

Post-Industrial Universe in Raymond Carver's Selected Short Stories: Reification of Subjects

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Abstract

Raymond Carver, a minimalist postmodern short story writer, is famous for his famous saying about Reagan's America. As a critic of American consumerist society, Carver explores the dark side of life through short stories. The present study is an attempt to illustrate the nature of repression in Carver's three stories, namely "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off", "Elephant", and "Where I'm Calling From". It seeks to demonstrate how these short stories exemplify material possession, complacency, and story-telling as repressive strategies adopted by the characters to conceal or suppress their anxieties. The argument is in the light of Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodern Culture Industry and reveals how the dominant ideology in America of the 70s and 80s reify and commodify the lives of its subject individuals in the era of post-industrial capitalism.

Keywords: Carver; Postmodernism; Jameson; Ideology; Repression; Commodification; Reification

1. Introduction

Various major novelists adopt crafting short stories as a secondary occupation because it has proven to be more financially beneficial in the short period and the interspersed appearance of novels far and in between.

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Yet, there are some other writers who choose it as their primary styles and genres, and it is their contribution which has helped elevating the position of short story as an authentic literary form worthy of academic study.

Late twentieth century met the works of one of these prolific writers in the short span of time from 1976 to 1988. Although Raymond Carver's literary life was brief and driven by economic necessity, he succeeded in producing five important collections of stories in addition to various compilations and several volumes of poems which set new standards in stark contrast to the self-reflexive practice of his contemporary short story writers and novelists. The present article seeks to disclose his unique approach in light of Fredric Jameson's critique of Mass Culture and Postmodernism. The three short stories which are selected for this purpose are "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off", "Elephant", and "Where I'm Calling From".

Writing for Raymond Carver was threefold: an economic need, an aesthetic passion, and a significant portion of the raw material, for his stories have their roots basically in his working class background. Born to a blue-collar family in 1938 in Clatskanie, Oregon, and marrying at a very young age, eighteen, Carver was familiar with the pain and insecurity inflicted upon common laborers. While holding various low-paid jobs to support his young family, he attended writing classes at Chico State College where he had as his mentor, John Gardner, later to become a nationally-acclaimed writer. He transferred to Humboldt State College and graduated in 1963. Over time, his increasing prominence gave him the opportunity of being a guest lecturer in various writing programs at different universities. The major collections of short stories published during his life include *Will You Be Quiet, Please?* (1976) and *Furious Seasons* (1977). Three other published collections are *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love* (1981), *Cathedral* (1983), *Elephant* (1988) and various compilations, the last of which appeared right before his early death in 1988 under the title of *Where I'm Calling From*.

The bulk of short stories crafted by Carver reveals a rejection of the self-reflexive mode of writing advocated by contemporary postmodern experimentalists such as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and William Gass. Carver did not favor the preference of textuality over reality and in his writing workshops and numerous essays accentuated the roles of traditional plot, character and dialogue. However, the extent to which his writing yields to such decorum is open to discussion.

His short stories are mainly first-person narratives about hardship, stress and sense of alienation which are indispensable elements of the life of the working class. They commonly resist any sort of encapsulation into a plot summary (rising action, climax, falling action and resolution), dialogues are sparse and traditional characterization can be formed only partially. Labels such as minimalism and realism which are attached to his style hint to the influence of Hemingway and Chekhov. According to Christopher Macgowan in *The Twentieth-Century American Fiction*, his stories "look back to Hemingway's kind of understatement, but are set in a much more working-class world-although the short story writer Carver most revered was Chekhov" (Macgowan 352). Influenced by these masters, what Carver did on his own initiative was giving voice to the otherwise silenced blue-collar Americans and share with the audience readers its repressed anxieties in the most advanced phase of capitalism; the multi-cultural capital.

