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# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Buried Cities and Buried Dreams in Raymond Carver's 'Beginners' and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*

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### Abstract:

The fiction of Raymond Carver has been described as set in a generic, small town setting, a 'Hopelessville' that could be anywhere in the USA. This article considers this premise by exploring the role of place and mobility in Carver's 1981 short story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and its manuscript, published as 'Beginners'. Both are included in *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories* (2009). A survey of the city toponyms in the manuscript shows the majority are located in the states of Washington, California, and Oregon. Several references to cities were cut in the editing process, as well as passages where place and mobility relate to plot and character development. However, in both the manuscript stories and the edited stories, the narrator's setting is often anonymous, 'shallow', or 'placeless', while named places are somewhere else, appear as future dream destinations, or are unattainable or 'buried' in past temporal layers. The mobility of the characters, their reliance on a 'next place' as a remedy, and their disappointment reflect features of a changing, increasingly mobilised, society, for example in the US West, connecting the stories to 1970s geographers' thoughts on place and placelessness.

**Keywords:** Raymond Carver; 'Beginners'; What We Talk About When We Talk About Love; Gordon Lish; place; cities.

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## Introduction

Raymond Carver's (1938-1988) fiction has been described as set in an ambiguous small-town or suburban area that could be anywhere in the USA. According to Chad Wriglesworth, it is a relatively new critical impulse to consider Carver's fiction in relation to place, because until recently it has been Carver's minimalistic style that has occupied critics. In Donald Newlove's 1981 review, Carver's short-story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* is called 'tales from Hopelessville' (Newlove 1981: 71). In Wriglesworth's view, this may give readers the impression that the stories are set in generic locations and are 'void of geographical significance' (2013: 19). Carver's stories have been dissociated from a specific region in some recent writings as well. John M. Findlay excludes Carver from his article 'Something in the Soil? Literature and Regional Identity in the 20th-Century Pacific Northwest', because the short stories 'tend to not be set in any recognizable Northwest' (2006: 180; Wriglesworth 2013: 19). In a 2015 essay, Laurence Goldstein comments that Carver and other minimalist authors launched a new 'K-Mart realism' in the 1970s and 1980s with 'bland, identical landscapes and cityscapes, Anywhere USA, where characters with tough surfaces and few depths enacted rituals of conflict in condensed and generic popular narratives' ('Charles Baxter and MQR', para. 5).

Wriglesworth argues that it is possible to find new contexts for discussing place in relation to Carver's work if one moves beyond his most anthologized work to lesser-known stories, poetry, and essays (2013: 19). This article finds a new context for discussing place in Carver's work by comparing *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (first published in 1981; henceforth *WWTA*) to the 1980 manuscript from which it developed, 'Beginners' (Carver 2009: 221-326; 749-953). The manuscript stories have received less scholarly attention than *WWTA*, which was Carver's breakthrough collection. Is there a void of geographical significance in the manuscript as well, and what is it about the stories that make them seem set in an unrecognizable 'Anywhere, USA'? There are fewer city toponyms in *WWTA* and some passages where place played an important role in relation to plot or character development were cut during the editorial process. Still, there is a generic quality or ambiguity of place also in the manuscript. The setting of the narrative is often left unnamed or 'shallow', while cities that are 'buried' in the past or referred to as future dream destinations are named. Characters seem to lack a strong sense of attachment to their homes: they are, as we will see, often newcomers or on their way to the next place. The stories describe characters trying to 'find their place' in life both figuratively and on the map: a sense of *placelessness* mirrors their distress in a time of crisis. Some of the unedited stories in 'Beginners' seem to deal with similar concerns regarding place and belonging that contemporaneous human geographers discussed. Relevant for the scope of this article are Yi-Fu Tuan's comments on city corruption and rural virtue in *Topophilia* (1974) and Edward Relph's definition of *placelessness* as a quality found in standardized landscapes, anonymous sites, and exchangeable environments in *Place and Placelessness* (Relph 1976, in Seamon and Sowers 2008: 46). To conclude, this article considers if the mobility of the characters in 'Beginners' and *WWTA* and their reliance on a 'next place' as hope or a remedy are characteristics that situate the stories in the West.

I will start by giving some background information about Carver's collaboration with his editor Gordon Lish, before comparing 'Beginners' and *WWTA* in terms of city toponyms and place relations. Then I will explore some of the parallels between the collection and human geography, and as a final point there will be a discussion considering disappointment, hope and mobility in the West.

### **What Collaboration Changed: Comparing 'Beginners' and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love***

*WWTA* became well-known for its minimalist style, but its manuscript, 'Beginners', was not as bare-boned as the edited version (Stull and Carroll 2006: 13). The Library of America published 'Beginners' in *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories* in 2009, making it easy to compare the manuscript to *WWTA*. During the 1970s, Gordon Lish, then fiction editor at *Esquire*, published Carver's stories in the magazine and promoted him to agents and publishers. In 1977, Lish left *Esquire* for a position at the publishing house Alfred A. Knopf. Gordon Lish edited 'Beginners' and it was published by Knopf as *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981 (13-14). The cuts made during the editing process often amount to several pages: for example 'A Small, Good Thing' was renamed 'The Bath' and shortened from thirty-seven pages to twelve, and overall, the word count of the collection was reduced by 55 per cent. The omitted passages usually relate to character development, plot, and figurative language (Stull and Carroll 2009a: 991-92, see also Monti 2007). Shortly after Carver received the finished text, he sent a letter to Lish begging him not to publish the severely edited collection. However, the contract remained in force, Lish made further cuts to the stories, and changes that Carver proposed in his letters (many that had to do with restoring passages) were not implemented (Stull and Carroll 2009a: 996-98). In 1983, Carver restored some of the stories to their fuller form in *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories* (Stull and Carroll 2009b: 974).

