in relation to* signifiers, otherness is inhabited in the materiality of language itself, in what Lacan calls the ‘signifying swarm’ (Lacan 1999: 141), close to Derrida’s insistence on the interrelationship between linguistic meaning and otherness in *différance*, and his notion that ‘the text is a thing’, a ‘foreign body already inside’ (Derrida 1985: 121), literature is excess, supplementary. Accordingly, for Derrida, literature ‘never proceeds without love’ (Derrida 1995: 83). For Badiou, on the other hand, literature harbours universality, not singularity - unsymbolised reality that he calls the universal void. Like Lish’s minimalism that is situated at the edge of the void, or cut, not *in* the gap that opens up, Badiou’s literature is not the void itself, but ‘arranged on the edge of the void’ (qtd. in Hallward 2003: 106). Indeed, Badiou speaks of literary ‘mechanisms that arrange these forms at the edge of the void, in a network of cuts and disappearances’ (qtd. in Hallward 2003: 106). Like my account of the linguistic cut that fails to find

integration in signification, Badiou's void is not the particular, but 'the solitary exception' that's 'uprooted from its situation' (2003: 193), it is the universal that fails to form relations. The literary event must 'formalise the formless', 'purify the impure', says Badiou (qtd. in Hallward 2003: 195) in a language of subtraction, a kind of pure distillation of language. Accordingly, for Badiou, love is also the event on the edge of the void. Love is the 'exceptional', the void removed from relation; Peter Hallward describes it as 'precise, austere, indifferent to all sentimental confusion' (2003: 185).

In Lacan, the *whole* and *not-whole* positions in language have different implications for knowledge. The *whole* position operates according to finite meaning, and so it pertains to finite knowledge. The alterity of the *whole* position, that which is outside of its meaning, continues to pertain to the field of knowledge, but it is its inverse: the unknown, situated in the gaps in symbolic meaning (Lacan 1999: 96). In the *not-whole* position, otherness (of meaning) is more 'radically other' (1999: 96): otherness is not simply the inverse of knowledge, as the unknown; it is 'unfathomable' (1999: 96) — radically outside the very field of knowledge. This has consequences for love. For Lacan, gaps in knowledge give rise to *desire*. But that which is radically outside the field of knowledge, unfathomable, gives rise to *love*. As we shall see in our reading of Carver, in the edited text the other person is depicted as an unknown object of fantasy. This unknown other person remains within the logic of determinate meaning, but as its hollowed out, unknown, semblance. In the unedited text, however, the other person is presented as radically other to the field of knowledge, unfathomable, and therefore loved.

Beginners at love

‘My friend Mel McGinnis was talking. Mel McGinnis is a cardiologist, and sometimes that gives him the right’: so opens ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ (Carver 2003: 114). These opening lines display determinacy of linguistic meaning: the sentences are lean, syntactically straightforward; the subject of the sentence occupies the position of grammatical subject. In line with Lacan’s *whole* position in language, the subject of the sentence appears to be in command of linguistic meaning, rather than inhabiting the materiality of language itself. As Lacan puts it, the subject *has* the signifier, instead of *being* the signifier (Lacan 1999: 73–4). The measured repetitions of the same subject verb object conjugation enhance the sense of semantic determinacy. Immediately after the word ‘right’, Lish cuts Carver’s original lengthy paragraph and starts a new one, so that alongside finite meaning comes the empty page. In contrast to the edit, the opening of ‘Beginners’ is more faltering: ‘My friend Herb McGinnis, a cardiologist, was talking. The four of us were sitting around his kitchen table drinking . . .’ (Carver 2009: 177; note, Herb is renamed Mel in the edit). With the subclause and run-on sentences, in the unedited version we see signs of a more capacious voice.

The edited story continues: ‘We lived in Albuquerque then. But we were all from somewhere else’ (Carver 2003: 114). Inserting a full stop before ‘But’, Lish’s edited line becomes pithy, economical. Again, the line is followed by a paragraph cut, leaving the reader lingering on the inscrutable ‘somewhere else’. Even in the opening lines, Lish’s editorial strategy is clear. On the one hand, he clips back Carver’s original expansive sentences, studding lines with full stops to enhance their

literalness of meaning. On the other hand, he lops paragraphs, creating linguistic cuts at especially nebulous moments. We see Lacan's *whole* dynamic emerging — finite meaning meets emptiness (Lacan 1999).

Lish's lean rhythms work similarly. Critics have remarked on the choppy Hemingway-like rhythms of the edited Carver (Morrison 2009; Campbell 2009; Barth 1984: 1). Indeed, we have seen this rhythm in the opening lines. Responsible for the thudding repetitions, Lish inserted the 'he said', 'she said' that became Carver's trademark:

The gin and the tonic water kept going around, and we somehow got on the subject of love. Mel thought real love was nothing less than spiritual love. *He said* he'd spent five years in a seminary . . . *He said* he still looked back to those years . . . *Terri said* the man she lived with before she lived with Mel loved her so much he tried to kill her. Then *Terri said*, 'He beat me up one night . . .' *Terri looked* around the table: 'What do you do with love like that?' (Carver 2003: 114; my italics indicating edit)

We learn that Terri's ex-boyfriend, Ed, loved her so much he tried to kill her and also himself, but he 'bungled it' (Carver 2003: 116). His head swelled up to twice the size. Mel says, "We had a fight over it. I didn't think she should see him like that. I didn't think she should see him, and I still don't" (Carver 2003: 118). Lish inserts this repetition. As Deleuze and Guattari have demonstrated, repetition has a contradictory effect: on the one hand, it affirms meaning; on the other hand, it negates it (we lose the sense of the words the more they are repeated) (Deleuze 1994). The same effect is produced in Lish's edit, as the repeated words certify literal meaning, but also render meaning redundant, emptying it. Again, we have the dynamic of Lacan's *whole*: both over-determined meaning and lack.

In Lish's minimalist edit we do not simply have a linguistic dynamic of meaning and then lack of meaning, since this would conform to the binding of the symbolic order, which works according to signifiers of meaning and differential gaps in meaning. In the edited Carver, the relationship between meaning and lack of meaning is more polarized. It is my contention that the minimalist prose performs a cutting into linguistic meaning, which might be understood in terms of Lacan's 'linguistic cut' (Lacan 1999: 44, 81–8). The minimalist prose amplifies the very contradiction of linguistic castration – that is, the subject's original severance between meaning and lack; it is as if the minimalist prose homes in on this originary linguistic cut, exposing the traumatic institution of meaning and absence.

We see this in Lish's tendency to lop paragraphs, which both emphasizes the determinacy of the preceding lines and creates semantic gaps. In the unedited story Herb and his friends make a toast: 'We touched glasses. "To love," we said' (Carver 2009: 182). After this sentence Carver originally started a new line. But Lish starts an entirely new subsection. Here, the protracted gap on the page creates an unsignified space, so that love appears inexplicable. This dynamic continues.

In the edited story, time and again references to love are followed by line breaks, which constitute a kind of cut: "What do you do with love like that?" [Line break] "I sure know you wouldn't call it love." [Line break] "Does that sound like love to you?" [Line break] "To love" [Line break] (Carver 2003: 114, 115, 119). In the unedited story, 'Beginners', characters ramble around the point. For example, Herb says:

'Did that love just get erased from the big board, as if it was never up there, as if it never happened? What happened to it is what I'd like to know. I wish someone could

tell me . . . I know that's what would happen with us, with Terri and me, as much as we may love each other. With any of us for that matter. I'll stick my neck out that much. We've all proved it anyhow. I just don't understand.' (Carver 2009: 183)

But in the edit the word 'love' is frequently followed by stark impassés. It is curious that, more than for other heavy-handed editors, critics have drawn on a vocabulary of violence to describe Lish's edit. In Blake Morrison's review of 'Beginners' in the *Guardian* he calls 'the true Carver . . . less brutal' (Morrison 2009). The stories 'were substantially, if not brutally, edited by Gordon Lish', says James Campbell, who also reflects on 'a five page Lish excision' (Campbell 2009). In contrast to the unedited 'Beginners', in Lish's edit 'the characters can be more brutal', says Wood (Wood 2009). 'Two stories had been *slashed* by nearly seventy per cent', we learn, in *The New Yorker's* 'Rough crossings: The cutting of Raymond Carver' (Anon 2007; my italics). The comments tap into what I see as the psychical truth of Lish's edit: that his minimalist language stages the formal structure of the originary linguistic cut – the traumatic cut between linguistic meaning and the failure of meaning to capture *being*, instituting an originary loss (Lacan 1998: 236–8). Lacan describes the *whole* position in terms of the brutal primordial loss instituted by linguistic castration (Lacan 1999: 44, 81–8). The symbolic order of language works according to two institutions of lack: first, the negation of being by the word, creating the *lack* of being; and, second, the *lacks* (or gaps) between signifiers in the differential chain of signification. In this way, the first, original lack of being is structured via the lacks in the structure of signification. In the symbolic order Lacan says that being 'slips' behind the signifiers which 'eclipse' it, so that *being* is partly hidden and partly revealed through language (Lacan 1998: 236–8). But the subject of the *whole* position appears to be more radically cut by the first

negation of being via the word: the subject is more radically riven between meaning and lack. Roman Jakobson described literature as ‘organized violence committed on ordinary speech’ (1987: 378), and this is precisely Lish’s procedure. But rather than dismember language and manipulate it into new, so-called experimental formations, Lish exacerbates its inherent logic — the brutal cut between determinate meaning and negation. In so doing, he captures a certain truth of the subject, what Paul de Man has described as the tragic linguistic schism: ‘literature is itself a cause and a symptom of the separation it bewails’ (1983: 115).

Revealingly, in his attempt to define the *whole* position Lacan also deploys the language of the cut: ‘I cannot designate it any better or otherwise because I have to rough [tranche] it out’, he states (1999: 74). In a footnote to the English edition of *Encore*, the translator, Bruce Fink, provides the original French term for ‘rough it out’ as ‘tranche’. In Lacan’s passage, the term *tranche* is used figuratively as in ‘determine’ but it also resounds with its literal sense, ‘to slice or cut’. To determine meaning is thus to institute a cut. As we have seen, critics have spoken of the violence of Lish’s edit, but they have also, curiously, described it as a kind of bodily cut: ‘He also consistently cut the stories to the linguistic bone, developing a uniquely spare, laconic, almost threatening aesthetic that was eventually dubbed “minimalism” or “Kmart realism”’ (Anon 2007). Indeed, expressing his own discomfort with his minimalist prose, Carver once described the style as a kind of bodily lesion:

I knew I’d gone as far the other way as I could or wanted to go, cutting every- thing down to the marrow, not just to the bone. Any farther in that direction and I’d be at a dead end . . . In a review of the last book, somebody called me a ‘minimalist’ writer. The reviewer meant it as a compliment. But I didn’t like it. (Carver 1983)

Just as Lacan's *whole* position cuts into the primal being, so for both Carver and his critics, the minimalist aesthetic of the edit appears to excise something original, cutting out something bodily. Framed as a corporeal cut, minimalism captures the originary cut between meaning and the loss of being.

Pleasure of the edit

Critics have noted the strange enjoyment one experiences in reading Carver's language of omission: 'But there is scant room for argument about the abrupt, elliptical tone of the early Carver, which intoxicated a generation of readers and writers', says James Campbell (Campbell 2009). I suggest that this affect can be understood in terms of the experience of painful pleasure that Lacan calls *jouissance*; *jouissance* refers to the pleasurable illusion of limitless access to being, the fantasy of total self-presence prior to the subject's division within language (Lacan 1999: 66, 75). Lacan states: 'No *jouissance* is given to me or could be given to me other than that of my own body . . . The result of the limit [of language] is that *jouissance* dries up for everybody' (qtd. in Fink 1995: 101). In other words, *jouissance*, as the pleasure of full self-presence, is necessarily impossible, always precluded because of the limits of meaning introduced by language – and thus such illusions of pleasure are also painful.

I will consider the distinctive affects of Carver's edited and unedited prose in light of Lacan's different formulations of *jouissance*: the *jouissance* of the *whole*

and *not-whole* positions (Lacan 1999). First, the *jouissance* of the *whole* position refers to the pleasurable pain procured through the lack (of being) instituted by language. ‘The goal of satisfying the thought of being’ is ‘never satisfied, except at the price of a castration’, says Lacan (1999: 115). In this sense, the *jouissance* of the *whole* position is the painful satisfaction that arises from linguistic castration – the subject’s first traumatic cut between linguistic meaning and lack (of being) (Lacan 1999: 105). This is the painful pleasure of renunciation; Lacan calls it ‘insufficient *jouissance*’ – the pleasure of renouncing full self-presence, getting off on the originary loss of complete being.

On the other hand, the *jouissance* of the *not-whole* position refers to the corporeal pleasure of inhabiting language (1999: 72–4). Lacan calls this ‘supplementary *jouissance*’ (1999: 72–4). Like the *jouissance* procured through Julia Kristeva’s ‘semiotic’ language, her language of ‘bodily pulsions’ (Kristeva 1984: 25), this is a corporeal *jouissance* that arises from inhabiting the ‘the being of signifiers’, the materiality of language (Lacan 1999: 71). Instead of the painful pleasure that arises from omission, the unedited Carver creates a gentle, more moving, or bodily affect, critics suggest. In place of dissociation comes feeling. Wood writes, ‘The edited characters well up; the original characters spill over’ (Wood 2009); for Blake Morrison states the unedited Carver ‘is gentler’ and ‘less brutal’ than Lish’s Carver’ (Morrison 2009).

Returning to the edited Carver, it is not just the reader or critic who experiences discomfiting pleasure from omission. This appears to be the predicament of the edited characters — why they seem so compelled to keep asking questions about love. This is the *jouissance* of the *whole* position: the inability to

define love elicits the painful pleasure that arises from gaps in linguistic sense. In the edited Carver, where talk of love consists of clipped meanings and impasses, such talk is not so much an attempt to understand love as to rub up against its enigma, to gain painful satisfaction from it. This *jouissance* of the *whole* position accords with what Lacan calls the logic of ‘necessity’: ‘it doesn’t stop *not* being written’ (1999: 59; my italics). In the edited Carver, the characters enact the pleasure of repeatedly confronting the lack in linguistic meaning.

In Lacan’s account of the *jouissance* of the *whole* position ascribing to the structure of ‘necessity’, of repeated negations, he appears to elide the *whole* with the repeated *movement* of negation that constitutes the symbolic order. In this way, he suggests that mobility inheres in the *whole* position (1999: 59). Indeed, critics have defined the *jouissance* of the *whole* position as arising from the symbolic order of language: the movement of negation in which one word is not another word along the differential chain of signification that continues, ad infinitum. Speaking of the *whole* position, Bruce Fink states: ‘pleasures are limited to those allowed by the play of the signifier itself . . . to what might be called symbolic *jouissance*. Here, thought itself is *jouissance* laden’ (Fink 1995: 106). For Bruce Fink, the *jouissance* of the *whole* position is the experience of mobility, of moving along the gaps in meaning produced by the symbolic order: *jouissance* is ‘tied to the aspect of the Real that under writes, as it were, the symbolic order’; it is what ‘keeps the symbolic moving’ (Fink 1995: 107). A reading of the minimalist Carver, however, suggests that the *jouissance* of the *whole* position gives rise to *inertia* more than motion. The edited Carver certainly stages the inexorable drive to talk about love, and thereby confront the lack of meaning, but rather than foster mobility this gives rise to stasis. On the level of content, we see this in the characters’ failure to get anywhere on the topic of

love; spatially, this is presented in the characters' stagnation within one setting, and in terms of affect, stasis is evoked in the numbing dissociation that critics have detected.

In this way, Carver's prose appears to question the putative *mobility* inherent to the structure of the *whole* position. It is my contention that Carver's prose suggests a rereading of Lacan's *whole* position in language that situates it closer to the inertia produced by the first, more extreme institution of lack than to the pleasure and mobility produced by the differential gaps in the symbolic order. The *jouissance* induced by the minimalist Carver is less the pleasure of moving from one gap in meaning to the next in the infinite chain of signification, than the pleasurable pain produced by the original linguistic cut. Rather than a mobilizing force, Lacan describes the 'insufficient *jouissance*' (1999: 72) of the *whole* language as stagnant; this '*jouissance* brings with it inertia', he says (1999: 72). This is the dissociation and inertia one experiences from reading the minimalist Carver, in contrast to the corporeality of the unedited prose, which we will consider in what follows.

The space of otherness

In the edited Carver, the linguistic structure of finite meaning cut off from lack has implications for the presentation of the other person. Returning to the edited story,

when the group of friends make their toast to love, Carver originally writes: ‘We raised our glasses again and grinned at each other like children who had agreed on something for once’ (Carver 2009: 182). In a striking alteration, Lish writes: ‘We raised our glasses again and grinned at each other like children who had agreed on something *forbidden*’ (Carver 2003: 120; my italics). In Lacan’s *whole* position, the linguistic cut creates finite meaning but also fosters the fantasy of something mysterious, something off-limits.

This is what he calls ‘object a’, which refers to the subject’s fantasy of lack: an illusion of the unknown fills the originary lack (Lacan 1999: 92). Bruce Fink notes that while the subject of the *whole* position is ‘wholly castrated, there is nevertheless a contradiction: that ideal of non-castration — of knowing no boundaries, no limitations — lives on somewhere, somehow, in each and every man’ (Fink 1995: 111). Similarly, Lish’s institution of finite meaning and lack gives rise to a sense of enigma. In the *whole* position, says Lacan, ‘knowledge’ of the other ‘is censored or forbidden’, giving rise to what he calls ‘idealism’: ‘it is by missing’ (Lacan 1999: 121), says Lacan, that the subject ‘sublimates with all its might, it sees Beauty and the Good — not to mention Truth’ (Lacan 1999: 121). In my reading of Lacan, the *whole* position engenders a space of omission which is the flipside of finite meaning: the fantasy of a *determinate* post-linguistic other. This alterity is the ‘semblance’ (1999: 92) of determinate meaning but in its inverted, empty form. The concept of ‘fantasy’ accrues different meanings in Lacan’s theoretical trajectory. But in *Encore* it refers to the fetishizing of linguistic lack, the phantasmatic fixity of the unsignified (1999: 92).

Accordingly, in carving out gaps in meaning, it is my contention that Lish

creates spaces reserved for unsignified fantasy; the lacks instituted through language become fetishized, calcified. This accounts for the strange phantasmatic feel to the stories that are otherwise so seemingly realistic. Characters fantasize about love's enigma much more so in the edited story than the unedited; likewise, they idealize others. We see this played out not only in Ed's early idealization of Terri, but also in Terri's near obsession with her ex, Ed. Both Ed and Terri fantasize the other who is off-limits (Terri left Ed for Mel; Ed is now dead). This is a more extreme form of fantasy than the neurotic's desire for the unobtainable. Lacan says: 'it is insofar as something brutal is played out in writing . . . that the impasses that are thereby revealed are a possible means of access for us and a reduction of the function of that being in love' (1999: 49). In place of love, we might call this fantasy of the other, as Lacan does at times in *Encore* (1999: 80–109). Capturing something of the nature of this fantasy, Colette Soler writes that fantasy of the other 'is a phenomenon of the subject, related to castration; hence, its essential correlation with not having' (2002: 105). In other words, fantasy of the other stems from prohibition, from not having something. Ed's fantasmatic desire for Terri and hers for him appears to be more extreme than neurotic or symbolic desire. There's a violence inscribed in it, leading to Ed's suicide and to Terri's morbid defence of it. "It was love", Terri says, in the edited story, "Sure, it was abnormal in most people's eyes. But he was willing to die for it. He did die for it" (Carver 2003: 118). In Blanchot's terms, we have a brutal 'seizing of the other' (1987: 18): instead of respecting otherness as ungraspable, the alterity of love becomes almost glamorised, fetishized as the unknown, what Blanchot calls 'sensational' (1987: 18).

While in the edited story Ed and Terri harbour the most dramatic fantasies of the other, Mel and the narrator are similarly disposed. Mel is nostalgic for his ex-

wife and describing his new wife, Laura, the narrator states:

I touched the back of Laura's hand. I picked up Laura's hand. The hand was warm to the touch, the nails polished, perfectly manicured. I encircled the broad wrist with my fingers, like a bracelet, and held her. (Carver 2003: 116)

First introduced as a body part, Laura brings to mind the theoretical origin of Lacan's 'object a', its reformulation of Freud's 'part-object' (Freud 1905: 197–206; 1930: 152–7). Just as the bracelet is an unsignified object of beauty, so Laura is encircled by the narrator's unsignified fantasy. Here, we have a modern-day blazon of the other as part-object. Indeed, two of the central figures of fantasy are presented as body parts — Laura as a hand, Ed as an imploded head — uncanny objects that occupy the space of lack. Bringing to mind Wallace Stevens's lines, 'A man and a woman / Are one. / A man and a woman and a blackbird / Are one' (Stevens 2001: 126–121), Lacan states, 'The sexual relation consists of three terms, one, the other, and object a' (Lacan 1999: 49). It certainly seems that in Carver-land couples rely upon third terms on which to project their unsignified fantasies: the unknown other couple in 'Neighbours', the blind man in 'Cathedral', the indeterminate voice down the phone in 'Whoever Was Using this Bed', the man with no hands in 'Viewfinder' (Carver 2003: 10; Carver 1995: 68–74, 292–308, 347–62). In 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' each couple appears to need the mystery of the other couple, acting as an unknown third term between them, to spur on their conversation about love.

Bodily text: feminine and masculine others

Critics have frequently characterised the minimalist Carver according to its gaps in meaning, its ‘holes’ that other writers would have filled with more language (Lohafer 1983: 65). But the unedited has been described as more visceral, ‘fleshier’, than Lish’s Carver, says Morrison (Morrison 2009). In the edited Carver we have more of a linguistic structuring of determinate meaning and semantic gaps, which incites calcified fantasies of the unknown other. But in the unedited story linguistic meaning and alterity appear more intertwined. Instead of positing otherness outside linguistic meaning, otherness appears more internal to language. In Lacan’s terms, at times the unedited prose harbours the ‘being of signifierness’: it conveys the visceral materiality of language itself (1999: 71). In the unedited prose, Herb’s account of love is particularly corporeal:

‘But it seems to me we’re just rank beginners at *love*. We say we *love* each other and we do, I don’t doubt it. We *love* each other and we *love* hard, all of us. I *love* Terri and Terri loves me, and you guys *love* each other. You know the kind of *love* I’m talking about now. Sexual *love* . . . attraction to the other person, the partner, as well as just the plain everyday kind of *love*, *love* of the other person’s being, the *loving* to be with the other, the little things that make up everyday *love*.’ (Carver 2009: 182; my italics)

Here, the word ‘love’ is repeated with such frequency that the finite meaning fades within the pulsating beat of the prose. We are confronted more with the grain of language; language as a material thing. In contrast to Lish’s lean repetitions, which foster fixed meaning and emptiness, here the repetition captures a bodily beat or rhythm. This is an embodied form of expression, closer to Lacan’s *not-whole*

position, which is acoustic, consisting of sound stripped of sense — visceral pulsations. The *not-whole* might be defined as ‘lalanguage’, says Lacan, resembling a ‘stutter’, the ‘repetitive language of children’ (Lacan 1999: 44). This corporeal form of expression is captured in the title of Lacan’s *Encore*, which refers to ‘more’ but is also pronounced the same as ‘en *corps*’: in the body. While the *whole* position is disembodied by the first linguistic cut, sundered apart, the *not-whole* position is more an embodiment of language. Indeed, Julia Kristeva, along with other writers associated with *L’écriture féminine*, draws on Lacan’s corporeal *not-whole* position in her conception of a ‘feminine’ language of ‘pulsions’ (Kristeva 1984: 25) that captures the original bodily rhythm of pre-linguistic being. In the throbbing repetitions of ‘love’, the unedited prose evokes a syncopated rhythm of a pulse or beat, kinetically pulsing with erotic suggestiveness, forming a ‘sense of dense corporeal pressure’ (Bois and Krauss 1997: 134). The ‘pulse is non-differentiated, what doesn’t call up figurative associations; it is the operation of the formless’, says Bois and Krauss (Bois and Krauss 1997: 135), and Carver’s pulsing language works similarly to destabilise meaning. Carver speaks of the need for writing to ‘bring news of the world’ (Carver 2001: 89), and here his prose ‘brings the news that we “see” with our bodies’ (Bois and Krauss 1997: 135). As in the edited prose, love is refused fixed definition, but its otherness is evoked through the pulsating language, the corporeal, rolling rhythms.

In Lish’s edit of the same passage, the sentences are more clipped and taut. The long-winded quality that characterizes the unedited Carver, instituting more a language of excess, is pared back. For example, the original phrase, ‘attraction to the other person, the partner, as well as just the plain everyday kind of *love*, *love* of the other person’s being, the *loving* to be with the other, the little things that make up

everyday *love*', is scrapped. In its place we have the controlled and pithy “‘love of the other person’s being, his or her essence’” (Carver 2003: 120). Love remains other in the edit, but the finite meaning juxtaposed with ellipses expresses love as elsewhere, unknown. This is a key difference from the unedited version. In the edited story love remains within the field of knowledge, but posited in its gaps. In the unedited story love is more unfathomable. In the edit the term ‘know’ is repeated 25 times, with several of the terms inserted by Lish. In the *whole* position, writes Lacan, I ‘love the person who is supposed to know’ (Lacan 1999: 67); that is, I love the one who holds some unknown knowledge. Carver’s minimalist aesthetic accords more with the unknown, as the lack in knowledge, which ‘isn’t just an avoidance, but a structural necessity’ of the language (1999: 105). In the edited story, characters ask determinate questions of love in search of finite answers, or solid enigmas. In the unedited story, characters similarly ask questions about love but these questions lose their impact in the expansiveness of Carver’s prose. Through Carver’s use of pulsing plosives and sprawling lines, love appears more unfathomable than unknown: radically outside the very field of meaning, rather than the inverse of finite meaning as finite lack. Like Lacan’s ‘cloud of language’ (1999: 120) that forms the *not-whole*, the more capacious language of the unedited story clouds the questions of love, as the reader experiences less the search for love’s meaning and more its subtle corporeality.

Lacan also refers to the *not-whole* and *whole* positions as the *feminine* and *masculine* (1999: 80). Interested in different modes of literary otherness and how Lacan might illuminate these, it is not my intention to enter into the broad question of gender and

language, nor am I interested in providing a gendered topography of prose, and so I have hitherto avoided deploying the *feminine* and *masculine* designations. However, Lacan's *masculine* and *feminine* bear some relevance to my reading of Carver, and I hope my reading of Carver lends some light to Lacan's distinction. For Lacan, *masculine* and *feminine* don't refer to the different biology or makeup of the human subject – the biological male and female can come under the feminine or masculine structure – rather they refer to different 'position[s] of inhabiting language' (1999: 80). In fact, Lacan situates himself in the *feminine* position, of which he states, 'Any speaking being whatsoever, as is expressly formulated in Freudian theory, whether provided with the attributes of masculinity—attributes that remain to be determined—or not, is allowed to inscribe itself in this part' (1999: 80).

In his account of sexuation, Lacan's *masculine* and *feminine* positions constitute different modes of relating to linguistic castration. Castrated by language, the *masculine* position is cut off from the m/other, and so the [female] other forms a fantasmatic ideal, the other is the object cause of desire, and every satisfaction comes up short; 'the whole realization of the sexual relationship leads to fantasy' (1999: 86). In the *feminine*, on the other hand, otherness is experienced *through* the corporeality of the signifierness, in *being* both lack and language, rather than severed from it through linguistic castration; the feminine is thereby able to acquire a more open, immediate, non-fantasmatic relation with the other (1999: 79).

In light of Lacan's distinction, it is perhaps pertinent that Carver's critics have seen his works as presenting a particularly *masculine* view of women, even if this is presented in order to undercut or wrestle with it (Ní Éigeartaigh 2009: 37; Hall 2009: 64). Carver's women are seen as lacking, or as the other who can fill the lack in the

male subject, critics have said of the edited prose. 'The women in Carver's stories are also more likely to be nameless, or at the very least defined primarily through their domestic roles of wife or mother', says Ní Éigeartaigh (Ní Éigeartaigh 2009: 37). 'Implicitly, the waitress in 'Fat', and overtly, the waitress in 'They're Not Your Husband' are disempowered as a result of their objectification', says Vanessa Hall (Hall 2009: 64). Just as in Lacan's *masculine* position in language, the cut between finite meaning and a more calcified otherness gives rise to the fantasy of the undefined other (Lacan 1999: 86), so in 'What We Talk About...' Laura stands as an object of fantasy for the male narrator, introduced as an ideal object part. Terri is the object cause of desire par excellence, her denial of her ex-boyfriend's fantasmatic love gives rise to his suicide.

Elsewhere in Carver's edited oeuvre women become the flipside of the enigmatic ideal, Lacan's horrific thing that must be regulated or destroyed (Žižek 2009: 48-50). In 'They're not your husband', we see the male regulation of the female body in Earl's brutal denigration of his wife Doreen (he calls her 'Slob', insists that she diets, and pretending to be a customer in her coffee shop, asks the man next to him, "Well, what do you think? . . . I'm asking, does it look good or not?"; Carver 1995: 40). In Carver's more menacing stories, women turn from ideal to a site of violence (Hall 2009: 62). In 'Tell the Women We're Going' Bill's disappointment in marriage gives rise to his murder of two random women; in 'The Third Thing that Killed my Father Off' a man avenges his wife's betrayal by killing her with a hammer and drowning himself (1995: 161-173), and the narrative of 'So Much Water So Close to Home' is haunted by a woman's raped and mutilated dead body.

For Lacan, the difference between the *masculine* and *feminine* gives rise to different forms of relationships. As we have seen, the *masculine* or *whole* structural position can only have the other as ‘object a’ (object cause of desire), as in the fantasy of the Real (the Real is on the *feminine* plane, the symbolic on the *masculine*). While Lacan’s *masculine* position can only have one form of relation with the other – as object a, the *feminine* position can have as a partner both the other who is determined by the symbolic cut or *masculine* position, and *feminine jouissance* – the other who inhabits the lack and signifierness of language. Displaying a more embodied language than Lish’s edit and is thus closer to the *feminine* plane, ‘Beginners’ presents the emergence of a different form of intimate relations – in the prominent tenderness between women that is removed from the edit:

Laura put her food down at once. She got up and said, ‘Terri. Terri, dear,’ and began rubbing Terri’s neck and shoulders. ‘Terri’, she murmured.
...Laura had pulled her chair over and sat with an arm around Terri’s shoulders. She murmured, her lips against Terri’s hair.
...I kept looking at the women at the table. Terri was still crying and Laura was stroking her hair. (2009: 197-198)

In a rare instance of physical intimacy in this story, the women communicate less through language than through bodily touch; and where language is apparent it is mostly in the form of an indeterminate ‘murmuring’, invoking the indistinct ‘buzzing’ Blanchot’s second slope of literature (1995a: 333), and the ‘acoustic’ language of Lacan’s feminine position (Lacan 1999: 44). On the level of content, the unedited story thus stages an opening up of different relations to the other: a shift from a more ‘masculine’ formation, where love is based on finite questions and the lover is the other who fills the lack in the subject, to an intimacy between the same sex based on bodily contact and indeterminacy.

This is not to suggest that in Lacan or in Carver the relation with the other that arises from an indeterminate, corporeal love more than from the fantasy of enigma occurs only for the female gender; the differences refer to different ways of relating to linguistic castration. In Carver, as we shall see, the male and female elderly couple relate to each other in a way that is more characteristic of Lacan's so-called 'feminine' position. But despite Lacan's self-avowed refusal of gendered distinctions, critics have accused him of essentialising the different sexes. In Lacan, man is concerned 'with where he fails' and woman serves to conceal this failure, says Salecl (Salecl 2002: 94). For Morel, woman [is used to] fills the gap in man: 'a phallic brilliance issues from the beyond of the loved partner – reflecting on her as a phallic veil - masks the unbearable character of castration' (Morel 2002: 79) 'The only thing that can be said about woman is said from the point of view of the Other and concerns semblance,' says Soler (Soler 2002: 104). It goes beyond the scope of my thesis to enter into the debate about gender in Lacan, but it is of some significance that the experience of reading Carver finally troubles Lacan's neat demarcation of the *feminine* and *masculine*, the *whole* and the *not-whole*.