The responses of cultural critics to Raymond Carver's works have been diverse and conflicting. The style of his short stories has encouraged analyses which are largely thematic by nature and concentrate on the portrait of America of the 70s and 80s in his works. While right-wing critics accuse him of giving a pessimistic and gloomy picture of America, their left-wing counterparts complain that he underpins the post-industrial hegemony by what in *The Carver Chronotope*, G.P. Lainsbury tags as "catatonic realism" (Lainsbury 3); that is impassivity in the face of the punitive reality of life and taking hardship for granted. There are some other critics who assert that Carver does not write realism style but hyper-realism and the slices of actual life in the restricting format of his short stories present a flipside to the postmodern reality of his time. This article seeks to analyze these contradictory cultural and counter-cultural drives in the three selected stories with the focus of repression as a defense mechanism in the postmodern stage of capitalism. Fredric Jameson's criticism of mass culture industry in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* bases the theoretical ground for this article.

2. Jameson and Literature

Fredric Jameson (1934) is one of the most renowned practitioners of Marxism in contemporary criticism. Jameson's ultimate target is culture in its diverse modes.

In his writings he seems to dissect mass culture as a culture industry and like Althusser regards ideology as a "quasi-narrative" that "has a vital mapping function to play in all societies" (*Ideology, Narrative Analysis, and Popular Culture* 544). Jameson believes that human life cannot be apprehended directly but is transmitted by mediatory forms, the most significant of which being money. Other mediatory forms include artistic works such as literature. It is through mediation that people comprehend the nature of their own existence. As Adam Roberts elaborates on the nature of Jameson's criticism in *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Fredric Jameson*: one of the key arguments in *The Political Unconscious* is that it is narrative, story-forms and plots that play a dominant role in mediating individual experience and social totality, according to a process of what he calls transcoding- the translating into an accepted code (which consists of certain narrative patterns and expectations) of social and historical reality to make it accessibly mediated for the individual (Roberts 78).

This is what Jameson constantly asks for throughout his two major books *The Political Unconscious* and *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. He contends that one must decode the transcoded mediatory forms to uncover their latent connotations and messages and to succeed in decoding, Jameson asks the readers to "always historicize!" in order to achieve a totalitarian perspective of the seemingly fragmented life they live. He believes that through the process of historicizing all fragmentations turn out to be mere illusions and the underlying totality reveals itself. For Jameson, Totality is the ultimate truth which if not fully grasped, can at least be approached and found in history which he designates as the Real.

Fredric Jameson approaches the issue of postmodernism as a cultural dominant and not a style. While current theories of postmodern state that the contemporary society no longer obeys the laws of capitalism which include the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle, Jameson attempts to prove it otherwise by analyzing the nature of its heterogeneity and contingency in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. According to Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick in *Cultural Theory: The Key Thinkers*, "Jameson recognized the appropriateness of characterizing contemporary culture as postmodern, yet interpreted certain trends within postmodernism as leading to the undermining of effective political and moral thought" (116).

His body of writings encourages regarding all art as political and decoding the manifest problematic spots of anxiety to be able to get closer to the latent unconscious messages hidden in the depth of human productions.

2.1. Jameson and Thingification

Multinational capital of the present age has taken the path of plurality in order to expand its market to the extreme poles and the tools it benefits from according to Jameson are those of reification and commodification. Jameson discusses reification or 'thingification' in his article, "Reification and Utopian Mass Culture" and contends that in late capitalism, reification has mastered all aspects of human culture. The logic of means and ends of post-industrial era victoriously commodifies all artistic works stripping them off their non-practicality. He asserts that "the ultimate form of commodity reification in contemporary consumer society is precisely the image itself" (Reification 61).

Schizophrenia and depthlessness are the direct results of reification in the post-industrial, multi-cultural macrocosm. According to Jameson, postmodern subjects are continuously bombarded by advertisements in media and as a result they consume not only the thing itself but more than that the image or abstract idea that accompanies the product. This is a strategy of the capital to veil the Real by breaking everything into small pieces and minute pictures. As an immediate result, human life becomes fragmented, schizophrenic, and devoid of depth. Jameson believes that in postmodern era 'past' has been swept away and alongside the sense of past, historicity and our collective memory. Past is broken and then renovated, restored and transferred to present through simulacra. The assumed reality is in fact hyper-real invented by media, television and film industry and this reveals the anxiety of the capital and its fear of getting unmasked without simulation. Applying Jameson's postmodernist views on Raymond Carver, a writer whose short stories aim at depicting different aspects of the life of American working class of the post-world-war II, can provide a more comprehensive insight into the writer's particular worldview as well as bring to the surface whatever he consciously or unconsciously evades discussing directly.