Carver's fiction has been categorized as Minimalism, Dirty Realism, New Realism, and Hyperrealism (March-Russell 2009: 236). Common to these genres is a tendency to write sparsely of 'regional and working class characters in a post-industrial economic context' and utilise elements of 'urban isolation and non-communication' (236). In the years following the publication of *WWTA*, critics often focused on its minimalism – a term Carver in an interview associated with 'narrow vision and limited ability' (Tromp 1984, in Gentry and Stull 1990: 80). Adam Meyer likened the evolution of Carver's style to an hourglass: wide and expansive at the beginning of his career, then narrow or minimalist, and widening out again in the 1983 publication of *Cathedral* (1989: 239).

Due to the sheer extent of cuts, it is not surprising that passages relating to place and place relations were among those omitted. It is hard to say to what extent this was a conscious effort of the editing process without a comprehensive knowledge of the lived world of the Carver-Lish collaboration, such as phone calls, letters and proofs.<sup>1</sup> Gordon Lish has stated that he wanted to increase a 'peculiar bleakness' of the stories (Stull and Carroll 2009a: 991). The result, according to Enrico Monti, is that Lish turned the collection into a 'deadpan, homogenous whole' (2007: 67). In Monti's view,

Lish deliberately set out to dehumanize the stories and decontextualize them by expelling geographical coordinates, reducing scenarios to their basics, and omitting names and the few references to renowned people—as if to make the stories *topoi* of a modern, hopeless life. (2007: 69)

Assessing the effects of the collaboration is also complicated because of the genealogy of the stories: some were published several times, stories closer to their manuscript form were published before *WWTA*, different versions were circulated at the same time, and stories were published again in unabridged form after *WWTA* (Monti 2007: 55-56). Carver's letter to Lish, and the choice to re-publish stories suggest that he preferred the full-length versions. Still, seeking authorial intentions in modern texts is a complex matter, for as McGann (1999) observes, a manuscript's formal features may not align closely with an author's final intentions.

Evenson aptly describes the Carver-Lish collaboration as a dilemma. On the one hand, the editing was very aggressive, but on the other, Lish was a 'promoter, editor, and publicity agent rolled into one, bringing Carver attention he would not have otherwise' (2018: 92, for more on the Carver-Lish controversy see e.g. Max 1998; Stull and Carroll 2006, 2009a and 2009b; Carver 2007; Monti 2007). The aim of this article is not to generalize about the Lish-Carver collaboration; instead, it explores and compares how place was edited into and out of the short story collection.

### **Buried Cities: Short Stories and Geographical Contexts**

The short stories in 'Beginners' and *WWTA* capture characters in moments of transformation or crisis. The motives of the characters and the circumstances leading up to these events are explained in greater detail in the manuscript: simply put, there is more 'context' in 'Beginners'. Monti, who has compared the two in terms of titles, cuts, syntactical and lexical changes, and endings, points out that characters refuse to 'think out loud' in *WWTA* (Monti 2007: 60). In my view, this refusal emphasizes the importance of the setting, as one instead seeks clues about the characters in the description of their surroundings. This is not an unusual technique for short stories, in which features are often combined for the sake of economy. For example, a spatial journey also becomes an emotional quest in Rudyard Kipling's 'They' (March-Russell 2009: 137), and in Margaret Jean Steffler's analysis of Alice Munro's "What Do You Want to Know For?" a breast lump 'coexists with the narrator's observations of the scientific and aesthetic qualities of the landforms of her home country, particularly the kame moraine. The interplay and parallels of geological and human energy form the shape of the narrative' (2017: 95).

In Carver's 'Why Don't You Dance', a man has moved his furniture from the inside of the house to the outside lawn for a yard sale, and arranged it exactly as it was indoors, e.g. the nightstand is beside the bed on 'His side' and 'her side' (Carver 2009: 751). He is drinking, and his loneliness and the yard sale implies that he is going through a break-up or divorce. A young couple driving by decide to stop for the yard sale and a series of events involving the items for sale ensue: the young couple try the bed, and the girl dances with the man to the music of a record player. Instead of spelling out the steps of falling in and

out of love, the inner and outer worlds in the story frame each other and give each other meaning. As Martin Scofield observes:

Carver's stories show a marked absence of metaphor or simile, but his method is instead metonymic. Everyday objects take their place in the story in a descriptive, realist manner, relating to each other in a mode of contiguity both in the 'world' of the story and in the syntax of its sentences. But they often come to take on a quasi-symbolic significance in the characters' lives. (2006: 229)

The literary geographer Marc Brosseau points out that short stories can afford to mention only a limited number of places due to their condensed form, and 'those that do appear are often stereotyped, generic and easily recognizable to the reader. There is no room for lengthy description of place and its multiple meanings'. However, because of this limited number of place references, 'those that do appear in the text acquire considerable meaning and importance for the action and the narrative development' (2008: 382). Because the settings become easily recognizable, it is possible for them to function thematically (Hones 2010). Brosseau has identified spatial situations he calls 'traps' in the short stories of Charles Bukowski. From these 'traps' – the home, the workplace and the streets – events emerge. These settings are generic, in that they are easily recognizable and lack thick descriptions (Brosseau 2008; Hones 2010).

