



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

46 | Spring 2006

Special issue: Raymond Carver

Introduction

Vasiliki Fachard



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/486>

ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires d'Angers

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 March 2006

Number of pages: 19-30

ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Vasiliki Fachard, « Introduction », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 46 | Spring 2006, Online since 01 March 2006, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/486>

This text was automatically generated on 30 April 2019.

© All rights reserved

Introduction

Vasiliki Fachard

- 1 Commemorations, I once read, can often resemble an author's second funeral unless the work can continue to interrogate us as well as enable a new generation to (re)discover the force of its message. Although "special issues" need not by any means be commemorative (rigorous scholarship is by its nature oblivious to it), there was a more compelling reason why this volume could *not*. Dampening any celebratory thrust or inhibiting it from becoming another encomium to the "master" or the "American Chekhov" were the revelations by D. T. Max in the New York Times of August 1998, the stupor one felt from the very opening sentence of that article: "For much of the past 20 years, Gordon Lish, an editor at *Esquire*..., has been telling friends that he played a crucial role in the creation of the early stories of Raymond Carver." From this side of the Atlantic at least, it seemed that Carver's status in *American Letters* had been "rattled," the hagiographies stained. Should the issue focus on, glide over, or ignore the controversy and the new, glaring light it had come to shed on his work and reputation? The process of editing this volume really got under way when William Stull, the recognized authority on the subject and whom I asked to address the controversy, kindly agreed.
- 2 My deepest gratitude for his acceptance notwithstanding, my ruminations on his forthcoming edition of pre-Lish stories and Carver's work as it now stood continued. Could the narratives which had resulted from a process of intimate collaboration with Lish now extricate themselves from what had become their own *history*? Their past was part of their present state, their "process" part of their now "fixed position." Characteristic also of Carver was to seek the eye and the ear of the other – a double – in his own process of becoming a writer. Stories such as "Neighbors," "Collectors," "Viewfinder" and "Put Yourself in My Shoes," among others, attest to an uncanny *dédoublement* or often puzzling relation between two intimate strangers. If Lish had played the role of such an other, how could we now begin to deconstruct the fruit of that symbiosis? The neophyte in Carver who had consented to Lish's earlier cuts is ever joined to the writer who will ultimately, in full possession of his craft, seek to disconnect and liberate himself from the patriarchal presence of the other.

- 3 The formation of amber appeared to me a felicitous metaphor for the process that congealed or crystallized into the stories we have today. In going from the viscous, *jello-like* (Carver's word in "Viewfinder") resin found in the Baltic littoral to the adamantine hardness of a semiprecious gem stone, organic matter, such as tiny insects, was often caught in the process. Far from diminishing its value in Antiquity, such impurities caused wonder and made it all the more precious rather than flawed.¹ Thus process – in Carver's case one of exclusions rather than what minerologists call *inclusions* in the above geological phenomenon – can presumably be an active ingredient of a work's esthetic quality. Of course, Carver scholars and readers can only pray that the uncut stories will soon see the light. Juxtaposed to the Carver we now have, the two may yield to us what the narrator of "Viewfinder" sought from the man with the polaroid: a "motion shot" of the *tremolo* or oscillation between the two, a fuller gaze into the moving process of its construction, a possible glimpse at the kind of "material" Carver was appropriating, "collecting," during a fourteen-year correspondence and friendship with Lish. For the time being the "gems" at our disposal cannot be disowned by their author any more than could the "baby" or metaphorical oeuvre by the "father" in the eponymic story – no matter how strange or unrecognizable it may have looked to him (Carver) after Lish's slashes.