The edit excises all of the meandering, capaciousness of the original, forging a more monolithic minimalist style closer to Lacan's *masculine* position. 'Beginners' is more voluminous, but at the same time bears traces of the edit's clipped sentences and gaps in meaning, fostering two quite different modes of expression and relations to alterity, and thus appears closer to the *feminine*. In this way, the edited and unedited prose appear to conform respectively to Lacan's *masculine* and *feminine*.

But the picture becomes more complicated. With the publication of *Beginners*, it has become difficult to read the edited Carver without the echo of the original. But it is also difficult to read *Beginners* without the resonance of the edit. In the edit, the

so-called *masculine* relation with the other thus resounds with the *feminine* relation that forms its blueprint; while the so-called *feminine* unedited prose cannot be read without the shadow of the more *masculine* expression that is present but in a more nascent form, ready to be drawn out by Lish. In the experience of reading Carver, the relation between the two – the unedited *feminine*, and the edited *masculine* – thus becomes less one of division and more one of intersection, troubling Lacan’s neat division, showing something of its inflexibility.

In the midst of love

“I’ll tell you what real love is”, says Herb, “I mean, I’ll give you a good example of it” (Carver 2009: 182). In a passage that is cut in the edit, Herb says:

‘I wanted to tell you *something* that *happened* a while back. I think I wanted to prove a point, and I will if I can just tell this thing the way it *happened*. This *happened* a few months ago, but it’s still going on right now. You might say that, yeah.’ (2009: 184; my italics)

Struggling to express his story about love, Herb “wanted to tell” and says he will if he “can just tell this thing”, but he gets caught on indistinct terms, “this thing”, “something that happened”, “it happened”, “This happened” (2009, 184; my italics); like the ‘stammer’ of Lacan’s *not-whole* position, the otherness of love emerges from an ‘indetermination’ of language (Lacan 1999: 46).

“I’ll try and keep a long story short”, says Herb, but the story within a story that follows takes up seven pages – wrapped up in three in the edit (2009: 185).

Here, in the so-called ‘realist’, unedited prose, love seems to inhere in the very talk about love, as the reader is privy to several false starts, narrative tangents and distractions, and repeated reflections on *telling* the tale about love more than the tale itself:

‘I wanted to tell you something . . . I think I wanted to prove a point, and I will if I can just tell this thing . . . I kind of mean what I’m saying too, if you’ll pardon me for saying it . . . Well, what was I saying? . . . Let me tell this, Terri . . . he went on talking, caught up in it now’. (2009: 182, 184)

For Felman, an erotic component lies in discursiveness (Felman 2003: 130); accordingly, in this story talking about love itself seems to be a form of seduction, as the tale of love turns out to be the tale of the love of a tale – love as the tale. As the narrator tells a tale about Herb, who tells about the elderly man, who in turn tells his own tale, we have a self-relaying chain of narratives, where love doesn’t so much begin (there are no Beginners at love, as such), rather love arises in the very process of talking about it. Reluctant both to *begin* and end his tale, Herb seems to want to prolong the telling, perhaps out of fear of love ending (‘What happened to that love? Did that love just get erased from the big board, as if it was never up there, as if it never happened’), but also to sustain the effect of love as process. Just as it is for the elderly couple, so here love is being in the midst, in the centre of things; in Cavell’s ‘philosophy of the evental everyday’ (Taylor & Kelly 2012: 134), love is the capacity to be in the moment, to accept the instant and process, rather than be seduced by the beginning or, as in Goethe, rush to the end of the world. In linguistic terms, this isn’t talking in order to rub up against impenetrable otherness, as in the edit; rather, love is the capacity to be in language, in its materiality – its very *process* of telling rather than what it tells: the being in language of Lacan’s *not-whole*

position.

When he does finally get to his story, Herb tells a tale about an elderly couple who are taken to the hospital where he works following a car accident. The couple are bandaged head to toe and the old man becomes depressed, not because he is immobilized, but because he cannot see his wife. Since they have been married, they have never spent a day apart. The old man sits with Herb, who is his doctor, and talks about the life he has spent with his wife.

They'd "only been apart from each other for any time on two occasions", says Herb, "only been away from each other for any real time on two occasions", "in all of their married life they'd only been apart from each other for any length of time on just those two occasions" (2009: 190), he says, repeating the sentence. He "*pined* for her", says Herb, "*pined*", "I never knew what that word meant", he says, "until I saw it happening to this man" (2009: 190). The old man tells Herb about life on the ranch, he fed cattle everyday through those "winter months" (2009: 190):

They would just be there together, the two of them, him and his wife...month in, month out, they'd be there together, the two of them, the same routine, the same everything, never anyone else to talk to or to visit during those winter months.

'We'd go to the dances every night', the man tells Herb, and a few lines on:

'We'd go to the dances every night . . . We'd play the Victrola and some records, Doctor. We'd play the Victrola every night and listen to the records and dance there in the living room. We'd do that every night . . . we'd listen to the records and dance in our stocking feet in the living room'. (2009: 191)

Distinguished by its discreet, embedded repetitions and half rhymes which seem to gently fold into each other, this is a voluminous, rambly writing – almost as if the elderly man, and Herb who speaks for him, are free associating. Just as the light inside the room gets 'weaker' and 'fuzzy' (2009: 187) (another instance of the

intersection of inside and outside), so the expression is indistinct, hazy, almost in the midst of meaning and otherness. Indeed, the story keeps returning to the hazy time of twilight. Outside you could “hear the snow falling”, the old man goes on, “If you’re quiet and your mind is clear and you’re at peace with yourself and all things, you can lay in the dark and hear it snow” (2009: 191). As in the snow outside, Carver’s prose muffles meaning; the drifting repetitions, like the ‘drift of the not-whole’ (Lacan, 1999: 112), ‘cloud’ finite sense (1999: 120) – this is the otherness you can hear if you listen quietly enough. Alluding to his later life and work, Carver once said that the ‘silences are right’ (Carver 2001: 106); here we read a silence that is distinct from those hard silence of the edit: lighter, gentler, not so stark, an otherness quietly embodied in the language.

Concealment seems to be the subtle, almost concealed thematic of these passages, also enacted in the language, as the elderly couple are wrapped in bandages, unable to see; the snow hides, darkness gradually drains the room; while repetitions are embedded in lines; indistinct words appear to denote but also hide their final meaning (“thing, something”, 2009: 192). Half hiding and half revealing meaning and otherness, the language of love is more intertwined than riven.

Holding otherness: rethinking Lacan

In Lish’s edited prose I have attempted to show that the dynamic of finite meaning severed from lack fosters the fantasy of the unsigned other. Curiously, Mel’s story

about the elderly couple performs the same linguistic dynamic, of meaning and lack, but the effect is different. Rather than forge fantasy, the impasses perform a kind of holding function — both indicating otherness and *containing* it.

While in ‘Beginners’ Herb’s story about the elderly couple takes up seven pages, Lish wraps it up in three. In place of the rambly account of the elderly couple, the edited story gains its impact through omission. While with ‘Beginners’ we are given abundance of information about the old couple, the edited version gains its power through what it omits. Excising the background rattle, the image of the elderly couple in bandages comes into sharper focus: “‘the couple are in casts and bandages, head to foot, the both of them’; the husband ‘couldn’t see her through his eye-holes’” (Carver 2003: 126). The image is at once highly determinate: the couple are fixed, immobilized in their bandages. But the image also evokes lack: blunt vacancy in the cut out eyes that cannot see. The image almost stands for the minimalist aesthetic itself – the way it works according to meanings sketched in bold outline, perforated with semantic gaps. While the image is present in the unedited story, it gets folded into the garrulous backstory.

Rather than elicit idealization of the unsignified other, in the edited story, here lack incites responsibility, protection of the other. The Greek mythological figure Orpheus tries to see what should remain hidden and so he loses the one he loves; but in the edited Carver, the elderly man experiences love precisely through not seeing (Blanchot 1999: 447–443). Here, in Blanchot’s terms, *not* seeing *is* seeing: it is recognizing that one’s orientation towards the other comes from not capturing their otherness, not seizing or fantasizing it (Blanchot 1995a: 40, 50). Evoking Lévinas’s account of the subject’s ‘destitution’ (Lévinas 1969: 215) before the other, Mel says:

“I mean it was killing the old fart just because he couldn’t *look* at the fucking woman” (Carver 2003: 127). Rather than affirm the subject, the other person’s alterity is the subject’s undoing, his self-wrenching.

In this crucial passage, which comes near the end of the edited story, lack no longer elicits idealization of the unsignified other, but starts to incite responsibility, protection of the other. Instead of fantasized, the other is sheltered by the elderly man’s love. The notion of protection is implied by the bandages, which conceal but also heal, such that *not* seeing provides protection. On the level of language, the dynamic of finite meaning and omission also starts to have a sheltering effect. The language becomes dense with a matrix of restrained repetitions:

‘Well the husband *was very depressed* for the longest while. Even after he found that his wife was going to pull through, *he was very depressed*. Not about the *accident*, though. I mean, the *accident* was one *thing*, but it wasn’t everything . . . Little *eye-holes* and *nose-holes* and *mouth-holes* . . . I’d get up to *see* his *mouth-hole*, you *know* and he’d say *no*, it wasn’t the *accident* exactly because he *couldn’t see* her through his *eye-holes* . . . the man’s heart was breaking because he *couldn’t see* . . . he *couldn’t look*. (Carver 2003: 126–7; my italics indicating repetition).

In this passage, which appears towards the end of the edited story, the repetitions work just like the repetitions in the early part of the edited story: they assert meaning and empty it. But they also have a *containing* function. Unlike the more pulse-like, irregular repetitions of the unedited version, the repetitions are *restrained*. But they are also less like the forceful thuds of meaning and emptiness that have characterized the edited story so far. The interlacing of quietly controlled repetitions has the effect of containing otherness, holding lack *between* the intricate lines.

This reading of the *whole* structure of language as ‘holding otherness’ is distinct from dominant readings of Lacan’s *whole* position, which locate the narcissism of the relation with ‘object a’, or the fantasy of lack (Morel 2002: 79; Soler 2002: 102). However, in his own account of the *whole* position, it is my contention that Lacan hints at another mode of relationship with the other than that of fantasy. Lacan suggests that the *whole* position can open up another relation with the other which is not based on fetishizing lack. This is not a different linguistic structure from that of finite meaning divorced from lack. Instead, the structure is *used* differently. Lacan describes the following:

. . . a web . . . in which one can grasp the limits, impasses, and dead ends that show the Real acceding to the symbolic . . . Its value lies in centering the symbolic, on the condition of knowing how to *use* it, for what? To *retain* (*retenir*) a congruous truth . . . hat of the half-telling, the truth that is borne out by *guarding* (*garde*). (1999: 93; my italics)

The structure of the *whole* is *used* differently, so that the original lack of being is opened up to the symbolic, without being totally homogenized by it. Moreover, this form of the symbolic is not simply that of a systematic, differential order of signifiers and negations, but an intricate web-like integration of delimited meanings and impasses, which *hold* (*retenir*, *garde*) the otherness of the Real.

Similarly, in the Carver passage, the rhythms enact the bifurcating division between finite meaning and otherness, but in a mosaic-like pattern of interrelationships, as the rhythms intersect. Thus signifiers relate to other signifiers, taking us away from the stasis of the originary cut to the mobility of the symbolic. In this way, the first schism of the originary cut is brought in relation with other

signifiers (one bifurcated rhythm interweaves with another). Moving to a relation with further signifiers outside the polarity of the first linguistic cut suggests accession to the symbolic. As in Lacan's different way of *using* the *whole*, this is not the homogenized, universal order of the symbolic, in which lacks get lost in the overarching system. It is a symbolic order that retains close contact with the originary cut of being. Otherness is not so much calcified and fetishized, as opened to relations with other signifiers, but otherness retaining its form as originary lack. A kind of *in-between* space is opened up: between the web-like bifurcating rhythms; here, otherness can be held, contained as other without being immobilized or fixed, but also without losing its distinctive origin as lack.

It is in this passage in Carver that the language of the edit begins to most resemble that of the unedited version: in the quieter rhythms, the more meandering sentences. This overlap troubles Lacan's neat division between the *whole* and *not-whole*. While for Lacan, the two positions are mutually exclusive, for Carver an interrelationship emerges. Indeed, the edit harks back to the unedited, but it is also hard to read the earlier text without invoking the later edit. Like the textual repetitions towards the end of the story, reading Carver is itself a repetition – one that creates an interstice space where the two texts interweave without merging. This is where the true experience of reading is held: in the in-between space of alterity.

3. The Mad Outside of 'So Much Water So Close to Home'

'So Much Water so Close to Home'

Published in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981, 'So Much Water so Close to Home' received a heavy editorial cut. Lish removed 70% of the story; he retained the title. *Beginners* fully restores the original, published in 2009 under the same title.⁴

The edited version of 'So Much Water so Close to Home' opens in typical Carver territory. A couple sit at their kitchen table, eating breakfast in silence. Claire's husband Stuart has returned home from a three-day fishing trip. They seem unable to communicate, their sentences are cut short, their words are repeated with little meaning.

The edited story shifts to Stuart's fishing trip, where he embarks on a hike with his friends to a mountainous river region. At their destination, Stuart comes across a dead girl's naked body floating down the river:

They took their flashlights and went back to the river. One of the men—it might have been Stuart—waded in and got her. He took her by the fingers and pulled her into shore. He got some nylon cord and tied it to her wrist and then looped the rest around a tree (2003: 69).

As we move from the domestic sphere to the American wilderness we enter a landscape uncharacteristic of Carver. Departing from Carver's so-called *gritty realism*, the girl's body has a fantasmatic feel and the image is subtly sexual - the nylon cord that is tied and looped around the girl's wrist, her fingers pulled. In its violent imagery and paranoid point of view, 'So Much Water So Close to Home'

⁴ Publication details taken from 'Notes' collated by Stull and Carroll in *Beginners* (Carver 2009: 209).

appears a more obviously ‘mad’ tale than Carver’s usual stories of domestic strife and failed communication.

Carver country is typically associated with suburban spaces: places where human relationships are strained yet tethered to the familiar, anchored in what critics have called ‘reality’. Yet this overlooks the quiet uneasiness that skirts many of Carver’s stories, the ‘madder’ moments that are eclipsed by the humdrum circumstances: the girlfriend who licks scotch off her boyfriend’s belly before trying to kill herself; the uncanny man who appears at the door with hooks instead of hands; the mother who collects boxes; the man who vacuum cleans strangers’ homes. In the edited version of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ the sense of ‘madness’ – as in something awry – is particularly prominent in the content and form of the story.

In the unedited ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ a sense of madness is not just under the surface, it becomes the explicit theme. In this version the narrator Claire mistakes her own identity for the dead girl. She lashes out violently at her husband, feels paranoiacally persecuted by her mother in law, and is recovering from what is alluded to as a nervous breakdown. In the content of the unedited story madness is brought much closer to home.

This chapter will explore the different presentations of ‘madness’ in the edited and unedited versions of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ on the level of narrative and in relation to the different linguistic bindings and unbindings of the two stories. Drawing on Leader and Green, I will explore the *minimalist madness* of the edited prose, where the mad outside of language is in part revealed through what defends against it. Drawing on Felman’s *Writing and Madness*, I argue that in the

unedited version madness inheres in a 'mad' infinite deferral and displacement of signification. The *realist madness* performs the differential madness of Lacan's symbolic. In the more meandering sentences of the unedited version, 'madness is the effect of discourse' (Felman 2003: 93). Conversely, the minimalist edit removes the certain neurotic or symbolic fluidity that is present in the unedited, approaching the mad outside of the symbolic through a form of minimalist defence.

Both stories try to find ways of expressing a post-traumatic psychic state, but where one uses the resources of silence and withholding, the other tries to draw trauma much more into language.

Theorising minimalist madness

In 'On a Question prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis' Lacan outlines his linguistic reformulation of Freud's Oedipal Complex, what has been termed Lacan's linguistic term. Here, Lacan reflects on the infant's first introduction to meaning and relates this to the question of *madness*. In the Oedipal complex the question of the mother's unknown desire, her otherness, is tied to an answer, says Lacan: to the paternal signifier, represented by the father figure (Lacan 2002: 189, 201-207). This paternal signifier forms the first metaphorical substitution, whereby the mother's unknown desire is substituted for the big Other of language and meaning, presented by the father (as the 'Other' object of the mother's desire). The paternal signifier anchors the subject in language, forming the law (of language) that regulates the incestuous relation between mother and child (Lacan 2002: 189-207). Thus, in

Lacan, the paternal signifier localizes libido, the strength of sexual attractions and interests between child and mother, making the mother prohibited and in part the horizon of desire. Through this localization of libido, the infant is able to locate objects of desire outside the body/mother, and situate him/herself at a safe distance (Lacan 2002: 189-207).

Reflecting on the ‘hole’ that opened up in Schreber’s reality, Lacan defines it as ‘a disturbance that occurred at the inmost juncture of the subject’s sense of life’ (2002: 191). He attributes it to the ‘structure’ of the ‘psychotic process’ (2002: 191), whereby a delusional hole or excess of reality arises from the failure of the first paternal signifier (or the Name-of-the-Father). In other words, the failure of the mediating effect of the Oedipal Complex gives rise to excessive otherness. Drawing on Freud’s *Verwerfung* (foreclosure) of reality, Lacan defines the *foreclosure* of the symbolic:

At the point at which the Name-of-the-Father is summoned—and we shall see how—a pure and simple hole may thus answer in the Other; due to the lack of the metaphoric effect, this hole will give rise to a corresponding hole in the place of the phallic signification. (2002: 191)

In the edited, minimalist version of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ I will look at how the narrative frequently presents failures of symbolization, giving rise to presentations of excess otherness as well as excess reality: unassimilated deadly things, paranoid fantasy spaces, and at times a persecuted narrative perspective. The minimalist narrative displays attempts to keep the disturbing otherness at bay – at a

safe distance. The unedited story, in contrast, shows a greater tendency to symbolize the unknown outside, domesticate it, bring it closer to home.

Leader: minimalist forgetting

In his recent book *What is Madness?* Leader draws on Lacan's psychotic structure, theorising what he calls 'everyday' ways in which humans defend against the hole opened up by the failure of the paternal signifier to anchor the subject in language (Leader 2011). Drawing on Lacan's imaginary, Leader attends to the imaginary modes in which the originary madness (excess otherness) might be stabilised. The novelty of Leader's contribution, and his departure from Lacan's theory of psychosis, lies in his theorisation of *everyday madness*; this is an *imaginary* form of the symbolic that replaces proper integration in the symbolic order (2011: 9-34). Where symbolization fails and the unsymbolised is approached, an imaginary defence is erected to stave off absolute alterity – or full-blown psychosis (2011: 9-11). Leader refers to *everyday madness* as the creation of a 'prosthetic symbolic order': one 'plugs oneself into the [imaginary] symbolic system that one had never incorporated' (2011: 205-206).

This defence against extreme, overwhelming otherness acquires particular characteristics of the symbolic – in an imaginary form. The imaginary symbolic often takes the form of a strict binary logic, imitating the first symbolic cut between meaning and otherness (as explored in my chapter 2), thus recreating, in imaginary form, the minimal binary of the symbolic. As such, *everyday madness* can entail 'attachment to machines or mechanical devices' that operate 'at the level of this binary structure, switching on or off', says Leader (2011: 205-206). Characterized

by rigid binary structures, *everyday madness* can have a switch-light effect. It is 'everyday' because this mode of madness is barely perceptible, taking the form of quiet, mechanical structures (2011: 9, 14, 22, 43). As opposed to the full-blown madness of Lacan's symbolic foreclosure and unmediated otherness, *everyday madness* is a quiet restraint; it works like a mould or frame that prevents slippage into the psychical abyss. Distinct from those prominent critics whose work popularizes Lacan, making his recondite theory more accessible (Žižek 1992, 2002; Fink 1995, 1997; Homer 2004), Leader's concept of *everyday madness* marks a substantively innovative contribution to Lacanian thought, drawing on Lacan while offering a novel theorization.

In his essay 'My Father's Life', Carver writes about his father's mental breakdown (a kind of madness) and alludes to the difficulty of expressing this time:

My mother went from crummy job to crummy job. Much later she referred to that time he was in the hospital, and those years afterward, as 'when Raymond was sick'. The word was never the same for me again. (2001: 83)

Towards the end of the essay, speaking about his father's funeral, Carver says, 'I thought I'd remember everything that was said and done that day and maybe find a way to tell it sometime. But I didn't. I forgot it all, or nearly' (2001: 86). Carver remembers his father's name repeated, which is the same as his own name. In his essay 'Fires' Carver speaks about a similar experience of forgetting:

I mean that much that has happened in my life I've forgotten...but I have these large periods of time I simply can't account for or bring back...the people themselves.

Large blanks. But I can remember some little things...an expression of sadness or bewilderment on someone's face, someone saying something in a particular way...Perhaps this is why it's sometimes been said that my stories are unadorned, stripped down, even 'minimalist'. (2001: 95-96)

In both essays, Carver alludes to a sort of amnesia, a certain distance from painful events and emotions surrounding them. In place of detailed recollections come fixed words or things, often repeated – his father's name, the term 'sick', an expression on a face (2001: 83). Carver sees these isolated words or things surrounded by a kind of absence, 'large blanks' (2001: 95), and in reading these passages the reader experiences a sense of finite, isolated meanings surrounded by emptiness – evoking a quiet splitting between stuck meanings and absence. As in his edited stories, in these essays Carver's language is curiously restrained, 'flat' (2001, 92), but the affect, particularly in the essay about his father, is of immense loss.

In what follows I will be interested in how Carver's 'minimalist' and flat language approaches unsymbolised trauma (of loss, of death, of pain), but with restraint and distance, or what Carver describes as forgetting (2001: 95-96), which form a kind of defence against intolerable, traumatic pain. This is not to say that Carver's minimalist writing lacks emotional affect; the distance can make the inarticulate emotional situation appear all the more painful and fallible – suggesting the very human need to create a buffer against traumatic pain. (Curiously, the essay about his father's madness and death might also stand as an account of the loss of the paternal symbolic, or at least a problematic relationship with it.) But distinct from Leader, Carver's minimalist defence is also a form of connection, I will suggest: a way of approaching the intolerable and inarticulate, of 'trying to connect' (2001: 85).

It is this forgetting, this approach to psychical otherness through linguistic distance as defence, that finds a theoretical echo in Leader's *everyday madness*. As in Leader's *everyday madness*, I will look at how Carver's prose approaches the unsymbolised through linguistic distance that keeps out traumatic alterity and though a certain fluidity of symbolic language. Carver himself alluded to the way his writing keeps something out, referring to the 'things that are left out' of his prose (2001: 92), of 'cutting out something else' (2001: 102). Of his own writing, he describes the 'landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes unsettled) surface of things', where the brackets keep the something 'unsettled' out (2001: 92). In approaching traumatic psychical otherness at a certain safe distance, and through a language that consists of a quiet splitting between finite meanings and otherness, and affects of flatness, I will look at how Carver's minimalist language shares some of the structural features of Leader's *everyday madness*. Reading Leader through Carver will also throw light on some of the limits of Leader's conceptualization, showing up a certain mad inflexibility in Leader's and Lacan's theories.

Green: minimal borders

In avoiding the totalisation of Leader's distinction between the neurotic and psychotic psychical structure, I supplement my use of Leader's *everyday madness* with Green's concept of the 'borderline' (2012: 60-84). Green sees no hard and fast demarcation between the mad and the sane, but a 'vast no-man's land between sanity and insanity' (Green 2012: 61). In the real world, writes Green, 'transitions and intermediate states are far more common than sharply differentiated opposite states' (2012: 73). The borderline is a 'moving and fluctuating frontier, both in normality

and in severe illness'; it concerns 'processes of transformation of energy and symbolization (force and meaning)' (2012: 73). In accordance with Green, my exploration of literary *minimalist madness* in Carver will constitute an examination of borders – between determinate symbolic meaning and that which exceeds it. Along with Green, I will ask 'what is the nature or structure of the border? What is the circulation in and out of its gates?' (2012: 62).

Formed by a 'stultification of the limit', a hardening of the boundary between extreme psychical alterity and symbolisation, Green's borderline state consists of a border that 'protects one's self from crossing over or being crossed over, from being invaded' (2012: 63). Accordingly, I will consider Carver's minimalist prose as staging a mortification of the linguistic limit between determinate meaning and otherness. In the content and language of Carver's minimalism I will explore what I see as a certain insulation against moving inside and outside: his minimalist prose keeps symbolic meaning and alterity divided, rather than permitting movement between them, as in the unedited prose.

Green's particular notion of borderline 'splitting' informs my reading of Carver's minimalist linguistic split. For Green, splitting – that is the split between symbolic meaning and a more radical psychical otherness – does not consist of an 'imaginary' symbolic defense, as it does for Leader. Instead, splitting is the normal structuring of linguistic thought: 'thought...consists of relations independent of the terms it brings into relation', writes Green, and 'Splitting is therefore a normal process enabling one to achieve communication out of the verbally uncommunicable affects and thought processes' (2012: 72). The infant's original splitting of thought 'never disappears', writes Green, 'but undergoes transformations with the help of a holding, containing, optimally distant, and time-delaying object' (2012: 72). In what

follows, look at how Carver's minimalist prose homes in on Green's ordinary split of language – the first cut between linguistic meaning and the otherness of being, which becomes more held, optimally distant, and integrated into differential language in the unedited form of his prose.

The minimalist split

The edited version of 'So Much Water So Close to Home' opens with the following lines:

My husband eats with a good appetite. But I don't think he's really hungry. He chews, arms on the table, and stares at something across the room. He looks at me and looks away. He wipes his mouth on the napkin. He shrugs, and goes on eating. (2003: 67)

The meaning of this passage is highly literal, the words are simple, and the sentences clipped. The writing creates a subtle, almost mechanical rhythm, a quiet, rigid structuring of meaning in the repeated subject-verb-object sentences. But this literality of meaning coincides with a sense of absence; the pithy lines appear to be surrounded by a kind of emptiness, as if silences punctuate the stark lines, interposed before the 'He' that commences the next sentence: 'He looks at me and looks away [silence]. He wipes his mouth on the napkin. [silence] He shrugs . . .'. What is more, this split between meaning and silence coincides with an overriding sense of something unknown – something that cannot be said between the couple.

The narrative shifts to dialogue:

‘What are you staring at me for?’ he says. ‘What is it?’ he says and lays down his fork.
‘Was I staring?’ I say, and shake my head. The telephone rings.
‘Don’t answer it,’ he says.
‘It might be your mother,’ I say.
‘Watch and see,’ he says.
(2003: 67; my underlining)

Again here we have the quiet, restrained repetitions of finite meaning (“staring”, “staring”, ‘he says’, ‘he says’), and abrupt lines. Again, this coincides with an absence of meaning: the emptiness at the ends of the lines and the silences that surround the chiselled sentences. The ‘he says’, ‘I say’ repetitions work as ‘shifters’, words which according to Jakobson indicate a subject’s place in a particular speech context but thereby lack their own specific reference (Jakobson 1957); as such, shifters themselves harbour a split between clear meaning and absence of meaning. As they accumulate, the indeterminate ‘he says’, ‘I say’ pervade the passage. The overall effect is of restrained sense but also semantic lack – a kind of splitting in the language. Indeed, Carver himself alludes to the splitting of his language when he says his stories consist of ‘concrete words’ as well as ‘things that are left out’ (Carver 2001: 92). A prevailing sense of unknown otherness also saturates the passage, as things remain unexplained. Why does the wife stare? Why does her husband state, “Don’t answer it”? The reader experiences both the pervasive unknown, as in Green’s unbinding of the reader, but also a surface splitting of finite meaning and absence: a splitting which has a protective, binding effect. Thus the reader experiences an unknown, unbound ‘landscape just under’ the split, or bound ‘surface of things’ (2001: 92).

The narrator goes on:

I pick up the receiver and listen. My husband stops eating.

‘What did I tell you?’ . . . He starts to eat again . . . ‘Tell me what I did wrong and I’ll listen! I wasn’t the only man there. We talked it over and we all decided. We couldn’t just sit around. We were five miles from the car...Do you hear?’ (2003: 67; my underlining)

Here, curt sentences rub up against the unknown – in the empty spaces that follow them: ‘I pick up the receiver and listen’ [unsignified space], “‘What did I tell you?’” [space], “‘We all decided’”[space]. On the one hand, meaning is determined – in the pithy lines, rhythms, and emphatically repeated ‘we’. But on the other hand meaning recedes. Again, the reader experiences a dominant sense of something unknown, an unbinding: what did the husband do that is so inexplicable and so suffused with dread? In Leader’s *everyday madness* quiet binaries of finite meaning and absence of meaning work to hold overwhelming alterity at bay. The edited passage appears to work similarly, as the splitting of meaning and absence forms a kind of minimalist protection, which approaches but also fastens down an overriding, dread-infused otherness. The distancing of the minimalist split is not an obvious, immediate affect, but the cumulative experience of reading. The ‘effect’ of Carver’s prose, writes Geoffrey Wolff, is ‘a function of accumulation’ (Wolff 1976). In Freud’s ‘Remembering, repeating and working through’ repetition replaces remembrance (Freud 1914: 145-156); it forms a pleasurable way of going over a traumatic experience, but also keeps the something traumatic out. A similar affect is created through Carver’s minimalist repetitions, as the reader experiences the pleasurable approach to unbound otherness, but also a distancing from it.

‘You know’, I say.

He says, ‘What do I know, Claire? Tell me what I’m supposed to know. I don’t know anything, except one thing?’ (2003: 67; my underlining)

The edited story continues. Stuart is supposed to know something, but this something remains withheld. The word ‘know’ gestures at knowledge, yet knowledge is withdrawn, as the term ‘know’ appears stuck in a juddering repetition, a quiet inarticulacy. The subtly insistent repetitions continue in the following line: ‘He raises his hands. He pushes his chair away . . . He takes out his cigarettes’ (my underlining). In approaching the unsymbolisable, writes Leader, ‘single words or expressions can take on a particular value, like joints or staples in speech that are necessary to pin down meaning...even a grammatical structure can have this function’ (Leader 2011: 134). Carver himself speaks of the power of the single word and isolated object. He uses ‘precise language to endow those things – a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring – with immense, even startling power’. In this passage of the story, Carver’s powerful fixity of terms (his repetition of ‘he’ and ‘know’) read like attempts to keep out the abiding sense of excess otherness. For Freud, repetition can function to block off associative thought and working through, as the compulsion to repeat forms a present day force, replacing the event of the past. Carver’s minimalist repetitions share something of this protective, defensive quality, as they form refusals to know the past; but in doing so, they approach trauma’s resistance to knowledge.

