



**THE LETTERING OF THE LETTER
IN RAYMOND CARVER'S "BLACKBIRD PIE,"
"CATHEDRAL," AND "WHY, HONEY?"**

BY

MR. KORPHONG WITCHAYAPAKORN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2015
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THESIS

BY

Mr.Korphong Witchayapakorn

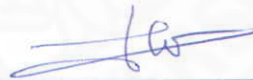
ENTITLED

The Lettering of the Letter in Raymond Carver's "Blackbird Pie,"
"Cathedral," and "Why, Honey?"

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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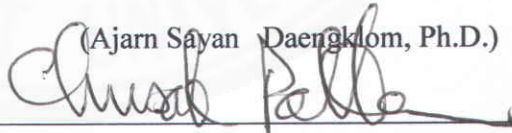
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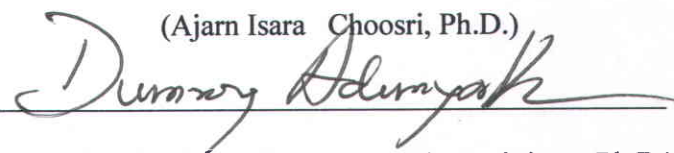
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the three short stories about the letter, "Blackbird Pie," "Cathedral," and "Why, Honey?," written by Raymond Carver. The first two are stories about the letter while the last one is written as a letter. Chapter two focuses on the formation of the letter-epistle. By comparing letter with other means of communication, face-to-face dialogue and telephone, it could be seen that the letter shares some of their traits. The letter-epistle resists to communicate the message as the face-to-face communication while the menace of the heteroglossia from telephone could be seen in the letter. Furthermore, because the letter always effaces itself from the narrative, the "being" of letter-epistle is of a trace. Its presence is its absence. Chapter three calls attention to the concept of letter-signifier in the mentioned texts, which has two primarily qualities. The narrative material, the first quality, is first approached in order to lay the foundation of the materiality of word or signifier in general. Any author is the signifier of the letters since s/he gives those words a materiality in a narrative. Next, the textual material, the other quality regarding the signifier, in Carver's text is analyzed. With reference to Barthesian concept of text, it could be seen that the textual quality is not a signifier *per se*, but the event of writing about the letter in the texts: the event handwriting and eye contact. The letter-signifier

is also compared to Derrida's idea of self-portrait. Ultimately, in chapter four, the concepts of letter-epistle and letter-signifier are put into a dialogue with the writings about the letter by Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari. Even though the idea of the materialistic destination is seen differently by Lacan and Derrida, Carver's texts offer, not a new approach, but a more neutralized way in looking at such matter, by focusing on the fictionality of the letter. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of expression and content could be used to study the intensity of the letter-signifier as a textual event. Lastly, the three characteristics from Kafka's personal letters, as commented by Deleuze and Guattari, are used as a new approach to Carver's only epistolary fiction "Why, Honey?" In the light of these dialogues, not only that Carver's minor works are read with a new approach, but the new idea about literature as a whole is found and/or found itself.

Keywords: Raymond Carver, Letter, Signifier, Writing, Trace

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Dear mom and dad: thank you for everything.

The author of this thesis wishes to expression a sincere appreciation for Associate Professor Chusak Pattarakulvanit for demonstrating that there is still a trace of freedom of idea, and idea about freedom, in this space. I am thankful to Dr. Sayan Daengkrom for being a kind of knowledge-jouissance, knowledge about jouissance, and jouissance in knowledge, and ... from the start, even before I know that the letter will ever arrive at its destination. I would like to communicate my gratitude to Dr. Isara Choosri for giving me a surplus of idea for my thesis. I am also grateful for Ajarn Annopé's support in writing an event for me to exercise my idea in public and yet adequately private space.

Yours Truly: Maprang (you know what I want and have wanted to say because the deference of your/my letter is conceptually different from those of others)

Mr. Korphonng Witchayapakorn

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PROLOGUE:
DEAR, RAYMOND CARVER

I know that you and I have never seen eye to eye, but a letter is the only condition of communication with you at the present as your current location has more of an affinity with the letters. The present of the voice would not be able to reach you. “I,” as the material ink on the erased space of the paper, and the signifier which represents my subjective intent to the other signifier, would be here at this moment of two short paragraphs. The reason is not that I is – am – a part of the western alphabetical order, making “I” a disappearing phantom between H and J. What determines “I” here is the law of something called “thesis” which forces my hands, eventually, to turn (yo)U into H(e) and H(im), and represses, but not entirely, the articulation of I. As a result, by the law of the academic writing you and I are forbidden to have any kind of subjective interaction. There exists only the objective observation between a mute object that writes and the object that studies: the lab rat and the dissector. Hence, this would be the only time I can contact you, through and by the letter. A promise.

Pedantry aside (enough with the deferral to undermine the system!), I write(s) (being written by?) this letter to you, which I hope that by the time the letter reaches you I will have already joined you, for two unrelated reasons. One of the reasons is to inform you that the academia law has dictacted me to dissect your life – anecdotes, essays, and interviews – as the starting point of the thesis, making your dismembered life the unary signifier of the thesis. This means that I have to bring you back as an academic plaything, and for this I am deeply sorry. It is true that I do not even know you – our eyes that never met – but I have to write to you to say that my unknowing of you and the other’s discourse about you will be known as you. The incorrect reading is about to be the only way of reading about you, as an individual. I am aware that the whole thing might sound strange and you probably smile ironically at the letter; however, this is the other reason of the letter. I want you to know that I am about to write about you and you are about to read about yourself. I also have/has

the same ironic smile on my face. I am certain that you will have known more about me when you finish with the attached document about our letter(s)...



CHAPTER 1

THE IRONIC SMILE

Irony is one of those tropes that does not usually manifest in the critics' discourse on the works of an American short story writer and poet Raymond Carver. According to Herzinger, Carver's writings does not include any ironic element because the stories are, most of the time, based on his life experience which he tries to communicate with the reader directly (as cited in Amir, 2010, p. xii). His stories are to portray, to use his own words, "the dark side of Reagan's America" (as cited in Mullen, 1998, p. 112) as he has experienced. There is nothing ironic about his personal life either. Born in a blue collar family in 1938, Carver worked his way up from a boy, who married at the age of nineteen (with two children in the first two and a half year of his marriage) in a small town near Columbia River, to one of the most significant American short story writers between the 70s and 80s. There is no luck or any irony of fate involved here. There is only a stubborn American pragmatism that drives him through the financial hardship and, in his own words, "crap job" (as cited in Nessel, 1995, p. 1). As it could be seen, the presence of the "American" trait is obvious in him. He errs on the side of pragmatism and the on-hand experience. Though writing is generally associated with the idea of imagination and intellectual indulgence, he writes only about the things he has had his hands on literally and figuratively. However, when it comes to the impression of intellectualism in relation to Carver, there is something ironic going on in the background: the other in which he himself is not familiarized with (or he is, but he does not try to reveal or conceal it like the stolen letter in Edgar Allan Poe's "Purloined Letter," hanging above the clitoral fire-place in the Minister's office).

On one hand, it is visible that Carver does not like to associate his writings and himself with anything academic or intellectual. In an interview with McCaffery and Gregory, when asked why his characters are mostly inarticulate and shut in blue collars, Carver replies that he tends to write more about this kind of people than the academic people in general because he, too, comes from this group of people – the people who are afraid when someone knocks on their door or calling

them on the phone, asking for the rent money (1985, p. 77). He then refers to a critic named Anatole Broyard who says that if the refrigerator is broken, the characters in "Preservation" should just call for the repairman to fix it. To Carver, "that kind of remark is dumb...Broyard may not be aware of it but some people can't afford to bring in a repairman if it's going to cost them sixty bucks" (Carver, 1985, p. 77). Carver also shows a sign of contempt toward intellectualism in his essay "On Writing," or formerly known as "A Storyteller's Shoptalk," saying that his writing does not rely on "tricks" for he prefers to write about people or the things which leave impressions on his "glimpse" (1989, pp. 23-26). Obviously, the tricks in this context refer to the postmodernist writing that had become a literary hype in the mid-70s: the play on language, and the intellectualized plot and characterization. In other words, intellectualism is not the drive that structures Carver's writing as it does with his contemporaries, as he says "the best art has its reference points in real life" (as cited in March-Russell, 2009, p. 237). The word "life" does not only refer to the life of the blue collar individuals, his inarticulate people, but also to the simple fact of life with no artistic (intellectual) intervention,¹ a life based on American pragmatism.

In terms of his writing style, Carver prefers to write only what has to be written, stripping bare his works from any accessorial diction. On the contrary, Hemmingway, whose style is supposedly the prototype of Carver's, writes as few words as possible for a certain artistic effect (the infamous tip of the iceberg) while the latter does so because he only wants to portray life as it is. In other words, Carver's style is more literal in a sense that he refers to thing as it is while Hemmingway's metaphoric: Hemmingway's "it" always stands for something else. On the side of the story, there is almost no plot mechanic in most of Carver's short stories because, after all, there is no plot in life, especially in the life of the inarticulate blue collar. Even though the plotless story is nothing new as it could be seen in Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921) and John Barth's "Lost in The Funhouse" (1968), Carver's plotless stories are neither dictated by the writerly language of Woolf or the self-reference of Barth. Unlike those two (and many more), his stories are less

¹ This, of course, echoes what Wordsworth says in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballad" (1801) about the celebration of the common man and the common language.

experimental. He does not try to write with “tricks” of the intellectualism; he only writes of what should be written, following the words of his teacher John Gardner: “[i]f you can say it in fifteen words rather than twenty or thirty words, then say it in fifteen words”(Carver, 1985).

On the other hand, and this is where the ironic mechanic comes in, Carver’s philosophy on writing, which is based on the anti-intellectualism (very American like, I have to say), is the machine that connects him to the intellectual-machine. Despite the fact that Carver does not like the term ‘minimalist’ which the critics give him (Carver, 1988, p. 6), implying his disdain for academic and intellectualism, it cannot be denied that Carver does theorize his own concept of writing. Looking back at “On Writing,” it could be seen that Carver does theorize the concept of short story writing in this essay. According to him, what distinguishes one great author from another is neither their cultivated (technique) nor natural talent, but how one specific author looks at the world (1989, p. 22). It is the gaze of the author that composes the text as it is. The works of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, for example, though related in terms of style, at least on the modern condition of the stream of consciousness, are actually unrelated, not because of their distinct talent, but how they perceive the world and/or are made to look at the world as such. In another essay “Fires” (original published in 1982), the idea of the framed gaze of the author is translated into the concept of influence, in which Carver says at the end of this essay movingly that it is his children who have the influence on his works (Carver, 1989, p. 39). One has to keep in mind that his children had been with him since he was nineteen, even before he started writing, which implies that his writing style is not fabricated, but interpellated by his economic and social status. In “On Writing,” with reference to a specific word from the definition of short story by V.S. Pritchett, Carver seems to believe that it is of the “glimpse” that the short story writer should focus on (1989, pp. 26-27). Because short story is supposed to be about a small part of life, only a glimpse of life, a small slice of life, the author ought to make that little object meaningful, together with an element of the unknown in a short time period. “And this is done through the use of clear and specific language, language used so as to

bring to life the details that will light up the story for the reader” (Carver, 1989, p. 27).

Another ironic gesture of Raymond Carver toward intellectualism could be seen in McNerny’s anecdote about Carver’s response to one of his students. When Carver taught “Form and Theory of the Short Story” at Syracuse University, one of the students, who is more on the side of literary theory, asked him why he did not teach anything about theory and all they did was to read short stories and talk about them. Carver replied “I guess I’d say that the point here is that *we read good books and discuss them. . . . And then you form your own theory.*’ Then he smiled” (emphasis added, as cited in Amir, 2010, p. xi). The smile at the end of the anecdote is too ironic to be read literally. It is a kind of gesture that both conceals and reveals the intention of the speaker. The smile renders the meaning of the message weak while intensifying the subtlety of the message. Despite the fact that, on the surface, it sounds as if Carver tried to avoid the subject that he is not keen on, by playing with his student’s question, his utterance has a trace of the theorist in it. It is hard to deny that literature is inextricably connected to many thinkers (theorists), such as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan (we could even go back to Plato and Aristotle and their concepts of mimesis and diegesis in regard to literature). They do not use the text as a mean to “show” their theory. They clarify their theory with the text and the text with their concept. The text and theory are mutually appreciated. Literature gives the theorists a new perspective that could affirm, negate, and even bring out a new perspective on the existing theory. At the same time, a theory could give the reader a whole new perspective of the text, revealing the concealed potential of the text. In other words, Carver, whether it is accidental or not, appears to be more theoretical than he thinks (we think).

Carver’s side of a theorist becomes more visible later in his life as he seems to gain a new understanding on what he could do with short story writing. Commenting on his four new short stories² in 1986, Carver says “I feel I am just beginning to make some discoveries about what I can do with a short story, about

² He refers to “Boxes,” “Whoever Was Using This Bed,” “Elephant,” and “Blackbird Pie” which are published in *The New Yorker* during February to July 1986.

what I want to do with my short stories. I am more or less verging on finding out something, and that's exciting” (as cited in "Chronology," Carver, 2009, p. 976). Despite the fact that we could never know what Carver's "something" is, for he passed away on August 2, 1988 (the same year his last collection of short stories *Elephant* (1988) was published), this gives us a textual opportunity to treat Carver as an author, not an individual: the author of "something." In this case, on the basis of "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes, 1977, p. 148), Carver's "something" as a textual artifact is to be read as a theory, both by itself as we could only theorize about it and by what it ought to signify. He discovers, I presuppose, that he could do more with a short story, with a set of ideas. This could be seen from "Errand," a story which is not related to Carver's life at all, only a set of ideas that he uses (further explanation on this story will be shown in the next section). Moreover, Carver's use of the word "discovery" is to be read with a connotation for history. When one says that one discovers something, one also implies that one has been working on finding something for sometimes, that one has a history with the discovered object, implying that the object of discovery has always existed, waiting to be found. Even though it is accidental, a series of events before the accident is what makes the discovery possible. Hence, Carver's "something" is not the finding of something entirely new, but "something" that has always been there in his short stories: a set of theories or themes to say. These sets of theories, regardless of Carver's awareness, could be found in the critics' general discussion on him— that is, what the critics generally talk about when they talk about him.

What They Talk about When They Talk about Raymond Carver

In order to extract the theoretical aspect from Carver's short stories, the critics' discourse has to be categorized into different groups. This will not only provide a clearer body of theory (idea) in his works, but also to fabricate the structure in Carver's criticism as a whole (the word fabricate here is used carefully to stress the imaginary nature of anything structure. This is to say, structure is formulated, it does not naturally exist). In the beginning of his essay "A Subtle Spectacle: Televisual Culture in the Short Stories of Raymond Carver" (1998), Mullen, to show that

Carver's fiction form and content are barred from each other, says that there are two dominating schools of criticism on Carver: the stylistic and social-realist reading. The former school tends to focus on Carver's prose by juxtaposing his writings with his contemporaries and precursors for the purpose of grouping and differentiating between the schools of the maximalist and the minimalist, or the postmodern and the post-postmodern. The latter school emphasizes on how Carver could portray the life of the blue collar as it is which draws critics' attention to the social conditions in his stories. As a result, Mullen tries to undermine the opposition by studying Carver's content and form together to show that the reader and the critic would gain a better understanding this way. Though Mullen could provide us a better insight in Carver's world and the effects of the televisual culture on Carver's characters and his awareness of the "class conscious" (Mullen, 1998, p. 112), it seems that Mullen's binary opposition is somehow questionable. Form and content in Carver's works could not be separated. They function like a unit of a Saussurean sign: a sheet of paper which cannot be separated. The form in Carver's short stories determines the content and vice versa (Amir, 2010, p. xviii). This is not to say that Mullen's criticism is lacking for his intention is to read Carver's works as a sign, but to say that when one talks about Carver's writing, one could not talk about form without mentioning the content and vice versa. Minimalism when associated with Carver, as we are going to see, gains a double articulation.

What differentiates one criticism on Carver from the other actually is a thematic reading. Theme, as the word suggests, implies a unity which can be differentiated from one to another. It is what holds the text, in Barthes' sense, together, delaying it for the moment of reading. This also means that one story could have more than one theme for a theme is only a unit in a text. With this approach, we would be able to extract the theories or ideas from Carver's short stories as a whole. Hence, the criticisms will be classified into different groups to highlight each specific theory from Carver's short stories. It should be noted that though each group of criticism has their own concept on Carver's fiction, they are organically connected. The difference is of the repetition in the act of reading itself, not of the works. That being said, there are four themes (theories) of fiction that manifest regularly in the

reading of Carver's short stories: fiction of minimalism, of the gaze, of postmodernism, and of the other.

Fiction of Minimalism

It cannot be denied that when it comes to Raymond Carver, minimalism is the signifier that is often mentioned the most. He is called “‘the godfather’ of literary ‘minimalism’” (as cited in, Nessel, 1995, p. 29). He is also one of the authors, such as Tobias Woolf, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason, who play a significant role in the minimalist project in America during 1970s-1980s. As a result from the booming of this particular style of writing, the critics have to invent terms such as, “hyperrealism,” “dirty realism,” “K Mart Realism,” and many more, in order to categorize their writing style. Nevertheless, those terms, while they could be used with other minimalist authors, could not be used with Carver (March-Russell, 2009, pp. 236,245). Dirty realism ignores the humanistic nature of Carver's works while hyperrealism focuses more on the experimental nature of form and reference to popular culture which cannot be found in Carver's works. In his essay “A Few Words about Minimalism,” John Barth says Carver's signature prose style is conditioned by his feeble domestic status (Barth, 1995, p. 69). In Carver's early stage of writing as stated above, it is well-known that Carver could not spend as much time as he wants on writing because he has to earn money from his “crap job” to pay for college tuition fee and to support his family. Unlike Borges whose later writing, which is considered minimalist by many, is affected by his trouble in seeing, Carver's style, theme, and signature are dictated by his life as a whole, not just a part of his life. However, according to Stull and Carroll, it is his editor Gordon Lish's aggressive editing style that shapes Carver into a minimalist as the world knows him today, especially from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), which is known for its extreme minimalist stories (as cited in, R. C. Clark, 2012, p. 105). Carver even wrote the letter to Lish, asking him to stop publishing his book because the stories have been changed so much from the original, but Lish refused. Such a claim holds some weights as his later stories in *Cathedral* (1983) are lesser minimalist than those edited by Lish and “mov[ing] away from his archminimalist phase to a more natural form, he has no longer felt this need to rewrite” (Meyer, 1989, p. 205).

Despite all of the biographical readings of his minimalist approach, there are critics who try to understand Carver's minimalist short stories textually. Having compared Carver's "Preservation" with his minimalist contemporary Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh," Henning (1989) argues that the reader ought to forfeit any form of interpretative reading attempt when reading both writers' works. Carver and Mason rely on the literal, the metonymic force that impedes the familiarized narrative's movement, disrupting the reading expectations for the things grand and symbolic. As a result, the reader is forced to strategize his/her reading by turning away from the metaphoric reading, to a literal one in order to appreciate the delayed day-to-day routine. In other words, in order to appreciate Carver's minimalist story, the reader should read his texts minimally. Furthermore, in his essay "Is Less More? A Reinvention of Realism in Raymond Carver's Minimalist Short Story" (2008), Just seems to agree with Henning, saying that fiction writing does not have to always signify something in order to be considered literature. In answering to Atlas, who questions whether Carver's less is more or less is less, Just pushes things further than Henning, arguing that Carver's minimalism is neither more nor less. "[T]his 'lessness' simply represents a syntactic manifestation of the semantic vision this type of short story tries to convey" (Just, 2008, p. 316). In order to appreciate Carver, the reader and critic are supposed to look at Carver's strategy of deferring the process of signification, of the banal setting in the everyday life, and the defamiliarization of such banality. It appears that the word "interpretation" when conjoining with Carver's minimalist stories, does not refer to what-it-means, but also how-it-works. Just further says that Carver's minimalist approach is not grounded on the basis of "more is less" but on the interconnection of multiplicity of methods he fosters, which are the reinventing school of realism, the awareness of "the materiality of language," the art of suspension of narrative, and the theory of alienation (316). In other words, Carver simplifies the complicate, not turning more into less.

Fiction of the Gaze

If minimalism is the first word that is usually made manifest in the criticism on Carver, the subject of the gaze is the second one. In their essay "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver"

(1979), Boxer and Phillips, ones of the first group of critics who put Carver's works in the scene of serious literature, observe that the voyeuristic motif is immanent in Carver's stories.³ "The Idea" for example, is a story about double voyeurism. The narrator, presumably to be a middle aged woman, watches her neighbors roleplaying a peeping tom: through the crack on the window, the husband watches the wife undressed inside the house. It could even be said that this is a triple voyeurism as it is the reader who also looks at the narrator of the story. "Neighbors" is another story that the motif of voyeurism plays an important role. Because their neighbors, the Stones, are on vacation, Bill and Arlene are asked to look after the Stones' apartment. As the story goes on, it becomes visible that Bill and Arlene voyeuristically enjoy the fact that they could live the life of the Stones. They take food from the Stones' refrigerator, putting on their clothes, and lying on their bed. In one scene, Bill even tries on Mrs. Stone's underwear. At the end of the story, the two of them accidentally lock themselves out of the Stones' home. "[Bill and Arlene] stayed there. They held each other. They leaned into the doors as if against a wind, and braced themselves" (Carver, 2009, p. 13). Aside from the plot, Carver's writing style also contributes to the insistence of the theme of voyeurism. Unlike other writers, the space between the text and the reader is almost absent from Carver's works (Boxer & Phillips, 1979, p. 79). Carver writes as if he were there with the characters, but the characters are not aware of him. In other words, he writes voyeuristically. As a result, the reader feels as if s/he, too, was there invisibly inside the room with the characters. It also should be noted that Carver emphasizes the importance of the "glimpse" and the real in his essay "On Writing," saying that the short story writers are to give life to the glimpse with little artistic intervention (Carver, 1989, pp. 26-27). This is to say that the short story writers are to create the voyeuristic art by giving the pleasure to reader with a story from the uncontaminated glimpse of the real.

The usage of the gaze also redefines Carver's minimalist stories as a whole. Using Carver's "Cathedral" as a point of focus, Clark (2012) says that

³ Despite the fact that this criticism is published only a few years after Carver first published book *Will You Please be Quiet, Please?* (1976), it lays a fundamental ground work for the study of Raymond Carver as a whole. That is, though this may sound exaggerated, I say almost every criticism on Raymond Carver is the footnote of this particular criticism.

Carver's minimalism is influenced by literary impressionism. Carver's deadpan and indifference prose reflects the impressionist's attempt to emphasize on the visual sense. Rather than imposing the narrator's voice on the narrative, the narrator tends to be self-effacing, showing rather than telling. Similar to Kronegger's definition of literary impressionism, it is the immediacy of the sense, visually, that is the narrative focus in Carver's fiction (as cited in R. C. Clark, 2012, p. 107). The elaborative discourse would delay the visual instantaneity. The narrator in "Cathedral" does not make any philosophical contemplation when he accepts the existence of the blind man, showing him how the cathedral looks like by drawing the image of a cathedral together. Also, the lack of political ideology and moral lessons in the story echoes Chekhov's impressionistic approach to his own stories. As an impressionist, Chekhov does not try to force any form of agenda on the reader; he only tries to show a glimpse of life. The moments of epiphany in Carver's works, not just in "Cathedral," are related figuratively to the sense of visual. The characters are often drawn to some forms of physical stimulation, a figurative seeing, that is beyond their knowledge and conscience.

Furthermore, in her book *The Visual Poetic of Raymond Carver* (2010), Amir shows that most Carver's short stories are structured by Deleuze's concept of cinematic "geometric frame," Goethe's quotation "what is inside is outside," and Roland Barthes's *punctum* in photography. The cinematic frame refers to the fact that even though Carver writes about the mundane, he figuratively puts a frame on it and makes a story out of it, making the mundane more than the mundane. Goethe's "what is inside is outside" is the equivalence of the literary "tell, not show." The definition of Barthes's *punctum* is rather problematic for she relates *punctum* to Lacan's concept of the Real, Deleuze's idea on the work of framing in cinema work, and even Derrida's own take on the meaning of *punctum* as a passage. Simply put, Amir says that the champagne cork at the end of "Errand," which is not included in the original version of Troyat's biography on Anton Chekhov, is a *punctum* because it gives the reader a sense that they – the reader and the cork – are there at the presence, a sense of being: the reality effect (Amir, 2010, pp. 168-169). As it could be seen,

Amir's treatment of the subject of image and photography somehow connects Carver to the fiction of postmodernism.

Fiction of Postmodernism

Though postmodernism is not often associated with the works of Carver, there are a few critics who argue that there are traits of postmodernism in Carver's work and his attitude toward the whole postmodern project. In *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study* (1995), Nessel argues that Carver's new realistic short stories are in fact "a post-postmodern modernism" (1995, pp. 5-6). The word modernism in this context does not refer to the writing style of modernist writers: the disjointed inner world of the characters, influenced by Freud's theory on the unconscious, and a heavy play on language. Rather it refers to the connoted meaning of the word: the sense of antagonism.⁴ That said, Carver's new realism reacts against the postmodernist project because it challenges the excess and ironic language, and the sophisticated plot of his postmodernist contemporaries, such as Pynchon and DeLillo. It also should be noted that it is "new" realism because Carver does not follow the realist project word by word. For example, unlike most realist authors who celebrate the heteroglossia of the real, Carver's limits his "real" to the interior of a house with a controlled discourse, making his stories, most of the time, "monological" (M. M. Clark, 1991).

Looking at this in a rather postmodern way, according to Lyotard, the postmodern writers are not supposed to limit themselves with any rule, implying that the reaction against the norm is to be celebrated (as cited in, March-Russell, 2009, p. 242). Therefore, it is Carver's antagonistic attitude toward postmodernist's "tricks" that makes him even more postmodernist. The repetition of "he said" and "she said" in "Why Don't You Dance," though used only to deprive the narrative of any artistic intervention, makes it "post-postmodern" because it intensifies the alienation of the characters from language, drawing the reader attention not to what the characters say, but to the performance of narration (Nessel, 1995, p. 38). In a way, the self-

⁴ However, this is a rather tongue in cheek comparison because modernism is not the only literary movement that carries such attitude. Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," for example, also carries the same antagonistic attitude.

effacement of the author-narrators in most of Carver's works could be seen as the cause and effect of the loss of language. Because the language, which is the means of the author and the narrator, is minimized, the subjectivity of the Symbolic subject, in turn, is affected directly by such phenomena. Despite the fact that his setting and theme concern only with his own experience as an American individual, the isolated characters, the fear of communication, and the undefined self of the author all emphasize the postmodern conditions in Carver's works and his status as the postmodern author (March-Russell, 2009, pp. 239-240). Furthermore, Carver's ever changing writing style, which could be seen distinctly when one compares his early stories with the stories from his last published collection of short stories *Elephant*, fits the postmodern conditions. While this is rather easy to argue because one could say that Carver's "On Writing" and his attitude toward postmodern writing are the rules that condition him so, it should be noted that his so-called rules, if this is to be read biographically, are changed according to the changing conditions of his life, such as his divorce and new marriage, his alcoholism and abstinence, which means that he neither makes the rule nor follows them. He only flows along the machine called life (there is a big difference between flow and follow).