The notion of repressive mechanism is not a novel concept in Marxist criticism. It is the forces whether direct or indirect that the ideology applies to control its subjects' moves and accord them with its own totalitarian scheme. The end in a consumerist society is the mastery and commodification of all cultural, social and individual realms to ensure an all-encompassing penetration of the market ideology of simulacrum. What is interesting in postmodern capitalism is the voluntary adoption of repression as a defense mechanism against the anxieties or melancholic state of life. Repression takes different forms in Carver's short stories and through it the characters run away from Present and suppress their worries. The Present section deals with the repressive strategies these characters undertake to avoid the irreversible realities of their lives. The stories selected for this purpose are "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off", "Elephant", and "Where I'm Calling From".

3. Jameson and Carver: The Argument

3.1. The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off

"The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off" like so many of Carver's stories is related by a first person narrator. A young boy tells the tragic story of Dummy, his father's co-worker, who murders his wife and commits suicide right after flood, robs him off the school of fish he has raised in his property near the river. Dummy has more than one reason for his hopelessness. Besides his physical handicap, his job as a common cleanup man who is the target of everyone's derisive laugh and the scandalous rumors circulating around his much younger wife has made him a malcontent who does not even possess the power to express his dissatisfaction and resentment. As a result, in the attempt to avoid having to face the dark side of life which he has no control over, he shifts his attention and obsessively cherishes the fish he has purchased.

Dummy's disability deprives him of the opportunity of constructing his public identity as he wishes by using language. His appearance, however, is not that of a common laborer as he is but shows a professional worker like a millwright: "Dummy carried a flashlight, even though he worked days. He also carried wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, friction tape, all the same things the millwrights carried"(WICF 138).

The tool he carries with himself constructs a public image which belongs to a man who is a skilled repairman. This man who can fix problems is in contrast to Dummy who is at a loss when confronted with real life issues. Thus, through this image, he tries to conceal his physical inadequacy and matrimonial failure. But when this repressive strategy of dealing with the anxiety of being exceptional in the company of other men fails to protect him from their mockery, he grabs the next alternative suggested to him by the narrator's father. He orders the three barrels of bass fingerlings and protects them the way he wishes he could protect his married life.

The fish in this story is the manifestation of the capitalist greed which has commodified lives of all subjects including the blue-collar Americans. As Gigliola Nocera asserts in her article, "Raymond Carver's America Profonda", objective correlatives in Carver facilitate "representing the world in this frantic and business-minded America" (par 6) and to borrow words from Collins, one can claim that in this story the fish is the objective correlative for the "quintessential decade of greed and excess" (Collins 92) which grabbed hold of Reagan's America. It represents the unquenchable thirst for possession and thus mastery of all the things that every person could consume regardless of his economic or social status. Reaganomic's optimism ensured the assimilation of all sections of society including the white low-middle-class and the blue-collar into the consumerist culture of the late capital. Its method was propagating a homogenized America through the availability and consumption of the same market products and media programs by all individual subjects.

Dummy's optimism about change nevertheless, is doomed to death and the change he undergoes accentuates latent darker side of the capitalist utopianism. One can trace the root of Dummy's ultimate disconnection from the human world to the late capitalist ideology which suggests diverting the attention to an object, hence reification, instead of probing the spot of anxiety on the personal or collective level. Consequently, in the attempt to acquire pseudo-tranquility, he invests on things rather than emotions and relationships. The rage of nature and loss of fish, however, designates the inefficiency of this system. This notion is foreshadowed on the arrival of the barrels containing the bass. Inside the barrels, "it looked like a million bass fingerlings were finning inside" (WICF 139). Then, Dummy emptied the barrels in the pond. "He took his flashlight and shined it into the pond. But there was nothing to be seen anymore" (the same).

In the wider space of the pond, a different vision of the fish is provided. To be more exact, no picture is offered at all. As a result one can claim that Dummy fences himself off the outside world to guard something which does not belong to him from the very outset. Being so, it can be assumed his repressive defense strategy makes him in possession of nothing more than a mirage.

