



ORAL NARRATIVES OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
IN THE WORK OF RAYMOND CARVER

JESSE SESSOMS

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
MA-ELL

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH (GSE)
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY
BANGKOK, THAILAND

SEPTEMBER 2009

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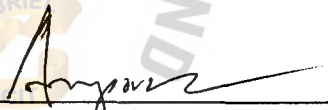
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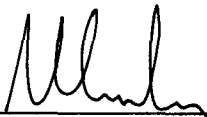
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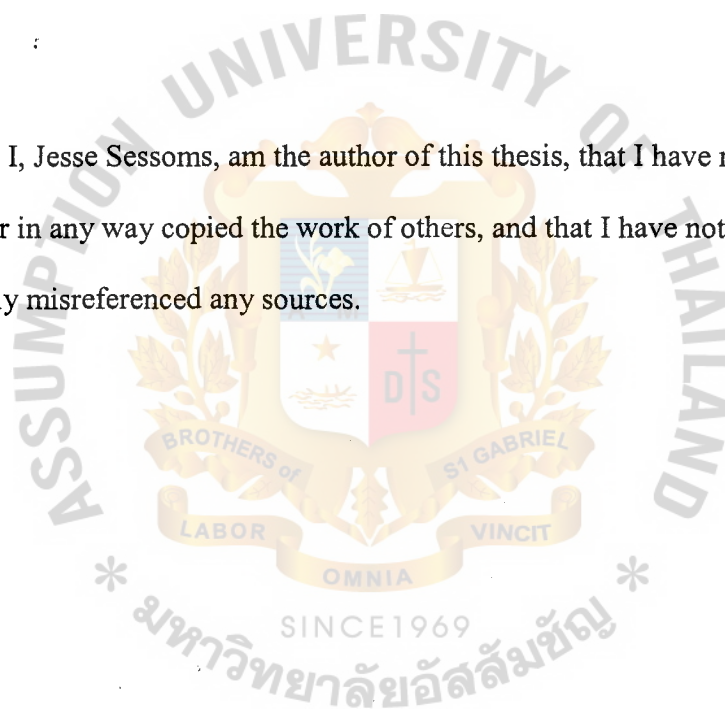


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I declare that I, Jesse Sessoms, am the author of this thesis, that I have not plagiarized or in any way copied the work of others, and that I have not stolen any ideas or deliberately misreferenced any sources.



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A central theme of Raymond Carver's work is communication in connection to its role in forging and maintaining relationships, usually intimate ones; or more aptly, miscommunication in connection to its role in relationships that are failing. These characters, who are white and, usually but not always, lower middle class and under educated, are notorious for their communicational deficiencies. As individuals, they have difficulty understanding their own selves. They are baffled by their thoughts and emotions and if they strike, by realizations. Along with their problems of self-understanding, they are also weak at interpersonal communication, especially when dealing with intimate, sensitive matters. They struggle at expressing their thoughts and feelings; they are reticent, at times even inarticulate. Furthermore, they struggle too to understand their loved ones. In treating characters who have intrapersonal and interpersonal communicational problems, as well as who tend to be of a lower social-economic strata, and whose marriages and families are conflicted, Carver gave "voice to a submerged population, who before his time had not been adequately recognized in the cultural space of America" (Lainsbury 1).

In most Carver stories, conversations/dialogue are foregrounded. Within many of these conversations a character tells an oral narrative of personal experience (ONOE). In humanistic terms, ONOE are narratives that are told by a person that concern the teller's life, as opposed to narratives about someone or something else. Telling autobiographical stories is an activity that all people seem to engage in, across all boundaries. While it is rare for a person to tell a story aloud when alone, to themselves, it is common for people to tell stories about themselves and their lives during the course of a conversation. As Nancy Bonvillian comments in *Language, Culture, and*

Communication: "in most conversational interactions, people talk about their experiences, past events that have meaning in their lives. Although storytelling may not be the focus of all conversations, narratives are frequently included to exemplify or dramatize a person's feelings, thoughts, and opinions" (94).

ONOPE are important to people on both individual and interpersonal levels. According to Elinor Ochs, as individuals, "narrating personal experience allows us to reconcile how we . . . behaved in the past and how we project ourselves in an as-yet-unrealized future . . . [ONOPE] is a way of fashioning a sense of continuity of self" (285), yet ONOPE are also "central to weaving the fabric of social life in that they forge and sustain social relationships and build shared lifeworlds" (Ochs 269).

The analysis of ONOPE can offer much insight into its teller. Daniel D. Hutto states that "autobiographical self-narratives . . . reveal more than just the 'facts' about our situations . . . their content and composition also reveals something about their authors -- about their character [personality] and concerns. Something shows through in what one chooses to highlight about oneself and how this is done" (4). It should be observed that ONOPE, being usually told to someone, in a conversation, are socially oriented. This means that elements of performance and audience are always inherently present. The teller's story telling style, and to whom the story is being told, are crucial to the communicative event.

A key feature of ONOPE is that, as Ochs notes, they "always depict or evoke an ordered sequence of events" (270). More precisely, the linguist William Labov defines ONOPE as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (225). Most

people, most of the time, when telling ONOPE recast the events in terms of a beginning, middle, and end, which framework essentially corresponds to the actual events. Labov described the structure of ONOPE in the following manner:

Abstract: what was this about?
Orientation: who, when, what, where?
Complicating action: then what happened?
Evaluation: so what?
Result: what finally happened? (234)

The aspect of evaluation covers a broad area. It concerns why the ONOPE might be of interest to the audience, why it is worth hearing, and hence involves all the means by which its teller strives to make it attention holding. Evaluation saturates the ONOPE, for the teller is always engaged in this endeavor. Labov says: "there are many ways to tell the same story, to make very different points, or to make no point at all. Pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder, 'So what?' Every good narrator is continually warding off this question" (231).

Furthermore, ONOPE are phenomenological and humanistic. ONOPE always have a protagonist, usually the teller; however, the teller could be recounting an event which he/she was a witness to and hence not the main actor. Time is always conceptualized in relation to the teller, as "human beings bring memories of their lived pasts and their projected or imagined, yet to be realized, life courses into their consciousness of the present" (Ochs 273).

ONOPE are a communicative event performed by humans. In fictional work, however, ONOPE are written. Therefore, the ONOPE are no longer truly oral, but written representations of one type of oral discourse. In this sense it is a contradiction to say that

what is being studied are *oral* narratives of personal experience. What is meant by the study of ONOPE in Carver's work is that the ONOPE are vocalized by a character, usually in the context of a dialogue (conversation). Because an ONOPE is vocalized by a fictional character, but written by an author, "as a type the story [ONOPE] lies somewhere between the purely oral narrative and the purely written one" (Toolan 149). The ONOPE must be vocalized. Internal and interior asides, memories, and stories do not count as ONOPE. However, there are certain exceptions to this rule which shall be explicated further on. Also, allusions to, and summarizations of, ONOPE do not count as ONOPE. The ONOPE itself needs to be represented.

It is a truism that fictional dialogue differs from actual conversation. For example, from a visual perspective, dialogue traditionally has quotation marks and speaker citations (he said/she said); and linguistically, dialogue tends to have less space fillers (for example, "well", "umm", and "uh-huh"), and less repetition. A more critical difference is that actual ONOPE come within a conversation that takes place in the vast spatio-temporal situation of life itself. The teller tells the ONOPE to a friend or loved one during a conversation, which itself is one event of that day, and that day is but one day in the teller's life. Fictional ONOPE, however, come within the context of a text, in the case of Carver, short stories. Fictional ONOPE are usually part of a dialogue which is, most often, a part of a larger story. There are thus two stories: the character's ONOPE, and the surrounding textual story. As Michael Toolan says: "entire narratives [ONOPE] may constitute part or all of the Evaluation of a different or larger narrative [the text] with which it connects -- and connects in ways which do not reduce" to grammatical choices (171). It is not simply that actual and fictional ONOPE differ lexically and

grammatically, but that a fictional ONOPE may "'fit' into the encompassing narrative" (Toolan 171) in a wide variety of ways.

Here, a distinction must be made between narrators. There is the narrator of the ONOPE. In this case, the term "teller" shall striven to be used. Then there is the textual narrator. Textual narration is a vast realm. Texts may be written in first, second, or third person, in omniscient or limited scope, with varying degrees of direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse. The teller of the ONOPE is not to be confused with the textual narrator. Often times in Carver's work the textual narrator is not the teller of the ONOPE.

The ONOPE are concrete instances in which Carver's characters' use communication to interpret their own lives, and to develop and maintain intimate relationships. Studying ONOPE therefore allows the theme in Carver's work of miscommunication in connection to the attenuating of relationships to be explored. Furthermore, the fictional ONOPE provide a means of analyzing the potential meanings of the "encompassing" text.

It is argued that Carver's use of ONOPE is one of his defining literary marks. The ONOPE are a site at which issues of voice can be discussed. The voice of these marginalized, culturally under represented characters can be explored, as well as the relationship between authorial voice and narratorial voice. By performing analyses of several Carver texts through analyses of ONOPE, the researcher hopes to demonstrate that Carver uses the ONOPE to diverse effects, and that the ONOPE are central to the meanings of the texts. That ONOPE are a significant aspect of Carver's work is quantifiably evident. Carver published fifty-eight stories out of which, according to the researcher's calculations, nineteen have a relationship to ONOPE. That is approximately

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one-third of his work. In more detail, in his first collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, there are eight pertinent stories out of twenty-two. These are: "Fat," "Put Yourself In My Shoes," "The Student's Wife," "How About This?," "The Ducks," "What Do You Do In San Francisco?," "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" and "Nobody Said Anything." In his second collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, there are eight out of seventeen, and they are: "What We Talk About," "Sacks," "Everything Stuck To Him"; "Bicycles, Muscles, Cigaretts"; "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off," "Why Don't You Dance?," "The Calm," and "Gazebo." There are three stories out of twelve in *Cathedral*: "Where I'm Calling From," "Fever," and "A Small, Good Thing" (more will be said on these texts).

There are three levels at which the ONOPE in Carver's work are examined. In the first instance, the ONOPE exist within a dialogue. In the analysis of the dialogic situation, aspects of the linguistic field of pragmatics are applied. This is in order to understand the ONOPE in terms of "what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said" which "requires a consideration of how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they're talking to, where, when, and under what circumstances" (Yule 3). Here are examined the identity of the dialogic participants, and the psychological atmosphere (for example, intense or relaxed) and physical setting (time and place) of the ONOPE event. Also discussed are: how the ONOPE's teller introduces the ONOPE into the dialogue, how turns are navigated during its telling, how the ONOPE is concluded and navigated out, how its teller tells it (performance style).

At the second level, consideration of the content of the ONOPE seeks to answer the question: how does the ONOPE reflect upon its teller? An ONOPE may be congruent or incongruent with, and affirm or disconfirm, what is already known about its teller; it may illuminate new aspects of him/her; it might lend depth to him/her, filling in what was before an outline. The teller's goal in telling the ONOPE is here considered. For example, a teller may intend the ONOPE to be entertainment; may seek to probe the meanings of the ONOPE; may intend the ONOPE as instruction (for example, a parent telling a child an ONOPE with the intention of imparting ethical values), or as a response to a conversational prompt (the ONOPE could be a response to a question, or it could be spurred by a statement by a conversational participant, in which case the ONOPE's teller might begin: "Oh! I know what you mean. I had a similar experience. It was like this . . ."), among other things. In addition, the hearer/listener must not be forgotten. The behavior and responses of the hearer/listener of the ONOPE must also describe themselves, so they too deserve analysis.

Finally, the relationship of the ONOPE to the larger story that it is found in are studied. An ONOPE might provide metaphors, symbols, or themes. It might itself be a metaphor or symbol. It could function as a narrative that either supports or undermines the surrounding narrative. It might function as an important part of the plot; for example, as a point of conflict, a climax, an expository opening or a denouement. The interaction of ONOPE with the larger story depends upon many factors which vary across texts, inevitably leading to different effects, making interpretations incredibly reliant upon contexts.

Usually, the ONOPE comes as a mini-narrative inside of a larger surrounding narrative, but in some cases instead of the ONOPE being situated within the text, the text is an attempt at the presentation of the ONOPE. The text is, essentially, an ONOPE. In these texts is a complex interplay between the authorial voice, the narratorial voice, and other voices, such as that of the social-cultural milieu. There is a sort of hybridity of forms in these texts between an actual ONOPE and its written fictional representation.

In a sense these levels of analysis are hierarchical, with that of the dialogic situation being the ground floor and that of the ONOPE's interactions with the larger text the upper floor. However, these levels are not distinctly separate from one another. The ONOPE are always a part of a larger story, and analysis of the ONOPE must eventually relate them to it. For example, analyses of an ONOPE's teller and receiver must always retain in mind their roles/places in the overall story. Between these levels of analysis and the larger story there would seem to be limitless interactions. One level might be more relevant to interpretation of a story than another; again, it is highly contextually dependent upon the text.

This study shall analyze the ONOPE in Carver's work in terms of three themes: voice, revelation, and the tension between oral and textual ONOPE. In chapter one, voice is discussed in terms of characters. In telling an ONOPE a character is given a voice, and by preventing a character from its telling a character is silenced. Furthermore, an ONOPE may be alluded to; it may be suggested that one is told by a character, but that ONOPE may not be depicted. It may be summarized, or suggested, so that the character's voice is weakened: the teller is not completely silenced, yet is not given a full utterance. What are

the effects of allowing characters various extents of voice? How are characters allowed to "speak" and how are they silenced?

Chapter two analyzes revelation. In Carver's work, ONOPE are often involved in the divulgence of very personal information. In these instances a character is exposing a deeper, intimate part of their being. The teller might reveal a feeling about a loved one, a feeling or attitude about their life, a deep regret, a burning desire. It will be shown through analysis of the ONOPE that these characters have difficulty communicating, both intrapersonally and interpersonally, their sensitive thoughts and feelings. How and in what ways do these characters miscommunicate? What are the effects upon the meanings of the text of the characters miscommunication? How does their miscommunication contribute to the texts' meanings?

Chapter three explores texts that can be seen as the attempted representation of an actual ONOPE. In one type, a situation is given for the conversation within which comes the ONOPE. In this type, the conversation, hence the ONOPE, consume the majority of the text. That is, the text consists primarily of a dialogue within which a character is telling an ONOPE. For these texts, interpreting the ONOPE is requisite to interpreting the text. In one sense, the events of the ONOPE are the textual plot. The ONOPE's events constitute the actions, or events, of the plot. However, as a situation and context for the dialogue/ONOPE are provided, the ONOPE is still to some degree a part of a larger story. In Carver's work the larger story is often that of the characters' struggle to understand their own thoughts and feelings, and to communicate these thoughts and feelings. That is, the larger story is the characters' *process* and undertaking of communication, in terms of understanding their own selves, and of interpersonal communication. How, in what ways,

and to what degrees are characters granted understanding and articulate self-expression, and to what effects?

In another type, a context is essentially not given. In these texts, the textual narrator is perceived as oriented to an extra-textual reader/listener, a meta listener. In these texts there is a more overt tension between the characterial voice and the authorial voice, between the fictional ONOPE and the actual ONOPE. These texts are the aforementioned exception to the rule that the ONOPE must be vocalized by a character. Here, the narrator's interior thoughts and memories seem directed to an external audience, to a listener. The narrator's interior is presented in a highly oralized manner. The text itself becomes an "utterance," (utterance is placed in quotation marks because it refers to speech, yet written texts are being studied). The style of these texts' narration is skaz, is highly oralized, to approximate its speaker's voice. In these texts, the speaker then tells an ONOPE, so that the text becomes an ONOPE. There is not a fictional dialogic situation, the text *is* an ONOPE. The dialogic situation thus transforms from one between fictional characters to one between a fictional teller of an ONOPE and a reader. One effect of this is that, being externally oriented, the text feels more personal, in that the ONOPE's teller is felt to be "speaking" directly to the reader.



Chapter One

The first portion of this chapter examines "Gazebo," and the latter explores "Nobody Said Anything." The effects of granting a character a voice, through telling an ONOPE, as in "Gazebo," and of denying a character a voice, by the denial of an ONOPE, as in "Nobody Said Anything," are explored.

"Gazebo," a ten page story from Carver's second book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, centers on a married couple, Duane and Holly, who are having a conversation in which they are trying to make a decision: whether to remain a couple, or not. The text is narrated in the first person by Duane, who presents the conversation as if it were occurring in the present, while at the same time he remembers interiorially various background details relevant to the conversation, and events leading up to it. The structure of the text, then, is a contrast between the apparently present-time conversation along with events of that day, and Duane's recollections, from which most of the background information comes.

There is a dialectic between Duane and Holly's conversation and the text. Within their conversation, Holly has by far the most and the longest turns while Duane appears laconic and reticent, so she would seem to be the dominant participant. However, at the level of the text, this is Duane's story. Since he is telling it, he is in control, commanding what information is included and how it gets told. Moreover, by telling this story he is in fact getting in the last word (although he does not portray himself in a flattering manner). This type of dialectic is also present in the text *Intimacy*, for an analysis of which see Bramlett and Raabe, 2004.

Duane and Holly have been working as managers of a motel for at least a year. This job seems to be for them an improvement economically and a step out of past financial struggles: "When we'd first moved down here and taken over as managers, we thought we were out of the woods. Free rent and free utilities plus three hundred a month. You couldn't beat it with a stick"

(22). The job comes at a time in Duane and Holly's lives which is pivotal for many Americans, their mid thirties ("She's an attractive woman just past thirty" 22). At this time people commonly look more seriously toward their future, assessing the worth of their current circumstances in relation to the place that they envision themselves being in in the future. It seems likely that Duane and Holly, who married young, are now earnestly considering living somewhere permanently, raising a family and saving money. In this way, Duane says "I was holding down another job nights, and we were getting ahead. We had plans" (23). This job thus represents not only the potential end of their apparent past financial hardships but also a chance to begin building the foundation of their future. With free rent and utilities plus three hundred dollars a month at the motel, combined with the supplemental income from Duane's night job, they must have been doing fairly well.

Returning to the clause "we thought we were out of the woods," it becomes evident through Duane's recollections that "out of the woods" implies more than financial troubles. Duane and Holly were perhaps trying to leave behind relationship difficulties as well. One problem that they might have had is trouble communicating. Duane says: "Drinking's funny. When I look back on it, all of our important decisions have been figured out when we were drinking" (25). Discussing important matters can be psychologically and emotionally intense for intimate couples, as at these times each person needs to give the information necessary for making a decision and so must open up their heart much more than usual, exposing their deeper desires, fears, and motivations, and leaving themselves vulnerable to psychological-emotional attack. Trust is required. It seems that since Duane and Holly needed recourse to alcohol in these sensitive situations, they did not have a deep trust.

"Everything was fine for the first year" (23) Duane says, thereby implying that they had problems after that, which they did. One problem was that they were "hitting it pretty hard. Booze takes a lot of time and effort if you're going to do it right" (26). A second problem was that they stopped managing the motel properly, letting it go to waste. There is an obvious association between the decay of the motel and the decay of their relationship. Their poor job performance is certainly due in part to their excessive drinking, but is perhaps not solely attributable to it. Duane says they "just didn't have the heart for it anymore" (26) and "had stopped caring" (27), which suggest deeper problems, problems for which people use alcohol to mask or evade.

Another problem was that Duane was having an affair with one of the motel's maids: "The thing with Juanita was five days a week between the hours of ten and eleven. It was in whatever unit she was in when she was making her cleaning rounds. I'd just walk in where she was working and shut the door behind me" (26). It can be inferred that his affair was not short but prolonged, and that it happened at the same place where he and Holly worked, and lived. The apparent length of the affair and its regularity, compounded by its sensitive place of occurrence, must have made it extremely painful and hurtful for Holly. Duane does not make explicit causal connections, but if the order by which he imparts this information is considered, there might be an implicit linkage; first he describes his adulterous affair, then his and Holly's neglect of the motel, and concludes by saying that they had begun drinking excessively. His affair thus seems to be the factor that caused things to go wrong, and when Duane says "we just didn't have the heart for it anymore" the referent of 'it' could likely be their relationship.

Indeed, they had "reached the end of something, and the thing was to find out where new to start" (27). They have now been in a suite since morning with a bottle of whiskey, talking and

trying to figure out "what it is we [they] should do" (28). The psychological-emotional atmosphere of the conversation is intense, and powerfully depicted by the story's opening sentences: "That morning she pours Teacher's over my belly and licks it off. That afternoon she tries to jump out the window" (21). In these parallel sentences, Holly is the active agent. The first sentence describes an act of potential intimacy, sexual intercourse, which contrasts with the suicide attempt in the second sentence. However, the sexual acts' intimacy is weakened by the vulgar way in which it is presented, and further eroded by Duane's use of the subjective pronoun 'she,' rather than saying her name or that in fact this woman is his wife. A sense of desperateness prevails, that "there was this funny thing that anything could happen now that we realized everything had" (27).