Also, in regard to Carver's change of style, Scofield (1999) observes that some of Carver's short stories are written in a postmodern manner: a metafiction. In "Put Yourself in My Shoes," a protagonist who is a writer becomes aware of himself being stuck "between stories" and at the end "he was the very end of the story" (Carver, 2009, p. 115). It should be noted that at first the protagonist is stuck in his house, vacuuming his floor, unable to write anything. However, when he leaves his house with his significant other and is forced by the context of the situation to be "taught" by other people, who are not writers, about the art of storytelling, he is finally at the end of the story: his own story and Carver's. Though the "meta" here is not as extreme as Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," it shows that Carver writes a story which is about writing. The narrator's ex-wife from "Intimacy" is also aware of her being written in the narrator's story which "made her feel exposed and humiliated" (Carver, 2009, p. 561). This could be seen as an encounter between the written subject and the writing subject, or the text and the author. Carver's "Errand," a homage to

Anton Chekhov, is known for its hyper-intertextuality. The narrating voice in the first part of the story is not of one source, but of “Suvorin’s and Tolstoy’s diaries, Marie Chekhov’s and Olga Knipper’s memoirs, Chekhov’s words as reported by different people, and various biographies Carver may have consulted, notably Henry Troyat’s *Chekhov*” (Verley, 2006, para. 2). Hence, in a way, Carver does follow a postmodern trend on self-referentiality of the text and intertextuality. Other than this, March-Russell (2009) inserts that most of Carver’s stories touch on the postmodern conditions of communication and space. Most of the time, his characters cannot find a word to describe their experience because the experience itself is often situated beyond their understanding (R. C. Clark, 2012, p. 113). The character’s space is also limited from the outside world which echoes postmodernists’ obsession with city space as seen in Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* (1987). As a result, the sense of otherness is created from without and within.

Fiction of the other

Even though the critics who focus on otherness in Carver’s works are related and actually “are” those critics of the gaze, they could and should be separated because the motif of otherness in Carver’s short stories deserves its own attention. Along with the motif of voyeurism, in Boxer and Phillip’s essay “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver,” (1979) also explores the theme of otherness. Through voyeurism, according to Boxer and Phillips (1979), Carver’s characters are often exposed to the otherness of the other, which is opposed to their own reality. The only thing that they could do with this otherness is to experience it vicariously. For example, as it could be seen above, the narrator from “The Idea” experiences the otherness of the other, her neighbors, by looking at them through her window every day. Nevertheless, the otherness that comes from the voyeuristic act is not of the other alone, but also of the characters’ themselves, namely the narrator’s banal and unexciting life with her husband. The result of voyeurism is not a kind of satisfaction, but an obscene enjoyment, in which the voyeur becomes aware of his/her “empty” identity. Though the Millers, from “Neighbors,” voyeuristically enjoy the otherness of the Stones, at the same time they become aware of their empty life. At the end of the story, the revelation, the product

of voyeurism, is not the experience of fulfillment, but of the lack, as the Millers, having locked themselves out, have to return to their own life. In other words, the familiarized daily life, juxtaposed to the other's otherness, is turned into something violent and defamiliarized. Hypothetically speaking, if Carver's characters do not interact with their neighbors, they would not have become aware of the other side of their life. Under the commonness in Carver's stories, there exists a violent force that exerts itself only when the character indirectly experiences the otherness of the other (of him/herself). Unlike Kafka whose world is already unfamiliar and obscene in itself, Carver lets the reader see that it is the familiar that is the most terrifying of them all. Hence, the voyeurism in Carver's works signifies not the sense of relatedness to the other, the desire to be, but the alienation of one's self from one's own and the other's.

The otherness also comes in the form of voices. Heteroglossia in literature is considered as something destructive and violent in Carver's stories, according to M. M. Clark (1991). The voices outside the house, or any form of communication with the outside world, would disrupt character's sense of security. It could be seen, for example, in "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?", that instead of staying at home like Carver's other characters, in response to his wife's affair, Ralph goes outside. As a result, having experienced an array of voices on the street, he experiences a form of abjection: he vomits. The act of resistance to the other voices can be found in most of his short stories. Hanging up the phone, turning off the TV, or staying inside their home, the characters disassociate themselves from the outside world. They yearn for a kind of isolation, physically and psychologically. Telephones and letters become the only form of communication between the characters and the outside world because of their one-way communication (M. M. Clark, 1991, p. 242). That is to say, they allow only one voice to get inside the character's secure room. However, M.M. Clark's argument tends to focus only on actual physical voices and otherness and overlook discursive voices and otherness because the otherness always comes through the letter and telephone and disrupts the character's subjectivity, which will be discussed later.

Unlike other critics, Cornwell (2005) argues that Carver's characters can overcome the other. According to René Girard's concept of desire, the subject can only desire when there exists the presence of the desiring rival (as cited in, Cornwell, 2005, p. 344). Such mediated desire is caused by the premise that God is dead. Because the desiring authority ceases to exist, the subject desires to be in the authorial position, but then realizes that it is impossible. Moreover, this kind of desire is of modernism exclusively, especially in America, as the free-market effaces the hierarchical social difference, focusing on the relationship between peers instead (Cornwell, 2005, p. 346). As a result, the subjects ironically desire more and more for and from the desiring rival because they cannot get what they desire, caught up in the network of desire. However, in Carver's short stories, the characters, though not actually getting what they desire, are able to be in the position of the authority: the desiring rival who gives them desire. Their actions and discourses imply that they, in the end, come to possess the desire itself, not the object of the desire. In "They're Not Your Husband," Earl attains a higher position than his rivals (the men in business suit who make crass comment about Earl's wife). At the end of the story, looking at his wife from a voyeuristic position, he is perceived by his wife's co-worker as something far more disturbing than his desiring rivals. In "Neighbors," despite the fact that the Millers accidentally lock themselves out of the Stones' apartment, it should be noted that before this scene they have attained the identities of the desiring Stones, enjoying the fact that they could enter the Stones' apartment as if it belonged to them. Relating her neighbor's wife to the ants under the sink while spraying them with insecticide, the narrator from "The Idea" metonymically kills the authority who gives her desire, the desire to have the same exciting but perverted sexual life. Jerry's killing two girls at the end of "Tell the Women We're going" is to be looked at as the manifestation of Jerry's own desire. Instead of being the object of the women's desire like his desiring rival Bill, Jerry's explosive rage signifies something beyond Bill's recognition.

Conclusion

The theme of minimalism, of the gaze, of postmodernism, and of the other, are the subject matters frequently discussed in Carver's short stories. The minimalism is not to be read as the determinism of the form, but that which articulates

the mechanic of the content, connecting to how the content works. It urges the reader to come up with a new reading strategy, so s/he could comprehend Carver's craft. The gaze is probably the first critical aspect that any critic has ever worked out from Carver's short stories. Relating to the subject of minimalism, the narrator becomes self-effacing because the Carver rarely gives any word-substance to the narrator. Hence, the reader is put in the position of the voyeur who eavesdrops on the characters. Also, Carver's characters often rely on their body function of the visual sense in order to comprehend the outside world which results in a kind of defamiliarization from their own world: inside the house. The subject of postmodernism in this context is defined in a negative term, a Saussurean difference which refers to something that can only has meaning when it is opposed by the other. Carver's new realism and attitude, disregard of the postmodern trend, affirm the opposite in a way that it seems as if he is the postmodern unconscious subject. His sparse prose and lack of narrator's subjectivity echo the postmodern conditions in literature. Furthermore, it can be seen from his later stories in *Elephant* that Carver becomes more conscious of the experimental trend. In Carver's short stories it is the other that constitutes the characters' subjectivity and disrupts it. The other, moreover, is made manifest in many forms, such as the polyglossia of the outside world, the character's neighbors, and even the characters' world inside the house. Lastly, these four theories of fiction are all interconnected, as one subject always connotes the other, and so on. Minimalism, for example, connotes the subject of the gaze in terms of literary impressionism; the postmodern in terms of the self-negation of the author; and the other as the other writing. They are the themes that govern the whole theoretical side of Carver, for who could deny that the idea of minimalism, the gaze, the other, and self-negate postmodernism are not the theoretical product of Carver solidified by the critics. These themes are the units that form the structure of Carver's criticisms in which the critics, consciously and non-consciously (which is the opposite of the unconscious) often rely on.

Nevertheless, as most of the theorists probably become aware at the moment of the utterance of the word "structure," there is always something on the edge of the structure, something which, because it is repressed, always returns. Even

though these subjects called critics follow the law of critical reading to the letter, it cannot be denied that they, in turn, have to repress some critical aspects and even some stories while focusing on the others. This is not to criticize those critics in any way, but to stress the obvious that it is written in the unwritten handbook of criticism ritual that the critics have to sacrifice (castrate?) a big chunk of a text, in order to save the other parts. What is saved here, as it could be seen, are the four pillars that support the structure of criticism/reading of Carver's works. By themselves, they are theoretical aspects which deserve their own further study. However, the aim of this study is not to reiterate the above, but to verbalize the re(turned)pressed theoretical side of Carver's stories – to be one of the cogs among the criticism-machine on Carver where the supposed reading always return to supplement the presupposed reading. That said, the repressed subject matter, which is to be the kernel of the study, is the idea of the letter⁵ in Carver's short stories.

The Return of the Letter

Not only has the theme about the letter never been articulated by the critics in a full speech before, but the short stories about the letter themselves also have rarely received any attention from the critics. Often they are only mentioned in passing as an empty speech to deviate the idea of the letter to one of the four themes above. Focusing on the theme of the other, M.M. Clark says that letters, along with telephone, are one of Carver's strategies that bars his stories away from heteroglossia, making them "monological" (1991, p. 242). In his criticism on Carver's "Blackbird Pie," which will be one of the key texts of my study, Scofield (1999) ignores the importance of the letter and focuses on the plot about history to put "Blackbird Pie" in the context of postmodern intertextuality, and a play on history which makes "Blackbird Pie" a prologue to "Errand." The lack of critical attention to the letter may also come from the fact that out of Carver's seventy eight published short stories there

⁵ The word letter here refers to both the letters as alphabetical and letter as a form of communication. The reason that they are mentioned together will be elaborated later in this chapter.

are only three⁶ stories about the letter.⁷ Nevertheless, if the stories and idea about the letter are not considered in terms of quantity, but of the tendency of reproduction in Carver's *oeuvre*, it can be said that the stories about letter are one of Carver's interesting subjects as they are present throughout his collections of short stories: three short stories about the letter from three out of four short stories collections.

The three stories mentioned are "Why, Honey?," "Cathedral," and "Blackbird Pie." In Carver's first published collection *Will You Please be Quiet, Please?* (1976), Carver writes his first, and probably the only, epistolary short story called "Why, Honey?." The writer of the letter, or the narrator, presumably writes a letter in reply to the unknown person who wrote to her first. The content of the letter focuses around the relationship between the narrator, a widow perhaps, and her son, who remains nameless throughout the letter. The narrator tells the unknown addressee a series of events which shows the resistance of communication between the two. For example, when she asks him how much money he makes from his job, a job she finds for him, he tells her he makes eighty dollars, which "was more than [she] was making" (Carver, 2009, p. 130); however, when she does the laundry she finds out that there is only twenty eight dollars in his pocket. Therefore, one night she confronts her son and asks him why he never tells her the truth. He does not answer her directly but he asks her to kneel down. He says "that's the first reason why" (Carver, 2009, p. 132). Later, he leaves the house. The narrator tells the addressee that the only way she could learn something about her son is through television and newspapers because he is elected as a governor. At the end of the letter, she tells the addressee that she becomes afraid of her own son – hence, she changes her name and moves to somewhere else, hoping that no one could write or contact her. As a result, she is surprised when the addressee's letter arrives at her place, so she wants the person to tell her who he is and why he wrote to her.

⁶ There are actually five of them. The other two stories, "Elephant" and "Menudo," are not considered to be the main focus in this study because the idea of the letter is not as heavy as the other three. "Elephant" focuses more on content of the letter, which is paraphrased by the narrator, about the idea of financial symptom created by the narrator's family members while "Menudo" only mentions letter passingly by the narrator. However, this does not imply that these two stories will not be mentioned in this study as supplement in a Derridean sense.

⁷ This could be seen in Carver's *Collected Stories* (2009), not including Carver's manuscripts of short stories in *Beginners* (2009) published by his wife Tess Gallagher.

Despite the fact that “Cathedral” from Carver’s third collection of short stories *Cathedral*, according to Nessel (1995, p. 66) and Peterson (2012, pp. 167-169), mainly concerns with the otherness of the blind man in relation to the narrator, the act of drawing in the second half of the story shows that it can be studied further in terms of the letter-writing as a signifier. The story begins with the narrator saying that the blind man, whom his wife used to take care of, is coming to visit them. It can also be seen that he does not want to meet the blind man. Before the blind man visits, the narrator explains that, because the blind man cannot write, the blind man and his wife can only contact each other by sending a voice recording tape. When the blind man, whose name is Robert, arrives, the narrator at first does not feel comfortable around Robert, but after a heavy drinking, a big supper, and rounds of smoking marijuana, the narrator becomes more relaxed around him. Later, the narrator wife falls asleep on the sofa, leaving Robert and the narrator alone with the TV set. The narrator tells Robert that what is on television is a documentary about a cathedral. He tries to describe what the cathedral is and how it looks like; nevertheless, he says “...I can’t tell you what a cathedral looks like. It just isn’t in me to do it. I can’t do any more than I’ve done” (Carver, 2009, p. 527). As a result, Robert asks the narrator to get a paper and a pen, so they can draw a cathedral together. Robert puts his hand on the narrator’s when they start drawing in order to visualize how the cathedral looks like. Later, Robert asks the narrator to close his eyes and continues to draw. When asked to look at the picture after it is finished, the narrator refuses to open his eyes. It seems as if the narrator were more comfortable in that state than when his eyes are opened.

The other story is “Blackbird Pie” from Carver’s last collection of short stories *Elephant*,⁸ which is his *magnum opus* (*minimum opus*?) of a story about the letter. The story begins with the narrator’s recollection of his wife’s letter. Despite the fact that the content of the letter, he says, is something only his wife or someone who has spent twenty-three years with him would know, he is convinced that the letter is not of his wife because the handwriting of the letter is not hers. He says that he wishes he has kept the letter for he could rewrite the letter word to word with the tone still

⁸ Again, it has to be reminded that the last collection of short stories by Raymond Carver in America is *Cathedral* for the stories in *Elephant* are included in his compilation *Where I’m Calling From*.

intact. Nevertheless, the narrator justifies his mistake by saying that he could remember everything he read because he has a good memory, implying that he has an affinity with history and factual details. For example, he says “if called upon to talk about the Seven Years’ War, the Thirty Years’, or the Hundred Years War, or simply the First Silesian War, I could hold forth with greatest enthusiasm and confidence” (Carver, 2009, p. 598). Later, he reproduces the content of the letter verbatim, and comments that this is not her letter because, aside from the handwriting, she never underlines her words.

The narrator recalls the night of the incident that his wife asks him whether he will be working in his room alone like every night. This seems absurd to the narrator because she must have known by now what he always does, having been together for more than twenty years. Sometime later, working in his room alone, a letter is slid through the door. Having read the letter (the content implies that his wife is leaving him) and convinced that it is not of his wife because of the handwriting, he opens his door to check if there is anyone on the corridor. There is no one there. He gets a sense that there is something wrong tonight, hearing the voice outside his room as if someone were on the telephone – he becomes afraid of his own house. He hears the door closed and realizes that his wife is leaving the house. He finds his wife petting one of the strayed horses in a fogged field. The narrator’s wife tells him that she writes the letter and she is leaving him tonight. She asks whether the narrator has actually read the whole letter even though she already knows that he must have skimmed through the letter. The narrator’s wife also tells him that it was her who uses the phone to call the sheriff’s department about the strayed horses. When the deputy arrives with the rancher, they put the horses in the trunk of a truck and the deputy tells the wife that the rancher will take her to the bus station in town. When the deputy gets in his car and drives to the street, the sound of the horn from the deputy’s car gives the narrator an idea that the historian should use the word-sound “tooted” in order to signify the crucial moment in history, such as after the massacre. A few days later after the incident, which is the time when the story begins, the narrator comes to contemplate about the letter and his wife again, as he finds the black and white picture of her with a wedding bouquet. He comes to realize that his wife would never come

back, and that what is important about the letter is not the handwriting but what is in the letter. History is not to be his domain anymore as he says “history has left me...And that I am saying goodbye to history. Goodbye, my darling” (Carver, 2009, p. 613).

As it could be seen, the three stories are not entirely related in terms of plot and characterization. The very reason that the three stories are to be studied together is that they hold something that the critics have never talked about Carver before: the letter. In “Why, Honey?,” the functions of the letter, as a form of communication, is complicated by the fact that the addressing (the sender) is missing from the letter. Hence, in relation to the author function, “Why, Honey?” leaves the letter somewhere in between the concept of work and text. This is not to say that Carver has come up with a new concept that undermines the binary opposition of work and text, but that the phenomenon of the letter in “Why, Honey?” should be studied in order to gain a better understanding of the story by itself (as far as I am aware of, “Why, Honey?” has never gained any critical attention from any critics as if this story did not exist) and to understand Carver’s theory behind the epistolary writing of “Why, Honey?.” Nevertheless, the reading of Carver’s letter-epistle could not be done without Carver’s other two stories about the letter. “Cathedral” also touches the similar topic seen in “Why, Honey?”. Because the blind man could not read, the narrator’s wife, in order to maintain a contact with him, has to send him the tape instead. Hence, it could be said that the function of the author and of the reader, in relation to the letter, is somehow changed. Letter is of the voice, instead of writing, implying that a letter is related to the function of the body as a means of communication, not just a letter by itself. Also, the act of drawing at the end of the story could also be seen as a kind of the subverted working of the letter. Looking at the drawing as an act of communication, there is no boundary between the addressee and the addressed because the hand of the narrator and the blind man is connected. In “Blackbird Pie,” the function of the letter is complicated by the fact that the sender becomes the unknown-knows: the narrator has an unconscious fantasy about the writer. He is convinced that the letter is not written by his wife, but by someone else, despite the fact that she tells him that the letter is hers. He knows that the wife sends

him the letter, but he does not know that he knows this. Therefore, he fantasizes about this letter to be written by someone else in Denmark, a place where his wife came from.

Furthermore, the function of the letter in Carver's short stories cannot be mentioned without referring to the act of writing and the letter-signifier. This does not imply that they are synonymous, but that they are connected. The drive that pushes the plot mechanic in "Blackbird Pie" forward and momentarily suspends the story for the sense of completion at the end is related to both the narrator's obsession with handwriting (letter) and his wife's message (letter) – that is, the rupture between the signifier (expression or handwriting) and the signified (content of the letter). It becomes the symptom of the story. Surprisingly, when it comes to "Blackbird Pie," the critics rarely pay any attention to the act of writing and the signifier, only focus on what is written in term of plot. Most of the time, "Blackbird Pie" is mentioned only in the feminist discourse, such as by Kleppe (2006), Seemann (2006), and Zarranz (2009) to emphasize the otherness created by the sexual politic between female and male in Carver's short stories. As a result, Carver's approach (theory) to the letter, to the working of handwriting and signification, is entirely ignored. How does the handwriting affect the content of the letter-epistle, and the subjects in relation to the letter? And what is the relation between the voice of the narrator's wife when she calls the sheriff's department and her handwriting? It becomes a snowballing effect, starting with a letter-signifier, a letter-epistle, and to the subject and the plot. Also, the theory of letter could be seen in "Cathedral." The drawing of a cathedral undermines the general concept of letter in the West: a writing-drawing or a letter-picture. Even though the letter-drawing of a cathedral is not juxtaposed to any unit of signifier, it can signify something without having any relation to its different meaning. The meaning of this "letter" is also related to the function of the body. It can only be written-drawn when both the blind man and the narrator are connected. The blind man assumes the position of both the writer and the r/leader at the same time while the narrator assumes the position of the blind and the followed. In other words, they are deterritorialized and reterritorialized by the letter-image of a cathedral, which also affects the position of the addressing and the addressed when it is treated as a letter-

epistle. Hence, further study of letter-signifier in Carver's short stories would provide us a better understanding of "Cathedral" and "Blackbird Pie."

This study, hence, aims to learn more about the theoretical side of Raymond Carver's short stories. Whereas the others turn toward the theories of minimalism, the gaze, postmodernism, and the other, I turn toward Carver's treatment of the letter to gain a better understanding of the three stories and the theory on the letter: the castrated aspect in Carver's *oeuvre*. This would provide us an even better appreciation of his art, to let the texts speak fully, to articulate the return of the letter. The theoretical aspect does not imply that Carver's works are theory-driven in anyway. His works is to be read as a "meta-fiction." It is not the metafiction that refers to the self-referentiality of his short stories in which Scofield (1999) tries to show in his essay. The word "metafiction" here is to be read with a bar between meta and fiction, showing that meta- is not something within the fiction, but an add-on, a parasite that deterritorializes the concept of fiction, from a fictionalized story about letter, and reterritorializes it into a fictionalized theory of the letter.

In this study we will begin with the fiction and later the meta-. In chapter two, we look at letter as another form of communication, comparing it to other forms of communication, a face-to-face communication and telephone, from other Carver's stories. The letter, as a whole, would be referred to as letter-epistle to distinct and relate it with other concepts on the letter. The traits of the other two media will be used as a foundation in understanding the letter-epistle as a letter of trace: a self-effacement letter whose presence is dictated by its absence. In chapter three, the main idea is to observe the event of letter-signifier from "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral." The very reason for excluding "Why, Honey?" comes from the fact that the former two stories are about the letter, not as a letter. As a result, this will make the observation of the event surrounding the letter more solid. The third person point of view always makes it easier to observe the whole picture. We will first look at the idea of how a word (a signifier) possesses a degree of materiality in a text of fiction: a narrative material. Even though this study is mainly about Carver and his lesser known part of his works, the idea here is to show the material of a word in a story in general. Later, we will study the significance of handwriting from "Blackbird Pie"

and the drawing of a cathedral from “Cathedral.” By approaching them via Barthes’s idea on text, it would allow us to learn more about the event handwriting of the letter-signifier. The event handwriting is not about handwriting, but about the event made manifest by the act of writing. It is the signifier of signifier. Unlike the narrative material, the textual material is an idea that is specifically found in Carver’s text. However, this does not imply its possibility of being a real phenomenon. The idea of letter-signifier will also be compared to Derrida’s idea of self-portrait to see that the letter in Carver’s text is not just a letter.

Lastly, the fourth chapter calls for a dialogue between the theorized Carverian letter and other theories about the letter. The first interlocutors are Deleuze and Guattari with their concept of expression and content. Even though both of them do not write anything specific about letter, their concept of expression and content could help us get a better understanding of the intensity in an event of signifier. The next is a trilogy between Lacan, Derrida, and Carver, focusing on the condition of the letter destination and materiality. It is true that Derrida does not agree with Lacan’s “Seminar on the Purloined Letter.” However, Carver’s letter shows that the condition of the letter must be looked differently if the letter is a fictional one, neither the real letter of Derrida nor the psychoanalytic letter of Lacan. Lastly, the letter “Why, Honey” is to be approached with the theory of the letter from Deleuze and Guattari as expressed in their discussion of Kafka’s personal letter. This would not only allow a new reading of “Why, Honey?” but also sheds some light on the minor concept of Deleuze and Guattari.

CHAPTER 2

LETTER-EPISTLE

Before the Letter

In Carver's short stories, a face-to-face communication sometimes could not communicate in a general sense. If an act of communication is to direct one sense (intentional meaning) from one to the other according to the will of the sender (presumed to be the master of the words), the practice of speaking face-to-face in Carver's short stories most of the time is hindered by the characters' lack of words. The characters cannot control the words – they cannot appropriate them according to their sense. There is a sense but not the word, a content without a form of expression. Sometimes the words slip away as the characters are at a loss with words while sometimes the characters do not know how to talk properly. This lack of words or the inability to speak one's sense does not only imply that the characters do not have a certain knowledge of language to represent and commute one's sense to the other, but also that they are not aware that what they say could not commute from one place to another. This, however, is not a lack for this lack of communication lacks the idea of lack in itself; and that a tautology of communication is a miscommunication. The lack is a resistance of word(s) and a subject. They refuse to articulate and be articulated by each other when they face each other. If a word is a content of knowledge-expression, the resistance of word can be considered as a resistance between communication and experience, and between an experienced subject and an experiencing subject. Hence, the character's lack of word is not a lack of communication because resistance, even in the form of silent protest, is a (mis)communication between parties. The word-experience (mis)communicates with the subject through the act of negation. In Carver's short stories, the resistance of word (whether the word resists or being resisted we "lack" the definite solution) is often articulated by the condensation and substitution of the direct speech, usually in an expression "I don't know what to say"; and by amplification and implication of a narrative.

At the end of “Neighbors,” while the Millers are walking to the Stones’ apartment, they discuss the possibility that the Stones would not come back for they take pleasure in being in the Stones’ apartment. Abruptly, Arlene Miller says to her husband “‘Or maybe they’ll come back and...’ but she did not finish” (p. 13). The ellipsis and the additional narrator’s comment, pointing out the obvious that she could not complete her sentence, is the external expression that signifies not only Arlene’s imagined emotional catastrophe, but also the resistance of communication. While the ellipsis and the narrator’s comment could imply the lack of communication, it is in fact the resistance on her part toward the word, the experience of resisting. It is her resistance toward the imagined experience (who could deny that an experience is a fantasy in a more contained manner) of living without the Stones’ apartment, and of her fantasy, which is about to be more than a fantasy, that resists to be uttered, to be made real by the act of speech. On one hand, Arlene resists to speak the real with her words. It is not that *she could not finish*, but as the narrator comments, she “did not finish.” She has the potential to utter her words. However, if the imagined experience, or fantasy, is made real, it would be more real than her present reality itself. Such degree of reality, through her words, would destroy her world even before the fantasy becomes reality. Fantasy slips into reality as a parasitic radical on words, Arlene seems to come across this fact at the moment of articulation – hence, she “did” not finish. Her immunity is stronger than the free radical. It also should be noted that the intervention of the narrator, saying that Arlene could not finish her sentence, is a voice of the Symbolic. It (s/he?) notices the immunity, and as such, it commemorates the resistance in the subject. On the other hand, it is the fantasy itself that resists to speak/ be spoken. A fantasy always fantasizes about the real, without an R, to contain itself. If a fantasy comes into contact with the real, even thorough the form of articulation, it would be more than a fantasy: something that cannot be fantasized about. At the first moment Arlene and her husband step inside the room, the fantasy is put in motion. In this case, the imminent return of the Stones, as the Millers’ marginal fantasy, resists to be articulated. If it is spoken, it would cease to be one: the Millers would stop fantasizing about their downfall, and not to mention that by speaking about the fantasy, the fantasy would turn into something that overpowers the real. In other words, Arlene’s lack of words is not a lack *per se*, but a strategy of resistance

between the word-fantasy and the fantasizing subject. It is a resistance that is condensed and substituted by an ellipsis.

Similarly, in “They’re Not Your Husbands” when Earl talks to his wife Doreen about her weight, Doreen replies that he has never said anything about her weight before. Carver describes Earl’s reaction as follows: “‘I never felt it was a problem before’ he said. He tried to pick his words” (p. 19). While this may seem like a kind of lack in communication, for Earl does not utter a word, it is a resistance of word. The narrator, as the Other, manifests at the moment of resistance. As a rule – that is, the Other as the rule, the utterance of the other, follows a certain law – the presence of the narrator denies any idea of “lack” in communication. It insists on the idea that even though the word is not uttered, the Symbolic law, as a rule, is not lacking. It is there, commenting on the absence of word. However, the word absence is inappropriate (I fantasize of writing “the word ‘absence’ should be made absent,” but because I am aware of a danger in the realization of a fantasy, I put ‘absence’ in a bracketed reality). The word(s) or the word-experience is not missing. It is there at the tip of Earl’s tongue. However, when facing directly with the experience, a repressed one, he is reluctant to say the least. If he says it out loud, as the other two customers do, he would be put in an unhealthy position with Doreen (for who would want to face a feminine wrath). Hence, he resists to communicate, denying the word its existence in his dyadic relation with Doreen. The word(s) would undermine them – this is not to say that their relationship has always been at stake. His act of picking a word, as commented by the narrator, though it may imply his judicious selection of the right word, is an act of deferral. Earl defers/resists to say the word. He does not want to communicate the idea with Darleen. Ironically, the mis-communication communicates. With the help of the supplementary narrator, the intention of Earl, of his avoiding the blame, is translated onto the reader. In the end, an act of deferral only delay: it cannot prevent the coming of a destination. The sense of avoiding in the act of picking a word is impending. The reader receives Earl’s message to Doreen. This also shows that by attempting to find a word, as a way of avoiding the Word, is a strategy of condensation and substitution. The Word is condensed into an act of

delaying, of its advent, and the act itself, to the reader's eyes, substitutes Earl's Word: a word that would strain Earl and Doreen's imaginary relation.