More than the story of a desperate old man alienated from his wife and other people, "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off" is the prophesy of a similar journey of hopelessness and death for the narrator's father and this furnishes the story with a collective side. Nocera believes that Dummy's story is in fact an objective correlative for the latent father's story, "in 'Dummy' ... Carver's most 'aphasic' story, it is again a child who sees the violent death of old Dummy, a sort of 'freak' singled out by his unintelligible idiolect, as an anticipation of the father's disease and death" (Par 15). In fact, the father's obsession about Dummy's private affairs, the fish he purchased and his suicide, the narrator's indirect references about the failed marriage between his own parents, and the nostalgic feeling about good old times suggest an unhappy ending for the father quite similar to Dummy's fate.

Dummy's suicide equals the end of hope for the father. Like so many Americans, he is already disillusioned by Pearl Harbor which was a blow struck on American pride in 1941. It officially led to active participation of the country in world affairs which meant no more isolationism of America in the world affairs. It connoted more openness to other cultures (multi-culturalism) and a leap toward the multinational capitalism. Besides Pearl Harbor, the narrator maintains that "having to move back to his dad's place didn't do my dad one bit of good, either" (WICF 146). Such a move backwards is a regress for the father in financial and perhaps matrimonial terms and the case with Dummy wraps up and solidifies all these anxieties he suffers from and kills him off. In a larger perspective, domestic concerns such as unemployment of more and more American workers, suggested by the talk of Dummy being laid off, and international worries about the vulnerability of America's economy and politics, suggested in the story through the talk of recession and Pearl Harbor, undermine the referred optimism both on the private and public domains.

As discussed, repressive mechanism in "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off" is not an outer force imposed on individuals' lives but an inner defense strategy that postmodern culture advocates as beneficial to their well-being. According to G.P. Lainsbury in *The Carver Chronotope: Contextualizing Raymond Carver*, "Dummy is infected with a strange possessiveness", and the greed which is manipulating him "makes him loathe to share the magic of his pond with anyone else, even with one man who would be his friend" (Lainsbury 55). The dominant ideology of postmodern culture has inculcated in its subjects that consumption and mastery of the object world can lead to prosperity and happiness. It conceals its ambivalence regarding the breakdown of older values and multiplicity of new ones and leads and moves the subjects on the surface of matters. Dummy yields to this process and deludes his self by taking the same path. Carver, on the other hand, escapes it through his art by inserting fragments of the Real in Dummy's story and "interiorizing" what Nocera calls "disaster behind the upbeat façade of the affluent society". In her words, "it is so ineffable that Carver prefers to interiorize it rather than voice it, thereby offering us characters bearing within them a sense of void and loss which is simultaneously personal as well as collective" (Raymond Carver's *America Profonda*).

3.2. Elephant

In contrast to the "interiorized" approach of "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off" is "Elephant" with its explicit treatment of the theme of financial destitution of common laborers. The short story reveals the frivolity of the claims of late postmodern capitalism with regard to equal distribution of the capital and welfare funding. Its narrator is a father, son, brother and ex-husband whose space and privacy is violated by his close kin who financially depend on him to send them checks at the beginning of each month. Being the only employed person in the family, he has six others besides himself on his payroll to support. This must be added to the money he has to pay to his ex-wife monthly. He feels he can no longer carry this load when one night he has two dreams about his father and his son which alter his viewpoint and give him some hope to cling on to. The ending of the story, nevertheless, withdraws a full-fledged optimistic outlook on future and leaves readers with doubt as to the happy resolution of the matters.

Unemployment and the consequential financial insecurity form the dominant elements of the story. Inefficiency of health insurance system and income-tax policies and lack of job security for the common workers demonstrate the vulnerability of the working class at the time of economic malaise of late 70s and early 80s. Nocera believes through his art Carver underscores that "there exists a multiple flipside to the American coin that in fact conceals a void: there's an empty reverse of well-being and empty counterparts of optimism, family, and love (par 10). Reagan's America was a country of excessive greed and optimism projected in the story by the figure of the mother. This, however, should not be interpreted as equal share of the capital among the members of society. The advocates of the new culture heralded the utopia of a classless culture in which all the people could have equal access to the resources of the state. This meant the projection and materialization of the American dream. Carver's short story brings to light the darker side of such utopianism manifested in the life of the narrator.