- 4 As this volume was taking final shape, I came across an article in the literary supplement of the Italian *Stampa* (September 3, 2005). Titled "Splendori, miserie, vite minime: da Balzac a Carver," it announced, along with the works of other European masters, the upcoming edition of *Tutti i racconti di Raymond Carver* by the prestigious Meridiani collection of Mondadori Press (comparable to the French *Pléiade* or *The Library of America*). I asked Gigliola Nocera, the editor of *Racconti*, for a contribution. She accepted instantly and with the same enthusiasm as all the writers in these pages. It is with her *Introduzione* as an *Appendice* that I felt this issue should close, as I mused over the resonance of an Italian title that placed the French master's *Splendeurs et misères* next to the American Carver's "minimal lives" in the land of Boccaccio, the master story-teller who, in Carver's words, "had invented the genre." Such illustrious company was not new for Carver. While visiting the bookstore across from the Sorbonne in the Fall of 1999, I stopped at the table displaying works of the authors chosen for the year's English section of the CAPES, the demanding nation-wide examination in France. There was Carver's work next to that of Shakespeare and Dickens. Would Myers (Carver) in "Put Yourself in My Shoes" continue to laugh at Morgan's veneration of the "old masters" if he knew that Europeans had included him in their pantheon? What was the seemingly antinomic connection between the birthplace of *Tel Quel* and Carver's view of the deconstructionists as "crazy" in *Conversations*? Had the Myers of "The Compartment" (also Carver in my reading of the story) intuited that his fiction was *destined* for such future recognition when his car was "uncoupled" and he no longer knew "where this train was going"? There is something of that intimation to be decrypted in the lines immediately following: "He had understood, at the time he purchased the ticket, that the train to Strasbourg went on to Paris. But he felt it would be humiliating to put his head into one of the compartments and say, 'Paree?' or however they said it – as if asking if they'd arrived at a *destination*" (emphasis added).

- 5 The above questions pointed to a broader conversation, *sotto voce*, between two continents, and Carver, once again, had encrypted a sub-story about that in the literary resonance of the axis of cities his train was traversing. In the parodic Jamesian tour of Europe Myers undertakes in “The Compartment,” “He had gone first to Rome,” then Venice, Milan and the border city of Strasbourg before continuing on to “Paris and fly [ing] home. He was tired of trying to make himself understood to strangers and would be glad to get back.” “Venice,” we are told, “had been a disappointment. There were grimy, water-stained buildings everywhere he looked.” At one point, Europe becomes to him insupportable: “...he looked out the window at this hateful place.” If this American’s impressions of Venice would have Henry James turning in his grave, part of the “old master” had not been oblivious to the possibility of a radical change or reversal of affairs in a projected future, as the following famous lines about his return to America show:

Here I am back in America...Here I am *da vero*.... My choice is the old world – my choice, my need, my life.... My work lies there – and with this vast new world, *je n’ai que faire*. One can’t do both – one must choose. No European writer is called upon to assume that terrible burden, and it seems hard that I should be. The burden is necessarily greater for an American – for he *must* deal, more or less, even if only by implication, with Europe; whereas no European is obliged to deal in the least with America. No one dreams of calling him lesscomplete for not doing so.... The painter of manners who neglects America is not thereby incomplete *as yet: but a hundred years hence – fifty years hence perhaps – he will doubtless be accounted so* (emphasis added). My impressions of America, however, I shall, after all, not write here.... In many ways they are extremely pleasant; but, Heaven forgive me! I feel as if my time were terribly wasted here!

- 6 If James wanted nothing to do (*je n’ai que faire*) with the American continent, “a hundred years” later Carver (who said, “You’re not your characters, but your characters are you”) also tells us through an irreverent Myers, that his fiction has everything to do with the new “American scene.” He reaffirms his position in “The Train,” another mysterious story in which an old man with “white hair and a white silk cravat” is evocative of an aged Randolph in *Daisy Miller*. If he is uncannily also waiting at a train station “without shoes,” it is to better feel his native ground, far from “that tribe” of earlier expatriates whose “existence is taken up with café au lait and cigarettes, their precious Swiss chocolates....” Juxtaposed to Carver’s recognition by the literati of Rome and “Paree,” the above signaled a definite reversal of an old hierarchical order – in literature as elsewhere. Europe was now dealing with an American writer on his grounds and not with one who looked to the older tradition for his “material.” If my view of Carver’s itinerary to the territory of the “old masters” as a dominant subtext in his fiction holds, my next question then is, is there anything to commemorate in that?