In the unedited prose, in place of fixity comes slippage of signifiers. The unedited story continues:

‘She was dead, ~~dead, dead, do you hear?~~’, he says after a minute. ‘It’s a damn shame,

~~I agree. She was a young girl and it's a shame, and I'm sorry, as sorry as anyone else, but she was dead, Claire, dead. Now let's leave it alone. Please, Claire. Let's leave it alone now.~~

~~'That's the point', I say. 'She was dead — but don't you see? She needed help.'~~

~~'I give up', he says and raises his hands. He pushes his chair away from the table, takes his cigarettes and goes out to the patio with a can of beer...~~

~~I must get over it; put it out of sight, out of mind, etc., and 'go on'~~

(2009: 114; strikethrough indicates unedited prose cut in the edit)

In the unedited prose we learn something of what has hitherto remained unknown – that Stuart's fishing trip is connected with a dead girl. As we can see, the unedited writing is less measured, the sentences are more irregular. The repetition remains, but it spirals rather than controls: “she was dead, dead, dead, do you hear?... She was a young girl...but she was dead, Claire, dead...She was dead – but don't you see? She needed help”. Scrapped in the minimalist edit, the more spiralling words are replaced by a simple fixed line: “She was dead”, he says, “And I'm sorry, as sorry as anyone else, but she was dead” (2003: 67). In the unedited story the repetition creates mobility more than fixity, as the word “dead” leads to new associations – that “she was a young girl”, that “she needed help”. This is not so much a mad restraint that keeps otherness at bay, but more the ‘madness’ of Derrida's condition of language (Derrida 1998: 10): the unsaid that keeps signification in motion, giving rise to difference. ‘I must *not* dwell on this any longer, I must get over it, put it out of sight, out of mind, etc., and ‘go on’’, continues the unedited story (underline indicates repeated terms, italics indicate repeated ‘o’) – a line that is scrapped from the edit. Here, the interweaving ‘o’s push on and on in a logic of displacement and difference, marking the *realist madness* of differential language, as opposed to the *minimalist madness* of the return to the same. In accordance with Felman's ‘madness of writing’, the *realist madness* of the unedited story is more akin to a neurotic ‘madness’, residing in the gaps between

displaced signifiers, in ‘those folds where the text is actively sketching and scraping itself, marking its boundaries only to bound over them’ (Felman 2003: 78).

Cutting out this verbosity, the minimalist edit remains stuck in more split structures of fixed meaning and absence that approach but also form protection against the unsymbolised trauma. We learn the hard fact that “‘she was dead’” (2003: 67) which Lish follows by an unsignified space. While what I see as Carver’s *realist madness* is closer to Felman’s ‘incessant sliding of signification’ (Felman 2003: 215), a system of doubt and fluidity, his *minimalist madness* echoes Leader’s ‘minimal binary – with no elasticity or movement’, the ‘binaries [that] may be a basic interpretation of the desire of the Other and have a crucial protective function’ (Leader 2011: 134). As in Leader, Carver’s discreet splits between fixed meanings and semantic absences could be seen to foster a kind of protective shell against the other’s desire: both the desire of the characters, but also the desire opened up in the reader, as in Green’s ‘delirium’ of the reader (2012: 339). The reader approaches an overriding sense of otherness, but at a safe distance provided by the minimalist shell.

The phone rings. “‘It might be your mother’”, says Claire, in the edit (2003: 67). For Lacan, the unsignified m/other gives rise to ‘a feeling of being intruded upon...[and] a delusion of being watched’ (Lacan 2002: 172). Intriguingly, when Claire answers the phone to a call that is somehow connected to the dead girl but also to Stuart’s mother, her husband says, “‘Watch and see’”, endowing the enigmatic voice with a visual presence, as if there is something out there looking on (Carver 2003: 67). Stuart’s abrupt command “‘Don’t answer it’, and his suggestion that people should “‘mind their own business’” (Carver 2003: 67), compounds the impression of the outside other/death/mother as persecutory. Alongside the minimalist shell comes a background sense of persecutory otherness.

In contrast to the more split language of the edit, the opening section of Carver's unedited story ends in light, meandering repetitions:

He waits a minute, then draws on his cigarette and leans back in the chair. I pity him for listening, detached and then settling back, and drawing on his cigarette... He can never know how much I pity him for that, for sitting still and listening, and letting the smoke stream out of his mouth. (2009: 115; underlining indicates repetitions)

This languorous passage is cut out from the edit. In place of the unedited stream of signification, and its intermeshing repetitions and continuous tense, the opening section of the edit closes with a mad pressing restraint: 'He doesn't move... He lifts his head... he doesn't move otherwise. He doesn't turn around' (2003: 68). As in Leader's *everyday madness*, here the minimalist language is 'not seen as disordered, but follows a rigour that may indeed be absent in the sane' (2011: 34). Critics have frequently spoken of the order and systematization of minimalist art. In 'Art and Objecthood', Fried quotes Donald Judd's account of the minimalist form of order that is 'simply order...one thing after another' (qtd. in Freud 1995: 129); in 'Serial Art, Systems and Solipsism', Michael Benedikt sees minimalism as a kind of 'system', and Mel Bochner concurs (Benedikt 1995: 63; Bochner 1995: 92). In its lean repetitions and splitting, Carver's prose displays this minimalist order and restraint, as if striving to approach the unsignified by containing its disturbing otherness.

Carver's minimalist space

The edited narrative shifts to Stuart's earlier fishing trip:

HE and Gordon Johnson and Mel Dorn and Vern Williams, they play poker and bowl and fish. They fish every spring and early summer before visiting relatives can get in the way. They are decent men, family men, men who take care of their jobs. They have sons and daughters who go to school with our son, Dean.

Last Friday these family men left for the Naches River. They parked the car in the mountains and hiked to where they wanted to fish. They carried their bedrolls, their food, their playing cards, their whiskey. (2003: 68)

Defined by their symbolic status (fathers with jobs) and typically macho sports (poker, bowling, fishing), the friends are in pursuit of masculine identities. Carver's stories typically take place in domestic spaces: kitchens, attics, bedsits. But 'So Much Water So Close to Home' shifts to an outside landscape, one more tinged with fantasy. We enter Hemingway country, the mythical American wilderness where male heroes embark on imaginary existential quests to find themselves.

This story within a story is told from the point of view of Claire, who isn't present at the narrated fishing trip. In the unedited story the reader is provided with narrative asides, reminding us of Claire's distance from her story: 'One of the men, I don't know who'. In the unedited story it is clear that Claire is retelling her husband's tale. Yet these diegetic pointers are omitted from the edit, creating both the uneasy sense that Claire is somehow there on the trip (and unseen), but also that the trip might be her fantasy.

In this sense, the move from the interior to the exterior takes on a more fantasmatic light. Mountains, rivers, camping under the 'moon': this is a strikingly

different landscape to the claustrophobic domesticity usually associated with Carver country. Almost too typical of the American outdoors, the landscape becomes tinged with a sense of the unreal. Indeed, following the enclosed space of the story's opening and its strained sheltering from outside otherness, this brief interlude outdoors (lasting one page in the edit, before returning to the couple's kitchen) at first appears liberating, as the reader eases into the narrative escape. We enter a space of freedom, where the men 'went ahead and set up their camp. They built a fire and drank their whiskey', as the 'moon came up' (2003: 68).

This fantasy realm can also be read as an imaginary protection from the unsymbolised. It can be vital to 'manufacture a space of lack somewhere', writes Leader, 'to distance the other – who is always so close to them – and to find a point of safety...a space where they can't be seen' (2011: 84). Both present and absent from the external landscape that she narrates, Claire's narrative interlude could be read as her own point of safety – a space where she is not seen or interpellated. Indeed, the reader also feels secure in this familiar, even clichéd narrative domain.

Yet the outside expanse soon becomes a site of explicit violence:

They saw the girl before they set up camp. Mel Dorn found her. No clothes on her at all. She was wedged into some branches that stuck out over the water. (2003: 68; my underlining)

The men stumble across a naked, dead girl's body floating in the river. But they don't report their discovery to the police straight away. Instead, they decide she 'wasn't going anywhere' (2003: 68). They set up camp and drink until midnight, and

then return to the naked, dead girl, because ‘Someone said they should keep the body from drifting away’ (2003: 68). The narrator states:

They took their flashlights and went back to the river. One of the men-it might have been Stuart-waded in and got her. *He took her by the fingers* and pulled her into shore. He got some *nylon cord and tied it to her wrist* and then looped the rest around a tree. (2003: 69; my italics)

In the edit, the girl’s body is static, ‘wedged’, ‘not going anywhere’. The men want to ‘keep the body from drifting away’ (2003: 69). More thing-like than human, the body is devoid of physical description, presented simply as ‘fingers’ and a ‘wrist’. In the unedited story, the girl is more personalized. She is given a face (she is ‘face down’) and referred to as a ‘girl’ in place of the even more anonymous ‘her’ (2009: 116). Overall, the unedited story sets up a more ‘realistic’ scene. Instead of bare outlines, we are offered more detailed descriptions of the incident: the men ‘stumble’ down to the river, ‘the wind was up, a cold wind, and the waves from the river lapped the sandy bank’ (2009: 116). With its personification and alliteration, this poetic sentence is far from the chilling, dehumanized depiction of the edit.

Immediately after the men find the dead body, in the edit they set off to fish: the men ‘split up to fish. That night they cooked fish’, they ‘took their cooking *things* and eating *things* back down to the river and washed them where the girl was’ (my italics): ‘the trout they’d caught were hard because of the terrible coldness of the water’ (2003: 69). As the girl’s dead body and the ‘terrible’ dead fish elide, the corpse acquires the status of Lacan’s Thing. As we have seen, for Lacan, the other has its own enigmatic desires. Unmediated through the symbolic, the other’s desire

has disturbing, maddening potential and can be perceived as a fantasmatic, unsymbolised thing. The Thing exerts a deadly fascination, it is ‘not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its...strangeness’ (Lacan 1992: 63). ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ is indeed one of Carver’s strangest stories, his writing at its most ‘odd and discomfoting’, as Ann Beattie has described it (qtd. in Hallett 1999: 49). Indeed, the sudden shift in genre from the domestic setting we’ve come to expect from Carver country to thriller territory, exacerbates the sense of strangeness for the reader (the dead girl’s body in the lake invoking numerous thriller scenes, Chandler’s *Lady in the Lake*, Lynch’s *Twin Peaks*, the recent TV thrillers *The Killing* and *Top of the Lake*). In the edited story, the dehumanized corpse stands out as the Thing that escapes symbolic representation: the inassimilable remainder that haunts Claire’s consciousness and that exceeds the reader’s capacity to visually or linguistically identify it.

Here, in the edited story, in place of the earlier minimalistic restraint against disturbing otherness comes excess meaning, as if the defended against other now resurfaces (literally through the surface of the lake) in the form of a fantasmatic image: a strange fish-girl thing. Restraint turns to excess, absence flips to plenitude, as if the attempt to defend against trauma gives way to a delusional structure. For Lacan, the visual image (the imaginary), language (the symbolic) and the body (the Real) are bound together to give our lives a sense of stability and establish our basic sense of reality. But here, the visual image confounds, and language halts around the dead body, repeating itself ineffectually in the ‘her’, ‘her’, ‘her’, ‘fish’, ‘fish’, ‘thing’ repetitions. Unsymbolised and thing-like, the body is its own signification: it is the return of the Real. Just as the split language forms an attempt to contain overwhelming otherness, so delusion works as an attempt to fasten the signifier to

the signified, according to Lacan (Lacan 2002: 189-193). The hard fixity of delusion, the way delusion is a defensive attempt to fasten meaning where symbolization fails, is captured in the stasis of this image: in the edit the girl is 'wedged' like an inhuman object, whereas in the unedited story she is 'lodged', more humanized, more at home within language. The frozen image, the girl's 'hard', 'terrible coldness', suggests the impossibility of dialectical tension, the frozen condensation of meaning of Lacan's paranoiac structure (Lacan 2002: 189-204).

In its presentation of the dead girl, the unedited story appears more repressed than dissociated. The girl's body acts more like a locus of loss, impelling the lengthy narrative that follows and giving rise to attempted interpretations that are removed in the edit: 'I don't know who, he could have done it' (2009: 116), says Claire. Triggering 'the desire of narrating', the girl's body forms what Brooks calls the 'motor of *narration*' (Brooks 2002: 53). In Lacan's terms, the corpse works more like Lacan's 'object a': the hard kernel of the Real that resides in the gaps between signifiers (Lacan 1988: 142-145, 159, 185), propelling signification on, forming mobile desire. With its quasi-sexual undertones that are excised in the minimalist edit, this is an altogether much more sexually desirous text. In an odd mix of the romantic and the erotic, the 'waves from the river lapped the sandy bank' as the men 'secured' the nylon cord on the naked girl's wrist, 'while the flashlights of the other men *played* over the girl's body' (a line cut in the edit), enacting a prurient form of sexual fantasy (Carver 2009: 116; my italics). Here, the unedited prose accords more with Felman's 'madness of language', which is post-castrated and desirous, as the naked dead girl figures for what is lost, giving rise to the men's nostalgic stories of past sexual liaisons. Embodying repressed, neurotic sexuality, the girl's naked body provokes further narrative in the smutty stories that the men tell into the night: they

‘told coarse stories and spoke of vulgar or dishonest escapades out of their past’ – all of which are cut in the edit (2009: 116).

The lengthy passage describing the men’s reaction to finding the dead girl is removed from the edit, along with the sexual references, leaving a more enigmatic and disconnected account of the event. The earlier, expansive lines of the unedited story are severely curtailed. In their place come hacking repetitions of fixed meanings surrounded by enigmas: ‘got her’, ‘took her’, ‘pulled her’, ‘tied it to her’ (2003: 69); it is as if the language is caught in the originary cut of castration, returning again and again to the first scission of meaning. To reiterate, for Lacan the symbolic order adheres to two modes of binding presence and absence. On a vertical plane, the word forms the presence of the absent thing. On a horizontal level, one word attains its meaning via the absence of another word, along the differential chain of signification (cat means cat because it is not bat, bat means bat because it is not bag). As in the linguistic castration of ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’, instead of the displaced binding of signifiers, here Carver’s minimalist splits seem to home in on the first linguist cut between absence and presence, showing resistance to moving along the chain of signification. The men ‘cooked breakfast...cooked fish, cooked potatoes...drank coffee, drank whiskey...drank coffee, drank whiskey’ (2003: 69): a juddering, almost stuttering repetition of simple fixed meanings and absences. Distinct from the minimal binary of Leader’s *everyday madness*, I suggest that this is not so much a mad ‘imaginary’ symbolic, but more a homing in on the splitting that staves off anxiety (2012: 75). ‘To some extent, splitting is necessary to the work of the psychic apparatus, which must not be overburdened and overwhelmed by tension’, says Green. But Carver’s splitting works more like Green’s primary split that fails to ‘undergo transformations’ into a

more fully mobile and integrated symbolic order; the ‘result is that something will be excluded, warded off’, says Green (2012: 72). The minimalist splitting surrounds the trauma at the centre of the text – the disturbing death and loss – as it works in part to shield against it.

At times in Carver’s edited story, however, there emerges an absence that seems more primary than the linguistic splitting, suggesting an otherness that is prior to the linguistic cut; this is presented in the engulfing image of the water, and cumulative empty spaces that appear to work differently from the minimalist splits. ‘The girl is wedged into some branches that stuck out of the water’ (2003: 68), writes Carver, and the edit adds a paragraph break, an expanse of white. The ‘terrible coldness of the water’ (2003: 69) is similarly followed by empty space. ‘She wasn’t going anywhere’ (2003: 68) receives another line break, gesturing at the unrepresentable death, and the indeterminate ‘where’ (i.e. she is dead, nowhere). Like the abyssal water, these are especially indistinct terms rather than finite meanings, made all the more unfigurable by the blank spaces that follow. The appearance of these more dense, unfigurable moments suggest that splitting sometimes only forms an ‘insufficient shield’ (Green 2012: 75). The empty spaces in conjunction with the amorphous water appear closer to the ‘blank states of mind’ of Green’s ‘primary depression’ (2012: 79), where for Green primary depression and splitting aren’t mutually exclusive, as they are for Leader; rather, primary depression is more originary. For Green, the mechanisms of splitting and primary depression take place together: splitting is like ‘pieces of land’ that are delineated by and secondary to the ‘surrounding space, which I have described as void’ (2012: 78). Splitting is a response to primary depression, to its basic emptiness. Carver’s primary emptiness is distinct from the ‘missing kernels’ and ‘omission’ (Greane

2012) that is the more obvious effect of his minimalist splitting. It is closer to what Marc Chenetier calls Carver's unfigurable, 'strange muteness' (qtd. in Hallett 1999: 47). As in Carver's own reference to 'large blanks', and 'total loss', something 'more than a little mysterious' (2001: 123) prior to words ('No more words', he says; 2001: 125), these more radically indefinable moments form 'traces' (Carver 2001: 180) of something prior to linguistic splitting, something more absolutely unsignified.

Mad desirousness: the unedited prose

The unedited story returns to more familiar Carver terrain, as we move back to the couple's suburban living room. It is eleven o'clock at night and Stuart has just returned home:

He put his heavy arms around me and rubbed his *hands* up and down my back, the same *hands* he'd left with two days before, I thought.
In bed he put his *hands* on me again and then waited, as if thinking of something else.
I turned slightly and then moved my legs (2009: 117; my italics).

In these gentle repetitions, the echoic words 'hands' fold into each other along the more expansive sentences. Stuart's 'hands' are the same as those he left with two days before, but also different, just as the signifier 'hands' harks back to the earlier word but accrues different meaning in the new context, shifting its sense along the differential order of language.

Moreover, this logic of displacement is tied to desirousness, depicted in the

hands that move into Claire's legs. Ironically, for an author renowned for his restraint, in this story we hear an emergent language of excess, as the 'hands' are soon echoed in the 'fingers that scraped against his stubble of whiskers' (2009: 117), and then in the 'hands, the broad fingers...moving...fingers that had moved over me, into me last night' (2009: 117); 'he drops his hand' (2009: 120), says Claire a little later, and she eyes 'his thick, sleeping fingers' (2009: 121). A few lines on Stuart 'touches my arm. His fingers burn,' and 'with his other hand he takes my free hand and puts it on the front of his pants' (2009: 121).

As opposed to the fixed repetitions of the stuck linguistic cut, in the unedited story the repetitions are more variant, and the sentences irregular. If there is madness here it is that of the supplement, of textual overflow, as the 'hands' that found the dead girl in the lake slide into those that penetrate Claire in the night, and then into other such sexually infused images. Felman defines the madness of the text as 'an excess of signifiers that are constantly being displaced', a linguistic binding that accords with Lacan's binding of the unconscious – 'the order of signifiers, of displacement' (Felman 2003: 88). Likewise, in the sliding, echoic repetitions, the unedited writing appears to perform the more desirous, displaced logic of the unconscious. The representation of Stuart's 'mad desire' entwines with a textuality that is madly desirous, which spurs on the narrative desire in accordance with Brooks, for whom 'Desire as narrative thematic, desire as narrative motor, and desire as the very intention of narrative language and the act of telling all seem to stand in close interrelation' (Brooks 1992: 54).

But as we drift from one signifier of 'hands' to the next, Carver's unedited prose starts to perform a more specific unconscious binding – that of Lacan's hysterical position. Unlike the psychotic, for Lacan the hysterical position has been

triangulated, mediated from the other's desire, but it bears a particular relation with the other. 'The hysteric seeks to divine the Other's desire and to become the particular object that, when missing, makes the other desire', writes Fink (Fink 1997: 120). Just as the hysteric's partner is always what Lacan calls the symbolic master, not a real or imaginary object, but someone with some unknown knowledge (Fink 1995: 134), so Claire is both over-preoccupied with Stuart's symbolic status (his social role) and with his unknown knowledge: "'You know'", she says, "'What do I know, Claire, tell me what I know, I don't know anything'" (2009: 114). Claire's psychic state is contagious, it infects the story and narrative voice. For Lacan, the hysteric identifies with the lack in the other – with what the other desires, and as Lacan reminds us, 'man's desire is the other's desire' (Fink 1995: 133-134; Fink 1997: 123-133). Exhibiting a hysterical structure, Claire adopts her husband's desires, revealed in her desirous fantasies of the girl and the enigma that surrounds her. Indeed, the excessive references to Stuart's fingers suggest identification with him and with the sexual desires embodied in his hands.

In the unedited story, Claire gleans further information about the girl's death through a newspaper article:

I read the account in the newspaper that he shoved across the table...unidentifiable girl eighteen to twenty four years of age...body three to five days in the water (2009: 118).

This is scrapped in the edit. In place of the newspaper comes a phone call, another paranoiac voice down the line:

The telephone began ringing right after eight.
'Go to hell!' I heard him shout.
The telephone rang right again...
He slammed the receiver down.
'What is going on?' I said (2003: 70)

In the unedited story, this telephone call is embedded within a lengthy paragraph and gets somewhat lost amidst the narrator's wider ruminations. In Carver's unedited version, stories seem to lead to further stories in a form of narrative displacement, as Claire's narrative interlude shifts to the story in the newspaper, which turns to a further newspaper article, to a news broadcast, and then to another newspaper story. But in the edit, the narrative returns, as if fixated, to the earlier, unidentifiable voice down the phone. Like the telephone call in 'Whoever Was Using This Bed' (1995: 347-363) and 'A Small Good Thing' (1995: 308-333), the minimalist edit appears stuck in the other's unknown interpellation, reinforcing the sense of pervasive excessive otherness.

"'Stuart, could we go for a drive?'" , says Claire, in the unedited story. And so the couple leave their home and drive through town. They cross Everson Creek, and without speaking they turn into a picnic area a few feet from the water

The creek flows under the bridge and into a large pond a few hundred yards away. There are a dozen or so men and boys scattered around the banks of the pond under the willows, fishing.

'So much water so close to home, why did you have to go miles away to fish?' I asked.

'Why did you have to go there of all places?' (2009: 119)

Claire goes on:

I look at the creek. I float towards the pond, eyes open, face down, staring at the rocks and moss on the creek bottom until I am carried into the lake where I am pushed by the breeze. Nothing will be any different. We will go on and on and on and on. We will go on even now, as if nothing had happened. I look at him across the picnic table. (2009: 120)

Imagining herself as the girl in the lake, Claire's narrative 'I' loses authorial stability. Up until this point in the unedited story there has been some indication of the distinction between the narrative 'I' and the 'I' of the protagonist – through the authorial distance of the past tense, the 'I said' authorial tags, and the author's descriptive commentary (for example, 'I said, alarmed'; 2009: 117). But as the prose creeps into the present tense the narrative 'I' merges more fully with the protagonist's 'I' ('I look at the creek'), and then with the protagonist's fantasy of the girl in the lake ('I float towards the pond'), in a linguistic *identification* with the other that again suggests a hysterical relation to otherness (Fink 1999: 119-134). Here, in the unedited story the divided subject attempts to plug her division, or lack, with the other 'I' through hysterical identification – performed in the disjunction, but also mergence, of the narrative 'I' and narrated 'I' of the dead girl. Language doubles, creating an 'I' that does not coincide with the 'I', disclosing the mad doubleness of the narrator who cannot own her sentence.

Unlike the edit, the unedited prose doesn't remain caught in the 'first linguistic cut' – the schism between hard finite meaning and a more radical alterity. Rather, the prose accords more with Lacan's 'separation' (Lacan 1998: 246, 257). For Lacan, the differential gaps in the symbolic order (the differences *between* words) institute structured absences and these *separate* and organise the first lack forged by the linguistic cut. Assigned to the differential form of signification, the subject's first traumatic lack is brought outside, exposed to structured alterities; as such, the

subject moves from fixation to the mobile desire (1998: 214-215). Claire's 'I' is not simply stuck in the polarised split of an 'I' and a 'not I' (presence and absence). Her 'I' becomes displaced, its meaning deferred along the mobile binding of signification: the first narrative 'I' is displaced onto the 'I' of the girl in the river, which is then 'carried' and 'pulled' by the stream of signification into the indeterminate 'we', and onto the narrative 'I' that looks at her husband across the table, as Claire moves from a hysterical structuring to a more integrated symbolic relation to alterity.

Imbricated in the flow of language, the narrative I goes 'on and on and on and on' (2009: 120), continually displaced. 'Nothing will be any different...it is as if nothing had happened...Yet nothing will change', Claire says, 'but nothing will ever really be any different' (2009: 120):

...our lives have *been set in motion*, and they will *go on and on* until they stop. But if that is true, what then? I mean, what if you believe that, but you keep it *covered up*, until one day something happens that should *change something*, but then you see nothing is going to *change* after all. (Carver 2009: 120; my italics).

Adrift the indeterminacy of language, subjectivity is 'set in motion', 'on and on', as the otherness or lack in subjectivity, its 'nothingness' to use Claire's term, is 'covered up' through symbolic language but also opened up – so that something should 'change', yet 'it's not going to change after all' (Carver 2009: 120). Here we have change and no change – difference and stability. In accordance with Felman's madness of the text, in the unedited prose, madness is not the origin of language, but the 'effect of signification' (Felman 2003: 31, 107) – the mad differential drift of its discourse.

Quite distinct from the clipped Carver we are more familiar with, the undulating nothing, nothing, on and on, creates assonance, a background murmur, such that at times the language of this story appears to function autonomously, without relation to experience or world. ‘The way language is structured gives us a clue to the mode of incorporating the addressee of the other’, says Leader (Leader 2011: 166). As we have seen, in the unedited prose excess otherness is mediated by being woven into the symbolic differential bindings of presence and absence. However, I suggest that the gradual murmuring, the cumulative whispering effect that the reader experiences in several passages of this text, might also form a means of blocking out the other, a different way of defending against excess alterity (of the girl’s death, Claire’s amorphous fears, her husband’s libidinal desires).

In the unedited story, the dead girl functions as a locus of loss, the nominal force of an absence that madly, desirously, drives the narrative on. Thus, in the unedited story the dead girl becomes a figure for the repressed past, the mad way in which the past, as other, as trauma, never stops coming to pass, as Claire’s narrative returns again and again to the image of the dead girl far more than in the edited story. Loss is the repetition of loss, according to Freud, and so in the unedited more repressed text loss is continually, ‘madly’ repeated in the *death in life* that recurs in the narrator’s point of view – her consciousness.

In Lish’s edit, however, the dead girl is not so much a figure of absence that propels signification, as a void that cannot be signified, that halts the words that approach it – giving rise to a splitting language. The unedited textual binding is linguistically post-castrated, giving an affect of loss. But the edit appears to remain more stuck in the cut, the first linguistic split, unable to move on. Removing the linguistic negations and displacements of the unedited prose (e.g. ‘Nothing will be

any different. We will go on and on and on and on. We will go on even now, as if nothing had happened'), the edit proffers the single line: 'I look at the creek. I'm right in it, eyes open, face down, staring at the moss on the bottom, dead' (2003: 71). Here, Lish inserts a paragraph cut, emphasizing the stubborn hardness of the term 'dead' and the void that follows it.

Both stories shift to an account of the police investigation surrounding the body. 'The body is still *unidentified, unclaimed, apparently unmissed*' (2009: 121), says the unedited, in a mellifluous line that is removed in the edit. The unedited story continues:

But for the last twenty-four hours men have been examining it, putting things into it, cutting, weighing, measuring, putting back again, sewing up, looking for the exact cause and moment of death. (2009: 121)

Through the rolling repetitions of the continuous tense, the words that chime but are also different, here textual madness arises from sliding signifiers. Compare this to the edit of the same passage and one can see the extent to which the harder repetitions and clipped syntax are the editor's creation. 'The girl's body has been identified, claimed' (2003: 71), states Claire in the edited story:

But it took *some* examining it, *some* putting things into it, *some* cutting, *some* weighing, *some* measuring, *some* putting things back again and sewing them in. (2003: 71; my italics)

Instead of the psychical movement or dialectic of the unedited, in the edit the recurrent 'some, some, some' freezes into one isolated repetition, as if caught at the moment that symbolization might have started but never did – the first linguistic cut.

In fact, these lines might be read as a vignette for Lish's overall editorial practice – his 'putting things in' (seen here in Lish's repeated insertion of the word 'some'), his 'cutting', 'weighing', and 'measuring' of sentences – creating the minimalist order of hard solid meanings and gaps in meaning that is quite distinct from the looser language of the unedited. Indeed, in the edit the phrase 'sewing things in' captures the *confining* effect of Carver's minimalism – the way in which the split between finite meaning and otherness forms the defence of quiet restraint. Indeed, for Green splitting forms an 'ego container' or 'envelope' (Green 2012: 78), and Carver himself alludes to his prose as a kind of container, speaking of his minimalist writing as a 'carton' with the lid closed.

In the more differential repetitions of the unedited prose, otherness is the 'moment of death' that spurs language on. Stuck on the same stuttering terms ('some', 'some', 'some'), clipped sentences and absences, the edit marks an appeal to a symbolic dimension that fails - fending off the trauma of extreme otherness by means of a radical split.

Significantly, at this stage in the narrative Lish cuts three full pages, excising the sexual references and backstory. In the unedited version, we are privy to Claire's rambling recollections of her past:

I cannot be sure that the things I remember happening really happened to me. There was a girl who had a mother and a father... Later, much later – what happened to the time in between? – she is in another town working as a receptionist and becomes acquainted with one of the engineers who asks her on a date....After a short while they decide to get married, but already the past, her past, is slipping away. The future is something she can't imagine. She smiles, as if she has a secret, when she thinks about the future...Once...he tells her that someday this affair (his words, 'this affair') will end in violence. She remembers this. She files this away somewhere and begins repeating it aloud from time to time. (2009: 192)

Dispossessed through language and the linguistic expression of memory, Claire is subject to a constant slipping away of self-presence. Divided in discourse, she is troubled by what escapes it - figured in the image of the dead girl that Claire cannot quite 'file away', and which recurs throughout her narrative. While the edited prose 'seizes what refuses to pass' (Blanchot 1987: 18) in the static otherness of the cut, the madness of the unedited text lies in its incessant passing – in the linear temporality inscribed in the symbolic binding of alterity. As with the past, the Claire of the future remains a 'secret', invoking Derrida's 'secret', as what does not reveal itself, what is outside the play of veiling and unveiling (Derrida 1992b: 21). Like the body in the lake, Claire's secret otherness lies on the surface of her discourse, as the indecipherable. 'Clearly the most tempting figure for this secret is death, that which has a relation to death, which is carried off by death', Derrida states (2001: 58). Just as the dead body floats downstream, so, in the unedited prose, Claire is carried away by the linguistic negations, her ongoing death within language. Speaking of what she cannot say with an otherness that can never be self-present, Claire's life story is a secret life, life as a matter of life-death.

What is more, in the unedited story the madness of the secret is tied up with sex. We learn that Claire 'goes away for a while to a place the doctor recommends' (2009: 122). In a paragraph that is lopped from the edit, we hear that Stuart's 'mother comes out from Ohio in a hurry to care for the child' (2009: 122):

But she, Claire, Claire spoils everything and returns home in a few weeks. His mother moves out of the house and takes an apartment across town and perches there, as if waiting. One night in bed when they are both near sleep, Claire tells him that she heard some woman patients at DeWitt discussing fellatio... Stuart is pleased at

hearing this. He stroked her arm. Things are going to be okay, he says (2009: 123).

The demand of Stuart's mother, her absence ('across town') which is also a persecutory presence ('she perches there, as if waiting'), is conflated with the couple's sexuality, as if what is other to her husband (his mother) triggers Claire to talk about fellatio. Sexuality in Carver's realist prose, so conspicuously absent from his edited oeuvre, is once more tied to a hysterical structure, as Claire seems to get off on the idea of her husband's 'other woman' (Fink 1997: 125). As with the madness of the secret, so in the displaced language of this more so-called 'realist' writing, rhetoric doesn't so much hide and disguise sex. Rather, as Felman suggests, sexuality is the madness of its rhetoric: the textual ambiguity and division of meaning, enacted in the pronominal instabilities but also in the textual substitutions, as Stuart's mother replaces Claire but Claire also replaces Stuart's mother. This particular binding and unbinding of otherness is closer to the hysteric's structuring – as the character and the language performs identification with the other's otherness (or desire). 'Sexuality is meaning as division, meaning as conflict' (2003: 158), says Felman. Likewise, here in the unedited prose sexuality arises in the gap between language and the subject's position in it: Claire struggles with self-definition, 'But she, Claire, Claire'; she becomes substituted by Stuart's mother, as the other's other; and this incurs her desire to talk about sex. Significantly, the edit cuts nearly all Carver's original references to sex, and the inexorable pull of the unedited prose, in its linguistic displacements, comes to a near standstill.