Comparably, the stories in 'Beginners' and *WWTA* are often set in recognizable settings such as suburban or small-town homes, backyards, motels, and airports which are not described in depth or richness. Is it possible to establish a wider geographical context for stories set in such generic settings? The manuscript includes many references to cities. Twelve of the seventeen short stories in 'Beginners' include city toponyms, some of which were omitted or replaced in *WWTA*. Most cities mentioned in the collection are located in California, Washington, and Oregon, which was familiar territory for Carver. His parents had migrated westward from Gifford, Arkansas to Omak, Washington in search of work during the Great Depression, before moving to Clatskanie, Oregon where Carver was born. In 1941 they moved to Yakima, Washington, where Carver grew up (Stull and Carroll 2009b: 957-58). During the 1960s and 1970s, Carver lived in numerous cities in California (including Eureka, Sacramento, Santa Cruz and San Francisco), Texas and Iowa; his parents moved to Crescent City, California in 1964 (961-72). This '[c]onstant shuttling between universities and residences earn[ed] Carver the nickname "Running Dog"' in the 1970s (967).

Many cities that were omitted during the editing process were part of larger 'chunks' of texts, such as long passages dealing with character development. For example, the manuscript story 'Where is Everyone' refers to Mountain View, Eureka, Richland, and Little Rock. For *WWTA*, the story was renamed 'Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit' and all cities except Little Rock were omitted, and of these, Eureka and Richland were part of a longer passage about the circumstances surrounding both the protagonist's and his parents' marital problems. In 'Distance', renamed 'Everything Stuck to Him', a reference to Seattle was removed, again as part of the background detail (the protagonist's sister-in-law committed suicide in Seattle). 'The Fling' includes references to Seattle, Los Angeles,

Phoenix, San Diego, Sacramento, Redding, Salem, Reno, and Chicago. In *WWTA*, the story was renamed ‘Sacks’ and Redding and Salem were omitted in a similar manner, when passages relating to character development were cut. The story ‘Beginners’ includes the cities of Los Angeles, Bend, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, El Paso, St. Louis, and Denver but its edited version, ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ omits all except Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

In some cases, the editing seems to have focused more on the toponyms. In ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’, Claire is driving to Summit to attend the funeral of a girl found murdered and dumped in the Naches River. In the manuscript story, Claire stops at a gas station to ask for directions. She has an uneasy encounter with a mechanic who asks her why she is going to Summit, and ‘What’s in Summit?’ The toponym ‘Summit’ is repeated five times during their tense discussion, and the mechanic even offers to take her there (Carver 2009: 877-78). Then, a man in a truck follows her, forces her to stop, and asks her if she wants him to follow her to Summit (Carver 2009: 879). Claire experiences these encounters as threatening rather than gestures of kindness. In *WWTA*, a man stalks her car, forces her to stop, and asks her if she is all right (278). Summit is not mentioned in the *WWTA* passage and the encounter with the mechanic was cut. Compared to *WWTA*, Summit becomes loaded with meaning in the manuscript (the dead girl’s birthplace, the funeral, Claire’s fear of ending up dead like her, and the mechanic’s offer to take her to Summit).

By removing names, a story could also lose its connection to a temporal setting. In ‘Want to See Something?’ the protagonist’s daughter has left her family to move to San Francisco to become a flower child, which sets the story in the 1960s/70s: this detail was omitted in the edited version, and the story was renamed ‘I Could See the Smallest Things’. Lish also made replacements: San Diego and Los Angeles were rewritten as ‘Dago’ and ‘L.A.’ in ‘The Fling’. According to Monti, Lish made several lexical changes to enhance the colloquiality of Carver’s language (2007: 63).

The motives behind other revisions are less clear: Santa Clara replaced Santa Cruz in ‘Pie’ and the story was renamed ‘A Serious Talk’. Carver was teaching at the University of California in Santa Cruz in the 1970s (Stull and Carroll 2009b: 966-67) and it might have seemed desirable to disassociate the place name in the story from the author as a non-fictional person. The name of the state park Painted Rocks (Indian Painted Rocks outside Yakima) was replaced by Picture Rock in the edited ‘Tell the Women We’re Going’. This revision does not muddle its connection to a specific place very much, as both ‘Beginners’ and *WWTA* describe the park as situated where a highway forks in two directions: one road to Yakima and the other towards Naches. In addition to city toponyms, ‘Beginners’ also refers to several states, including Washington, California, Nevada, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Arizona, Oregon, Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia and Ohio, as well as many waterways, rivers, lakes, passes and bridges: Everson Creek and the Cle Elum River, the Naches River, Chinook Pass, Blue Lake, Lake Rimrock, the Columbia River, the Moxee Bridge, and Lake Tahoe. Places associated with World War II and the Cold War, for example Vietnam, Pearl Harbour, Guam and Korea situate the stories in a post-war temporal setting.