There are other incidents in other stories where the narrator's comment supplements the characters' resistance in communication. For examples, at the end of "One More Thing," when L.D. says that he has one more thing to say to Maxine before he leaves her and her child, the narrator adds at the end, similar to Earl's case, that "he could not think what it could possibly be" (p. 326). In "The Bath" when Scotty is accidentally hit by a car, the narrator comments that he neither cries nor wants to talk anymore (p. 251). Both stories follow the logic of resistance. L.D. resists to communicate. While in the articulated real without an R he moves away from the child and his wife, in his non-articulated real, he holds on to the last word – that is, he denies the word that would be the last of the relation and his very last word that would castrate him from his family. Likewise, Scotty, a child, refuses to say what happens to him because the word resists him: communication mis-communicates. He does not want to relive the experience of getting hit by stranger's car. If this could even be considered a traumatic experience for Scotty, the resistance is of the unconscious mechanic: repression. The word-experience is repressed, and the conscious resists the word-experience's manifestation with repression. Most importantly, both stories emphasize the idea of condensation and substitution in the resistance on a face-to-face communication. The Word is condensed into a small commentary of the Symbolic agent, intensifying the character's resistance. At the same time, the narrator substitutes the act of articulation. That is to say, the resistance is transferred to him. The commentary of a mis-communication strengthens the act of communication. In other words, a face-to-face communication needs a supplementary a narrator, to interrupt the flows of a dialogue, in order for a face-to-face dialogue to be a (mis)communication. A communication can only be one when it is interrupted and made fragmented both by other and the Other.

In other cases, the resistance of word is uttered directly by the characters. In "Fat," when the narrator-character, who is a waitress, says to the fat customer that she likes to see a man enjoy his food, the fat customer replies "I don't know...I guess that's what you'd call it" (p. 4). In "Fat" the resistance could be seen when the

waitress says to herself (her friend?) that she knows what she wants but she does not know what it is (p. 5). She resists to say it out loud, by saying “it” out around. In “What Do You Do in Francisco?” The narrator-character Henry, who is a postman, seeing that Lee suffers from his marriage breakdown, tries to console him. However, when he sees Lee’s face, which connotes a kind of suffering, he describes his reaction as “such a look on [Lee’s] face...froze the words in my mouth” (p. 91). Furthermore, the moment when Henry hands Lee the letter, he notices that “[Lee] took it from me without a word and went absolutely pale” (p. 91). The letter gives Lee a kind of sensation which resists to be put into words: the word is there on his lips, but it is frozen (delayed). In “Boxes,” when the narrator’s mother moves to live somewhere else, the narrator says that he wants to say something to her but he does not know what to say (p. 544). In “Feathers,” having seen Bud’s and Olla’s baby described as ugly, Jack tells the reader that “[no] words would come out of my mouth” (p. 372). Although the baby is described as ugly, his lack of word is not simply because of the baby’s indescribable ugliness but the social pressure demanding him say something about the baby: his impression of that “ugly” baby. He can describe how the baby looks like to the reader. However, he could not express the sensation he gets from this ugliness to the reader. In other words, his ego-formation resists to address the abject for it would undermine the ego, and that the abject is already a non-Symbolic experience. It is on the other side of Symbolic – hence, its resistance to dialectic. It can also be seen that the resistance of the word is condensed and transferred on to the act of not-saying, which is not the same as the lack in communication.

Aside from the resistance in the form of condensation and substitution, the resistance in/to communication can also be seen in the form of amplification and implication. In this case, the character’s narrative would be the point of focus. In Carver’s short stories, a narrative becomes a mean of face-to-face communication, to communicate one’s sense to the other (because it is assumed here that the reader is familiar with the general idea of the significance of storytelling in culture, the elaboration for the story-telling as the cultural utility for teaching and communicating will not be discussed). While the reason for this is almost the same as the above – that the message or meaning resists to be uttered; and that the speaker resists the

realization of the word. The difference is a nuance in strategy. A narrative amplifies the communication. By talking around the subject, the word is expanded through its connection with the surrounding words. The idea of pin pointing the “right” meaning is erased. What is left is the resistance in meaning. It could only be implied: the intended meaning. The act of amplification works two ways. On one hand, it represses/resists the word-experience of the speaker as the word is repressed by a sea of words. On the other hand, it intensifies the grandeur of the meaning. The fact that word could not be articulated does not only show that the meaning cannot be captured, but also that the act of uttering the word itself would render it meaningless. In order to be the Word, it has to preserve its mythical status, as the veiled word among words. That said, it is through a narrative that the communication resists in order to be commuted.

In “Fat,” the narrator, a waitress, instead of telling her friend directly that she feels depressed about her life with her significant other Rudy, tells her friend Rita about her encounter with a fat customer and relates this to her own experience with Rudy. At one point, after finishing a story about the fat customer and her childhood memory about the fat kids, she tells her friend Rita that when Rudy is on top of her, she feels that she is fat, “so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all” (p. 7). The narrator does not tell Rita that she “feels depressed” (p. 7) because she thinks that she has told Rita everything on her mind which is more than she wants to say. However, prior to this statement, only one sentence above, the narrator says that Rita does not have the ability to comprehend what she has told her. “[Rita] doesn’t know what to make of it” (p.7). Even though the usage of fat as a metaphor for both the pleasant feeling (with the customer) and the unpleasant one (with Rudy) is worth discussing in detail, the point here is only to show the ironic gesture of the narrative in “Fat” about resistance of communication. The narrator already believes that her story should be able to communicate with Rita since she even says that the story is more than enough to tell Rita about what she wants to say. However, when the narrator realizes that her story could not denote her feelings, she blames Rita for her inability to understand. The false is not of Rita, as it could be expected, nor the narrator. It is of the “fatness” itself. It resists to be comprehended by Rita. It is lost in the plateau of

words in the narrator's story. In its asymbolic moment, the communication communicates. Rita has the message in which she understands by not understanding it. At the same time, the reader gets the same message as Rita. The communication reaches the destination. The reader could not comprehend what narrator feels. We could not understand her, as the narrator would say. However, in the non-understanding, in the resistance in communication, the experience is amplified and implied. By not understanding, the communication is implied to be more complicated than saying word for word in a face-to-face communication. The non-understanding is the core of communication. At the same time, by not being able to speak, the narrator's experience is amplified by the silence. This is not to say that she does not say anything. It is the silence surrounding the secret that intensifies the power of secret.

“What We Talk When We Talk about Love” is another story that shows how the resistance of word is formed under the condition of narrative. In this case, not only the intentional meaning of the character is repressed in the act of speech, but the other's narrative barred the truth from the realm of speech. In the story, the topic of the conversation between the four friends is love – what love is. Terri, Mel's wife, talks about her previous relation with Ed who is described by both Mel and Terri as an extremely abusive and violence individual. Terri believes that what Ed does is out of love. To her, this is what love is even though she does not know what it is. Terri is aware of the feeling that Ed has for her. Nevertheless, she does not know how to utter it into word(s) – for she knows that this is love but what this love is in a specific way, she could not say. Hence, she resorts to story-telling. By telling her friends and the narrator a story about Ed, she believes that she could communicate with them on what love is to her. The reader and the other characters know that it is abusive; however, the meaning of love that comes with such relation cannot be transferred from Terri to the others. The narrative resists to communicate, and the idea of love itself denies any objective definition. When Mel says that he does not agree with Terri about her concept of love, it does not imply that he understands what she talks about when she talks about love. He disagrees with her not only because he does not understand her but also because he has his own version of love. He tells Terri ““I don't know what

you'd call it, but I sure know you wouldn't call it love" (p. 310). Not knowing what Terri would call "it" implies that the resistance does not work properly. There is a thing that slips through the narrative: the thing that resists the act of naming. It is the thing, something repressed by the narrative, that returns by way of resisting the resistance. However, the thing itself always resists – the thing which could be the concept of love. As a result, it mis-communicates with Mel. In the second part of quoted statement, it could be seen that Mel has his own concept of what love is – hence, he does not accept what Terri terms as love. Again, this does not imply that he understands her concept of love. It is only a slip of idea that he could get from the story, and that is a floating idea of "love." Therefore, Terri's attempt to create an equation *love-signifier + her story = love signified* does not work because in actuality it is *narrative-love = the thing about love*. The problem lies not only in the story itself but also in the fact, as I have discussed so far, that Carver's characters, when in a face-to-face communication, could not communicate for there is always a kind of resistance.

At one point after Terri's concept of love is lost in communication, Mel tries to tell the others what love is. "I'll tell you what real love is...I'll give you a good example" (p. 314). At first, he says that there is a carnal love, but this is not love because it will eventually turn into memory. It will not last forever – hence, his story about his ex-wife whom he used to love. Later, he tells them a story about his patients, the old couple, which, he comments, "ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we're talking about love" (p. 316). Mel wants to show that the old man is dying because he could not see the face of his wife even though she is lying on the bed next to him. Mel too uses story-telling as a way of communication. His story is to be the truth of what love is, signifying something that Terri's story could not. It ought to be "the example" he says. Unlike Terri, who is not aware that her story is inadequate as the substitute both for the meaning of love and for her ill skill in communication, when Mel finishes the story, he says "[d]o you see what I'm saying?" (p.320). The verb "see" implies that communication is in fact not of Symbolic only, but also of imaginary. The act of understanding is compared to sight – hence, a normal communication has an equivalence of seeing. An image-meaning is a

lure. By asking whether the others could see what he says or not, it can be read that Mel attempts to trap the others with image-meaning of a narrative. However, an act of communication cannot be dictated by sight alone. The others are to be blind in order for the message to be able to commute: blind as a strategy of resistance to image-meaning. While Mel tries to force the gaze of the others to see his image-meaning of love in his narrative, something that cannot be done, the others resist by shifting their sights on to Mel. The others all look at him (p.320) after he finishes the story. They resist to see the image-meaning. The idea of love resists to be seen because love has never been a subject of a gaze. It always makes one blind to it and blind to oneself. What the others see could not be said for at this part of the story. There is only a blank space on a page: a space leaving as a mark of resistance of communication. As a result, Mel's story is a mis-communication as the reader and even the characters do not know whether they understand Mel or not. It is a communication with a resistance because the idea of love, as an *asymbolic* thing, could be ~~expressed~~ by not being expressed directly. The idea of love resists to be captured through articulation. Yet, by not articulating, the idea of love could be expressed. It is amplified by Mel's desire for the absolute object and implied by the gesture of the blank space after this section of the story. Simply put, Mel's narrative functions similarly to his wife's as both stories resist and are resisted by the act of face-to-face communication of Carver.

Furthermore, the title of "What We Talk about..." emphasizes the idea of resistance in communication of Carver's texts. What is significant here is a word "talk" in the title of the story and how the story tells the reader about love. The subject of conversation is about something else. The characters talk about others (Ed, the old couples, Mel's ex-wife, and so on) and ideas which are hardly objective (objective both in a sense that it can be touched – hence, the presence – and that it is unbiased). Terri identifies with Ed while Mel with the old man: those who are not present. In this respect, the characters use the narrative of the other as a way of communication instead of expressing directly. Most importantly, the subject of love, though talked about, is never uttered in a full speech. It slips, and eventually lost, along the lines of words in the narrative. Here lies the very core of my argument. They could only "talk about" but they could never express love. If this is a paper on love, the following

sentence would be that “love cannot be expressed because it is love.” However, because this is a discussion on a face-to-face communication, the following statement from such point would be that love cannot be expressed here in speech because the characters can only talk about love. Talking, as an act of speech, has never been about a tautology: 1=1. There is always a thing missing and added in the discourse. The subject of conversation is hardly expressed directly not only because the point of a face-to-face communication is a practice of interaction, but also because language in its very core is a system of absence. Hypothetically speaking, one talks to the other not to exchange information, but to preserve one’s relation with the other through the Other. But most importantly, it is resistance in talking itself that makes subject worth discussing about. The act of talking around something, about something, instead of facing it directly, is a supplementary nuance in any speech. It is not only that love cannot be talked aloud, only around, but also that a face-to-face communication in Carver’s short stories intensifies the fact that speech is not always a logocentric practice. Thus, the idea that Mel and his wife could only talk about the other’s love shows that the center of a face-to-face communication is other: it others itself. The other is the subject of the Other.

In “Sacks,” the father, as an attempt to express his love to his son, or the narrator, (who also has a daughter back at home), tells a story about his affair with the neighbor’s wife. After the father finishes the story, he says “[y]ou don’t know anything do you?” (p. 249) when the narrator does not respond to his story. Nevertheless, the narrator says to the reader that he is not sure whether his father wants him to say something about the incident or not. Similar to the above, the father’s story, as a substitution for his feeling toward his son and himself, cannot express what he intends. The image-word resists the act of the articulation and vice versa. The other is the subject of content, as the other persons are the other words in the story that intensify and imply the father’s words. If the image-meaning is the father’s wish for his son to interact with him, the neighbor’s wife in the story is the other that amplifies the father message. This is not to say that the woman is the focused subject, but that she is the complete other to the father’s intended meaning. As a result, the (mis)communication is complete. It is not the face value of the

interaction between the father and the son, but the moment of interaction itself that shows how the father could communicate with his son. With his mind on the story, the son interacts with his father, sharing something that they never have before: a deep moment of interaction without actual interacting.

In “The Third Thing That Killed My Father off,” although the narrator states in the beginning that one of three things that kills his father is the death of a man called Dummy, the narrator goes on telling a story about Dummy and his father, as if the story would make his statement clearer. The story does not in fact explain why Dummy’s death affects his father. On the contrary, the story is turned into a kind of doubling speech. It is spoken by the narrator and by the others who are not present. While the narrative expresses many forms of lack, such as the narrator’s lack to express why Dummy’s death affects his father, both Dummy’s lack to say he was killed (as he is dead), and the father’s lack to have an answer for the son are actually a resistance. The resistance of the word comes from the dead for they *should* not be brought back to life by way of articulation. The undead would not only undermine the world of the living (speech) but also of the dead (writing). There is a law that *should* never be broken. Something dead and something alive cannot co-exist (but a letter would be otherwise). This could be seen from the narrative about Dummy told by the son. This story is not a story told by the narrator, or the son, alone, but also by the father who is absent. It is for the father, an attempt to elaborate on the impact of the incident on him, and, for Dummy, to search for the reason of his death. When the narrator reaches the part where the father blames Dummy’s wife for his death, the narrator comments that “I think he [the father] just didn’t know who to blame or what to say” (p. 290). It is true that that the comment is made by the son. However, it is also spoken by the father and Dummy. They haunt his word as a ghost of the past event. They resist to give the son the answer he wants. Even though the son performs a ritual, retelling the story of the dead, they would not give him the answer he wants. The narrative represses/buries the dead. Nevertheless, as shown above, the repress connotes the return of the repressed.

In “The Calm,” the resistance in a narrative could be seen clearly. The narrator retells a story about the incident at the barber shop in Crescent City,

California. It is about a customer who tells a story of deer hunting. When another customer comments on his story, the storyteller is furious. As a result, the barber thinks that the narrator causes the trouble. Sometimes later after the narrator has left the city, he contemplates on the incident and tells the reader how calm he feels when he “closed [his] eyes and let the barber’s fingers move through [his] hair” (p. 301). The two stories here, the one told by the narrator and the other told by the other customer, delay the expression of the narrator. Even though the narrator knows what he feels is “the calm,” the stories are needed in order to express such a feeling, to amplify the sensation. As a result, while the message is amplified, “it” is lost in the field of words.

Before following the line of discussion about the letter, I would like to take this moment to summarize what is being discussed so far. There is a resistant force in a face-to-face communication in Carver’s short stories. While it may seem like a lack or a miscommunication at first, the resistance or the delay makes the dialogue possible between parties. Even though M. M. Clark (1991) says that the reason behind this event is that the characters experience something beyond their understanding, it is in fact the character and the medium that resist to articulate and be articulated. The characters can comprehend what they experience. However, they cannot translate it into words in order to communicate with the other. In some stories, the mis-translation is on the characters’ part, such as in “They’re no Your Husband,” “The Bath,” “Neighbors”. In other stories, the resistance of/in words come from the experience itself, such as “The Calm” and “What We Talk about” A face-to-face communication in Carver’s stories is the other to itself for it resists and (mis)communicates when it is put in motion.

It is the limitation of the time and paper space that telecommunication could not be uttered in detail. One has to be cut off to prolong the intensity. Such is the essence of criticism. Telecommunication would only be mentioned in passing, as a specter who spectates what is left of its trace, to compare, by the designed destiny of the event-letters. It is, after all, the letter, which will be the center (the word that is despised by intellectuals, but cannot live without). It probably becomes apparent now that the framing of the letter, though endowed with the spirit of the return of the

repressed, has to repress something in its turn,⁹ both in the sense of turn taking (queue) and in the sense of the upper hand.

Tracing the Letter

Letter in Carver's short stories is not the absolute other of the face-to-face communication as the letter resists/disturbs itself and generally disrupts the characters' life. Its resistance to communication comes from its unreadability both in terms of its content and its addressee. In "Cathedral," the sense of the letter as shown in the blind man's letter to the narrator's wife is hindered by the blind man's presence. Its communication is interrupted. The narrator never learns of what the blind man thinks of him throughout the story. The focus is shifted from the letter to the blind man himself, from the missing word of the absent person to the present person. Also, at the end of the story, the moment of knowledge, though about the narrator, is not from the perspective of the blind man, but from the blind narrator. He learns not what the blind man thinks of him, only what he thinks of himself. That the message of the letter is entirely repressed in the story underpins how the letter resists to communicate and is resisted by communication. In the beginning of the story, the letters as alphabets cannot be used as a form of communication between the narrator's wife and the blind man. The blind man could not read the letter – that is, the letter-signifier on the letter-epistle. His eyes are blind to such material. Voice, thus, is the only medium that could be used in substitution of the letter. Nevertheless, the voice in the letter and the voiced content resists to be articulated: the word is lost.

In "Blackbird Pie," although he acknowledges that this is his wife's letter demanding a divorce, the narrator cannot understand the content of the letter – that is, it does not communicate with him. The word "acknowledge" used here has to be read carefully. In the story, it cannot be denied that both the reader and the narrator are aware of the wife's intention. However, the degree of such awareness is at the level of acknowledgement. Both the narrator and the reader know only the literal meaning of letter, of the word presented in them. The reader becomes aware of the wife's

⁹ I am in debt to Dr. Sayan Daengkrom for such remark.

message both from the re-written letter made by the narrator in the beginning of the story and by the narrator's summary, affirming that the letter is about a divorce while denying it on the ground of the different hand writing. The narrator's obsession with the handwriting (which also possesses the reader) has two functions. First, the obsession blinds him from the content of the letter. His eyes are veiled by the handwriting. The handwriting, as a part of letter-communication, is a form of resistance that delays the narrator from reaching the point of caption in the message. Secondly, the handwriting becomes the substitution for his denial of a divorce. His obsession is created by himself, not caused by the handwriting. When he tells his wife that he has read the letter, he admits to the reader that "I was lying ... but it was a white lie. A partial untruth" (p. 607). It is a white lie because he has read the letter, but does not want to accept the truth about the letter. He resists, even undermines, the communication in the letter, not just the letter that undermines the act of communication. In other words, the content of the letter is unreadable not because of the lack in communication, but because of the two forms of resistance: a handwriting as an object-obstacle and the reader who rejects the message. Furthermore, similar to "What We Talk about," there are moments in the story where the thing repressed in communication could slip out. For example, the husband says "there is ... some truth [in the letter]What I want to say, all I want to say, is that while the sentiment expressed in the letter ... may even hold some truth" (p. 602). As stated above, a miscommunication is a communication in its nature.

Lastly, while it is true that the resistance of communication in "Why Honey?" is *lacking*, there is no sign of miscommunication between the addressed and the addressing. The reason for this might come from the fact that the form of the fiction, if I could use such a word, is of an epistolary fiction. As a result, the response of the addressing cannot be seen. The only thing that could be seen is that the narrator does not know where the letter comes from. Nevertheless, if we look at the content and the form of the story, in a general sense, it could be seen that the letter somehow revolves around the resistance in communication between the writer of the letter (the narrator) and her son. The son refuses to communicate with the mother about the "truth" and the mother does not communicate truly with the addressed. Nevertheless,

the resistance itself create an essential dialogue between the mother and the son, letting her know about the truth that is resisted and repressed. Also, the resistance of communication between the son and the narrator, which is supposed to be the response of the reading, becomes the content of the letter (the doubleness of expression and content will be discussed further in chapter 4). As a result, the communication in the story is a mis-communication for it communicates only its “being,” not its content: “being” of communication as a trace that resists to be whole. Its resistance communicates with the reader by insisting that it is neither a letter nor a fiction, but an epistolary narrative of resistance in its form, expression, and subject: the son. The resistance of communication in this text is a phenomena [effect] caused by nothing but communication itself, a communication as a force of resistance for the son to undermine the communicating mother (one could skip the next part and read the end of chapter 4 if the deferral of information proves to be a nuisance). It is always the missing father that complements the miss in communication.

Apart from partaking in the resistance of communication with the face-to-face communication, the letter also functions similarly to the telephone in aspect of heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin (1981), a novel, including a short story, is a phenomenon artifact created from a unity of different styles of languages which are located at separated linguistic planes: the author’s style, the everyday speech, the written discourse (such as letter and diary), authorial literary text (scientific, philosophical, academic and so on), and the characters’ style of speech (pp. 261-262). However, according to M.M. Clark, polyphony or heteroglossia is one of the reasons for the lack of communication in most of Carver’s short stories. Even though this is the essence of fiction in general, when it is made obvious in Carver’s short stories, such phenomenon disturbs the character’s subjectivity. As a result, Carver usually limits the difference of voices in his short stories (M.M. Clark, p. 240). The characters’ space is limited as, most of the time, Carver’s stories usually take place inside a closed space, such as bedroom and a house, so the exterior voices are barred out to minimize the heteroglossia. Nevertheless, it cannot be done so. For example, despite the fact that there is no voice in the void outside in “Neighbors,” the voices are imagined by the characters. When they are house-sitting the Stones’ apartment,

there is only one voice: the voice of imaginary fetish, where they voyeuristically enjoy their life as the Stones. They are safe and sound inside their monological fantasy. However, when they accidentally lock themselves out of the Stones' apartment, their fantasy is invaded by other voices. The voices of the real¹⁰ from outside disturb the Millers' subjectivity. Even though the scene is depicted as a void for there is literally nothing for them outside the Stones' apartment, this nothingness creates a dialogical moment (heteroglossia) with the imaginary fullness inside the Stones' apartment (Millers' fantasy).

There are other Carver's short stories that are more clear cut in term of the contrast between inside and outside voices, such as "Put Yourself in my Shoes," "Will You Please be Quiet, Please?," "Feathers," "Are You a Doctor?". M.M. Clark argues that letters and telephone would "exhaust" and "unsettle" the voices from outside (p. 242). They would limit the sense of violence¹¹ from heteroglossia by limiting the space and delimiting the space at the same time. The characters would be able to communicate with the outside world without the voices from the outside. However, this is only practical in theory, as the sense of violence [otherness] is written in the letter. Heteroglossia is not the point of focus, but rather the otherness or the menace, to use Carver's word, that comes with it. Before showing how the letter could not rid of the menace, which makes it similar to the face-to-face communication where the sense of otherness imbued within bars meaning from transferring, M.M. Clark's argument about telephone will be discussed first, for there are connections between the two artifacts.

The two words, exhaust and unsettle, which act as one, will be the focus here but first we have to look at the context in which these words are employed. When discussing the effect of telephone on the polyphony in Carver's short stories, M.M. Clark specifically says that telephone could limit the space of voices from the outside. She later adds that the violence from heteroglossia could not really be rid of entirely. Her choice of example is "'Whoever Was Using This Bed,' where a

¹⁰ We could even say that this is the return of the real.

¹¹ Violence here implies both the de-subjectification of the characters and the distortion in their communication. Hence, the word violence can be interchangeable with "other."

persistence late-night caller causes a couple to lie awake talking about life and death” (p. 242). However, compared with her other examples on the effect of polyphony in Carver’s short stories, the story reveals that the violence or otherness is of different kind. On one hand, in her example of “Will You Please be Quiet, Please?,” the violence of voices is immediate and direct. The heteroglossia from the outside, that is the others’ voices, makes the character vomit, a form of abjection that unsettles the character’s unity of body and subjectivity, and later he tries to reclaim his lost sense of self in front of the bathroom mirror. The undermining of the sense of self and subjectivity is perceptible, as it is immediate on the narrative and on the pages. On the other hand, her example of “Whoever Was Using This Bed” is of irritation. It has to be accumulated and does not possess the same degree of violence like the former. It is the persistence of calling that causes the couple to wake up from their bed-sanctuary to the reality of life and death. It is here that the words “exhaust” and “unsettle” need examining. M.M. Clark, defending her argument about the limitation of polyphony in Carver’s short stories, says that telephone could only “exhaust” and “unsettle” the polyphony. Even though the polyphony could not be rid of by telephone, at least it could be weakened. One may argue that M.M. Clark sees irritation as a weaker form of otherness. The couple is irritated by the ringing; as a result, they have to wake up. The couple’s talk about life and death in “Whoever Was Using This Bed” counteracts not only the chaos in voices, but also the de-subjectifying nature in heteroglossia. However, it seems likely that it is not the telephone that undermines the power of polyphony, but the simplified argument about violence of otherness (as it could be expected from criticism on Carver, the theme of communication tends to be generalized and marginalized).

Not only the violence of polyphony cannot be weakened by telephone, but the telephone itself also acts as the conduit of the otherness.¹² On one hand, the sense of irritation should not be seen as the degradation of other because it imbues with one of the most significant aspects of otherness: incessant repetition. The other does not have to be something immediate and obvious as in “Will You Please be Quiet,

¹² “[T]he telephone becomes the conduit for voices from the outside... [it] limits the polyglossia” (M.M. Clark, p. 242)

Please?." For examples, similar to "Whoever Was Using This Bed," in "Are You a Doctor?" the story begins with an image of the ringing of the phone which "hurried [the protagonist] out of the study" (p. 25); or at the end of "The Bath," coming home tired from the hospital and trying to rest, the mother is scared by the ringing of the phone. The telephone is often presented as ringing, insisting the called to pick up. The violence is more in the ringing than the caller's voice. At the moment of ringing, the characters face with the accumulation of the incessant repetition of the voice. They do not know who calls them. Even though they expect someone to call, as in "Are You the Doctor?," the ringing of the phone is the other because it is not the expected person's voice. The feeling of irritation, created by the ringing telephone, disturbs not only the sense of self but the body of the characters. It imposes a body motion on the subject. In most cases the character's body is in the resting position before the ringing moves the body violently. They have to hurry or run to the sound of the phone. The violence lies in the sudden body movement from resting to running or walking. Similarly, the dialogical moment of heteroglossia is created by the silence and the ringing of telephone. The telephone ringing acts as both the background and foreground of the situation. It rings first as the foreground, and when the phone is picked up, the ringing is pushed into the background, leaving the shadow of the ring as a reminder of why the characters have to pick up the phone. The heteroglossia is not created from the voice of the callers only, but of the incessant ringing of the telephone itself. As a result, the heteroglossia could not be undermined for it is there even before the undermining moment as claimed by M.M. Clark. While one can argue that the polyphony is undermined when the phone is used because it reduces voices into two voices, one should know that the ringing of the phone, as the other existence inside the house, has already disrupted the characters' sense of unity by the irritation-repetition of voice. Furthermore, the repetition is only one of the possibilities for the otherness in polyphony, not the necessary one.