Felman identifies the 'madness of literature' with a certain formulation of a deferred, displaced order of signification, where desire is inscribed in the differential

gaps between signifiers. Felman's formulation is informed by Lacan's psychoanalytic conception of the symbolic order, and Derrida's infinite deferral and displacement of meaning. She locates her conception of the 'madness of literature', specifically in the writings of Gérard de Nerval, Flaubert, Balzac and Henry James (Felman 2003: 59-119, 141-251). Illuminating my reading of the specific modes of binding and unbinding alterity in Carver's unedited writing, Felman's 'madness of literature' helps me to locate a mad desirousness of textuality and narrative. Yet Felman's readings of very different writers can have a monolithic quality to it: de Nerval, Flaubert, Balzac and Henry James are all read, albeit in specific ways, according to their infinite deferral and desirous displacement of meaning. In reading Felman in relation to Carver I hope to have shown both the value of her reading of literary madness, but also where her reading can become totalized. Distinct from Felman's 'madness of literature', at times Carver's unedited language performs a specific relation to alterity that is not simply that of infinite deferral and displacement – it is more that of a merging or identification between linguistic alterities, suggesting a peculiarly hysterical mode of binding alterity, which can give rise to a more static otherness. This is not to suggest that this hysterical binding of language is completely at odds with Felman's more orthodoxly symbolic and neurotic operations of language. Rather, it shows a subtle departure, through a hysterical structuring that emerges and submerges at different moments in the unedited prose.

A paranoid cut

Towards the end of both the edited and unedited story Claire goes for a drive. She is on her way to the girl's funeral. In both versions of the story Claire encounters a strange experience with another driver on the road. But the depiction of this encounter is subtly different in each version of the story.

'A green pickup comes up behind me and stays behind me for miles', we read in both the edited and unedited story, 'I grip the wheel until my fingers hurt' (2003: 73; 2009: 128). In the unedited text the driver is 'a crewcut man in a blue workshirt in his early thirties' (2009: 128). With typical excision of detail, in the edit he becomes simply a 'crewcut man in a blue workshirt' (2003: 73) – more a bold outline. In both versions of the story Claire waits for the man to pass and then finds a place to pull over, a dirt road off the hard shoulder, where she 'can hear the river down by the trees' (2009: 129). But then she hears 'the pickup returning' (2009: 129). In the unedited story, we read:

I start the engine just as the truck pulls up behind me. I lock the doors and roll up the windows. Perspiration breaks on my face and arms as I put the car in gear, but there is no place to drive. (2009: 129)

In place of these lines, the edit provides the pithy, more chilling single line: 'I lock the doors and windows' (2003: 73) followed by Lish's characteristic paragraph cut.

The unedited version continues:

'You alright?' the man says as he comes up to the car. 'Hello, Hello in there.' He raps the glass. 'Are you okay?' He leans his arms on the door then and brings his face close to the window. (2009: 129)

Scrapping the genial 'hello hello', as well as the description of the man

walking up to the car window, the edit presents us simply with a voice stating, ““You alright?”” (2003: 73), and a man’s face up close against the window. The unedited story humanizes the man, giving him motive for his actions and a more human idiom. The man informs Claire:

‘After I passed I slowed some, but when I didn’t see you in the mirror I pulled off and waited a couple of minutes’ . . . ‘How come you’re locked up in there? Hey are you sure you’re okay Huh?’ (2009: 129)

In the unedited story an exchange ensues for 40 odd lines in which it becomes apparent that Claire is the more unhinged of the two. ““I want to smother”” (2009: 129), she declares, as the stranger does his best to help her. The edit whittles down this exchange to 12 laconic lines, excising any clear explanation for the stranger stopping by, so that the man’s face simply appears at the window, as if magnified. This episode has a paranoid feel, a ‘feeling of threat or sense of menace’ that Carver says he likes in writing (2001: 92), and which is the affect of several stories (Facknitz 1992). Speaking of the early edited work, Wolff says, ‘Such turmoils are, as in all of these stories, elliptically revealed, and potent with division... They are menacing’ (Wolff 1976); Allsop speaks of the ‘inherent menace in his stories’ (Allsop 2013: 70). At the moment at which the appearance of the threatening man looms, the edited language shifts from a binding of otherness and meaning that is closer to the unedited prose style, to a sudden splitting, as lean repetitions start to cut off finite meaning from otherness:

I slow down and find a place. I pull over and shut off the motor. I can hear the river down below the trees. Then I hear the pickup coming back.
I lock the doors and roll up the windows. (2003: 73)

In the repetition of the same subject, verb, object sentences, the narrative voice

appears stuck at an early, infantile sentence formation. It is pertinent that this splitting is not so much a permanent state, as it is in Leader's 'minimal binary' of *everyday madness*, but arises at especially anxious moments.

This linguistic splitting coincides with spatial splitting:

"You all right?" the man says. He raps on the glass. "You okay?" He leans his arms on the door and brings his face to the window.
I stare at him. I can't think what else to do.
"Is everything all right in there? How come you're all locked up?"
I shake my head.
"Roll down your window?"
He shakes his head and looks at the highway and then back at me.
"Roll it down now."
"Please," I say, "I have to go."
"Open the door," he says as if he isn't listening. "You're going to choke in there."
He looks at my breasts, my legs. I can tell that's what he's doing. (2003: 73)

Claire's helplessness and diminished position is intensified by the truncated sentences and infant-like repetitions, which express a spatial and emotional contraction. Shouting imperious commands, the man appears as a swelling, persecuting voice outside the window. When he is physically described, the man appears only in bold outline. He 'raps on the glass... He leans his arms on the door and brings his face to the window', with magnified body parts, pressing in oppressively.

The unedited story, on the other hand, presents more of a symbolic frontier between the inside and outside of the car, materialized in the glass window that separates Claire's inside, imaginary perspective from outside, objective reality - that this is a man trying to help a woman in distress. The reader is made more aware of the distinction between what is Claire's internal imagining and objective reality. Claire's refusal to wind down her window signals the necessity of maintaining a

functioning symbolic frontier that ‘affords communication with an adequate selection of what has to be taken in or kept out’ (Green 2012: 63) – a boundary like Green’s ‘osmotic membrane’ that separates rather than splits the inside and outside. In the minimalist edit, however, the window works less like a symbolic partition and more like ‘a stultification of the limit’, a ‘kind of mortification’ (Green 2012: 63). Like the minimalist linguistic splitting, this harder defence results in the return of what cannot always be kept out, as the unsymbolised acquires a persecutory presence in the menacing image of the man.

It is significant that here the unassimilated Real erupts at the very borderline that separates the outside from the inside – where the minimalist splitting falters. It is as if the primary emptiness, the more extreme unsignified otherness that the quiet minimalist splitting tries to keep out, comes back ‘with an intrusive, persecutory quality’ (Green 2012: 76). ‘Splitting is the last defensive measure against implosion, disintegration, or loss’, says Green (2012: 78). But here the paranoid fantasy breaks through, accounting for the ‘loss-intrusion’ affect of Carver’s writing (2012: 76).

Just as Carver’s minimalist writing works more at the borderline between finite meaning and absence, so it is not a coincidence that much of the action of this story takes place at borderline spaces - on motorways, on holiday, on the road, the hard shoulder, down the river that cuts through the mountainous landscape. As with the linguistic cut between meaning and otherness, on a spatial level the edited story returns to places at the edge of the inside and outside, as if in an attempt to impose symbolic castration. The madness of the edited prose isn’t outside of reason, as it is in many formulations of literary madness. As in Blanchot, his *minimalist madness* appears to quietly hover at reason’s boundary: at the very cut of reason which splits finite meaning from otherness. A vignette from Blanchot’s *The Madness of the Day*

illustrates the madness of this boundary:

Outdoors, I had a brief vision: a few steps away from me, just at the corner of the street I was about to leave, a woman with a baby carriage had stopped, I could not see her very well, she was manoeuvring the carriage to get it through the door. At that moment a man who I had not seen approaching went in through that door. *He had already stepped across the sill when he moved backward and came out again. While he stood next to the door, the baby carriage, passing in front of him, lifted slightly to cross the sill, and the young woman, after raising her head to look at him, also disappeared inside.*

This brief scene excited me to the point of delirium. I was undoubtedly not able to explain it to myself fully and yet I was sure of it, that I had seized the moment when the day, having stumbled against a real event, would begin hurrying towards its end. Here it comes, I said to myself, the end is coming; something is happening, the end is beginning. (Blanchot: 1989: 194; my italics)

Blanchot's madness of the day arises at the boundary space where the 'real event' happens but doesn't happen, just as Carver's *minimalist madness* resides in the repeated moments where signification is both about to begin and ends. In Blanchot's passage madness is not loud or dramatic but ordinary – the moment where meaning and the outside of meaning divide, it is the cut inflicted in Blanchot's first slope of literature. Similarly, Carver's minimalist language isn't obviously transgressive as irrational. His minimalist prose has an everyday quality to it, as critics have indicated (Davis 1993: 653-658; Ní Éigeartaigh 2009: 33-52; Matsuoka 1993: 423-438; Henning 1989: 689-698). Indeed, Green describes splitting and its protective effect as in some respects a 'normal' defence: 'to some extent splitting is necessary to the psychic apparatus, which must not be overburdened and overwhelmed by tension', says Green (2012: 75). What makes Carver's minimalist prose appear slightly awry is the way it homes in on this minimal split, prior to its links with further signifiers along a more integrative, differential binding of signification (Lacan's separation). This accounts for the odd, quietly estranging affect of Carver's writing that critics speak of. Carver's 'characters tentatively reach out toward otherness' through a kind of

‘disengagement’, says David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips (Boxer & Phillips 1979: 75). Carver himself refers to the ‘essential sense of mystery or strangeness’ of his minimalist prose (2001: 177).

Carver’s domestic settings can appear as stripped bare as his sentences, as if his landscapes also present trauma by a certain forgetting. Carver describes his domestic settings as ‘unadorned’, resounding with forgetting (2001: 95-96). At times, then, Carver’s bare isolated rooms can appear as confined places that shield against unsignified trauma. In ‘Boxes’, ‘Gazebo’, and ‘Chef’s House’ (Carver 1995: 333-347; 112-119; 243-248), characters even go so far as to seek out spaces where they cannot be seen, where they are removed from the other’s gaze. With the edited prose, we become the ‘sheltered reader’, in de Man’s terms (de Man 1979: 63). Indeed, this private sheltering is even a characteristic of Carver’s choice of form - the enclosed and sheltered space of the short story that Frank O’Connor speaks of (O’Connor 1976: 87).

Metaphoric connections

As the unedited narrative moves to the girl’s funeral the prose stands out for its unexpected use of poetic language, so at odds with the stripped prose we have come to associate with Carver. The funeral is described in two pages that Lish cuts down to 15 lines. As opposed to the objects of the edited text that sometimes form returns of the Real, here objects appear to be quietly anthropomorphized. In the chapel ‘chairs creak as they settle themselves,’ outside ‘sunlight glances off polished hoods

and fenders...for a minute the parking lot reminds me of a meadow, but then the sun flashes on car windows,' says Claire (2009: 130-1; my italics). As Claire becomes reconciled with the otherness of the girl's death and her husband's enigmatic or vicarious part in it, the unedited language shifts from the mad, desirous differential bindings to a different register – that of metaphor, with its associate links.

Here the objects are less paranoiac and more transformative. They come briskly alive and in tune with human mourning. The sunlight glances, the chairs quietly creak and respectfully settle, in touch with rather than sheltered from the mourning of the trauma. In his essays on writing Carver frequently speaks of the importance of making connections. Writing is a way of 'trying to connect', of 'staying in touch' (Carver 2001: 85, 89). Claire similarly starts to make psychical connections. Where she once confused herself with the dead girl, now with the separation of poetic vision Claire explicitly imagines rather than becomes the dead girl, envisaging her 'journey down the river, the nude body hitting rocks' (2009: 130). Claire pictures a 'man who is drunk (Stuart?) take her by the wrist' (2009: 130), as Claire makes symbolic links, recognizing, 'There is a connection to be made of these things...if I can find it' (2009: 130). In these last passages of his story, the unedited writing has the 'light touch' that Carver says he prefers (2001: 229) and which is absent from the edited writing. Connections are made, but they aren't fixed. The poetic images of the meadow and sun don't settle on determinate meanings, but together they implicitly conjure an outside, rural landscape, perhaps gesturing at that outside rural domain where Stuart first came across the girl's body, and which Claire has hitherto found so traumatising.

According to de Man the metaphor is inextricably bound to what he calls the 'symbolic'; as with Lacan, de Man sees the 'symbolic' as the substitutive link

between signifier and signified (or word and object) that founds meaning. For de Man, in its explicit substitutive operation, the metaphor is the linguistic figure par excellence for the *substitutive operation of language* (de Man 1979: 62). As such, the metaphor draws attention to the founding, substitutive structure of language. De Man's register is not that of psychoanalysis, but for Lacan this founding, substitutive metaphorical structure of language is also the foundation of subjectivity, since the cancelling out of one thing (the non-linguistic subject) by another (the signifier) is at the root of the Lacanian metapsychology. In Lacan, 'metaphor's creative spark is the subject; metaphor creates the subject. Every metaphorical effect is then an effect of subjectivity', says Bruce Fink (1996: 70); in other words, subjectivity is expressed through the metaphoric operations of signifiers that stand in for the non-linguistic signified of being. Accordingly, the metaphorical language that emerges towards the end of the unedited story brings to light the way the unedited writing, more than the edited, is anchored in the metaphorical, substitutive processes of the symbolic order. It also suggests the strengthening of Claire's capacity to symbolize, that her subjectivity becomes more grounded in symbolization. Indeed, it is not insignificant that the metaphor, as a quintessential symbolic operation, emerges at the girl's funeral, since the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest. It is through the funeral that the dead person, and the otherness of death, are symbolised, inscribed in memory, allowing for a certain reconciliation and acceptance of loss.

Yet the sudden, unexpected appearance of metaphors doesn't simply suggest the text's grounding in the symbolic operations of language, it also suggests perceptual or psychological change. In 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud', Lacan draws on the linguist Roman Jakobson, claiming that unconscious meaning is characterized by the operations of metonym (in line with

Freud's displacement) and metaphor (in line with Freud's condensation), where the former works by contiguity and the latter by resemblance (Lacan 2002: 138-169). In the metonymic pole, signification is formed along a horizontal, contiguous axis of differentiation, where one sign acquires its meaning because it is part of (but also different from) another sign (the part for the whole). In the metaphoric pole, the linguistic operation takes place vertically, through the transformation of signified into signifier.

In this light, in contrast to those critics who have defined the edited Carver as minimalist (Buford 1983: 5; Dickstein 1991: 507; Runyon 1994: 1-4, 14; Hallett 1999: 43-66), one could argue that the unedited text displays more the madness of the differential, metonymic chain of language, Žižek's mad autonomous functioning of the symbolic (1992: 150-151). Crucially, along this metonymic, differential axis, it is possible to add something to the chain without fundamentally altering it, says Lacan. Metaphor, on the other hand, brings about a new configuration of thoughts, establishing a new combination or permutation, a new order in the signifying chain: 'with the metaphor, the signifier brings something new in the Real (the extra-symbolic subject) and drains off more of the Real into the symbolic' (Fink 1995: 71). The appearance of metaphoric language in Carver's story thus marks a shift away from Felman's conception of literary madness, as desirously differential, metonymic language, towards a new kind of literary and psychological binding.

De Man also defines the metaphor as vitalizing and transformative. Via the 'intervention of an analogical motion stemming from a different property' reading can 'acquire a wider dimension and become an action', which 'extends the function of consciousness beyond that of mere passive perception', says de Man (de Man 1979: 63). In this sense, the shift from the contiguous, metonymic language that we

have so far detected as governing the unedited prose, to metaphor, can be understood as precipitating a shift in the narrator's and reader's modes of apprehension. From being passively subsumed by the mad, infinite deferral of meaning, the reader becomes more actively involved in a transformative mode of meaning making, forging a shift in the subject's position.

As we have seen, in the edited prose the girl's body stands for the return of the Real. In the unedited prose, however, throughout most of the narrative the image of the dead girl seems to function more as Lacan's 'master signifier', as it works to structure and hold in place Claire's trauma. The master signifier is the signifier that triangulates the infant and primary caregiver/mother's unknown desire; it is what in his earlier works Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father, or paternal metaphor, that installs the subject in the symbolic order (2002: 189, 190, 191, 205). In the neurotic, every signifier is linked to the master signifier. By the time of Lacan's *Seminar XVI* his master signifier has become a positional notion; there is not so much a single unique master signifier, rather it comes to designate a signifier that is isolated from the rest of discourse (Fink 1995: 77). The master signifier is often recognizable in analysis by the fact that the analysand repeatedly butts up against the term, 'it may be a term like death, for instance, or any other term that seems opaque to the analysand and that always seems to put an end to associations instead of opening things up' (Fink 1995: 77).

In the unedited story, one could argue that the girl's body has up until this point in the story functioned as a master signifier. As we have seen, in the unedited story Claire's narrative perspective has in part been determined by differential linguistic associations, operating along a differential axis of meaning. But just as the master signifier acts as a stopping point, a dead end that freezes the subject, so for

Claire each new association refers back to the girl, as if stuck at this point, circling around this nonsensical signifier. In Lacan, the subject that is eclipsed by the master signifier remains fixated or subjugated, and acquires a permanence as such. The subject's symptomatic fixation thus has a metaphorical structure, that of a nonsensical signifier standing in for, or over and against, the subject (Fink, 1995: 70). In that sense, analysis can be viewed as 'requiring that new metaphors be forged. For each new metaphor brings with it a precipitation of subjectivity which can alter the subject's position' (Fink, 1995: 70).

The sudden advent of poetic metaphors at the end of the unedited prose coincides with the deactivating of the paternal metaphor (the master signifier) – the dead girl that has hitherto organised Claire's narrative. Here, the fixed master signifier seems to come unstuck, as Claire is able to see the dead girl's body more objectively for what it is – a tragic event – rather than experience herself as defined by it. In this light, the sudden eruption of metaphorical language, so conspicuous for being the only metaphorical language in the piece (and for being so uncharacteristic of Carver's writing and scrapped in the edit), suggests psychological change. In Eric Santner's terms, we see a 'deanimating of the undeadening', or the transformation of an undead core of the Real that sustains a stuck symbolic structure (Santner 2007: 19, 65), and in Lacan's terms, a dialectising of the master signifier (Fink 1995: 26).

Indeed, the unedited story concludes on a note of reconciliation and change, a signification of otherness. "I love you" (2009: 132), Stuart says to Claire. Moving away from the register of death, love becomes the new term in which to position the subject. For Barthes, 'I love you' is a totally appropriate expression of true love: the words never sound adequate enough and so they bring the lover up against the absence of meaning – the locus of what is other in the other person, and for Barthes

this is love (Barthes 1978: 147). Moving from the alterity of death to the alterity of love, Stuart's words are anchored in symbolic bindings, but where the symbolic is brought up against its limits – the otherness of the Real. Stuart's words approach an alterity that is transformative – and in relation to the other person. After Stuart says, “I love you”, Claire hears him say something else and then she ‘wakes up’ and says: “For God's sake Stuart, she was only a child” (2009: 132). Here, openness to otherness gives rise to communication, to saying the inexpressible, as Claire brings into thought and communication with the other what has so far remained traumatically unsaid. This is not a fully formed, determined meaning, more a gesture at what has previously disturbed Claire: that “she was only a child”, suggesting perhaps that the dead girl brings up something of the unsymbolised infant in Claire.

Minimalist affect

The edit ends with a different tenor:

Back home, Stuart sits at the table with a drink of whiskey in front of him. For a crazy instant I think something's happened to Dean.
'Where is he?' I say. 'Where is Dean?'
'Outside,' my husband says. (2003: 74)

Characteristically, the unedited passage proffers more detail:

Stuart sits at the table with a drink in front of him. ~~His eyes are red and for a minute I think he has been crying. He looks at me and doesn't say anything.~~ For a wild instant I feel something has happened to Dean, ~~and my heart turns.~~

‘Where is he?’ I say. ‘Where is Dean?’
‘Outside,’ my husband says.
~~Stuart, I’m afraid, so afraid, I say, leaning against the door.~~
~~What are you so afraid of, Claire? Tell me honey, and maybe I can help. I’d like to help, just try me. That’s what husbands are for.~~ (2009: 231; underlining indicates what is deleted in the edit)

Exemplifying the menace or terror that underlies several of Carver’s stories, both versions of the passage invoke the catastrophic, as Claire has a sudden unfounded fear that something has happened to her son, Dean. Reflecting the ‘ambience’ of imminent disaster that stalks several of his stories, in his essays Carver alludes to his own sense of catastrophe and dread that inadvertently informs his writing. In ‘Fires’ he says he needs the ‘belief that the known world has reason for existing, and is worth writing about, is not likely to go up in smoke in the process’ (2001: 101). The ‘main influence in my life and writing has been a negative one, oppressive and often malevolent’, he says (2001: 93). And alongside the ‘Large blanks’ in his life he can remember ‘Little things’ such as ‘somebody picking up a knife and turning to me in anger (2001: 95); or else hearing my own voice threaten somebody else. Seeing somebody break down a door, or else fall down a flight of stairs’ (2001: 95).

In the minimalist ending of the story, Claire’s sense of catastrophe is exacerbated by the overwhelming presence of the unsignified, as Lish removes Carver’s more fluid expression, along with the narrator’s emotional articulation (I’m so afraid, so afraid). This hollowing out ‘provokes a lack of a chain of associations’ (Perelberg 2003: 579), creating an empty space in the reader’s mind, like that which the analyst can experience, according to Perelberg. This emptiness can leave us with a sense of exclusion from the character’s internal worlds, which might account for the much talked about but under-theorised ‘externality’ of

Carver's writing. In place of symbolization of fear, the reader experiences more of a 'basic emptiness' (Green 2012: 79) like that of Green's primary depression of the borderline state, the basic emptiness that also gives rise to 'feelings of severe threat, of 'helplessness' (Green 2012: 77), as the two coincide towards the end of Carver's edited story.

But Lish's creation of absence could also be read as a means of containing excess otherness. "“Something's happened to Dean” [blank]. ““Where is Dean?”” [blank]. ““Outside”” (2003: 74), says her husband, figuring for the way the *outside* of the signified is presented but nonetheless supported, or structured, through the blank empty spaces that Lish creates. In his account of the borderline state, Green refers to the term *pare*, which stems from *parer*, meaning 'to act out', and also 'to cope with, to counteract, to protect oneself, to avoid, to ward off' (2012: 74). But significantly *parer* also carries the other meaning, to *pare*, as in to pare back, of which the OED offers the following pertinent definitions:

1. To cut or trim. a. To trim (an object) by cutting off... to cut close to the edge ...; to cut away the outer edge or outside of (something)...
- c. To reduce (a thing) by cutting or shaving away portions...to diminish little by little.
2. a. To cut, shave, or shear off (an outer border, surface, rind, or skin); to trim away (a projection or, formerly, any part on the outside of something). (OED Online)

In this light, one could read Carver's paring back of meaning, his cutting off outside otherness, as forming a means to cope with, protect and ward off, the threatening unsignified. Indeed, 'pared back' is a term frequently used to characterize Carver's writing (Morrison 2009; Larry and Gregory 1990: 98; Kleppe 2006: 113). In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory in 1984, Carver said of his own writing that he liked taking his sentences and 'paring them

down to where they seem solid somehow' (McCaffery and Gregory 1990: 109). In paring away a more fluid symbolic language, the edit creates structured absences that hold anxiety in place.

In the final lines, the unsignified is connected with the libidinal for the first time.

He drains his glass and stands up. He says, 'I think I know what you need'.
He reaches an arm around my waist and with his other hand he begins to unbutton my jacket and then he goes on to the buttons of my blouse.
'First things first,' he says.
He says something else. But I don't need to listen. I can't hear a thing with so much water going.
'That's right,' I say, finishing the buttons myself, 'Before Dean comes. Hurry?'
(2003: 74)

Exposed to a libidinal relation, Claire's capacity for meaning falters: 'He says something else', but whatever this something is remains unknown. Claire can't 'listen'. She can't decipher meaning. Instead, she becomes flooded by unsignified otherness – 'I can't hear a thing with so much water going'. The final shielding of otherness that has been particularly characteristic of Carver's minimalism gives way to a more flooding sense of otherness. For Leader, to be dead means to be distant and cut off, but at the same time to be incredibly open and unprotected (2011: 112). This seems to be the condition of both the corpse in the edited prose (impenetrable but also exposed to the reader's and the men's gaze), as well as Claire, who here appears deadened, disconnected, but at the same time open and vulnerable. In a sense this figures for the overriding literary affect of Carver's writing – the way his linguistic splitting creates a distance from but also exposes a traumatic otherness. Claire's final line signals a last attempt to contain excess alterity: "'That's right,'" I say, finishing the buttons myself, "'Before Dean comes. Hurry?'" as Claire attempts to own, take control of the mad, libidinal otherness.

4. Speaking From the Heart: The Carver Lish Correspondence

The Carver letters

Extracts of Carver's letters to Lish were first published by D.T Max in *The New York Times Magazine* (Max 1998). A fuller version of the correspondence appeared in the *The New Yorker* in 2007, published anonymously. The letters are archived at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, where they were acquired as part of the Lish manuscripts in 1991.⁵

‘Well, as it happens I do have a few stories on hand, and I’m sending them along within the next day or two. I hope you can find something you like’: so writes Carver in a letter to Lish, dated November 1969 (Carver 2007). The letter marks the beginning of an entangled editorial relationship that would last for the following fourteen years. Published anonymously in the *The New Yorker* in 2007, this opening missive accompanies a series of excerpts from Carver's correspondence to his editor that spans the shifting relationship from 1969 to 1983.

⁵ The Lish mss., 1951-2012, consist of the correspondence, manuscripts, and papers of editor and writer Gordon Lish (Lish 1991).

A year later, on July 15, 1970, Carver writes to his editor again: ‘Hombre, thanks for the superb assist on the stories . . . Feel the stories are first class now . . . I appreciate the fine eye you turned on them’ (Carver 2007). And in the published letter of September 27, 1977, he states, ‘you are my idea of an ideal reader . . . you know, old bean, just what an influence you’ve exercised on my life’ (Carver 2007). But on July 8, 1980, after receiving the particularly severe cut of his manuscript of *Beginners*, Carver’s adulation turns to grief: ‘I’m afraid, mortally afraid, I feel it, that if the book were to be published as it is in its present edited form, I may never write another story . . . I’m grieving right now’ (Carver 2007).

In what follows I will read Carver’s correspondence with his editor in relation to the psychoanalytic accounts of transference of Freud, Lacan and Laplanche. It will be my contention that Carver’s very early correspondence, from 1971 to 1974, frames the other as inciting openness to alterity, bearing some correlation with Laplanche’s ‘hollowed out transference’ (Laplanche 2005: 233-236). The early correspondence from 1977 to 1980 starts to exhibit idealized transference of the other, close to Freud’s ‘love transference’ (Freud, 2006: 341-353); in Lacan’s terms, Carver’s language performs an imaginary relation with the other. I suggest that the middle correspondence of 1980 displays over-exposure to otherness, but also marks a shift towards symbolization of the other’s alterity. The final letters of 1982 to 1983 consolidate this trend; through their address and openness to otherness, they perform the open structure of Laplanche’s ‘hollowed out transference’, as we shall see (2005: 233-236). I also examine the relation between transference, literature and the epistle form, drawing on Derrida’s *The Post Card*, along with the reflections of Felman, Green and Brooks.

Transference, literature, letters

Before turning to a close reading of the Carver Lish correspondence it is necessary to reflect on how I understand ‘transference’ and its relation to literature.

In ‘Observations on Love in Transference’ Freud sees the ‘outbreak[s] of tempestuous demands for love’ as ‘resistance in the guise of infatuation’ (Freud 2006: 344, 348). For Freud, the patient’s transference love constitutes *resistance* to her unconscious truth; she is ‘activating and acting out in actual life something that she ought simply to remember, reproduce as mental content and confine within the mental sphere’ (2006: 347). But this ‘resistance did not create the love’, says Freud, rather resistance returns to an early ‘love’ relation: ‘this infatuation consists of reissuing old components and repeating infantile reactions. But that is always the essence of falling in love’ (2006: 349). Love as resistance forms the comfort of a return to a primitive fixed relation with the other/primary caregiver in order to avoid giving expression to, that is symbolizing, indeterminate unconscious truths.

Lacan rereads Freud’s ‘love transference’ as imaginary transference, which stems from the early ‘mirror phase’ of psychological development where ‘identification with its reflected image constitutes the ego [so that henceforth, the ego] will be concerned . . . with demands for recognition and with defensive manoeuvres to protect self-esteem’ (Muller 1996: 92). Transference love is an illusory means of

acquiring self-recognition and avoiding confronting one's lack (Evans 2010: 212). Thus, in Lacan's imaginary transference, the gap in the other, as in the lack that institutes the other's desire, is filled with fantasy in a structure of narcissistic self-enclosure (Fink 1997: 59). Lacan's imaginary transference, as the filling up of the other's lack with one's fantasmatic projections, is modified in Laplanche's 'filled in transference', where the repetition of childhood imagos and scenarios of the past are projected onto the other (Laplanche 2005: 233). For Laplanche, the symmetrical, mirroring nature of this relation is captured in the very word 'transference' which implies the transportation of the same thing to somewhere else (2005: 219). In terms of 'imaginary transference', my reading of Carver will be less interested in the transferal of the past to the present and more concerned with what takes place in the here and now of the writing – how transference is performed in the interlocutory situation of the written words. I will be interested both in the fantasy of merging with the other that inheres in the words' meanings, but also the merging performed through the formal qualities of the writing: the mirroring aspects of the vocabulary, syntax and rhythms.

For the late Lacan, transference is the attribution of knowledge to the Other — the supposition that the Other is a subject who knows (Lacan 2004: 230-243). Here, transference love arises from the fantasy that the other harbours some unknown knowledge. But for Lacan, the other can also *know too much*. If the other's or the analyst's knowledge is too fixed, if their interpretations are too stuck, this can lead to a kind of stasis in the analysand. The other mustn't fall into the trap of interpreting from the position of the one who knows; the analyst shouldn't 'slip into a false sense of mastery . . . deliberate on what is right and wrong', as this encourages the analysand to 'demand' rather than 'desire' (Fink 1995: 88). In Carver's

correspondence of 1977, I consider how Lish is presented as the ‘subject supposed to know’. In 1980, Lish becomes the other who interprets too determinately: the otherness of his minimalist mould becomes increasingly fixed and enclosed, and these over-determinations have a stultifying effect on Carver’s letter writing, giving rise to stuck demands in place of the mobility of desire.

For Freud and for Lacan, splits occur at the level of transference (between past and present, ‘fantasy’ and ‘reality’, the imaginary and the symbolic), but for Laplanche the most important is the primordial split. In *Essays on Otherness*, Laplanche claims that the infant’s primary relation with the other is a relation with the other’s/ caregiver’s ‘enigmatic message’ (2005: 174-176). The adult other harbours her own unrepresented unconscious desires, which the infant absorbs at a time when he/she has not yet acquired the capacity for symbolisation. According to Laplanche, in the originary infantile situation the other’s ‘sexual enigma is presented to the child by adults in an address, and this address is enigmatic in so far as the other (the one who sends it) does not entirely know what he is saying; he is other to himself’ (2005: 233). Laplanche writes, ‘the adult’s sexual, provocative, traumatising enigma is, for the child, what has to be ceaselessly mastered, translated, brought back into constancy’ (2005: 233).

Laplanche’s ‘hollowed out transference’ refers to the process by which the analyst or other offers a ‘benevolent hollow’ – a benign space of alterity that reignites the originary alterity, opening it up for decomposition and retranslation. ‘We offer the analysand a hollow, the analyst’s own interior benevolent neutrality, a benevolent neutrality concerning our own enigma . . . *another hollow*, the enigma of his own originary situation, is placed there’ (2005: 233). It is the offer of analysis

that creates ‘transference . . . in other words, the reopening of a relation, the originary relation, in which the other is primary for the subject’ (2005: 233).