- 7 Turning now to the present assessments of a work inexorably fixed in time, one can discern that in spite of the diversity of angles the authors have chosen, their eyes often meet, their fields of vision intersect. “Neighbors” are thus formed. The linear order in which they appear in this volume consequently contains “couples,” converging on some points while diverging on others. Opening the issue is Charles May with his analysis of “Put Yourself in My Shoes,” a complex narrative that was Carver’s story about a writer as well as on the writing process itself. While focusing on “Put Yourself,” however, the author of *Short Story Theories* provides us with a theoretical survey, spanning the Russian

formalists and other critics, of a story's intrinsic doubleness: its mere "description" of events and "narration," *récit* and *histoire*, story and plot, the "bits of details" of the former and the mysterious process of "transforming them into significant parts of an artistic coherent whole" that gives life to the narrative. What Morgan, the academic who is opposed to the writer, cannot understand is that the three stories he tells as a series of events throughout the evening do not constitute such a whole. He thus becomes the object of Myers's laughter and derision. To understand the writerly process which escapes him, Carver turns to the reader, asking him to put himself in the writer's shoes.

- 8 One would be hard put to disagree with May's assessment of Morgan and Myers as representatives of the two axes of the story. The minimal events which form the linear thread of Morgan's sequence of stories are not enough to explain the spell it casts on the reader, nor the process of giving those events what May calls a "poetic life" irreducible to the "real story" of what actually happened. Equally difficult to refute is May's citing of Lukacs that "the short story [and "Shoes"] contains cryptic, elliptical mysteries of human experience that cannot be explained by rational means." Where my reading of the same story diverges from May's is in the precise function of that reader, whom I see not merely as an observer but as an active participant in the writer's process. To participate, however, is not to "explain" what the writer himself does not know, as Carver, who liked to "mess around" or "tinker" (Carver's word for Jakobson's *bricolage*) with a story, himself admitted: "Maybe I revise because it gradually takes me into the heart of what the story is *about*. I have to keep trying to see if I can find that out. It's a process more than a fixed position." It is in the act of writing that a writer can hope to know anything, as Carver once again tells us in *Conversations*: "...how do I know what I want to say until I see what I've said?" It follows that the process which the reader is solicited to observe contains "matter" which escapes the writer's cognition, "signals" pointing to the unconscious forces which so often erupt and fissure Carver's "smooth (but sometimes broken) surface" of mimesis. Manifesting themselves in the form of a *lapsus*, anagrams, gaps, or other semantic incoherencies, such signals constitute the "material" for the construction of a reader's *other* story, one that will write Carver as much as he writes it. Thus for both writer and reader, "To truly know A is to make (*faire*) A," as Valéry iterates in his *Cahiers* (II 1041). Knowing is an act and not contained in any verbal sequence.
- 9 Also focusing on the unconscious forces clinging underneath the mimetic surface of a story is Randolph Runyon's "Dreams and Other Connections among Carver's Recovered Stories." While my essay tries to reconstruct a story from the plethora of parts under its "broken" referential surface, however, Runyon is drawn to the "connections" linking all of them. In a clearly Freudian reading, he perceives the connecting parts as being analogous to the "residue" used in the "dream process," ever "recycled" or woven into the material of subsequent stories. Having shown such "connections" in his book *Reading Raymond Carver*, Runyon returns to tell us, with no less brio, that the posthumous stories published in *Call If You Need Me* are unmistakably Carver in so far as they also yield similar connecting links to form what he once called "intratextuality." If his connections, do not *explain* what the stories are *about*, they cast much light on them as they cross and intersect with each other, as well as on what is so often suggested rather than made explicit in a Carver text. Thus, the pervasive hatred of a father toward a son that we see in his fiction and poetry is obliquely expressed in the fire that consumes a child in a (childless) wife's dream as well as a neighbor's children in the posthumous story "Dreams." The hidden "wish" of the husband is thus being "fulfilled." Runyon's reading

goes a long way toward elucidating Claire's sudden ellipsis in "So Much Water So Close to Home": "There is a connection to be made of these things, these events, these faces, if I can find it. My head aches with the effort to find it." In searching to find "it" Runyon unveils much of what Carver himself insisted on calling "obsessions" rather than "themes" in his work.