The phone by itself is the body of other, the effect of heteroglossia in Carver's short stories. The caller is almost always someone the characters do not know, such as the unknown voice at the end of "The Bath" asking for Scotty, the unknown caller in the beginning of "Are You a Doctor?" and "Whoever Was Using

This bed,” and the unnamed male voice in the middle of “A Serious Talk.” The other, as the voice, invades the characters’ space via telephone as telephone situates right in the middle of the characters’ house. Contrary to M.M. Clark’s suggestion that Carver’s short stories attempt to bar out the polyphony, the characters non-consciously invite the other, the violence of heteroglossia, inside their own home. In the beginning of “The Bath,” the mother accidentally invites what is to be the body of a force of violence into her house by exchanging the telephone number and address with the baker. “[S]he gave the baker her name and her telephone number...small exchange, the barest information, nothing that was not necessary” (p. 251). Later in the story, because no one picks up the cake, the baker starts calling the family without knowing that the “birthday boy Scotty” is in a coma. The voice(s) at the end of the story embodies the other. It is the voice(s) because the text does not show the identity of the caller, as it could be either the doctor or the baker. Neither the reader nor the mother knows who is calling. The phone de-signatures the voice, leaving only the content without the signature-voice. “‘Scotty,’ the voice said. ‘It is about Scotty,’ the voice said” (p. 257). “The voice” is mentioned twice to emphasize lack of the origin in the voice. The mother does not know whose voice it is; she only knows the content but not the caller’s identity. As a result, the chaos of heteroglossia is evoked in the text: the voice of the baker, of the doctor, the mother, the unknown, and of the reader. Therefore, the telephone does not exhaust and unsettle the polyphony, but restores the bared voices inside the characters’ monologic space. The voices are materialized by the telephone as a telephone.

In summary, telephone cannot protect the characters from the cacophonous voices outside. The irritation caused by the incessant ringing of the phone is not the weaker form of otherness. The phone could reduce the space of communication but the effect or the otherness which comes with the polyphony could not be rid of. The ringing of the phone disturbs the stability of the characters’ subjectivity. The ringing is other as it is unknown, not in the sense of whose voice it is, but in a sense that it cannot be identified: the ringing-machine. At the moment of the event ringing, the character is lost. They stuck in the unknown space which is between the inside (resting inside the bedroom) and the outside (the voices on the other end of the

phone). In this unknown space, the body of the character is forced to move with a sudden motion as the force of the unknown ringing pushes forward to the known. The characters are imposed with a position to find out who calls them. Here, there is a telephone paradox. If the character refuses to pick up the phone, the repetition of the ringing would be the other itself. However, if the characters choose to pick up the phone, they are to meet with the otherness from outside. On the other hand, the phone itself is already the otherness. Its materiality invades the characters space because it materializes the other from the outside. By putting the telephone in the house, the characters non-consciously opens the door for the menace outside. The voice, the unknown caller, exists as the body of the phone. It is the voice that cannot “be” by itself as it needs the body of the phone to be as such. In short, unlike M.M. Clark’s argument, telephone in Carver’s short stories is the materiality of the other and the other-event.

Voicing the Letter

Similar to the telephone, the letter also functions as the conduit for the chaos of voices. M.M. Clark contends that “[l]etters function in the same way – to unsettle, to exhaust – in several stories, especially in ‘Blackbird Pie’” (p. 242). However, the very story itself shows that the attempt to ward off the voices, not by the text, but by the critic, only bring more chaos to the story. M.M. Clark does not explain how the letter in “Blackbird Pie” does as she says. Probably she overlooks the complexity of the letter as she has done with the telephone. She takes for granted that because the two companies do not have to engage in a face-to-face communication, the menace or the otherness from communication is to be reduced. However, a quick look at the first paragraph of the story shows that the sense of menace or otherness comes with the letter. Moreover the beginning of the paragraph is structured almost the same as other Carver’s short stories with telephone. “I was in my room one night when I heard something in the corridor. I looked up from my work and saw an envelope slide under the door” (p. 598). The narrator is pulled away from the sound space by the intruding material. In most cases, it is the ringing of the phone, but in this case it is the materialized of the voice in the form of the letter. First there is a voice, and then there is a sudden movement of the letter. The transformation from voice to

material echoes the unknown voices and telephone discussed earlier. Most importantly, the narrator's questioning of the letter, whether it is purported or not, is the gesture of the menace. The narrator is disturbed by the voices; in this case it is the origin(s) of the letter. The lack of the fixed author opens the possibility for the emergence of polyphony – that is, the becoming-answers to this question is driven by the force of multiplicity. As the narrator admits in the first paragraph, it could be anyone that has spent time with him. Even though the story implies that it is his wife, the text undermines this stability by its textual function. The letter constantly preoccupies the narrator's thought as he is obsessed (possessed?) by this very question throughout the story: the attempt to reproduce, reread and rearrange the letter. The letter becomes the specter that haunts him, and the reader is put in the position of the spectator who spectates the spectacle.

In the first paragraph of "Why, Honey?" the polyphony is within the letter. The eruption of voices in the beginning paragraph of the letter could be seen in the narrator's question. "I was so surprised to receive your letter asking about my son" (p. 129). The moment of surprise, self-explanatory as it is, shows that the letter, and the voices that come with it, interpolate the subjective space of the narrator. "No one knows who I am here" (p. 129). In a way, the letter interpellates the narrator. She becomes the speaking subject because the letter "speaks" to her. It is not the content that speaks, but the material of the letter itself. The moment the letter reaches her hands is the moment of interpellation – that is, when her body (eyes and hands) interacts with the body-letter, the dialogic moment is articulated: question and answer. She now must have a voice even though she has been trying to get rid of it, being where no one would interact with her. She is put in the position where she needs to know. "[H]ow did you know I was here?" (p. 129). The question evokes an answer that is not one. Because she could not know, she can only speculate. Like "Blackbird Pie" where the narrator speculates the origin of the handwriting, here the narrator speculates the origin of the letter itself. In the process of speculation, the answers become many – hence, the nature of heteroglossia. One could argue that there is only one voice here, and that is of nothing, because the text does not show the possibility of speculation. However, one only has to look at how she describes her feeling after

her son becomes a governor to see the plurality of speculation. “I built up all these fears” (p. 133). The small *s* at the end of “fear” signifies multiple signified – that is, multiple *s*. With this in mind, rereading the question in question would show that the narrator speculates her answer based on the multiplicity of voices (fears). Furthermore, because heteroglossia is always ever-growing,¹³ the other question is posted at the beginning. It is in the presence of “you” that heteroglossia becomes more perceptible. *Who are you?* The narrator does not know, but now it is there in her discourse. The clashing of the pronoun reference brings the sense of menace into the character’s world. The you, the lacking you, is the word that needs to be fixed, to make non-hollow in this context. The drive to the logocentric and to anchor the position of you disturb the narrator’s sense of self. She wants to know what “you” is. This question also brings out other questions, such as “is that really my son, is he really doing these things?” (p. 129). The desire to know brought upon by the letter under the disguise of voices disturbs the narrator’s sense of security. Multiplicity resides not only in the question’s form but also in its content. The letter here could not exhaust and unsettle the polyphony as M.M. Clark claims. Any attempt to reduce the heteroglossia in literature and language is usually done in vain.

Last but not least, in “Cathedral” the letter literally lets the menace knocking at the character’s door. When the narrator’s wife asks the narrator to listen to the blind man’s letter, the letter could not be “read.” ““From all you’ve said about him, I can only conclude –”” (p. 516). The last word, which could make the letter sensible, is missing. It is not there because it is materialized into the presence of the word: the narrator’s menace or the blind man – that is, the voice of the blind man. From the very beginning of the story the blind man posits the sense of otherness as the narrator admits that “[m]y idea of blindness came from the movies.... A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to” (p. 514). The narrator’s concept of blindness is generated by multiple voices: movies he has seen. It is not the blind man knocking at the front door he is afraid of but the ideas of blindness itself (again with the theme of blindness and the letter in Carver’s short stories). Despite the fact that the multiple forms of blindness are embodied by a single blind, reducing from many

¹³ A conversation about one topic could lead to the other topics.

to one voice, the sense of hetero-menace is not undermined in anyway. It is the sense of menace created from heteroglossia that is the focus, not heteroglossia according Bakhtin.¹⁴ Heteroglossia and the menace are not to be looked at as cause and effect, but as expression (heteroglossia) and content (menace), for it cannot be said precisely whether the menace is the cause or effect of heteroglossia.

The knocking of the blind man, an agent of the letter, at the door is also another form of hetero-menace. “[W]e were interrupted, a knock at the door, something, and we didn’t ever get back to the tape” (p. 516). The knocking noise knocks the narrator out of his comfort zone. The sense of self is shattered as the what-to-him-is-menace is about to be inside his house. “Now this same blind man was coming to sleep in my house” (p. 516). It is the performance of the knock that should be looked carefully. The sound of knocking, a production of the letter, seeps through the door even before the eyes of the narrator could see the blind man. Voices are faster and more substantial than perception: a temporary blindness created by the substance of the voices (supposing that the blind man knocks more than once). The knocking here could be compared to the sound of ringing of the telephone for both of them are not the representation of the other, but the other-content by themselves. Most importantly, the idea of the other’s existence is emphasized by the act of knocking at the door. The blind man is the other at the point of knocking because he is a pure presence with no definite subject. There is only a presence of the sound, presumably multiple knocks, implying something is present outside the house. It is something that is also absent for it is not inside.

While one could always say that the sense of menace at the end of the letter, at the point of door knocking where the word is erased, is undermined because the narrator later learns what the blind man wants to say – “[m]aybe it was just as well. I’d heard all I wanted to” (p. 516), it should be noted that this story is a recollection of the event: an after image. The moment of frustration is there when the knocks come. It is at such moment that is the focal point of the discussion at the moment: the eruption of heteroglossia. Even though the narrator says that he has

¹⁴ A little reminder: M.M. Clark tries to argue that letter could prevent menace from heteroglossia. However, as it could be seen, that is not the case.

learned (saw) what the missing last word is, it is his awareness of the knocking sound at door, without any knowledge of who/what knocks the door, that makes it visible: the interruption of the letter by the knocking sound. The missing word is the blind spot of this narrative. It is within the after-closure of the narrator. The similar logic could be seen in *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993). Derrida, working on Merleau-Ponty, says that it is the invisible in the visible that makes an image perceptible, or it is in the forgetfulness in the memory that makes memory as such (pp. 51-52). Therefore, because the sense of menace from/of the letter is acknowledged by the narrator in the beginning, the sense of closure is affirmed, which could be seen at the end of the story. The closure does not erase the menace. It intensifies the sense of prevalent menace, for the reader at least. Also, even though the narrator claims that he has heard all that he wants, what he hears is not the content of the letter. It is the blind man. This blind man is the double of the author of the letter. Even though they are the same person, their position in relation to the letter is different. The blind man at the end of the story has no relation to the letter. He is there literally, present in full flesh, not the missing subject (author) who writes the letter. Unlike the blind author, the present blind man could say what he wants to say at the end of the sentence, giving the narrator a sense of closure. It is not a matter of presence and absence here, but of the letter. The message cannot be communicated because the letter interrupts itself, breaking and shredding itself to pieces with a missing piece. It is lost in the narrative as it is only at the beginning that we could “see” the letter¹⁵ (this matter will be discussed in a moment). The eruption of the menace from the letter effaces the sense of menace itself from the narrative, leaving only a blind sense of closure. Simply put, the sense of violence from the letter seems lacking here not because it could be rid of, but because this is the nature of menace in the letter. It undermines everything even itself. What is left is the trace that marks the absent mark.

In conclusion, a temporary one, the letter in Carver’s short stories shares the similar trait of the other two forms of communication. Like the face-to-face

¹⁵ The shredding of the letter can also be seen in the other two stories. In “Blackbird Pie” the letter is literally shredded by the narrator as he attempts to reproduce it. The words are scattered. In “Why, Honey?” the letter is shredded as the letter-ness of the letter is missing – that is, the narrative form takes hold of the page space.

communication, letter could not supplement the character's lack of speech. While the characters, when in a face-to-face communication, either literally says that they could not speak or substitutes the missing discourse with a narrative non-consciously, the letter's lacking communication is caused by its form of expression. The miscommunication in a face-to-face speech is of the speaker while it is of the letter-material that causes the event-misread. In "Blackbird Pie," the narrator's wife and the narrator could not communicate because of the letters in the letter. Even though the topic of letter-signifier will be discussed in the next chapter, it is worth saying here that the letter-signifier is neither the form nor content of the letter, but the letters as such. It is in the hand-writing that the content and form of the letter are (un)seen. The narrator indeed holds the letter in his hand; he reads it with his eyes. Nevertheless, he could not see the content and its form. In "Cathedral," it is the letter that interrupts its own message, the message of its author: a patricide.¹⁶ The missing last word(s), at the moment of reading, leaves the narrator in oblivion, not only because he lacks the anchoring closure, but also because the word materializes itself into something far more menace than its absence: the present blind man. Moreover, even though the letter deterritorializes the concept of communication, it also reterritorializes it. This could be seen from how the narrator's wife and the blind man have to write the letter with their voices (and not to mention that the existence of communication communicates itself as such to the subject in question). In "Why, Honey?" even though the text does not provide the response of the character-reader, its content is formed around the miscommunication between the narrator-author and her son. Because the letter's form and content is repressed by the narrative, it can even be said that it is the letter itself that cannot communicate. It could not communicate itself as such because, like the speaker of the face-to-face communication, it is non-consciously supplemented by the narrative.

Similar to telephone and dissimilar to M.M. Clark's argument, letter in Carver's short stories cannot exhaust the sense of menace from heteroglossia. The telephone itself is the menace that it tries to exhaust: its materiality (sitting inside the character's space), its effect (ringing and the unknown caller), and the ritual of

¹⁶ It is also a suicide as the letters destroy itself, as comments by Dr. Daengkloem.

exchanging the address. All of these are the products of heteroglossia. Even though the concept of polyphony in telephone is an actual voice, the voices in the letter are the menacing multiplicity itself. The sense of menace here should be looked at as something that disturbs the sense of unity and harmony of the characters. Like the telephone, before the letter arrives, the characters feel complete inside their own familiarized space. In “Blackbird Pie,” the sense of menace comes from the plurality of the origin of the letter as it multiplies itself when read. There is one reading, and that is the wife’s intention to divorce the narrator. However, the multiplicity is the letter itself. The narrator does not know, aside from the dramatic irony on the reader’s side, who writes the letter. The sense of menace could be seen from the first paragraph and in the middle of the story where he starts to describe the process of defamiliarization in the house. Focusing at the first paragraph, the letter, with its menacing aura, breaks the narrator with its multiplicity out of his routine. It even breaks him out of his character as we could see at the end of the story. The sense of otherness in “Cathedral” is more concrete than the first one. While the letter in “Blackbird Pie” only affects senses with absence, the letter in “Cathedral,” the blind man, literally comes knocking at the narrator’s front door. At the moment when the word is disappearing, the blind man, who is also the conceptual product of heteroglossia, knocks at the door. It is that very moment when heteroglossia of telephone and letter conjoin: the ringing of the phone and the knocking of the door. The blank space in the last sentence is also multiplicity itself. It is lacking in itself. The sense of menace from heteroglossia is the deferred unknowing of the letter. This delay of signification is not created on the ground of plot device. On the contrary, because the text is (about) the Carverean letter, the narrative has to be as such. Like the early story, the menacing figure in “Why, Honey?” is the unknown sender. The narrator does not know who sends her the letter. As a result, she fears of this unknowingness. It is in her description of her feeling as “fears” that the copulation of plurality and the sense of menacing otherness can be seen.

(Even though the analysis above has not followed M.M. Clark’s original argument on heteroglossia of the letter, it should be noted that the analysis follows the philosophy in the argument. While she focuses more on the violence of

heteroglossia, I focus also on the violence of the letter. M.M. Clark herself does not follow Bakhtin's theory to the letter. Originally, heteroglossia does not imply violence of a discourse, especially a discourse in a novel, since it is the essence of a novel or short story to be as such. In other words, Bakhtin overlooks the self-destructive nature of heteroglossia as M.M. Clark seems to see, and I overlook the importance of heteroglossia as M.M. Clark sees)

Letter-Epistle, or the Epistemology of the Letter¹⁷

The section above is named "Tracing the Letter" for a reason. While its aim is to trace the traits of the letter, it shows that the letter is the trace of the other two forms of communication. The act of tracing is not only to trace the missing analysis of the letter in Carver's short stories, but also its trait. It is the trait of the letter in Carver's short stories to be traced for it functions like a trace. The letter follows the trace of the face-to-face speech and telephone, but it is not them – that is, a letter is not a combination of the twos. The difference itself, the letter is. The letter in Carver's texts is similar to how Derrida describes trace (*differance* and *gram*) in *Positions* (1981). It is "the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text" (1981, p. 26). It is not "another text" in this context, but *the other text* as it is not only a transformed production of the other two types of communication, but also of itself. It is the other to itself. The letter also functions on the dissemination strategy because of its neither-nor effect. Even though "*dissemination* means nothing, and cannot be reassembled into a definition" (Derrida, 1981, p. 44), it would suffice to say that dissemination is not the same as polysemy. A text with multiplicity is not the text with multiple readings. The latter aims at the anchorage of meaning. Despite the fact that a text could be read in many ways, the goal of reading is to fix a text to a new meaning(s). On contrary, dissemination ~~aims~~ to exhaust the artifact. The letter exhausts itself to be unreadable, to meaninglessness. It is true that because dissemination has an aim it is put on the same space of polysemy. However, the aim

¹⁷ Conceptually, this is to be called the ontology of the letter: what is the letter, the being of the letter? However, in its design, the letter lacks ontology, so this part would be about how we come to know the letter as what it is.

here is put under erasure. It is not the aim that aims for the stability of the event. The aim here is based on the movement of difference and repetition. Even though it repeatedly follows the track to exhaustion, such exhaustion is always different from itself. The state of difference, though the product of repetition, cannot be repeated. It can even be said that the letter as a trace is schizophrenic. “There is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 5).¹⁸ The Carverean letter is not a permanent mark on a white page for a mark is a material on the letter – the time to discuss about the mark will be marked later.

(At this point, because the thesis statement has been stated, that the Carverean letter is a trace, it would be sufficient to begin the next chapter of the letter. However, because a promise is made as a sign of delay in the above sub topic,¹⁹ this part needs the analysis of the strategies that make the letter in Carver’s short stories a trace, or, in other words, to write about “what the letter is in Carver’s short stories.” It should be kept in mind that a promise can never be broken even though it is not fulfilled. When the promise is made, the subject and the object is put in the trap of deferral. The goal is only a lure to keep the subject and object in a bond, or a pact. That is, the aim of a promise is the relation between the promising and the promised, not the object-promised. Here, it has to be done as promise, to make a promise of breaking the rule of promise, to write about what makes the letter in a more academic manner, so it could be seen that a promise cannot be kept. It also should be kept in mind that the things that are about to be said, though synonymous, are the supplement of each other, of the trace, that makes the traits of the letter.)

¹⁸ Despite the fact that Deleuze and Guattari write a lot about the process of becoming, there is a misconception about the terms. Most of the time it is understood as “the process” or something designed not to reach its destination. However, Deleuze and Guattari specifically write of “the third meaning of process as we use the term: it must not be viewed as a goal or an end in itself, nor must it be confused with as infinite perpetuation of itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 5). There is a goal to becoming and that is to be (about) minority-becoming. However, because the centrality of force always invades the minor space, the minority-becoming has to be on the line of flight. In a way, while this could be looked as always in a process, the focus or the theme of becoming is at the pause of becoming-minority, not the process to be one. Similarly, letter is not the process that makes the letter a letter, but its letter-becoming that makes it so.

¹⁹ Self-citation: “[i]n the last part of this chapter, the ontology of the letter in Carver’s short stories will be written in a more focused manner.”

Self-erasure is the very strategy that makes the letter in Carver's short stories (about) a trace. The process of disseminating and tracing in the letter is made manifest through the act of self-erasure. According to Pluth (2007), "a trace is a sign reduced to a pure materiality without signification" (p. 24). It refers to itself. The process of referring to itself is the act of self-erasure²⁰ – that is, the act of rendering itself insignificant. When it is said that "referring to itself as a letter," it should be read as a letter refers to itself as a Carverean letter. It makes the reader aware that it is a letter-epistle by showing that it is not a letter – hence, the textual-dissemination of the artifact. What is left is the trace of the letter as such, showing that it is neither what it ought to be nor what it is. The very short story that could give us the most details about letter is "Why, Honey?" because it is written as a letter. In "Why, Honey?" the letter effaces itself with its own expression (the word content should not be used to avoid the binary opposition of content and form). It starts first as a letter with the mark of "Dear, Sir" (p. 129). Later, the expression of the letter slowly turns the letter into a story. The mark is temporarily put in delay. The letter becomes a story, the author the narrator, the contents her characters, and the sender-receiver of the first letter the reader. It ceases to communicate with the party of two. It transforms what is specific to general, and private to public. It is true that any written work is deemed for public for it needs an audience. However, as a text can never be private in the field of Symbolic Order, the imaginary idea of the intended audience make it possible for a text to be private. As delayed as it is, the letter follows its own trail to the mark that insists on its letterness: "Yours truly" (p. 133). However, this does not mean that when the mark of the letter is missing, "Why, Honey?" is turned into a story-text completely. Because it makes its own effacement. There is always a trace left. One could not efface oneself to the point of complete absence since one always needs the hands of the other to do so.

Even though the sender-receiver "you" of the first letter could refer to the reader of a fiction, this does not mean that "you" as the character is not on the letter. The narrator refers to "you" as if "you" were not the reader but the sender-receiver of

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that this can be a gesture of self-importance as much as self-erasure.

the first letter. “You know he was an excellent student, you know that about him if you know anything” (p. 130). The implied knowledge about her son can only be direct at the sender of the letter, not the reader of the story. How could the reader have such knowledge? Only the subject of the letter could have this implied knowledge. Nevertheless, when she says “[i]f you are a powerful man and want to find someone, you can find them, it wouldn’t be hard” (p. 133), the implied you does not only refer to the reader but also the sender-receiver of the first letter. This is to show that even though the letter is missing from the text, there is still traces of its: the trace as the unknown sender. Furthermore, the lack of the speech mark²¹ or quotation marks in the narrative could be seen as the specter of the letter that disturbs the unity of the story-text. In the beginning of the story, when the text shows that “Mr. Cooper saw two boys in the field putting firecrackers in Trudy’s ears” (p. 129), the lack of the speech mark neither confirms that this is a paraphrase of the narrator nor a direct speech from Mrs. Cooper. It creates a wrinkle on the smooth space of the story, the wrinkle where the act of letter and narration meet by way of eruption. It is here that “Why, Honey?” is (about) a letter-becoming. Mr. Cooper, as a textual subject, and his acts are neither the products of the narrator’s story nor the re-telling of the letter’s author. He sees what happens by way of the letter. He sees only the trace of the boys who hurt Trudy because those boys run away (p. 129), leaving only a distilled image. The letter, because it is a trace, has to follow its trait to its destination: who kills Trudy? The point of this letter is to tell the sender-receiver of the first letter why the narrator is afraid of her son. As a result, it needs to efface itself with its content, turning into a story about tracing, in order to become the affect of the narrator’s fears,²² commuting with the reader about the fears that is not in the story, but in the act of finding the letter: the original letter of the unknown sender, the unknown sender himself, the letter of the narrator, and the letter of the writer of the letter.

²¹ It has to be called speech mark because sometime this mark is not a quotation mark. For example, James Joyce uses a dash instead of quotation marks. It could very well be a report speech designated with a usual “he said” “she said” in other texts. Nevertheless, these are still the mark of the character’s speech all the same.

²² Unlike the face-to-face communication, the narrative is employed by the letter, not by the speaker.

The effacing of the letter tells a story about the narrator's fears unveiled by its self-effacement. The multiplicity of the narrator's fears is (about) the letter where it is imbued with its ever-changing form-content. The narrator's fear is also ever changing by the strategy of difference and repetition. In the beginning, she does not want to be noticed by anyone. Later, she wants to be noticed by her son, and not to be a stranger to each other. However, as because she becomes afraid of her son, she does not want to be noticed by him. At the end, however, she says "I wanted someone to know. I am very ashamed" (p. 133). Her repetitive pattern is to be, or not to be noticed. The repetition here echoes the repetitive transformation between the letter and the story already discussed. It first starts as a letter, then a story, then there are traces of the letter, and then it turns into a story, and then the letter. Also, her fears, or her desire not to exist, function similarly to the letter. The fears come true because they leave their traces behind. She leaves her trace as letters. "I found out his address and wrote to him, I wrote a letter every few months" (p. 133). Even though she later stops writing to him, an attempt to efface herself, it cannot be done because she has already written to him. The letters have been there. The trace has been left. Because of this trace, the narrator somehow gets a letter from nowhere, which is also traceable because she writes "Why, Honey?" as a response letter. Whether her letter reaches its destination or not will not be discussed here, but it should be kept in mind that the letter as such, before the start and after the end, will have been read.

One last point before moving on to the next letter on the line, even though "Why, Honey?" is an epistle fiction, this does not mean that the text is originally the letter. When a text is read, besides its form and content, it is the structure of the page that should be put in question. Before the marks of a letter, there is a mark of a text, the title of the text: "Why, Honey?". The story title at the top of the page of "Why, Honey?" is the mark that effaces the origin of the letter as much as turning the text into undecidability. The mark renders the text to be neither a story nor a letter because this mark can be the mark of anything, such as an essay, an academic article, and so on. Most importantly, a letter is not always marked by a title. The title as the mark, "Why, Honey?", incidentally, is also the actual words the narrator says to her son, asking him why he lies to her. When such mark is traced to its origin, when the

narrator says that very words, it becomes insignificant. When it becomes visible, its signification turns invisible. There is no impact when the narrator says those words. It only leads to another moment of impact: the moment when her son tells her to kneel down (p. 132). “Why, Honey?” is only a group of words in the narrator’s discourse. However, this is the very aim of the mark “Why, Honey?”, to not mean anything when it refers to itself, leading the tracker to something else more meaningful to him/her. In most of Carver’s short stories, the title of the text is rendered insignificant when spoken by the character. Similar to the mark in Woolf’s short story, it is significant when it is traced; however, when it reaches its point of anchorage, being a snail, it loses all of its intensity. Nevertheless, the word “lose” is not the right word for the intensity has already been there when the mark is traced. The snail is only a trick, or a trap for the tracker to lose his sight on the real trace. “Why, Honey?”, because it is a letter-trace, lacks its place of origin. It is the very mark, or the title of its origin that effaces its origin as a letter.

Nevertheless, if one needs to see the first mark that places the letter on its track, one only needs to look above one’s head. Before a mark on the wall, there is the white blank wall. In this case, before the mark on top of the page, there is the white blank space that is on the page: the margin. It is here at the margin that a text difference is created. It separates the textual-artifact from its surrounding, and at the same time constructing the text. In the conventional western reading practice, the right margin is to create a difference of reading space which affects the form and content of the text. The mark of the letter “Dear Sir” and “Yours truly,” and the spacing of the paragraphs are determined by the difference in the margin. Without the difference of marginal positioning, the text would be unreadable. The bottom and the left margin mark the limit of the text, to signal when one should stop following a line of words, a trace, and starts a new one. If one follows the line into the margin, one would be lost inside the trace. The margin or a blank space between the words in the text is what makes any words meaningful. Without this spacing, a word would not be a word. It would be only a convoluted incest of letters. Because these are unconsciously read, they should be called the white blind spot. In other cases, these would be the focus of

discussion. However, because we are trying to find the origin before the letter-trace, before “Why, Honey?”, it would be the top margin that will be discussed.