"Elephant" deals with the fear of uncertain future and the threat of imminent loss. Carver's characters sway between the two extremes of naïve optimism and realistic skepticism. Their future lives are ruled by luck which basically does not favor them. The failure of the brother's investment plans or the daughter's planning about the cannery job and the narrator's desperate effort to make ends meet suggest the lack of control over one's destiny and the supremacy of luck. Under such circumstances, their days begin and end with the anticipation of a "catastrophe". In Nocera's words, "whatever the meaning of these losses, their common denominator is an expectation, a tension ever projected towards what Carver calls 'a sense that something is imminent and which is in fact already a catastrophe'" (par 12).

The catastrophe lies not only in the financial loss but also in the loss of happiness or "false happiness" resultant of owning and possessing objects. The narrator's brother daughter and mother either experience or fret over such losses. The narrator shares similar worries:

So I started cutting back. I had to quit eating out, for instance. Since I lived alone, eating out was something I liked to do, but it became a thing of the past. And I had to watch myself when it came to thinking about movies. I couldn't buy clothes or get my teeth fixed. The car was falling apart. I needed new shoes, but forget it.

(WICF 310)He in fact feels double miserable in the loss of "false happiness" and the alleged balance of life. As Fredric Jameson contends: the misery here is the misery of happiness, or at least contentment (which is in reality complacency), of Marcuse's 'false' happiness, the gratification of the new car, the TV, dinner and your favourite program on the sofa-which are now themselves secretly a misery, an unhappiness that doesn't know its name, that has no way of telling itself apart from genuine satisfaction and fulfillment since it has presumably never encountered this last. (PM 280)

It is noteworthy to underscore the inefficiency of the family unit on both financial and emotional levels. What Carver portrays here is the breakdown of family in the old sense. Although they sympathize with each other they strive for their own causes, set guilt traps and in the daughter's words "violate" each other's "space". In addition to this, family in this story is not a unit of production anymore but consists of a group of isolated failures obsessed with material consumption. Working, making and spending money have become ends in themselves but tranquility and contentment seem far-fetched dreams which are continually postponed and never realized in their lives.

When all was said and done, I decided things could be a lot worse. Just now, of course, things were hard for everyone. People's luck had gone south on them was all. But things were bound to change soon. Things would pick up in the fall maybe. There was lots to hope for. I kept on walking. Then I began to whistle. I felt I had the right to whistle if I wanted to. (WICF 315)

The above quoted lines from the ending of the story manifest a sort of complacency on the part of the narrator which is in fact how he attempts to cope with his anxiety. Contentment assists him in denying the malignancy of his state. He embraces the present situation lest he suffers from more misfortunes in the future. This attitude is induced in him by the two dreams. In the first, he is riding on his father's shoulders pretending he is an elephant. The strong father-figure who is protective of his family has no resemblance to the image of the narrator in the second dream smashing the window of his son's car and threatening his life. It suggests how under economic destitution, he emotionally distanced himself from his family members. This fractured picture works like an epiphany in him. His deceased father alongside the bygone past and its social values do not exist anymore.

According to Collins, in postmodern life, values are "distorted and called into question by economic conditions" (Collins 27). Likewise, for the narrator of this story, the feeling of closure with his family members belongs to the golden past. While he feels responsible, he does not seem to wish to get more engaged with their personal worries. Getting emotional belongs to the time he used to drink; the time when he was whole-heartedly ready to stick up for his daughter against her irresponsible partner. However, financial pressure necessitates rational maneuver. He stopped drinking, and became sober, both of alcohol as well as sentimentality.

Similar to the material possession of things, complacency brings about only "false happiness" for the narrator because it is not durable in the reified, money-driven postmodern life. Carver shows his skepticism about it in the final lines. Having decided to walk to work, the narrator is spotted by his co-worker who sees him while he is standing with his arms raised up level with his shoulders. Once more, he is thinking about riding the elephant. He accepts the ride to work from his co-worker. The car is newly-overhauled and George, the driver, talks proudly about it. He wants to show to the narrator the speed:

He punched it and gave it everything he could. I fastened my seat belt and held on. 'Go,' I said. 'What are you waiting for, George?' And that's when we really flew. Wind howled outside the windows. He had it floored, and we were going flat out. We streaked down that road in his big unpaid-for car. (WICF 316)