The text is constructed so that their decision is emphasized. This is affected by the omission of background information relevant to their story. It is not known why Duane engaged in this affair, nor how he feels about the affair, its female counterpart, and its effects on his wife; it is likewise unknown how his wife discovered it, how long she knew about it prior to their having this conversation, and her feelings in general regarding their time as managers at the motel. Did she know about the affair while it was happening, or did she only learn of it afterwards? If she had known about it for a while, then how long did she live with the information inside her, and why had she waited until this time to deal with it? Not knowing these things, their decision becomes the focus, which in turn increases the importance of their present-time conversation and intensifies the psychological atmosphere.

Yet the language of "Gazebo" purposefully confuses the sense of time, hinting that this conversation might not actually be happening in the present. The use of 'that' (rather than 'this') in the opening sentences points toward the past: "That morning she pours Teacher's over my

belly and licks it off. That afternoon she tries to jump out the window" (21). However, the present-time of the conversation engenders a sense that the goal of their conversation has yet to be reached. The possibility of past-ness is returned to in a concrete manner in the text's final two lines:

'Duane,' Holly goes.
In this, too, she was right. (29)

He does not say that she *is* right, but that she *was* right. Thus the story's opening and closing form a past-tense frame for the present-time conversation, which begs the question that if these events had taken place then did or did they not reach a decision, and if they did what it was. However, by the story's end this has not been made clear.

Considering the last line of the story ("In this, too, she was right"), it is not known what the demonstrative pronoun 'this' refers to; its antecedent has been eliminated. Given that in the preceding line Holly is about to speak, it might be referring to whatever it is she says, which could likely be her own decision regarding their relationship. Her speech has been omitted, though, and therefore the text's resolution as well. By hinting that a decision has been made but not imparting that information to the reader, the text is structured open endedly.

Toward the end of the text Duane asks Holly: "What is it we should do" (28)? It is the determining question of their conversation and her answer is crucial, having the potential to settle the matter. It is a site of complication; the termination of the conversation could also be that of the text's, but the two do not have to coincide. For example, her answer, whatever it might be, could catalyze a new direction in the tale and prolong the text further. Out of the ways that she could choose to reply (assuming that being an adult she has developed more than one method of communicating in sensitive situations), she responds with a narrative of personal experience. It consists of two paragraphs, the first being able to stand alone as a mini-narrative, but the

second continuing out of the first. The entire narrative concerns an experience that she and Duane shared at an earlier time in their marriage. She says:

You remember the time we drove out to that old farm place outside of Yakima, out past Terrace Heights? We were just driving around? We were on this little dirt road and it was hot and dusty? We kept going and came to that old house, and you asked if could we have a drink of water? Can you imagine us doing that now? Going up to a house and asking for a drink of water?

Those old people must be dead now . . . side by side out there in some cemetery. You remember they asked us in for cake? And later on they showed us around? And there was this gazebo there out back? It was out back under some trees? It had a little peaked roof and the paint was gone and there were these weeds growing up over the steps. And the woman said that years before, I mean a real long time ago, men used to come around and play music out there on a Sunday, and the people would sit and listen. I thought we'd be like that too when we got old enough. Dignified. And in a place. And people would come to our door. 28

The first paragraph is replete with images that have long and powerful associations in cultural imagination. For instance, they are out in the countryside. It is the romantic iconic image of an idyllic nature, the antithesis of city life. Here, it is likely that Duane and Holly's hearts and minds are unburdened and they experience a momentary escape from their everyday worries. They are on a little dirt road. It is a man made intrusion into nature, but it is not a wide road, nor paved. It has the potential of the new; it might lead to new experiences, to new metaphysical and existential considerations. They are young, out on a leisurely drive. Youth with all its positive connotations; perhaps their relationship was more innocent, more idyllic, more spontaneous, then. They are engaging in a probably spontaneous act, together, doing something solely for fun, and enjoying each other's company. There is the car and freedom, freedom to go wherever one desires, leaving behind troubles, worries, the past; at the wheel and in control of one's destiny,

the future one of potential and possibility and hope. There is the farm and its old house, with its many positive associations, such as stability and rootedness, hard work, self-sufficiency and independence, honesty, pragmatism.

The thematic unity of the images in the first paragraph can be viewed as culminating in the second paragraph's first sentence, with her projected image of the elderly couple (the owners of the farm) having since then passed on and perhaps being buried in a cemetery somewhere, side by side. This first portion of her narrative thus presents one possible trajectory their relationship could have taken: from youth, freedom, and discovery (represented by their leisurely drive in the car on the dirt road), to an adulthood of work and labor, planning and saving (implied by the necessity of their having to end their drive and return to the city, and to work), followed by or continuing on to a time of stability in which the rewards of their hard work are reaped (signified by the farm house), and finally, having lived out their lives together, they too pass on and are buried in a cemetery, side by side.

The remaining portion of her narrative concerns their experience at the farm house, and is slightly different thematically. They leave the car (and all with which it is associated) and go to the farm house to ask for a glass of water. The elderly couple who live there invite Duane and Holly in for cake, then give them a tour of the place, during which they show Duane and Holly their gazebo in back, and relate some of its history, which seems to make a strong impression upon Holly for she describes it in some detail.

At the level of their conversation, Holly perhaps intends her narrative most of all to serve as a comparison and contrast with both their present situation and with the future that she had imagined. This intention is overtly expressed when she caps the point in her narrative at which they arrive at the farm place and ask for water by saying: "Can you imagine us doing that now?"

She uses the verb 'do,' a strong action verb; furthermore, she uses it in present progressive tense, and in the following sentence she uses two more verbs in present progressive (*going up to a house, asking for water*), so that she focuses the evaluative point of her narrative upon their behavior. In this way, she contrasts their behavior then with their behavior now, implying that that positive kind of behavior they engaged in earlier in their relationship (spontaneously going for a drive in the countryside, the adventure of approaching a strange -- in the sense of unknown -- house, the unity of a joint undertaking) is no longer possible. Their relationship has been damaged to such an extent that they have become unable to engage in mutually rewarding behavior - the kind that builds, sustains, and affirms a relationship. In a literal sense, it is possible that she means that she actually can not imagine it: her heart is so hurt that even thinking in this vein is too painful.

In another sense the demonstrative pronoun 'that' in her question "can you imagine us doing that now" not only refers to the actions of going up to a strange house and asking for water, but perhaps more importantly to the relationship-life trajectory imagined in her narrative (from youth and the car, to death and burial together). She is saying in an unstated way that that future is no longer possible. The elderly couple living on the farm thus represent all they shall never have together: the stability of a home, a happy old age, a love till death do they part. At the conclusion of her narrative Holly states these sentiments more directly: "I thought we'd be like that too when we got old enough. Dignified. And in a place. And people would come to our door."

The elderly couple can be seen to represent the values of an older generation, in which there is a greater sense of hospitality (they invite Holly and Duane in for cake, and show them around), and a style of love and marriage that (perhaps) emphasizes loyalty, stability and

monogamy - a love till death do they part. Values which contrast with those of post-Vietnam, commercial, consumptionist, American society, in which dislocation, relativity, replaceability, and transitoriness are dominant, which are represented by Duane and Holly, who work at a motel, a prototypical symbol of such values.

In the structure of Holly's *ONOE*, at its end there is some discontinuity. Holly has spent time on the image of the gazebo, then she shifts to imagining her and Duane's future ("I thought we'd be like that too . . . in a place. And people would come to our door"). Why does Holly suddenly shift from the gazebo to imagining her and Duane's future home? Why is the text entitled after the gazebo, rather than given a title referring to their drive itself, or the farm house, or even the little dirt road, all of which are also important images in her narrative? That is to say, what position does the gazebo hold within the text's hierarchy of meaning?

The gazebo is first of all an unessential structure, something of an extravagance. It is not necessary for the elderly couple's existence at the farm place; it is solely for leisure and relaxation. The kind of recreational activities it is built to accommodate are of a more communal type: the elderly couple could sit inside the gazebo in the backyard on an afternoon or evening, conversing and enjoying each other's company, activities that affirm and sustain interpersonal relationships. In this way the gazebo has positive associations that relate thematically to those of Duane and Holly's leisurely outing. Since visitors (e.g. travelling musicians, neighbors, friends) could, and did, come to the gazebo, it was also a place where not only relationships between a couple or within a family could be forged, but social and communal bonds as well, and from these a sense of belonging to a community. Perhaps Holly views the gazebo as a symbolic reward and benefit (the icing on the cake) of working hard, saving money, planning, and settling down at a permanent location somewhere - having done all that, it would be possible to relax at

the gazebo, with a sense of deserved satisfaction. The decayed state of the gazebo might indicate the loss in contemporary American society of a greater sense of community, with a corresponding increase of a feeling of isolation.

On the other hand, at the level of the text the gazebo makes an interesting comparison and contrast with the motel. The gazebo bears a dual sense of permanence and transitoriness: it is an adjunct of the farm house and so has permanence, but it is also a site for the inherently temporary visits of guests. However, the motel is exclusively a site of transitoriness. Its owners most likely have nothing more than a financial relationship with it, interested in it only so far as it continues to produce profit. Holly and Duane, not owning it, certainly have a cold impersonal relationship with it. Moreover, they treat it as a stepping stone to better things.

Viewing Duane and Holly's leisurely drive metaphorically, on the road of their relationship they have not reached their destination, the farm house, and have not achieved a sense of permanence and stability. Where they have made it to is the motel, a metaphorical way station. They are rather like the travelling musicians of an erstwhile era that the elderly couple spoke of, stopping by the gazebo, admiring the beauty of the land, and remarking upon the benefits of having a place of one's own, with someone you love. From having their farm place, the elderly couple possess at least some sense of belonging, as it is a part of, and interacts with, the surrounding land and the surrounding community. Living and working at the motel, Duane and Holly do not possess that same feeling. Furthermore, rather than hosting guests, as the elderly couple presumably used to do at their gazebo, and as the elderly couple invited them in for cake that day, Duane and Holly engage in financial transactions with customers who are always strangers passing on.

It must be remembered that this narrative is directed at Duane, in answer to his crucial question. Let's consider his reaction and response when Holly finishes her narrative, for it must surely evaluate his character. At first he is silent, unable "to say anything just yet." He then says lamely: "Holly, these things, we'll look back on them too. We'll go, 'Remember the motel with all the crud in the pool?'" (28). At some level he equates the events and their time at the motel with her memory of that rural drive. Yet these things are quite different. Firstly, the crud in the pool, and all that it represents, the deterioration of the motel, of their relationship, their heavy drinking, and Duane's adultery, is the antithesis of her narrative.

Secondly, in her *ONOE* is an implied vision of their future whereas in Duane's response there is no reference to their future. One wonders *from where* they will look back upon their time at the motel. He conspicuously does not acknowledge, recognize, or reciprocate her expression of a shared future. He only says that "these things" will also become shared memories. It is at best an ambivalent response, at worst an uncaring one. Indeed, it could be that he is saying something, anything, because some type of response is required at this juncture of their conversation. This interpretation of Duane as being ambivalent is supported by an earlier scene, where he asks Holly for forgiveness: "I get down on my knees and I start to beg. *But I am thinking of Juanita* [the maid]" (24).

The text ends with this image: "I move over to the window and look out from behind the curtain. . . . I hear a car start. Then another. They turn on their lights against the building and, one after the other, they pull away and go out into the traffic" (29). There is departure, isolation and loneliness, darkness, fear, and sorrow, saturated with a sense of their future. The image resonates off its antithesis, Holly's narrative. Time comes together. The nostalgic past is contrasted with the bleak present, which anticipates a foreboding future.

Thus we can see that Holly's ONOPE plays a crucial role in the text's meanings. It reflects upon Holly, providing much needed depth to her character. Her ONOPE shows that she loved Duane deeply and desired to have a life long relationship with him. The vivid detail of her ONOPE (for example, the gazebo had a "little peaked roof" and "there were these weeds growing up over the steps" 28) portrays her as an articulate woman. Holly's tacit comparison of her and Duane with the elderly couple, and the implications of that comparison (they will not be like the elderly couple), are an intelligent, subtle response to Duane's question. Furthermore, the images of her ONOPE; for example, the "old house", the gazebo "under some trees," the "little dirt road," portray her as possessing deep and sincere emotions, a description not provided by the surrounding story. Holly's ONOPE also reflects on Duane, in the way that he responds to it. Duane's response casts him as conflicted in his feelings.

As a mini-narrative within a larger narrative Holly's ONOPE functions dialectically. It portrays an alternate path their lives might have taken, one that is opposite of the actual path of their lives. By her narrative's including elderly people, and a countryside farm, suggestions of generational and cultural differences and changes are incorporated into the text's themes as well. That this mini-narrative was put into the form of an ONOPE rather than integrated into the structure by other means, such as by flashback, perhaps gives it immediacy: her vocal reminiscence of it brings it out of the past into the present; it becomes a part of their current, ongoing story, as her response to his questioning her what it was that they should do.

The structure of "Gazebo" and the text that follows, "Nobody Said Anything," are quite different. "Gazebo" is a relatively compact ten pages, and has been shown to be relatively complexly structured. For example, it manipulates time and withholds information to create specific effects. It is narrowly focused, concentrating upon a single conversation involving one

couple in one room on one day. In contrast "Nobody Said Anything" is a lengthier eighteen pages, and is perhaps structurally more simple. It follows a linear time line, and it is divided into ten sections which are approximately two pages each, each of which clearly leads into the next. It is also perhaps broader in scope. It depicts interpersonal relationships within a family, in particular that of the narrator, who is an unnamed adolescent boy, to his parents, changes settings, and consists of a series of events. It is the themes and the tone that bond these texts. Both explore the psychology and emotions of characters involved in fractured intimate relationships; "Gazebo" concentrates on adults in a disintegrating marriage, while "Nobody Said Anything" looks at the effects of the failing marriage upon the child.

The opening sentences of the text indicate its underlying theme: "I could hear them out in the kitchen. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but they were arguing. Then it got quiet and she started to cry" (43). It is not known who 'I' or 'them' refers to; therefore, the general knowledge is emphasized that there is a subject, who is listening, and the object of this listening is an argument between some people. Continuing on, a dialectic begins to take shape: it is learned that the 'I' is an adolescent boy who, being young, is in a subordinate position in the family, which is associated with not having a voice (witnessed in the first place by his being in the role of listener, and again by his having to listen to something that he does not want to hear but that is beyond his control) and the 'them' are the narrator's parents who, being in an obvious position of dominance, control communication within the family (witnessed by their not having to restrict their quarrelling to a private situation). Thus on the part of the narrator, pertinent information about setting and scene is excluded (for example, that the narrator is in his bedroom, having just woken up, on a weekday morning must be inferred based upon common beliefs about the way things are in life), and on the part of the parents, background information about their

quarrel is excluded, so that what they are fighting about becomes less important than the fact of their fighting, it might be that fighting is a common occurrence.

The dialectic of boy-subordinance-voicelessness against parents-dominance-communicative control occurs within the context of a family. According to Barbara H. Fiese a family can be viewed as a "rule-governed system that changes over time" whose members are engaged in "a transactional process that interlocks parents, children, and the caregiving environment" (1). In this paradigm the family is like an ecological system, whose every member affects and is affected by every other member. In *Nobody Said Anything* this transactional process is seen from the point of view of the child, with the particular aspect being explored of the potential harmful effects upon the boy's psyche of the parents' marital discord.

In regard to this boy's family's transactional system, the boy reports that "last night she'd [his mother] said she wouldn't know what it meant any more to go to work without being 'stirred up'" [45], which indicates that the quarrel between his parents on that morning was not an aberration; they quarrel regularly. Within our ecological paradigm of the family, it follows that negativity in parents' marital relationships may have a negative impact upon other members. Prior to that morning, then, the adolescent narrator may already have been experiencing, at least indirectly, psychological harm. Moreover if that morning is an accurate index his parents have not kept their fights private, which could have a more obviously harmful influence upon him.

In fact, both parents display a disregard for their children's feelings: the father slams the door on his way out, making a loud and upsetting noise, but more directly, the boy says that the mother has "told me before that he [the father] wanted to tear up the family" (43). Her statement is beyond the scope of the narrator's years; he must be unable to cope with it. By it, she appears to be trying to align the boy to her side and against the father, consequently making the boy a

pawn in their ongoing marital strife. In this family's system, the psychological needs of the parents are clearly prioritized above those of the children, even to the extent that the children are incorporated into their disputes. At the narrator's young age, his parents' strife with its attendant negative effects are beyond his control ("I didn't want to listen," the boy thinks, in response to her statement, but he has no choice. 43); moreover, he is not mature enough to understand the psychological complexities of it all, and so is unable to voice his feelings, to explain how it is affecting him.

There are several indicators that the boy is indeed being adversely affected. For example, after everyone has left the house the narrator smokes some of his mother's cigarettes and checks the grocery-money stash to see if there is some he can take without its being missed (46); these acts center on his own gratification, but are also minorly rebellious against his parents. More prominently negative than this though is the narrator's relationship with his brother. It is evident that he dislikes him. He makes this evaluative, general statement of opinion about him: "George is such an asshole" (43), which he repeats later, more strongly: "George is a royal asshole." Although it is possible the brother's poor relationship might be a separate issue unrelated to their parents' marital conflict, the vehemency of the narrator's expressions of dislike (for example, the absolute judgements) seem excessive. They might therefore be a manifestation of suffering somehow caused by the negativity in the parent's relationship.

In the middle section of the text, the boy goes fishing at a local creek. He is outside, on his own, independently experiencing a reality separate from that of his home. Yet a clear distinction between the internal world of home (where he occupies a lower position in a system) and the external world (where he is free) is blurred. As he stands on the creek's bank preparing to fish his thoughts shift to his father, as if making an unconscious association:

I tried to think where to start. I had fished here for three years, ever since we had moved. Dad used to bring George and me in the car and wait for us, smoking, baiting our hooks, tying up new rigs for us if we snagged.¹ (49)

The issue of public versus private space in the domicile, in which the boy is forced to hear his parent's quarreling, and who is incorporated into the marital strife, intrudes, for here he remembers a past experience with his father, who just that morning had slammed the door on leaving home. However, the boy's memory is that of a positive association with his father. Despite the father not actually having left the car to go fishing with the boy, the boy still feels it was a good experience. The activity of fishing might have served to equalize somewhat the power hierarchy between the father and the children, momentarily changing the relationship to one more of friendship. At the least it was an activity through which they experienced some amount of relationship bonding. The boy's (semi) bonding with his father while fishing might be similar to Holly's feeling of bonding with Duane during their leisurely country drive, recalled in her *ONOPE*. Having fishing in common, it is a topic on which the boy and the father can communicate; thus, the boy remembers that: "the last time I was up here I caught two fish about ten inches long and turned one that looked twice as big - a summer steelhead, Dad said when I told him about it" (51). Evidently, the boy had told the story of that fishing trip (a narrative of personal experience) to his father, who responded with a knowledgeable answer, and this was a positive communicative interaction for them.

The boy's present fishing trip turns out to be a unique one. First, the boy catches a fish that is remarkable for its sickliness. It "looked strange;" the fish had "green sides with black trout

¹ Moving can be especially upsetting for (pre)adolescents, as they are in a sensitive developmental period, and having to make new friends, attend a new school, and adjust to a new community present significant emotional and psychological challenges.

spots, a greenish head, and like a green stomach. He was the color of moss," and the boy had "never saw [seen] one like him before" (51, 52). But something even more surprising happens after that. Moving down the creek, the narrator sees a boy wading energetically in the water. This boy who "looked like a rat or something" and "had buck teeth and skinny arms" (53) is trying to catch a fish by chasing it out of the creek, onto land. It is a gigantic fish, and the narrator's "heart jumped" when he saw it. This motley pair manage to catch it, but only with strife and a mild amount of violence.