The top margin, the blank white space before the black mark, puts the letter-trace in motion. In the performativity of reading, at the point of beginning, the eyes focus on the title, the black mark at the top of the text. It puts the reader on a trace as the title is figuratively and literally a question: “Why, Honey?” It is that which drives the reader along the trace of the letter. Nevertheless, it is the blind white space above/under the mark that first gives the trace a state of existence. The mark “Why, Honey?” needs to be situated on a place where it can slide along the trace. In this case, it is at the top of the page above/under the blank space.²³ The motion of the trace is created by a binary movement of 0-1-0. At first, there is nothingness of the margin (invisible to the eyes), then there is the mark, and then there is nothing before the story, and then there is the mark of the letter in general. Verticality is the movement of the trace and it is at the top before the mark that puts the trace in motion. The very reason that it has to be motion is that the trace cannot be given birth to. One cannot create a trace; one can only follow it (the intentional trace would be called a mark). Figuratively, it is the top margin of the text that creates a trace, if that is what one really wants to say. However, the point has always been to show that “Why, Honey?” is not a letter but a trace. It is the self-effacement of the letter that makes it a trace. In this case, it is first the marginal white wall on the page. With this in mind, one would be able to see that reading between the lines cannot be used with this kind of text. The Carverean letter can only be read along the trace.

Where’s the Letter?

The same strategy of self-effacement of the letter in the other two short stories works similarly to “Why, Honey?”. However, they are not entirely the same because “Cathedral” and “Blackbird Pie” are not written in an epistle form. The trace of the letter is both within and without the letter. The letter is effaced by ways of summarizing in “Cathedral.” The letter in the story is only mentioned in the first part of the story. The reader is only aware of the letter through the narrator’s words that

²³ It is above because it is written on the page while it is under because it is under the structure of the blank space.

there is an act of letter sending between the two companies, and that the letter is taped, not written. The self-effacing act of the letter here is that it is voiced. It is voiced by the sender and receiver, and it is voiced by the text because the reader could not see the letter. As a result, it lacks materiality of the letters. The materiality of the letter is in the general sense of word, not in the sense of a Carverean letter where the material is the event of a trace. Generally speaking, a letter is written. However, because it is voiced in this case, it lacks a solid weight of a writing that holds it in its place. The only way that the letter could be presented in “Cathedral” is by way of a tracethrough the narrator’s words. Even though the reader learns what the blind man and the narrator’s wife talk about, it is only a trace, not the whole letter as in “Why, Honey?”.

The content of the letter revolves around the trace. “She told the blind man she’d written a poem and he was in it...The poem wasn’t finished yet. She was still writing” (p. 515). On one hand, the poem in the letter is about a trace because the reader and the blind man only hear/see the traces of it through the narrator’s speech; and because it is about the tracing of the wife’s face. “[T]he blind man asked if he could touch her face. She agreed to this...She even tried to write a poem about it” (p. 514). On the other hand, the act of writing is the act of tracing after the experience itself. The narrator says that his wife writes a poem “after something really important had happened to her” (p. 514). She always traces “after” what has happened to her through writing. It is not the poem that is the trace, but the writing itself. The poem is only a writing as/of a trace in its imaginary expression. At this point, it has to be reminded that the tapes between the wife and the blind man are written because it is a letter. However because the letter’s trait is self-effacement, in “Cathedral” the writing in the letter effaces itself with voice. The expression of the letter, though paraphrased by the narrator, still has traces of the letter in its content and form (from now on the word “form” will be used only since form and content are connected).

Even though in “Cathedral” the text presents the reader with the letter, it is literally a trace of the letter not only because the last word is missing, but also it is the only quotation from a whole letter. In the tape, the blind man says “[f]rom all you’ve said about him, I can only conclude –” (p. 516). The act of concluding

implies that there is something before the conclusion, such as the body of statement and introductory words. This means that in “Cathedral” it does not matter whether the narrator quotes or paraphrases the letter, it is always a trace. This is so because it has already been a trace. Because the letter is a trace, the narrator could not conceive what the expression of the letter is. The possibility of meaning in the last word is plural – hence, the menace of meaning. However, because this is a trace, there is no polysemy, but only dissemination. “The tape squeaked and someone began to talk in this loud voice” (p. 516). The meaninglessness of the voice refers to itself as it is; there is no multiple readings of this event in any other way. At the point of squeaking, the letter in “Cathedral” can be neither quoted nor paraphrased. It is a phenomenon that could not even be translated into words. There is only a sound that signifies the other sound. The same can also be said with the quotation of the letter. The quotation signifies only itself as a trace by “—.” This does not in any way imply that the act of self-referring renders the artifact meaningful in itself. On the contrary, the act of self-referring is self-effacing. There is no meaning in a trace.

Furthermore, while the narrator says that he has heard all he wants (p. 516) after the interruption of the letter, implying that he could untrace the letter, what he has heard/seen is but the traces of the trace. During the act of drawing in blindness, the narrator refuses to open his eyes to look at the drawn cathedral because “[i]t’s really something,’ [he] said” (p. 529). Referring back to after the “—” where the narrator comments that he knows what it is, “something” does not give any sense of closure to the trace. “Something” only refers to itself as “—.” It does not mean anything. It can only be something general, but not a specific thing. The reader and the narrator do not know what the meaning of “something” is. It is only a trace of the trace. This does not mean that this scene lacks the moment of enlightenment, if that is the word to use. Because of the trace of the trace, the intensity of this scene is spread all over the page. It leads to nowhere and everywhere. It leads to the point where the reader and the narrator are aware that there is something happening. However, it does not lead to anywhere because the narrator and the reader could not see what something is, and neither does the critic. There is only a trace of the trace. Hence, the narrator does not want to open his eyes because he could see only when in the process

of following the trace and creating a new trace. As he follows the movement of the blind hand, he also creates a new trace, a trace of his own that he has to follow, to see where it leads to, such as “something” which leads to somewhere and nowhere. Like his wife, he is lost in the process of tracing the letter. While his wife incessantly writes poems and letters, the narrator is lost in the process of drawing, writing and following his own trace. They are both blind by the trace.

The trace as a letter in “Cathedral” is, however, not a labyrinth. The writing-trace does not trap the narrator and the wife in anyway. If the function of the labyrinth is to block the movement of an individual, to be an adversary of knowing, the trace here is the individual’s advocate for knowing. The wife comes in contact with her meaningful events through writing, and the narrator also learns “something” about himself through the similar activity. A trace keeps the two at a safe distance from a point of tracing. The wife can never finish her poem, as she keeps having new impactful events. She has to always keep writing, following the trail of her desire. It is in the process of writing incomplete that she knows something, a writing that puts her on the trail of the trace. At the same time, the narrator (and the reader) could only learn something about the moment of blind drawing through its lack of signification. He could never finish the drawing literally and figuratively. In a literal sense, the story ends at the moment that he says “something.” It does not provide enough information to inform the reader whether he stops or not. In a figurative sense, because the narrator refuses to open his eyes, to look at the finished product of his (?) creation, the image is not finished. It is still in the process of writing. It is only when the artist opens his eyes and looks at the image that the image is considered finished, that is, when it is observed by the eyes of the spectator, not the eyes of the maker. It is only in the act of unfinished writing, or a trace, that the narrator could learn something about himself. Even though it is not put in a specific word, it is the traces that mark such knowingness: “I thought it was something I ought to do,” (p. 529) “I didn’t feel like I was inside anything,” (p. 529), and ““It’s really something”” (p.529). The narrator, like his wife, is put on trace, on the performance of deferring, where delaying a knowledge is the real knowledge. If knowledge is put at the point of contact, it would

cease to be one because it is unveiled as truth.²⁴ In this case, both the narrator and the wife can enjoy their activity with the help of a trace, of being lost in a trace. In this way, the narrator does learn something. However, it is not of himself as an individual that he learns, but of the process of a trace that he learns and enjoys. It is the letter as the trace, both for the wife and the narrator, that helps them with their enjoyment of knowing. This is not the same thing as seen in the case of a face-to-face communication. In such act of communication, it is the speaker who could not say the word. However, in the case of a story about a letter, it is the trait of the trace, not the speaker, that does not signify anything but only itself. The specific word, or the point of truth, is lacking not because of the speaker but the trace, as just said about truth and knowledge.

While the blind man and the act of drawing will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter about the letter-signifier, it is worth noticing that his hand that holds the narrator's keeps them in the motion of tracing. It is neither the guiding nor the following hand. As Derrida says, "[t]he theme of the drawings of the blind is, before all else, the hand" (1993, p. 4). The tracing is first introduced in the beginning of the story where he "sees" the wife by touching her face. "[H]e touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose – even her neck" (p. 514). The blind hands trace along the face to see. However, it is also the face that traces the hand. It guides the hands along the line of its facial out-line. The hands can only follow the structure of the face. Nevertheless, because the blind man literally cannot see, his hands are the eyes that trace the face to be seen according to his own movement of the hands. He creates the image of face according to the movement and the touch of his fingers. Simply put, the face is redrawn and drawn anew simultaneously during the process of (re)tracing. The wife also does not know whether the blind man could "see" her face or not – hence, this is the motivation for her letter to keep in touch with him. What she knows is that "something really important ha[s] happened to her" (p. 514). In order to

²⁴ While knowledge and truth are almost identical in nature, the difference between them lies in their animacy. Truth cannot be moved or tinkered with. It is there standing still as the pinnacle of "something." It could be either scientific or fictive truth. However, knowledge is the state where one is aware of the incompleteness in the known truth. One can tinker and play with knowledge. Knowledge is animate. Once knowledge stops moving or growing, it becomes truth. In other words, truth is an inanimate state of idea while knowledge is an animate state of idea.

keep in touch with “something,” the letter is needed to connect the traces of the past with the present. Consequently, because the letter is a trace, the writing process sustains itself as a trace, waiting until the point of eruption (the knocks on the door of the blind man). The wife’s writing starts with the tracing of the blind hand.

Later in the story, the blind man’s hand traces the image of the cathedral in the process of blind writing. At first, the blind man follows the narrator’s line by holding his hand. Nevertheless, at one point, the narrator closes his eyes as he draws the image of a cathedral. Similar to face tracing, the blind man’s hand and the narrator’s neither follow nor lead. They are both in the motion of blind tracing. The narrator only sees the trace of the cathedral, and so does the blind man. It is “something” for him, something as a trace of the traces. Also, the “something” of the wife is neither accidental nor intentional to the narrator’s. The two are connected by way of the hands that trace the letter. At the moment of the disappearance of the last word, the door is knocked by the hand that traces “something.” The presence of the hand that knocks the door, interrupting the letter, is the self-effacement of the trace of the letter. It effaces the last word with the trace in order to refer to itself as a trace, in order to be the blind. As the unknown sender that traces after the narrator’s address in “Why, Honey?,” the blind hand follows the traces of the wife’s letter to her place, to keep her and the narrator in the motion of the trace – hence, to keep the text of the Carverean letter in the motion of the trace. This is not the will of the blind man, but of the blind hand, the will to trace. Its trait is to trace after the trace to refer to itself as a trace.

The Unrepeatable Trace

Lastly, similar to “Cathedral,” the letter in “Blackbird Pie” can neither be quoted nor paraphrased for there are only traces of it (like the blind man and the act of drawing in “Cathedral,” the subject of handwriting in this story will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). This could be seen in the narrator’s attempt to reproduce the letter. The letter, the letter text as in “Why, Honey?” is recreated in the text by the narrator. It is not quoted since there is no quotation marks; and yet it is not paraphrased because the letter is marked by the mark of the letter: “Dear.” Even though the narrator says “when I say I can re-create the letter...I mean what I say” (p.

599), he could not recreate it as it is. The very reason for this is that the letter is read as a trace. However, this does not mean that the letter is incomplete. It is the letter itself that allows the narrator to read it in its partition. When the narrator says that someone purports the letter, claiming to be his wife (p. 598), the act of purporting the letter does not come from the other imaginary individuals, such as someone in Denmark. It comes from the letter itself. This is the act of the Carverean letter, the act of self-effacement to be a trace. It is designed to be a trace.

The fact that the letter is a trace can be seen much more obvious when the narrator says that he wishes he has kept the letter, so he could re-create it. The origin of the letter in "Blackbird Pie" thus comes from the trace. It is the trace left on the narrator memory. Although the real letter is presented in the story, that letter is not the letter as it is because it is created from a trace of a trace: a memory of the letter. Therefore, at the scene where the wife confronts the narrator about her letter, the wife knows that the letter is a trace. Even though the narrator says that he does not read the letter, the wife seems to expect this beforehand, that he would not read the letter. The letter is expected to function as such, but for what reason, it will be discussed in a moment. The more the narrator tries to recreate the letter, the more it turns into a pure trace. The third time the letter is presented in the story, the mark of the letter is gone. What it is, is the collection of traces, or words from the letter. "In this manner, going from page to page, here a line, there a line, I read in snatches" (p. 605). It is here, at the moment of pure trace, that the letter puts the reader closer to knowing. Even though it is a collection of traces, the reasons for the divorce in the second letter is clearer. "...withdrawing farther into... a small enough thing but...not to mention the insane asylum (p. 605). This does not mean that it is a tautology of "my reason for divorcing you is this and that." On contrary, in this form, the traces become clearer as they are not anchored by the mark of the letter. Strictly speaking, even though the narrator still does not know how his wife feels at this point, he is in the process of knowing. As already discussed, knowing can only be achieved by way of the trace. If knowing lacks mobility of the trace, the knowing subject and the subject of knowing would lose their tracks.

The very reason that the wife writes the letter to her husband, aside from avoiding the confrontation, is that she wants to save him and herself from history. History in “Blackbird Pie” is presented as something contrary to the trace. On one hand, history is dominating. Throughout the story, it is obvious, without the need of help from the trace, to see the narrator’s obsession with history. He is obsessed with his work, a workaholic, a history addict. History, as a whole, has dictated his whole life since he was still in school. Even though he is aware of his affinity with history, he is not conscious of its effects, particularly of how it affects his life. As a result, his wife suffers from history also. This could be seen from the trace in the letter: “[y]our “work”...Please! Give me a break” (p. 605). It is not the narrator but history that is the reason for the divorce. Against their own will, it turns their life into a history. On the other hand, history in “Blackbird Pie” is logocentric. Anything with history in this story is considered by the narrator to be real and truthful, the ultimate Truth. The narrator knows the truth about the letter because he knows the history that comes with it. “[T]he grievances could only have come from someone who’d spent twenty-three years observing me on an intimate, day-to-day basis” (p. 598). The truth, to him, however, is that the letter is not real. It is a counterfeit. What is not real about the letter is the handwriting. It does not correspond to the history. The narrator knows so because “I received seventeen hundred or possibly eighteen hundred and fifty handwritten letters from her” (p. 601). As a result, the writer of the letter, the wife, is rendered non-real. The non-real in this case is used in a sense that she becomes almost invisible in the narrator’s eyes. She lacks the form of the historical real. He does not notice her as he does with the historical events – hence, this is one of the reasons for the divorce. At the last moment when he could speak to his wife, instead of interacting with her as if she is real, the narrator tries to hold on to her through the logocentricism of history. He holds on to the facts, the unchanging facts of history. He tells her that she used to wear the same hat and high heels at her father funeral with her arm in his (p. 611). He could not see the wife in front of him. The veiled eyes can only see the real of history; in this case, it is the high heels and the hat. History blinds the narrator to reality of the real while rendering the wife invisible. As the narrator says ironically, “[s]he is three months pregnant, though the camera doesn’t show that,

of course” (p. 612). He is the blind camera that can only see the logocentric history of events, the purported facts, and the wife as an invisible stain on the trick camera.

If history in “Blackbird Pie” is the very reason for the characters’ suffering, it is the trace that liberates them from the grasp of history. A trace is a blind spot in history. If history dictates the sight of the narrator to see only the logos, a trace is the blindness, or a “*punctum caecum*”... a mere image, an analogical index of vision itself ... of that which, seeing itself see” (Derrida, 1993, p. 53). It is an index, a margin inside the seeing, that creates visibility as such. It is not dominating because it is not aggressive like history. What it does is fleeing on the line of flight from being destructive to the other. The only sense of destructive it has is of itself: the self-effacement.²⁵ It is not logocentric because it is neither absence nor presence (the permanent absence is also another form of presence). It is the margin imbued within the logocentricism of history. As a result, in order to be free from the grasp of history, the Carverean letter, because it is (about) a trace, is used. The expression itself is a trace. “Things are not good And you know what I’m talking about. We’ve come to the end of the line” (p. 599). It lacks the sense of presence. The letter neither tells nor shows. It cannot be historicized. There is only a trace that refers to itself as such. The letter is written by the wife to be as such because she exists as a trace in the narrator’s life or in the history of the narrator. Consequently, the sense of history, because it needs presence and a fixed referent, is undermined. It is not the narrator that is the subject of the letter, but the history itself. While one could argue that the letter itself is actually history because it is of the past, one should be aware of two things. Firstly, such argument would be a tautology. As the trace is the blind spot in history, the trace can only be presented in relation to history. Trace and history cannot be separated, but they are not the same. Secondly, in this story, though it can only be seen in relation to history, the trace is ahistorical. While the idea of history in “Blackbird Pie” is shaped by verifiable concretized facts, numbers, and significant events, trace is a set of events that *should not* be identified by numerical quantity. For example, the letter with an unknown handwriting is a trace because it cannot be identified/compared with the

²⁵ It effaces both the history and itself because history is the only condition that it could be presented.

narrator's history of the letter, which is defined by the number of the letters. It is a letter without an origin. Hence, it is not written according to how the narrator perceives history. A trace, it is, the letter.

Throughout the story history is being undermined at every turn as the narrator tries to cling to the history or things via history. After the narrator reads the letter, the solidity of history is disturbed. “[T]here was *something else afoot* to night. At the moment, I found myself afraid” (p. 604). The fear comes from history itself. Even though it is the narrator who utters the words, the words are of history because the narrator is the subject of history. He is structured by history. The fear comes from the fact that history could not make sense of the letter – an event that is outlandish to the perception of the historical familiarized life. The letter is unreadable not because the narrator could not read, but because his eyes are blinded by the history itself. He could see only the presence and fixed reference. Like the other two stories, the letter brings with it the sound that interrupts the flow. In this case, it is the flow of history that is undermined by the sound of “murmuring” (p. 604) and “*the muted sound of a doorknob*” (p. 605). In this story, the flow of history is a familiarized repetition, which could be seen in the couple's conversation after the dinner, and how the narrator conceives his life: a fixed pattern. It is the letter here that defamiliarizes the narrator with history. When the narrator tries to get the fixed and definitive answer of what happens from the wife, she only refers to the trace, to the letter, and then to an allegorical story about a boy and a girl, representing him and her. Nevertheless, the narrator could not understand. Later, when the wife says that she is leaving him (p. 608), he does not understand those words because of the letter. “Whereas ... my wife never underlined words ... she was now speaking ... as if virtually every other word out of her mouth ought to be emphasized” (p. 608). He understands what she says but only as a trace of the trace. The intent is lost in the letter, in the traces of expression in the letter. Because of this, the narrator has to give up history in order to understand the reality of the real, of the trace. This does not in any way imply that the trace takes the place of history. History is effaced here because of the trace's self-effacement. The two cannot be separated even in death.

The erasure of history can be seen in two events at the end of the story. The first one is when the narrator tries to make sense of the event after the wife leaves him. Instead of historicizing the event with the quantitative mark of history, the narrator marks the event with the qualitative mark, the sound of a car horn from the deputy's car.²⁶ "Historians should use more words like 'tooted' or 'beeped' or 'blasted' – especially at serious moment" (p. 6012). The sound of a horn – like other insignificant sound from the letter, such as the knock on the door or the murmuring – marks the beginning of the trace. Consequently, he starts tracing the qualitative sound to other traces, the traces of his wife. He recalls the black and white photo of his wife (p. 612). He could see her face, "smiling" and "happy" (p. 612), and something that history cannot see, that his wife is pregnant in the picture. The picture is historical while the object in the picture the trace(s). The qualitative mark of the trace, the tooted, lets narrator see the reality of the real that is suppressed by the logocentric history. The wife is freed from the grasp of history not at the moment that she leaves the house but at this moment. It is when she exists as a trace of subjective memory, not of objective history. The other moment could be seen *literally* because the narrator comments on the erasure of history in words. "I'm having to go on *without history*...it dawns on me that autobiography is the poor man's history. And that I am saying goodbye to history. Goodbye, my darling" (p.613). His life is no longer an autobiography because he is not within his-story. While "darling" could be read as a reference to his wife, it also could be read as a reference to history, his-story when he was blinded by history. Most of important of all, the narrator acknowledges that this is the consequence of the letter. "How could it be after the consequences of the letter? Not the letter itself but the things I can't forget that *were* in the letter" (p. 613). Even though the narrator insists that it is content of the letter that creates this chain of events, as it has been discussed many times above, the content and form of the letter are always connected. The unreadable content of the letter is its form. The fact that

²⁶ Quantity refers to an aspect of history as seen by the narrator: something that could be identified by precise numbers and dates. That is to say, his-story is marked by factual numbers. On the contrary, quality refers to the aspect of something that could not be described by numbers. It is something that the narrator in the story has never used as a mark of history until now. In this case, it is the sound of a car: a force that cannot be counted and has never been used as a mark of history before.

the letter could not be re-created is the content. All in all, because the letter is a trace, what is within the letter is also without the letter: they are all connected as traces.

In Some

Letter in Carver's short stories is (about) a trace. Its traits can be traced to the face-to-face communication and telephone. It cannot be communicated like the former while it has the heteroglossia of the latter. However, this does not mean that it is the combination of the two. While it cannot be communicated, the lack of communication is of the letter itself, not of the subject. The letter cannot communicate because it is a trace. A trace only signifies itself as such. In all three stories, the letter cannot communicate with the addressee. However, it can affect the addressee with the qualitative force. The sense of heteroglossia, unlike the telephone, is of the letter itself. A trace is multiplicity, not multiple voice. It does not offer any interpretation or reading. The reader can only trace along the traces of the letter. While there are more than one trace, all traces are connected. This could be seen in the narrator's third attempt to reconstruct the letter in "Blackbird Pie," and the motif of "something" and blind man's hand in "Cathedral." It is the self-effacement of the letter that makes it a trace. Also, there is only a trace of the letter in every Carver's short story about a letter. The reader is only aware of the ~~presence~~ presence of the unknown sender's letter in "Why, Honey?." The letter of the narrator effaces itself as a letter with its own expression. It turns a letter into a narrative. However, this is not permanent as there are traces of the letter in the narrative itself. In "Cathedral," the letter effaces itself into a blind man. The moment of effacement can be seen at the exact instant when the last word of the letter is interrupted by the knock on the door. The letter can never completely erase itself for there are always traces of it. The multiplicity of the letter's form in "Blackbird Pie" should be sufficient to prove that it fails to erase itself. If it could erase itself, there would be no multiplicity. Lastly, because a letter is a trace, it can neither be paraphrased nor quoted. This is so because it is the anti-production of history. History needs to be quoted and paraphrased in order to be history, to be factual and logocentric. Unlike history, a letter is a trace that cannot be quoted

because of its trait. In all three stories discussed here, there are repeatedly failed attempts to quote and to paraphrase a letter.



CHAPTER 3

LETTER-SIGNIFIER

In the previous chapter, the traits of letter-epistle in Carver's short stories have been traced in order to comprehend how the letter functions in the story. A preliminary conclusion is that the letter is structured like a trace because of its non-present and non-absent formation. One of its traits is the mark on the letter that makes it unquotable and unparaphrase-able. It is also the non-sensible voice of the letter that marks its arrival, as could be seen from the knocks on the door in "Cathedral" and the strange noise in "Blackbird Pie." In this chapter, we will look more closely at the idea of the mark, or what marks a mark. The focus would be on the materiality of the letters and their functions in "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral." Aside from their association with the letter-epistle, "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral," though with a different set of characters and plots, are related by the materiality of the letter-signifier working in both texts. "Why, Honey?" will not be discussed here since by itself it is a letter not a story about the letter. After all, a story about a letter is also a story about the letters. A letter is not the letters because the latter is on a letter. A story consists of two materials: narrative material and textual material.

Narrative Material

The quality of the first material, which is irrelevant to the letter, but worth discussing, is of the words as materials with meaning in a narrative. This could be seen from the similarity between the handwriting in "Blackbird Pie" and the cathedral in "Cathedral" as Carver's narrative tools. The two word-things are charged with the author's violent instinct to train/tame the word, a tradition that every reader is familiar with. Strictly speaking, the connotation and denotation of "handwriting" and "cathedral" do not originally refer to anything in the stories. They are only words in the field of, say, words,²⁷ flowing through the stream of lexicon from words to words. It cannot be denied that they do have meaning even though only in relation to the

²⁷ While words are countable theoretically, its qualities (the variety of pronunciation and specific uses in each dialect) cannot be measured.

others. They lack value that could enhance their substantial visibility which could lure the individual to be used and be of use. As a result, when the author employs them in his discourse-narrative as a tool, these words are made meaning/full with the new meaning of the author. The new meaning is not the new definition of such words, but how the words are made more significant with their new positions in the text. They become more elaborated things called narrative material (the narrative tool is to designate their function while the narrative material are the form.). In other words, the first quality of materiality of the handwriting and the cathedral, as the words, are rendered possible because of their relation to the narrative, exercised by the author.

The narrative-machine in “Blackbird Pie” works because of the handwriting’s new meaning-position in the discourse. However, this does not mean that the story entirely represses the original meaning-position of the word. This could be seen when the narrator says “[t]ake this word ‘*talked*’, for instance. This simply isn’t the way she’d write ‘talked’” and “[s]econdly, my wife *never* underlined her words for emphasis” (p. 601). Handwriting signifies the individual’s personal style of making an alphabet: how one’s *S* is written differently from the other’s *S*. It is more than a practice of creating a representation of sound with graphic, but something of an event which connects to the hand and eye’s movement of an individual. That is, handwriting is contrary to what Saussure says in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). He insists that the meaning of the written word and its sound are not affected when written by different individual only the image-value that is changed and that one person can have more than one way to write a letter (Saussure, 1916, p. 69). What Saussure says is more on the side of a cultural exercise, a calligraphy which can be practiced and exploited at will, while handwriting is a bodily instinct which can be affected when one “find[s] himself in a situation that is completely atypical...*the pressure of the moment*” (p. 602). Here, Saussure talks about something other than the handwriting, while the narrator in “Blackbird Pie” focuses on the handwriting. That said, the new meaning-position of the handwriting in the story is a play on the original meaning-position of the word, something which is more complicated than how it is presented here. The narrator, with an unconscious intention of the Other-author, calls for the historical inspection of the object. He becomes historically obsessed with its

origin. “After all, I’d been reading my wife’s handwriting since before she was my wife...as far back as what be called our prehistory day” (p. 601). In order to show that he is the expert of his wife’s handwriting, the narrator, following the historian instinct, makes a memory research and gives the reader the number of letters received from his wife. “I received seventeen hundred or possibly eighteen hundred and fifty handwritten letters from her, not to mention hundred and fifty handwritten, may be thousands, more informal notes” (p.601). Hence, the old meaning-position of the handwriting is subverted by the new meaning-position, making something trivial and personal to something grand and objectively historical, echoing Carver’s style of writing which often put a glance on something trivial and mundane to make it substantial and other. It is at the movement between Saussurean calligraphy and handwriting that marks “handwriting” in the story, making it a narrative tool. The word is put in the structure of literature where meaning is uprooted to make the word a material for narrative. It is posited on the ground of Saussure’s argument, and yet it gains a new position in the story. The handwriting becomes the word-thing of the “Blackbird Pie” with its new position(s) in the discourse-narrative.