It is also possible to establish a geographical context by turning to some of the subtler details in the stories. Famous, instantly recognizable landmarks (such as the Space Needle in Seattle or the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco) are not featured in the collection. Instead, there are landmarks on a smaller, local scale, such as bridges, roads, community centres, cemeteries, hotels, dairy plants, schools, markets, parks and bars. Some of these places do not exist outside of the fictional world of the stories (like 'Fikle Ridge' in 'The Calm'), whereas others used to be found, or are still found in the region (e.g. the Donnelly Hotel in Yakima, Washington in 'Tell the Women We're Going'). In one of the more obvious decontextualizing efforts of the editing, Lish replaced 'California Polytechnic Institute', 'the Nasa Operation in Mountain View', 'Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong' (Carver 2009: 766-767) in the manuscript story 'Where is Everyone?' with simply 'the aerospace place' and 'the astronauts' (232-33) in the edited story (which was renamed 'Mr. Coffee and Mr Fixit'). Still, even if 'Mountain View' was cut, one might still associate an 'aerospace place' or the aerospace industry with Mountain View, California, or the West overall, as the industry was concentrated there. Washington and California, in particular, benefited from military contracts after the war (White 1991: 515), and Mountain View was one of the fastest-growing aerospace industry cities after World War II. The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA, the forerunner to NASA) started flight research in Mountain View in 1939 (Stickler 2007).

Similarly, the manuscript version of 'Tell The Women We're Going' refers to a Darigold Milk Plant, and a Darigold Head office in Portland. Even if 'Portland' was omitted in *WWTA*, some readers may be able to link the story to a specific area. Darigold has had a long history of producing milk and cheese in the Pacific Northwest (Ferrendelli 1999), and according to their website (Darigold 2018), seven of its eleven remaining processing plants are still located in Washington and Oregon. The character Larry in 'The Fling' (renamed 'Sacks' in *WWTA*) is a driver for 'Consolidated Freight'. Consolidated Freightways was a freight service based in Portland, with one of its key stops in Spokane, Washington (Tinsley 2017). Thus, one could perhaps say that the editing sometimes recontextualized the stories rather than decontextualized them. The world's geographies are still discernible, but forming a clear view of them demands more from the reader.

Then again, geographical ambiguity is inherent in the manuscript stories as well. While the stories refer to several places, these are seldom the actual setting of the stories, but referents loaded with significance, like 'Summit' above. In 'The Fling' Les reads 'HARRAH'S CLUB RENO AND LAKE TAHOE. Good places to have fun' on the bottom of an ashtray (Carver 2009: 790). This moment may allude to the father's story about his affair (having fun), but also to Les's wish to be somewhere else, and to escape his father's annoying monologue. While these toponyms, gathered together, create a general area of reference for the stories (specifically the Western United States), the places also stand in contrast to the 'shallow', often anonymous, vague, or transitory settings of the migratory main characters. The protagonist of 'Where is Everyone?', for instance, lives in an anonymous town, while his friend, in contrast, still lives in Richland, his parents once visited a little place outside Eureka, and his aunt resides in Little Rock. Objects found in most homes appear frequently when indoor settings are described, for instance television sets, and the outdoors appear as a diffuse mix of fields and highways: somewhere in

between the rural and urban, with cars frequently driving by. These techniques build a sense of ambiguity around markers of place in the stories, and mirror the unease of the characters, who wish that they were ‘Dignified. And in a place’ (Carver 2009: 239).

If not anonymous, the setting is often transitory. ‘The Fling’, for example, takes place at the airport in Sacramento. Valerie Shaw (1983: 154) points out that ‘transitory environments are useful as settings in short stories because, through them, writers can establish the scene rapidly, making it unnecessary to fill in specific details about the setting as the reader has experience of similar places. Instead, the focus can be kept on the characters. The characters in ‘Beginners’ are also always on the move, and never quite seem to feel attached to place. For example, in ‘Dummy’, the narrator relates a memory about his father in Yakima, but the location of the son telling the story remains unnamed. The family originally moved to Washington from the South, and at the end of the story, the father relocates to Wenatchee. At the very end of ‘The Calm’, the narrator moves away from Crescent City. In the story ‘Beginners’, a group of friends are spending an evening at Herb McGinnis’s house. The main character, Nick, states, ‘We lived in Albuquerque, but we were all from somewhere else’ (Carver 2009: 927). At the end of the manuscript story, Nick stands still by the window and looks at the field of grass, bending like waves towards a highway connecting Albuquerque with El Paso, with cars moving back and forth, as if he has already decided to relocate. In ‘Gazebo’, the couple Holly and Duane have been managing a motel in an unnamed city. Moving is Holly’s way of coping with the break-up: “I think I’ll move to Nevada she tells Duane”, “Maybe I can find someone who loves me there” (774).