This violence is shown in that the other boy twice says, evidently serious: "I wish I had my gun" (53, 54). Perhaps it is not unusual for boys in rural American towns to have, or have access to, guns, but it does seem a bit sordid that he wants to use it as a fishing instrument. Furthermore, the boy tries wildly to club and kick the fish. Also, the narrator tells the boy to "kick the living shit out of him [the fish]," then has these aggressive and derisive thoughts: "But the dumb idiot had himself a club, the asshole . . . the fish veered off . . . the asshole idiot kid lunged for him and fell flat" (54). It is not to say that the narrator is a mean spirited person, for he doesn't seem to be; rather, these negative thoughts could be manifestations of his distressing home environment. As the boy feels victimized at home, he in turn victimizes the fish. They are both very impressed by their catch. It was "at least two feet long" and "bigger than anything I [the narrator] had ever caught" (57). Except that the fish is even sicklier than the one he caught earlier. The problem is that "he was so skinny, too skinny for how long he was, and you could hardly see the pink stripe down his sides, and his belly was gray and slack." Nevertheless, the narrator still admires the fish. A problem then arises over ownership of the fish. The boys decide to divide it in half, but further conflict ensues because they both desire the top half, which has the

head. It is resolved by the narrator giving the green looking fish to the boy as well as allowing him to keep the huge fish's bottom half, in exchange for its top half.

This fishing trip is ripe with meanings for the boy, which he needs to contemplate and explore. In order to make sense of the events the boy will need to put them into the form of a narrative, because as Ochs notes, "while inside an experience, participants are not able to adequately grasp how they and others are acting, feeling, and thinking in a situation at hand" (Ochs 285). In the form of the ONOPE, the events might become interpretable to the boy. There is further impetus for the boy's desire to tell a narrative of personal experience because he has had several novel experiences and been through something of an adventure, and "the life events that receive narrative attention tend to be cast as unusual, in that they are unexpected or problematic" (Ochs 271). He caught not one, but two fishes, and they were both quite unusual. He met a new person of his own age, a potentially interesting event in itself, but the boy was strange looking as well. Together they caught a fish in a way that neither of them had probably ever tried before.

Finally, a new situation for the narrator developed when he had to negotiate the best method of dividing the fish. These unusual events might cause the boy wonderment: he might wonder about the other boy's life, such as if they went to the same school, if he had seen him around before, and, perhaps, what kind of home life the boy had; he might wonder about the ethics of that situation, in which he and another boy had jointly achieved something but both of whom desired the spoils; and he would certainly wonder what had happened in nature and in the world to make those fish become like that.

It might be noted here that similar to "Gazebo," a theme of deterioration is prevalent in the text: the water in the creek is very low (in "Gazebo," the swimming pool was full of "crud") and not roaring like it once was; one of the boy's fishing spots is where water dumps out of a

drainage pipe; on his way to another portion of the creek he crawls under a fence with a keep-out sign on it (it is the farthest edge of the town's tiny airport) and notices cracks and oil on the runway (50); both fish are sickly; the other boy is ratty looking.

The events of his day are surely a narrative that the boy would want to share with his father since they have fishing in common, and as noted earlier, he has had positive communicative experiences with his father regarding fishing. So the narrator heads home with the top half of the fish hard won in negotiation, and an exciting story to tell. When he arrives home he heads to the back of the house and prepares to "march into the house, grinning" (60) with his fish, eager to share his experiences with his parents. In a sense it is a show and tell, except that the telling of his narrative to his parents, with their subsequent input, feedback, and general exploration of it shall have important emotional and psychological significance for the boy. Perhaps and hopefully his parents will help him to make sense of it, will even explore with him its latent ethical and existential issues, for his is not a story with a clear meaning and moral, but one that needs probing. In the form of the narrative of personal experience, the adventure will gain meaning for him, becoming a part of his identity, and so too will become a part of him the interaction that he has with his parents in its telling.

But before he could enter he "heard their voices and looked through the window. They were sitting at the table. Smoke was all over the kitchen. I saw it was coming from a pan on the burner. But neither of them paid any attention" (60). His parents are in the kitchen, engrossed in the continuance of their fight of that morning. They do not realize that the narrator is present, watching through the window, and he hears what they say:

"What I'm telling you is the gospel truth," he said. "What do kids know? You'll see."
She said, "I'll see nothing. If I thought that, I'd rather see them dead first."
He said, "What's the matter with you? You better be careful what you say!"

It is slightly problematic whether to classify their behavior as directly or indirectly affecting the boy, for on the one hand it is not directed at him, yet he is still a witness to it. There is again the conflict between public and private, and internal and external. The boy's standing outside of the house looking in recalls both the scene in the morning, in which the parent's fighting in the kitchen awoke the boy, and the scene in which the boy thinks of his father while standing on the river bank preparing to fish.

Again being an unwilling witness to the parent's fighting, the boy receives a psychic blow, and his belief of trust in his relationships with his parents is severely damaged in multiple ways. To begin, the father seems to be defending his own honesty, standing firm by something that he previously said. In so doing, however, he disparages his own children, in fact calling into question their veracity. Here, the boy suffers in two ways: first from the open mistrust between his parents, and second by having his own honesty doubted. In defending her children the mother responds in a very strange way, her statement logically meaning 'If I thought my kids had lied like that, I would rather see them dead.' Whatever her intent, a mother's association of death in any way with her own children must be disturbing for the children, as mother's are the source and sustenance of their lives. Furthermore, the boy might wonder if she truly meant the meaning of her words: if he really had lied, would she really rather see him dead?

After both of them have abused trust and said unkind things, the father ironically emphasizes the need and importance of being careful about one's speech. From those words it is possible that the boy could come to associate emotional turmoil and strife with the communicative act of speech. Those words and this type of interaction by his parents could make the boy feel that intimate interpersonal communication is a battlefield or a minefield; a thing

fraught with serious psychic dangers. The mother's words in the opening come to mind: "I don't feel like another battle this morning" (44). But the turbulence does not stop here. The father finally notices the smoke filling the kitchen and comments upon it, which prompts the mother to pick up the smoking frying pan and throw it across the kitchen against a wall. The father gets a towel and begins wiping up the grease. There is a pause in their bickering.

At this moment, the narrator chooses to enter.

Proud of his trophy, the narrator wants to show it to them. He is very excited. Given the content of his personal narrative, though, and the situation at the house, his emotional state might be better described as agitated. There does seem to be a mismatch between the content of his narrative and his affect,² for his "legs shook" so that he "could hardly stand" (61). His mom looks inside the creel but the fish is so long and skinny that she thinks it is a snake. Adding insult to this injury, she says: "Please, please take it out before I throw up." The father first rejects the boy by not even looking. Then the father says: "'Take it out!' he screamed. 'Didn't you hear what she said? Take it out of here!' he screamed." The verb "scream" is used twice in this line of dialogue, emphasizing his angry tone. The father's disinterest must hurt the boy. The boy says to his father, "But look, Dad. Look what it is." To the boy's request the father directly refuses: "I don't want to look." For the boy, this could likely be taken as a personal rejection; the father not only does not want to see the fish, but is also not at all interested about the boy's feelings. In short, it might come as a rejection of the boy's essence. Despite everything, the boy still makes an attempt to tell the father his personal narrative. Indeed, he is impelled to tell it. He has become extremely agitated, his "voice was crazy" but he "could not stop" and he says:

It's a gigantic summer steelhead from Birch Creek. Look!

² On the "Congruence of Affect and Content," see Fiese et al. 1999: 10.

Isn't he something? It's a monster! I chased him up and down the creek like a madman! . . . There was another one, too . . . A green one. I swear! It was green! Have you ever seen a green one? (61)

Here we see a subtle clue that turns this sad scene into a tragedy for the boy: it is not just any fish - it is a summer steelhead, just like the one that got away, the one that he told his father about before. This fish thus has dual significance, as it serves to continue the previous story (he has now caught one like the one that got away), and also begins a new story (it is a new and strange monster of a fish). This information that bears tremendous emotional importance has been placed in the text's structure: it is withheld until the very end, and even then it is worked into the dialogue in a quite inconspicuous manner. Hearing that it is a summer steelhead, the father takes a look. He is horrified, and his reaction is far beyond what would be appropriate: "his mouth fell open" and then "He screamed, 'Take that goddamned thing out of here! What in the hell is the matter with you? Take it the hell out of the kitchen and throw it in the goddamn garbage!'" The verb "scream" is repeated a third time, and the profanities "goddamned" and "hell" are both used twice, highlighting the father's anger. Capping these angry words are exclamation points. Furthermore, the father rhetorically asks what is "the matter" with the boy, as if wanting to show the father his catch was a crazy, bad desire. Just as the father slammed the door in the morning on his way out, he now slams a metaphorical door on his son. The father has utterly rejected him. The fish has been deemed a disgusting creature no one should be allowed to see, and the boy has not gotten to tell the narrative of his exciting and unusual day. The boy is rendered speechless. He does as he has been screamed at to do, and takes the fish outside to throw away in the trash bin.

At the level of the individual, not being able to tell his narrative, the events go uninterpreted for the boy, hence unassimilated into his being; they remain in the state of things-

that-happened-to-us-but-which-we-do-not-understand. Having not made sense of the events, a portion of his identity goes unconstructed. The boy might gain a pessimistic belief that things will happen to him in life that are beyond his understanding, beyond his control, creating skepticism, and perhaps fear, of the external environment. His parents' behavior shall certainly cause him to mistrust them, and mistrusting his own parents (by far the most intimate and powerful of a child's relationships) it is likely that in the future it will be difficult for him to trust those with whom he is intimate. Moreover, the manner by which his parents prevented his narrative act was particularly negative and hurtful, and could cause the boy to feel that they did not love him; in turn, this feeling of nonlove could cause psychic harm, by forcing him to doubt the worth of his own existence.

The question arises: seeing what the narrator saw beforehand, why does he try to communicate with them at all? Probably because he still has some positive beliefs in the relationships. His trust had not yet been annihilated. Maybe the trust was waning and this was an effort to prevent its total slippage, to bolster the relationships, to create something positive between them all, but especially between he and his father. Being a child, he might simply not know better.

The style of interaction of the family indicates that its "members are seen as separate and unrelated individuals" (Fiese et al. 13) whose younger members are in a strict position of subordination to those in power, the parents, who delegate to them a speech turn based primarily on their own psychic and emotional needs, regardless of the childrens' states of being. The parents display a blatant disregard for the feelings of the children. Not only do they not make an effort to lessen the negative impact of their marital discord upon the children by restricting it to their own privacy, they actively inflict psychic harm on the boy(s) by their words and behaviors.

It was noted earlier that the mother incorporates the children (at least the narrator) into their interpersonal drama as pawns, but this is also true of the father, for it seems that his immediately harsh and negative reaction, despite the boy's presentation being about something that he actually likes and something that they have in common, has to do with a desire to align himself with the mother's positive feelings. That is to say, by scolding the boy the father attempts to defend the mother, who had just been attacking him, and get back onto her good side. It is also possible that the father is simply already angry himself at the boy, for telling the mother something negative about him (hence his rhetorical question: "What do boys know?").

The final scene presents a powerful image of the negative effects upon the boy's psyche of not being able to share his narrative with his parents, and all its accompanying adverse consequences. He is standing alone, kicked out of the house, with his part of the fish. The theme of decay recurs, as the boy has only half of a fish.

Half a fish in part represents the text's theme of the blurring of distinctions: public/private, internal/external, domestic/nature, power/powerlessness. The domestic violence spills over into the narrator's violent hunting style and profane language, into the narrator's momentary consideration of beating up the other boy and taking the fish ("I could have taken him if it came to that. But I didn't want to fight" 58); the deterioration of the boy's family relationships is reflected in the degradation of nature (for example, the sickly fish).

It is quiet outside where he is standing, alone. He is outside of the house and outside of the family, a family which he might not feel a part of, nor wish to be a part of, any longer, with a pressurized world of emotions inside his adolescent heart, and no outlet for them. Like Birch Creek, whose water "bubbled and hopped through this little run" then "got shallow again as if nothing had happened" (50) the family will presumably go on again, as if nothing had happened;

and for the boy these intimate relationships will be shallow. And nobody will say anything about how he felt then. The motif of water again recurs: the "crud" in the pool (in "Gazebo"), the boy fishes by "where the water flowed out of a big pipe," and the "creek was about six feet below the bank" at whose edge the water was once "roaring" (50).

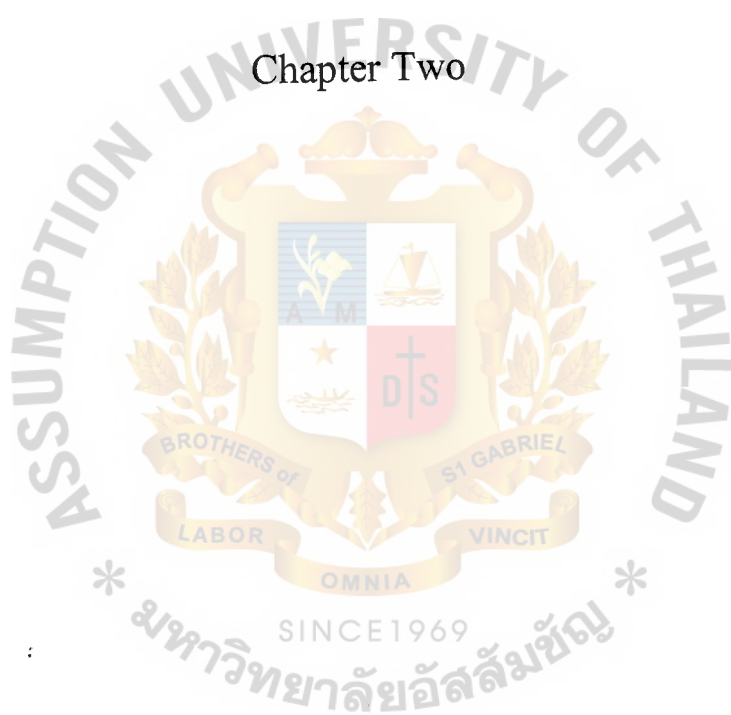
It is possible to view "Nobody Said Anything" as the ONOPE that the boy was prevented from sharing with his parents. In this view, the boy has grown up, and written this short story, in order to tell the ONOPE that never got told. The boy, who was silenced at the time, has gained a voice. The oral voice has been sublimated to a written voice. But the events of that day did not cease with the end of the fishing trip; important things happened before and after the fishing trip, and those events also needed to be incorporated into the narrative. As the boy's day begins and ends with the parent's discord, so too does the text begin and end with it, so that the boy is inside of it, enmeshed: it is his environment.

In "Gazebo" and "Nobody Said Anything" the ONOPE are integral to a fundamental comprehension of their texts, and would seem to be a necessary part of any overall interpretations. However, they are used to quite different effects in each text. In "Gazebo," in terms of the characters, it comes as Holly's response to Duane's question, by which she suggests that she is terminating their relationship, and future together. It also in part describes Holly, by indicating that she values stability, monogamy, and a marriage that is forever; that she wanted one day to have a home, and (probably) children, with Duane. In relation to the surrounding story (text), Holly's ONOPE serves as a contrast, as the alternative route their relationship might have taken. Her ONOPE thus accomplishes several things at different levels in a compact manner, and provides the text with a depth and complexity it might not otherwise have.

In the text "Nobody Said Anything" it is the absence of the ONOPE that is crucial. Structurally the story has been built so that the boy's telling of his story is the expected event, and the text climaxes with the violent negation of his voice, of his story telling opportunity, and of the boy himself, to intense dramatic effect. It climaxes with silence. The boy's failed attempt at story telling with his parents could not suggest in a stronger manner deep problems within the family. The importance of sharing the events of our lives through stories, with others, especially our intimate ones, is thus highlighted. It is an important process in the larger project of the construction of our self identities, as well as in the sustaining of intimate relationships.

Finally, the ONOPE can be seen in terms of voice: Holly has been given a voice, her ONOPE is the primary source of knowledge about her character, while the boy has been denied a voice. In the next chapter we shall look at ONOPE in which the tellers reveal intimate information about themselves. How this specific type of ONOPE event functions in the text, and its effects of this type of ONOPE event upon the texts' meanings, shall be explored.

Chapter Two



The subject of this chapter, revelation and disclosure, is vital to both intimate relationships, such as marriages, and to less intimate ones, such as friendships that are more casual. Brent D. Ruben says that "couples who are willing and able to converse with one another about their relationships, its evolution, and its problems may achieve more satisfying and effective relationships because: partners will be able to anticipate . . . potential problems at an early stage, will have the benefit of knowing how each other . . . feels about the relationship, and will have the opportunity to work together to meet challenges" (334). The ONOPE in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" and "The Bridle" thus offer a concrete means of exploring this aspect of interpersonal communication. Furthermore, the specific communicative events of these ONOPE shall be shown to have vital, crucial, functions in their texts.

"Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" is a twenty page story from Carver's first book, of the same name. The title draws attention to orality, and to the theme of communication. In this case, the title is a request by its speaker for another person to be silent. This is thematically associated with the title of the story "Nobody Said Anything," which also alludes to silence, and which story climaxes with the forcing of silence upon the boy by his parents. The repetition of the polite word "please" gives the request an imploring tone; furthermore, most American speakers of English would probably interpret, the words "please" as being lengthened when spoken, as in "will you pleeeeeease be quiet, pleeeeeease?," which emphasizes the imploring-ness of the tone.

Structurally, this text is divided into three numbered chapters of dissimilar length. Chapter one consists of an opening mini section of summarization, and a scene in the kitchen involving a conversation, which centers on an ONOPE. The ONOPE and chapter

one simultaneously conclude with the protagonist's apparent gaining of insight. Chapter's two and three treat the protagonist after experiencing the epiphany. The text is written in the third person, with the narration being fixed to the point of view of the protagonist, Ralph, who is a white middle class male, and often moves inside his character, via indirect and free indirect discourse, to reveal his thoughts and feelings. The text explores issues concerning Ralph's self-identity, and of his capacity for intimacy in intimate relationships. An overview of the text shall be given in order to provide the textual context in which the ONOPE exists, and to allow for the analysis of the ways that the ONOPE contributes to the text's meanings.

The first seven paragraphs (three and a half pages, 227 - 230) of chapter one comprise what might be seen as a mini section. It chronologically summarizes in a neutral tone approximately a decade of Ralph's life, from around the time of his graduation from high school, through college, marriage, children, and the settling into of a career. By the phrase "neutral tone" it is meant that the narrator is being nonjudgemental. While this might be expected for this section's reportorial type of prose, throughout the text this tone is maintained. (One of the distinctive attributes of Carver's prose is this nonjudgementality of the characters.) At the same time, the majority of this coverage describes Ralph's relationship with his wife, Marian. This opening section serves two purposes: it gives depth to Ralph's character, and provides information which can be used to evaluate the ramifications on him, and on his marital relationship, of the events to be portrayed later in the text.

Ralph and Marian meet in college, where they are both English majors. Their courtship takes a respectable path; they "never let their going together

. . . interfere with their studies" (228). They become engaged, "both sets of parents eventually gave [give] approval to the match," and shortly after graduation they marry. Both of them choose teaching as a career. They apparently enjoy each other's company very much, for not only do they do their student teaching internships together, but upon graduating both of them accept teaching positions at the same high school (one in another town). A year passes and together they seem to be continuing to make progress: Marian begins teaching at a junior college, they place a mortgage on a home, and soon they have two children, Dorothea and Robert. Their lives together have taken a sensible path. They have a happy home, a relationship of mutual love, and they "considered [consider] themselves a happy couple" (230).

After the the expository mode of the mini section, the text transitions to scenic presentation. The events of one night in Ralph's, and Marian's, life are portrayed. Accompanying the narratorial shift is a change in the sense of time, from the historical-past to the immediate-past. However, the linguistic way that time is presented merits attention. The narrator says: "but now it was a Sunday night in November" (230). Most often, the adverb "now" is followed by a verb in the present tense, for example, "is." From another angle, the more usual word choice might be the adverb "then," (rather than "now") because it points toward the past. The feeling that the events are happening "now" might lend them greater urgency, yet they also bear a feeling of having already taken place.

There is also a feeling of immediacy to the events because the text shifts almost directly to one single scene. In terms of textual pace,³ the velocity of the mini-section's summarization, in which many events were recounted, is decelerated. This scene has as its focus one conversation, between Ralph and Marian, and that conversation has just one topic; it is being given an in-depth, under-the-microscope treatment. Furthermore, eight pages of chapter one (230 - 238) are spent on this scene, nearly three times more than the amount of textual space used in the description of the prior ten years or so of his life. It is in fact the longest in the text. While it is possible that the author is playing with structure and meaning by emphasizing an unimportant scene while de-emphasizing a critical scene, it is not so regarding this text; therefore, this structural highlighting of Ralph and Marian's conversation through pace and space demonstrates it is of central importance. It is in this scene, in Ralph's and Marian's conversation, that the ONOPE is found.