Laplanche’s formulation of transference is particularly critical to my reading of Carver’s correspondence. In outline, I suggest that the very early correspondence of 1971 and 1974 frames the editor as at first attentive to the enigma of Carver’s prose, opening up its alterity. This is closed up in the imaginary transference that pervades the correspondence from 1977 to 1980. In the pivotal letter of July 8, 1980, Lish is presented as the other who knows too much, as his alterity becomes overly excessive and at the same time stuck. But this correspondence also displays attempts to translate the excessive enigma, bring it back to constancy. The enigmatic otherness is re-opened through the later letters from 1982 to 1983. Overall, I consider how the language of Carver’s correspondence displays an increasing openness to and binding of the other’s alterity, bearing some correlation to the shifting mode of prose of his literary fiction.

On an epistemological level, how am I understanding transference? Am I speaking of ‘actual’, empirical transference between Carver the man and Lish, his real life editor, or a certain transferential relation as it is expressed through the textual operations of language? What is the relation between psychoanalytic transference and transference outside the clinic, in particular, literary transference?

The domains of clinical work and literature might seem incompatible, but in fact both put the idea of a knowable entity called ‘reality’ under suspicion, thus troubling the distinction between *real life* and literature. Indeed, as Laplanche

reminds us, it is questionable to speak of the *real life* mother because in the originary relation the other is already taken for someone else:

Analyst: You are taking me for someone else, I'm not the person you think.
Analysand: But the other in the originary relation was, precisely, not the person I thought. So I'm perfectly right to take you for someone else. (2005 218)

Moreover, if the subject is always other than himself, as Laplanche suggests, then the othering of literature, its powers of 'presenting the unrepresentable' (Lyotard 1992: 15), could be seen to bear an affinity with the othering of the originary relation in so-called *real life*. And if the author is already always divided in real life, other than himself, then one could say that it is futile to speak of the *actual* author of the work, as if he is a psychologically realisable human being, ready to be psychoanalysed through a psychobiographical literary reading. Eschewing such an approach, I will heed Derrida's caution not to confuse the empirical author with his words: 'Who is writing? To whom? . . . the signers are not inevitably to be confused with the senders, nor the addressees with the receivers' (Derrida 1987: 5). For Laplanche, the author of the literary work is dead not simply in Barthes' sense, that the written text overrides authorial intent, but because the author's words are inscribed with originary otherness: 'of course, the author is always absent, definitively or not; but is he perhaps essentially absent, whether or not he is dead' (1987: 226). Accordingly, it will not be my intention to read the letters as transparent channels to Carver and Lish as psychological human beings; rather, I will be more interested in the presentation of the unrepresentable in the letters, the text's unconscious organisation. Green reminds us that 'to write is first and foremost to transform. It is to transfer the nonrepresentability of the unconscious fantasy to the

nonrepresentability of the written word, through the mediation of preconscious representations' (Green 2005: 348). Avoiding a speculative examination of Carver's past 'life' and how it might hold sway on his relationship with Lish, which has been the matter of most psychoanalytically oriented criticism in this area (Tutter 2009: 502-507; Tutter 2011: 915-959; Bethea 2001; Romon 2003), I will be more concerned with the ways that the nonrepresentability of the unconscious is opened up and closed off through the written word of Carver's correspondence.

I will also examine the reader's transferential relation with Carver's writing. In line with Laplanche, I will be interested in how the reader's unconscious is activated by Carver's writing – the way in which the written letters might stimulate the reader's originary enigma (2005: 228). For Green, the reader or 'analyst becomes the analyzed of the text', as the reader's unconscious is triggered by the writing (Green 2005: 338). Likewise, I will be interested in how far the letters encourage the reader to unbind or bind meaning, open up or close off interpretations and associations.

Finally, the epistle form can be seen as particularly propitious to my understanding of literary transference. Just as for Laplanche transference is an enigmatic address to the other, so in *The Post Card* Derrida reminds us that the letter is an address to the other, and one that interrupts, opening up the other's internal alterity. I detect an affinity between the structure of the epistle and that of hollowed out transference – its 'movement to the limit' (2005: 233).

As a last preliminary note, it is important to recognise that the correspondence I attend to is that published in *The New Yorker* in 2007, not the full correspondence between Carver and Lish. As a written, selected, and edited collection, I will thus treat the correspondence as a literary product.

1971-1977: 'an ideal reader'

'Thanks for going over it.—Listen, something you said a long time ago, *the thing itself* is what matters. Is true, in the end', writes Carver, in one of his early letters to Lish, dated January 19, 1971 (Carver 2007; my italics). Carver's idiomatic 'thing itself' finds a theoretical echo in Lacan's reading of the Freudian Thing (das Ding), where the 'thing' is 'the beyond-of-the signified...it is excluded. It is something that is *entfremdet*, strange to me, although it is at the heart of me' (Lacan 1992: 71). Lacan's 'thing' is what is strange and inassimilable, and so Carver's 'thing itself' remains similarly undefined: it is simply 'what matters' and is 'true' (Carver 2007). Indeed, Carver's repetition of the word 'thing' suggests his struggle to define it: 'So lean on it, if you see things' (Carver 2007). Thus, in the very early stages of the correspondence and editorial relationship Lish is positioned as attentive to the indeterminate *thing* of Carver's writing.

In the following letter of November 11, 1974, Carver states, 'Tell me which ones and I'll go after it, or them. Tell me which ones. Or I will leave it up to you & you tell me what you think needs done or doing' (Carver 2007). In Carver's appeal to Lish, the editor stands as grammatical subject of the sentence while Carver occupies the passive object position ('me'), situating himself in a passive relation to the other. For Blanchot, one is 'passive' towards 'that which in thought cannot make itself present, or enter into presence', the passive relation is 'the closeness of

distance, the closeness of the other' (Blanchot 1995b: 33). This is echoed in Laplanche's hollowed out transference, where the subject is positioned as passive towards the other's enigma, which opens up the subject's alterity. Accordingly, in his early correspondence Carver displays passivity towards the other who elicits the enigmatic *thing* of his writing, as Lish attends to and brings out the thought that cannot make itself present in Carver's prose.

In its abundant use of the second person 'you', Carver's subsequent published correspondence of September 27, 1977, reads like an apostrophe to the other:

You've made a single-handed impression on American letters that has helped fix the course of American letters. And, of course, *you know*, old bean, just what an influence *you've* exercised on my life. Just *knowing you* were there, at your desk, was an inspiration for me to write, and *you know* I mean that. *You*, my friend, are my idea of an ideal reader, always have been, always, that is, forever, will be. (Carver 2007; my italics)

Repeated six times, the 'you' eclipses the 'I', performing the non-reciprocal, 'dissymmetric' relation to the other that characterises Laplanche's hollowed out transference, which 'is not, properly speaking, the place of an exchange. There is an essential dissymmetry in the relation' (2005: 229). 'In the relation of the self to the Other', writes Blanchot, 'he withdraws me, by the pressure of the very near, from the privilege of the first person' (1995b: 18). In his apostrophe to the other, Carver is similarly stripped of the first person self-mastery. Yet as Scarfone points out, in Laplanche's hollowed out transference the address to the second person also reduces the *other* to a state of passivity: 'the one who "is spoken to" is not only the subject requesting an analysis, but is also embodied by the analyst himself', says Scarfone, 'For it seems clear that the analyst is expressly positioned as the one who is spoken to in the second-person and who is, consequently, in a state of relative passivity'

(Scarfone 2010: 3). In Laplanche's hollowed out transference, the *other* must occupy a position of passivity towards his own enigma in order to invoke openness in the subject. Just as for Blanchot the other 'answers to and for what he is not' in 'the patience of passivity' (1995b: 18), so in the early correspondence through his invocative 'you' Carver's apostrophe to the other could be seen to make Lish into an invocative, passive site of alterity. At the outset of the correspondence and editorial relationship Lish is presented as open to the otherness of Carver's prose, just as Carver is open to Lish's alterity. It is only later that Lish appears less passive in relation to the enigma, and the literary enigma starts to become fixed.

'And of course, you know', writes Carver. 'Just knowing you were there at your desk... you know' (Carver 2007). Throughout the passage, in the repeated conjunction of 'you' and 'know', Lish is conflated with knowledge, positioning the editor as Lacan's 'subject supposed to know' (Lacan 2004: 230-244). As we have seen, in Lacan, transference arises from the attribution of knowledge to the Other; the subject's transference is ignited by the other situated as 'the subject supposed to know'. For Lacan, 'As soon as the subject supposed to know exists somewhere, there is transference' (Lacan 1998: 232). Just as Alcibiades falls in love with Socrates because he believes the philosopher has something that he hasn't, some unknown knowledge, so the analysand falls for the analyst because he is the subject who knows. And so the other's knowledge must remain indeterminate, according to Lacan. The analyst must not interpret from the position of the one who knows determinately; he should 'not present himself as God, he is not God for his patient' (1998: 230). For Lacan, if the other knows too much this causes the analysand to 'demand' rather than 'desire'. For Fink, 'explicitly acting as if one were such a subject [a subject supposed to know] tends to elicit imaginary relations' from the

analysand, 'and serves only to make the latter more dependent on their analysts' (Fink 1995: 88):

For by responding to the analysand's demand for advice and interpretation, for understanding . . . the analysand gives what he or she has ('knowledge') instead of what she or he doesn't have (lack, in other words, desire), and encourages the analysand to demand rather than desire, to remain alienated rather than separate. (Fink 1995: 88)

Carver's correspondence of September 27, 1977, starts to subtly position the editor as the subject supposed to know (in a determinate sense). This is expressed in part through the elision of 'you' and 'know', but also through infantile demands for knowledge ('Tell me . . . Tell me . . . you tell me'; Carver 2007). For Lacan, all such demands are demands for love (Fink 1995: 89). When the analyst is cast as parental other, the other's interpretations are cast as signs of love, which in turn fuel the analysand's demands, fixating him or her on the love object. Carver's letter of 1977 begins to display a similar idealisation of the other:

You, my friend, are my *idea* of an *ideal* reader, always have been, always, that is, forever, will be. So you loomed large on the literary scene, and that is a fact, as well as a truth, but you loomed large in my conscious and unconscious life as well. (Carver 2007)

As the word 'idea', invoking knowledge, elides with 'ideal', suggesting fantasy, Lish becomes the 'idea' of an 'ideal' – knowledge as fantasy; indeed, the near mergence of the words idea and ideal suggests an imaginary merging with the other. The language of fusion continues in, 'always have been, always, that is, forever, will be', where the syntactical mirroring suggests the emergent mirroring

relation with Lish, while the clichéd words invoke the stultifying, closed nature of the editorial relationship. As Lish ‘loomed large’ and ‘loomed large in my conscious and unconscious life as well,’ the editor’s presence is inflated, idealized; the term ‘loom’ itself is a word that seems to extend, distend, and once repeated it almost balloons. Tellingly, this is the only time in his oeuvre that Carver uses the word ‘unconscious’, suggesting the deep import of the editor’s presence and the level of the interchange. Moreover, to ‘loom large’ is the inverse of to ‘hollow out’, suggesting a relation with the other that has become closer to Laplanche’s ‘filled in transference’: a transference that fills up the other’s lack with fixed imaginary meanings (Laplanche 2005: 233).

Carver’s relation to Lish is on the imaginary plane in that Lish’s edit is determinate in the sense of increasingly didactic and interventionist. But the mode of the edit is paradoxically that of instituting gaps in knowledge. One could say that in its predictability such unknown knowledge becomes known – known as unknown.

The idealization of the other continues a couple of letters on. In the correspondence dated May 10, 1980, Carver states, ‘Besides, you’re my hero—don’t you know?’ (Carver 2007).

He writes:

Ever since you left PA [Palo Alto] and went out into the Great World and began sending me messages back from time to time what it was like out there...There’s no question of your importance to me. You’re my mainstay. Man, I love you. I don’t make that declaration lightly either . . . For Christ’s sweet sake, not to worry about taking a pencil to the stories if you can make them better; and if anyone can you can. I want them to be the best possible stories, and I want them to be around for a while. (Carver 2007)

In his explicit declaration of love, Carver invokes Freud’s love transference, in

which sudden outbreaks of love form ‘resistance’ to psychical truth: to the otherness of the unconscious (Freud 2006: 347-348). Indeed, the repetitive structure of the words is also characteristic of the repetition inherent to Freud’s ‘love transference’ (Freud 2006: 349). Carver’s demands for recognition (‘I want them to be around for a while’), affection (‘I feel closer to you than to my own brother’), and approval, all of which Lacan sees as demands for love, can be seen to exhibit the love and fascination peculiar to the transference relation (Carver 2007). Repeated six times in the course of the fifteen published letters, the word ‘love’ punctuates Carver’s words, so that it can seem as if we are reading a series of love letters. ‘When I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love?’ asks Derrida (Derrida 1987: 8). In accordance with Derrida, in the early correspondence Carver’s love declarations seem at times to be addressed to love itself, or the fantasy of it, more than the singular other. And while the absence of Lish’s reply previously turned him into a site of alterity, it now makes the letters appear to turn in on themselves, as if they are self-relating, suggesting Lacan’s imaginary, self-affirming transference.

‘You’re my mainstay’, Carver writes. The OED cites ‘mainstay’ as a ‘nautical term’, referring to ‘the rope that serves to steady and support the mainmast of a sailing vessel’ (OED Online). In describing Lish as his ‘mainstay’, Carver invokes Laplanche’s ‘support’ and ‘constancy’ that is crucial to the psychoanalytic process, which must unbind but also bind, provide containment: ‘as a counterbalance to this force of unbinding, this liberation of psychical energies, psychoanalysis offers itself as a guarantor of constancy; of containment, as it has been called; of support...a frame’ (Laplanche 2005: 231). In this sense, Lish might be seen to provide both the openness to alterity as well as the *framework* or *stability* that Attridge sees as so crucial to the process of creativity (2004a: 29-30). Yet there is also something over-

valuing about the expression, 'you're my mainstay': the language is a little too elevated, as if Carver is again idealising the other. The repetition of the possessive 'you're my' reinforces the sense of Lacan's imaginary transference, where the relation with the other is one of mastery and narcissistic identification (Lacan 1988: 253-256).

Carver concludes his letter of May 1980, 'So open the throttle. Ramming speed' (Carver 2007). As an object that both opens and stops up, unblocks and blocks, 'throttle' stands as a peculiarly apt metaphor for Carver's early written relation with Lish: the structural openness to the other and subsequent closure that we have so far detected in the early stages of Carver's correspondence with his editor. Indeed, such tension is even at play in the words and syntax of these last lines, as the meaning of the words signify openness and velocity, but the staccato sentences create a halting effect, closing off alterity. The image of the throttle also invokes Lacan's 'object a' as 'obturator' (Lacan 1988: 147, 159). Lacan's 'object a' is conceptualized in multiple ways throughout his oeuvre; as obturator, 'object a' functions to plug the lack in the other, to fill it up with imaginary meaning (Lacan 1988: 147, 159). Just as the obturator is in touch with otherness only to fill it with imaginary meaning, so the image of the 'throttle' stands as Carver's early written stance in relation to Lish – the letters that start to fill the other's otherness with imaginary, idealised meaning.

1980: 'liable to croak'

In his early letters, then, we have seen a shift from a relation with the editor that opens up alterity in Carver's writing, to an imaginary relation with the other – Carver's idealization of his editor's input that leads to determinate identification with his edit, closing off Carver's own mode of literary alterity.

Longer than many of his edited stories, Carver's correspondence of July 8, 1980 has been at the centre of critical commentary on the Carver Lish relationship (Stull and Carroll 2009: vii; Wood 2009; Anon 2007; Max 1998). Writing in *The Observer*, Wood states, 'The letter is an incredible document, a missive from a man both indebted and imperilled, unsteady, spewing. It's at once a plea and a manifesto – it reveals the extent to which writing was connected to Carver's sense of self' (Wood 2009). 'In future discussion of *Collected Stories*, there is likely to be much mention of Carver's anguished letter to Lish, written on July 8, 1980, after he finally got round to reading the revisions,' says Campbell in the *TLS* (Campbell 2009). In what follows I look at how this crucial letter presents Lish's edit as a violent imposition of excess otherness: its stultifying effect is revealed in the language of the correspondence. But Carver's letter also reveals an attempt to symbolize the violent otherness of the edit, bring it back to constancy.

On the morning of July 8, 1980, Carver wrote his most impassioned and aggrieved letter to Lish. Carver had been up all night reviewing the severe editorial cuts of his *Beginners* manuscript (Anon 2007). As we have seen, two stories were slashed by nearly seventy per cent, many by almost half. Endings were truncated, characters renamed, and a more digressive, fluid voice excised. 'Dearest Gordon', Carver writes:

I've got to pull out of this one. Please hear me. I've been up all night thinking on this, and nothing but this, so help me. I've looked at it from every side, I've compared both versions of the edited mss—the first one is better, I truly believe, if some things are carried over from the second to the first—until my eyes are nearly to fall out of my head. (Carver 2007)

He continues:

I see what it is that you've done, what you've pulled out of it . . . I'll tell you the truth, my very sanity is on the line here. I don't want to sound melodramatic here, but I've come back from the grave here to start writing stories once more. As I think you may know, I'd given up entirely, thrown it in and was looking forward to dying, that release. But I kept thinking, I'll wait until after the election to kill myself, or wait until after this or that happened . . . Now, I'm afraid, mortally afraid, I feel it, that if the book were to be published as it is in its present edited form, I may never write another story . . . It would be like having a part of myself die, a spiritual part. (Carver 2007)

For a writer renowned for his restraint, the tone is surprisingly overwrought. The language is far closer to the more garrulous prose of the unedited work than the stripped back writing of the edited stories. Indeed, as his words spew forth, Carver seems almost incapable of silence – so at odds with the hard silence of the edited writing. A language of extraction recurs: 'I've got to *pull out* of this one' . . . 'what you've *pulled out* of it', suggesting the forced excision of the edit. In Laplanche's 'hollowed out transference' (Laplanche 2005: 233-236), the other's hollow provides a holding function, opening but also stabilising the subject. But in this correspondence the otherness of the edit appears less benign and open, and more like a violent appropriation – with a destabilising effect. Psychoanalysis is governed by the 'zero principle', says Laplanche, 'setting in motion what Freud, in his way, designated as the death drive' that fosters 'dissolution' of psychical formations (Laplanche 2005: 231). Yet in counterbalance:

. . . psychoanalysis offers itself as a guarantor of constancy; of containment, as it has been called; of support . . . The principles of constancy and zero are, for me, the true principles of psychical functioning. (Laplanche 2005: 231)

Carver appears to experience the other's edit as dissolution without constancy: 'my very sanity is on the line here . . . I'm just likely to start coming unravelled', he writes (Carver 2007). As if subjected to the inexorable dissolution and repetition of the death-drive, the opening language of Carver's letter is pervaded with references to death: 'I've come back from the grave . . . I'd given up entirely, thrown it in and was looking forward to dying, that release . . . Now I'm afraid, mortally afraid . . . it would be like having a part of myself die' (Carver 2007). As in Blanchot's impossibility of dying, which marks a failure of pre-linguistic 'elusive existence' to arrive at a relation with language (Blanchot 1995a: 328), here death appears as nullification – sheer impossibility. In place of the psychoanalytic zero *and* constancy, the minimalist cut is presented as a kind of constant zero, alterity as a constant.

I'm awash with confusion and paranoia...I know that the discomfort of this decision of mine is at its highest now, it's rampant, I feel nearly wild with it . . . But if I don't speak now, and speak from the heart, and halt things now, I foresee a terrible time ahead for me. The demons I have to deal with every day, or night, nearly, might, I'm afraid, simply rise up and take me over. (Carver 2007)

Carver's voice appears flooded. A cascading rhythm is produced and the effect is of deluge, as the beats ascend on 'every day, or night, nearly, might, I'm afraid', before reaching their final engulfing peak – 'simply rise up and take me over'.

In Lacan's account of transference the unknown desires of the other (the other's lack) open up the subject's unknown desires, undoing her fixed imaginary

identifications. ‘Man’s desire is the desire of the other’, says Lacan (Lacan 2004: 235). In the movement towards the absent other, and dissolution of imaginary identifications, Carver’s later correspondence could be seen to bear structural resemblance to Lacan’s transference. Yet for Laplanche, Lacan’s transference is incessantly cyclical: ‘with Lacan, one sometimes seems to have emerged from monadology. But the Hegelian formulations on desire as the desire of the other easily become circular (the desire of desire of desire)’ (2005: 229). For Laplanche, this unremitting cycle results from Lacan’s linguistic construction of the unconscious: ‘an endless circle that favours the assimilation of the unconscious to a language’ (2005: 229). My reading of Carver’s correspondence of July 8, 1980, also leads me to reread Lacan’s *desire is the desire the other* as circular, but in terms of a dialectical recognition of lack. In this reading, one lack (Lish’s) mirrors the other’s lack (Carver’s), which mirrors the first lack, thus remaining in a dyadic impasse; here the perception of lack is identificatory, operating according to Lacan’s imaginary rather than the differential openness and mobility of the symbolic. According to this reading, the subject’s mirroring relation with the other’s lack accords with the ‘hysteric’s position’: the position whereby the subject, preoccupied with the other’s unknown desires, identifies with the other’s lack (Fink 1997: 123-133). We see traces of this hystericised merging of otherness in the language of excess alterity that suffuses the correspondence of July 8, 1980.

As we have seen, Lish’s editorial strategy is to exacerbate the alterity of Carver’s prose, but in Carver’s letter of July 8, this excess also appears constraining. Rather than work by suggestion, as in the psychoanalytic situation, Lish’s editorial impact is perceived as deterministic and confining. Speaking of Laplanche’s hollowed out transference, Scarfone writes, ‘the analyst is the bearer of an “excess

of message”, an excess that *triggers* a process of translation-detranslation’ (Scarfone 2010). But as Carver presents it, Lish doesn’t so much ‘trigger’ the enigmatic excess as inject it. In Laplanche’s hollowed out transference, the ‘implantation’ of the other’s enigma is supposed to give rise to ‘less rigid constructions of meaning’ in the subject (Scarfone 2010). But for Carver, the enigma that Lish inserts in his prose starts to acquire its own rigidity, which stultifies rather than opens up. In this way, the editorial injection of otherness works more like Laplanche’s ‘intromission’, which is a deeper, more entrenched insertion of alterity than the implantation of engima:

Implantation is a process which is common, everyday, normal or neurotic. Beside it, as its violent variant, a place must be given to *intromission*. While implantation allows the individual to take things up actively, at once translating and repressing, one must try to conceive of a process which blocks this, short-circuits the differentiation of the agencies in the process of their formation, and puts into the interior an element resistant to all metabolisations. (Laplanche 2005: 139)

Putting ‘into the interior’ elements that are ‘resistant to all metabolisation’ and translation (Laplanche 2005: 139), intromission ‘performs a kind of hijacking, crippling the apparatus of translation’ (Scarfone 2013: 561). For Carver, Lish’s injection of enigma is similarly stultifying, more like a blockage. Speaking of the stories in their brutally excavated form, Carver writes, ‘I’m liable to croak if they came out that way...they’re apt to cause my demise’ (Carver 2007). The forced alterity of the edit leads to a failure to speak (he will ‘croak’ instead of talk), a failure to translate the untranslatable, and the threat of dissolution (‘they’re apt to cause my demise’; Carver 2007).

‘The inability of the analyst to sustain a praxis in an authentic manner results

in the exercise of power’, says Dylan Evans (Evans 2002: 215). Ultimately ‘the mastery of the analyst’, writes Laplanche, ‘is largely illusory; but a mastery which recognizes its limits and acknowledges its own testimony is something different from one which strains itself and, in the end, fails’ (2005: 236). Rather than listen to the specific alienness that dwells in Carver’s writing, the emergent more roomy alterity that appears as his writing develops, Lish stands as the other/analyst who ‘imposes his own idea of reality on the analysand’, enforcing his minimalist landscape (Evans 2002: 215).

‘What betrayed us is that you wanted generality’, writes Derrida (Derrida 1987: 23), and the same could be said about Carver’s sense of betrayal by Lish. When the unsaid that Lish once heard in Carver’s writing becomes Lish’s ‘style’, the hallmark of his edit, and ceases to stem from the singularity of Carver’s prose, it is experienced by Carver as a constrained generality. In Lacan’s terms, one could say that the edit once worked according to the operations of *tuché*: Lish homed in on the ‘chance encounters with the Real’ of Carver’s writing, those kernels that resist symbolic meaning (Lacan 1998: 53-67). But the edit starts to work more like Lacan’s ‘automatum’: a habitual expression of otherness that restricts an emerging, changing relation with the Real (Lacan 1998: 53-67). Under Lish’s cut, Carver’s evolving otherness becomes calcified, stuck in its former manifestation.

Speaking of the edited stories, Carver writes, ‘Even though they may be closer to works of art than the original and people be reading them 50 years from now, they’re still apt to cause my demise’ (Carver 2007). For Attridge, ‘creativity’ involves a skilful handling of known material, yet ‘introduces no alterity and instigates no transformation in the cultural field’ (Attridge 2004a: 25). But with the ‘artwork’ the ‘other’s arrival destabilises the field of the same’, an ‘event’ occurs,

‘breaking down the familiar’ (Attridge 2004a: 26). If the artwork is, as Attridge suggests, an opening up to the unfamiliar, changing the current field, then Carver’s early prose and Lish’s minimalist edit of it could indeed be understood as an ‘artwork’. Together Lish and Carver ‘composed a taut new voice’, says Wood (Wood 2009); with the advent of *What We Talk About*, Carver became the ‘godfather of minimalism’, says Nessel (Nessel 1995: 2). But when his minimalist alterity became predictable, recognizably ‘Carveresque’ (Leypoldt 2011: 851; Bethea 2002: 54; McDermott 2006: 1-2), one could say that his writing became assimilated to a norm and thus ceased to be an ‘artwork’, in Attridge’s sense. What Frederick Barthelme said of postmodernism – ‘That trick was at the centre back then, but the problem was you figured it out, and once you figured it out it wasn’t interesting anymore’ (Barthelme 1988) – became true of so-called ‘minimalism’. By the early to mid 1980s, creative writing programmes had started churning out stripped-back prose by the class full, ‘assembly line’ writers, as the critic John Aldridge called them (Aldridge 1990: 19). Soon, all want-to-be writers were hacking the heart out of their stories (Klinkowitz 1993), choosing the limp line and amputated sentence over a fleshier expression. Read alongside the scraped thin voices that surrounded him, Carver’s writing of the early 1980s began to have a mannered feel, according to some critics (Davis 1993: 653). It is arguably this homogenization and predictability that Carver found so constraining (Carver 1983).

In Lish’s refusal of Carver’s emerging amplitude, the edit could be seen as forming a defence against psychical, structural change, Freud’s ‘loss of the plasticity’ and ‘exhaustion of the capacity for change and development’, whereby ‘relations and distributions of energy’ become ‘immutable, fixed and rigid’ (Freud 1937: 241-242). Through its streamlined mode of otherness, paradoxically Lish’s

opening of alterity became a kind of defence. For Freud, such immutability gives rise to ‘psychical inertia’ (Freud, S. 1937: 241). And speaking of Laplanche’s untranslatable enigma, Scarfone describes the heavy, straining effect on the mental apparatus (Scarfone 2013: 561). Carver’s critics have similarly spoken of the inertia of his edited stories (Runyon 1994: 32; Saltzman 1989: 47), which is lifted in the ‘light touch’ of the unedited writing (2002: 229).

But in the language of Carver’s letter of July 8, 1980, alongside exposure to extreme otherness comes a quiet binding of alterity:

So what should we do now, please advise? Can you lay it all on me and get me out of the contract someday? . . . Or else can or should everything just be stopped now, I send back the Knopf check if it’s on the way, or else you stop it there? And meanwhile I pay you for the hours, days and nights, I’m sure, you’ve spent on this. Goddamn it, I’m just nearly crazy with this. I’m getting into a state over it. —No, I don’t think it shd. be put off. I think it had best be stopped. (Carver 2007)

Here we see tension between overflow and restraint. Carver’s ‘Goddamn it, I’m just nearly crazy with this. I’m getting into a state over it,’ suggests unboundedness. For Lacan, excessive access to the Real gives rise to ‘anxiety’: the fear of ‘slipping back into the chaos from which [the subject] started’ (Lacan 1953: 15). A similar sense of anxiety is evoked through Carver’s series of panicky, escalating questions. But the near slippage into chaos is also restrained. The ever-shorter sentences and abrupt end stops (‘I’m getting into a state over it. —No, I don’t think it shd. be put off. I think it had best be stopped.’) arrest abiding excess. Note the curiously truncated ‘shd.’, and punctuating full stops, while the term ‘stop’ is repeated three times – reining in excess alterity, as if damming the flood. ‘The repressions behave like dams in a time of flood,’ says Freud (Freud 1937: 225). As

with Carver's unedited prose, the language of Carver's correspondence could be seen as more repressive than the edit, as the writing attempts to bind the unbound, defend against it.

Carver continues:

True. On the other hand, if the book comes out and I can't feel the kind of pride and pleasure in it that I want, if I feel I've somehow too far stepped out of bounds, crossed that line a little too far, why then I can't feel good about myself, or maybe even write again; right now I feel it's that serious, and if I can't feel absolutely good about it, I feel I'd be done for. I do. Lord God I just don't know what else to say... The book will not be, as it should, a cause for joyous celebration, but one of defense and explanation. (Carver 2007)

While Carver expresses pain, his writing is curiously pervaded with references to pleasure: 'pleasure in it . . . feel good about myself . . . absolutely good . . . joyous celebration', and earlier in the letter Carver speaks of his 'new found mental health and well being' (Carver 2007). As in the unedited stories, so in this correspondence, Carver's language moves closer to the symbolisation that Lacan associates with the pleasure principle than to the death drive's dispersion of meaning (Lacan 1988: 54-55). Carver appears to experience Lish's edit as prohibitive of his emergent, more pleasurable symbolic voice, as if in the unbinding of meaning Lish's edit goes too far beyond the pleasure principle: 'I feel I've somehow too far stepped out of bounds, crossed that line a little too far' (Carver 2007). This is not to say that the more symbolic language of this particular correspondence and the unedited prose is 'truer' than the edit. Rather, in accordance with the pleasure principle, the language of this letter starts to form a more homeostatic defence against excess otherness. 'The psychic apparatus is intolerant of unpleasure and strives to ward it off at all costs and, if the perception of reality involves unpleasure, that perception—i.e. the truth—must be sacrificed' (Freud 1937: 236). In the edit, Lish could be said to home

in on the ‘unpleasure’ that is nascent in Carver’s writing and this perhaps accounts for its powerful affect. But Carver’s writing style (and indeed his life) moves on from the earlier more primitive mode of otherness. If the book is to be published in its more othered form, more excessively exposed to psychic alterity, Carver’s response will not be one of ‘joyous celebration’, he says, but ‘one of defense’ (Carver 2007), where the term ‘defence’ hints at a binding of excess otherness.