This section has discussed differences between the manuscript and edited stories in relation to place. While the editing decontextualized the stories to a certain extent, it is still possible to find a geographical context by turning to subtler details and local landmarks. Lish’s only extant commentary on these changes and orientations is his assertion that the ‘peculiar bleakness’ he detected in the stories is what he wanted to bring out (Stull and Carroll 2009a: 991). This treatment of the stories coexists with the continued presence in them of place experiences tied to identifiable locations, although the latter are recessed and enigmatic in their narrative role. The setting is, however, ambiguous in both the manuscript stories and the edited stories due to its anonymity and ‘shallowness’, and the mobility of the characters. Next, I will discuss contemporaneous human geographers’ concerns about place in relation to Carver’s stories.

### **Placelessness in the Short Stories and Human Geography**

Similarities to the experience of place in ‘Beginners’ and *WWTa* are found in the work of human geographers of the time. In 1957, the architectural writer and later geographer J.B. Jackson wrote about the peculiar qualities of ‘placeless’ American cities. Suburbs had become indistinguishable from each other, as if everything has been experienced before in the ‘rows and rows of (presumably) happy and comfortable homes’, which are ‘essentially the same wherever you go’ (1970 [1957]: 93). Later, in *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Edward Relph argued that an authentic sense of place was being overshadowed by ‘placelessness’: standardized landscapes of mass values and efficiency that threatened to

replace diverse and significant places with anonymous places and exchangeable environments (in Seamon and Sowers 2008: 46). Carver's stories seem to mirror these concerns about placelessness and mobility: the characters move frequently, and anonymous and exchangeable environments have replaced significant places. In the preface to the 2008 reprint of his book, Relph discusses the circumstances that led him to write it. In part, doing so was a reaction against modernism and rationalism: '[t]he rather neat binary interpretation of place and placelessness that followed [...] seemed appropriate at a time when clean-sweep urban renewal and other-directed commercialism were actively renewing the way landscapes looked' (2). The experience of urban renewal, car ownership, and increased mobility stood in contrast to the experience of place that previous generations had, where to be rooted or to feel at home was related to coming from a fixed and familiar place. What Relph wrote in the 1970s 'suggests a Manichean struggle between place, which is represented as good, and placelessness, which is bad' (Relph 2008 [1976]: 4).

The editing of Carver's stories to an extent shifted them from indicating an environment of small, knowable places, towards indicating a placeless and increasingly anonymous America. But the manuscript stories contain evidence of feelings about place resembling those which Relph expresses more plainly. In 'A Small, Good Thing' (the manuscript version of 'The Bath'), for example, there is a contrast between a more 'authentic' small town and a city. A car hits a small boy, Scotty, on his eighth birthday as he walks to school, and the story follows the parents, Howard and Ann Weiss, as they worry about their hospitalized child. Ann recalls the previous time she was worried about her son. She could not find Scotty near a ditch where he had been playing with friends:

She and Howard had gone to look for him at his board-and-rock fort at the far end of the field near the highway, but he wasn't there. Then Howard had run in one direction beside the highway and she had run the other way until she came to what had once been a little stream of water, a drainage ditch, but its banks were filled now with a dark torrent. (Carver 2009: 818, omitted in *WWT A*)

Worried, and fearing that Scotty has drowned in the ditch, Ann prays to God: 'She promised then that she and Howard would change their lives, change everything, *go back to the small town* where they had come from, *away from this suburban place* that could ruthlessly snatch away your only child' (819, my italics). However, Howard eventually finds Scotty, and the family never returns to the small town. Ann regrets this because,

Now here they were still in the same city and it was two years later, and Scotty was again in peril, an awful peril, and she began to see this circumstance [...] as punishment. For hadn't she given her word that they'd move away from this city and go back to where they could live a simpler and quieter life. (Carver 2009: 820, omitted in *WWT A*)

Ann misses the familiarity and safety, and perhaps permanence of the small town, while the 'suburban place' or 'city' to which they have moved, a landscape of fields interrupted

by highways, is a ruthless kidnapper. The water in the ditch has transformed from a small stream of water into a 'dark torrent', foreshadowing Scotty's death, while at the same time suggesting environmental pollution or heavy irrigation. This is one of the most aggressively edited stories in the collection, cut in length by 78 per cent (Stull and Carroll 2009a: 1000). The omission of Ann's regret supports Monti's observation that Lish wanted to decontextualize and dehumanize the stories. 'The Bath' is utterly condensed, and focuses on the horror of the situation without the context of (or commentary on) the environment or mobility. Lish also omitted the ending, in which the parents start a process of healing. While 'A Small, Good Thing' thus suggests that safer places exist, or have existed, and that the parents may be able to 'move on' after Scotty's death, the world of 'The Bath' has fewer options, and leaves the parents stuck in a bleak moment of grief.