The speeding car suggests a picture of freedom when all of a sudden they lose control and floor it. It connotes the emptiness of all that brief moment of pure joy and optimism. Elephants are going extinct in the fast pace of post-industrial life and with them go the elegance, mighty power and graceful tranquility. While trapped inside the maze of materialist life, one is unable to maintain composure and an open heart to the beauty that still exists outside either in the natural world or the world of human beings. The narrator attempts to escape this maze through complacency and direct denial of the main problem. He tries to get some distance from his stapled situation by adopting an omniscient view of the shape of his life from outside of the maze, seeing all he has to be grateful for. Yet the accident pulls him back in the maze and he bangs into another dead end once more.

3.3. Art of Story Telling

In conjunction with material possession and complacency, the third repressive technique which is the most popular in Carver is story-telling. It assists the characters in fitting together the pieces of their lives' puzzle and reconstruct it as a way to figure out life. Except that the juxtaposition of these discordant pieces results in a shape somewhat alien to the original pattern. The characters do not pursue the "why" of their circumstances in the stories they tell and the narratives do not yield to a manifest meaningful pattern. The characters give anecdotes of their lives and doing so, attempt to paint a picture albeit distorted of their identities. The narrated stories are not necessarily based on reality and one cannot be certain about their authenticity. Nevertheless, this is of little concern to both the characters and the narratives.

The function of these stories unlike realistic novels is breaking the Real into fragments and creating a parallel reality in the dual attempt to evade direct treatment of the anxiety-provoking issues and familiarize the already de-familiarized sense of self. Charles E. May makes the same point in " 'Do You See What I'm Saying?': The Inadequacy of Explanation and the Uses of Story in the Short Fiction of Raymond Carver". Speaking of the differences between novels and short story genre, he draws upon Walter Benjamin and asserts that "stories do not demand plausibility or conformity to the laws of external reality, argues Benjamin. What story does is to show us how to deal with all that which we cannot understand; it is half the art of storytelling to be free from information" (May 41). With this outlook on the art of story-telling in general, the following paragraphs deal with the way Carver's characters willingly repress their worries and reconstruct their schizophrenic identities through the healing power of storytelling, listening to others' stories and in Fredric Jameson's words " transmuting 'facts' into 'accounts'" (On Goffman's Frame Analysis 120). Moreover, this article seeks to demonstrate how from a formalist aspect, the quick shifts of past and present tenses during the process of storytelling suit the disintegrated selves who narrate these stories and is in the service of disruption of a realistic presentation of accounts as well as suppression of latent anxiety.

In 'Raymond Carver's America is helpless,' 'Michael wood writes, 'clouded by pain and the loss of dream, but it is not as fragile as it looks. It is a place of survivors and a place of stories.'"(Nesset294).

The above extract from Kirk Nessel's "'This word Love': Sexual Politics and Silence in Early Raymond Carver" rightfully highlights two distinguished points in Carver's stories namely their optimism and storytelling as a cure for the postmodern malady. This article explores how through special frames and disruption of temporality, Carver undermines the alleged integrity in one of his masterpieces, "Where I'm Calling From". The narrative presented in this story seems trivial and depthless and Carver succeeds in portraying the bafflement of the narrator of "Where I'm Calling From" and J.P.'s at this depthlessness. He achieves this objective by pairing the narrator and J.P. on the porch of the drying-out facility and having them tell stories about their past. Like the other alcoholics of Frank Martin's, they are alienated from the space they float in and this reflects their alienation from their own feelings in addition to their escape from centered subject and dissociation from self. The stories they narrate reflect such sense of alienation from self and fear of the de-centered universe.