‘I’m jabbering now’, Carver goes on (Carver 2007). Carver’s language might be beset with excess otherness, but it also betrays a roomy, capacious voice, as if free-associating. We see this effect in the previously cited lines:

. . . eventually, my discomfort and yours, will go away, there’ll be a grieving, I’m grieving right now, but it will go away. But if I don’t speak now, and speak from the heart, and halt things now, I foresee a terrible time ahead for me. The demons I have to deal with every day, or night, nearly, might, I’m afraid, simply rise up and take me over. (Carver 2007)

Speaking ‘from the heart’, ‘grieving’: this is strikingly expressive language. Carver’s writing may be awash with excess otherness, but it also attempts to express and symbolize this. The rhythms and repetitions attest to an urgency of self-expression, a need for speech to ward off the demons that threaten to take over. This free-associative speech is far closer to the language of the unedited stories and has a compulsive edge to it, suggesting the need to speak in a voice that has been cut short by Lish. The sentences studded with commas, and the quiet repetitions and half rhymes (night, nearly, might), capture spontaneity of expression and waywardness. In its relations with the id the ego is ‘blinded by its errors’, says Freud, and ‘the result of this in the sphere of psychical events can only be compared to being out walking in a country one does not know and without having a good pair of legs’

(Freud 1937: 236). Like the blind man in Carver's story 'Cathedral' whose blindness is a form of seeing (he apprehends otherness by failing to form fixed identifications) in this correspondence Carver's wandering voice skirts about alterity, approaching psychic otherness with the blindness of symbolic distance. In Lacan, accession to the symbolic marks a shift from the fixity of drive to the mobility of desire; through the differential order of language the subject is repeatedly brought to the limit of the Real, open to alterity, but at the protective distance of signification (Lacan 1988: 253-257, 276). As such, the discourse of the symbolic order involves openness to wandering, to getting lost or waylaid. Like the itinerant figures that frequent Carver's oeuvre – the woman who goes from house to house selling vitamins in 'Vitamins' (1995: 199-215), the man who vacuum cleans strangers' homes in 'Collectors' (1995: 90-97) – the language of Carver's letter of July 8, 1980, bears the essential waywardness of differential language, the incessant 'sliding away' (*glissement*) and drift of the signifier (Lacan 2002: 145, 152, 291, 344). Thus the sprawling, meandering voice opens up a different kind of alterity to the hard thing-like otherness of the minimalist edit: an alterity bound through the digressive, differential symbolic. In this way, Carver's symbolic expression forms some protective separation from the extreme alterity presented by Lish – the other and addressee of Carver's missive. Of course, transference is itself also en route, a kind of detour. And the epistle is similarly in transit, *on the way* to the other: 'The condition for it to arrive is that it ends up and even that it begins by not arriving...you understand, within every sign already, every mark or every trait, there is distancing, the post', says Derrida (Derrida 1987: 29). Similarly, in Carver's missive otherness is not finally arrived at, or 'seized' (Blanchot 1987: 16), as it is in the minimalist edit, but approached through a language of fleetingness, skirting, en

route.

Carver's emergent symbolisation of otherness is also present in the mourning that pervades the letter of July 8, 1980. The term 'grief' is repeated four times in this letter, and the word 'loss' frequently occurs. 'I realize I stand every chance of *losing* your love and friendship over this. But I strongly feel I stand every chance of *losing* my soul and my mental health over it, if I don't take that risk' (Carver 2007: my italics). In Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' (Freud 1917: 237-258), melancholia entails fixation with the unsymbolised, whereas mourning involves symbolization of loss, apprehension of its otherness. In this letter, Carver's mourning could be seen to bind the traumatic, unbound alterity of the other's edit, giving it symbolic form. But the correspondence could also be read as mourning for his own lost minimalist voice. In this reading, the edited Carver would stand as the more 'melancholic' text, and the unedited, the more 'mournful'.

Carver closes the letter of July 8, 1980, with his signature, 'Ray'. Of all the published correspondence, this is the only letter to which Carver appends his signature. For Derrida, the signature implies 'identity, the possible identification of the emitters and receivers' (Derrida 1987: 45). The proper name, property, the proper, all these terms relate to the Latin *proprius*, meaning 'own' (Royle 2004: 120). Signing off with his proper name, Carver stamps his ownership, authority, and literary property; Carver's signature attests to his unique style and idiom. Yet the idiomatic is 'a property that one cannot appropriate; it signs you without belonging to you', says Derrida (Derrida 1995: 119). In signing Ray, Carver's singularity is therefore already bound to that which doesn't belong to him – to the generality of language (my name is someone else's name). Thus, even prior to Lish's edit, one could say that Carver's own linguistic expression is always already determined,

appropriated even, by the generality of linguistic meaning; his specific mode of otherness evokes his singular struggle for self-expression within the general condition of language.

Despite Carver's attempt to assert his authority, stamp his specific literary mode of alterity in the July 8 letter, only two days later Carver appears to have a change of heart. In a letter dated July 10, 1980 the author concedes to Lish's cut, marking a radical turnaround. What happened in the two interim days has only ever been a matter of speculation. In a strikingly different tone and idiom, Carver writes:

July 10, 1980

Please look through the enclosed copy of 'What We Talk About,' the entire collection. You'll see that nearly all of the changes I suggest are small enough, but I think they're significant and they all can be found in the first edited ms version you sent me. It's just, not just, but it's a question of reinstating some of the things that were taken out in the second version. But I feel strongly some of those things taken out should be back in the finished stories. 'Gazebo,' for instance. 'In this, too, she was right.' That ending is far superior and gives the story the right, the just ending, the narrator's sense of loss, and a sharp, perfect ending for the story. Otherwise, the narrator is a lout, a son of a bitch, and totally insensitive to everything he's been telling us. Otherwise, why even is he telling the story, I wonder. (Carver 2007)

As the published version of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* reveals, bar a few minor alterations, Carver yields to Lish's substantial cut. 'I feel strongly some of those things taken out should be back in the finished stories', Carver states, in a language of extraction and insertion redolent of the July 8 letter (Carver 2007). But otherwise Carver's suggestions prove 'small enough' (Carver 2007). Indeed, in its matter of factness – its shorter, more contained sentences, and thudding repetitions of the final lines – the prose style of this letter is more akin to

the edited Carver than the unedited.

‘(. . . At bottom I am only interested in what cannot be sent off, cannot be dispatched in any case)’, writes Derrida, his parenthesis both emitting the message and retracting it (Derrida 1987: 15). In retracting the July 8 letter, the correspondence of July 10, 1980, can be read as the earlier letter’s failure to arrive. Thus, a curious logic is at play. In its refusal to arrive at the other the July 8 correspondence approaches by withdrawing, in what Derrida calls the arrival that is ‘therefore not to arrive, at its destination’ (1987: 23). In accordance with Lévinas’s ‘relation without relation’ (Lévinas 1969: 80), the withdrawn letter suggests a refusal of an identificatory relation, as in Heidegger’s advent by retreat, which is a giving by withdrawal. Thus, while the letter of July 10 shows Carver’s submission to Lish’s edit, returning to an identificatory relation with him, the structure of his retraction – his approach as withdrawal – hints at a movement away from identification towards a relation that is both open to the other and separate.

1982 to 1983: ‘limbs and heads of hair’

Unlike the increasingly violent insertion of otherness that constitutes Lish’s edit, in Carver’s correspondence openness to the other is precipitated in part through the letter form by which Carver chooses to address Lish. More so than the short story form, the epistle form has alterity inscribed in it. The epistle can be seen to work at the threshold between the inside and outside: of consciousness and the unconscious, the subject’s interiority and external address. Confessional, informal, spontaneous,

the epistle is particularly conducive to the free flowing, 'sleep-like' expression of the unconscious, says Felman (Felman 2003: 134). In its constitutive situation of interlocution and address, the epistle fosters orientation towards the other; it could thus be seen to restore the textual force of the unedited, re-inscribing its dynamic of difference and desire. At the 'level of the unconscious fantasy the traces (of the non-representable) are manifest by an empty space, a blank, an absence', says Green (Green 2012: 347). Likewise, in Carver's correspondence the empty space between the letters can be seen to present the non-representable. Carver's transference movement to the limit is manifest in his approach to the gaps between the letters – the literal holes in the text.

It is it is worth reiterating that this is not a psychobiographical argument. I'm not delineating a causal relationship between the empirical absence of Lish's letters in reply and the mode of linguistic expression of Carver's correspondence, along with that of his short stories. This would only be a matter of speculation, and moreover, we don't have access to Lish's possible letters in reply. My point is not to determine causal 'facts' but to consider the written words as they are published on the page – in part in relation to Carver's written stories (just as psychoanalysis can be seen to attend to the words in the analytic setting more than the empirical truth of the subject's life.) I'm interested in the structure of the interlocutory relation of the published letters, the stance in relation to the other. It is my contention that in the published form of the later letters, the absent addressee presents the enigma that stimulates the particular form of writing of Carver's correspondence, which bears affinity to that of his later prose. It is perhaps no coincidence that in his account of hollowed out transference Laplanche alludes to the written correspondence between Fleiss and Freud:

. . . the addressee is essentially enigmatic, even if he sometimes takes on individual traits . . . so it is with Van Gough's Theo, who is as much an analyst *without knowing it* as Fleiss is for Freud . . . addressees of the message in the bottle. (Laplanche 2005: 227; my italics)

Like Fleiss and Theo, both recipients of famous published correspondence, Lish could be read as the interpellating addressee, the analyst who assumes this role 'without knowing it'.

In their published form, the absence of reply to the letters could also bear resemblance with the 'dissymmetric relation' of Laplanche's hollowed out transference (Laplanche 2005: 231). Avoiding the Lacanian circular recognition of lack that we have witnessed in the July 8, 1980, correspondence, Laplanche's 'essential dissymmetry' between patient and analyst is a relation that avoids mutual exchange (Laplanche 2005: 231). Through the accrued epistle form that addresses an indeterminate other, Lish starts to occupy the site of 'benevolent neutrality' (2005: 233). Functioning as the absent present addressee, Lish stands for the other/analyst who refuses to know the good of the subject, the truth of the good, Laplanche's analyst as 'benevolence – to want the good without knowing what it is' (2005: 233). The form of communication of the epistle enables a freer relation with the other than that of the more appropriative edit. Hollowed out transference arises 'if the relation is free enough' (2005: 232), says Laplanche, suggesting the necessity of a certain looseness of the relation to otherness, as opposed to the forced relation of the edit. Thus one could say that the *relation* itself has bearing on the mode of alterity; by implication, a forced relation makes otherness calcified, stuck, while a looser relation *triggers openings*. Green captures the necessary looseness of this relation when,

aligning the analyst with the reader, he speaks of the ‘loose, free-floating reading’ that ‘jerks the text [or patient] out of its groove’ (Green 2012: 339). Rather than forced, Carver’s deployment of the epistle forges an open relation to alterity that gives rise to an ‘unbinding of the text that is the necessary step towards a new binding’ (Green 2012: 341), what Green calls ‘deconstruction-construction’ (2012: 341), witnessed in the shift in Carver’s writing to new modes of meaning formations and new relations to otherness – as seen in the later correspondence and short stories.

While we have traced an orientation towards the other fostered cumulatively through the structure of the epistle, let us now turn to the specific language of Carver’s later correspondence from 1982 to 1983.

On August 11, 1982, two years after the publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Carver writes to Lish about his latest manuscript, *Cathedral*:

. . . one thing is certain—the stories in this new collection are going to be *fuller* than the ones in the earlier books. And this, for Christ’s sake, is to the good. I’m not the same writer I used to be . . . But I know there are going to be stories in these 14 or 15 I give you that you’re going to draw back from, that aren’t going to fit anyone’s notion of what a Carver short story ought to be—yours, mine, the reading public at large, the critics. But I’m not them, I’m not us, I’m me. (Carver 2007)

Here, the transferential relation with the other appears to take place not simply between author and editor, but between author and reader – Carver’s ‘reading public at large’. Transference is inscribed in the author-reader relationship, says Brooks, as the author’s words transfer onto the reader, but the reader also transfers back onto the text (Brooks 1992: 260). In the letter of August 11, 1982, Carver appears confined by his ‘reading public’, his ‘critics’. Like the originary caregiver and analyst, for

Laplanche the cultural domain is also a site of stimulating otherness, transference is already, in itself, outside the clinic (Laplanche 2005: 226). Laplanche writes:

If one accepts that the fundamental dimension of transference is the relation to the enigma of the other, perhaps the principle site of transference, 'ordinary' transference, before, beyond or after analysis, would be the multiple relation to the cultural, to creation or, more precisely, to the cultural message. (Laplanche 2005: 226)

While Freud's reflections on creativity are more concerned with the work's content and the unconscious origin of the artwork, Laplanche asks the overlooked question, 'why communicate *in this way* – that is, by addressing no-one, aiming beyond any determinate person?' (2005: 227). Laplanche responds:

. . . what can be isolated here as characteristic of the cultural is an address to an other who is out of reach, to others 'scattered in the future', as the poet says. An address which is a repercussion, which prolongs and echoes the enigmatic messages by which the Dichter himself, so to speak, was bombarded. (2005: 227)

In this light, Carver's relation with his 'reading public at large', his address to the enigmatic cultural other, could be seen to reignite the originary relation with the other. So when the reading public's response becomes known (their 'notion of what a Carver short story ought to be', what 'fits'), the other's enigma dissipates. Accordingly, by creating stories that 'aren't going to fit', that depart from the minimalist mould, Carver disrupts the reader's predictable identifications ('I'm not them, I'm not us, I'm me'; Carver 2007), renewing the enigmatic address.

Of course, in its published form Carver's written correspondence also has its own readership. Indeed, in the address to the other, Carver's invocative 'you' implicates the reader in the letters. The reader's relation to the enigma inverts the author's relation, says Laplanche, renewing the 'traumatic, stimulating aspect of the

childhood enigma' (2005: 228). In the address to us that isn't specifically addressed to us, the correspondence could be seen to invoke our otherness. In Green's reading of the analyst as reader, 'the analyst [reader] becomes the analysand of the text' (2012: 338), as the literary text activates the reader's unconscious. The 'interpretation that the reader must give himself is of the effects of the text in his own unconscious', says Green (2012: 338).

It is striking, however, that the linguistic peculiarities of Carver's published correspondence re-emerge in the very language of the critics, suggesting a relation that is more one of mirroring, in accordance with Lacan's imaginary, than of otherness. Echoing the hysterical timbre of Carver's famous July 8, 1980, correspondence, it is as if the excessive exposure to otherness presented in the letters provokes a similar excessive undoing in the critic. Take Toby Litt's response to the letters and publication of *Beginners*. Speaking of the crucial correspondence of 1980, Litt writes:

This shows, I think, a man being tortured. He begs, pleads, attempts to reason, elevates his torturer to a godlike status - the status of a deity who may cause the pain to stop.

. . . When *Beginners*, the book, is published, I hope there is a whole heap of recantation that goes on.

Raymond Carver knew he was not a saint. I think his exquisite awareness of dishonesties of all sorts was partly dependent upon his experience of covering up for the dual authorship of his first two books.

I think he can be blamed for not being honest about this. I think you could, quite justly, call him a liar – a sinner by omission if not commission. (Litt 2009: 20, 25)

Litt's remarks close him off from Carver, while his opening spiraling sub clauses suggest a hyperbolic, over exposure to the other, as expressed in the image of the ineffable, persecutory (torturing) deity. Here, the critic almost occupies a mirroring, imaginary relation with Carver's correspondence, where Carver's own closure to alterity (his hystericised openness to the other that is actually a form of

closure) reverberates in the critic's prose. We also see this in Gallagher's response to Carver's correspondence with Lish:

'The plea in his letters,' Gallagher says, 'that main letter to Lish, really strikes you, understanding that he almost died from the alcohol and that his work meant so much to him as a way of his own personal deliverance. He said at one point it was all he had of religion. If you take someone's work and put it in a direction where you didn't have their permission, and they say it is their religion and as important as their religion, then you have really touched them, you have done something that is going to affect them in a deeply disturbing way'. (Bourne 2000)

In describing Carver's work as deliverance and religion, Gallagher echoes Carver's (and Litt's) relation to extreme otherness. But Gallagher could also be seen to present what is excluded in Carver's words: Carver's repressed rage, witnessed in the July 8, 1980, correspondence and then subdued in the following letter, resurfaces in Gallagher's words, like a return of the repressed:

I have things at stake. I just didn't want to go into that particular arena having the intimate knowledge that I do, because I didn't want these things to be pulled out of me . . . I don't know what the significance of Lish's role is/was because Ray didn't ultimately accept it, as we know from his letter . . . He did not want that book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* to be published in the form Lish designed. His wish did not prevail . . . he did override Ray's wishes. We have the results of that. (Bourne 2000)

Gallagher's 'pulled out of me' mimics Carver's exact same words, gesturing at the violent undoing. But the excluded voice of Lish also reemerges in the critics: 'it's time we reclaimed Lish...So, in short, forget about Carver: there's much more to Lish...', writes Daniel Winters in a recent article in the *Guardian* (Winters 2013). Yet the distinction between Carver's correspondence and the critic is far from simple or polarised; the correspondence could itself be considered a form of criticism – as

Carver's critique of his own work, which occupies an odd midway position between the literary and non-literary.

'Some of these stories may not fit smoothly or neatly, inevitably, alongside the rest', Carver continues in the letter of August 11, 1982. He writes:

But, Gordon, God's truth, and I may as well say it out now, I can't undergo the kind of surgical amputation and transplant that might make them somehow fit into the carton so the lid will close. There may have to be limbs and heads of hair sticking out. My heart won't take it otherwise. It will simply burst, and I mean that . . . (I love your heart, you must know that.) But I can't write these stories and have to feel inhibited—if I feel inhibited I'm not going to write them at all. (Carver 2007)

Surgical amputation, transplant: the edit appears as a bodily invasion. While for Laplanche the other's enigma is 'implanted' in the 'psychophysiological "skin"' (2005: 139), in the surface of the body and perceptive periphery, Laplanche's 'intromission' is a deeper, more entrenched insertion of alterity, as we have seen. Forcing otherness into Carver's writing, Lish's edit could be seen to function more like the intromission that forms a 'foreign body', an invasive, immobile mode of otherness, like the amputation or transplant. This is quite distinct from an alterity that is skin deep, on the surface, and thus open but also bound. As with Laplanche, the forced otherness of the edit starts to have a 'crippling effect' (Scarfone 2013: 561), inhibiting Carver's writing capacity – his ability to bind the unbound.

Curiously, in their accounts of the relation with the other, Lévinas and Derrida also draw on the language of the skin. 'The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute . . . it leads you beyond', says Lévinas (Lévinas 1985: 86-87). 'I send you in order to have me under your skin', Derrida writes (Derrida 1987: 61). In Laplanche, and in Lévinas and Derrida, exposure to the other is thus an opening on the surface, like the wound or scar on the skin, a relation that is exposed and

protected, open *and* symbolised. Through the course of an analysis the unconscious truth ‘came away...like sutures after an operation’, says Freud in ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ (Freud 1937: 251), framing psychological truth as a wound (an operation), but also a suture: a symbolic stitching. While the image of wounded skin suggests an alterity that is unbound *and* bound, open and closed, Carver’s ‘transplant’ and ‘amputation’ suggests a more brutal, intrusive otherness. Here, Carver presents Lish’s minimalism as more like the *bound unbound*, calcified, stuck, rigid. A year later, in an interview with the *Paris Review*, Carver again depicts the minimalist edit as a bodily intrusion: ‘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,’ Carver writes (Carver 1983). ‘In a review of the last book, somebody called me a ‘minimalist’ writer. The reviewer meant it as a compliment. But I didn’t like it’ (Carver 1983).

For Carver, minimalism is a cut too deep – further than the skin, or bone even, and the effect on his writing is deadening (‘I’d be a dead end’; Carver 2007). Carver’s image of minimalism, his ‘carton’ with a *closed lid*, invokes Laplanche’s ‘tub’ where otherness forms a ‘narcissistic enclosure’ (Laplanche 2005: 111), in contrast to the benevolent hollow that is open and contained. This is an early, primitive and absolutely pre-symbolic alterity, which is not an address to an other, but self-enclosed, unrelated:

The everyday manifestations of the unconscious, the ‘formations of the unconscious’, do not escape this closure: they appear within the narcissistic space of the ego, and also, due to the almost machine like mechanism of the primary process, they cannot be considered as messages . . . The model of the tub, as I have termed it, clearly schematises its initial ‘unrelatedness’, its ‘narcissism’. This could be shown equally

for the symptom, which is not immediately relational, allucutory . . . [with] no witness, or ‘address’, even a virtual one. (Laplanche 2005: 111)

In what Carver perceives as the mechanical, closed otherness of his early writing, the more ‘minimalist’ prose could be seen to present a more rudimentary form of self-enclosed alterity – one that Carver moves away from in his later life and work. Significantly, this brings to light the difference between an otherness that loses its mode of openness through its stuck repetition, and an otherness that fosters mobility and change: an impenetrable alterity and a more permeable one. In Lish’s minimalist edit, as Carver frames it, rather than bearing a *relation* with the container, otherness itself *forms* the container, and a particularly rigid one: the minimalist other constitutes a shell, a carton with the lid closed. Where Carver once saw Lish’s edit as opening up the otherness of his prose, he now sees something encapsulated about his minimalism. Hence the claustrophobic image and the heart that’s ready to burst, and the heads of hair and limbs that need release. Indeed, Carver’s edited stories are striking for their enclosed spaces which appear more open in the unedited, critics have argued. According to Mathias Keller, in the edited story ‘The Bath’, ‘the tiny enclosure of a bathtub provides a sole comfort for characters’, whereas in the unedited version of the same story, ‘A Small Good Thing’, ‘we traverse to the indoor daylight of the bakery, where food and talk and commiseration actually do make a difference’ (Nesset 1994). Nesset writes:

Embodied in this ‘fuller’ version of the story, Carver’s ‘opening up’ suggests further the very real extent to which style can wall an artist in—suggests how as an artist Carver, like a few of his more fortunate characters, is capable of breaking free of enclosing environments, exchanging them not only for greater capaciousness but, we must assume, for a new understanding of himself and his craft. (Nesset 1994)

In what Carver perceives as its increasingly manufactured otherness, its *style*,

Lish's minimalism walls him in. Thus, paradoxically, the more extreme otherness of the edit confines, closes up. Like the analytic space that is open and closed, forming an opening at the heart of the most closed phenomenon, one could, in a kind of anachronistic inversion, see the unedited prose as opening up the hardened otherness of the edit. As we shall see, the later collection *Cathedral* fosters a different, more permeable form of alterity.

It is not insignificant that the metaphor occupies such a prominent place in Carver's correspondence of August 11, 1982. And as we have seen in 'So Much Water So Close to Home', the metaphor also emerges in Carver's unedited prose, only to be excised in the edit. Just as his heart is about to burst, so Carver's correspondence of August 11, 1982, bursts forth with metaphors, all the more conspicuous because of their absence from his minimalist prose. Transference inheres in the metaphor, in the transfer from the vehicle to the tenor, says Brooks (Brooks 1992: 223). Etymologically, the word 'metaphor' derives from a literal Greek version of the Latin of 'transference' (both meaning 'carrying beyond or across'). According to Brooks, the metaphor creates a new understanding, a new opening and binding of otherness: 'The substitution – as the characteristic operation of metaphor – of a present signifier for an absent one sparks an understanding of the meaning of that which is absent', says Brooks (Brooks 1992: 223). Through the hard silences and curt repetitions, in the minimalist edit the metaphoric process of creating new psychical meanings is 'foreclosed or frozen' (Modell 1997). Introducing the difference and substitution inherent to the metaphor, Carver's correspondence of August 11, 1982 could be seen to restore the process of metaphoric change that Modell sees as essential to rebinding stuck, traumatic otherness (Modell 1997). The later prose presents a shift or deanimating (Santner

2007: 19, 65) of the earlier, more traumatic linguistic constructions.

Two months later, on October 3, 1982, Carver reaffirms his need for authorial control over the *Cathedral* manuscript, granting Lish only minor editing input:

You know I want and have to have autonomy on this book and that the stories have to come out looking very essentially the way they look right now. I'm of course not saying we can't change words or phrases or a line here and there, and punctuation, sure. But after you've read the book, I'll come down and we'll talk about titles, the ordering, or any suggestions you might have. (Carver 2007)

Reiterating the same point just weeks on in a letter dated October 29, Carver states:

My biggest concern, as you know, is that the stories remain intact . . . You know what I'm saying. Please help me with this book as a good editor, the best . . . but not as my ghost . . . the stories, are going to be so different, in so many regards, from so many of the earlier stories, that the book is going to be met with a good show of enthusiasm, even celebration. And, yes, I'm eager to have that artist you were talking about do something for the cover, if she can. Yes, for sure. I hope that works out. (But that, finally, will be *your* final decision; the matter of the text, in this case, has to be mine.) (Carver 2007)

Again, Carver emphasizes the shift in his prose, the opening to something 'different', a new linguistic relation to otherness that will give rise to a new reception, renewing the enigma of his cultural recipient (Laplanche 2005: 226).

Up until this point in the published correspondence Carver's letters appear to be 'left unclaimed' (Derrida 1987: 7) – destined towards an other who refuses to respond, whose open silence starts to function as a benevolent hollow, opening up alterity in the writing of Carver's correspondence. But then in a letter dated November 19, 1982, we suddenly come across the editor's response:

Dear Ray—Here’s ‘Where I’m Calling From’ reworked to the extent that I think it must be—as basic as I can keep it. I’m aware that we’ve agreed that I will try to keep my editing of the stories as slight as I deem possible, that you do not want me to do the extensive work I did on the first two collections. So be it, Ray. What you see in this sample is that minimum: to do less than this, would be, in my judgment, to expose you too greatly. At all events, look: if this is in keeping with your wishes, call quickly and say so—and I will then be guided thereby in my handling of the rest of the stories. Love, G. (Carver 2007)

Tellingly, in reference to his ‘slight’ edit, Lish draws on a term that has come to define the edited prose: ‘What you see in this sample is that *minimum*’ (my italics), with the term invoking the style for which the edited Carver became famous. Here, it is as if the minimal is intrinsic to Lish’s very self-expression. It is not insignificant that Lish signs off ‘Love, G’. For Žižek, love opens up a gap in the other between their positive properties and their enigmatic otherness. This is why being loved makes one tangibly aware of the gap between what one is as a determinate being and the unfathomable X in oneself that stimulates love (Žižek 2009: 48). Although he acquires a voice, Lish’s words in response to Carver say very little. Rather than force his edit, creating a fixed relation with the other, Lish will now be ‘guided’ by Carver. He now forms a site of open otherness.

January 21, 1983

From Carver to Lish

What’s the matter, don’t you love me anymore? I never hear from you. Have you forgotten me already? Well, I’m going back to the [*Paris Review*] interview and take out all the good things I said about you. (Carver 2007)

So states Carver in his final letter to Lish. Dated January 21, 1983, the final letter is written the same year as the publication of *Cathedral*: the book that became

Carver's most celebrated yet, praised for its new, more expansive voice. Critics commented on the marked difference in style of *Cathedral*. On the cover of the *Times Book Review*, Irving Howe wrote that 'Mr. Carver has been mostly a writer of strong but limited effects – the sort of writer who shapes and twists his material to a high point of stylization', but in his new, more capacious work one saw 'a gifted writer struggling for a larger scope of reference, a finer touch of nuance' (Howe 1983). For Campbell, writing in the TLS, '*Cathedral* displays more abundant narrative talents than Carver's readership had come to expect' (Campbell 2009). D.T. Max notes, 'an evident gap between the early style of 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?' and 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love', Carver's first two major collections, and his later work in 'Cathedral' and 'Where I'm Calling From'' (Max: 1998). Max writes:

In subject matter, the stories share a great deal. They are mostly about the working poor – unemployed salesmen, waitresses, motel managers – in the midst of disheartening lives. But the early collections, which Lish edited, are stripped to the bone. They are minimalist in style with an almost abstract feel. They drop their characters back down where they find them, inarticulate and alone, drunk at noon. The later two collections are fuller, touched by optimism. (Max 1988)

As Carver states in his final letter to Lish, he wrote 'good things' about his editor in the *Paris Review*. Asked about Lish in the 1983 *Paris Review* interview, Carver writes:

He's remarkably smart and sensitive to the needs of a manuscript. He's a good editor. Maybe he's a great editor. All I know for sure is that he's my editor and my friend, and I'm glad on both counts. (Carver 1983)

But in the same interview Carver makes clear his preference for his later form of expression: ‘There’s something about ‘minimalist’ that smacks of smallness of vision and execution that I don’t like. But all of the stories in the new book, the one called *Cathedral*, were written within an eighteen-month period; and in every one of them I feel this difference’ (Carver 1983). It is interesting, then, that in his final letter to Lish Carver appears to hark back to his earlier editorial relationship. ‘What’s the matter, don’t you love me anymore?’ (Carver 2007) suggests a plea for an identificatory love, a transference of exchange and mutual recognition, as opposed to the kind of transference love that opens up otherness. In this final correspondence, Carver’s terse sentences and pithy three-liner evoke the style of the edit, while the last lines mimic Lish’s editorial process. Just as Lish did to Carver, so Carver will now do: he’ll go back over his own written work and ‘take out’ what he wrote, thereby closing off openness to the other, his approach to ‘you’. The final letter thus enacts a curious relapse to the earlier linguistic relation with Lish. Ingesting Lish’s editorial style and strategy, Carver’s final words betray both an inability to let go of the other, as well as Lish’s lasting influence. In his final adieu, Carver’s mimicry suggests nostalgia for a past identification with the edit – a kind of compulsive, masochistic return to the persecutory relation, which suggests a sado-masochistic bond, as a way of preserving rather than destroying the object of love (Glasser 1998: 887-902).

5. Dwelling with the Other: Hospitality in Carver's 'Cathedral'

'Cathedral'

Following *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), 'Cathedral' was published in the titular volume in 1983. The collection was Carver's most celebrated yet, receiving high critical acclaim; it was nominated for both a Pulitzer and a National Book Critics Circle Award, and in 1983 Carver won the prestigious Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award (Max 1998). With *Cathedral*, Carver asked Lish for only a light edit: 'I'm of course not saying we can't change words or phrases or a line here and there, and punctuation, sure...[but] the stories have to come out looking very essentially the way they look right now,' he wrote on October 3, 1982 (Carver 2007). At the publication of *Cathedral*, critics spoke of Carver's new, gentler, more 'realist' voice, marking a departure from his earlier 'minimalist' prose (Runyon: 1994: 85; Howe 1983; Yardley: 1983). More recently, critics have drawn parallels between Carver's late prose style and his early, unedited work (Campbell 2009; Wood 2009).

At the beginning of Raymond Carver's story 'Cathedral' the narrator awaits the arrival of a guest to his home: 'This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night' (Carver 1995: 292). But the visitor is unwelcome: 'I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit' (1995: 292). It is not out of jealousy or a sense of inconvenience that the visitor is rejected. He is renounced because he is unfamiliar, as a blind man. Presenting the unknown, the guest threatens to disrupt the narrator's sense of stable identity, open up his guarded interiority to the outside: 'A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to' (1995: 292).

By the close of the story, however, which is also the close of the day, the narrator and the visitor are depicted sitting side by side on the sofa, their fingers entwined: ‘He found my hand, the hand with the pen. He closed his hand over my hand’ (1995: 307). In the dark, the two characters tentatively draw a picture together – of a kind of ‘house’ with ‘spires’, ‘flying buttresses’, ‘great doors’, ‘windows with arches’ (1995: 307).

What forges this transition from the rejection of the stranger to the welcome of the other as friend? How is the bounded home opened up to the outside? Why is there a shift away from the solitary figure hiding inside his home to a communion between others that revolves around the representation of a different kind of home?

In what follows I will consider the presentation of hospitality in Carver’s writing with regards to Lévinas’s account of responsibility to the other; this will take place via a close reading of Carver’s ‘Cathedral’ (Carver 1995: 292-308) and Lévinas’s chapter ‘The Dwelling’ (Lévinas 1969: 152-168). I will examine the presentations of the ethical relation with the other in Carver and in Lévinas in terms of the *inside* and *outside* of the home, of language, and of visibility. Challenging common conceptions of Carver’s later writing as more traditionally ‘realist’ (Baym 2011: 346; Kleppe 2006: 115; Nessel 1995: 5), I will argue that in ‘Cathedral’ apparently finite linguistic meaning is always dependent on alterity – the outside of clear content; determinate meaning relies on the indeterminate. Conversely, I will claim that Lévinas is often misread as a philosopher of the infinite, the absolute other (Eagleton 2009: 231). Reading Lévinas through the concrete materiality of Carver’s writing I hope to demonstrate that Lévinas’s ethical thought is bound to the finite: Lévinas’s

other is grounded in signification of meaning. Thus, reading Carver along with Lévinas leads to an othering of dominant conceptions of each. As we shall see, this reading of Carver and Lévinas is guided by the psychoanalytic thought of Lacan.