What is the context of their conversation, in pragmatic terms? Their conversation begins in a psychological atmosphere of contentedness and domestic tranquility. It is winter and presumably cold outside, but Ralph and Marian are in the warmth of the kitchen. Ralph has just taken a break from grading papers and Marian is ironing. The radio plays softly and a pot of coffee rests on the percolator. The children are asleep. Ralph feels "enormously happy" (230). Marian appears happy too, smiling at him and lifting "up her face to be kissed." They are relaxed, at peace, and they love each other. At this point the scene in the kitchen is idyllic, and contrasts with the violent kitchen scenes in "Nobody Said Anything," both of which took place in the kitchen. In these peaceful

³ Pace is concerned with time and speed in the text. The two basic distinctions being summary, in which "the pace is accelerated through a textual compression of a given story period into a relatively short statement of its main features" and scene, in which "story and text duration are conventionally considered identical (e.g. passages of seemingly verbatim dialogue)" (Toolan 52).

times when the heart and mind are at ease within a safe environment, the portcullis of the soul raises up and deeper, more delicate and sensitive, thoughts and feelings slip out.

It is at this time that, apropos of nothing, Marian asks if Ralph "ever think[s] about that party" (231). Despite the party having been at least two years earlier both of them know exactly which one she is referring to. The narrator, and Ralph, give dates for the party varying from two to four years prior (230, 231, 232, 237, and 246). While it could be that they attend so few parties it is easy for them to recall those that they have been to, it seems more likely there is something particularly memorable about this party. This is implied by Marian's use of the pronoun "that" without providing its antecedent. Marian assumes Ralph will know exactly to which party she is referring and hence does not provide further informative details. Indeed, it is on that night Ralph believes that his wife had a sexual tryst. After two or more years of mutual silence on the topic, Marian has raised it.

Their attitudes toward the subject of "that" party appear quite different. Ralph is "stunned" (231), while Marian seems still to be in a pleasant mood. Marian downplays its importance, saying she "was just thinking about it" so she just asked him and "that's all," because "sometimes I [she] think[s] about it" (231). Ralph, though, responds by accusing her, saying "he kissed you, after all, that night, didn't he? I mean, I knew he did. He did try to kiss you, or didn't he" (231). Yet his reaction is perhaps not surprising. Ralph had begun fantasizing about what she might have done: "increasingly, ghastly images would be projected on his eyes" (230). For Marian to bring up this topic in the first place then to treat it in an unassuming manner, while at the same time Ralph has been having horrible fantasies about it, implies that in some ways there is a mutual lack of understanding. The

peaceful atmosphere has dissipated, and the motif of the kitchen as a site of marital and familial discord recurs.

With the topic in the air, they both proceed to display some dishonesty. Marian evades Ralph's initial accusation by asking him again if he ever thinks about it, the truth of which is that Ralph not only thinks about it often, but has perhaps been obsessing over it. Yet he replies: "not really. It was a long time ago, wasn't it?" (232). This is a misleading statement of his thoughts and feelings, and it also disagrees with the quick accusation he had just made. In comparison, Marian's falsity is perhaps on a more serious level. Ralph repeats his accusation, but this time Marian answers: "yes . . . he did kiss me a few times" (232). This contradicts her prior stance; she had always maintained that nothing sexual had occurred.

By this first confession Marian scratches the wound of Ralph's mistrust, impelling him to press for full disclosure. She does open up, telling him the story of what happened that night. Since Ralph and Marian's conversation has already been spotlighted in the text's structure, her narrative in turn becomes the text's core. It consumes nearly the whole of their conversation, making it the longest speaking turn in the text. It consists of two paragraphs divided by a portion of dialogue. In the first paragraph, which is approximately a page in length, she recounts the scene at the party leading up to her departure with a man named Mitchell Anderson; in the second, which is half of a page, she recounts their journey to and from the liquor store. In the first, she says:

"You remember Emily'd already gone home with the Beattys, and for some reason Mitchell had stayed on. He looked a little out of sorts that night, to begin with. I don't know, maybe they weren't getting along, Emily and him, but I don't know that. And there were you and I, the Franklins, and Mitchell Anderson still there. All of us a little drunk. I'm not sure how it happened, Ralph, but Mitchell and I just happened to find ourselves alone together in the kitchen for a minute, and

there was no whiskey left, only a part of a bottle of that white wine we had. It must've been close to one o'clock, because Mitchell said, 'If we ride on giant wings we can make it before the liquor store closes.' You know how he could be so theatrical when he wanted? Soft-shoe stuff, facial expressions? Anyway, he was very witty about it all. At least it seemed that way at the time. And very drunk, too, I might add. So was I, for that matter. It was an impulse, Ralph. I don't know why I did it, don't ask me, but when he said let's go -- I agreed. We went out the back, where his car was parked. We went just as . . . we were . . . didn't even get our coats out of the closet, thought we'd just be gone a few minutes. I don't know what we thought, *I* thought. I don't know *why* I went, Ralph. It was an impulse, that's all I can say. It was the wrong impulse." She paused. "It was my fault that night, Ralph, and I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done anything like that -- I *know* that."
(234 - 235)

In the second, she continues:

". . . We went straight to the liquor store, and I waited in the car until he came out. He had a sack in one hand and one of those plastic bags of ice in the other. He weaved a little getting into the car. I hadn't realized he was so drunk until we started driving again. I noticed the way he was driving. It was terribly slow. He was all hunched over the wheel. His eyes staring. We were talking about a lot of things that didn't make sense. I can't remember. We were talking about Nietzsche. Strindberg. He was directing *Miss Julie* second semester. And then something about Norman Mailer stabbing his wife in the breast. And then he stopped for a minute in the middle of the road. And we each took a drink out of the bottle. He said he'd hate to think of me being stabbed in the breast. He said he'd like to kiss my breast. He drove the car off the road. He put his head on my lap. . . ." [. . .]
"He said shall we have a go at it?" And then she was saying, "I'm to blame. I'm the one to blame. He said he'd leave it all up to me, I could do whatever I want."
(236 - 237)

One notices firstly that Marian's drive in the car with Mitchell to the liquor store refers to Holly's ONOPE in "Gazebo," in which she and Duane went on a leisurely drive. Both of these female tellers of ONOPE, Marian and Holly, describe a drive, and hence evoke the metaphor of the inner journey, of the open road, which is a dominant theme of American literature, and alludes to, among countless others, Whitman, Kerouac and the Beats, and Steinbeck (for example, *Travels With Charley*). The car and driving are again a site of inner discovery and exploration.

Perhaps the most salient insight into her character derived from her ONOPE is that there is a romantic aspect to her personality. Many of the details that she remembers have to do with (what is for her) Mitchell's romantic manner. For example, she remembers that Mitchell psuedo-poetically said: "If we ride on giant wings we can make it before the liquor store closes;" she also recalls that they talked about Nietzsche and Strindberg, two romantic thinkers; and on the return leg when Mitchell made a move on her, he said "something about Norman Mailer stabbing his wife in the breast. . . . He said he'd hate to think of me being stabbed in the breast. He said he'd like to kiss my breast." It seems that Marian was attracted to Mitchell's "theatrical" and "witty" style. She is also cast in a romantic light by the way she evaluates her own behavior on that night. She twice says that "it was an impulse . . . I don't know why I did it." As well as being attracted to Mitchell, she might also have been attracted to the spontaneity of the moment. By yielding to her momentary passions, her impulsive action might be in the romantic tradition of being true above all else to one's unique inner feelings. Marian confesses that she and Mitchell had sexual intercourse on the return leg of their drive. She was attracted to Mitchell and acted on it; first by leaving the party with him, then by engaging in sex. She followed her feelings through to their conclusion. Her narrative thus constitutes her as an independent, fully sexualized female. She has her own unique motivations and desires, which she may obey given conducive circumstances.

Marian's ONOPE portrays her romantic sensibility, which in turn contrasts with Ralph's character. The first two years at university are for many people an exciting time of inner exploration and discovery. For Ralph, though, this time was "his lowest ebb," due in part to his being unsure of what his future profession will be, and he "get [got]

drunk every night" (227). When Ralph becomes certain of his career, deciding to be an English teacher, he feels much better. His life gets back on (what is for him) a respectable track. He joins a student chamber-music group, and is elected to the quite unromantic position of secretary of the senior class. Ralph is someone who makes a "prudent measure of himself," knowing "what he could do, what he could not do" (230).⁴ While one effect of Marian's ONOPE is thus to contrast her personality with Ralph's, it has another, greater, effect. Her narrative galvanizes some sort of epiphany in Ralph: it causes him to gain some kind of new understanding of her, of life, of himself. Ralph's apparent insight can be seen as the core of the text, and is perhaps the text's climactic point. It divides the text into halves figuratively, as before his insight and after, and literally, as it occurs almost in the text's exact middle, at the bottom of page 237 and top of page 238.

That "Will You Please" is centrally concerned with Ralph's epiphany is indicated in the text's opening sentence, in which the meaning of life and the way it should be lived are introduced as major themes: upon Ralph's graduation from high school, his father "counseled" him that "life was a very serious matter, an enterprise insisting on strength and purpose . . . an arduous undertaking . . . but nevertheless a rewarding one" (227). Along this existential theme, it seems that some type of deeper personal knowledge has evaded Ralph. While at college he "took some classes in philosophy and literature and felt himself on the brink of some kind of huge discovery about himself. But it never came" (227). Later in the mini section the narrator states that "Ralph felt he understood himself" (230). Ralph's opinion of himself as a self aware individual conflicts with his not

⁴ While Ralph teaches only English, Marian also teaches French, one of the Romance languages, and a language stereotyped as romantic. She also mentions that she plans to teach Rimbaud, a famously romantic poet, in her French class.

having made a huge self discovery. Clearly, he does not understand himself in certain ways. By believing that he knows himself yet being in some ways blind, Ralph is presented ironically.

As Marian tells her ONOPE, divulging the details of her adultery, Ralph seems to undergo a concurrent process of realization that incrementally builds in magnitude. The first realization comes in the transition from conversation into the telling of the ONOPE, after Marian's initial disclosure that she had in fact been kissed. Ralph says: "For Christ's sake, Marian! Now I mean it, . . . and he suddenly knew that he did" (234). It is only then, during their conversation, that Ralph realizes he surely and certainly wants to know what she did that night. Given that Ralph had been fantasizing about her possible behavior on that night some part of him already wants to know, but until this moment he could have been fearful of the ramifications of knowing. This could be why Ralph's initial accusation was spoken so timidly ("he kissed you, after all, that night, didn't he? I mean, I knew he did. He did try to kiss you, or didn't he"). This first insight concerns Ralph's own being, while the next insight concerns Marian.

She concludes the first half of her narrative with an evaluation of her behavior. By this evaluation she probably intends to mitigate the damage of her disclosure: "it was an impulse . . . it was the wrong impulse" (235). It instead incenses Ralph, and causes his next realization, which concerns Marian's personality. He says: "'Christ! . . . But you've always been that way, Marian!'" (235). Ralph becomes fully cognizant of Marian's trait of spontaneity, or impetuousness. It is by the act of speaking those words aloud that Ralph gains new knowledge: "he knew at once that he had uttered a new and profound truth."

In terms of voice, there is a contrast in narratorial style. Ralph's and Marian's speech is presented in a way that attempts to authentically replicate actual oral speech; for example, Ralph uses a profanity, "christ." Ralph's interior is presented, on the other hand, in a written/textual voice. Ralph's thoughts are oriented more to an authorial narrator than to his own personal voice. For example, at that emotionally intense situation it is unlikely that Ralph would think the phrase "he had uttered a new and profound truth." That is, the phrase can not realistically be rewritten in the first person, as in "I knew at once that I had uttered a new and profound truth." Access to Ralph's interior is thus stymied. On the theme of revelation, Ralph's interior is not revealed.

Finally, when Marian's ONOPE reaches its apex of sex with Mitchell, Ralph experiences an intense and drastic realization. To him this final epiphanous moment is monumental. Somehow this knowing has derailed the previously straightforward course of his life, the course on which his father had counseled him, and which he had endeavoured his life to follow. The foundational beliefs of his self and his life have been overturned, so that "he did not know what to do. Not just now . . . not just in this, not just about this, today and tomorrow, but every day on earth" (249). Things appear altered. He notices starkly mundane household objects: "There was the tall stool beside the draining board. There was the table where they had sat . . . the clock over the stove . . . the table with the lace cloth, the heavy glass centerpiece . . . the draperies beyond the table open" (248). The kitchen and table now have new significance as the site of this pivotal life event. The distinction between internal and external, which was seen to have been blurred in "Nobody Said Anything," is again blurred. Access to Ralph's inner voice has been denied, but his interior being moves into the external world, the household objects are

transformed. Ralph's own body appears altered; he studies his face closely in a mirror and thinks: "a face: nothing out of the ordinary" (243), as if his inner change had wrought a physical one.

The climactic insight caused in Ralph by Marian's ONOPE seems to be into the nature of his wife. Marian at first appears to have been more of a passive participant in that night's events. She followed her "impulse," not knowing what would happen, and one thing led to another. However, Marian's ONOPE contradicts this passivity. Not only did Marian willingly participate in the sexual encounter, but clearly she wanted and desired it: she actively participated in it. She says: "He [Mitchell] said 'shall we have a go at it?' . . . I'm the one to blame. He said he'd leave it all up to me, I could do whatever I want" (237).

Not fully understanding the meaning of Marian's words, Ralph asks her why she did it, and his insight is again tied to his speech, for "then suddenly he knew! his mind buckled . . . he knew! His mind roared with the knowing" (238). The verb "roared" alludes to the creek in "Nobody Said Anything" whose water was once "roaring," and thus refers to the thematic thread of water ("crud" in the pool in "Gazebo"). In this instance, Ralph's mind is perhaps likened to the flowing water of the creek, which alludes to the iconic metaphor of the mental thought process as a "stream of consciousness." Ralph has realized that there are depths of complexity to Marian's character of which he has not been aware, and does not understand. She harbors passions he knows not of. To Ralph's moderate sensibility, this must be terrifying.

However, Ralph's epiphany seems to be broader than this insight into Marian. It is evident throughout the text that his epiphany is very much concerned with female

sexuality more generally. The sexual content of Marian's *ONOE* interacts with a theme of sexuality in the text. For example, Ralph seems not just to admire his wife's physical beauty, but to objectivize it. Descriptions of her focus on her outward appearance (meaning, her clothes) and on the parts of her body, namely her hair (it is long) and her bust (it is big). Her bust, which is representative of her femininity and sexuality, is associated with Ralph's epiphany. Early in the text he notices "her breasts pushing against the white cloth [of her blouse]" (229). Later he thinks: "Yes, there was a great evil pushing at the world" (241). The verb "push" with the present participle has been repeated, so that it alludes to her sexuality. Female sexuality now has extremely negative associations. The phrase evokes the sense of an ongoing, timeless state of affairs ("pushing at the world"); it is a generic, evaluative statement; to Ralph, female sexuality has come to be a generic source of life's suffering.

Indeed, chapter two, which describes his post-epiphany wander through the night, is rife with negative connotations of female sexuality. Ralph's journey on foot parallels the motif in Holly and Marian's *ONOE*'s of the metaphorical inner journey, represented by the car and driving. Except that Ralph does not drive in a car, but rather walks, rambles, in a sort of stunned daze. Ralph's undertaking of a walk also parallels his wife Marian's *ONOE* in that Marian depicted her actions as spontaneous, and Ralph's walk, and all the events during it, are also spontaneous.

The bar at which Ralph stays most of the night is Jim's Oyster House, which has for a sign "a huge neon-lighted clam shell with a man's legs sticking out" (242). The clam shell can be seen as representing Marian's sexuality, which is consuming him, and as female sexuality generally, which consumes men. Clams are an aquatic creature, and thus

allude to Carver's motif of water. While standing at the bar counter, he "hear[s] a woman say angrily: 'Well, there's going to be, trouble'" (243). Trouble and anger thus being associated with the female gender. He uses the bar's bathroom and sees on the stall's wall a scrawled picture of a vulva and the words "Betty M. Eats It," and feels that "his heart was squeezed in the weight of Betty." These negative allusions to femininity culminate in the scene presented to Ralph when he returns from the bathroom. A woman is being urged on by the crowd to join the band on stage and sing a song; she makes "a mock effort" to resist (244) but finally gets on stage and takes the microphone. The scene has primal overtones: the male crowd urging the lone female to unleash her normally chained in sexuality and passion. Ralph can not bear it, and leaves the room. While Marian's ONOPE detailed a sexual event that was adventurous and exciting to her, on Ralph's journey sexuality is contrastingly negative.

Yet while Ralph feels negatively toward Marian's sexuality, he also seems to be intrigued and fascinated by it. When Marian is at the point in her ONOPE of the sexual encounter between her and Mitchell, the text elides her speech and shifts to Ralph, who feels "a peculiar desire for her flicker through his groin" (237). Perhaps Ralph feels that being sexually aroused for her at that particular moment is "peculiar" because she is describing having sex with another man. Just what were the "ghastly images" that were "projected on his eyes" over the years since that party? Why is it that Ralph has not merely rehashed in his mind that party and the possibility of her betrayal, but has fantasized about its "certain unthinkable particularities"? Perhaps Ralph is jealous of Mitchell's seeming male charisma, his spontaneity and wit, and imagines himself in the role of seducing a woman. In this way, Ralph might imagine himself in Mitchell's place

on that night, seducing Marian. It is even possible that Ralph could be imagining himself in the more sexually kinky role of a voyeur, watching his wife with Mitchell. This raises the theme of inside versus outside, which refers to "Nobody Said Anything;" for example, the image of the boy outside the house looking in through the window at his parents fighting, and at that text's conclusion, of the boy standing alone, outside).

If by epiphany it is meant that a person not only gains new knowledge but also new understanding, then it is possible that Ralph has not had one. He knows something, and his mind "buckled" and "roared" with the knowing, and he felt like his life had forever been altered, but it is undetermined that he understands what he now knows. While Marian takes responsibility for her actions ("it was my fault that night"), thus when she says that she "know[s]" her behavior was wrong, it implies that she has learned from that experience. However, from the text's portrayal of Ralph it can not be ascertained that he has the emotional and psychological maturity and skills necessary to experience a true epiphany, by which he would have a new understanding of himself, his wife, or life. Given that in college he never made the self discovery he felt he was on the verge of, it is possible that he has merely repeated that process.

This possibility is perhaps reflected in Ralph's ramble through the night. Rather than being the description of his new understanding, the walk might be simultaneous with his struggle toward understanding. In this way, the negative associations between external objects and female sexuality are therefore made in the subconscious of his psyche. While he thinks he is upset and disturbed only by what he has learned about his wife, he is actually disturbed by a spectrum of issues which have been triggered by his wife's ONOPE. If this is so, then he never reaches full understanding.

At the first bar that Ralph goes to, named Blake's, which could be an ironic reference to William Blake, a romantic, mystical, prophetic poet and artist, he notices a man standing at the jukebox making a selection, and "as if making a momentous discovery" he thinks "that man is going to play something" (239). Except that that thought is not a momentous discovery, and he has not made any other momentous discovery. It is only "as if" he has made one. The gender of that person being male, the implication could be Ralph does not understand any better the male gender, much less himself.

Furthermore, after leaving the next bar, Jim's Oyster House, he decides to go to the waterfront to sit on a pier and look at the water. Although it is a spontaneous decision, it can be seen as the destination of his night's journey. Here the motif of water again appears. It is a romantic destination; he wanted "to see the water with the lights reflected on it" (247). Ralph gets mugged on the way though, and passes out on the spot. Instead of the romantic waterfront, he pathetically sleeps on the sidewalk. This might be symbolic of his epiphany's ultimately not leading to a final deeper insight. Ralph's inner journey might be arrested. Marian seems to have learned from her experience, but Ralph might not have learned from these experiences.

By the time Ralph arrives home at dawn he has "understood things had been done," (249) but has most likely not understood their meaning. Thus, to him then "everything seemed open." The modal verb "seem" implies that perhaps everything was not actually open. And entering the bedroom, he sees her "secret body angled at the hips" sleeping on the bed. Her body is "secret;" he still does not understand her. Ralph notices

not a deeper part of Marian's being, but that her body is "angled at the hips." Everything is not "open" now.