'Placeless', anonymous, or exchangeable suburbs or small towns are also found in 'Viewfinder', 'Why Don't You Dance?', 'Want to See Something?', and 'Where is Everyone?'. Robert Beuka (2004) points out that the mere mention of suburbia will bring to mind familiar images, such as identical houses, the swimming pool, or the barbecue. Taken together, these signifiers 'connote both the middle class "American Dream" as it was promulgated by and celebrated in popular culture in the post-war years and that dream's inverse: the vision of a homogenized, soulless, plastic landscape of tepid conformity, an alienating "nonplace"' (4). In the manuscript story 'Where is Everyone?', for instance, the main character looks at photos of his ex-wife and her new lover and comments, 'In the other picture he was standing against a house – my house? I couldn't tell' (Carver 2009: 761), in a sense echoing Jackson and Relph's commentary on indistinguishable, standardized, 'placeless' cities and their suburbs. Likewise, in 'Viewfinder', the main character looks at a photograph of his suburban house and thinks, 'There was a little rectangle of lawn, the driveway, carport, front steps, bay window, kitchen window. Why would I want a photograph of this tragedy?' (757). The suburb in Carver's stories thus represent a lost or unattainable, 'buried' dream and a living nightmare: the inverse of the 'American Dream'.

Relph's *Place and Placelessness* also discusses 'existential insideness' and 'existential outsideness'. Existential insideness is a 'situation of deep, unself-conscious immersion in place and the experience most people know when they are at home in their own community and region'. Existential outsideness is 'a sense of strangeness and alienation, such as that often felt by newcomers to a place or by people who, having been away from their birth place, return to feel strangers because the place is no longer what it was when they knew it earlier' (1976, in Seamon and Sowers 2008: 45).

Relph also writes that the identity of places 'represents a lost and now unattainable involvement' for existential outsiders (2008 [1976]: 62). Relations to place in Carver sometimes resemble those which Relph describes. In Carver's story 'Gazebo', Holly and Duane, have moved from a small town to another town, close to a city, to run a motel. In this sense, their situation is very much like the Weiss's in 'A Small, Good Thing', or the group of friends in 'Beginners'/'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' who are also newcomers to a place. Holly and Duane are breaking up because of Duane's unfaithfulness, and the deterioration of the motel reflects their crumbling relationship. Holly remembers a time when they were out driving, and went to a 'farm place' outside

Yakima, out past the suburb Terrace Heights to ask for a glass of water (Carver 2009: 779). An old couple ran the farm, and they had a gazebo in the yard:

The woman said that years before, before we were born even, musicians had come out there to play on Sundays. She and her husband and their friends and neighbors would sit around in their Sunday clothes and listen to music and drink lemonade (Carver 2009: 779-80).

Holly laments that her marriage to Duane has ended, instead of them growing old together like the old couple. When she asks Duane what he thinks would happen if they went back to the farmhouse to ask for a glass of water now, his reply is “We’d be shot” (Carver 2009: 779). In *WWTA* this statement was replaced by Holly’s remark that “Those people must be dead now’ [...] ‘side by side out there in some cemetery’ (329). Holly and Duane have become ‘existential outsiders’ on many levels: they are newcomers, the motel has deteriorated, and the once-safe farm place is lost, ‘buried’. In *WWTA* the farm place is alien because time has passed, while in the manuscript, the area has turned unsafe, perhaps because of urbanization and/or poverty, thus echoing the duality of old and new, rural and urban, good and bad, themes which are also present in ‘A Small, Good Thing’.

In the preface to the 1990 edition of *Topophilia*, Yi-Fu Tuan writes that although Americans were becoming more conscious of the environment in the 1960s and early 1970s they nevertheless still ‘saw in the landscape – more often than not – prosperity rather than beauty, urban landscapes and gleaming skyscrapers rather than any deep concern for the human attachment and love of place’ (1990 [1974]: xii). People believing in the preservation of both wilderness and old neighbourhoods needed a convincing language with which to present their case to political representatives. *Topophilia* was Tuan’s proposed framework for doing so: to discuss the different ways in which people develop a love of place (xii). There are, in other words, some similarities between Tuan and Relph: humans’ attachment to or love of place is important, and there is a concern that the environment and our attachment to place is being damaged or decreased by phenomena like pollution or rapid urban renewal. Tuan also points out that the theme of city corruption and rural virtue is “popular enough to be classified as folklore” in North America (108) and “[t]he sentiment permeates American culture. One finds it in the neglect of the cities and in the flight to the suburbs, in the weekend exodus to the country, and in preservation movements’ (109).

However, in ‘Beginners’ and *WWTA*, the anonymous suburbs have lost their status, but so have the non-urban areas. The identity of the ‘farm place’ in ‘Gazebo’, for example, has changed from a place of history, community and ease to a life-threatening place. In ‘So Much Water So Close To Home’, the body of a dead woman is found in the Naches River, and In ‘Tell The Women We’re Going’, a man rapes and murders a woman (two women in *WWTA*) in Painted Rocks. Sandra Lee Kleppe has pointed out that serial killers were active in Washington in the 1970s, and the murders of women in the Northwest outdoors were ‘an ominous phenomenon in Carver’s day’ (2006: 10). The violence in ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’ could be described as a ‘fictional recording of the

contemporary trauma of the pervasive threat of the rape/murder of young American women in non-urban settings' (10).