In the following I will be less interested in drawing connections between Carver's early unedited *Beginners* and the later collection *Cathedral*, as I will be in looking at the specific spaces of alterity opened up by Carver's so-called later 'realist' prose. Contrary to critical accounts, I will suggest that Carver's later 'realist' writing also displays aspects of his earlier edited 'minimalist' mode, suggesting that the two forms are not so mutually exclusive. In terms of literary form then, I will argue that Carver's later prose shows an intersection of realist and minimalist techniques, but ultimately that his realist bindings of alterity open up to the more radically unsymbolised spaces of his early minimalist writing.

The ethical other: Carver, Lévinas, and Lacan

Before turning to the story, I will say a few words about my way of reading the ethical other in Carver. For Lévinas, ethics is the putting into question of the ego, the knowing subject, or self-consciousness. Ordinarily the ego assimilates what is outside itself, reducing otherness to familiarity, says Lévinas. But in the ethical relation the ego is called into question by the other, referred to variously as the 'Other', 'other' 'otherness' or 'alterity', as that which escapes the subject's powers of comprehension. The other is what disrupts my modes of comprehension, my

determinate ideas.⁶ In Lévinas, this other is presented as the ‘Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself’ (Lévinas 1969: 39), also as ‘the infinite, the transcendent’, the ‘exterior’ (1969: 49), and as the ‘face’ – figures which suggest the impossibility of grasping the other through finite meaning, the ways ‘in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me’ (1969: 50). Lévinas is also concerned with how the revelation of the other takes place in linguistic expression. Distinguishing the ‘Saying’ and the ‘Said’ (Lévinas 1981 6-18), Lévinas defines the Said as the content and identifiable meaning of words, and the Saying as a performative, disruptive mode of linguistic expression that cannot be reduced to determinate content (1974 5). Thus, Lévinas is interested in the thematisation of the other, but also in how the other works as a residue or interruption of meaning (the Saying) (Lévinas 1981 6-18).⁷

So why read Carver along with Lévinas’s ethics? Firstly, I see striking commonalities between the literary content, what Carver calls the obsessions (‘the content or obsession, I don’t care for the word theme’; Carver 2001: 182) of ‘Cathedral’ and Lévinas’s ethical preoccupations in ‘The Dwelling’ (Lévinas 1969: 152-168). Both are concerned with the figuration of the other as stranger, the intrusion of the other in the home, questions of hospitality, the presentation of the other as face and as the possessed and dispossessed. Secondly, just as for Lévinas linguistic meaning is always bound to and disrupted by otherness, so in Carver’s

⁶ Original responsibility to the other disrupts what Lévinas sees as the self-enclosure of ontology that has dominated the western philosophical tradition: the attempt to comprehend Being. In ontology, Lévinas avers, objects of cognition are objects *for* consciousness, grasped through adequate representation, which transmutes otherness into the Same (known and familiar cognition).

⁷ In his early work Lévinas showed suspicion towards literary art, seeing exegesis as the privileged site for exploration of the other. But he later came to see literary writing as a special domain for an encounter with the strange other: the artwork ‘turns into something other than itself’ (Lévinas 1989: 146), and ‘poetry is a conversation with the infinite’ (1989: 42). In *Otherwise than Being* in particular Lévinas’s own style of writing can be seen to bear such literary qualities of otherness, as he presents less a totalized theoretical edifice, and more descriptive terms which gain meaning through evocation rather than definition.

‘Cathedral’ I consider how the subject matter of his story — its representation of a strange other in the blind man — coexists with linguistic and visual stagings of otherness in the silences, the unsaid, and resistances to meaning, along with the indeterminate visual presentations. In this way, I am particularly interested in the ethical otherness of Carver’s literary presentations, explored in depth in the final section of the paper.

So why bring together Lévinas and Lacan? How might Lacan enrich the encounter between Carver and Lévinas? Certainly, there is nothing in Lévinas’s intentions that justifies a link with psychoanalysis: ‘The unconscious in its clandestinity rehearses the game played out in consciousness, namely the search for meaning and truth as the search for the self’, he says (1996: 83). But despite Lévinas’s misgivings about psychoanalysis, in what follows I discern psychoanalytic resonance in his writing. Eschewing knowledge, representation and presence, I see Lévinas’s ethical subject as explicitly not the subject of consciousness; rather, I argue that the ethical other is theorised at the level of the unconscious. As Simon Critchley notes (Critchley 1999b: 186-189), Lévinas’s rejection of the unconscious is contradicted at several points in his works, in particular where he refers to the traumatic otherness of the subject’s unconscious: the ‘meaning of the unconscious’ is the ‘night where the ego comes back to the self under the traumatism of persecution’ (1981: 183).⁸ As we shall see, I draw a structural affinity between Lévinas’s other and Lacan’s Real as the unsymbolised psychical core of the unconscious – what is *other* to symbolic meaning in the unconscious (Lacan 1988c: 82).

⁸ Dominique Scarfone also draws a connection between Lacan’s Real and Lévinas’s other (Scarfone 2013: 5).

I turn to Lacan's psychoanalytic categories to challenge, clarify and bring out the psychological resonance of Carver's literary presentation of the other, as well as of Lévinas's ethics. This also runs in the other direction, so that Lévinas emphasises the ethical dimension of Carver's writing and Lacan's. In summary, I bring the three writers together because I see a common formal structure to the three – in Carver's literary presentations (thematically and linguistically) of closure and openness towards the other, in Lévinas's theory of appropriation and ethical openness to the other, and in Lacan's theory of imaginary concealment of and symbolic openness to the unsymbolised Real. Along with the formal correspondences between these writers, at times I confront the departures, and I consider how reading the writers alongside each other leads to an othering of dominant critical conceptions of them.⁹

In turning to *both* Lévinas and Lacan I also hope to avoid projecting a unilateral theoretical reading of Carver's story. Instead, I deploy theory in a lighter and more heterogeneous way, so that the literature probes different theories, which in turn question or trouble Carver's prose; it is in this vein that I also make some reference to Arendt and to other thinkers.¹⁰

For Lévinas, in our relation with the other we become 'the addressee, the interlocutor' (Lévinas 1981: 18); reframing this, one might say that *we become the reader*, as the reader experiences the event of being in relation with the other. Thus I will be interested in the reader's reception of Carver's presentation of literary

⁹ I see the alliance between Lacan and Lévinas as enriching, but it is also necessary to recognise the differences between the thinkers. Some have noted their different relations to Kojève's Hegel (Critchley 1999: 200): the dialectic of intersubjectivity is at the core of Lacan's subject and symbolic order, but in his absolute relation Lévinas refuses a dialectical model of subjectivity, critics claim. However, I argue that the opposition between the two in terms of the dialectical basis of subjectivity is oversimplified, failing to address the prominence of the Real as the limit of the subject's symbolisation, and overlooking aspects of the symbolic that are inscribed in Lévinas's ethical relation with the other.

¹⁰ I turn to Arendt because I discern a thematic link between Carver's story and her writing on public and private dwelling, and a formal link between Carver's language and Arendt's prioritisation of determinate structures of meaning from which otherness arises.

otherness: the demand of the textual otherness on the reader. I will be interested in the points at which this demand is at its strongest, mostly towards the end of the story, where the realist bindings of otherness open up to the more radically unsymbolised spaces of the early minimalist form.

The Real other: solitary dwelling

This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night.
(Carver 1995: 292)

The opening line of 'Cathedral' sets up the narrator's linguistic rejection of the other. In the grammatical order of the sentence the guest is first and foremost a 'blind man', his status as 'friend of my wife' is secondary. Refused a proper name, the blind man is further negated by the 'he' of the final clause: a deictic that is redundant to the overall sense of the sentence. 'He was no_one I knew' (1995: 292), the narrator goes on_to state, presenting the blind man as unfamiliar, but also as literally 'no one'. The other is finally eclipsed in the last line of the paragraph, where even his status as human being is removed: the visitor was 'not something I looked forward to' (1995: 292).

The narrator of Carver's 'Cathedral' strives to refuse what is other to the self and to linguistic meaning, wanting instead to dwell within absence of meaning. At the moment the stranger enters his home, the narrator clings, like a recalcitrant child, to the absence of speech: 'I didn't say anything . . . I had absolutely nothing to say'

(Carver 1995: 297, 300). Bearing the imprint of Lish's earlier minimalist edit, the narrator remains nameless throughout Carver's story and he refuses the proper names of others – that of the blind man and his wife's first husband: 'Her officer, why should he have a name?' (1995: 293).

In Lévinas's terms, the narrator attempts to dwell within the abyss of being: 'The separated being can close itself up in its egoism, that is, in the very accomplishment of its isolation . . . banishing with impunity all hospitality (that is, all language) from one's home' (Lévinas 1969: 173). For Lévinas, 'shutting oneself up at home with oneself' (1969: 173) means residing in 'prime matter, absolutely undetermined' (1969: 159). And I suggest this 'prime matter' finds a formal echo in Lacan's 'hard kernel of the Real': the primitive psychical element that 'cannot be assimilated into any imaginary or symbolic identification, but can only be thought of as a pure posit' (Lacan 1988c: 82). At the outset of 'Cathedral', Carver's narrator deploys the 'elementary and truncated language' of Lévinas's primordial 'I' prior to its relation with the other person (Lévinas 1969: 155-156). Rather than use language to gesture at something unknown, the narrator strives to banish a linguistic relation with the other altogether, attempting to dwell within Lévinas's 'prime matter' (1969: 158), or Lacan's impossible unsymbolised Real. He thus cleaves to a more radical otherness than the edited splitting or the unedited linguistic inhabiting.

Just as the narrator resists a linguistic relation with the other, so he rejects visual apprehension of otherness, as the visual depictions of the blind man recall the bald contours of the early minimalist edit. The guest is not only denied the singularity of the proper name, he is also deprived of specific physical appearance. All we can envisage of him is that he is blind.

The first few lines of the story repeat the term 'blind' with such frequency ('this blind man . . . she and the blind man . . . being blind . . . idea of blindness . . . the blind . . . the blind man' . . . etc. 1995: 292) that the meaning of the word 'blind' recedes behind its pulsating rhythm. Carver's writing stages the pulsating logic of Kristeva's materiality and originary drive of the pre-linguistic infant (Kristeva 1984: 25), as the reader falls into a visual vacuum, a dearth of meaning. Here, otherness is not so much embedded with linguistic meaning, as it is in the unedited; the darkness that pervades this opening paragraph does not so much signify the outside of visual identification as stage the *absence* of visibility – Lévinas's 'fathomless depth' (Lévinas 1998: 67) or Heidegger's 'night of anxiety' (Heidegger 1949: 91), where being dwells alone. This is an absence more radical and primordial than that of the minimalist linguistic cut or of the unedited textuality.

Unlike the blind man, the narrator cannot accept his visual limitations – his visual castration – that *he cannot see it all*. Instead, he wants to see blindness itself: see the unseen. His preoccupation with the inability to see has an obsessive quality, with the term 'blind' recurring 5 times in the first 7 lines. The narrator is thoroughly engrossed by the fact that the blind man ever had a relationship *without seeing*: 'They'd married, lived and worked together', he says, 'all this without his ever having seen what the goddamned woman looked like. It was beyond my understanding' (1995: 295). Maurice Merleau-Ponty aligns 'concrete visual perception' with consciousness, and what he calls its 'invisible condition' with the unconscious: for Merleau-Ponty, the visual indeterminacy of the unconscious conditions conscious visual representations, but this invisibility must be forgotten in order for us to see properly (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 68). Preoccupied with the unseen, Carver's narrator refuses Merleau-Ponty's 'blindness of consciousness' – that such

invisibility must be forgotten, must not be seen, *in order to see* (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 248). In this way, the narrator recalls Blanchot's account of the Greek mythological figure Orpheus who, warned not to look back at Eurydice as he ascends the underworld, cannot resist and is swallowed by the visual void (Blanchot 1999).

Failing to heed the visual prohibition, the narrator tries to prise open blindness itself, see the impossible, invisible condition of seeing. And in doing so he comes face to face with the monstrous:

The [blind man's] pupils seemed to move around in the sockets without his knowing it or being able to stop it . . . One eye was on the roam without his knowing it or wanting it to be. (1995: 297)

Here, the blind man's eyes recall Lacan's 'gaze', as 'the non-human eye of the other' (1988: 82). Distinguishing between the eye and the gaze, Lacan defines the eye as pertaining to the imaginary field, fixing on identifiable objects, while the gaze is 'the underside of consciousness' (1988: 82-83), the visually ungraspable, unconscious horizon within which the visible is established.¹¹ The gaze does not originate from any particular pair of eyes, it is the monstrous, indefinable visuality that precedes and possibilizes the field of the visible.¹² With the gaze, 'there is something that looks before there is a view for it to see', says Lacan (1988: 273). The gaze *threatens* because it exposes the constitutive absence at the core of the psyche –

¹¹ In Lacan's scopic domain, the distinction between the eye and the gaze is a way of specifying the dependence of consciousness upon the structure of the unconscious.

¹² Merleau-Ponty occasionally attended Lacan's seminars, but his work is more informed by Gestalt psychology (the concepts of figure and ground), and by Freud (sexuality as being in the world). Merleau-Ponty calls for the need to 'make not an existential psychoanalysis, but an ontological psychoanalysis,' where the unconscious is the constitutive background field out of which the figures of the consciousness are identified. For a detailed examination of the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan see Richard Boothby (Boothby 2001, 54-61, 286-287). Boothby suggests that one departure between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and psychoanalysis is that phenomenology encounters the limits of representation, but in psychoanalysis those limits are the central concern: the exploration of the unconscious is undertaken in and for itself.

the unsymbolised Real (Lacan 1988: 70). Concomitantly, for Lévinas, the absolute abyss in which being dwells alone is also defined as ‘menacing’ (1969: 166).

Critics have frequently characterised Carver’s late writing of ‘Cathedral’ and ‘Elephant’ as ‘realist’ (Baym 2011: 346; Kleppe 2006: 115; Nessel 1995: 5). But for the supposedly late realist Carver, ‘Cathedral’ contains a surprising abundance of monstrous, menacing images; these figures emerge just at the moments when the narrator tries to see the impossible invisible condition of seeing. Here, a different kind of language emerges: a monstrous excess of alterity. The opening lines, which as we have seen invoke a visual vacuum, culminate in the narrator’s image of an inhuman blind man ‘who moved slowly and never laughed’ (1995: 292) and who is led by strange ‘seeing-eye dogs’ (1995: 292). And later, when the narrator and the blind man watch TV together, the screen shows men dressed as skeletons and devils and the ‘outside of a cathedral lined with Gargoyles. Little statues carved to look like monsters’ (1995: 303). At such moments, the reader encounters the gaze – the monstrous excess of the unsymbolised.

It is pertinent that the cathedral is lined with monster-like ‘gargoyles’. Etymologically ‘gargoyle’ derives from the late Latin ‘gurgulio’, meaning throat. Originally used in Ancient Greece as a waterspout attached to roof gutters and then in medieval times on the walls of churches to ward off evil, the gargoyle has traditionally been located at the threshold between the inside and outside (OED Online). In Carver’s story, the gargoyle can be read as a warning that the threshold between inside and outside must be respected – that idealised attachment to the unsymbolised within should be avoided, but so too should its neglect in an imaginary traversal outside.

In Carver's 'Cathedral', to lead a self-secluded life is to be deprived, invoking the ancient Greek meaning of *private* as *privation* (OED Online). In his solipsistic rejection of the other, Carver's narrator appears unable to flourish as a human being. Indeed, he feels 'left out' of the relationship between his wife and the blind man, even though he chooses to sit apart from them (1995: 299). In ancient Greece, a life spent on one's own outside the world of the common would have been idiotic by definition, says Arendt (Arendt 1999: 38). For Arendt, the absolutely private realm is inherently violent: in the private household of ancient Greece, 'force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity', and furthermore, this 'sheer violence is mute' (Arendt 1999: 31, 26). To be too self-secluded is thus to be destructive. Formally concordant with Arendt's absolutely private domain, Lacan's dwelling in introverted attachment to one's own Real – to the psychically unsymbolised – also means being governed by violence in the destructive force of the death-drive, a primordial force that Lacan also describes as 'mute' (2002: 101). If it is difficult to conceptually grasp the destructive death drive, it is in anxiety that one can experience its unsymbolised force, says Lacan (Boothby 1991: 145). Accordingly, critics have noted that it is in anxiety, in a quiet unease (Wood 2009), that Carver's reader also experiences the radically unsymbolised of Carver's writing – those visual vacuums and uncanny figures that erupt unnervingly.

The narrator's attachment to the otherness within him, and his need for isolation from the other person, is distinct from privacy proper. In fact, it results in loss of privacy. What is involved in *jouissance*, Lacan tells us, is a 'making oneself heard and seen' (Lacan 1988c: 87). That is to say, the intimate core of *being* is no longer sheltered by language (by the absences that are held in the symbolic order, as in the earlier unedited writing), but becomes exposed. However, *being* does not lose

its essential nature as resistance to determinate meaning. Rather the otherness of the void itself is exposed, as contentless and nonsensical (Jameson 1993: 33-57). In his account of dwelling with the other, Lévinas also appears to warn against overexposing the unsymbolised other: ‘the home should not leave being *exposed* to vegetable communication with the elements’, instead, the home ‘has a street front and also its secrecy’ (1969: 156; my italics). In Carver’s writing, overexposure of the psychically unsymbolised is presented on a visual level in the empty, sterile and stifling spaces that pervade his oeuvre: the intrusion of private space in ‘Neighbours’; the claustrophobic bedsit where a couple’s relationship breaks down in ‘The Student’s Wife’; the oppressive garret where a woman tries to throw herself out of the window in ‘Gazebo’; and the reclusive mother’s house lined with cardboard boxes in ‘Boxes’ (Carver 1995: 68-74; 26-34; 112-119; 333-347).

These barren spaces are also sites empty of Lacan’s ‘symbolic desire’, of the symbolic binding of otherness and meaning.¹³ With the subject’s entrance to language (Lacan’s symbolic order) the radical otherness of *being* is structured by the internal absences in the symbolic system, as we have seen (Lacan 1988c: 107), and this gives rise to desire. Žižek summarises Lacan’s symbolic desire clearly:

Desire is the force that compels us to progress infinitely from one signifier to another in the hope of attaining the ultimate signifier that would fix the meaning of the preceding chain. (Žižek 1993: 222)

In Lacan, desire is bound to symbolic interpretation: we desire as we trace meanings along chains of signifiers. In Carver’s stories, the empty visual spaces that resist interpretation forestall the reader’s desire. The reader of ‘Cathedral’

¹³ Imbricated within the differential order of signification, in which absences are *structured* in the gaps between different words, the subject is exposed to alterity, brought up against the limits of language and thus to the otherness of the Real; in this way, the subject desires (Lacan 1988: 258-263).

experiences something of this absence of desire, as the enclosed space of the living room where the action of the story takes place refuses the desirousness of interpretation: other than the TV and sofa, the room is shorn of description. Here, the bare room presents that which should remain sheltered in signification: the private emptiness of primordial being. Indeed, the narrator's reluctance to welcome the visitor inside his home and his unwillingness to leave the stranger alone in his own room, attest to his attempt to protect that which has been left open – the unsymbolised psychological core that is overexposed at the outset of 'Cathedral'

Carver stages the self-destruction that ensues from solipsistic rejection of otherness. In Lévinas, 'shutting oneself up at home with oneself could not be produced without internal contradiction' (1969: 173): being alone is an illusion, man is always bound to the other. Accordingly, in Carver's story the refusal of that which is outside the self, as in the other person, can only be short-lived. The narrator is bound to the other – his wife – but he is also finally unable to close his doors on the stranger. Most of the twentieth-century Great American Novels are written from the first person, delving into the interior thoughts of the heroes who nearly always live alone (Gatsby, Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*). While Hemingway has been seen as a precursor to Carver (Beatha 2007: 89-104), his stories are more often written from the first person position, and his heroes are more inward, more solitary than Carver's. From the early 'minimalist' to the more 'realist', Carver's stories are mainly pitched outside the characters' minds, even when they are written from the first person, so that the prose feels closer to drama than to the novel, less inward. What is more, Carver's characters rarely live alone. Indeed, many of Carver's stories abound with instances of strangers, neighbours, friends, wandering in and out of dwelling places. Many of the stories

centre on this very conceit ('Neighbours', 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love', 'Alaska', 'The Fat Man'). Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that the novelist Richard Ford, a long time friend of Carver's, describes the 'beginning' of their friendship as the time 'he entered my life and my dwelling' (Ford 1998). Ford even colours this moment with the language of ethics: 'from the moment he entered my life and my dwelling at 60 Jefferson Road, Princeton, Ray was good will's very soul' (Ford 1998).

In Lacanian terms, the impossibility of dwelling alone in a kind of mental void or absolute otherness marks the *impossibility of the Real*: the pre-symbolic substance that can only be posited as such through the symbolic. For Lacan, the Real comes *after* the symbolic, as the experience of something missing. Similarly, for Lévinas, the 'notion of an idealist subject' as an 'ether' is formed 'a posteriori' (1969: 153, 168). Lévinas claims, 'the isolation of the home does not arouse magically', rather the 'I exists *recollected*...Interiority is concretely accomplished by the home' (1969: 153-154; my italics). It is only through the symbolic structures (of the home) that the Real (of subjectivity) can be conceived. Eagleton claims that in its infinite openness to otherness Lévinasian ethics is 'psychotic' (Eagleton 2009: 225). However, I suggest that the psychotic is more the predicament of 'being at home with oneself' than being open to the outside (Lévinas 1969: 159). In 'Cathedral', the narrator's wife asks 'Are you mad?', bringing to mind the more severely unhinged characters of both Carver's edited and unedited stories, who suffer from having spent too much time in doors: Claire in 'So Much Water So Close to Home', as we have seen, the mother who won't go outside in 'Boxes' (1995: 333-347), the violent ex-wife in 'Intimacy' (1995: 363-371), and the suicidal girlfriend in 'Gazebo' (1995: 112-119).

In the opening of Carver's 'Cathedral' then, at the level of content, language and visuality, the narrator's solipsistic attachment to his own otherness gives rise to his refusal of the outside other – in the form of the blind man. This is the implicit ethical dimension of Carver's later writing. Critics have described the late Carver as 'realist' (Yardley: 1983; Runyon: 1994: 85) and one might concur, in that he often deploys the resources of linguistic meaning to explicitly state the failures of representation ('I didn't say anything...I had absolutely nothing to say'; 1995: 297, 300). Yet as we have seen, 'Cathedral' also bears traces of *both* his early minimalist and realist otherness, where in conjunction they express a more radical unbound alterity than the early writing, but one that is presented as inherently impossible, only ever a narcissistic fantasy. Furthermore, in the (monstrous) intersection of 'realist' writing and 'minimalist' otherness, a different form of expression emerges: a more monstrous mode of excessive alterity.

The imaginary other: outside fantasies

'Was his wife a Negro?' I asked . . .
'What's wrong with you?' she said. 'Are you drunk?'
'I'm just asking,' I said.
Right then my wife filled me in with more detail than I cared to know. (1995: 295)

After hearing about the death of the blind man's wife the narrator asks, "'Was his wife a Negro?'" The narrator's drive to dwell in the abyss of prelinguistic being coincides with his refusal to acknowledge the other person's otherness. Instead, as the story goes on the narrator attempts to suppress that which is alien to him by deploying a language of familiar stereotypes. Employing determinate language as a

means of controlling difference, the blind man's wife is categorized "a Negro" (1995: 295). Significantly, the narrator doesn't care 'to know' about any singular 'detail' concerning the visitor. Instead, he relies on naive preconceptions:

I remember having read somewhere that the blind didn't smoke because, as speculation had it, they couldn't see the smoke they exhaled. I thought I knew that much about blind people. But this blind man smoked his cigarette down to the nubbin and then lit another one. (1995: 298)

If the narrator cannot be left to wallow in the absence of meaning then he seeks solace in determinate language, as dwelling in the fantasy of absolute otherness gives way to overly determined significations of the other. The narrator refuses to open up his identity by entering into dialogue with the outside other. Instead, he responds to the blind man's open questions in a language of closed answers, shutting off the reader from alterity:

How long had I been in my present position? (Three years.) Did I like my work? (I didn't.) Was I going to stay with it? (What were the options?) (1995: 299)

When he finally ventures to ask the blind man a couple of questions about himself, the narrator responds to the blind man's answers in a language that reduces unfamiliarity to familiarity: "Sure you are. I knew it . . . I knew it" (1995: 298). This closure to the other has a formal echo in Lévinas's 'being at home with oneself', which is 'mastering' the outside by 'introducing it into a world of the identifiable' (1969: 159) – and this is certainly the propensity of Carver's narrator. Crucially, Lévinas describes the assimilation of the outside other to the inside as 'treating being as a furnishing, transportable to the home' (1969: 160). In a thematic echo, in 'Cathedral' the blind man is presented as indistinguishable from the furniture: the

narrator becomes preoccupied by the new sofa on which the visitor sits, then he contemplates the old sofa, and finally becomes concerned with the way the blind man touches the sofa, such that the visitor almost becomes subsumed into one of his household possessions.

The narrator's attempt to fix the identity of the outside visitor coexists with his egotistical drive for self-confirmation through the other person. 'I waited in vain to hear my name on my wife's lips', the narrator states (1995: 299). Here, the narrator appears subject to Lacan's 'imaginary phase', in which, as we have seen, the infant that consists of unsymbolised pulsions acquires an imaginary sense of stable identity by identifying with the reflection of the mother/other in a narcissistic mirror image (Lacan 2002: 1-9). I see Lévinas's 'dwelling in the home' as having a formal affinity with Lacan's imaginary: Lévinas's 'dwelling in the home' is a kind of 'primordial grasp', the 'first grasping that relates to me and my egoistic ends', the attempt to 'seize, master and possess' the outside other (1969: 159). Concurrently, for Lacan the imaginary is an 'irreducibly narcissistic structure' in which the infant 'looks for self-mastery' over the mother/other through an 'instinctual thrust outside' (2002: 24). Speaking of Lacan, Boothby claims that 'the tendency towards stereotyping belongs to the very essence of the imaginary function' (Boothby 2001: 144), confirming that the language of Carver's narrator conforms to Lacan's imaginary and Lévinas's 'egoistic' dwelling with the other.

In 'Cathedral', as the narrative goes on, fixed linguistic identifications of the outside other coexist with fixed visual identifications. The narrator holds a preconceived visual image of a blind man and he is disappointed when the visitor fails to live up to it:

He didn't use a cane and he didn't wear dark glasses. I'd always thought dark glasses were a must for the blind. Fact was, I wish he had a pair. (1995: 297)

Here, the attempt to force the unfamiliar into the familiar enacts the Sartrean look. In line with Hegel's slave and master dialectic, Sartre supposes a kind of visual duel between one person and the other, where one person emerges as the seeing subject, and the other person is subsumed by the force of the look (Sartre 1956: 215). This formally echoes Lacan's distinction between the 'eye' and the 'gaze', where the 'eye' pertains to the field of the imaginary, as the perception of unified objects, and the 'gaze' pertains to Lacan's unrepresented 'unknown desire' (Lacan 1988: 67-79). The 'eye' fixes upon visible objects in order to escape the unknowable 'gaze' (Lacan 1988: 67-79). Accordingly, the narrator of 'Cathedral' sees in order not to see the other's alterity. The visual objectifications occur just at the point where the narrator and reader begin to experience the unknown gaze of the other – in the uncanny image of the blind man's roaming pupils, and the eyes that have 'too much white in the iris' (1995: 297).

Yet rather than give rise to self-unity, the narrator's drive for visual identification instils self-doubt, as he starts to see himself through the eyes of his wife: 'My wife looked at me. I had the feeling she didn't like what she saw' (1995: 297), he states, confirming Lacan's point that our imaginary identification of ourselves depends in part on how we think we are seen by someone else (Lacan 2002: 1-9). Finally, the narrator's preoccupation with visual recognition is rendered ridiculous when he imagines the blind man's wife on her deathbed and speculates that her last thought was 'he never even knew what she looked like' (1995: 295).

In 'Cathedral', the reduction of the outside other to the inside also has socio-political implications. One camp of Carver critics, concerned with ideology and its propagation through literature, believe his work serves to reinforce the hegemonic ideological discourse of late capitalism instead of presenting a counter discourse. Carver refuses to engage with questions of political action, such critics aver. 'In making the intractability of the universe the measure of possibility', Alan Wilde contends, Carver's stories 'assume the pointlessness of any [political] action whatsoever' (qtd. in Lainsbury 2004: 3).¹⁴ But one could argue, in line with Adorno, that such critics of Carver endorse a heroics of political representation and identification that is complicit with the narcissistic, identificatory logic of the consumer culture they disavow (Jarvis 1998: 84-90) – where consumer objects form illusory self-confirmations and identifications, ideologically disguising the true inequalities and loss of self-possession for the underprivileged. Carver is certainly far from the writer as agent of explicit ideological investigation and social change that Wilde valorises. Yet from Carver's early 'minimalist' prose to his later more 'realist' writing, his stories foreground the unfulfilling preoccupation with private possessions that is characteristic of late-capitalism – in the colour TV that plays a pivotal role in 'Cathedral' and is omnipresent in Carver's stories, in the motorcar of 'Are These Actual Miles', and in the vacuum cleaner of 'Collectors'. But more significantly, in the narrator's drive to master and identify the otherness in the other person, and in the linguistic and visual stagings of assimilation of otherness, Carver's writing shows up the narcissistic, self-acquisitive logic that underpins late-capitalist consumerist attitudes.

¹⁴ Frank Lentricchia dismisses Carver's works as 'a-political' because they are 'about the agonies of autonomous individuals operating entirely in the domestic or private sphere' (Lentricchia 1990: 241).

Carver's stories present a conflation of the private and public. This conflation is also complicit with the narcissistic logic of mergence, and with the mergence of private and public that Arendt identifies with the 'social' sphere:

The emergence of society – the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organisational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen. (Arendt 1999: 28)

For Arendt, in Ancient Greece the private and the public were clearly designated as separate yet interrelated domains, but in modern times the two merge in the 'social' realm – where 'intimacy' replaces proper privacy in a more exposed form of love. Carver likewise stages the fusion of the public and private through the visual spaces that dominate his stories. Rarely situated in the outside world of public recognition, or within a properly private domain, intimate relations in Carver's writing often take place in interim zones – in corridors, porches, doorways, and backyards – which are particularly conspicuous in the edited stories, suggesting a loss of properly private relations. The loss of privacy proper, says Arendt, also results in over-exposure of personal struggles. In the social domain, writes Arendt, the 'activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public' (1999: 46). In the desperate world of Carver's fiction, throughout his unedited, edited, and late writing, the personal struggle to hold onto a job is made all too painfully public: we see this in the figure of the salesman of the early story 'Collectors' (1995: 90-97); in the waitress of 'They're Not Your Husband' (1995: 34-41); in the baker of 'A Small Good Thing' (edited and unedited versions; 2003: 39-48; 2009: 54-81); and in the saleswoman of 'Vitamins' in Carver's later fiction (1995: 199-215). What could be a more perfect example of the loss of a proper private realm, as well as the loss of

a public place of recognition, than the story 'Why Don't You Dance?', where the inside of the home is literally brought outside – the contents of it sold in a painfully public display of the inhabitants drive for survival (1995: 125-131).