As a result, the wife’s handwriting becomes the narrative material that puts the narrative of “Blackbird Pie” in motion, and structures it like a detective narrative (after all, a narrative material functions like a fuel for the story, an imaginary function that is essential to fiction). The first scene, the scene of crime, starts off with the murder of the wife’s letter. The letter is dead because of the handwriting. It is not hers, the narrator is convinced, even though the content of the letter can only come from her. That said, the narrator becomes the detective of the letter, searching for the traces and signs of the missing handwriting. Looking for the reason of the misplaced handwriting, he searches through history that comes with the handwriting, and through the interrogation with the *femme fatale*, the wife who holds the suspense as the suspect of our detective. At that time, she even calls the deputy to be the witness of her innocence. The subject of the law, somehow by the magic of the fatal framing of the situation, suspects that it is the detective, the narrator, who commits the crime, the other crime. The deputy asks the wife “he’s [the narrator] not going to give you any trouble, is he?” (p. 608). The blind law, which is the nature of law to be so, asks

whether the narrator has ever hurt his wife, a question with no answer, for the answer is presumed by the law through the mechanism of suspecting. The deputy suspects that the wife leaves the narrator because of the domestic violence – hence, his question is a rhetorical one. It is obvious that the wife, structured as a *femme fatale* in this context, uses the law as her means of escape from the grasp of the law! It does not matter what the narrator, our detective of the letter, tells the law because the interrogation of the law only confirms the moment of freedom for the suspect. At the end of the story, not only the crime is left unanswered (the narrator is not convinced that it is his wife who writes the letter), but also, like the protagonists in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), the narrator's identity is affected by the crime of the handwriting. By affect, it is meant to be effaced, as the effect of the letter to efface "being." The handwriting is not just a suspense and a suspect that holds the reader's attention, but also the center of the story, the only material evidence of a crime, a rather out-of-trend concept but cannot write without.

The materiality of a drawn cathedral from "Cathedral," as a narrative tool, can be seen from how its new meaning-position affects the outlook of the narrative. The original meaning of the cathedral is put in the story. "[Cathedrals]'re really big ... They're massive. They're built of stone. Marble, too, sometimes. In those older days, when they built cathedrals, men wanted to be close to God" (p. 526). At the end of the story, it could be seen that the cathedral is not built by bricks and stones, but by the drawing of the two blind men. It is not a grand architecture but a simple blind drawing on a paper. The intention is not to be closer to God but to show the blind man what the cathedral is. While the aim of the two versions of a cathedral is almost the same because of the almost synonymous nature between the seeing of the blind and God in Christianity,²⁸ the meaning-position of the very word is changed in the story. It has never been about the aim of seeing/drawing a cathedral that determines its materiality according to the usage of "materiality" in this context. It is the slight shift of the thing in a general sense to a more specific sense that is the focus of the material of the word. It is the word's meaning-position, that it is either written or uttered, not the

²⁸ Derrida writes about the seeing of the blind and Christianity extensively in his *Memoirs of the Blind*.

reference of the word (if there is such a thing, for things are created by word), that materializes the word itself. The seeing of the blind and God are the connotation of the word, but not its materiality. A drawn cathedral, the very word, is materialized by the fact that it is “drawn.” The act of drawing shifts not only the literal condition of the cathedral but also the meaning-position of the word. The author draws the word a new position in the narrative. It is a shift, a movement, from one meaning to another that makes the word tangible on the eyes that makes it significant –hence, it exists as a material word. In other words, the word “cathedral” is constructed by its new meaning-position(s) from the author.

In this case, unlike the narrative material in “Blackbird Pie,” it becomes a break in a narrative for a battery of a fiction does not always push a fiction in one direction. Even though the drawn cathedral is not the intensive narrative drive for “Cathedral,” its cause-process-effect changes the entire outlook of the story, from a Carverean tale to the modern Oedipus tale. The trace of the shut-in character, the failed relationship, and the advent of the other (the blind man) in the beginning of the story all point to the story signed by Raymond Carver, the author of the mundane. It is going to be a story of the banality of the life of a blue collar family; that is what the traces point to. When the blind man arrives, the Carverean structure of the plot is intensified because the delayed day-to-day activities are at play. The characters talk, but of nothing important; they have a big supper together with emphasis on the details of eating; they share a marijuana joint (This is not Carver’s first story that the characters smoke marijuana. See, for example, “What’s in Alaska?” and “Nobody Said Anything”); and they watch TV and drink. The story is at the door of the story of nothing. However, the whole structure of the narrative is changed when the blind man wants to see a cathedral. He wants the truth, the image of a cathedral that he could not see, and it is the implied action of the narrator, who can see, to show him the image. A dramatic irony ensues. The narrator is astonished by the fact that his speech does not hold any truth as he could not describe the cathedral to the blind man. The act of speaking of the truth is hindered by some unknown reasons (to him). However, the reader-audience of the drama is well-aware of the reason behind this mumbling. The narrator’s aversion to truth could be seen since the beginning as the narrator does not

want to “see” the blind man. He is blind, like King Oedipus, to the truth that is in front of him, which is neither in the process of concealing nor revealing, only there. As a result, the blind man, as the purveyor of truth, asks the narrator to open his eyes to the truth (cathedral) by drawing a cathedral for (with) him. Putting his hand on the narrator’s, the blind man becomes both the guiding and the guided for the narrator. The narrator thinks that it is the blind man who is guided as he is blind; however, it is actually he himself who is guided by the blind man to see the truth. Later, the narrator is asked to close his eyes, metaphorically gauging his eyes like Oedipus in the scene of castrating discovery. At the end of the story, the Oedipus effect is pronounced. The narrator becomes the blind king as he refuses to see the false reality, preferring to see the truth in absolute blindness. Unlike “Blackbird Pie”, the drawn cathedral does not put the narrative in motion. It stops the narrative in the middle of its movement, and turns it around into something else entirely.

The notion of words as narrative materials may be too general and applicable to any work of any author. However, such notion is worth exploring. Here, the materiality of the words is created in its relation to the story. The similarity in terms of material, at least on this level, is how the two word-things are employed in the story, making them meaningful. Any word in a textual artifact could be moved to a new meaning-position. The locality of the new meaning-position, therefore, in “Blackbird Pie” and “Cathedral” is not fixed on handwriting and cathedral only. It could be the play on the wife, the blindness, history, and even a horse in a fog – that is, how these words are employed in the narrative. Even though the mechanism of metaphor and simile works similarly to this strategy of materialization, it is not quite the same. In this context, focusing on the motif of defamiliarization in Carver’s works, the usage of materiality implies the transformation of the insignificant, of putting the mundane in a new meaning-position. It needs reminding that this is not a question of marginality since words cannot be marginalized, only generalized. The process of stuffing the word is not of putting a new meaning inside a word – hence, metaphor and simile. On the contrary, it is of putting the word in a new position within the narrative-discourse that makes a word solid. It is the relation *par excellence* that stuffs the word to the point of being a narrative material.

While this might sound similar to the use of a narrative in a face-to-face communication where characters cannot communicate because of the lack in themselves, the difference is of the specific and the general. The narrative employed by the characters is about putting the specific meaning to a general word, of expressing the inexpressible. For example, in “Fat” the narrator tries to convince her friend of how she feels about her significant other through a story about her encounter with a fat customer. However, she could not express her feeling because her narrative lacks the word – that is, it lacks materiality which could make it matter. The narrative in the face-to-face communication, hence, is not the same with Carver’s narrative because the former lacks the materiality of the word. If the expression they try to express is substantial, they would be able to put the “word” in their narrative. The substance of a word comes from the author or the speaker, not of the word itself as Lacan (2006) explains “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object” (247). The formation of meaning-position is a doubling of an object. While we could not control language, as often said that *a subject is spoken by the language*, an ability to put words in a narrative both subjectifies and objectifies an individual. It objectifies the speaker, or the author because an individual has to rely on the process of signification, an essential element of language, in order to give material to a word. That is, a word can only be materialized when it is used by the objectified individual in the formation of language. At the same time, it is in this very process that subjectifies the individual. At the moment an individual is objectified by the language, being the language’s tool, an individual has an ability to give the word its materiality. For example, the new meaning-position of “handwriting” and “drawn cathedral” is given by the author who is at the same time is spoken by language in the process of signification. This shows that when a character is put in a face-to-face communication, trying to communicate through a substituting narrative, they cannot say the word because of their relation to the circumstance. It is the relation to the face, of seeing, that deprives the material of the word from the speaker. On the contrary, Carver’s stories, because they are not written in such manner, could give a word its materiality, or the new meaning-position. Carver the author could not see the reader.

All in all, the materiality in this aspect is of its usage in the narrative. Any author, not just Carver, could materialize any word with the new meaning-position in his/her discourse-narrative. When a word is put in a new position, in relation to other words in a context, it becomes partially tangible to the eyes of the reader – that is, the specific of the general could be seen. The material here is at the level of a signifier, not of signifier as a function, but a surface of a material called word. A word-sound, in general, lacks material because it is lost in a sea of lexicon. However, when they are written with a new meaning-position in a narrative map, the materiality of sound and word starts forming around such a word. Uttered in a narrative, the handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” and the drawn cathedral in “Cathedral” gain a new meaning-position that could give them and a narrative a substance. The two objects become the materials that fuel the narrative: the former pushes the narrative forward while the latter breaks the narrative flow. This strategy of materializing a word is not limited in Carver’s authorship only. It is a general practice that could be found in any author. To understand the point of this analysis, one has to be reminded that, because Carver often writes about the specific in the general, this phenomena follows the same logic of Carver’s writing. That is to say, this analysis uses Carver’s writing strategy to defamiliarize the materialism of word in a narrative, both of the naming of the story and in the narrative itself. There is no specific matter, only a defamiliarized generality of the matter – hence, if this analysis seems too board and too general, that means that it follows its aim. However, in the next quality of materiality, we will look at the signifier of a signifier in a more specific manner: the letters and the hand that writes the word. Again, the objects from the two Carver’s short stories will be used. Nevertheless, we will follow the marks of the trace that could be seen as the two stories show us.

Textual Material, or Textual Event

The handwriting and the drawn cathedral could be seen at work on two spaces: they are on the story space when they are seen as the characters see them to be, and they are on the narrative space when they are seen as the author sees them to be. This refers to the fact that characters are not aware of the significance of the word

as the narrator does when he materializes the word in their world: the narrator could see but is not aware of the author-other gaze who can see and is conscious of being seen. The reader could be at any space depending on how they interact with the story. The idea of seeing and meaning is imminent to their materiality. They are substantial because they are seen with their new meaning-position in the narrative-discourse. The first quality of textual material between the stories follows the logic of “seeing is being.” The second quality of materiality is not of word and seeing. They are not posited on the level of story and narrative – that is, they are not work. On the contrary, they are text. Before discussing the idea of materiality of handwriting and the drawn cathedral any further, it would be apt to discuss the idea of the text first, for the textuality of the text has significant impacts on this form of materiality. In this context, we will follow the ideas of text according to Roland Barthes’ essay “From Work to Text” (1986).

The first aspect that distinguishes a work from a text is its perceptibility. “[T]he work is seen...the text is demonstrated...; the work is held in hand, the text is held in language” (Barthes, 1986, p. 57). For Barthes, a work is simply a material form of a text, a book or a pamphlet, while a text is a linguistic phenomenon. Even though the idea of work, as in the first quality of the materiality, does not follow Barthes’ concept of work to the letter, for to Barthes work is the tangibility of a book. It should be noted that the idea of seeing and unseen echoes what Barthes say of text and work. The characters and the author could see the handwriting and the drawn cathedral. The former see them because they are in the story while the later sees them as he is the one who designs them. Both of them could hold the handwriting and the drawn cathedral in their hands. The reader could see the handwriting and the drawn cathedral with their new meaning-positions also because these words become substantially visible in the narrative-discourse. Just as the eyes see the words on the white blank page, so does the reader acknowledge the words with their new forms and meanings in the narrative space. However, on the textuality level, the handwriting and the drawn cathedral could not be seen or held by the reader. Even though the handwriting is mentioned throughout “Blackbird Pie,” the reader could not really see the handwriting. The only thing the reader knows is that it is supposedly not the

wife's handwriting because, for example, she does not write "talk" like that, and she does not underline her words. Like the narrator's emphasizing on the word "talk," instead of underlining the words as they are, the text (or the narrator) italicizes those words. As a result, the handwriting in the letter cannot be distinguished from the narrator's own words which are also italicized in his own commentary. The narrator and the reader are both blind to the handwriting. The drawn cathedral in "Cathedral" also cannot be seen. Despite the fact that the narrator could provide enough details of the real cathedral to the blind man and the reader (p. 526), the text (or the narrator) does not describe the image of the drawn cathedral that the narrator and the blind man draw together. The text only provides the effect and after-effect of the drawn cathedral. The reader could not see the drawn cathedral; nor could the narrator in "Cathedral" literally see it. His eyes are closed while drawing, and he refuses to open them at the end of the text. Consequently, the text ends at the moment of pure blindness. No one could literally see the image. The image could be seen only figuratively. Like the drawn cathedral, the handwriting in "Blackbird Pie" could not be seen even at the end of the text. Surprisingly, although these objects could not be seen, by the reader at least, the two texts somehow give a sense of closure to both the narrator (and the reader hopefully). In other words, these two objects are the textual material because they lack the ability to form their materiality on the eyes of the reader. Nevertheless, their substantiality cannot be denied since it is there in front of the reader and the characters. Their substantiality is an event caused by the interaction between the reader and the text.

Secondly, a text is simply not a "(good) literature" (Barthes, 1986, p. 58). On one hand, the first quality of materiality relies significantly on being in a narrative – hence, it can be easily classified. The handwriting and the drawn cathedral are the plot materials that make Carver's "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral" a (good) story. The handwriting puts the narrative in motion while the drawn cathedral breaks the flow of Carverean narrative in order to give the story a substance. On the contrary, the handwriting and the drawn cathedral, by themselves as the textual events, are not literature. They precede literature for they are textual. They are the marks that mark the marks – that is, they are handwriting (we will discuss about this later). When the

two objects are put in a narrative they become the plot materials; however, by themselves, they are textual. On the other hand, since a text is not a literature, its author is not the author (Barthes, 1986, p. 58). The “handwriting” and the “drawn cathedral” in the two stories are dependent on the subject called author in order to be substantial. The author is the one who makes them matter. If the words are left out of the story, there is a small chance for them to matter as they are here (even now). Also, the author in this sense is purely singular because there can be only one author for a story (in most cases), in which case it is the author called Raymond Carver. On the contrary, the author of the handwriting, or the one who writes, is not limited because a text “is situated at the limit of the rules of the speech-act” (Barthes, 1986, p. 58). The handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” is written by the narrator’s wife, someone in Denmark, and the narrator. Even though the wife says that she is the one who writes the letter, the narrator is convinced that it is not her but by someone in Denmark. The letter may be hers; however, the handwriting is not hers. The narrator also is the author as he writes the letter at the moment he recalls it. When he shows that his wife does not usually underline the words, instead of being underlined, the letters are italicized. It should be noted that the letters are italicized when they are of personal voice and underlined. As a result, underlined/italicized words show that the handwriting is of the wife and the narrator. The drawn cathedral in “Cathedral” is also not written by the author. At the moment of drawing, it can be said that it is the narrator and the blind man that draw the cathedral. The guiding hands are guided by the hand that they guide. The hands that draw are of plurality for there are more than one that draw the cathedral. This echoes another aspect of the text, that the text “can be *broken*” because of its plurality, or difference, or dissemination, or the lack of the father author. (Barthes, 1986, pp. 59-61). The meaning of the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are not fixed as they change accordingly to their relation with the hands. If it is of the narrative material, of the work, it is better defined by the one-handed author.

Thirdly and consequently, because a text is not defined, it is a signifier (Barthes, 1986, p. 59). In terms of work, the two objects presented here are the signifieds of the narrative and the author. After all, the first quality of materiality is of

the words. Even though they are used as signifiers to define the new meaning-position in the text, they are signified by the author. The handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” is the narrator’s signified-signifier of the things subjective, or the ahistorical thing. As discussed in the previous chapter, the narrator objectifies and factualizes everything. Anything to him could be quantified by numbers with factual dates and numbers. As a result, he could not comprehend the significance of the letter because he could not understand the subjective aspect of the handwriting. It denies the factual and historical background of such a subject. The drawn cathedral in “Cathedral” is more direct in its signified nature. It symbolizes that the “true” seeing is the blind one, the one where appearance of reality does not interfere with the real. However, in terms of text, the two objects here are “radically symbolic” (Barthes, 1986, p. 59). The symbolic here is not a figure of speech but something strictly linguistic (symbol, as a figurative tool, is a signified since it locks one thing with the other). Looking at the two objects closely, they are symbolic for they are in the field of a signifier. While the handwriting is self-explanatory as a mark that marks, and as the hand without the author body or with its own body, so is the drawn cathedral in the process of drawing. Both the hands of the narrator and the blind man in “Cathedral” lack the body of the author. There are only the hands in the process of drawing-writing the cathedral on a white blank page. Furthermore, the drawing-writing of the cathedral itself is the signifier of a signifier: a signifier (drawing) that represents itself with another signifier (cathedral as signifier of the other’s signifier and so on). The drawing-writing blind is the signifying itself. It neither needs to signify nor sees the object. There are only the hands and the drawing-writing in the field of signifier. That is to say, because both objects from the two stories are written by any hand without the author body, they are textual signifiers by default. (The subject of handwriting, or hand-writing will be discussed in detail in the next section, but for now one should be able to see that the handwriting, as the event of drawing-writing blind, is textual.)

Lastly, Barthes says that while work is of reading only, or of consumption, text brings reading and writing closer by way of playing (1986, p. 62). Because the narrative material is of words being used with their new meaning-

position, the words could be read²⁹ only. After all, the author writes their work to be read or consumed. The words in the work, because they are used as plot materials, are to be read as such according to the narrative and story. The reader could not play with the work for that very reason. They are ruled by the “Father’s inscription” (Barthes, 1986, p. 61). Text, on the other hand, plays with the idea of reading and writing. In “Cathedral,” the event of blind drawing-writing is a play of writing and reading between the narrator and the blind man. The distance of the two activities is shortened because of the drawn cathedral. The narrator and the blind man both read and write simultaneously. The blind man, at first, reads the narrator’s handwriting by following the trace or the movement of the hand. Eventually, when the narrator closes his eyes, it is the blind man’s hand over the narrator’s that writes the cathedral as the narrator only follows (reads) the trace of his blindness. The hands without the eyes, or the body, are not limited by the sight of the reader and the gaze of the author. This is so because handwriting or the blind hand is not subjected by the full body of the author. It is a body without organ(ization): there is no organization that bars writing from reading. Because of the lack of organization, the textual event plays with the individuals (playing is not a privileged performance of a being only). Like the musical instrument, the listener (reader) is also played by the text (Barthes, 1986, p. 63). In “Blackbird Pie,” the narrator is played by the handwriting. While the handwriting is “read” by the narrator as he contemplates on its origin, it is also re-written at the same time. Because the handwriting is not a material thing, but a textual event. It cannot be read as it is. Reading itself re-writes the handwriting. The handwriting is not fixed by one author. The handwriting also reads and writes the narrator. The reading can be seen from how the narrator is read as he reads the text event. The reading of the handwriting is made manifest in the reader (a handwriting cannot actually reads the narrator!). The reader learns about the narrator and the wife as the handwriting is read. The rewriting of the narrator done by the handwriting can be seen at the end of the story. It is not the letter-epistle that rewrites the narrator “but the things...that were *in* the letter...there’s far more to this than somebody’s handwriting” (p. 613). Simply

²⁹ The use of the word ‘read’ here should be read in relation to seeing an image – that is, reading as a fixation on the ideal meaning and image.

put, the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are textual events because they disorganize the space of writing and reading.

In conclusion, with reference to Barthes's concept of textuality, the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are textual events. Their lack of perceptible (imaginary) materiality distinguishes them from the word-things in a work. While the first quality of materiality relies on how the word is perceived with its new meaning-position in an author's discourse-narrative, this quality is of event – that is, of happening as an event in a text. They cannot be seen, but their effect affects the text. The author of the word-things is one. He is the father who materializes the words, making them visible to the eyes of the reader while the textual event lacks the author. This is not because there is no author; it is that the author as the Father does not exist for the text. The father is foreclosed by the text – hence, the text's schizophrenic nature. It does not have the meaning as the work. On this quality of materiality, the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are neither signifiers nor signifieds. They are the “aftermath” of meaning (Barthes, 1986, p. 59). There is only an event of a text that cannot be seen on the eyes of the reader. Most importantly, as the text is schizophrenia, it disorganizes the boundary between writing and reading. In the first quality of materiality, the mentioned two objects, as the word-things, show that reading and writing cannot be performed simultaneously. It is the author who writes the words in the work, and it is the reader who reads (sees) those works. However, because the second quality is textual, there is neither the one who writes nor the one who reads. The reader writes as s/he reads, and vice versa for the writer (there is no author, only writers in the text!).

Before we discuss the idea of handwriting itself, it would be apt in saying something about the lack of the political tone in the analysis above. In “From Work to Text,” one could be able to notice the political tone in Barthes' discourse. Work is of something that is driven by the concept of hierarchy, based on the idea of the author and signified meaning. The idea of literature is also associated with work for the reason that literature can be easily defined. As a result, the bound and defined artifact is deprived of its freedom. To Barthes, as how I see it, work is the product of

totalitarianism, of the Father and tamed desire. Text is not the opposite of work. It is that which liberates an artifact from the idea of work. It turns the factual and meaningful into a play of meanings. Literature does not have to be work. It is not governed by the idea of a good story, written by the author. Literature can be written by anyone and its significance is of its multiplicity, or its paradoxical nature. The activity of interacting with the artifact also changes. While the reader can only read the work, that is of consumption, the ~~reader~~ of the text (it has to be put under erasure because the reader does not read in a general sense of the word) can play with the text. Obviously, work deprives freedom from an individual. The reader cannot enjoy the work for they can only consume/be consumed according to the law of the Father. Finally, a text is of pleasure and desire. These two words are rather problematic in defining as noted by Deleuze in his notes to Foucault "Desire and Pleasure" (1994) in which he addresses Foucault the problem of these two words. Moreover, in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the idea of desire and pleasure is of two different sphere, but not separated: the former is of the unconscious while the latter the body. However, in this context I believe what Barthes means is that of an enjoyment. The text gives the reader an enjoyment when ~~read~~.

Though the idea of work and text are applied to the first and the second quality of the maternity respectively, the implication of political agenda is not translated from Barthes' text. The very reason for this is that the idea of work and text for the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are not of the separate planes. The politic is not of the macro one between egalitarianism and totalitarianism, but a micro one purely between the work and the text. The idea of work and text in the handwriting and the drawn cathedral are connected and overlapped. The separated quality of the first and the second is not something ordered hierarchically, but differently. The numerical order is used only as a tool to simplify and distinguish two types of materiality. On one hand, the idea of handwriting, as a textual event, is made manifest by the work of the author named Raymond Carver. That is to say, the handwriting as a textual event is made possible according to how it is presented in Raymond Carver's "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral." Without its new-meaning position in those stories, the reader and the critic would not be able to see the handwriting as a textual event.

The handwriting would not exist; the handwriting and its aspect would not be acknowledged. The word is always materialized to the eyes of the reader. In the end, a psychotic needs the father to have its body even though the father is foreclosed. On the other hand, as the semen is to be disseminated, the idea of the handwriting is purely accidental by its nature. The handwriting cannot be shown in the work as it is. There is only an event of a text that can only be seen in a work. The author cannot control the handwriting as a word. This does not mean that it lacks materiality because it is materialized when it is read and written. The distinction between the two qualities of materiality is not to criticize one or the other, but to show their difference and their connection. There is no “better” materiality in this context since work and text are not driven by a macro political goal (apparently, Barthes prefers text more than work for their differences in political sense).

Also, one should note that the first quality does not function as the signifier of the second one because this would imply the politic of signifier (at this point it is assumed that the reader has a background knowledge of the two schools of the signifier for we will not be discussing them here. The first one is of the classical one where reference precedes the word while the second one is that it is language that structures the existence of things). Even though the first quality is the one that determines the existence of the second, as it is the Carver who puts the idea of handwriting in the story, this does not mean that the event of handwriting is of the second order. The word handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” is not a representation of the event handwriting, but the condition of a narrative, or its limitation to be precise. In the story, the narrator is obsessed with the handwriting because it signifies the wife by not signifying her. The handwriting is brought up in relation to the wife. It does not have anything to do with the idea of the handwriting discussed above. The event handwriting is only the rupture of the handwriting used in the story. It is a left over which the narrator non-consciously mentions in order to make sense of the event of his wife leaving him. The relation between the word handwriting and the event handwriting is not of signifier and signified, but of a conditioned accidental circumstance of a narrative. The second quality of the materiality that is of the textual event is not a signified but a function of the word. The “drawn cathedral” and the

“handwriting” are the event handwriting (which we will discuss next). Because textual event is not something that is of signified by nature, the moment of utterance is the moment it functions. It disappears at the moment it is said. The handwriting is missing at the moment the author tries to show how the wife writes. The text only italicizes and underlines the word “talked.” The drawn cathedral and the act of drawing is nowhere to be seen in the text also. There are only the traces of handwriting and drawing. If the signified is the already-exist object, the disappearance of the event handwriting shows that the event does not precede the words. The event occurs simultaneously with the utterance of the very word. Also, if a signifier is defined by its arbitrariness to a signified, the relation between the two qualities is not of a signifier and a signified. This would imply that a signified precedes the signifier. The utterance of the handwriting is the formation of the production of the event. It is not arbitrary that the utterance of the word causes the event handwriting to disappear. The sound, of course, is arbitrary (we cannot deny that), but the act of utterance of the word in the story is not. We can discuss much further about the politic and handwriting. However, as of now, one should be able to notice that the work quality and the textual quality of the handwriting does not follow Barthes’s political aim. By themselves the textual quality is a signifier and the work a signified, and yet when they are related, they are not strictly signifier and signified. The next question is: what is the handwriting or a mark of the letter in Carver’s short stories?

Handwriting: the Signifier of the Letter, or the Letter-Signifier

Handwriting in Carver’s short stories is a mark, put on top of the letter-trace as discussed in the previous chapter. Because the letter is self-effacing, it needs something to mark its disappearance. In this case, it is the materiality of the letter that could mark such phenomena. The handwriting is the event that occurs before and after the self-effacement of the letter. The handwriting, graphically, is an edge of the letter, the borderline that starts and ends the letter. This does not mean that the handwriting has an ability to “end” and/or “begin” the letter. Its function is to mark the beginning and the end of the letter, making the letter more tangible, to be a mark of the trace. As discussed in the previous chapter, the disappearance and appearance of the letter in

Carver's short story are sudden. As a result, it needs the weight or the materiality from the handwriting to mark it down, though temporary.

On one hand, the handwriting occurs before the letter because it is literally writes over the letter of the letter. The handwriting "covered the pages of the letter" in "Blackbird Pie" (p. 601), and is "over the paper" in "Cathedral" (p. 528). It marks the location of the trace before the trace appears. The narrator in "Blackbird Pie" knows about the handwriting before the letter arrives. He says that he has received the wife's letters and notes for more than seventeen hundred times (p. 601). As one could see, there has always been the handwriting before the particular (changed?) handwriting as the mentioning of the previous "letters" seems to imply. The handwriting of the previous letters exists prior to the particular mark of the particular letter-epistle in the text. The handwriting in "Cathedral" is slightly more complicated to see in terms of its temporal position to the letter, not because of its sheer complexity, but because of its formal multiplicity. There are more than one event handwriting in the story. The anecdote about the blind man touching (seeing) the wife's face with his hands is the event handwriting. By itself, it is an event. It has to be performed at the moment it is uttered, and that is of seeing of the blind. *How could the blind see without blind gesture of the hand? Words would not suffice for the hand that has eyes.* The fact that it is both written and read has been already discussed earlier. Nevertheless, it should be added that the act is literally the writing of a hand: the writing that has the blind hand as its subject and object. The hand has to write and be written in order to be a handwriting. The act also marks the advent of letter as it precedes the wife's routine of writing a letter to the blind man. Most importantly, the speech act of the letters between the two is marked by the handwriting as a voice on the tape: the signatory in the voice. The other form of handwriting that precedes the letter in "Cathedral" is the act of drawing. At the moment of drawing, when the two hands are connected, the hands mark the coming of the letter, the missing words at the end of the tape. The letter here is of course not the drawn cathedral but how it affects the narrator and the blind man: they both see the trace after the event handwriting.