Similarly, in 'Dummy' ('The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off' in *WWTA*) a murder-suicide (or double murder) takes place outside Yakima. The narrator's father and a mute man nicknamed Dummy are working for the Cascade Lumber Company. Dummy lives a marginalized life in 'a small tarpaper covered house near the river, five or six miles from town' (Carver 2009: 886). The landscape has transformed: 'A half mile behind the house, at the end of the pasture, lay a big gravel pit that the state had dug years before when they were paving the roads in that area' (886). The father persuades Dummy to buy live bass fish from Baton Rouge for an artificial pond behind Dummy's house. Dummy's wife has 'the reputation of going around with Mexicans' (886). After a night at a bar, Dummy beats his wife to death with a hammer and then jumps in the pond and drowns. However, in the manuscript, the situation is more complicated, and includes a witness called 'Garcy or Garcia'. The deputy at the scene seems to doubt the witness's story

He [Dummy] took the wife out of a bar last night and beat her to death in the truck with a hammer. There was witnesses. Then ... whatever his name is ... he drove to this here pond with the woman in the truck still, and just jumped in over his head. Beats all. I don't know, couldn't swim, I guess, but I don't know that ... But they say it's hard for a man to drown himself, to just give up and drown without even trying, if he knows how to swim. A fellow named Garcy or Garcia followed them home. Had been chasing after the woman, from what we gather, but he claims he saw the man jump in from off that rock-pile, and then he found the woman in the truck, dead." He spat. "A hell of a mix-up, ain't it? (Carver 2009: 899-900).

The tragedy prompts the narrator's father to relocate to a farm near Wenatchee, and it is also the beginning of years of misfortune for the family. The edited version did not omit place names, but the focus is shifted slightly, away from the connection between the introduction of the 'foreign' fish and the wife's reputation of 'going around with Mexicans'. As with other revisions, Lish removes context, and zooms in on the bleakness in the story: death, the loss of innocence, and displacement.

At a time when both American suburbia and its literary representation had reached a high degree of complexity, defying presentations of them as timeless (Dines 2020), humanistic geographers including Relph were concerned about the tendency towards placelessness they identified. Some practitioners of humanistic geography had links to the regional settings that Carver sometimes indicated in his stories but also partially erased from them. During the 1970s, Jackson worked at the geography department of the University of California, Berkeley, where Tuan had earlier received his PhD. Carver's stories, known for the 'bleakness' which Lish saw as the essence of their value, can also be seen as pieces of protest writing objecting to these changes. Characters in 'Beginners', whether they know it or not, operate in an environment marked by what human geographers of the period saw as placelessness. They long for significant places where they could feel at ease, but these have become unattainable or 'buried': the suburb is placeless and rural places are dangerous. The stories also comment on spatial changes such as new

roads and increased pollution. This could suggest that Carver was influenced by concerns and discussions about the environment, or that he found it an effective technique to combine the distress felt by the characters with a lack of attachment to place (or both). Next, I will briefly discuss mobility, hope and disappointment in Carver's stories.

### **Buried Dreams: Mobility, Hope, Disappointment**

The previous section linked exchangeable environments and mobility with placelessness. Could these characteristics, alternatively, be characteristics that situate the stories? Movement from place to place shaped, and was characteristic of, the American West in the post-war era and migrants focused their hope for change on the city and the metropolitan areas (Findlay 1992: 270, 277). Findlay even describes migrants as 'chronically mobile', moving from city to city, and staying for only a very short time (1992: 35). However, the growth of new urban areas was often described in negative terms after the mid-1960s (9): as "chaotic" and "formless," "sprawling" and "fragmented", a landscape in "disequilibrium" and a society infected with "anomie." (7). While it seems counter-intuitive, some of the characteristics that make Carver's stories seem placeless could also be argued to link the stories to the West: the mobility of the characters, their tendency to rely on a 'next place' as comfort or remedy, and a landscape that seems diffuse: somewhere in-between the rural and urban.

In 'The Fling', for example, there is the idea of a next place as remedy. Les meets his father at Sacramento airport. The father tells his son about an affair that he had with a married woman. While Les listens to his father's story at the airport bar, the jukebox plays Petula Clark's hit 'Downtown' from the album *I Know a Place* – a detail that was cut in the edited 'Sacks' (the story was cut by 61%, Stull and Carroll 2009a: 1000). The lyrics include the lines: 'The lights are much brighter there / You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares' and 'Downtown / And you may find somebody kind to help and understand you / Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand to / Guide them along' (Hatch 1965). The father explains how he fell in love with Sally Wain, a woman selling Stanley products door to door in the suburbs. In the manuscript story, Sally and the father share dreams of moving and changing their lives. This detail was omitted in *WWTA*. Together, they indulge in escapist fantasies: they joke about pulling a heist like the bank robbers 'back up east', and of using the money to move elsewhere (Carver 2009: 791-92). If Sally Wain had the money, '[s]he guessed she'd quit selling Stanley products and they'd move to San Diego and buy a home there. She had relatives in San Diego' (792-93). When Sally's husband Larry finds out about the affair, he commits suicide in the Jefferson hotel 'down on Third' in downtown Sacramento (800, omitted in *WWTA*), thus giving a more sinister meaning to the song.