The text's final sentence maintains the immediate-past sense of time, yet is shaded with a feeling of presentness, of ongoingness. After having just had sex with Marian, "he turned and turned in what might have been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marveling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him" (251). The sense of the eternal present is achieved by the inclusion of the adverb "still" in the verb phrase "and he was still turning." This could indicate that the interior process of transformation has yet to be concluded. Ralph is still trying, struggling, to understand what it is that he has learned. He is not awake, alert, conscious, but in a "stupendous sleep." The verb "turn" implies directionality, as in turning to someone, or turning away from someone. Ralph turns "to her." He might be turning toward things, to face his wife and his conflicted self. In this sense, Ralph marvelled "at the impossible changes . . . moving over him." The adjective "stupendous" and the verb "to marvel" both have positive connotations. This might imply that the experiences of this night have been positive for him. Ambiguity is thus created, between Ralph's apparently arrested inner journey, and an inner change for the positive.

This ambiguity is perhaps emphasized by the text's concluding with the act of sex between Ralph and Marian. It seems ironic that given the conflict and negativity Ralph apparently feels about female sexuality that he ends his day, his journey, with marital sex. He is a passive agent in the act; he "tensed at her fingers, and then he let go a little." He does not want to release, rather he "held [holds] himself as long as he could [can]." Ralph's interior is still conflicted, "tensed". He does not want to "let go." This phrasal verb implies an object, to let go of something. Ralph is thus perhaps holding or

possessing something that he is struggling to "let go" of. Those things might be the things that he is conflicted over (female sexuality, his own insecurity). If the process of inner discovery galvanized by Marian's ONOPE had been successful, he might have been able to "let go" of these things.

Marian is the active actor in the sex act. Using the present continuous tense, the text narrates that "she was pressing her body over his now and moving over him and back and forth over him." Marian is "over" and on top of Ralph, in a position of dominance. She presses her body on him, reminiscent of his feeling that he was "squeezed in the weight of Betty." It is a feeling of claustrophobia, of a lack of space. Also, in this sentence the narration shifts to a more oral voice, oriented more toward Ralph's possible style of thought. That is, it is possible that Ralph might think "she was pressing her body over me now and moving over me and back and forth over me." The "impossible changes moving over" Ralph are associated with Marian, because she was literally "moving back and forth over him."

In Marian's ONOPE she recalls many details about her conversation with Mitchell, which means it was important to her, for she is able to remember the details at least two years later, even though she had been drunk on that night. Conversation, discussion, hence communication are thus shown to be important to her. Furthermore, in telling her ONOPE she is in control of the story; it is her story. She is the one, it must be remembered, who raised the topic of "that party," which led to her telling her ONOPE. She acted to bring up the topic. Perhaps Marian sought deeper communication with Ralph. In this sense she sought to connect with Ralph, to bond, to lessen the space between them.

In contrast, at the text's conclusion Ralph does not want to talk, to communicate, with her. He asks her, implores her, "will you please be quiet, please?" (250), and then tells her imperatively "just be quiet, please" (251). Then they have sex, but during it they do not talk. The text thus concludes with a sense of silence, which is reminiscent of the silence at the end of "Nobody Said Anything." Since Ralph is asking, telling, her to be quiet, it is not a positive silence, like one of mutual understanding, but rather a silence of distance. The closeness of sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is counteracted by a silence of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

It might be noted that the misunderstanding could be solely on Ralph's part; perhaps Marian knows exactly what she is doing. For example, she actively takes responsibility for her behavior on that night, she "was the one to blame," and is aware of her motivation, it was "an impulse . . . the wrong impulse." Knowing that she obeyed an impulse in this instance, she must be aware to some extent that she can be impulsive, spontaneous, or impetuous.

The text thus ends ambiguously. It leaves open questions of Ralph's new understanding: knowing new things, does he understand them? If so, to what extent? Are the changes wrought in Ralph by Marian's disclosure of adultery recounted in her ONOPE positive or negative? This ambiguity is emphasized by the possibility that time has passed since the night of Marian's ONOPE of disclosure, and Ralph is now reflecting on that night. This sense is imparted in the sentence: "he held himself, he later considered, as long as he could." The phrase "he later considered" connotating the passage of time. Furthermore, the verb "consider" implies that Ralph has been thinking

about that night, contemplating it. If so, then there is a sense of the text as an inward "turning."

Finally, the narration being fixed to Ralph, if he has not reached a deeper understanding, there can be no deeper understanding to be imparted to the reader.

The next text to be studied, "The Bridle," differs significantly from "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" in its structure. "Will You Please" is written in the third person and past tense, while "The Bridle" is in first person and present tense. Like the majority of Carver's work, "Will You Please" focuses on a male character, but "The Bridle" focuses on a female character. In "Will You Please" one conversation and one night in the life of its protagonists are foregrounded, but events in "The Bridle" occur across a longer period of time (a few months), and no event is foregrounded. There is a climactic point in "Will You Please," which perhaps oddly occurs in the middle of the text, but "The Bridle" does not have a climax since no event has been foregrounded. "Will You Please" is comprised of causally related events, while events in "The Bridle" are clearly related, but not necessarily causally. Furthermore, "Will You Please" is delimited to concerns of its protagonist's psychology and of intimate relationships, but "The Bridle," while still being concerned with intimate relationships, more broadly describes the historical milieu in which its characters exist.

It was noted above that in "The Bridle" no particular event has been foregrounded, either textually by structural-stylistic techniques or by its narrator Marge placing greater or lesser psychological-emotional value upon specific events. Instead, the events are presented as if they are of equal weight, co-existing upon a flat line. This neutrality of presentation allows for hermeneutical entry at any point within the text, as

all events are approximately coequal. Therefore in contrast to the preceding analyses whose discourse proceeded parallel to the texts' plot lines, this analysis shall begin with a discussion of "The Bridle's" narratives of personal experience, in which they are considered as self-sufficient narratives, then their interactions with the encompassing text are explored.

"The Bridle" is narrated by Marge, a female most likely in her mid twenties to late thirties, who is married to a man named Harley; together they live at and manage an apartment complex, where Marge takes care of the accounts and Harley does general maintenance work, a situation reminiscent of Holly and Duane's in "Gazebo". Marge describes the arrival of and subsequent events concerning new tenants, who are a couple named Betty and Holits and their two teenaged boys. Marge's interest in them seems to be spurred by similarities between the two couples: they are of like ages, married, and from elsewhere.

The ONOPE are told by Betty. After being at the apartment for a week she makes an appointment with Marge to have her hair washed and colored, work which Marge does for extra income. As Betty sits relaxed in the chair with her hair being dried in the drying machine and Marge giving her a manicure, she opens up and tells Marge two personal narratives. The first ONOPE concerns Betty's relationship with Holits, and the second conveys her current attitude, or opinion, of what life means to her. Betty's first ONOPE shall be the primary object of analysis since it is this ONOPE that is at the center of the text's nexus and layers of meanings, as shall be demonstrated further on. Betty's second ONOPE shall be considered in so far as to take into account the attitude that it expresses.

Betty enters into her first narrative indirectly via several casual disclosures. First, she says apropos of nothing that the boys are Holits's "from his first marriage. He was divorced when we met" (198) and she "couldn't love them . . . more . . . even if I [she] was their natural mother." Perhaps prompted by the last phrase, "natural mother," Betty then says that Holits's first wife "lit out on them, on Holits and the boys, on New Year's Day ten years ago. They never heard from her again." These discursive disclosures can be seen as concluding with Betty's blunt summarization of her courtship with Holits: "he and I started going out. Then we got married" (199).

Betty's first narrative actually begins with her next statements: "he and I started going out. Then we got married. For a long time, we had us a life. It had its ups and downs. But we thought we were working toward something." In these last three sentences Betty shifts from a narrative mode of historical-summarization to evaluative statements of opinion ("we had us a life . . . we were working toward something"), and in them is encapsulated her first narrative's theme. At an earlier time in Betty and Holits's marriage, they had some goal which they were striving to achieve. Their relationship and individual lives were in that sense teleologically oriented; having a goal they felt hopeful and positive toward the future. Betty tacitly implies that now she and Holits do not have any goal; therefore, they are not using their energy and resources in a meaningful way, and do not feel positive toward the future. An expectation is engendered in this thematic segment that it will be conveyed what was the cause of her and Holits's downward change of fortunes. Betty says in her ONOPE:

But something happened. Something happened to Holits, I mean. One thing happened was he got interested in horses. This one particular race horse, he bought it, you know -- something down, something each month. He took it around to the tracks. He was still up before daylight, like always, still doing the chores

and such. I thought everything was all right. But I don't know anything. If you want the truth, I'm not so good at waiting tables. I think those wops would fire me at the drop of a hat, if I gave them a reason. Or for no reason. What if I got fired? Then what? [. . .] Anyway, there's this horse of his. Fast Betty. The Betty part is a joke. But he says it can't help but be a winner if he names it after me. A big winner, all right. The fact is, wherever it ran, it lost. Every race. Betty Longshot -- that's what it should have been called. In the beginning, I went to a few races. But the horse always ran ninety-nine to one. Odds like that. But Holits is stubborn if he's anything. He wouldn't give up. He'd bet on the horse and bet on the horse. Twenty dollars to win. Fifty dollars to win. Plus all the other things it costs for keeping a horse. I know it don't sound like a large amount. But it adds up. And when the odds were like that -- ninety-nine to one, you know -- sometimes he'd buy a combination ticket. He'd ask me if I realized how much money we'd make if the horse came in. But it didn't, and I quit going. (199)

In fact, the entirety of Betty's first narrative is devoted to explicating the causal factors of her family's dislocation. In her opening statements, "but something happened. Something happened to Holits, I mean. One thing happened was he got interested in horses" Betty does two things: she indicates that Holits experienced multiple changes, and that she is confining the scope of her *ONOE* to the change that involved horses. Betty and Holits used to own and work a farm (187), perhaps reminiscent of the elderly couple in "Gazebo." Whereas the elderly couple still lived at their country house, the Holits's farm was repossessed by a bank.

In her *ONOE* Betty does not pinpoint this specific change of Holits's involving the race horse as the central cause of their problems; however, her concluding clause, "I quit going," creates an association with her present circumstances. Betty quit going; Holits kept racing it; it kept losing, and now here they are -- living in an apartment

complex in Arizona, a state far, and radically different, from their state of Minnesota, with their family's entire possessions being only that which their car can carry.

Some formality might be expected in Betty and Marge's conversation. Having known each other for only a week they are still strangers; moreover, they had not conversed since Betty and Holits's initial signing of the apartment's contract; in addition, as a manager of the apartment and the one to whom Betty pays the monthly bills, Marge occupies a higher position vis a viz Betty. Yet in both the lead-in to her narrative and its content Betty has related to Marge much quite personal information. For whatever reasons Betty has neglected, or surmounted, the usual formality of such a situation. Given the superficial similarities previously noted between the two couples, and hence between Betty and Marge, this communicative act of Betty's might be seen as a bonding moment in her and Marge's relationship, whether Betty is consciously aware of it, and purposely attempting to forge a relationship, or not. Between them though there still seems to be emotional-psychological distance.

This distance is first witnessed by Marge's thoughts when Betty begins to talk: "I can see she wants to tell me about it. And that's fine with me. They like to talk when they're in the chair" (198). Marge does not express any desire to be an active, empathic listener, saying only "that's fine with me." A feeling is conveyed that since Marge ~~is~~ doing Betty's hair and nails, Marge has no choice but to be there and listen. Then Marge uses the impersonal pronoun "they" to make a generic statement concerning her clients: "they like to talk when they're in the chair."⁵ Marge thereby reduces Betty's individuality

⁵ There is an obvious association with the psychoanalyst's sofa. For Americans, there might also be an association with the electric chair; while this is a stretch, it does agree with Carver's consistent theme of intimate communication as a thing to be dreaded.

by grouping her with all of the other clients. The emotional distance described here is witnessed again in a more salient manner at the conclusion of Betty's second narrative.

A key sign that a listener is listening sincerely is by their response⁶. One genuine response in this situation might have been for Marge to ask Betty some questions regarding Betty's life as she has just recounted it, the appropriate level of intimacy of the questions in accordance with Marge's judgement of the overall situation, and of Betty's displayed emotional-psychological disposition. Contrary to this Marge responds to Betty's two personal narratives, which are both quite intimate, by beginning to tell Betty about her own problems (201).

Betty has held her turn on the conversational floor, and now Marge wants a turn. Although Marge's desire to share her own ONOPE is a positive desire, it might be that Marge was not fully listening to Betty because she was already thinking of her own story, and mentally preparing for her turn. Marge is denied her turn however for Harley enters the room at that moment, and she ceases talking. Her cessation indicates that Harley was going to be the point of her discussion, in which she was going to negatively criticize him. This negativity is highlighted by her following description of him drinking a glass of water, in which his actions are described as being non-human, as reptilian: "He tips his head back to drink. His Adam's apple moves up and down in his throat" (201). Clearly, Harley seems to disgust her. Thus, Marge is prevented from the probable telling of an ONOPE, is silenced, alluding to the motif of silence in both "Nobody Said Anything" and "Will You Please."

⁶ On listening and relationships, see any work by psychologist Carl Rogers, an expert on empathic listening.

The potential bonding experience of Betty's communicative act of ONOPE was thus missed. Nor did it plant a seed of friendship between them that might have grown over time. Betty actually never returns for another beauty treatment, and in fact seems to not speak to Marge again. Her reasons for not returning, while unclear, are perhaps mundane (for example, she did not like the treatment; she could not afford it), but her apparent avoidance of Marge seems odd. Betty clearly does not want to develop a friendship with her. Rather than having a positive effect, the communicative act has had adverse consequences. Distance is increased, not lessened. The lack of bonding witnessed in their communicative interaction is representative of a pervasive shallowness, awkwardness, and sense of confusion in the characters' relationships.

Since the text is replete with examples of intimate relationships that are shallow, that are somehow conflicted, only those involving one specific character will be discussed. At a point in the text after the Holits family has moved in but preceding Betty's appointment at the beauty salon, the narrator Marge sees from her office window two of the apartment complex's tenants sitting by the pool's side, sun tanning, which prompts her thoughts to focus on them. In her flow of thought, she considers the details about them that she knows, as well as a specific experience with each of them that she has had.

Both of these recollections come in the form of narratives of personal experience, except that they are not oral, but are interior thoughts. As such they lack the crucial aspect of being conversational and dialogic, and are therefore not communicative, in the sense that communication is generally required to have both a sender and a receiver. For the purpose of clarity, it must be reiterated that these analyses deal exclusively with ONOPE that are oral, usually coming within a conversation. However, chapter three will

treat the tension between an oralized style of textual narration (a personalized voice) and authorial narration (a more written style of narration).

As both of the textual narrator Marge's interior narratives are equally acceptable examples of the shallowness, awkwardness and confusion of these characters' intimate relationships, it is necessary to relate just one of them. In the first she describes an interaction she had with Irving "Spuds" Cobb. Leading in to her tale, she mentions that Spuds was "a recent widower when he moved in, a year or so back. But after a few months of being a bachelor again, he got married" (194). This is the first example in her tale of the characters' incomplete relationships. Spuds's short period of mourning for his late wife questions the depth and sincerity of his presumed love for her against his own selfish desires (assuming that Marge is a reliable narrator, so that her phrase "a recent widower" can be accepted as accurate). Marge then describes an evening in which Spuds and his current wife had her and Harley over for dinner. Afterward, Spuds showed a home-movie which was of himself and his former wife taking a vacation together. Spuds's action shows little regard for his current wife's feelings. At the same time, the current wife plays along with it, by repeatedly pointing out the former wife: "'There's Evelyn [the former wife] again,'" the new Mrs. Cobb would say each time the first Mrs. Cobb appeared on the screen" (195). In her recounting of the dinner, Marge does not note any of the current Mrs. Cobb's non-verbal behavioral nuances, such as facial expressions or tone of voice, so that Mrs. Cobb's psychological-emotional state at that time can only be guessed at. It does seem that hers was an awkward response.

Beyond the quality of the communicative interaction between Betty and Marge in Betty's telling of her ONOPE as being an example of the quality of the text's intimate

relationships, there is a more direct interaction between Betty's ONOPE and the text. At the center of her ONOPE, is Holits's acquisition of the race horse, and present at the opening and ending of the text, framing it, is the horse's bridle. Given this salient connection, the horse would seem to be invested with metaphorical or symbolical meanings. How is the horse portrayed in Betty's ONOPE, and how does it interact with the text's themes?

In her ONOPE, Betty casts Holits as seeming to view the race horse as merely a potential source of income. Holits's feelings for the horse are not stated. He "got interested in horses" and then purchased one, but it is unclear if he was genuinely fond of it. The only relationship he seems to have had with it is as the object upon which he gambles, even Holits's potential relationship to the horse as its jockey is not discussed. Although unlikely, it is possible that he did not race the horse himself. For the joint purposes of gambling and generating revenue, Holits could have purchased a number of similar items, such as a sports car or a motorcycle; therefore, the horse is replaceable. It seems that to Holits the horse was more an object than a sentient being: an object to be exploited.

In the text, Holits too became an object of exploitation. Having lost the farm and subsequently his economic independence, he was forced to become a laborer, hence an object to be exploited by his employers. Holits might even be unemployed during his time at the apartment complex; his work status is pointedly unclarified. The comparison between Holits's horse as an object and himself as an object can be carried a step further, to the domain of competition: the horse competes athletically while Holits now must compete economically (except the American idiom for individual economic competition

is rat race, not horse race). A significant difference between the horse and Holits in regard to economics would seem to be that the horse is owned while Holits possesses freedom. However, while Holits may not be literally owned, his life is influenced by external forces beyond his control. There is an underlying conflict in the text between the characters' active responsibility for their lives and consequent self-culpability for their unhappy circumstances, and their status as passive recipients of external financial-industrial and societal forces.

Within this thematic context lies one interpretive aspect of the bridle. It is associated with control, both controlling and being controlled. When Marge finds the bridle she notices the bit and thinks "if you had to wear this thing [the bit] between your teeth, I guess you'd catch on in a hurry. When you felt it pull, you'd know what time it was. You'd know you were going somewhere" (208). Perhaps to Marge the prospect of being controlled, being guided or led, by something is positive, if the force directs one to a clear destination. It seems that for Marge self-responsibility is troublesome.

It certainly seems to be so for the other characters. These characters make poor choices and behave inconsiderately. Spuds decided to show a home-movie of himself and his deceased wife in front of his new wife. Holits's first wife abandoned their family, never to be heard of again. Holits did not stop betting on the race horse, in spite of its unbroken losing streak. Moreover, it might have been a better decision to have used the money that was spent on the race horse to reinvest into the farm, improving it, or toward payment of debts. Drinking with some of the other tenants by the swimming pool one night Holits became inebriated, and in a failed show of physical prowess he decided to try to jump off the roof of the adjacent cabana into the pool, but instead landed on the

pavement and badly injured himself, possibly incurring brain damage in the accident (203). The swimming pool here, at which Holits's accident occurs, alludes to the pool in "Gazebo," and the motif of water. Also, Holits's failing to make the jump into the pool recalls Ralph's failure to make it to the waterfront in "Will You Please," both of which failures involve physical injuries. The extent of Holits's brain injury is unclear. Also, exemplifying the text's non-causal association of events, it is shortly after Holits's accident that they depart, but their departure could have been for any number of reasons other than the accident; for example, a dislike of the city or state, employment problems, debt.

On the other hand, the characters' poor decisions can also be seen as indicative of an underlying sense of confusion stemming from both a literal and metaphorical displacement caused by societal-cultural and economic-industrial changes that America underwent in the nineteen sixties, seventies and eighties. Some of these changes were the cultural upheaval of the sixties in general (for example, the Vietnam war, black people's fight for equality), along with its upheaval of traditional values related to gender, sexual intercourse, courtship, and marriage⁷ due to the advent of an effective contraceptive device (the pill); the energy crisis; a high deficit; increased competition with foreign companies (for example, Japanese steel producers and auto makers), and Reagan era reforms/cuts of government social service programs.

From this broader cultural perspective the problematic aspects of the characters' relationships described earlier might be caused by a confusion in gender relations after

⁷ Prior to the pill these values were perhaps designed in part to limit the female's opportunity to procreate, a design which the contraceptive pill made obsolete.

the nineteen sixties. Indeed, it is contemporary with these characters that the women's liberation movement began. Marge's apparent yearning for a controlling force could derive from a dissatisfaction with her husband Harley, who displays no passion and whose sole hobby seems to be watching television, and a desire for a more active, responsive, or imaginative man. Harley and Ralph, of "Will You Please," are both unromantic male figures. Although there is no evidence that Betty is similarly dissatisfied with Holits, his acquisition of and gambling on the race horse, and their loss of the farm, which was not necessarily causally related to the race horse, compounded by the terrible failure of his athletic feat, portray him as being so powerless as almost to be castrated. Holits's apparent powerlessness recalls Ralph's powerlessness, as in "Will You Please's" concluding with Marian on top of Ralph, in a dominant position. Furthermore, Marian's "moving back and forth over" Ralph conveys the image of her riding Ralph like a horse.