On the other hand, the handwriting is posited at the end of the trace because, even though the letter is missing, it is the object of handwriting that marks

the absence of the letter. This can be seen easily in "Blackbird Pie." The narrator states in the beginning of the story that he loses the letter. Even though he tries to recreate the letter, its content can only be revived back, not the tone in the handwriting of the wife (p. 598). As it could be seen, the letter is missing, leaving only the subject of handwriting to be seen. Furthermore, before disclosing the loss of his wife's letter, the narrator's attention is held by the handwriting. One should keep in mind that the temporal logic of the story is structured around the recalling of the event; therefore, at the moment he recalls about the event of the night his wife leaves him, the letter is long gone, leaving only its mark on the letter. This does not mean that handwriting could exist without the letter. On the contrary, because the letter is self-effacing, the missing of the letter is essentially its presence. Furthermore, as the narrator shows that he has received a number of letters from his wife, he could not present the reader with a single letter, implying that they are also missing. It is the handwriting from those missing letters that is the only material affirming his argument. In "Cathedral," at the end of the letter, when the blind man is about to say what he thinks of the narrator, it is the hand that appears after. It should be noted that the knocking and the hands are two separate things. The knock is the function of the letter in which it erases itself. The hand is the handwriting that marks the disappeared letter. The wife's attempt to write a poem can also be seen as a handwriting. If we follow the logic that the handwriting could mark the beginning and ending of a trace, while the wife's attempt to write a poem marks the beginning of a trace, the beginning of the voice-letter, the same event also marks the end as the whole event is recalled by the narrator. The letters between the wife and the blind man are also missing, like the wife's letter in "Blackbird Pie." What is left is the handwriting of the wife. She re-writes the trace (about the experience) as she re-reads it: the textual quality of the handwriting event. Lastly, while the drawing of a cathedral marks the beginning of the act of tracing the cathedral, it does not mark the end of the trace for the drawing is never finished. The narrator refuses to open his eyes. The text does not show whether the blind man takes his hand off the narrator's or not. This suggests the possibility that the narrator is still in the process of drawing, still on the trail of tracing after the seeing of the blind. However, this does not imply that the handwriting could not mark the end of a trace. After all, if we look at "Cathedral" as a story about a trace, the beginning and the

ending are marked by the handwriting of the blind man: the act of seeing the wife's face and drawing with the narrator.

As one should have noticed, handwriting is not an event of alphabetical letter. The letters are the representation of sound that makes up a word when juxtaposed accordingly to each other. Even though they are written differently each time they, the sound they signify, arbitrary as it may be, remains the same. They do not connect to the body of the writer as the letters are purely symbolic artifacts. Their function is of signification: an arbitrary object at its finest. Handwriting is not limited to letter. It is an event that precedes the letter for it signifies the letter: a letter-signifier, and a mark of the trace. In "Blackbird Pie," it could be seen that while the word "talked" is written with the same set of letter, it is not the same word. "That simply isn't the way she'd write 'talked'" (p. 601). Unlike the letter,³⁰ handwriting is positive. It "connects" to the body of the subject. One should notice that the word "connect" is not similar to signifierness (signification denotes both signifier and signified). A process of signifying of a signifier is when an object (artifice or being) gives an idea its concrete form, whether it is an idea of sound or being. For example, on one hand, an elephant is not an elephant, but the word "elephant" signifies the concept of elephant to the object elephant; on the other hand, a material of an elephant signifies the idea of an elephant by giving the scientists and artists something tangible to their idea. Handwriting is something that distinguishes the scientist's elephant from the artist's. This does not mean that they have different elephant, but that each of their elephant only has a positive connection to the hand of the writer. In "Blackbird Pie," even though the wife insists that the letter is hers, the narrator is not convinced. He believes that the letter comes from her, but the hand that writes it is not hers simply because of the way she writes "talked" and the underlining of the words. If the narrator reads the word "talked" according to the formation of the letter, there would be no complication of the plot. The letters t-a-l-k-e-d are arranged according to the

³⁰ The letter here could be both printed, typed, and/or written. The idea of handwriting is something that is not specific only to written letter only. As it could be seen in "Blackbird Pie," the wife's handwriting is seen by the narrator as something that could be repeated without any difference. To him, a handwriting is a printed and/or typed word. This implies that even though it is his wife's, the handwriting is not connected to her. It can stand on its own according to the narrator's history with the handwriting.

structure of English. The letters are written differentially, or negatively. The word negative does not mean that the letters are negative, but that the letter cannot signify itself materially. An individual only acknowledges them negatively – that is, a is different from b (Saussure, 1916, p. 68). Hence, the word “talked,” if it is read letter by letter, will be read as t is different from a, l, k, and so on, forming a signifier that is different from others in the lexicon.

The handwriting is to be read as an event on the letter. It is an event material that happens (forms?) on the letters. It does not have to be letter per se. For example, while the underlining is not of the letter in “Blackbird Pie,” because it is not included in the English alphabetical order, it is a matter of handwriting. “[M]y wife *never* underlined her words for emphasis” (p. 601). In the beginning of the story, the event handwriting on the letters is described adequately by the narrator that it is the tone, not the content (p. 598). The tone of voice is a component of a discourse that cannot be literally seen on the letters, but the reader, with keen ears and eyes, can “see” it happen on the letter. While most of the time the tone of voice could affect the meaning of the word – a spiteful uttered interjection is different from an interjection in a moment of surprise. In this context the handwriting is not a tone of voice in every aspect. The meaning of the letters is not shifted by the change of hand. What it affects is the meaningfulness of the letter. Unlike meaning, meaningfulness of a word does not always have to be a word with meaning. It can be put roughly as a value, not a symbolic one, of the letters: a connection that could be “seen” on the word between the reader and the writer. In “Blackbird Pie,” it could be seen that, because of the handwriting, value of the letters inside the letter is affected. The meaning of the letter remains the same. The narrator acknowledges what the letter is about. It can be assumed that the letters are written according to how they are designed to be read as the narrator can make sense of the letter. However, its meaningfulness is affected by the handwriting, as it “happens” on the letters as an event. That is to say, the handwriting in the story marks the letter as something more than a word for word communication. This is not the same as connotation, for a connotation is denotation in a way: a minor one. It is to be read as more than a purely symbolic formation of language for handwriting is connected to the body of the writer; however, we will talk

about this in a moment after the discussion about the other event handwriting in Carver's short story.

The event handwriting is not fixed on the letter only. The short story "Cathedral" shows that it could be of voice, drawing, and even touching. Generally speaking, a voice, as a mean of a face-to-face communication, has an affinity with the speaker's presence. The speaker plays the role of the author for s/he is present at the moment of speaking. Even though a meaning always slips, the presence of the speaker, as the speaking author, could stabilize the meaning for a moment. The instantaneous of a respond and the apparent body gesture play important role in defining and confining a speech. Quoting Hegel, Derrida says in the beginning of *Of Grammatology* (1976) that by speaking and hearing one's own voice, a *phone* communication puts the speaker closer to the ideality of subjectivity; therefore, s/he is closer to the object, without having to be in a practical relation to the object communicated (p. 12). Writing, thus, is looked at as the representation of sound for it is, to use one of Plato's infamous words, thrice removed from the object. It should be kept in mind that speaking, while performative, is not actually an event. While an event occurs without the permanent determination of the subject, speaking as a practice is determined through the speaker's performance. The writing-reading implies that the author is missing. There is only the event that determines the subjects, preventing subject from stabilizing its identity: an event of selflessness. On the other hand, speaking is about preserving one's subjectivity in terms of the speaker's narcissism. Despite the fact that it relies on the static presence of the speaker, hearing oneself speaks denotes the narcissistic nature of the Father-author who can only hear the words uttered by him: a muted man who masturbates to his own image of an ideal meaning. That being said, the voice in "Cathedral" is handwriting because it is written, read, and deferred on the letter.

Unlike the voice of the speaker which is immediate, the voice, because it is on the letter, is deferred. This can be seen not only when the wife and the blind man have to wait for the other message as the symbolic/postal order is structured by the idea of deferral, but also when the husband, who is not the designed destiny of the letter, is put in relation to the letter. The final word(s) of the letter cannot be delivered

at the moment it is expected – that is, when the husband anticipates the letter in its whole expression. The knocks on the door, as one of the aspect of the letter in Carver's short stories, interrupt the immediacy of the voice of that last utterance. "From all you've said about him, I can only conclude –" (p. 516). At this exact moment, the event of the handwriting could be seen. The dash mark o functions similarly to the underline mark in "Blackbird Pie." They are both the event of the letter that marks the letters. In this case, even though the letters are missing, the dash marks the absence of the voice, giving the presence to the absence: the present absence of the voice. Because it can be assumed that the original message consists of the last words, revealing what the blind man thinks of the narrator, the ellipsis of the word adds tone to the voice. It happens at the moment when the letter voice is played by the wife and the narrator, to listen to the message. It is something that happens over the voice, not something from the voice: an event that marks something on the letter that is absent from the letter.

(The signatory perspective of the handwriting on the voice can also be seen from the fact o how the mark of absence affects the words themselves. It gives the letter the signature of the blind man. The message cannot be seen (read) immediately for the reader is blind to it. The blindness, however, is not permanent. The blind could still see; it is only that their perception is put on hold. The narrator finally learns what the blind man thinks of him through the process of blind drawing. Nevertheless, the message is deferred. He refuses to open his eyes as he learns about "something." While in chapter 2 this is said to be the effect of the trace, here it should be added that the effect of trace overlaps with the event handwriting of the blind man. The message of "something" is learned by the characters, but it is deferred from the reader. Even though we could assume what "something" is, it could not be the same as the narrator learns from the blind man's signatory voice. It also should be noted that the narrator does not identify with the blind man at the end. He closes his eyes not to be blind, but to read and write the handwriting of the blind, to participate in the event handwriting of the blind, as a remainder of the letter)

Where's the Drawing?

Likewise, the event handwriting can be seen in the act of drawing for the image itself cannot be seen while what could be seen is the event of drawing itself. Generally speaking, drawing by itself is the practice of perception, acting like an alphabetic in which it turns voice into image, from the realm of sound to image. Drawing is to be seen by both the artist and the audience. Even the blind artists, such as Bramblitt, use hands to perceive the image drawn. The event handwriting, here, is of the fact that the image cannot be seen on the textual level for there is only an event of the drawing that could be “read.” It is at the moment of drawing in a text that the images are effaced, and the event is written by the hands. Before discussing about the event, first we have to see why the image could not be seen in the story.

Even though the text shows the object drawn by the narrator, such as “box that looked like a house,” “spires,” “windows with arches,” and “flying buttress” (p. 528), the blind man could not see the image. On one hand, there is no indication in the text to show that the blind man could see the picture. At the end of the drawing, the blind man only asks the narrator to look at their drawing and tells him what he thinks of it (p. 529), implying that the point of drawing is not for the blind man to see, but to let the narrator truly read the missing voice at the end of the letter. ““You’ll see. Draw”” (p. 527). On the other hand, the very reason that the drawn cathedral cannot be seen is that it functions like an alphabetical letter. It represents a voice. In this case, it represents the voice from the TV, talking about a cathedral, in which the narrator tries to translate it into words first, and then the image for the blind man. However, because alphabetic letters can be materialized only when the subject has a symbolic position in the structure, the blind man could not see the drawn image. The story does not follow Hegel’s argument that “the ear...perceives...interior vibration of material substance without placing itself in a practical relation towards the object” (as cited by Derrida, 1976, p. 12). The blind man’s ear could not bypass the relation between him and the material cathedral. The substance could not exist without a prior knowledge of the thing, indicating that the knowledge, as formed in Symbolic Order, or the system of absence, exists prior to the voice, or the system of present. The blind man can see the cathedral that the narrator tries to convey, as he sees it and how the reporter in the

TV program shows, only when he could share the symbolic position as the other two: seeing. In other words, the blind man could not see because there is no indication in the text (as the text shows that it is the narrator that is to see) and that drawing itself is representative or perceptive in nature which, as a result, forecloses the blind man from its structure.

However, what the blind man could see (the erasure mark is imminent since seeing by the blind is not a literal seeing) is the act of drawing itself, or the event handwriting. “The image of the movement... of what this finger-eye inscribes, is thus sketched out within me...It coordinates the possibilities of seeing, touching, and moving. And of hearing and understanding, for these are already word of the blind...” (Derrida, 1993, pp. 3-4). In the story, these gestures or events of movement can be seen when “[the blind man] closed his hand over [the narrator’s] hand” (p. 527), “[t]he blind man felt around the paper. He moved his tips of his fingers over the paper, all over what I had drawn, and he nodded” (p. 528), and “his fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper” (p. 528). The hand that closes upon the other hand is open. It does not foreclose the possibility of writing and reading. That is to say, as one of the textual quality of the event handwriting, the handwriting is written and read simultaneously. While the idea of writing-reading of the letter-signifier has been discussed above, there are some aspects that should be noticed here. The handwriting of the blind man and the narrator marks the trace in the drawing. Like the wife’s handwriting in “Blackbird Pie,” the gesture of the hands distinguishes the image as an event, a particular one. The image is still the same, a cathedral. It is the event handwriting on the material itself that marks the trace of the material. Without the handwriting, the narrator in “Blackbird Pie” would not be able to be on the trace of the ahistorical event. Similarly, without the written event on the drawing, the narrator would not be able to acknowledge the trace of “something.” This can be seen from the moment that the blind man sees the picture by moving his fingers all over the paper. The tension of the pen forces a mark upon the paper, leaving the trace for the blind man to see, presumably a drawn cathedral. Nevertheless, the mark on the paper is nothing of important in our discussion (However, Lacan might say otherwise in his “Lituraterre” (1971)). It is the action of the blind man itself that is the mark. He

performs a blind reading in the middle of a blind writing (for the blind could only see the mark on the trace). The narrator momentarily stops writing, letting the blind man read, and then starts writing again – hence, the textual quality of handwriting. The interruption or the break lets the narrator see the trace in front of him: the trace of the message from the blind man’s act of seeing. It is laying bare all over the paper, unformed, and yet not random, the trace of the missing last word(s). The reading of the blind man, tracing after the marks on the paper, is the event handwriting that marks the trace of the letter. The narrator sees the blind man reading; therefore, he reads what the blind man sees: a doubling reading.

In conclusion, the handwriting event at this point focuses on the movement of blind drawing that gives the narrator and the blind man eyes to read the mark on the trace. The narrator can finally read the letter-trace as he finally acknowledges the mark of the blind. One could say that the narrator finally feels empathy towards the blind man. But as we all know, this is only viable at the level of a humanistic reading. This is not empathy for empathy is identification. It is not even about equality between individuals. After all, the politic of the event handwriting is situated at the micro level between text and work.

The similar event handwriting in “Cathedral” could also be seen at the moment when the blind man touches the face of the narrator’s wife. The movement of the blind man’s hand on the wife’s face is the mark of the trace. It marks the trace of the wife’s face: the line that traces her face. Before the event, the face is expressionless and blank to the blind man. He could not see her. He could only hear (see) her tone of voice as she “read[s] stuff to him... [and] help[s] him organize his little office” (p. 54). Nevertheless, as discussed above, to the blind man, the voice is not as immediate as Hegel believes. Even though the voice could translate her tone, which is an event handwriting, the blind man could not see her. There is the trace in her voice, but he could not see the trace. The act of seeing here does not imply that he sees what she looks like. On the contrary, the seeing of the blind is to mark the trace of seeing: the eye contact, or the meeting of the eyes. This phenomena could be seen in the previous discussion about the handwriting on the drawing. The narrator sees the eyes of the blind, or how the blind sees, by watching him moving his fingers over the

paper. At the same time, the blind man could see the narrator as he marks the trace on the paper and “closes” his hands on the narrator’s. It is at the moment when the narrator sees the blind man’s reading that the eye contact is made. *It is of the function of the eye and hand, not of meaning made by them, that is an event handwriting.* Similarly, the eye contact is made when the blind man touches the wife’s face. The wife could see the blind man’s reading her face (in case of the narrator, his face is on the white page as his expression on the paper). Like the fingers’ gesture on the drawing, the wife tells the narrator that he touches “every part of her face” (p. 514). The event marks the trace of seeing: the blind man sees the wife’s face, and the wife sees the blind man reading her. The trace that cannot be translated by voice is marked. This can be seen vividly in their routine of sending the letter. Because both of them have seen the trace, they are put on the trace. The wife and the blind man trace “something” (p. 514). While the wife traces the effects of the event, the blind man, presumably, traces someone who has seen him see because at the end of the story, the trace of the letters marked by the gesture of handwriting brings him to the narrator. (Could this be the desire of the blind, or even the blind’ *jouissance*, to see the other see him? The enjoyment of watching the other watching himself. While this might follow Lacan’ famous formula on the ego formation and the gaze, it should be noted that the blind man is blind and his gaze is of something else entirely. But we will leave this for the psychoanalyst to ponder.)

The Writing of the Written Hand

As of now, one should be able to see that the event handwriting is not a complete event of the Symbolic. While the event is connected to the linguistic phenomena, which involves the motif of signification and differance, the non-symbolic aspect of the event could be seen in the event’s connection with the hand(s), the eyes, and their movement. If language is accumulated as Symbolic on the level of the unconscious, the event handwriting is on the body. The gesture of the hand is neither posited in memory nor amnesia. It is made present at the moment that the hands move either over the paper or the face. As said by the narrator of “Blackbird Pie,” the handwriting is of “*the pressure of the moment*” (p. 602). It is ahistorical, unlike the letters which can be located in history. The blind man could neither

remember nor forget what the narrator's wife looks like because he has never seen her. He does not move his hands over the wife's face from memory. It is the flow of the line on the wife's face that articulates his hand's movement. At the same time, the wife's face is re-written as the blind man reads her face. On the symbolic level, it is the trace on the wife's face alone that signifies her face, differentiating hers from the others' that the blind man could have seen. However, at the non-symbolic level, the movement of the hand does not signify the face as a representation of the existing face. It re-writes the face while reading, giving it a signatory of the event. Similarly, the event handwriting on the drawing of the cathedral is presented at the moment of writing. Even though the drawing of a cathedral is supposed to signify the cathedral by way of difference, structuring different parts of the cathedral, drawing from the memory of the narrator, it is the doubling of the hands that makes it outside the order of memory and amnesia. The narrator neither forgets about the cathedral nor draws it completely from memory. Despite the narrator's list of the cathedral's parts, the style and movement of his hands are articulated by the hands of the moment: the doubling of the hands. This means that the blind man also does not draw the cathedral as he sees it. Connected to the narrator's hand, his follows the moment/movement of the narrator's hand. As a result, while it cannot be denied that the image is drawn under the idea of representation, the event handwriting of the drawing is non-representative, both of the object and itself – the first textual quality of a handwriting. It gives the drawing a signatory aspect. That is to say, the movement of the hand marks (writes) the trace of the letter in the drawing as drawing in Carver's story is an act of exchanging the letters between the blind man and the narrator.

The event handwriting also connects to the eyes for two reasons. On one hand, as could be seen from above, the eyes are needed for the eye contact formation. The seeing of seeing is the formation of the eyes where the reader could see (acknowledge) the writer seeing. It marks the trace on the letters, making the writer partial presence in his absence. That is to say, the handwriting has to be seen in order to exist. However, the eyes here are not restricted to the optical organ along as seen from the touching of the blind in "Cathedral" and the narrator's mention of the tone of voice in "Blackbird Pie." The event handwriting, as it is seen in Carver's short

stories, is not a seeing of the eyes per se, but the event of the eyes that sees their seeing, such as the acknowledging of the narrator and the wife of how the blind man sees in "Cathedral." If the eyes could not see their seeing, the handwriting would not be presented. In "Cathedral," the wife and the narrator are aware of their seeing as they observe the seeing of the blind man. It leaves them a kind of a signature of the event: the something of something. Nevertheless, if the eyes are of the past, as the narrator in "Blackbird Pie," where he compares the present letter to the past, the event handwriting would be turned into a historical artifact: handwritten letters. Unlike the event handwriting, the formation of such artifact is essentially and structurally symbolical. It signifies and differentiates from one another. Hence, the event handwriting in "Blackbird Pie" lacks the eye contact phenomenon. The narrator could see the tone on the letters, but he could not see the seeing of the wife. He literally materializes the event, turning a text into a work, making an event of handwriting into handwritten letters.

On the other hand, while the hand and its movement connect the body of the writer to the event, the eyes of the reader dismember the hand from the body. It is undeniable that a handwriting in general has a strong connection with the author. It confirms the presence of the author in his absence. What is signed by the handwriting is defined by the author: its meaning is his. However, if we look at the handwriting as an event, the handwriting has a possibility to commit a patricide by castrating the hand. Even though the handwriting confirms the authorial hand of the author, it is the reading eyes, a part of the event handwriting, that undermine the author, making him a writer: a maimed and muted individual. In "Blackbird Pie," it is the reading eyes of the narrator that cut his wife's hand. At the moment of the eye contact between the narrator and his wife (this has been discussed above where the seeing of the blind man is seen by the narrator and his wife in "Cathedral"), the handwriting, which is supposed to confirm the wife's absent presence on the letters, removes the wife's authority on the letters. The meaning of the words is not changed. However, his eyes see that the handwriting is not the wife's; the focus is on the material letter not the event. Even though the wife says that the letter is hers, he believes that the handwriting is not hers. Not only the movement of the hand that creates the event

handwriting is severed from the event, but also the wife's hand is detached from her body by the eyes of the narrator. Her hand, that is her authority over the letters, is undermined. The words of the author, in this case the narrator's wife, cannot affirm her authority in the letters as the narrator's eyes are fixed on the letters. As a result, the eye contact could not happen as the narrator eyes do not meet with his wife's. When the author and the handwriting exist in the same space, there is a possibility that she would be turned into a writer whom the handwriting does not recognize and who is erased by her own hand: the one hand that becomes independent from her by the reader's eyes – hence, the reason for the partial presence of the writer on a letter. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the narrator eventually could make an eye contact on the event handwriting at the end of the story. This does not mean that the wife is turned into the author, but that the narrator could see the gaze of the writer.

Lastly, the functions of the event handwriting are similar to the drawing of the blind, or a self-portrait of an artist. This does not mean that it is to a drawing. According to Derrida, there are three aspects that distinguish drawing from painting, making the latter what it is. The first aspect is its *aperspective* (Derrida, 1993, p. 44). In the moment of drawing, where the hand moves over the paper, the drafts(wo)man's³¹ sight is removed from the object. The gaze is to be lost in the night in which the draftsman has to follow the trace. As a result, there are two possibilities of this aspect. On one hand, the draftsman has to restore the loss of sight in the night through memory, or *anamnesis*. This is a “*naturally sacrificial matrix*” (Derrida, 1993, p. 47) of drawing where the sacrifice of sight enhances the draftsman's ability in drawing, making an object visible in the invisibility. “[D]raftman begins to go blind simply through the fear of losing his sight” (Derrida, 1993, p. 48). On the other hand, as the draftsman is lured by his image, blinded by his image, the amnesia of the memory acts as an index in this self-blinding (M. M. Clark, 1991, p. 53). An amnesia is not the opposite of memory, which is invisible. It is another kind of visibility imbued in the visibility itself, but not visible to the indifferent eyes. Merleau-Ponty says that amnesia is a supplement, or ‘*a punctum caecum*’ in consciousness (as cited

³¹ Since Derrida mentions that there is not much discussion about the draftwomen and a blind women, here the draft(wo)men is to be used in the equivalent of the blind, where sexuality is indifference.

in Derrida 1993, p. 52). One sees more than one is conscious of. It is an index for one's perception. This means that as a draftsman draws a self-image, it is the seeing of his/her own looking eyes that blinds the draftsman, putting him in the night of the trait.

Unlike drawing, and writing, according to Derrida, is neither memory nor amnesia. In "Cathedral" the blind man has no memory of the cathedral and the narrator's wife. He has to draw-write them to see them. In "Blackbird Pie," because the narrator reads the handwriting historically, comparing the one in his hand to the one in his memory, he could not see the event handwriting. The event handwriting is the moment of the present. Nevertheless, aside from the theme of memory, the idea of blindness in drawing could be seen in the event handwriting. Like the blind draftsman, in these ahistorical moments, the writer of the handwriting is blinded to what is in front of him/her. The blind man could not see how his hand is moved on the paper and on the wife's face. Likewise, the narrator could not see how his hand is moved, both in a sense that his eyes are closed and that his hands are held by the blind man. In "Blackbird Pie," as it has been repeated throughout this chapter, the wife is blind as she writes for it is the "pressure of the present" that writes. She could not see how she would write the letters. If the event handwriting was connected to the memory of the subject, the wife would be blinded to the pressure of the moment, the important aspect of the event handwriting. What is written would be a counterfeit of a handwriting: a multiple of the same, a *doppelgänger* of the past. On the contrary, an event handwriting functions similarly to the letter-trace because both are multiplicity. While there could be one event handwriting, for it occurs as the pressure of the present, it does not mean that this rupture could erupt once: a multiplicity of difference.

Despite the fact that event handwriting is not of the amnesia or amnesia, there is a possibility that such narcissistic phenomenon could be seen on the reader's side. Like the self-portrait, narcissism in the event handwriting is of the history of the reader. In "Blackbird Pie," the narrator is trapped his own gaze as he sees the handwriting historically. The eyes are lured by their own seeing of seeing themselves seeing. He sees that the handwriting is not the same as he used to see one.

The presence of the author could not even break this dyadic relation. As the wife says that the letters are hers, implying also that her eyes are looking at him, the narrator's eyes are locked onto his own eyes, saying that every word out of her mouth is underlined as it is on the letter (p. 608). It is in the end after the event of divorce that there is a break in the narrator's dyadic relation with his own gaze. This could be seen from how the narrator could see that the event is to be marked by the sound-event of "toted,' or 'beeped' or 'blasted'" (p. 612). His eyes are not locked onto his own eyes but the wife's eyes by the memory of a photograph: a doubling of memory (a photograph is itself a memory). "She looks into the camera" (p. 612). The break or the rupture is not created intentionally, but from the fact that the narrator himself keeps looking at his own eyes. The longer he holds on to the dyadic relation, the more the break will erupt. In other words, the break in the relationship is the manifested blind spot. Derrida says that a break or rupture comes from the fact that an event has been repeated "continually" and "interminably, for the break is the opposite of a random action, or an accident" (1981, p. 24). It can even be said that it is written, as a supplement, in the structure of a Narcissism in the event handwriting for a break to occur. The longer one stares at one image historically, the more one will see the other in the image.

Retrait

The second aspect of drawing is the withdrawal of the outline or the trait (Derrida, 1993, p. 53). Derrida's concept of the withdrawal of the trait, like his other ideas, refuses to be defined with the single logocentric meaning. According to Brunette and Wills, Derrida could be referring to writing because a trait is neither an essential linguistic nor symbolic (as cited in Wolfreys, 2004, p. 86). Imminently, this would imply that trait could also mean reading for reading happens simultaneously with writing. Nevertheless, in this moment, the withdrawal of the trait would imply the draftsman's brushstroke, or an outline of the figure on the drawing which has a linguistic formation. It is at the moment of drawing that the withdrawal of the trait could be perceived. Here Derrida focuses more on the brush stroke than the draftsman's eyes. An outline of a figure should not be seen in the drawing. The border of color is marked by the outline, and yet, there is only the juxtaposition of colors.