- 10 Contrapuntal to the focus on the unconscious forces at work in Carver's narratives is Daniel Lehman's essay. His article, which first appeared in *JSE* in Autumn 1991, constituted a response to the postmodern critics of the 1980s who, in a climate of rampant postmodernism, claimed Carver as one of their own. Struck by the freshness and continuing relevance of Lehman's position after reading it more than a decade later, I asked him for permission to reprint it. Situating him squarely within the realist tradition, Lehman argues that Carver's "rhetorical rein over objects and events" is "deeply controlling." Far from suspecting the referentiality of words or creating "ambiguity," Carver's "symbolic strategy resolves" it. Where postmoderns see "entropy," he discerns a "meticulously crafted order in which facts offer reliable symbolic guideposts for the reader." The fact that his characters often do not see those "guideposts" does not absolve the reader from seeing and trying to "make sense" out of them. Such "guideposts" to the nature and flux in the relationship of Edna and Wes are the clouds and other "meteorological signs" in "Chef's House."
- 11 Prompted to apply Lehman's arguments to the above story, this reader can see still another symbolism in the name "Chef" for the owner of the house he was letting them have "for almost nothing." If the two characters have not given that name a thought, its intent is unambiguous from the beginning: the irresponsible couple ("Wes had quit his girlfriend, or she'd quit him - I didn't know, didn't care") cannot make a viable, clean start in life so long as they remain impervious to the fact that the house, along with the responsibilities it carries and they refuse to assume, is not theirs. Edna has a glimmer of the above when Chef comes "in his big car" to tell them they must move out and she finds herself saying, "He dropped his hat and gloves on the carpet and sat down in the big chair. *Chef's* chair, it occurred to me. *Chef's* carpet, even.... I sat down on *Chef's* sofa..." (emphasis added). There is little doubt for the reader that Chef is the head (*caput*) and master of this house and - unlike Wes - of his life as well. Lehman's quasi-diametrical opposition to my own essay's view of a writer who only half-knows what his stories are about, thus reducing his capacity to control his own process, takes nothing away from the cogency of his arguments nor from the force of his riposte to the postmoderns - then and now.
- 12 A common subject links Arthur Bethea's "Now This Is Affirmation of Life: Raymond Carver's Posthumously Published Stories" to Runyon's "Connections," also in the posthumous work. The similarity seems to stop there, however. For unlike Runyon's search for hypogean material that Carver recycles from one story to the next, the author of *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction of Raymond Carver* comes to remind us - and especially myself - that his fiction is referential and not only self-regarding, filled with human subjects and not merely describing a scriptor monitoring his own unconscious as he gazes at a process that structures itself. As Carver himself said, "Fiction that counts is about people. Does this need saying? Maybe. Anyway, fiction is not, as some writers believe, the ascendance of technique over content." This is not to say that technique is absent or minimized in the posthumous stories analyzed by Bethea, whose essay swarms with symbolic references. His focal point, however, remains on the characters, whom he

now finds “much more economically, intellectually, psychologically, socially, and even spiritually endowed.” He seems to leave out no details in pointing to the “amazingly expanded world” resulting from their new acquiescence, or self-control when coping with marital problems, thwarted expectations, or “devastating personal loss.” The former menacing forces, in other words, are still there, yet the characters rarely succumb to despair even when they cannot altogether subdue them. Appeasement and reconciliation are prevalent, even when violence looms near: in the fire that burns a neighbor’s house in one story, a house in another; it is also present in a wife’s dream. In “Dreams,” for example, Mary’s two children used to sell “seeds,” a sign of resurrection, before their death in the fire. They, as all children in the posthumous stories, are “passionately loved” by their mother, what constitutes a change in Carver country. Rebirth is also seen in the “spring,” the season Mary, whose name is associated with love, speaks of actually planting the seeds they left behind. Culturally more “endowed,” she also listens to Scriabin while reading *Great Expectations*.