3.4. Where I'm Calling From

"Where I'm Calling From" consists of three different stories which are about J.P., Tiny and the narrator himself. The first two stories are in fact used by the narrator to furnish the story of his own alcohol addiction and personal problems. Besides the direct anecdotes about his past, he uses these stories in order to provide a fuller picture of his uneasy self without the danger of its close dissection. In the "Tiny" mini-story, the narrator assumes an omniscient stand by reporting how one of the alcoholics who is about to leave the rehabilitation facility and spend the Christmas holiday besides his family is unexpectedly attacked by seizure at the breakfast table and drops flat on the floor. Throughout the story, the narrator is preoccupied with worries about his own health. He suffers from shakes which he tries to conceal from his friends and is unsure about leaving the sanctuary and entering the world outside. So while he is talking about Tiny, all of a sudden his omniscient viewpoint shifts as he becomes aware of his own position among the other alcoholics who are leaning over Tiny watching his misfortune:

Suddenly, Tiny wasn't there anymore. He'd gone over in his chair with a big clatter. He was on his back on the floor with eyes closed, his heels drumming the linoleum. People hollered for Frank Martin. But he was right there. A couple of guys got down on the floor beside Tiny.

One of the guys put his fingers inside Tiny's mouth and tried to hold his tongue. Frank Martin yelled, "Everybody stand back!" Then I noticed that the bunch of us were leaning over Tiny, just looking at him, not able to take our eyes off him. "Give him air!" Frank Martin said. Then he ran into the office and called the ambulance. (WICF 189)

This gives a different perspective to the scene described. It seems the narrator is at the same time beyond the 'Tiny' narrative and entangled in it; floating inside the maze and outside of it. He is unable to keep his previous retrospective distance from the story and fails in perceiving himself in a temporal continuity, hence his lack of a totalitarian perspective of his life. This shift of viewpoint also reflects the fact that he is at the mercy of a similar physical disadvantage which overpowered Tiny and dreads the same fate might befall him. According to Kirk Nessel in "Narration and Interiority in Raymond Carver's 'Where I'm Calling From'", "still upset about Tiny's 'seizure,' the narrator chooses not to think of the extreme consequences of ill-prepared exposure to the outer world. Nor does he remind himself that death entered the heart of the sanctuary only days before, this time without claiming its prize" (Narration&Interiority 25). We have very little access to Tiny's consciousness. The story does not enter his mind or others for that matter. Therefore one can say the story in fact belongs to the narrator, who occupies Tiny's space and relates to the reader the story of his own worries without actually involving his self in it. He peacefully reconstructs this aspect of his broken identity by projecting his self in the other's space.

The same is true about J.P.'s 'well' story retold in the narrator's words. Here, the reporting verbs are scarce and so J.P. is almost expunged from the story he narrates. This helps the narrator turn the 'well' story into his own account of alcoholism and try to reconstruct it in a way to produce a meaningful message about life. J.P.'s situation in the well is like the narrator's current condition in the drying-out facility. J.P. is trapped at the bottom of a well and there is no one who can hear his cries for help. He "had suffered all kinds of terror in that well, hollering for help, waiting, and then hollering some more" (WICF 189). Up there, the blue sky can be seen from the opening of the well.

It connotes hope and optimism for the little J.P. According to Michael Sonkowsky in "Grown Men in 'Where I'm Calling From'", the bottom of the well is like his current situation because he is isolated from his loved ones. J.P. "had suffered all kinds of terror in that well, hollering for help, waiting, and then hollering some more" (WICF 189). But nothing "closed off that little circle of blue. Then his dad came along with the rope, and it wasn't long before J.P. was back in the world he'd always lived in" (WICF 190). Therefore, one can agree with Sonkowsky that this is the projection of the narrator's hope about personal transformation he wants to undergo and an optimistic ending for his confusing situation. (Sonkowsky 27)

Another issue worthy of consideration with regard to the technique the narrator applies in reconstructing J.P.'s story is the manipulation and juxtaposition of past and present tenses. This is more evident in the 'chimney sweeps' story where one can observe how time moves backwards and forwards in the same paragraph or even in two adjacent sentences. The following paragraph provides a revealing example:

J.P. and Roxy are having some real fights now. I mean fights. J.P. says that one time she hit him in the face with her fist and broke his nose. 'Look at this.' He says. 'Right here.' He shows me a line across the bridge of his nose. 'That's a broken nose.' He returned the favor. He dislocated her shoulder for her... Anyway, he found out about it-about Roxy's boyfriend- and he went wild. He manages to get Roxy's wedding ring off her finger. And when he does, he cuts it into several pieces with a pair of wire cutters. Good, solid fun. (WICF 192)