Many of the stories in 'Beginners' express tensions connecting hope and disenchantment. Carver's stories embody a time of disappointment and lowered expectations, 'post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-energy crisis' (Lainsbury: 2004: 8), and the characters represent the communities that were hardest hit during the recession in the 1970s (March-Russell 2009: 240). They cling on to the idea of a next place as a cure, but the stories are open-ended: we never find out if Holly finds love in Nevada ('Gazebo'). In

‘The Fling’, the dream of moving ends in tragedy; in ‘Dummy’, moving to Wenatchee results in years of misfortune. The small glimpses of hope in the ‘next place’ make the stories even bleaker, as characters’ faith in these new places seems unconvincing or naïve. In ‘Distance’, the narrator tells his daughter about what life was like when he and his wife were young: ‘The two kids [...] were very much in love. On top of this they had great ambitions and they were wild dreamers. They were always talking about the things they were going to do and the places they were going to go’ (Carver 2009: 918), but then ‘Things change’, ‘without you realizing it or wanting them to’ (926). This despair was even further enhanced in *WWTA*. According to Evenson, ‘[t]he feel of the stories changed in revision, Lish working to rid them of their hopeful moments, of anything to give them the sense that the characters still have functional connections with one another, and of any move toward transcendence, redemption, or consolation’ (2018: 131).

Wallace Stegner saw hopefulness as characteristic of western narratives, ‘In them lived the founding promise of westward expansion: the West was America’s “geography of hope”, the place where American dreams came true’ (Stegner 1967, in Comer 1999). However, by the 1990s, Stegner’s view on western narratives had changed,

Chastened by a lifetime of witnessing boom-and-bust economic cycles play themselves out always at the expense of environmental wisdom, chastened too by the knowledge that the West’s history of settlement by conquest necessarily meant that one man’s geography of hope was another man’s geography of the *end* of hope, Stegner finally disclaimed the West as America’s salvation. [...] By the 1990s, Stegner had fundamentally rethought western literary history. Its speakers were multiracial. Its landscapes were often urban. He talked about western culture not as heroic but as “A cultural battlefield.” Western character, he surmised, looking as much backward as directly into the eye of the postmodern storm, was more about “desire” (his word) than the satisfaction of desire. (Comer 1999: 45)

Also the dream of a ‘next place’ has become ‘buried’ in Carver’s stories, as these future destinations no longer represent hope and opportunity in the same way they used to. Carver’s characters dream of a next place, but this desire is not satisfied.

## Conclusion

This article explores place in Raymond Carver’s work by comparing the short story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* to its manuscript ‘Beginners’. A survey of city toponyms in the manuscript shows that the majority of cities referred to are located in the states of Washington, California, and Oregon. The stories also contain references to other geographical topoi, with an emphasis on smaller, local landmarks. To a certain extent, Lish decontextualized and dehumanized the stories by removing names, and passages where place and mobility relate to character development, to enhance the bleakness of the stories and perhaps in order to shift the perspective towards (universal) feelings of hopelessness rather than the environment. Characters in ‘Beginners’ seem restless, and lack a rootedness to place, and the settings are often anonymous, or diffuse:

somewhere in-between the rural and urban. The parallels between contemporaneous human geographers' ideas of place and Carver's stories suggests that Carver may have been writing from the experience of a changing landscape and an increased mobility that was transforming the way in which people experienced place. In the stories, the older identities of places have become 'buried' or unattainable: the suburban 'American Dream' is lost, the rural places or small towns are dangerous, and even the faith in new places has started to fade.

The editing of Carver's text buried an original version in which place connections, particularly in the western USA as a region, were more prominent than in the version, *WWTA*, which made his reputation. Places touched on in 'Beginners' included urban ones, but these were often smaller towns without much fame, rather than being the more metropolitan American sites. The specific characteristics of the US West, which rapidly urbanised in the decades after the Second World War, are present in both versions of Carver's places, despite the efforts at blurring or erasure. The changes made between the manuscript and the published collection sometimes introduced more ambiguity, as when Mountain View was changed to 'the aerospace place'; sometimes they arguably served to erase biographical references to the author, as when Santa Cruz became Santa Clara. A high proportion of text was cut at the editing stage, and place references form only a small proportion of the material removed. Monti's take that Lish 'dehumanized' and 'decontextualized' the stories by cutting out background details could be read as a statement about place: if lives were placeless, as Jackson, Relph and Tuan suggested, then an accurate representation of place could involve the removal of details people connect with such as toponyms. Both humanistic geography and Carver's fiction can be mined for commentary on the same era and place, the postwar USA, and features of it including the dispersal of people through an increasingly anonymous networked urban West. Yet as the comparison between manuscript and edited publication shows, he did so in a way unlike theirs: instead of making recommendations, he emphasized enigmatic and mysterious aspects of contemporary urbanization.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The Charvat Collection of American Literature at the Rare Books and Manuscript Library of Ohio State University holds the literary archive of Raymond Carver. The papers of Gordon Lish are held at the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington. The scope of this article is limited to published documents.

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