- 13 One question that arises after reading so much evidence of an “attitudinal shift” in the climate of the posthumous stories is what prevented Carver from publishing them during his lifetime. Could it be that such mellowed characters, suspended between the existential fears of earlier stories and the grip Carver will manage to have on his own life in a near future, mark a stage “in-between,” a phase of “collecting” “kindling” (the title of the first story) material that will be used in the later “fires” of creation? Are we to see them as bearing (or being) the “seeds” that will germinate into (the) later stories? Whatever the answer to the above, the questions Bethea asks along with his “affirmations” are most engaging.
- 14 Sandra Kleppe’s study of “Women and Violence in the Stories of Raymond Carver” shares with Bethea a segment of the visual field through which both regard human subjects within a social framework and reality. Within that field, however, she zooms in on women in particular and on the violence which they either submit to or perpetrate themselves. For women who “send dishes...smashing and scattering across the floor,” “throw a pan against a wall over the sink,” or even inflict a gunshot wound on a husband “for not meeting his payments,” violence performs a “communicative” function: it is a necessary vehicle through which they express a long-muffled “dissatisfaction with roles and norms prescribed to the two sexes.” Therapeutic as well, it enables them to achieve some control over their lives and move on to another phase. Focusing at the end of her essay on “So Much Water,” Kleppe presents the narrative as a “fictional recording” of an actual series of murders perpetrated in or around the Naches River, where the story’s female corpse was found by Claire’s husband and his fishing companions. Undoubtedly aware of the murders in his native Northwest, Carver transfers the dangers and violence targeting women to both versions of “So Much Water.” Kleppe brings out a significant change in the longer version, however, when Claire refuses to yield to her insensitive husband’s demand for sex. It is a sign that she has made a step toward affirming her “independence and concern with the issue of women’s brutalization.” Claire’s move parallels a similar one in a society’s acknowledgement of domestic violence and its consequent metathesis from the private to the public sphere: “In 1988, significantly, the year of Carver’s death, the U.S. Surgeon General declared domestic abuse as the leading health hazard to women.” By linking women’s violence to a very precise social context, Kleppe shows the proximity of a literary discourse to a social one. Within the literary one, however, other readers may see a significant contrast with Hemingway. If the old realist could write *Men*

Without Women, Carver could only write with, for, or about women, seldom with or about men alone. As the “old guy” who dances with the younger woman in “Why Don’t You Dance?” intimates, there is always “His side, her side” in almost every Carver story. Women, Kleppe reminds us, were not merely present in Carver’s fiction but had also a compelling story to tell. Carver parts company with the old master at least on that issue.