Playing with tenses shatters the temporal cohesion in both the text and story. The narrator unconsciously attempts to escape the restriction of time because it fills him with concerns about his blurred future. More significantly, the passage of time for the narrator signifies death. The concept of death is approached at the beginning of the narrative when the narrator relates about Tiny's seizure which can be counted as a simulation of death. It is re-introduced toward the end of the narrative when Frank Martin talks to the narrator and J.P. who are sitting on the porch about Jack London:

Frank Martin uncrosses his chin toward the hills and says, 'Jack London used to have a big place on the other side of this valley. Right over there behind green hill you're looking at. But alcohol killed him. Let that be a lesson to you. He was a better man than any of us. But he couldn't handle the stuff, either.' (WICF 193)

Jack London was a stronger storyteller who fails to overcome his alcohol addiction and surrenders to death. The character that the narrator recalls from London's story, "To Build a Fire," is frozen to death but the narrator delicately evades direct treatment of this theme and instead alludes to it through the metaphor of the fire going out: "He gets his fire going, but then something happens to it. A branchful of snow drops on it. It goes out. Meanwhile, it's getting colder. Night is coming on" (WICF 199). In the quoted lines, the continuous tense disrupts temporality once more, defers death and denies its present possibility. Therefore once again, the narrator attempts to latently project his obsessive worry about passage of time and death by reconstructing another story-teller's story.

In the introduction to *The Visual Poetics of Raymond Carver*, Ayala Amir states that the writer is remembered among friends as a "passionate listener and consumer of anecdotes and juicy stories" (Amir xii). So many of Carver's characters share the same enthusiasm with their creator and the narrator of "Where I'm Calling From" is one of them. A major part of the story is dedicated to him listening to J.P.'s anecdotes about his relationship with his wife, Roxy. He continually encourages his friend to keep talking, no matter what he is talking about. Listening to stories told by others has a similar effect of telling one's own story using the other's small narratives. It alleviates nervousness about shattered self and diverts the attention from the subject of anxiety by universalization of the problem. No tangible solution or resolution is offered. The problem still exists but the anxiety is suppressed and forsaken. This is depicted in the narrator's reaction whenever J.P. unexpectedly stops talking. The following is an example:

J.P. quits talking. He just clams up. What's going on? I'm listening. It's helping me relax, for one thing. It's taking me away from my own situation. After a minute, I say, 'What the hell? Go on, J.P.' He's pulling his chin. But pretty soon he starts talking again. (WICF 192)

Still, it must not be neglected that for the narrator, his defense mechanism of listening to others' story is not totally repressive. Separated from his own wife and estranged from his girl-friend, the narrator is desperate to seek and find possibility of peace and happiness in another couple's relationship. Listening to J.P and meeting Roxy on Christmas day encourages him to try to call his wife and consider sorting matters out with his girl-friend as well.

No action is taken yet and the future is as blur as it was at the beginning of the story. He is still in the 'porch position' discussed, but it can at least be counted as getting one step closer to taking an action. As a result, one can claim story-telling and listening to stories has a double function of hiding behind another one's narrative in addition to healing from inside. Similar to the other repressive forces, it manifests the extent to which the culture of the postmodern regulates the lives of people by having them internalize its values as vital for survival in the world which is collapsing around them every moment.

4. Conclusion

The study of repression in this article from Jameson's stand reveals the extent to which the postmodern ideology has taken hold of its subjects' thinking and behavior. In a consumerist society where even the notion of consumerism itself has been reified by the media apparatus, the likes of Dummy find the only solution for the melancholic life they lead in mastering the material world and buying an image of prosperity. Dummy's life as a common laborer is as reified and unstable as the complacent life of the unnamed narrator of "Elephant" who, helpless as he is when confronted with forever-rising financial pressure and expectations of his family, shuts his eyes to the solid reality and takes refuge in a retreat to bygone and tattered values evoked in him by the dream about his father. In "Where I'm Calling From", Carver underlines the role of narration in reconstruction of self and concealment of hidden anxieties. He also reinforces the healing power it has in its connection to the other. Being so, it presents the brighter side of the postmodern culture. As illustrated, repression in these stories is willfully and willingly embraced by the characters as a means to deny or suppress latent anxieties on both private and public domains.

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