In Ancient Greece the public realm was the domain of 'speech', 'action', and 'political engagement', but what matters in the 'social' sphere of 'intimacy', where the private and public merge, is what Arendt calls 'housekeeping', which she defines as the 'administration' of life' – the bureaucratisation of life processes (1999: 38-40). Carver's merging of private and public also coincides with the administration of life-processes. Lacking outside political ideologies or inside protection from social forces, Carver's characters are left to fend for themselves, managing and compartmentalising their lives as they see fit. The narrator's wife of 'Cathedral' is a housekeeper for the blind man. Answering an advert for 'HELP WANTED' she sets to work 'organising' his home (1995: 292), and in terms redolent of admin, she reads him 'case studies, reports' (1995: 292). When her job is over she records herself on a dictaphone: 'she told him everything...about her life', and then 'sent the tapes off lickety-split' (1995: 294). Compartmentalising her life in a collection of cassette tapes, the woman makes her private thoughts and her very life processes (her feelings of loneliness and suicide) public. The administration of life in Carver's domestic domain is so ubiquitous it is barely perceptible as such: in 'Careful' a marriage ends following an 'assessment' (1995: 215); in 'Boxes' a woman arranges her life in cardboard boxes, like a filing system (1995: 333-347). Indeed, Carver's language – the forensically factual, list-like descriptions of insignificant things – can have the ring of data collecting. This suggests that the bureaucratisation of sheer existence is internalised in the very discourse, as if the characters treat *themselves* as objects of administration.

As the narrator's wife compartmentalises life, she is also subject to unceasing movement – from one dwelling to the next. As a young woman she was married to an Air Force officer and was 'posted from one base and then another', the narrator informs us

She sent tapes [to the blind man] from Moody AFB, McGuire, McConnell, and finally Travis, near Sacramento, where one night she got feeling lonely and cut off from people she kept losing in that *moving-around life*. She got to feel that she couldn't go it another step. She went in and swallowed all the pills and capsules in the medicine chest and washed them down with a bottle of gin. Then she got into a hot bath and passed out. (1995: 293; my italics)

Here, the presentation of the dwelling space is aligned with restless, destructive movement in that moving-around life. In Lacanian terms, this restless movement from one house to the next in a cycle of self-destruction can be seen as structurally concordant with the drive for *jouissance* (specifically that of the *whole* position in the late Lacan) – the illusion of obtaining an impossible unity of self and other, inside and outside, and consequent self-punishment for failing to do so.¹⁵ Furthermore, Arendt aligns the shift from private use value of money, to late capitalism's ever-changing exchangeability of wealth, with the move from a conception of property as belonging to the public realm, to property as consumption and commodity: 'When wealth becomes capital, whose chief function is to generate more capital', we have 'the abolition of private property in the sense of a tangible, worldly place of one's own' and instead property acquires 'the permanence of a *process* rather than the permanence of a stable structure' (1999: 69-70; my italics). On a thematic level, the Carver story that examines late capitalist consumer values most explicitly is 'Elephant', a late story published in 1988 (1995: 386-402). In this

¹⁵ It also finds a formal structural echo in Lévinas's account of the relation between home and world as 'the first *movement* of the economy' that 'is in fact egoist': it is 'to grasp, to seize, to take away' from alterity (1969: 157-158; my italics).

narrative, the most ruthlessly materialist individual is, perhaps not coincidentally, the only Carver character who lives in a mobile home: the daughter's restless roaming from one dwelling space to the next mirrors her insatiable drive for consumer goods. This notion of dwelling as *process* and *movement* is also presented in Carver's deployment of genre. In contrast to the traditional novel that has a clear beginning and end, forging a self-enclosed space, Carver's assemblage of short stories can be seen to propel the reader from one domestic sphere to the next in a cycle of ever changing and exchanging dwelling places.

Thus, as the narrative of 'Cathedral' progresses it stages imaginary narcissistic relations with the other, where the blind man's otherness is denied and reduced to the narrator's subjectivity. This has ethical and socio-political implications: in the assimilation of otherness to the self/same; in the rejection of difference; in the loss of proper privacy; and in the bureaucratisation of otherness. 'Cathedral' continues to bear traces of both the early minimalist and realist modes of language; but in this section of the story, staged at the level of content, language and visibility, Carver tends to present the imaginary relation with the other through overly fixed meanings and identificatory seeing – two modes of expression which in their power of representation could be called 'realist', but where such realism is deployed to show its fantasmatic structuring, its narcissistic concealment of otherness.

The symbolic other: thresholds of hospitality

‘Cathedrals’, the blind man said. He sat up and rolled his head back and forth... ‘Maybe you could describe one to me? I wish you’d do it. I’d like that. If you want to know, I really don’t have a good idea.’ (1995: 304)

The story comes to a close with the three characters sitting around a television set. The wife falls asleep and the narrator is left alone with the blind man. “‘Are you ready to hit the hay?’”, the narrator asks. “‘No, I’ll stay up with you, bub. If that is alright. I’ll stay up until you’re ready to turn in. We haven’t had a chance to talk’” (1995: 302). So the two of them talk about what’s on TV. A documentary about cathedrals. And then something occurs to the narrator. “‘Do you have any idea what a cathedral is?’” he asks. “‘What they look like, that is? Do you follow me?’” (1995: 304). No, the blind man admits. He asks the narrator to describe one to him.

In Carver’s story the cathedral stands for the unknown other, as what exceeds finite meaning. It is just at the point when the narrator recognises the difficulty of defining the cathedral that he welcomes the blind man into his home: “‘I’m glad of the company’”, he admits (1995: 304). Just as for Lévinas the ‘I welcomes the Other that presents himself in my home’ by recognising that the ‘Other is not what we grasp or thematise’ (1969: 172), so the narrator expresses hospitality in awakening to the outside of linguistic identification:

I stared hard at the cathedral on the TV. How could I even begin to describe it? But say my life depended on it. Say my life was being threatened by an insane guy who said I had to do it or else. (1995 304)

The narrator’s attempt to describe the indescribable is experienced as a dispossession, as if he’s inhabited by an insane guy, recalling Critchley’s

‘Nebenmensch complex’. Drawing a formal correspondence between Lacan’s psychical Real and Lévinas’s ‘Other’, Critchley claims that the I is compelled to responsibility by awareness of a disturbing, unconscious Thing in the other person. The unknown in the other person makes a demand on me, interpellating that which is unknown in myself: ‘The Thing is something strange to me, though it is at the heart of me, as the excluded interior’ (Critchley 2012: 66). Towards the end of Carver’s narrative, the unknown demand of the other person does not overwhelm the narrator. Rather than sink into the abyss of inexplicable otherness, the narrator chooses to embrace the powers of signification, as he attempts to signify a cathedral:

‘To begin with, they’re very tall,’ I was looking around the room for clues. ‘They reach way up. Up and up. Toward the sky. Sometimes the cathedrals have devils and such carved on the front. Sometimes lords and ladies carved on them. Don’t ask me why this is’... ‘They’re really big,’ I said, ‘They’re massive. They’re built of stone... I’m sorry, but it looks like that’s the best I can do for you. I’m just no good at all.’ (1995: 304)

Here, the narrator’s attempt to signify the cathedral epitomises Carver’s singular way of capturing existence in his late writing, which becomes particularly prevalent towards the end of this story. Rather than dwell within a postmodern abandonment of meaning, Carver’s prose often exhibits faith in a certain communicability of language. As we have seen, in ‘On Writing’ Carver suggests that the writer should use ‘clear and specific language. The words can be so precise they may even sound flat, but they can still carry’ (2001: 92). In this story the cathedrals are defined in clear and specific terms: they are “‘built of stone’”, with “‘lords and ladies . . . carved on them’” (1995: 305). The cathedrals are “‘really big’”, “‘they reach up and up. Toward the sky’” (1995: 305). In Carver’s late so-called ‘realist’ writing his linguistic description is so simple that it does indeed seem to *carry*. Carver’s prose displays the flatness of the early minimalist writing, but without the

hard clipped sentences and silences – the linguistic cuts. It is through the flatness, the simplicity, that Carver's words *carry* the sense of something other, outside linguistic definition.

Thus, exhibiting the more representational qualities of the early unedited prose, Carver's writing binds meaning, but his prose is also informed by the minimalist edit, as the language approaches what is more radically outside of meaning. In this way, towards the end of 'Cathedral' Carver's later language appears to work more like Lacan's symbolic – where the symbolic order structures meaning but also points to the Real outside of it. Accordingly, in reading Lévinas in relation to Carver, Lévinas's notion of the other appears to be not as absolute as critics suggest – not entirely incompatible with the symbolic. For Eagleton, Lévinas's responsibility to the other is 'obligation without economy', it is 'beyond all reason and regulation', radically outside the symbolic order of meaning (Eagleton 2009: 232). Yet on close inspection, Lévinas states 'no interhuman relation can be enacted outside of *economy*' (1969: 172), and he states that respect for otherness is '*not* the entry of a sensible thing into . . . the ideal' (1969: 174; my italics): it is not a relation with an idealized, absolute other. Rather, in accordance with Lacan's symbolic order which approaches otherness through the mediating separation of language, Lévinas's responsibility is defined as an 'approach' while maintaining 'separation' (1969: 111, 170). Richard Ford captures this intimate distance beautifully when, speaking of Carver, he says, 'I come toward our friendship with caution and careful, unsummarizing forbearance' (Ford 1998). Indeed, what could be a better conceit for this symbolic dynamic of hospitality than Ford's description of their friendship as 'an informal and mutual deference that sometimes seemed courtly' (Ford 1998).

Another way in which hospitality towards the other emerges as symbolic in 'Cathedral' is through the *medium* of language itself, rather than its finite meanings, and in this way his language works like the early 'realist' prose. Happy just to "have a chance to talk" (1995: 302), the blind man isn't fussed about the precise meaning of the narrator's words, it is the narrator who is initially preoccupied with this. The narrator gets frustrated in his efforts to fully define a cathedral, but the blind man isn't bothered, stating, "I get it, bub. It's okay. It happens. Don't worry about it" (1995: 306). The two bond through the *act* of describing the cathedral, rather than its actual definition, in Levinas's terms, they bond through the Saying, through 'the very signifyingness of signification' (1974: 5). Similarly, the tapes that the wife and the blind man send to each other are important not simply because of the content of their words, but because of the act of talking ('She wanted to talk. They talked'; 1995: 293). This corresponds to Lévinas's claim that the 'generality' of the word 'institutes a common world' (Lévinas 1969: 174): the universality of words in themselves, as opposed to their specific meanings, institute collectivity. Drawing out the symbolic dimension of this generality of language, Agamben states that 'the possibility of human beings to experience the same communicativity, the same generic essence' lies in the linguistic space of 'mediality' (Agamben 2000: 114-5): it is the mediation and textuality of language, rather than its specific meanings, that fosters universal connectivity.

Community not only arises out of the median space of language in 'Cathedral', it also stems from the presentation of mediating social objects and activities. The narrator goes on to offer the blind man food, drink, a spliff. In contrast to the objects of heroic self-possession in Heidegger's being at 'home with oneself', in dwelling with the other Lévinas points to a whole set of tools that are social and

even hedonistic: a cigarette lighter, a fork, a cup. The mediating objects in ‘Cathedral’ are similarly collective and pleasurable. ‘I rolled us two fat numbers’, the narrator states, ‘I lit one and passed it. I brought it to his fingers. He took it and inhaled’ (Carver 1995: 300). For Arendt, ‘to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common [which] like every in between, relates and separates man at the same time’ (1999: 52). Likewise, in ‘Cathedral’ the cigarette *relates and separates*, conjoins and disjoins, moving between the narrator and the blind man, the self and the other. Some critics have claimed that Lévinas ‘rejects an ethics based on happiness and the good life’ (Eagleton 2009: 223-233). Yet I think this overlooks the pleasurable parts of Lacan’s imaginary that can be discerned in Lévinas’s ethics, while his ethics departs from its more destructive, narcissistic aspects. For Lévinas, ‘the autonomous being of enjoyment is discovered, in this very enjoyment to which it cleaves, to be determined by what it *is not*, but without enjoyment being broken up, without violence being produced’ (1969: 148: my italics). Thus, departing from Lacan’s *jouissance* of the imaginary, as the enjoyably destructive fantasy of merging with the other, Lévinas’s enjoyment arises from acknowledgment of otherness – of what the I ‘is not’ (1969: 148). As with Carver’s enjoyable relation of connection with separation, in Lévinas enjoyment can be seen to be inscribed with symbolic reserve: there is a ‘distance with regards to enjoyment’, Lévinas states, a ‘postponement of enjoyment’ (1969: 154).

This healthy symbolic separation from the other is staged in Carver’s presentation of visual partitions. As he attempts to depict an image of a cathedral, the narrator invokes visual boundaries:

‘They’re so big, some of them, they have to have these *supports*. To help *hold them up*, so to speak. These *supports* are called *buttresses*. They remind me of *viaducts* for some reason’. (1995: 304; my italics)

The etymological root of ‘viaduct’ is ‘the way, bridge or crossing’ (OED Online). In ‘Cathedral’, the viaduct figures for the supportive ethical bridge between the two characters: the ‘relation without relation’ that connects and separates self and other (Lévinas 1969: 80). Hospitality for Lévinas is opening up the dwelling place of being to the outside other, while keeping the boundaries firmly in place: ‘The possibility for the home to be open to the other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows’ (1969: 173); being is thus open to and separated from the other via the ethical space of the threshold. Concurrently, the narrator’s attempt at depicting the cathedral abounds with figures of thresholds: “‘flying buttresses’”, “‘great doors’”, “‘windows with arches’” (1995: 303). These visual thresholds also work like Lacan’s visual ‘screen’ – his symbolic frontier that separates the unknown Real of the other from a mergence with it in *jouissance*, so that the Real can be signified and the fantasy of mergence annulled (Žižek 1992: 13).

Carver’s early edited story ‘Neighbours’ explores fantasies about the other person’s private space (1995: 68-74). Asked to look after the Stones’s home next door, Bill and Arlene Miller frequently meet on the corridor in between the couple’s apartments, as if experiencing a certain *jouissance* from the split between themselves and the other. As we have seen, the threshold is a common spatial setting of Carver’s edited stories, with relationships enacted in porches, corridors, and garages. As we have seen with ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’, in the early edited stories liminal spaces tend to function like splits between the self and other, as the stories return again and again to the originary traumatic split of linguistic castration. But in

‘Cathedral’ the visual partitions start to work by forming connection and separation. Indeed, the narrator’s wife embodies this visual partition: “‘I may just sit here for a while between you two guys with my eyes closed’” (1995: 301), she says. At once visible and invisible, seen and yet failing to see, the wife both cements relations and forges distance between host and guest, creating openness to the other with separation.

Towards the end of ‘Cathedral’ this threshold space of hospitality that points to yet protects otherness doesn’t simply reside on a horizontal plane. It has a vertical dimension, suggesting a more radical otherness. As we have seen, when describing the cathedrals the narrator says, “‘They reach way up. Up and up. Towards the sky’”, he goes on, “‘In the olden days, when they built cathedrals, men wanted to be close to God’”. (1995: 304). “‘Up and up’”, the prepositions gesture at something but the reader fails to arrive at any determinate content. The ‘other approaches me’, Lévinas states, not only from the outside but from a ‘dimension of height’. Responsibility ‘breaks the *ceiling* of totality’ (1969: 171; my italics). In Carver, as in Lévinas, the height that gestures at a transcendent other has a theological dimension (Batnitzky 2004; Bloechl 2000). “‘Can I ask you something?’”, the blind man says to his host, “‘Are you in anyway religious?’” (1995: 305). To which the narrator responds, “‘I guess I don’t believe in it. In anything. Sometimes it’s hard. You know what I’m saying’” (1995: 305). The narrator’s difficulty in coming to terms with what is outside finite meaning is associated with a decline in religious belief: “‘In those olden days’”, the narrator states, “‘God was an important part of everyone’s life’” (1995: 305). According to Žižek, over the last eighty years or so the west has experienced a demise in the ‘Big Other’ – the symbolic order of social structures, institutions, and customs, in which religion plays a significant role (Žižek 1991: 12).

The loss of belief in religion as an outside system of authority, Žižek contends, has given rise to a dangerous fixation with the emptiness of being, resulting in increased attachment to private enjoyment (Žižek 1991: 237). In Carver's story, isolation and loss of a relation with something outside the self is captured by the medium through which the cathedrals are first revealed. Cathedrals were once a site of collectivity, where people joined together publicly in their relationship with something transcendental, but in Carver they are presented as commodified objects, consumed through the television set in the privacy of one's own home.

But the cathedral begins to point to something transcendental at the level of sensibility. "I got an idea", says the blind man, "We'll do something. We'll draw one together" (1995: 306). The narrator fetches something to draw with and the blind man 'ran his fingers over the paper. He went up and down the sides of the paper. The edges, even the edges. He fingered the corners' (1995: 306). Through the edges and corners the seam between the inside and outside is explored through the sense of touch. 'He found my hand', says the narrator, 'the hand with the pen. He closed his hand over my hand. "Go ahead, bub, draw", he said, "Draw, you'll see. I'll follow along with you. It'll be okay"' (1995: 306). The narrator and the blind man form a bond not by staring at each other and forgetting the world, but while holding hands, turning to the outside, to a third point – the image of the cathedral. This image, moreover, is *between* the inside and outside of representation. For some critics, Lévinasian ethics is too austere, 'too remote from the workaday sympathies of Hutcheson and Hume' (Eagleton 1999: 231). Yet reading Lévinas along with Carver reveals that infinite responsibility is not completely otherworldly, but arises in part out of corporeal compassion for the one close to hand (Lacan 1999: 75–80). It is at the level of sensibility that the self is awakened to the other's impenetrability: 'To be

at home with oneself in something other than oneself, to be oneself while living from something other than oneself, to live from . . . is concretized in corporeal existence' (1969: 164). Just as the narrator and the blind man form a 'relation without relation' (Lévinas 1969: 80) via their sensuous recognition of otherness, so for Lévinas the 'hand takes and comprehends, recognising the being of the existent at the same time as it suspends that being' (Lévinas 1969: 145).

Hospitality in 'Cathedral' also arises out of the reader's awareness of mortality that intimates alterity. The reader becomes attuned to the blind man's mortality when he first arrives in the house through the deathlike image of the 'eyelids that drooped and then snapped open again' (1995: 303). Indeed, the blind man and death are immediately elided in the opening lines of the story: 'His wife had died', we are informed, 'He was visiting the dead wife's relatives in Connecticut' (395: 292). For Lévinas, human finitude marks the outside of existence and comprehension, thereby awakening responsibility; death isn't the unmediated abyss, it is *signified* through the *body*. 'Death is embodied' (1969: 57), says Lévinas, and the 'body is my possession according as my being maintains itself in a home at the limit *between* interiority and exteriority', self and other (1969: 162; my italics).

In Carver's 'Cathedral', the reader is brought to the limit of comprehension through the deathly appearance of the other's face; the narrator, like the reader, cannot identify the blind man's face, and nor can we and the blind man 'read the expression on [his wife's] face as she slips off into death' (1995: 295). Here, we encounter Lévinas's 'face of the other', which 'comes from beyond the world, but commits me to fraternity' (1969: 215). But like Agamben's 'face' that stands at the threshold between 'what is properly one's own and what is common, what is internal

and what is external' (Agamben 2000: 98-99), the inscrutable face in 'Cathedral' forms a calling for responsibility that retains the boundary between self and other.

“I got an idea,” says the blind man, “We’ll do something. We’ll draw one together” (1995: 306). And so they draw. ‘He found my hand,’ says the narrator, ‘the hand with the pen. He closed his hand over my hand...“Draw, you’ll see. I’ll follow along with you. It’ll be okay”’ (1995: 306). “Close your eyes now”, the blind man implores (1995: 307). In the dark, their fingers entwined, the blind man and narrator begin to draw, encountering the threshold between seeing and not seeing, visuality and language, the sensible and transcendental. “Don’t stop now, Draw”, says the blind man, ‘So we kept on with it’ (1995: 307). For Lévinas the ‘home is the very opposite of the root’, it is an approach, ‘a disengagement, a wandering – that is the surplus of the relation with the other’ (1969: 169), and similarly ‘Cathedral’ evokes responsibility – in the reader and in the characters – through the *approach* towards otherness, not in a final meeting with the other. “I think that’s it, I think you got it”, says the blind man, “Take a look” (1995: 307). But the narrator resists a look. The ethical gesture, Agamben contends, is ‘not a means in view of an end’, nor ‘an end without means’, but ‘the process of making a means visible as such’ (Agamben 2000: 57). Accordingly, at the end of ‘Cathedral’ hospitality is the reader’s and the narrator’s awakening to the *process* of linguistic and visual presentation, its materiality, without arriving at any final representation of the other:

I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn’t feel like I was inside anything. It’s really something. (1995: 307)

In its curtailed sentences and grammatical repetitions, the final line of ‘Cathedral’ bears the imprints of the minimalist edit: the clipped lines interposed with gaps, and the paragraph cut that creates a space of emptiness. But there’s also a softening of the hard edit, as the pithy lines harbour an opaque materiality more redolent of the unedited writing. The indeterminate ‘anything’ slides into the indistinct ‘something’, as the ambiguous thingyness of the language is captured in the acoustic echo of the undefined ‘thing’. The more calcified otherness of the edit is softened, brought into a relation with signification. Just as in ‘Cathedral’ the expression of otherness takes place in a language that’s between the edited and unedited, which is also between radical alterity and linguistic meaning, so in the closing line the narrator is presented as neither inside his self, nor wholly outside, but in *between*, on the symbolic threshold with the other.

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Conclusion

Far from reaching a universal truth about the literary other, this thesis has argued that Carver's 'minimalist' and 'realist' writings open up different kinds of alterities, suggesting different forms of psychological otherness. The minimalist edit approaches the unsignified through a language that tends towards flatness and a quiet splitting of finite meaning and otherness, performing and continuously troubling the first traumatic cut of linguistic castration. The unedited harbours a more obviously representational language, where signs indicate signifieds without apparent disruption; yet otherness is subtly entwined within the material opacity of the language itself, Lacan's signifier. Both forms of writing thus approach the unsignified trauma, but in different ways. These different approaches have different implications for the presentation of the other – as that which exceeds finite meaning. The minimalist linguistic cut can give rise to a stuck fantasy of the enigmatic, unsignified other, or its flipside in the form of a paranoid, horrific thing. Yet these effects are absent from the unedited, which presents the other as more entwined with meaning, in a corporeal openness to alterity.

In distinguishing the edited, so-called 'minimalist' prose and the unedited 'realist' writing, I am aware that I could forge a splitting that accords with the split structuring that I have identified in Carver's minimalism. However, to collapse the differences would also be to perform the fantasmatic mergence with the other that can be a characteristic of the edited text. Instead, I hope to have distinguished the two stories not in terms of a polarised relation but with respect to subtle differences, born out in the different textual orientations: the singular demands and affects of the

edited and unedited texts. Furthermore, as we have seen, the distinctions between the edited, minimalist prose and the unedited, realist writing, are not absolute. ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ bears traces of the unedited story and ‘Beginners’ of the edited version. At times the edited and unedited versions of ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ overlap. Moreover, while one could see the quiet splitting of the minimalist aesthetic as forming *defence* against otherness, the same could be said for the more symbolically structured alterity of the unedited; in both forms, otherness is *mediated* through language, thus one could say that linguistic meaning inescapably defends against excess otherness – in different ways. The edited and unedited also overlap to the degree that minimalism homes in on the originary split that institutes the more symbolic discourse of the unedited; the difference being that rather than move into the differential bindings of symbolic signification, the minimalist edit tends to remain closer to the first cut, returning again and again to the traumatic lesion, whereas the unedited displays greater incorporation into the symbolic.

The later story ‘Cathedral’ exhibits the more representational, material language of the early, unedited work, but it also bears traces of Carver’s minimalism, as the two intersect. In this story, other forms of expression emerge, in the monstrous defying of determinate identificatory language, and in the list-like cataloguing. Consequently, the late so-called realist prose of ‘Cathedral’ deploys a language of symbolic expression and materiality, which opens up to the more radically unsignified alterity of the minimalist edit. This symbolisation of radical alterity has political and ethical implications. Through the conjunction of the imaginary and the Real (the more apparently realist and the minimalist), ‘Cathedral’ stages the monstrous conflation of private being and public; it also suggests the

biopolitical commodification of being. But through its symbolic gesturing at radical alterity, the story also fosters respect for what exceeds familiar modes of thought (Attridge 2004a: 123-126).

Most criticism on otherness and literature has focused on so-called 'innovative' work, more obvious ruptures of meaning (Attridge 2004a: 131). Departing from those critics who claim that realism tries to hide the discursive origins of narrative, whereas more disruptive texts shows these origins, I have avoided deploying the term 'otherness' as that which simply despoils the referential illusion of realism, as the term is often used. In my reading of the unedited Carver, otherness inheres in the very binding of the realist, representational prose – in the material substance of the language. Even in the minimalist edit, otherness is not a rupture of meaning, but a quiet insistence on the split that is also the foundation of symbolic representation. In attending to 'minimalist' and 'realist' forms of otherness, it has been my intention to shed some light on under-examined, quieter modes of literary alterity. I also hope to have dispelled the tendency to fetishise otherness as somehow outside representation, revealing the covert normative ethics inherent to such account of otherness. Here, my argument accords with Adorno, for whom 'The work of art cannot be the a-rational sheer object for which it is taken without ceasing to be a work of art' (Jarvis 1998: 103). Only identificatory thought would suggest that works of art are purely image-like, a-rational (Jarvis 1998: 105).

In eschewing the formulation of the literary other as radically outside linguistic meaning and so-called representational language, my reading of Carver has been informed by Adorno's account of the 'non-identical'. For Adorno, to discern the truth content of literature is to 'extrapolate what is insoluble in works of art', which he calls the 'non-identical', as what resists determinate identificatory thought (Jarvis

1998: 104). The non-identical always arises in specific relations *to identificatory thought*. Thus, literary works can no more be read with cavalier disregard for their literal meaning than they can be read with total literal mindedness (Jarvis 1998: 147). Just as for Adorno there is no pure sensation or non-identical which is utterly immediate and free from conceptuality, so in my reading of Carver I argue that there is no literary otherness free from linguistic meaning. In line with Adorno's non-identical, the literary otherness this thesis has explored is not a-rational, ineffable, devoid of any cognitive content, but always other in specific relations to determinate meaning. As in Adorno then, this thesis has considered the precise ways in which literary alterity is brought *in relation* to literary meanings, and the subtle differences in how this relation is formed in the edited and unedited Carver: on the one hand, a quiet splitting between finite meaning and more radical otherness, and on the other hand, an otherness that inhabits the very materiality of language, while the late 'realist' prose fosters symbolic gesturing at the unsignified.

As with Adorno, whose interest lies not in rejecting conceptual categories, but in showing the non-identical that resides within the identical, so it has not been my intention to do away with the designations 'realism' and 'minimalism' in a postmodernist abandonment of categorization. Formally, Carver's unedited writing is certainly 'realistic' in its tendency to conceal the gap between signifier and signified, words and so-called 'reality'; in this sense, it appears to have its roots more in the American realist tradition (as explored in the introduction). But a closer consideration of this 'representational' language reveals the alterity that resides within it – in its quiet folds of meaning. Likewise, Carver's minimalist prose indubitably operates according to pithy sentences and gaps in meaning, omission more than exposition, the external more than internal expression, and can thus be

associated with a whole American minimalist tradition, as explored in the introduction. But my interest has been to discern the specific psychological bindings at play in these formal qualities, which I have identified as linguistic castration and a form of splitting. Refining rather than simply abandoning the categories 'realism' and 'minimalism', I have therefore attempted to other these designations with respect to their psychological implications and in relation to the specific forms that they take in Carver's edited and unedited writings.

It goes beyond the scope of my thesis to extend my conceptions of Carver's minimalist and realist alterities to that of 'minimalism' and 'realism' in general. In accordance with Derrida and Attridge, it is only ever my intention to draw the general from the singular through close attention to Carver's specific writings; any such endeavour to examine and extend my reflections to other so-called 'minimalist' and 'realist' writings would of course be welcome – but goes beyond the remit of this current project. Again taking my lead from Attridge and Derrida, for whom the singular otherness of writing resides in singular readings of texts, my accounts of the minimalist and realist alterities have arisen from detailed readings of Carver's edited and unedited stories, with some reference to Carver's wider oeuvre.

Just as it has not been my aim to unthinkingly project the terms 'realism' and 'minimalism' onto Carver's writing, so I have tried to avoid mapping theory onto his literary texts. Resisting carrying out a reading in which a supposedly consistent methodology is mapped onto the literary text, like a kind of 'portable methodology' for literary criticism (Jarvis 1998: 91), I have taken heed of Adorno's suggestion that such an approach would be complicit with instrumental reason in its domination of the particular (or otherness). Eschewing a single conceptual theorization of Carver's work, I have employed what Adorno calls a 'constellation' of concepts (Jarvis 1998:

110), drawing on different lines of conceptual thought and considering the relations between them, as well their non-identical aspects. Furthermore, in avoiding instrumental readings, it has been my intention to read the theory in order to show what is other in Carver's literature, and to read Carver's writing to disclose what is other in the theory.

To this end, I have placed Carver's literary texts in relations of openness to the psychoanalytic and theoretical material, showing up the limits in the theory and the otherness in Carver's texts. The experience of reading 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' and 'Beginners' leads to re-readings Lacan's *whole* and *not-whole* relations to language, where the *whole* is not so much aligned with the symbolic, as with linguistic castration, and the *not-whole* is closer to the symbolic, but with respect to the literary otherness that inhabits its signifierness. Reading Lacan through Carver also shows up certain intersections between the *whole* and *not-whole* that Lacan refuses to permit. Carver's edited version of 'So Much Water So Close to Home' shows up the inflexibility of Leader's (and Lacan's) mutually exclusive demarcations of the neurotic and psychotic. In addition, whereas in Leader, splitting is a permanent state, in Carver it emerges as a response to anxiety. Instead of Leader's foreclosure of the symbolic, at times Carver's edited writing keeps out a certain fluidity of expression, but the rejection isn't absolute; and where for Leader 'everyday madness' blocks out disturbing alterity, Carver's flatness and quiet splitting also forms an approach to unsymbolised trauma. Likewise, Carver shows up a certain monolithic quality to Felman's 'madness of writing'. Reading Carver's correspondence through Lacan's account of transference shows his theorization as at times too rigidly determined by structural linguistic. It also reveals a hysterical dimension to Lacan's 'man's desire is the desire of the other'. Carver's

‘Cathedral’ sheds new light on Lévinas’s responsibility to the other, where the other does not pertain to an absolutely other domain; instead, the transcendental is always grounded in the concrete, the infinite other is founded in the finite.

In many ways, this thesis has shown literary otherness to be inscribed in *between* spaces – between finite meaning and a more radical otherness, between the materiality of signifierness itself; but also specific literary alterities emerge between theory and literature, and the theories themselves, as well as between Carver’s edited and unedited writing, and his early and later writing.

A strange othering of Carver’s writing also arises through the odd temporal experience of reading between the edited and unedited writing, which others the ‘minimalist’ and ‘realist’ alterities. While the unedited prose of ‘Beginners’ could be seen as the ‘original’ Carver, the story was published in 2009, later than the edit. And although the edited Carver was written after Carver’s original drafts, it is associated with the early Carver period (from 1976 to 1980). Reading the edited stories affects our reading of the unedited writing, and the unedited versions impact upon our reading of the edited stories, with implications for our understanding of different spaces of psychical alterity, as we have seen. Reading the edit in light of the unedited, for example, shows the linguistic cut to be the bedrock or foundation of the more fluid expression of the unedited stories, suggesting a stuckness at a specific traumatic moment that can become more liberated.

Speaking of the ‘traumatic’ otherness of some artistic representations, Foster argues that the ‘trauma is perhaps only seen in the repetition’ (Foster 1996: 240), by which he means, in the repeated presentation of the unrepresentable. Accordingly, perhaps it is only in reading the edited Carver in relation to the

unedited writing, and the unedited stories with respect to the edited prose, that one can begin to properly discern the alterities of each. Just as for Laplanche, 'it always takes two traumas to make a trauma' (Laplanche 1989: 88), so one might argue that the quiet psychological otherness of the original 'realist' prose only really emerges through reading the minimalist edit, and that Carver's 'realist' form of traumatic otherness also brings out the latent trauma in the minimalist edit.

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