- 15 “I’m not given to rhetoric or abstraction in my life, my thinking, or my writing,” Carver had said in his conversation with Larry McCafferey and Sinda Gregory in 1984, “so when I write about people I want them placed within a setting that must be made as palpable as possible.” In “Houses of Identity: Inhabiting and Emerging from Despair,” Hilary Siebert explores such settings or houses as “palpable” spaces people do not merely inhabit, statically, but which are dialectically bound with their identity, as they also propel their process of becoming. He affirms that there is a “dynamic movement between structures which house being and those which allow it to expand outward and emerge into new spaces.” For Siebert “characters undergo experience in highly particular physical situations and settings: a house..., a kitchen..., or a bed,” spaces which echo Carver’s answer to William Stull’s question “Can poetry open doors?” in *Conversations*: “The door to the kitchen, the door to the living room, the door to the closet. Even the bathroom! And if it’s locked, why not open it?” Thus Wes and Edna’s short-lived experience in “Chef’s House” is inextricable from the house they rent, Bill and Arlene Miller’s from the “transformative” possibilities of the house of their “neighbors”; the narrator’s vision of the private space of his house will be irrevocably altered after having a “glimpse” of the monumental structure and spiritual resonance of a cathedral in the eponymic story. Readers can continue the long list of residences which open doors to the “differing kinds of reality and the nature of experience in Carver’s stories.” It can even be stretched in my view to include characters deprived of residences altogether, or on the hop from one to another. Such are the Holits in “The Bridle,” the three people waiting at a station in “The Train,” and Myers in the moving train of “The Compartment.” Beyond them there is *poetic space* itself (Gaston Bachelard’s eponymous work inspired Siebert), the writer’s own “house of fiction.” Siebert has opened many doors to future studies of space in Carver.
- 16 Coupled with the above notion of space is that of time, to which Harold Schweizer is drawn in “Waiting in Raymond Carver’s ‘A Small, Good Thing.’” The essay’s virtuosity or articulate attempts to grapple with a temporality that escapes words – such as the emptiness of “waiting” for a son to wake up from a coma, the nothingness of his loss, the parents’ and baker’s attainment of a “temporality where waiting is no more endured, where time is no longer” – attest to a highly philosophical and not so often encountered “window” into Carver’s fiction. Pointing no less to Schweizer’s penchant for the abstract and philosophical are his references to Bachelard, Bergson, Levinas, as is his grasp of their concepts of *mémoire* and *durée*. Simultaneously, however, his essay is not to be reduced to mere metaphysical pirouettes or excursions into an abstract territory. For Schweizer also makes those excursions “palpable” by *localizing* time into three spaces: the waiting room in which Scotty’s parents seek to “harness” it to their own “human desires,” where “waiting” is “expectation”; the parking lot and its indifference to their hope; the bakery with its cathedral-like ceiling and “unexpected plentitude” following the child’s death, the place where “the empty planes of duration are suddenly gathered up in an impromptu celebration.” As he yokes temporality to the passage of Scotty’s parents from one “locus” to another, ever fusing its movement with a “symbolic space,” Schweizer also draws our attention to the scientific dimension of such a fusion, one which

Tess Gallagher also intimated in *Remembering Carver*: “Carver’s stories had the kind of impact on American fiction that Einstein’s theory of relativity had on science. We couldn’t quite fathom how it worked, but it changed the way we regarded the lives of middle-class working people.” Time and space are as inextricable from matter for the scientist, as they are from the “material” of the artist. The correlation can be extended to “The Compartment,” where the *lost* chronometer or “watch” Myers was to give his son and his *lost* destination when the train was uncoupled in Strasbourg, a city of linguistic crossings and fusions, work hand in glove.