From this wider perspective the Holits family might be seen as victims; for reasons not made known in the text but for which they might not be at fault, they became heavily indebted and the banks then cold heartedly appropriated their farm. However, this conflict between the characters' self-responsibility and their passive reception of external forces goes unresolved, rendering implausible a definitive metaphorical or symbolical interpretation of the bridle.

Approaching the bridle's potential meanings from another angle, we return to its structural framing of the text to find a parallel: the text opens with the arrival of the Holits family and concludes with their departure; at their arrival they had brought with them the bridle, while at their departure they left it behind. In this context, the race horse might be associated with hope and luck, as well as nostalgia. Hope, in that, at least in

Holits's conception, the race horse had been a means toward a better future. Perhaps also that some day in the future they hope to return to a rural way of life. Luck, for it is always involved in racing and gambling. Nostalgia, in that the horse and by extension the farm, represent an agrarian way of life which has traditionally been associated with positive values such as simplicity, moral and ethical probity, stability, independence, and a sound work ethic. That the Holits family brought the bridle with them implies the presence of these associations; their leaving it behind implies their loss.

Therefore, the bridle is invested with several associations. There is the unresolved tension between active self will and passivity, between internal self guidance and controlling externalities, and there are the feeling-ideas of hope, luck and nostalgia. All of which apply to Marge. At the text's conclusion, it is she who finds the bridle. In finding it, the bridle's many metaphorical undercurrents are instantly linked to her. The question of personal choice against greater forces, and the matters of hope, luck and nostalgia become juxtaposed with her apparent and prevailing feeling of unhappiness.

Marge's melancholy, which constitutes the prevailing tone of the novel, is specifically manifested in feelings of anonymity and powerlessness. These negative feelings are witnessed in one scene in which she writes her name across the front of several fifty dollar bills, and thinks "they [the bills] could go anyplace, and anything could happen because of them" (192). The implication is that while the bills can travel and experience life, she can not. Marge then considers the idea of people acquiring these bank notes with her name on them, and imagines that "people will stop in the midst of their spending and wonder. Who's this Marge? . . . Who's this Marge?". Clearly, this is an expression of a feeling of anonymity. Marge's unhappiness is further realized in that

she seems quite dissatisfied with her husband, a point previously delineated. Marge's internal state might also be interpreted as hopeless. This connects with Betty's second ONOPE. In it, Betty says:

Once, when I was in high school, a counselor asked me to come to her office. She did it with all the girls, one of us at a time. 'What dreams do you have?' this woman asked me. 'What do you see yourself doing in ten years? Twenty years?' I was sixteen or seventeen. I was just a kid. I couldn't think what to answer. I just sat there like a lump. This counselor was about the age I am now. I thought she was *old*. She's old, I said to myself. I knew *her* life was half over. And I felt like I knew something she didn't. Something she'd never know. A secret. Something nobody's supposed to know, or ever talk about. So I stayed quiet. I just shook my head. She must've written me off as a dope. But I couldn't say anything. You know what I mean? I thought I knew things she couldn't guess at. Now, if anybody asked me that question again, about my dreams and all, I'd tell them. [. . .] I'd say, 'Dreams, you know, are what you wake up from.' If anybody asked, that's what I'd say. But they won't ask. (200)

In this ONOPE Betty reflects on how she responded to being asked by a high school counselor to describe her "dreams." This topic alludes to Holly's ONOPE, in "Gazebo," in which she tacitly describes her dream, which was marriage, a home, perhaps a family, "dignity." However, Betty, a teenager at the time, could not answer, she was silent. Holly probably chose not to have a future with Duane, his adultery causing her to end their marriage. On the other hand, Betty had a home and a farm, a husband and family. However, the farm was lost and her family displaced. Thus, in Carver's fiction, a voice is given to a dislocated, dispossessed, marginalized group of people. They are literally given a voice, as Betty depicts her troubles in two ONOPE.

Betty's second ONOPE also touches the subject of deeper knowledge, of realizations, which was a central theme of "Will You Please." Betty felt that she "knew things she [the counselor] couldn't guess at." Ralph too felt that he knew new things. For Betty, in the process of growing up, she came to feel that she did not actually know

anything "secret" then. It was an illusion. Ralph too might not know anything "secret," beyond the fact of his wife's adultery, for his realizations are left ambiguous.

The text ends in an open rather than closed manner. Marge's finding of the bridle engenders the possibility that she will attempt to change herself or the circumstances of her life, or both, in order to become happier. The text's focus has thus shifted from the Holits family to Marge, and its sense of time from the present to the future. In this way, the text concludes as the potential beginning of a new story, that of Marge's possible attempt at change, and the ramifications of her actions upon the course of her life. Yet given the unresolved thematic conflict between self will and passivity, it is possible that Marge will not take action. Perhaps she, and the other characters, shall never progress in their lives. They are only moving in circles, like a race horse running round and round a track.

The ONOPE in these two texts, which are otherwise structurally disparate, are crucial to their respective stories. In "Will You Please" Marian's ONOPE is important in its relationship to the characters, and to the plot. In terms of the characters, Marian's ONOPE serves to describe her personality (she is partly romantic), and to contrast her with Ralph (he is not so romantic). Her ONOPE does more than describe the characters, though. It might be seen as a plot event; perhaps the core of the plot. It stimulates Ralph's (apparent) realizations, and in turn his nocturnal wander. However, Betty's ONOPE in "The Bridle" is significant more for the information it provides about the characters and themes.

Betty's ONOPE tells the story of her family's coming to be at the apartment complex; in doing so, it gives the only coherent background story of any of the

characters, the rest of whom are described only by certain isolated, specific events (recalled by Marge). Her ONOPE reflects on herself, as well as her family, as feeling hopeless, lost, dislocated. These feelings are representative of those of the other characters as well, and of the themes of the text. Her ONOPE provides a core metaphor(s) for the text, the bridle and by extension the race horse, which are key to the text's meanings. This is witnessed in the text's being titled "The Bridle" which refers to the race horse depicted in Betty's ONOPE. The title of the text "Gazebo" similarly comes from an image found within the text's ONOPE. The importance of the metaphors of the horse and bridle is also demonstrated by "The Bridle's" being framed by the presence of the bridle.

In radically different ways, the ONOPE in these two texts can be seen as related to the theme of characters revealing personal information about themselves: Marian reveals her affair, and Betty the story of her family's troubles. In both cases the ONOPE and the revelations act to create distance between people, rather than intimacy and closeness. Communication, witnessed in the form of ONOPE, has not succeeded.

Chapter three examines texts in which the dominant feature is a character telling an ONOPE.



In the two texts to be discussed in this chapter, "Fat" and "Where I'm Calling From," dialogue again takes precedence over plot. However, the presentations of the communicative interactions and the situations in which they occur differ from the texts previously studied, creating different effects. While by this point it has been demonstrated that the ONOPE within Carver's texts are greater than rhetorical devices and useful methods of interpretation, but are integral to the texts' meanings, the point is carried further in "Fat" and "Where I'm Calling From."

To explain, we can begin with some observations concerning dialogue within these two texts. Firstly, both texts consist primarily of dialogue. "Fat" is in the form of a single cohesive conversation between two characters, and thus is wholly dialogue. By cohesive it is meant that the conversation is essentially direct discourse unalloyed by interior asides or recollections, or external events. This form recurs in Carver's work, a close example being "Intimacy." On the other hand, the dialogue in "Where I'm Calling From" is mixed with narratorial recollections and asides, and events in the environment. Secondly and more importantly, in these two texts the topics of the conversations are ONOPE.

"Fat" in particular might be seen as an account of the communicative event of ONOPE. One way this is achieved is by the omission of details of setting; it is known only that the narrator is "sitting over coffee and cigarets [sic] at my [her] friend Rita's" (3). The setting seems relevant only in that it is not formal, but casual. The characters' backgrounds are also omitted. The characters must be judged solely upon their conversation, the dialogue, which in this text does not cover their past histories. Even the name of the text's first person narrator, who is also the narrator of the text's ONOPE, is

unknown. Furthermore, the characters' nonverbal behaviors during the conversation, such as physical appearance and gestures, are not described, making the interpretational process more difficult. It seems that only a minimal amount of information necessary to create a naturalistic context for the conversation is provided. The conversation, hence the narrator's ONOPE, become the text's central focus. Since "Fat" is a presentation of an ONOPE, the entire text would have to be quoted to include the ONOPE in this study, for which there is obviously not enough space. It must be remembered, therefore, that all of the quotes from "Fat" are a part of the speaker's ONOPE. However, there is a second ONOPE in "Fat" which is short enough to be included.

Structurally, "Fat" is six pages in length. The first five pages are consumed by one ONOPE, while the last page is taken up with a second ONOPE. In an instance of play with temporality reminiscent of that of "Gazebo," the conversation itself is presented in present continuous tense ("I am sitting over coffee . . . at my friend Rita's"), and the narrator's ONOPE are presented in simple present tense. As ONOPE concern events that have already happened to their narrators, the past tense is required. Only present tense, present time, is used. The sole use of present tenses might relate to the omission of the characters' backgrounds in that the past is de-emphasized, and the present emphasized. Attention is concentrated on the past events in the ONOPE as they affect the narrator/speaker, and the hearer, now. A subjective, phenomenological sense of time is used; that is, time, and the past events, are presented in relationship to the narrator/speaker's psychology. Bringing the past into the present, the future is implied. How might the past events, related through ONOPE, affect the narrator's future?

Elinor Ochs commented that "the life events that receive narrative attention tend to be cast as unusual, in that they are unexpected or problematic" (271). This is certainly so regarding the first ONOPE. The narrator, who is a waitress, (an obvious piece of information derived from her narrative) relates a recent evening at work during which she serves a customer who "is the fattest person" (3) she has ever seen; "everything about him is big" and his fingers "look three times the size of a normal person's fingers." However, it is not the size of this man, which while unusual is yet rather mundane, that seems to affect her, but the way that her peers speak about him: they are quickly and easily disparaging of him. For example, one of the narrator's coworkers says to her "who's your fat friend? He's really a fatty" (4), another says "God, he's fat!" (5), and yet another says "how's old tub-of-guts doing? He's going to run your legs off" (6). These negative comments concentrate on nothing but the man's weight.

The narrator though is able to move beyond this distinctive feature of the man. In fact, she describes him as "neat-appearing and well dressed enough" (3), and as a good customer, in that he speaks and behaves politely. In contrast to the apparent gentility of this customer, the narrator twice mentions having to serve "a party of four businessmen" who were "very demanding" (3, 5). Her repetition of the adjective "demanding" serves to reinforce the contrast between the customers' behaviors. It might be that as figures of American capitalism, the business men possess authority and are granted a right by the culture to be demanding. On the other hand, because of his physical shape the obese man is someone who is culturally marginalized, and therefore lacks authority.

The cultural paradigms underlying the coworkers' ridicule, that permit the man to be a figure of mockery, and that rank the business men higher than the obese man on a

social scale of respectability, seem to "run counter to [the narrator's] personal . . . assumptions about how events should unfold and how life should be lived" (Ochs 271). This is witnessed at an early point in her *ONOPE*; she recalls that "Margo says to me, Who's your fat friend? He's really a fatty" then, in a tale-telling pause, she says: "now that's part of it. I think that is really part of it." The referent of "it" is textually unspecified, but given that the phrase "that's part of it" comes immediately after her description of her coworker's behavior, that behavior would seem to be a referent, the feeling being that she is bothered by it. Further evidence comes when at a later point in her narrative she responds to a coworker's mockery by saying that "he is fat . . . but that is not the whole story" (7).

While these quotes serve as examples of the narrator's dislike for the coworkers' denigration of the obese customer, they also indicate that the experience has had a broader impact upon her, which she is attempting to understand. From this conception, "it" and "the whole story" are equivalent: both represent the totality of potential meanings of the experience to her. Yet she has not fully comprehended what "the whole story" is. The obesity of the customer is one aspect and her coworkers' disregard for him is another, but she feels that there is more. She is thus engaged in a process of self discovery, the ultimate goal of which is to understand "it" as deeply as possible. Her comments of this kind help create a sense that the narrator is engaging in a process of self discovery through the telling of her narrative of personal experience; that is to say, that her inner process of realization is occurring at the same time as she is telling her tale. The telling of her narrative and the progress of the text are therefore parallel, a perhaps traditional

synchronization of which would be for the text to climax at its very end with the narrator's experience of new and profound realizations.

However, her first ONOPE concludes without the reader's anticipation of some enlightenment on the narrator/protagonist's part being satisfied. Instead, she purposely ends just when a springboard has arisen for her to move out of the narrative's confines and delve into the murky underworld of her emotions and psyche. Since by the telling of this tale the narrator is "probing multiple logics of experience . . . what happened, why, and . . . the relevance of an [the] incident for life more generally" (Ochs 276), this is a crucial, critical point of her tale telling communicative interaction. The entry point for inner inquiry that she avoids lies in her recall of her last exchange with the fat man:

Me, I eat and I eat and I can't gain, I say. I'd like to gain, I say.

No, he says. If we had our choice, no. But there is no choice. (7)

The subject of choice is raised, entailing a vast realm of philosophical and personal exploration. Perhaps sensing that the tale has reached a critical moment, the narrator's friend asks: "what else? . . . this story's getting interesting now" (7). The narrator stifles any potential efforts by the friend to help her explore her narrative of personal experience, by bluntly saying "that's it," there is "nothing else."

But there is something else. This ONOPE is directly followed by her second ONOPE, so that the second seems linked to the first, assuming that the narrator is not schizophrenic and randomly associating events. The second ONOPE can be seen as both an independent narrative and as an extension of the preceding one. Viewing it as an independent narrative, it could be told separately; it is possible for the text "Fat" to actually consist only of this brief narrative. Viewing it as an extension of the first narrative, it lends it greater depth, expands its range of meanings, evaluates it, and

sustains the possibility that she will gain some self understanding, all of which were circumvented by her sudden ending of the first narrative and side-stepping of inner exploration.

In discussion of this second ONOPE, a piece of information that has hitherto been neglected shall now be given attention. The narrator's intimate companion, who could be either her husband or a serious boyfriend, a man named Rudy, is a chef at the restaurant at which she works, and was in fact working on that night. The conflict in values between herself and her coworkers (and the business men) centering on the obese customer also pertains to Rudy, for not only was he present at that time, but he too spoke derogatorily of the customer. Indeed, Rudy asks her if she has "got a fat man from the circus out there" (7), and goes on to say that it "sounds to me like she's sweet on fat-stuff." Rudy's presence in the first ONOPE might seem tangential for he was but one of many staff members who mocked the overweight customer, but it becomes directly relevant as the second ONOPE in fact describes him, and the narrator's relationship with him. In it, she says:

[. . .] we drink our tea and pretty soon I get up to go to bed. Rudy gets up too, turns off the TV, locks the front door, and begins his unbuttoning.

I get into bed and move clear over to the edge and lie there on my stomach. But right away, as soon as he turns off the light and gets into bed, Rudy begins. I turn on my back and relax some, though it is against my will. But here is the thing. When he gets on me, I suddenly feel I am fat. I feel I am terrifically fat, so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all. (8)

Just prior to her second ONOPE, the narrator recalls that she and Rudy had returned home from work that night and were watching television when Rudy told her of some memories he had from his youth of two remarkably overweight boys. Rudy's

recollections do come within a conversation and they are of his personal experience; however, the remembered details are not transformed into a narrative framework. Rudy says simply that he once knew "a couple of fat guys, really fat guys" (8) who "were really tubbies," and that he and his friends had called them only Fat and Wobbly. In their derisiveness, Rudy's memories of the overweight children in his youth agree with his ridicule of the overweight customer at work earlier that evening. Since the narrator has already shown that she is upset by this type of attitude it is unsurprising that she does not respond to him, and silently goes to bed.

The locus and center point of the threads of meanings in the narrator's two ONOPE might be seen as lying in the next event. Following her to the bedroom, Rudy "begins his unbuttoning." The insertion of the possessive pronoun "his" is not usual, it indicates the separateness of the action from the speaker, and serves to increase the sense of space in their relationship. Then she "move[s] clear over to the edge [of the bed] and lie[s] there on my [her] stomach." She has positioned herself as far away from Rudy as possible while still being in the bed. As the speaker is on the edge of the bed, so too might she be "on edge" emotionally-psychologically. Her inner state is reflect in the external environment. She is not far enough away however, for as soon as Rudy is in the bed "he gets on me [her]" and "he begins." These phrases connote the routineness of the act; he begins, then he ends. Rudy is the active participant, and the speaker an unwilling recipient/participant. Either being very passive or else utterly resigned, she tries to "turn on my [her] back and relax some." Her statement that the act is "against my [her] will" could even indicate that it is to some degree a case of marital rape.

It is at this time of being engaged in unwanted marital sex that she has a feeling:

I suddenly feel I am fat. I feel I am terrifically fat,
so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all.

This feeling involves both fatness and Rudy, so that it connects her two ONOPE. This point is the climax of her second ONOPE, but it is also perhaps the climax of her first ONOPE as well. The two essential components of each of her ONOPE are linked in basically one statement and placed in the form of a feeling, a surreal dream like feeling that seems to rise up from a deep part of her unconscious. All threads of meanings and associations are woven together in the most central site, the narrator's internal psychic world, which had hitherto been unaccessed. The readers' anticipation that these ONOPE will be shown to have deeper significance to their protagonist, and affect change in the protagonist, are thus somewhat satisfied.

Considering how her feeling of suddenly being tremendously fat might contribute to the meanings of her ONOPEs, the customer's statement that "there is no choice," which raises issues of choice and self responsibility, becomes more significant. Since this enigmatic statement is in response to her saying that no matter how much she eats she can not gain weight, he would seem to be saying the opposite, that no matter how much he eats, he can not help but gain weight. If this is true and the customer has a physical problem, such as an extremely slow metabolism or a dysfunctional thyroid, then despite how little food he consumes he inevitably adds weight. That being so, perhaps he ceased efforts to keep his weight in a reasonable range. In spite of having no control over these physical problems, and in spite of his neat, clean appearance and polite behavior he must suffer humiliation by society's narrow judgementality.

The narrator might identify with this customer's apparent marginalization. As a lone individual, the values of her society are beyond her control; she has no choice that the culture in which she exists allocates authority to the male figure and applies stricter more conservative values to females in comparison to males, constricting females' freedom. There is no choice that as a female her position is subordinate to the male. On individual and personal levels, the power imbalances within the culture are exemplified by the customer's suffering the indignity of mockery due to his weight, and the narrator's suffering the indignity of having unwanted sex.

On the other hand, it is possible that the customer might mean that he has no choice in his eating habits. That is, he is an addict, who is addicted to food. The pleasure he derives from it, the satisfaction of psychological needs and emotions it gives him, the inner motivation and drive for it, are so great that he is compelled to eat. Eating is for him a compulsion. From this angle, the satisfaction given to him by food might not outweigh the ridicule of society. He might not have quit caring that his peers criticize him, that he does not meet society's standards of physical pulchritude, that, in short, he deviates from a societal standard.

In his compulsion to eat, he does not gain internal strength, an integrity of character, by being true to his own needs and desires, and seeking first to satisfy them, despite the cost. If his eating behavior had been a conscious volitional personal choice then these positive aspects would have been possible and true, but because for him "there is no choice" they are impossible. However, the narrator might misread and misinterpret the significance of the obese customer, applying these positivities to him, recognizing a non-existent freedom inherent in his supposed acceptance of his situation, which she

admires, which she wants to identify with, and emulate. That is, she too would like to cease striving to meet society's expectations (in her case, of the female), to place her own happiness first (supposing that she had been placing Rudy's happiness before hers), to be individualistic rather than conform to values that she disagrees with, to exercise her right as an individual to be different from, but not lesser than, others.

Considering further her feeling of fatness, the dependent clause ". . . so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all," expresses aversion to Rudy. This aversion is portrayed in terms of size: Rudy's size has been reduced until he is barely noticeable. Her description suggests that obversely Rudy is a very large figure in her life, that his presence perhaps dominates her emotional-psychological existence. Her feeling also expresses an action, one that takes place in or on her, which is the increase of her size. It is important to note that it is not Rudy's size that shrinks, but that she balloons. Her blimping might therefore represent a surge in personal initiative, an increased desire to take volitional action. In this way it contrasts with her apparent passive resignation toward the unwanted sexual act.