- 17 The above story – cited by me often enough in these pages – shows an uncanny resemblance to a French *nouveau roman* which also takes place exclusively on a train. Michel Butor’s *LaModification* (1957) is also about a trip during which the protagonist changes his mind and decides not to abandon his Parisian wife for Cécile, the mistress waiting for him in Rome, the train’s place of destination. Curiously, the last word of the novel is *compartment*. Carver’s Myers reverses the direction, from Rome to Paris. Could he have read or known of the novel, or are the similarities a *pur hasard*? Be it as it may, the *nouveau roman* and most notably its critics (its most zealous defender being Roland Barthes) did impose their presence on American criticism in the twenty years before Carver’s death. If they also turned English departments into what Jay McInerney in *Remembering Ray* calls “a battleground between theorists and humanists, [as] poststructuralism lay heavy upon the campus,” the last article by Claudine Verley can be seen as representative of a new narratological approach many of the above theorists imported from France. If the import often suffers in transit – and the method sometimes turns into a sterile exercise – her essay makes clear that such an approach is simply *native* to her.
- 18 With Claudine Verley’s “Errand,” or Raymond Carver’s Realism in a Champagne Cork,” we move from content, or *what* (and who) goes in his fiction to *how* Carver manoeuvres narrative devices (voice, point of view...) in order to say something about Chekhov and the act of writing. No brief summary here could do justice to her vastly intricate and multi-levelled analysis of Carver’s exploration of narrative “performance” as he weaves a new hypertext from the elements of the implicit hypotext. In the process of shifting or modulating his narration from one to the other, Carver has taken the reader from the “exclusively autobiographical” narrative territory and its “polyphony” of voices (from “diary, memoir, letters and press release”) in the beginning of “Errand” to a single, subjective viewpoint of an “openly fictional character.” The “second narrative voice [in] the second story” is that of Olga, Chekhov’s wife, who, after instructing the bellboy to go and bring a mortician to the room in which Chekhov has just died drifts off into an image or story in which she – possibly the actress in her – fancies her “errand” being executed: “He was to behave exactly as if he were engaged on an important errand...he should imagine himself as.... The mortician...was a man of restraint and bearing.... The mortician takes the vase of roses.... Chekhov, you say? Just a minute, and I’ll be with you.” At this point, the fictive image she has been concocting of a situation she infuses with solemnity is broken when the bellboy’s eye takes in the champagne cork, a trivial object from the *real* rather than imaginary world. With it, reality also erupts into Olga’s fictional space, collapsing it like a “house of cards.” It thus supplies “Errand” with “a lesson in realism” Chekhov would have undoubtedly liked and which is also Carver’s way of paying homage to his own master. By exploring the narrative strategies used to stitch together a story in which fiction and reality interpenetrate, Claudine Verley has demonstrated, in a dynamic

rather than static narratological fashion, *what* the story itself is also about: “What could be the subject of such a story,” she asks in her closing paragraph “*except* the process of writing and the nature of the realism that links the two writers in the same tradition?” With her ending Claudine Verley brings this issue full circle to the point where the American critic Charles May had opened it with his focus also on the writing process, in which Carver tells the reader, “Put Yourself in My Shoes.” Lastly, since “connections” are what this introduction is much about, Carver may not have known Baudelaire as well as he did Flaubert. Nevertheless, in the idiomatic expression of the above title there is a distant literary echo of the symbolist addressing the reader as *mon semblable, mon frère* in his prologue to *Les Fleurs du mal*.

- 19 If the presentation of the essays ends with Claudine Verley’s study, the volume itself, as stated earlier, closes with Gigliola Nocera’s *Introduzione* to the forthcoming *Tutti i racconti*, Carver’s work a neighbor to Balzac’s. As introductions often go (and epilogues too, for that matter), it does not provide us with a single aperture to Carver’s work, as do all the other contributions, but with something for which, once again, Carver had a word: a “territorial vista.” As such, it will serve best as this volume’s epilegomena, a contribution for which I am most grateful to the Italian critic, as I am to all the Carver scholars who precede her. As for its prologue, I am indebted to William Stull and Maureen Carroll, not only for their generosity in accepting to write it, but also for their encouragement and collaboration from the initial stage of this editing process. Their presence and editorial authority, along with the rich reflections to be found in all the essays, can only help to make this issue a tribute to the Carver of both continents. (Is “tribute” much different from “commemoration”?)²

NOTES

1. The “ant” and “bee in amber” images found their way into Martial’s *Epigrams*: “While an ant was wandering under the shade of the tree of Phaeton, a drop of amber enveloped the tiny insect; thus she, who in life was disregarded, became precious by death” (bk VI, ep. 15); “The bee is enclosed, and shines preserved, in a tear of the sisters of Phaeton, so that it seems enshrined in its own nectar. It has obtained a worthy reward for its great toils; we may suppose that the bee itself would have desired such a death” (bk. IV, ep. 32).
2. I am grateful to the Helm Fellowship Committee at Indiana University for a grant that permitted me to consult the Carver archives at the Lilly Library. I would especially like to offer my warmest thanks to Breon Mitchell, its Director, as well as to all the other members of the Library staff for their efficiency and hospitality. They helped make my stay there memorable.