Even if she has misperceived the obese customer (a point that while plausible is unverifiable, and depends upon one's textual interpretation), his presence would seem to have had a positive effect upon her, galvanizing her to take greater control over her life. Following this reasoning, it is possible that she might choose to become fat. By doing so she could reduce Rudy's impact upon her emotional-psychic life, for if she is fat then Rudy would likely feel less sexually attracted to her, and she would no longer have to endure sex with him. For her, the relief from the psychological pressure of enduring

unwanted sex could very well be greater than the social stigmatization of being overweight.

Moving to the text's ending, the narrator finishes the second ONOPE then has what are presumably a series of thoughts (to reiterate, quotation marks are not used in this text):

That's a funny story, Rita says, but I can see she doesn't know what to make of it. I feel depressed. But I won't go into it with her. I've already told her too much. She sits there waiting, her dainty fingers poking her hair. *Waiting for what?* [Carver's italics] I'd like to know. It is August. My life is going to change. I feel it.
(8)

These last thoughts suggest that the narrator has changed. The speaker shifts out of story-telling mode, and pauses in the conversation, thinking these thoughts. The speaker's inner voice is heard. The telling of her ONOPE to her friend, Rita, has somehow led to new and enhanced understanding. It seems that she might take personal action to improve the quality of her life. Rita is waiting for something, but the speaker, no longer, is not. The month is August, a month with positive associations because it falls in the summer. Increased satisfaction seems imminent to her; there is certainty in her statement "my life is going to change." Despite her saying that she feels depressed, she nevertheless seems upbeat, and the text appears to have a positive conclusion.

Yet while the events the speaker has depicted have had an impact upon her, the exact causes have not been explicated. Returning to the narrator's statement "now that's part of it. I think that is really a part of it," the referent of "it," and what "the whole story" is, remain unclarified. The text may have climaxed with some realization(s) by the narrator, but it is ambiguous what it is. Or the text may not have climaxed with some

realizations by the narrator. It is possible that actually the speaker has not matured or developed psychologically-emotionally. The text concludes with the narrator feeling her "life is going to change," but experiencing this feeling does not mean that she comprehends its causal factors. She could be in a bewildering inner state of limbo, of being in transition, unsure why, unsure of the future. The inner process of struggling toward new self-understanding; the process and the experience of the process, are foregrounded.

New realizations do not equal action; therefore, the narrator may or may not take action. The language of her closing thoughts suggests inaction. She says "my life is going to change," as if an outside force will intervene, or a big unforeseeable event will take place. Her language does not express personal and direct initiative, she does not say: "I am going to change my life." Furthermore, the certainty of that statement is qualified by her very next thought, for the impending change is not conceived as a fact, but a feeling - she *feels* her life is going to change. She can feel that way eternally but, probably, if she herself does not take action, nothing will happen. In this vein of entropy, August's apparent positivity diminishes. Spring is traditionally considered the season of change, growth and renewal, not summer; moreover, following summer are the somber seasons of fall and winter.

In relation to this, it must be remembered that the narrator is telling these ONOPE within the framework of a conversation, to her friend Rita. Although Rita has had a minimal role throughout the conversation, her presence gains significance at the text's end. The narrator consciously acknowledges that the ONOPE event is a collaborative process, and that Rita could aid in her exploration of the ONOPE, but this

acknowledgement comes in the form of refusal: "I won't go into it with her. I've already told her too much." Reminiscent of the failed relationship bonding via the communicative act of ONOPE witnessed in "The Bridle," between Betty and Marge, this narrator has also failed to bond with her friend. The narrator in fact describes Rita negatively, using the adjective dainty, "her dainty fingers", thereby questioning the quality of their friendship.

Fingers are mentioned twice, at the opening and closing of the text, suggesting deeper meaning. Both instances come in the narrator's descriptions of people: the obese customer has fingers "three times the size of a normal person's fingers -- long, thick, creamy fingers" (3) and her friend Rita has "dainty fingers." The obese customer's fingers are described as an object of food, in a positive manner, suggesting an admiration for the obese customer by the speaker, and that perhaps she will choose to become fat.

The negativity expressed toward the speaker and Rita's friendship casts doubt upon the prospects of the speaker's inner change. If she has not bonded with Rita through this intimate communicative act of ONOPE, it is also uncertain that she will develop a more meaningful relationship with her partner Rudy, or if she leaves Rudy, with another man. Furthermore, it perhaps displays an unfairness on the speaker's behalf, for if she did not trust in Rita's faculties and qualities of intelligence, empathy, and honesty then she would have been better served to tell these ONOPE to a friend in whom she did trust. That she did not do so indicates, perhaps, that the narrator has broader problems with intimate relationships.

"Fat" therefore ends openly. It could be that the protagonist is unsure of what is happening in her heart and mind, and this state is reflected by the text: if she does not

understand, or does not gain understanding by the text's conclusion, then understanding is unable to be portrayed. The possibility here of arrested self growth refers to that of Ralph's in "Will You Please." Though it could also be that the speaker has indeed gained new understanding, but chooses not to disclose it. This narrator might be reliable but insecure. Her final thoughts evoke mistrust, for she has "already told . . . too much." The reader, being in a position equivalent to that of Rita's, as conversational participant, is also a recipient of these thoughts, and has also been told too much. Like all of the stories discussed so far, "Gazebo", "Nobody Said Anything", "Will You Please", and "The Bridle," in "Fat," communication, and specifically the act of ONOPE, exemplify the failure of communication.

In the next story, conversation and communication are again alluded to in the title (like "Nobody Said Anything," and "Will You Please") which for this text is "Where I'm Calling From." The title evokes an initiating of contact, in that telephoning someone is an act of communication. It also highlights location, hence touching the intertextual theme of space; which in Carver's work is often expressed as a tension between openness and closedness, openness in terms of talk and intimacy, closedness in terms of silence, repression, and avoidance. Along with the literal place of the caller, there is implied a metaphorical place. This metaphorical place being the interior of the speaker. The title thus brings out the dialectic between inner and outer; the internal state of being from which the speaker is communicating, and the literal, external place.

Like "Fat," the nineteen page text "Where I'm Calling From" can also be seen as being essentially the recreation of an ONOPE. The stylistic presentation of the ONOPE in it (there are two), and their interactions with and relationships to the surrounding text are

perhaps more complex than in "Fat." To begin to understand this complexity, the aspect of textual narration might first be considered. "Where I'm Calling From" is in first person and is restricted to the mind of its narrator, whose thoughts are presented in a style that is akin to skaz, or stream of consciousness. That is, all things in the text are described by and related through the narrator's mind. The ONOPE in "Where I'm Calling From" are not told by the narrator, but by the narrator's conversational participant.

If the cleft sentence of the text's title were completed it would read: where I'm calling from . . . is an alcoholism treatment center. It can be assumed *prima facie* that being at this place, the characters are to some extent dysfunctional. From this external location, it can be inferred that the textual narrator's interior is distressed. The textual narrator is an anonymous male presumably in his late twenties to mid thirties. The text is comprised of stories and memories that he relates, which have to do with clients at the treatment center, including himself, and events there. These narratives and recollections, which seem to be randomly linked by the narrator's flow of thought, are narratives of personal experience, but they are told interiorially, not orally, and exist only within the narrator's mind. They are not actual ONOPE, but the textual narrator's inner voice.

The conversation happens "on the front porch at Frank Martin's drying-out facility" (127). The textual narrator and J.P., his conversational participant, have both been for just a couple of days at the treatment center and this is their first meeting. Being "first and foremost" alcoholics, they are suffering the initial effects of withdrawal. J.P. has "the shakes"; his hands tremble uncontrollably. The textual narrator has a nerve that spasms at the base of his neck causing his mouth to become dry. They must be feeling

physical, psychological, and emotional stress. They are far from being "out of the woods."

Yet the conversational situation could be conducive to divulgence of intimate personal information. It is casual. They are alone on the porch, sitting in chairs with their "feet up on the railing" (136) looking out at the Oregon valley and in the distance the hills. They share a common problem-ailment, their time is free, and they have no activity to do other than talk. Their respective stories and explanations of how they came to be there, sitting on the porch at the treatment center, would seem to be a natural topic of conversation. In this vein, J.P. tells two ONOPE, the first concerning an episode from his childhood that had a strong impact upon him, then the narrative of his marriage, family life, and gradual descent into alcoholism.

The first narrative is one paragraph in length. It seems to be told apropos of nothing, as something about which J.P. happened to be thinking. The textual narrator says:

What's J.P. talking about, anyway? He's saying how when he was twelve years old he fell into a well in the vicinity of the farm he grew up on. It was a dry well, lucky for him. "Or unlucky," he says, looking around him and shaking his head. He says how late that afternoon, after he'd been located, his dad hauled him out with a rope. J.P. had wet his pants down there. He'd suffered all kinds of terror in that well, hollering for help, waiting and then hollering some more. He hollered himself hoarse before it was over. But he told me that being at the bottom of that well had made a lasting impression. He'd sat there and looked up at the well mouth. Way up at the top, he could see a circle of blue sky. Every once in a while a white cloud passed over. A flock of birds flew across, and it seemed to J.P. their wingbeats set up this odd commotion. He heard other things. He heard tiny rustlings above him in the well, which made him wonder if things might fall down into his hair. He was thinking of insects. He heard wind blow over the well mouth, and that sound made an impression on him, too. In short, everything about his life was different for him at the bottom of that well. But nothing fell on him and 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. (130)

Beginning to interpret J.P.'s ONOPE, space is noted: he was trapped at the bottom of the well, a strange, claustrophobic, terrifying place. Assuming that the textual narrator is reliable and has provided the important information in J.P.'s ONOPE (there does not appear to be evidence to the contrary), it seems J.P. was quite lucky. Firstly, the well was dry, preventing him from drowning, and he did not simply die from the fall. Secondly, he did not break any bones. These two facts indicate J.P. did not fall with his head first; therefore, keeping in mind his age, he might have been playing at the well, rather than trying to hoist up a bucket. If this is true, then J.P. had a part in the accident: he was playing at an obviously unsafe place.

At the bottom of the well J.P. could only wait and hope that someone would rescue him. His fate, his life, depended on things he could not control. The patch of sky was his sole connection to the world above; the fear of losing it and becoming encased alive in a sort of tomb, a fear probably prolonged, for assuming that he was not performing an errand nor immediately needed at home, it would have been a substantial amount of time before his family noticed his absence, must have been utterly terrifying. Luckily his father eventually found and saved him. There are religious tones: the bottom of the well representing hell and the blue sky above heaven, J.P.'s father God, his father's rescuing him an act of Divine intervention. In J.P.'s narrative themes of fear, responsibility and control, faith and hope, luck and fate, are thus present.

How does J.P.'s ONOPE interact with the encompassing text and the situation that J.P. and the textual narrator are in? Without having specific knowledge of their personal lives certain general inferences might be made about them based on the twin facts of their

being alcoholics, at a treatment center. They might have lost self-control, and control over their lives. Alcohol might rule them. The money and time, commitment and investment, to alcohol have most likely damaged their intimate relationships, as well as their skills of survival, meaning primarily those skills necessary to maintain a job and a steady income, and to manage personal finances. As adults they are probably aware at some level of the damaging effects that alcohol is having on themselves and their families, but being addicted they are not able to stop it. While knowing that their behavior is destructive, is potentially ruining their lives, they are helpless and immobilized in their addiction. Their presence at the treatment center, though, is a direct step toward recovery. As such it implies that either they personally desire to recover, or that they have loved ones who do. If it is the case that J.P. and the textual narrator have not been forced into the recovery program and are there volitionally, then they must hope that they will be able to recover, and to rebuild their lives. However, being at the beginning of the process they might feel highly uncertain that recovery and a re-start are possible.

There are numerous similarities between J.P.'s ONOPE and the above assumptions regarding his and the textual narrator's emotional-psychological states. J.P. fell into the well accidentally, yet it was partly his fault (if he was playing there); no person ever plans or wants to be an alcoholic, but in the final analysis it must always be his or her own fault. J.P. was trapped in the well; they are trapped in alcoholism. J.P. had no control over his situation at the well's bottom; as alcoholics they cannot control their drinking. J.P. was dependent upon outside help; they are dependent upon outside help (the treatment center). J.P. could only wait and hope; they can only wait (for the phase of

withdrawal to pass) and hope. J.P. had only one tie to the outer world (the bit of sky); they might feel cut off from the world. J.P. felt terrified he might never be found and would die; they might feel terrified they might never recover, and perhaps might eventually die from alcohol related causes. J.P. could have been sealed alive in that place; seeing the damage of alcoholism, but being unable to stop it, they could feel encased alive. The physical crampedness of J.P.'s situation and the extreme psychological pressure of the situation were claustrophobic; the physical problems of withdrawal and the psychological pressure attached to it might make them feel claustrophobic.

J.P.'s ONOPE thus seems to act as a metaphorical representation of their psychological-emotional states, and therefore, of the place that the textual narrator is speaking from: they might feel as if trapped at the bottom of a well. Moving from the above assumptions concerning them to the actual details of their circumstances, J.P.'s ONOPE's metaphor resonates with the information provided. They are indeed suffering; their lives are in turmoil. The textual narrator is anxious about his health, that the spasm in his shoulder might be a symptom of something worse, a worry exacerbated, or caused, by his, along with the other clients, witnessing another client suffer a seizure during a meal. Describing his shoulder spasm the textual narrator says: "I want to hide from it . . . just close my eyes and let it pass by, let it take the next man" (128). There are things in the textual narrator's personal life as well that he would like to hide from, and let pass by.

The textual narrator is estranged from his current wife and living with a new girlfriend. He seems to be a difficult intimate partner, as his wife "asked me [him] to leave," (138) and his girlfriend "didn't have any idea what she was letting herself in for when she said I could stay with her." It is his second time at the treatment center; his

"wife brought me up here the first time. That's when we were still together, trying to make things work out," but "this time around, it was my girlfriend who drove me here." His life is literally in disarray, for some of his belongings are at his wife's and some are at his girlfriend's. The one time that he called his wife, from the treatment center, they yelled and cursed each other, but with his girlfriend he has not had any contact, and he is actually uncertain he wants to speak to her. Finally, he, and his girlfriend, were drunk for several entire days when he decided to come again to the center (it was his idea), he was still drunk, and still drinking, while on the way (his girlfriend driving drunk in a rain storm), so on arrival he was utterly drunk.

The inherent, obvious, pain in J.P. and the textual narrator's situation is never overtly conveyed. In terms of their communicative interaction, in their conversation neither of them opens up about their feelings. This might be due to several reasons: they are still strangers; coping honestly with their own emotions and behaviors might be difficult for them; having essentially just arrived there, they might be sort of stunned, in a state of bewilderment; they could be avoiding things; but whatever their reasons, they avoid the topic of their own emotions.

At the level of textual narration, there is an intimacy afforded by the narration's being inside the narrator's mind. It would seem to grant access to his most private thoughts and feelings. However, this interiority does not actually give greater intimacy. His memories and stories, rather than being psychological-emotional explorations of self, soul searchings, instead come in a straight-forward factual style that recounts events devoid of their psychological-emotional significance. In this absence of emotional portrayal the metaphorical function of J.P.'s narrative of personal experience is heavily

weighted. The text's themes become compacted into it. Since J.P.'s ONOPE functions as a metaphor, the metaphor is extended, drawn out, and placed in the more prominent location of the framework of a conversation, thus strengthening and emphasizing it.

A metaphor having connotations similar to J.P.'s ONOPE, of claustrophobia and desperation, is placed toward the text's end. This is the textual narrator's recollection of having read a short story by Jack London entitled *To Build A Fire*, in which: "This guy in the Yukon is freezing. Imagine it - he's actually going to freeze to death if he can't get a fire going . . . He get's his fire going, but then something happens to it. . . . Meanwhile, it's getting colder. Night is coming on" (147). The themes of terror, desperation, hope, luck, divine intervention, extreme psychological pressure, are all present.

Having explored certain aspects of J.P.'s ONOPE's function within the text, a question of voice arises. On the surface there is duality. J.P. and the textual narrator are on the porch; the two of them are having a conversation; J.P. is talking while the textual narrator listens; they are both alcoholics with backgrounds of trouble. This duality, that is linked by a commonality, is stressed in the text's opening words: "*J.P. and I* are on the front porch at Frank Martin's drying-out facility. Like the rest of us at Frank Martin's, J.P. is first and foremost a drunk" (127). The grammar of the nominal phrase casts them as equals, and the shared fact of alcoholism dominates. Having established this duality, the textual narrator goes on to make a series of comparisons between them: "It's his first time here, and he's scared. I've been here once before", "He's about thirty years old. Younger than I am. Not much younger, but a little", "*we've* only been in here a couple of days", "J.P. has these shakes, and every so often a nerve . . . begins to jerk in my shoulder."

However, this duality becomes complicated, and blurred. The majority of the conversation that they have is not presented in literature's standard format for dialogue, which involves use of techniques such as quotation marks and the division of those lines on the page that are in the dialogue according to speaker; instead, the conversation is reported indirectly through the narrator's thoughts, as can be observed in the citation of J.P.'s first ONOPE. J.P.'s ONOPE is filtered through the textual narrator's consciousness. J.P.'s second ONOPE is also reported in this indirect manner. J.P.'s ONOPE in their original form, as he himself orates them, are unavailable to the reader. They become re-told and re-presented by the textual narrator. Yet J.P. is not excluded in this re-telling. The ONOPE are not completely in the grammar of reported speech, but include direct quotes of J.P. Furthermore, J.P.'s physical presence, as well as the reality of their conversation, is confirmed by the textual narrator's providing details of J.P.'s nonverbal behavior, and of the setting. Therefore, complexity and tension exists between the natural duality of their conversation (there are two participants) and the univocality of the textual presentation, and the ONOPE's assumed occurrence in the realistic-but-fictional world and its re-telling and existence in the abstract interior world of the textual narrator, the only domain available to the reader.

Continuing on with the matter of voice, J.P.'s second ONOPE, as noted earlier, concerns his courting of his wife, Roxy, marrying her, making a family, and gradual decline into alcoholism. This is ONOPE is approximately five pages in length, a considerable amount of space, and too long to be cited in its entirety. This second ONOPE provides, if not an in-depth look into his character, at least a clear outline of him. This background information contrasts with the information the textual narrator provides

about himself, which does not go into any detail; he does not describe his courtship of his wife, or new girlfriend; what went wrong in his marriage; or when, why, and how he became alcoholic. The textual narrator's thoughts instead center primarily on his current situation. J.P. thus has a depth of character. At this level, J.P.'s second ONOPE seems to operate as a comparator-contrastor with the narrator's own story. The exploration of the background details of the textual narrator's personal story that have been withheld are replaced by J.P.'s story, from which inferences can perhaps be made about the textual narrator.

On the other hand, five pages is but a portion of the entire text. Furthermore, the textual narrator's re-telling of J.P.'s narratives imbues them with his own voice. J.P.'s narratives are laced with reported speech designators (J.P. says, J.P. said) and direct quotes so that their authenticity is maintained, but it is the textual narrator's voice that is being heard/read. For example, when the textual narrator reports the portion in J.P.'s ONOPE in which J.P. falls in love with his wife, it is ambiguous exactly whose voice it is, and in what way the voices are mixed: "It was something that was out of his hands. Nothing else in the world counted for anything. He knew he'd met somebody who could set his legs atremble. He could feel her kiss still burning on his lips, etc." (132).

These words could certainly be quotations of J.P.'s actual speech; they could be re-written from J.P.'s position, as in "I (J.P.) knew I'd met somebody who could set my legs atremble." Yet they could also be the textual narrator's own descriptions, because specific designating phrases have been left out; for example, the textual narrator says that "he [J.P.] knew he'd met," rather than "he *said* he knew he'd met . . ." Also, the Latin words "etc." especially create ambiguity, as it seems to be an authorial narrator's voice.

People do not usually think in that manner, "He could feel her kiss still burning on his lips, etc."; it seems to be more of a literary style. Therefore, that sentence might be neither J.P.'s own words, nor the textual narrator's own thoughts. A third voice, the authorial voice, is possibly introduced here. It is therefore ambiguous how distinct, how much, of a voice J.P. has. His character could be independent, occupying a position more or less equal to that of the textual narrator's, or J.P.'s voice could be intertwined with the textual narrator's voice.

The presentation of "Where I'm Calling From" through the mind of the textual narrator, the re-voicing of J.P.'s ONOPE through him, and the majority of the text's consisting of the textual narrator's thoughts concerning his own situation combine and serve to orientate the central story of "Where I'm Calling From" to be that of the textual narrator's personal story. The governing question of the text would therefore not be whether *they* will recover but whether the textual narrator will recover, and the significance of their communicative interaction, and J.P.'s telling of ONOPE, lies not so much in the ways that it reflects upon J.P., but in its relevance to and interaction with the textual narrator.

The textual narrator's experience of listening to J.P.'s ONOPE seems to have had a salubrious effect upon him. The evidence of this is that by the text's conclusion he has become motivated to call both his wife and his girlfriend. This desire to speak with them perhaps implies a new desire in him to re-establish contact, and at some level to begin attempting to salvage the wreckage of his close relationships. It is a possible gesture toward intimacy. Moreover, he has a positive desire to speak with his wife without bickering and arguing. The importance of his wanting, and trying, to speak with each of

them on the phone is highlighted by its being mentioned four times (140, 141, 145, 146). In fact "Where I'm Calling From" concludes with the act of his phoning, and simultaneous thoughts on it: "I bring some change out of my pocket. I'll try my wife first. If she answers, I'll wish her a Happy New Year.

. . . I won't bring up business. I won't raise my voice. . . . After I talk to her, I'll call my girlfriend" (146). The text thus seems to culminate in a positive behavior that is a result of the textual narrator's and J.P.'s communicative interaction. The ONOPE event in "Where I'm Calling From" thus contrasts with those in the previous texts, all of which involved miscommunication, failures at bonding and understanding, distancing rather than lessing distance.

Further analysis, however, casts doubt on the positive value of the phone call, and thus on the text's positive ending. The textual narrator's circumstances must be remembered: he is estranged from his wife, and living at his girlfriend's place. This is an extremely distressful situation for a marital relationship to have sunk to, and while it is possible for them, and the relationship, to recover, heal, and progress from this point, it must be difficult to do so. In contrast to his stated wish to avoid conflict in his phone calls, he has earlier expressed negativity in various ways concerning both his wife and his girlfriend. Regarding his girlfriend, just prior to the textual narrator's coming to the treatment center, she received hospital test results indicating she might have cancer, although the tests did not seem to be conclusive. At one point, the textual narrator begins to phone her but stops, thinking "I don't want to talk to her. . . . I hope she's okay. But if she has something wrong with her, I don't want to know about it" (143). Granting that he must be in a very low psychological-emotional state, it still might demonstrate a

selfishness, a callousness. He is not only in a position from which he can offer her minimal support, but he actually does not have the desire to offer it. This self-centeredness also appears in his expressed reason for wanting to call his wife, which is not out of concern for her or their relationship, but because "something had to be done about my stuff. I still had things at her house" (141). He wants to discuss the issue of his belongings.

In this light, J.P.'s second ONOPE interacts with the story of the textual narrator in another way. In it, J.P. expresses his wife, Roxy's, loyalty for him. Roxy's parents advised her to "take the kids and clear out. But Roxy said it was her problem. She got herself into it, and she'd solve it" (134). J.P. and Roxy have had physical fights, and she even had a boyfriend, but they are still together, she hasn't left him, and her family has taken the step of bringing him to the treatment center. Roxy's devotion to him is then demonstrated in actuality, for she visits him at the center, and displays affectionate behavior for him; when greeting him she "slips her arm around J.P. and kisses him on the cheek" (143). It would seem that J.P. and his wife still have hope of saving their marriage.

On "Where I'm Calling From's" penultimate page, the textual narrator remembers a happy memory of his former domestic life. In this recollection it is morning and he is at home with his wife, in bed. They hear noise outside, and going to the window he sees the landlord, who has come early to paint the house before the day becomes too hot. The textual narrator recalls that "a wave of happiness comes over me that I'm not him - that I'm me and that I'm inside this bedroom with my wife" (145). It is a nostalgic memory for a period and situation in his life that, given his apparently self-serving behavior, is

irretrievably, irrevocably lost. The space in this recollection contrasts with that of the textual narrator's current space. In the memory, he was in the intimate, even idyllic, space of home, in the bedroom, with his wife in bed, in the early morning. The textual narrator was inside looking out the window, at the landlord, who was outside. It is the reverse situation from "Nobody Said Anything," where the boy was outside the home looking through the window at his parents fighting in the kitchen.

Once the textual narrator had experienced a period of marital happiness, but, perhaps in ways that are similar to those in J.P.'s second ONOPE, and implied by it, he forever lost it. During that process of loss, he might have come to a point that was similar to J.P.'s current situation, when it was his first time at the rehabilitation center, when his wife still found him worth fighting for, when there was still hope. This point he passed though, and now all he can do is to call his estranged wife and try to avoid fighting with her, to ask about those possessions of his that remain at her house.

"Where I'm Calling" despite being filtered through the narrator's mind, might in fact be perceived as an ONOPE. There are two foundations to this reasoning. The first is that "Where I'm Calling From" is, as mentioned earlier, presented as if it were oral. There is a sense that it is being spoken by its teller, the textual narrator. That is, while the text's narration affects a sense that the reader is witnessing the protagonist's intimate flow of thoughts, there is at the same time a greater sense that the narrator is speaking, is addressing these thoughts, to the reader. Related to this orality is that the majority of the text's content concerns the textual narrator. This is so directly, by way of the textual narrator's own thoughts being invariably on his own situation (as opposed to concerning his wife, girlfriend, or J.P.), as well as indirectly, in that J.P.'s ONOPE are most important

as a comparator and evaluator with the dominant story of the textual narrator. "Where I'm Calling From," might therefore be seen as actually being an ONOPE, that of the textual narrator's experiences of failed intimate relationships and alcoholism, which is being addressed and told at a meta-level to a (the) reader.

In chapter one it was shown that the ONOPE found in the two texts could be related thematically to voice, and those in chapter two to revelation. Both "Fat" and "Where I'm Calling From" consist of ONOPE, albeit of different types; "Fat" is the account of an ONOPE while "Where I'm Calling From" might actually *be* an ONOPE. These two texts are, essentially, characters telling stories. As such, they foreground the theme in Carver's work of marginalized, often dysfunctional, characters striving toward understanding, specifically through the communicative act of ONOPE.





As concrete instances of Carver's characters' communicative interactions, the ONOPE exemplify the ways that the characters miscommunicate. Ruben broadly defines communication as "the process through which individuals - in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies - respond to and create messages to relate to the environment and one another" (14). Carver's characters fail to relate to one another, they fail to bond. This is observed through relationships at various levels of intimacy. The relationship between Marge and Betty in "The Bridle" is one of a less intimate, more social nature. They are strangers, and there is a power asymmetry, as Marge is a manager of the apartment complex and Betty is a tenant. Through two ONOPE Betty discloses intimate information about her family and herself, yet her disclosures seem to distance her from Marge. After that, Betty avoids Marge (that is, if Marge is a reliable narrator and has accurately interpreted Betty's behavior). The vocal act of ONOPE has led to silence: Betty no longer talks to Marge. At a higher level of intimacy is the relationship presented in "Fat," between the anonymous narrator, who is both textual narrator and teller of the ONOPE, and Rita, who are friends. The teller of the ONOPE fails to relate to her friend. This teller/narrator feels defensive, as if she "has already told . . . too much." Perhaps Betty in "The Bridle" feels that she told too much, too.

The intimate relationships of marriage and family are presented differently than the above ones, in that the marital and familial relationships are already in a state, or phase, of deterioration. The relationship units are becoming less united, less cohesive and more separate, such that "things that once were shared no longer are. Words or gestures that once mattered no longer do" (Ruben 338). In "Gazebo" Duane and Holly are on the verge of dissolving their marriage. In this situation any bonding in the relationship would

seem odd. Hence Holly's ONOPE is a nostalgic act, a hearkening back to an earlier, better time in their relationship. In "Nobody Said Anything" the parents have been quarreling in front of their children probably on a long term, consist basis. They display disturbing physical behavior; the father slams the door on leaving to work in the morning, and the mother throws a smoking frying pan across the kitchen against the wall. They incorporate the children into their ongoing war. Even though the adolescent narrator has a positive ONOPE to share with his parents, their negativity and quarreling overrides him, and he is prevented from doing so.

The characters' ONOPE events also illustrate communicational problems at an intrapersonal level. Humans have a "self-reflexive capability" that "allows us to look upon and analyze ourselves, our thoughts, and our actions. It permits us to turn our attention inward upon ourselves in order to examine our own communication and behavior. [. . .] we can replay and think about our actions, reactions, and interactions. Similarly, we can examine our own self-development" (Ruben 310). Many of these characters are unskilled, deficient in their self-reflexive abilities. For example, Ralph, the protagonist of "Will You Please," is presented ironically, for he "felt he understood him - what he could do, what he could not do, and where he was headed" (230) yet while at college he "felt himself on the brink of some kind of huge discovery about himself. But it never came" (227).

Ralph's wife Marian's ONOPE hits upon his lack of self-awareness, it raises up underlying issues in Ralph's psyche, which for him concern sexuality, and a conflict between romanticness - spontaneity - openness and prudence - closedness - inhibition. Marian's adultery, confessed through an ONOPE, while understandably painful, might

not be as much of a problem as Ralph's lack of self-understanding. It is Ralph's repressed being that is the central story. The narration reflects Ralph's inhibition by being tightly bound to him and not venturing into the other peoples' psyches (namely, Marian's), by not entering directly his own interior but staying safely distanced from deep feelings/desires, and by not clarifying what it is that he has learned from Marian's disclosure (beyond the fact of her adultery), or if he has actually learned anything.

In consideration of the theme of character voice, one observation is that females tend to be the tellers of ONOPE. The ONOPE in "Fat", "Will You Please", "Gazebo", and "The Bridle" are all told by females. This is true for the majority of the texts having ONOPE, of which "The Student's Wife", "How About This", "Why Don't You Dance" have female tellers of ONOPE, and "Put Yourself In My Shoes" and "What We Talk About" have multiple ONOPE with both male and female tellers. An issue is thus present of the relationship between gender and communication. By frequently having tellers of ONOPE who are female, Carver has given them a voice in American culture. In part, these female characters seem to "speak" for a group of women who are dissatisfied in their marriages, dissatisfied with the quality of their marital relationships.

In keeping to the study of ONOPE, the theme of unhappy females is witnessed in the story "The Student's Wife." In it, a husband, Mike, and wife, Nan, are in bed at night and the wife attempts to engage the husband in talk; she tries to tell him two ONOPE, one concerning the dream she just had, the other concerning an earlier, happy, event in their marriage. Despite Nan's requests, Mike does not engage. This instance of the failure of her to bond with him, through the ONOPE event, is implied as representative of the prevailing quality of their marital relationship, which seems to be shallow, to be

deteriorating. The story ends with Nan alone in the living room, praying: "'God,' she said. 'God, will you help us, God?'" The wife clearly desires a more empathic husband, who would communicate more openly with her.

Another aspect of Carver's depiction of female voice is that women often appear more articulate, more emotionally aware and sensitive than men. This accords with the popular cultural idea that women are better than men at communicating. For example, in "Gazebo," Holly's use of ONOPE is fairly sophisticated in that it is an indirect, subtle way of communicating to Duane that their future together is finished. Females perhaps appear to be more adept communicators than men, though, because men are often depicted as reticent. The male characters often avoid communicating their feelings-thoughts, they tend to be closed rather than open. Ralph, from "Will You Please" has already been shown to exemplify this. It is also witnessed in the males' responses to the females' ONOPE; for example, Mike actively refuses to engage Nan ("The Student's Wife"), and Duane's response is ambivalent ("Gazebo").

When males do tell ONOPE they tend not to probe its meanings. This is witnessed in the texts "The Ducks," and "Everything Stuck To Him." In them, the male characters are conversing with intimate female companions (a wife and a daughter, respectively) and tell ONOPE, but do not explore them. Often times the male character seems to simply present the ONOPE, leaving the hearer/reader to interpret it. The text "Where I'm Calling From" is an example of this. J.P.'s ONOPE are told, but not explored. They gain meaning and interpretability from the textual context they are in. J.P.'s ONOPE are understood in relation to the characters' location at an alcoholism treatment center, and in relation to the textual narrator's personal story. J.P.'s ONOPE are refracted

through the textual narrator's consciousness, which has been shown to be narrated in a highly oralized manner, as if to a meta listener, an external listener. The textual narrator therefore presents his own story to the reader, but in a way that avoids direct disclosure and revelation. The textual narrator avoids opening up, confronting his own issues.

The other texts that have a narrator "speaking" to an extra-textual "listener" are "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off", "What Do You Do In San Francisco", and "Sacks." These texts are a hybrid form of actual, "oral" ONOPE, which are a communicative event, and the written text, which is a static object. These written texts are presented *as* the vocal act of ONOPE.

In all of these texts the narrator is male. Furthermore, this male character simply presents a story, without a clear accompanying moral, or ethic. By having the male figure oriented to a meta "listener" rather than to a fictional conversational coparticipant, the male "speaker" is able to avoid being questioned.

Thus, in these texts the narrators' do not incorporate or anticipate a meta listener's potential responses. For example, they never use a phrase such as "you might think I'm crazy, but what I'm about to tell you is the honest truth," in which statement an external "listener" is indicated by the personal pronoun "you" and an opinion of this external "listener" is anticipated and responded to by the "speaker" (the "speaker" defends his narrative reliability, saying his story is "the honest truth"). In lacking any "listener" participation in the ONOPE event, these texts are univocal. Their "speakers"/narrators are taking a conversational turn, are "speaking" at length, and the (meta) conversational participant and reader is in a role of silent "listener."

From this observation another aspect of voice arises, which is that between the relationship of speech and power. Very broadly, in American culture the speaker is essentially taken to be in a higher position of power viz a viz the listener. The speaker is talking, active, in control of the conversation, while the listener is passive (on the other hand, there is such a thing as "active" listening, and there are groups of American society which value listening more than speaking, such as psychologists and psychiatrists). Power is especially related to ONOPE, for in ONOPE the speaker/narrator is in control of the narrative, choosing what details are included, in what way, and how it is performed.

In Carver's fiction, the relationship between speech, power and gender seems to be that the male is usually ultimately in control of the narrative, despite female characters frequently being the vocalizers of ONOPE. For example, in "Gazebo" Holly is the teller of the ONOPE, and also dominates the entire conversation (meaning, in the number and length of turns), but since the text itself is narrated in the first person by Duane, it is the male character in control of the whole, larger story. Holly's ONOPE, and speech, are incorporated into, and refracted through, Duane's voice. Another example is in the text "What We Talk About." In it, two couples are sitting at a kitchen table talking and drinking, and a female character, Terri, begins to tell an ONOPE. Her husband, Mel, however, persistently interrupts her, disputes her interpretation of the events of her ONOPE, and even imperatively denies the thesis of her ONOPE (Terri believes that her previous partner, Ed, in spite of physically abusing and intimidating her, did still love her; Mel, on the other hand, does not agree that Ed's feelings for Terri could be called love). Subsequent to Terri's ONOPE event, Mel takes command of the conversation and tells his own, lengthy ONOPE.

There is also a power relationship in Carver's fiction between the characters' voices, the textual narrator's voice, and the author's voice. This is witnessed obliquely in the text "Nobody Said Anything." Even though it requires a bit of imagination, it is possible to conceive of this text as being written by the adolescent boy, who has grown up. The text is presented in the first person through the adolescent's mind; however, it could be that the writer of the text is the older boy looking back on his younger self. Along with the ONOPE of his fishing adventure that he never got to tell to his parents, his parents and their marital strife are incorporated into his story. Silenced at the time, he now has a voice, and is now in power, in control of the narrative.

The relationship between author/writer and character voice is overtly witnessed in the text "Put Yourself In My Shoes." This story is written in the third person, and its narration is confined to its protagonist, a middle aged male named Myers. Myers is a writer. He and his intimate companion (wife?), Paula, pay an unannounced visit to another couple's home, the Morgans. Both of the Morgans tell ONOPE (although they both are not the protagonists of their ONOPE, but are associated with the events). The Morgans and their ONOPE are subsumed into the text which can be conceived of as having been written by the fictional male character Myers. The characters are given a voice, they are given the necessary space and time to tell ONOPE, but the dominant controlling voice is finally that of the author/writer's.

So far, discussion of ONOPE in Carver's work has highlighted the communicational problems of his characters. In his last book, *Cathedral*, there seems to be a shift to a more positive portrayal of relationships and interpersonal communication. The texts "Where I'm Calling From", "Fever" and "A Small, Good Thing" all seem to

involve instances of positive communication. "Fever" and "A Small, Good Thing" can be seen to conclude with positive acts of ONOPE. The text "Fever" ends with the male protagonist Carlyle telling an ONOPE to his babysitter concerning the failure of his marriage. "A Small, Good Thing" ends with a character telling an ONOPE to a couple concerning his (the speaker is male) deep unhappiness with his life. In both texts, though, the ONOPE are not represented, but suggested. These ONOPE are not filtered through another character's mind, as in "Where I'm Calling From" and "Gazebo," but summarized.

In "Fever" Carlyle talks until he has no more to say, after which he has "understood it was over [his marriage], and he felt able to let her go" (186). The telling of his (suggested) ONOPE has helped him cope with his suffering. However, he has been denied a voice in that his ONOPE has not actually been represented. How has telling this ONOPE helped him? How does it reflect upon him? How might his ONOPE of the failure of his marriage interact with what the reader knows about him in his present situation? Presenting Carlyle's ONOPE would give the reader greater certainty regarding his capacity for positive change and self-growth. By not presenting it, ambiguity is created. Even though the ONOPE event has apparently benefited Carlyle, the reader remains unsure that he can and will begin to heal, and improve his life. The same can be said of the ONOPE event in "A Small, Good Thing." The apparent shift toward a positive communication, witnessed in ONOPE, is therefore frustrated by ambiguity.

Often, Carver's characters are telling ONOPE as a therapeutic process. The emphasis is not upon the outcome of the communicational interaction, but on the process. An example of this is "Fat," in which the teller of the ONOPE has seemed to reach some

new understanding by the end of the ONOPE. Another example is in "Will You Please," in which Ralph has realizations while listening to Marian's ONOPE, and when he actually speaks, Ralph's realizations are thus tied to speech, to the oral event, and are thus related to the *process* of communication. The results of the ONOPE events are ineluctably left ambiguous. The "speaker" in "Fat" may or may not have learned and grown. Even in Carver's later fiction (for example, "Fever", "A Small, Good Thing", and "Where I'm Calling From"), ambiguity still prevails.

Beyond Carver's depiction of characters who are of the working class, of women who are waitresses, unhappy in their marriages, with husbands who are often dullards, and men who are stressed by the demands of supporting a family, and harboring frustrated ambitions (for example, the husband in "The Student's Wife), men who are reticent and avoid the disclosure of intimate thoughts and feelings, characters who had before been grossly under represented in American culture, is Carver's unique emphasis on the interpersonal communicational process. Readers are asked not merely to observe characters who are struggling at understanding themselves and their loved ones, but to relate and identify to these characters' and the process of understanding. Communicational events, exemplified by ONOPE, are presented, but their outcomes are left open. Carver intertwines the oral event of ONOPE with the textual narrative through ambiguity: the characters may or may not have learned and grown, and the texts may or may not end positively. By this ambiguity Carver seems to imply that it is the process of communication and understanding that is of concern. Readers are thus asked to transcend their own experience, to identify with characters whom they might not usually relate to.

Carver's emphasis on the process of communication touches a theme universal to all people, not only Americans. In compelling readers to identify with these characters, readers are perhaps inspired to consider and reconsider their own communicational abilities, their own levels of self-awareness and willingness to disclose and discuss intimate matters; readers might re-evaluate their own intimate relationships. In this sense, Carver's fiction moves beyond class issues. The characters' prevailing working class status becomes secondary to the broader theme of the process of communication, especially in relation to intimate relationships.

The study of ONOPE in Carver's work drew out a dialectic between open and closed. In the communicational process this was in terms of, usually, a male character being repressed and bound up inside and attendant difficulty in opening up, disclosing and discussing personal matters; in silence. This dialectic was seen to be related to another one, viewed in terms of space, of inner and outer. That is, there is a motif of a character being inside a home looking out through a window, and the opposite. Also, physical objects, often water, were seen to symbolize the characters' interior beings, as well as the quality of their relationships.

Further research might explore the dialectics between speech and silence, voice and power, inner and outer, as it is expressed in different ways throughout Carver's work. Also, a more detailed study of the linguistics of the characters' ONOPE could be performed. Such a study might in turn also concentrate on the linguistic relationship between "oral" ONOPE and their fictional, written representation.

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