The trait, which is between the interior and exterior of a drawn figure, appears and disappears immediately and simultaneously. It appears at the moment the two edges are seen as separated; and it is the touching of the two that makes the trait disappear, leaving only the inside and outside, denying any “pure identification and forming” (Derrida, 1993, p. 54). In a way, a trait always retraits (withdraws and/or retreat). It can only be seen, despite the fact that it should not be, when it is withdrawn from the eyes.

One should be able to notice immediately that the letter-trace in chapter 2 is about the trace that appears in the drawing. The letter-epistle in Carver’s short stories can only be seen when it is unseen. The narrator and the reader have to retrace after the letter’s trace in order to see them. Nevertheless, the trait in each story functions differently. In “Why, Honey?” the trait occurs at the moment of contact between the narrative-form and the letter-form of the story. Even though the story begins and ends as a letter, it does not mean the structure of the story is distinguished (written/read) to letter and story sections. There is always the trace of the letter in the story and vice versa. There is no specific outline where the geopolitics of the form could be distinguished completely from one another because the trait “is in no way *ideal* or *intelligible*” (Derrida, 1993, p. 55). There is only the trace of the letter in the story about a letter: a limit of limit. It is posited at the edge of formal limit where narrative is not epistle, and yet such limitation could not define the limit that limits one form from the other: a difference in the act of retracing.

The letter in “Cathedral” is also a trace for it “divides itself in its ellipsis” (Derrida, 1993, p. 55). The reader could not see the letter, but the implied message of the letter could be read from the ending of the story, by watching the narrator and the blind man draw together. Aside from the letter itself, in the same story the wife and the narrator’s desire for “something” functions as the mechanism of retrait. In the wife’s attempt to re-enact the experience of seeing the blind’s man reading through poem writing, the withdrawal of the trace can be seen as she tries to trace after something only when it disappears. However, such desire only exists (appears) when it is not there (disappears). The narrator’s quasi-closure at the end of the story is also *literally* a retrait. He could not see, therefore he sees. Furthermore,

the wife and the narrator both trace “something.” That very “something” is the objective element of the trait. “[B]y *leaving* itself, and *starting from* itself, it takes leave of itself, and establishes itself in no ideal identity” (Derrida, 1993, p. 55). The wife and the narrator’s object of desire, if we could use such concept in this context and not being lampooned by the conservative lacanians, lacks a definite material object, whether it is feeling/sensation or a real object, because it is the outline of a trait: something that is there when it is not there. Similarly, in “Blackbird Pie,” the letter is a trace for it should not be presented in the story. Even though the narrator claims that he could recreate the whole letter, he mentions that there is always *something* missing from the letter.

As discussed above about the event handwriting as a mark of the letter-trace, the similarity between the drawing and the letter is not that both of them are traits, but that both of them mark the event of the trait. Most importantly, Derrida specifically states that “drawing always signals toward this inaccessibility... threshold where only the surroundings of the trait appear... which thus not belong to the *trait*” (Derrida, 1993, p. 54). Drawing itself, like the event handwriting, is not a trait. Because the trace and trait are “inaccessible,” to appear, they need drawing and the event handwriting to mark the movement of the trait. This does not mean that the trace and the trait would cease to be without the mark. As the name suggests, the mark only indicates the present disappearance. The only difference between drawing and event handwriting is that while drawing is of the present for it signals of what is to be the future and the past of the trait (the spectator and the spector in front of the drawing). Ironically, unlike the motif of present conscious of the event, the handwriting as a mark of the letter-trace is posited before and after the trace. That is to say, to mark the letter, one can only do after and before its “being” not at the moment of being. It marks the beginning (appearing) of the trace and its ending (disappearing). The beginning of the trace is not *literally* a beginning for the letter-trace connects to other traces, such as the multiplicity of letter’s form in “Blackbird Pie” and the shift from the last word to the drawing in “Cathedral.” This means that the mark is an event that erupts at the point of connection between the traces, marking its present-absent, which could be seen clearly in “Why, Honey?” for there is no

obvious mark of the shifting of text's form. Also, the word "before," as the handwriting which is posited before the letter, is to be read as on the letter since the letters are written on/before the letter-trace. Its materiality should temporarily mark the invisibility of the letter trace as in Carver's short stories about a letter as the letter cannot be seen. Consequently, the event handwriting is posited after as a remaining or the ruin of the letter.

The other aspect of drawing is "*the rhetoric of the trait*" (Derrida, 1993, p. 56). A drawing of a man cannot be by itself. The eyes do not see things as they are. Almost always, the eyes are written by/with the Symbolic Order. A subject only sees things as his eyes are written to see as such. That is to say, the eyes are always inscribed by the mark of the symbolic rules. Imminently, any drawing could not be without the order of words. Without a name, the self-portrait would not be one. It could be a portrait of any subject. The audience eyes would not recognize the trait on the drawing: the shadow of the draftsman's hand and the eyes that are looked and looking on the drawing. However, with the inscribed name (a self-portrait of...), it exists as a self-portrait. The spectator is turned into a reader as his eyes are articulated in the event of language: naming. "Drawing comes in the place of the name, which comes in the place of drawing" (Derrida, 1993, p. 57). Derrida furthers his argument on this subject by showing that there is a "*transcendental retrait or withdrawal*" (Derrida, 1993, p. 57) in the self-portrait of Henri Fantin-Latour, emphasizing on the duel between the two eyes, to show that there is always a duel in the drawing, such as between language and drawing, Fantin-Latour's withdrawn and seeing eye, and the sacrificial and transcendental logic in drawing. On one hand, one eye is opened as it looks at itself seeing. The moment that it sees is the moment that it could not see. The draftsman's eye could not lock onto the self-figure in front while drawing. What he draws and sees with the seeing eye is only a trait. The seeing eye, hence, is a blind eye. On the other hand, the other eye of the draftsman is not shown. It is usually present as a mark or a stain on the self-portrait (see Fantin-Latour's self-portrait on the cover of Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind* for more detailed example). To Derrida, this eye, the veiled eye, shows that as the blind man (the draftsman) "observes

himself,” he also “has others observe...” (Derrida, 1993, p. 57). In other words, the veiled eye of the draftsman is the other eye that is looking at the blind man seeing.

Language and Image of Handwriting

Likewise, the event handwriting is a “duel” between image and language. In “Blackbird Pie,” a handwriting is seen by the narrator as an image with history. It represents the representation of itself: its ontology is its repetition. However, this “image” is a repetition without the intensity of difference. It is a still image. Hence, the narrator’s eyes could not see the wife’s words, as his eyes are mutilated by the image of the letters. The eyes are drawn to the repeated form of an image. At the same time, the image of the handwriting is a defined articulation of the wife’s speech. She had been there when the narrator sees the image for it is of the past (a repetition without difference aims only to repeat the past-present: a present which is made past at the moment it is written). This could be seen from how the narrator can only see the handwriting as a representation of a wife in her younger years, when she was still content with the relationship.³² However, there are signs of event handwriting – an event that occurs at the linguistic level – on the image handwriting, such as the underlining of the letters and the tone of voice. The event is not a part of the image for it is an event of difference, the blind spot in the handwriting itself. When it is said that the handwriting is an image of repetition, it is an ideal image of a handwriting. The difference from the event, a difference which is of the present, is the break that erupts from that repetition: the underline and the change of hand. In the end of the story, the narrator dyadic relationship with the past image is castrated by the event of the present, the event on the symbolic (the signifying of a car horn as a break that breaks him from the general historian’s mindset). He loses his sight from the past image by seeing the blind spot on the past event: the wife’s smile from the photograph in his memory. This does not mean that language always win over image for this is only how the narrative works in Carvers’ short story.

³² Could this be the narrator’s latent desire to deny the present of the wife? That is, his eyes are blinded by the desire to preserve the old days. Are the castrated eyes the preservation of dyadic narcissism?

In “Cathedral,” the motif of image and language could be seen throughout the story surrounding the event handwriting. The event handwriting of the wife and the blind man at the beginning of the story is driven by the imaginary and the symbolic order. The imaginary line on the wife’s face – how her face is structured – is formed on the basis of repetition without difference. The face at the moment that the blind man wants to see is a face of imaginary. He wants to see her face as it had been: an unchanged ideal image. Like the narrator’s attitude toward the wife’s handwriting in “Blackbird Pie,” the line on the wife’s face, to the blind man, is to represent the wife’s speech to his sight (all those time he could only talk to her). However, as he touches her face, he does not only see her (imaginary) but he also rewrites and rereads her face (symbolic). Because his eyes could not speculate the face, the hand rewrites the face as he reads her facial line. The blind man sees the face differently. The pressure of the moment marks the event as difference and signatory. The linguistic element in this event is not written in the formation of signifying and naming only, but on the basis of writing, reading, and difference. Furthermore, at the end of the story, it can be seen that the event handwriting is a play between image and the language. The blind man and the narrator evidently engage in the activity of an image: they draw cathedral together. The point of drawing, as it could be assumed, is to represent a cathedral as represented on TV. The narrator hopes that he could repeat the image of cathedral without difference on a paper for he wants it to be “historically correct,” like the narrator and the image of handwriting in “Blackbird Pie.” Nevertheless, the image is not a pure pictorial artifact. The symbolic element breaks out at the moment of drawing as the image no longer captivates the speculators. The seeing eyes are rendered blind; the narrator’s eyes are closed. This is achieved by the symbolic gesture of the blind man. His words interpellate the narrator. “‘Close your eyes now,’ the blind man said to me [the narrator]” (p. 528). The narrator’s organ eyes are castrated by the symbolic power. As a result, the drawing of a cathedral is to be read and written instead of seeing. The pictorial artifact, as to capture the gaze, only connects to the eyes. However, because of the hands intervention, the blind and the narrator see with their hands. The structure of seeing is deconstructed into reading. The drawn cathedral ceases to be a pure image as the event handwriting creates it. The repetition now is with difference not only because of the obvious symbolic formation

on the narrator and the blind's man part, but simply also because the drawn cathedral does not represent the cathedral. It becomes a mark, an event handwriting on its pictorial form. The event handwriting, or the symbolic element in this context is bound to the event (act) of drawing while the image handwriting is bound to the artifact itself.

Lastly, as one should have noticed, the phenomenon of eye contact of the event in "Cathedral" works similarly to how Derrida writes about the transcendental withdrawal. The only difference is that during the act of drawing drawing both eyes are posited on one subject-object. However, in the event handwriting the seeing eye and the veiled eye are posited in different positions. One could always argue that in the drawing the veiled eye is the eye of the subject of the unconscious while the seeing eye is the ego's eye. However, in this context, we are talking about the position in an empirical space not the psychological one. That is to say, while the eyes in the drawing are of two different subjects, they are posited on the same material space, on the same drawing. The eyes of the event handwriting are posited on two different materials, or individuals. At the moment the wife and the narrator could see the blind's man reading (the face and the paper), there are two types of eyes. The first one is the blind man's eyes. They are veiled, but could be seen only when it makes a movement: the movement of the hand on the face and the paper. They do not share the same sight as the other one for it could not see itself seeing. Since their eyes could not see, they read and write accordingly to the trait on the smooth space. The writing process of the blind man's eyes is purely free from any deterministic force as they are articulated along the trait: the unseen wife's face and the cathedral on a paper. The writing and reading, though are generally two separate activities, are related in this context. While the reading implies a non-defined process of seeing, the writing process occurs simultaneously as it performs a signifying act on the object itself, undermining the ideal image of the face and cathedral.³³ The blind man's eye is the symbolic part of the event handwriting. The other eyes are the seeing eyes of the wife and the narrator. Their object of the gaze is connected to the pictorial

³³ One does not have to be *literally* blind to be able read. One has only to be blinded to the ideal image of the text in front of one's eyes when seeing the work.

artifacts. The seeing eyes could not write for they can only blindly follow the rule of an image. They are trapped by the object they are seeing: they are blinded by their gaze. However, there are moments in the process of seeing where the captive is freed. Such moments are when the seeing eye can see the seeing of the other. The seeing on the eye functions like a blind spot on the eye since the eyes could not see the seeing itself. Hence, when the seeing sees its own seeing blindness, the dyadic relation between the pictorial artifacts and the eyes is cut. In this context, it is of the eye contact on the event handwriting that frees the characters from their blinded sight. The wife could see how the blind man sees as he marks the trace on her face; the narrator could see the seeing of the blind man as he sees him moves his hand on the paper. Thus, the writing of the blind man on wife's face and on the paper is a signatory gesture.³⁴

In conclusion, the event handwriting in Carver's "Blackbird Pie" and "Cathedral" is the letter-signifier that marks the letter-trace. The event is the mark that signals the inaccessibility of the letter – hence, it could be found before and after the letter, marking the disappearing and the appearing of the trace. Unlike the materiality of the words and letters, the event handwriting's is symbolic. It cannot be seen on the eyes since in a text, the event happens, not transcribed into letters. The event is not limited to the alphabetical letters. For example, in "Cathedral" the event handwriting could be seen when the blind man touches the wife's face; and when he draws a cathedral with the narrator (it should be noted that both of the two events are related to the letter in the story). The event handwriting itself, though a symbolic event, is physically dependent. It relies on the movement of the writer hands and the seeing of

³⁴ Like the previous chapter, the theoretical part of the discussion is neither implemented in the more appropriate section nor written earlier because the writing is to emulate the flow of the rhetoric. Generally and academically speaking, the theoretical discussion of Derrida's essay should be put in the first part of the analysis, following the blockage of a thesis ritual. However, since the mark could be seen before and after to trace and to mark the inaccessibility of the trace, the theoretical part here should be read as a mark. It should mark the traits of Derrida's idea in the analysis retroactively, enabling the text to rewrite and re-read itself. The analysis of the letter-trace and the letter-mark is evidently my attempt to apply Derrida's idea in a new context. Nevertheless, I refuse to write about Derrida, leaving only his trace for those who have their eyes inscribed by Derrida to see. The unseeing eyes can also see but with the deferral of the blind. They can see only after seeing how the others see: that is the part where I observe Derrida's essay with the mark. At such moment, the unseeing eyes would see and rewrite the text retroactively, acknowledging the *punctum caecum*. At the same time, the seeing eyes would rewrite and reread as they see that they do not share the same eyes with the others for the others misread, mis-read, and mistreat the Other.

the eye to occur. The movement of the hand is not determined by the writer himself, but by the “pressure of the moment” as the narrator in “Blackbird Pie” mentions, implying the lack of the defined author. It is also the movement of the blind man’s hand, a hand without the defining sight, that marks the trace in “Cathedral.” That is to say, unlike the handwriting in general, the event handwriting is not dictated by the repetition of the author’s body, but by the hand without the author. The seeing of an eye could be seen when the seeing itself is seen. Unlike the narrator and the wife in “Cathedral,” the lack of the event handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” arises from the fact that the narrator’s eyes are fixed on the letters, but not on the event. The eyes contact is not to see what the signer sees, but to see how the signer sees. If the reader’s eyes are fixed on what the signer sees, the image itself would be rendered ideal and absolute. The narrator of “Blackbird Pie” could see what the signer see – the content of the letter, implying her presence that erases her presence in the event, but not how the wife sees: the event that determines the wife’s object of the gaze. On the contrary, in “Cathedral,” the event handwriting occurs throughout the story as the wife and the narrator could see the blind man seeing (reading). In this context, the eye contact is not the meeting of the eyes, but the point where the eyes could see the blind spot in its sight, a point where it sees itself seeing. Lastly, the event handwriting functions similarly to Derrida’s concept of the self-portrait of the artist in their aperspectiveness. They both function as a mark of a trait, and they are created from the “duel” between pictorial and symbolic formation.

CHAPTER 4

THE LETTERING OF THE LETTER

In this chapter the idea about the letter seen in Carver's texts will be discussed in relation to the ideas of the letter with other texts. Nevertheless, it would be apt to momentarily re-trace the remark about the letter of Carver. In the previous chapters, the idea of the letter has been discussed as an event singularly manifested in Carver's texts to illustrate and intensify the complexity of Carver's stories and his critical side. As a result, there are two ideas concerning the letter that could be seen in Carver's texts: letter-epistle and letter-signifier. The first one focuses on the movement and the "being" of the letter. On one hand, the letter as a trace refers to the idea that the letter shares the similar traits with the face-to-face communication and telephone (keep in mind that these two are also exclusive forms of communication in Carver's text that deserve their own discussion). The resistance of communication from the face-to-face communication is visible in the letter. Carver's letters resist to communicate because the communication resists itself and the subject refuses to articulate the idea. The letter in "Cathedral" and "Blackbird Pie" could not communicate because of the character and the letter itself. In "Why, Honey?" the resistance of communication is the content of the letter itself. The heteroglossia or the menace of the voice from a telephone is also presented in the letter. While the voice of the telephone comes from the artifact itself, the voice of the letter comes from the tracing of the letter. Unlike the former, the voice in the letter does not have to be posited before the arrival of the letter (as the ringing of the telephone). It is a movement between the voice and the letter that creates a sense of menace to the character's subjectivity, such as the knocking on the door and the murmur. The voice is in-between. Also, the voice itself does not always have to be a voice per se. It could be the voice as the act of speaking in the narrative as found in the beginning of "Why, Honey?" The chaos of questions and answers undermines the mother's sense of security.

On the other hand, the letter as a trace refers to the "being" of the Carverean letter, or how we come to know the letter. The letter's being is structured

by its own self-effacement. Its presence is the written absence – hence, the being of the letter is a trace, or a left over, of itself. In “Blackbird Pie” and in “Cathedral,” the letter as a trace could be seen clearly as the narrators from the two stories try to articulate the letters in a definite fashion. Even though the letter of “Blackbird Pie” could be presented in the story, the narrator acknowledges that it is only a trace of the letter. In the process of recreating the letter, there is always something missing from the letter for the letter is always missing from its place. In this case, it is the tone in the handwriting. As a result, the letter, though recreated to the letter, is amiss/has something missing. At one point in the story, the content of the letter is literally turned into a trace. The narrator takes the letter apart, leaving only sentences in question with an ellipsis between them, an ellipsis which is also the sign of trace.... Surprisingly, despite the fact that what is left is only its trace, the letter still makes sense. Its absence is its present. Similarly, the letter in “Cathedral” functions as a trace. The moment it is presented, it is erased by its very presence. It leaves only a part of it. The last word is left out, replaced by a “—.” At the end of the story, even though the narrator somehow learns about the last word, of what the blind man thinks of him, the last word is omitted and left as a trace of “something.” While the trace in “Why, Honey?” could not be observed like the other two stories, because it is not a story about a letter but a letter itself, we could witness the self-effacement or the dissemination of the letter first hand. It starts as a letter (or a text because of its title-mark); however, throughout the story, it constantly shifts from one form to another.

The Letter-signifier is the other aspect of the letter in Carver’s short stories. Unlike the letter-epistle, the letter-signifier is a broader and more general concept that focuses more on the event surrounding the idea of alphabetical letters, a material on the letter, and a signifier in Carver’s text. There are two qualities of the letter-signifier. The first one emphasizes on the usage of the written words in Carver’s short story. In this regard, it is the condition in which words are materialized in the narrative by the author, the crafter of words, in order to give them the movement of meaning-position. If a word is left as it is, it would lack an epistemological existence in a semiotic field. However, when it is tamed by the narrator and given a new position in relation to other words in the narrative, it has a potential to be materialized

as a word to the reader's eyes. The words "handwriting" and "cathedral" are, thus, endowed with a new meaning position in Carver's discourse (the idea of seeing will play an important role also in the next quality of letter-signifier). Such potential relies on how the author shifts its old meaning-position to a new meaning-position. While this practice could be seen in other author as well,³⁵ it is the idea of defamiliarizing the general (words) that makes this relevant to Carver. As it is known, Carver's stories are often about the otherness in a daily American life. Also, his method of naming the short stories often involves the insignificant phrase or words spoken by the character in the story. As a result, those words are materialized to the eyes (ironically, when one reaches the part where the character speaks of the word, such moment lacks any momentum of its own). The letter-signifier could be read as the function of Carver as the author, like other authors, who are the signifiers that signify words with the letters. The signifier here must be read with an accent of a magnifying. While this aspect of letter-signifier does not concern with the letter itself, it is the very condition of "seeing is being", of seeing letters as words, that relates to idea of letter as a trace and mark. A trace (letter-epistle) needs to be marked (letter-signifier) to be seen.

The other quality of the letter-signifier is its textuality. Whereas the narrative material relies on the materialization of words to the eyes, the textual quality is of its imperceptibility. It starts with what a textual material is first. A work, unlike a text, usually relates to beingness, perceptibility, and words in their materialized form on the papered narrative. However, a text is the effect of those words, such as the wife's handwriting and the drawing of cathedral, which are impossible to be seen in Carver's texts since they are rendered immaterial on the imaginary order. The handwriting and the cathedral, also lack the author. Unlike the narrative material, the handwriting and the cathedral drawing, as textual material, have more than one author. In the process of writing and drawing, there is more than one subject involved. The drawing of cathedral is read and written by the blind man and the narrator while the wife's letter in "Blackbird Pie" is assumed to be written by someone else. The handwriting by itself is an event of writing, the signifier of signifiers, or the letter-

³⁵ For example, Virginia Woolf talked about the idea of word, which surprisingly echoes many (post)structuralist ideas, on a BBC radio on April 20th, 1937, which later transcribed as an essay titled "Craftsmanship" in a book called *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

signifier, which play a significant role to the letter-signifier as whole. The process of drawing a cathedral is also the letter-signifier in the same manner. Both the blind man and the narrator draw (write) a cathedral in order to signify the other signifier (while Lacan would call this a signified because a signifier is referred to another signifier, here it should be called signifier because the referred signifier lacks the defined content. It is just “something” which can be anything. The signifier in this context, hence, is a process of signifying without a signified). The handwriting and the drawing of a cathedral also erase the gap between writing and reading as any text event would do. The moment that the handwriting is read by the narrator, it also rewrites itself. The handwriting in *Blackbird’s Pie* is turned into italicized letters. Instead of being the wife’s handwriting, it is the narrator’s. In “Cathedral,” the reading-becoming and writing-becoming could be seen more easily. In the beginning of the story, while the blind man is reading the wife’s face, touching-seeing her face, he is writing hers at the same time for what he sees is what he desires to see, not what it is. Similarly, at the end of the story, in the act of drawing-writing a cathedral, the image is both being read and written by the blind man and the narrator. Even though the narrator’s hand is to guide the blind man, indicating that the narrator is the writer and the blind man the reader, at the moment that the narrator closes his eyes, the position of the subject reading and writing is shifted by the object cathedral.

The textual quality of the letter-signifier is to function as a mark for the letter-trace, giving the trace a mark of its being through the textual material. As it could be seen, it is not the letters on the letter that mark the “being” of the letter in Carver’s texts. It is the textual material, which is formed as an event, before and after the letter-trace that gives the letter its place of being in the story. Unlike the narrative material where the focus is on the meaning, here it is of the effects of the text. Generally speaking, the letter by itself can exist without the help of the letters; the letters are only the representation of the author’s message. However, in Carver’s works the letter-epistles are structured as the trace because their presence is attenuated by their absence. They are always on the move from one position to another, such as the form in “Why, Honey?,” the content in “Blackbird Pie,” and the change of hands in “Cathedral.” As a result, the only time that the letter could be seen in Carver’s

works is when the handwriting as an event of writing is articulated (keep in mind that the word handwriting here refers to the process of writing and drawing as a textual activity).

As it could be seen, the ideas of the letter and letters seen in Carver's texts are rather complicated on their own terms. The letter-epistle exists only when it effaces itself. Nevertheless, it could not erase itself entirely – hence, the trait of the letter is its trace. The letter-signifier erupts as an event that marks such a trace. This does not imply that without the letter-signifier, a letter-epistle would cease to exist; and that the letter-signifier could be by itself. On the contrary, the letter-trace is the supplement of the trace which means both of them are intra-related. Furthermore, the letter-signifier in Carver's stories is a textual material that has different modes, which function by way of multiplicity. Essentially, it is the event of the letters. However, such event could entail, spreading its root, to other modes of functionality, such as the gaze and the writing, the writing-reading, and even the material of a word (which is not the same as the letters). With this premise, the idea of the letter found in Carver's works will be compared with the existing ideas about the letter and literature. The topics of the discussion would be the material of the letter, its destination, and the subject regarding the letter as found in the writings of Deleuze, Guattari, Lacan, and Derrida.

Musica Epistula

It has to be stated from the start that, unlike Lacan and Derrida's comments on "The Purloined Letter," Deleuze and Guattari mention Kafka's letter in their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986) only because it is one of the three components of the expression machine, of which the other two are the animal focused stories and the novel as a form of Kafka's work (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 40). Their main aim is to discuss the idea of minor literature in Kafka's works as a whole, a topic that is rather too complex to be put in a limit space of the letter. Also, despite the fact that they discuss the ideas of a letter in the text, those ideas are limited to Kafka's letters only. Nevertheless, in the context of the material of the letter, there is a relevant concept that can be discussed in the name of the letter: content and

expression. It seems likely that the function of expression here is closely resemble how the word material in general sense works. Moreover, the letter itself is also the component of Kafka's expression machine. Hence, my discussion will focus on how their concept of expression and content, significantly influenced by Louis Hjelmslev's linguistic theory, could provide a better understanding of the letter in Carver's text.

The relation between expression and content is very much similar to that of a signified and a signifier in a general sense. However, while the connection between a signified and a signifier is arbitrary, as Saussure would say, expression and content are related. In Kafka's work, according to Deleuze and Guattari, there are two expressions that express two different contents: the bent head with a portrait-photo and the straightened head with musical sound (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 5). On one hand, the bent head is the gesture of individual that is often found in a portrait-photo in Kafka's works, such as the porter's portrait in *The Castle*, Gregor's portrait of woman in "Metamorphosis," and the photo of the parents in *Amerika* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 3). The gesture is the form of content whereas the material, in which case is the portrait, is the form of expression – hence, the form of expression expresses the form of content. With this pair, a pair which is not fundamentally opposed, a desiring-machine, a movement that is important to the idea of minor literature, is blocked and repressed not only because of its submissive content (a bent head) but also its fixed and immobile form of expression, a squared portrait. On the other hand, the musical sound is the expression of the straightened head content. In "Metamorphosis" Gregor lifts his head up when he hears his sister playing a violin. Karl Rossman from *Amerika* "feels rising within him a song which reach[es] past the end of this song" (as cited in Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 6). As a result, the desiring-machine in this equation, of music and straightened head, can move around freely without any form of constraint, as a fluctuation of a real desire.³⁶ While the idea of desire will not be discussed here, its characteristic plays an important role with regard to expression, which will be discussed when the destination is reached.

³⁶ According to Deleuze and Guattari, desire in psychoanalysis is a desire that is shaped and tamed by the psychoanalyst while the real desire is not composed of lack and gaps, but a movement and connection.

Despite the fact that the pair of form content and expression above seems to be structured by the binary opposition, only the two forms of content are situated on different sides whereas sound and portrait, as form of expressions, are not opposed to each other. “What interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to *its own abolition*...a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 6). The formation of expression itself is the signifying process that forms [signifies] a content as such – hence, music is “the *unformed material of expression*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 6). It deterritorializes the form of a content in order to create a line of escape for the content. The content ceases to function according to the law of meaning (signified), the law which represses the intensity of a form of content to be a coded object for the reader to decode. Expression for Deleuze is “truly conceptual...tied to [his] understanding of conceptuality” (Colebrook, 2010, p. 95). Because Deleuze’s expression is about the intensity and possibility of things, his idea of materiality is the connectivity of Lacan and Derrida’s materiality. His is an idealistic stance, to use Derrida’s word on Lacan, based on the material object. The object should not be looked as something complete and structured by itself, but at its intensity to connect to others. For example, while a poem could be read as an object with a completed and structured meaning, each word in the poem has an intensity of its own that could produce a new connection outside the structure (Colebrook, 2010, p. 96). This may echo how a poem is approached deconstructively; however, deconstruction and deterritorialization is not the same. While the former is to undermine the hierarchy of opposition especially the idea of presence, speech, and centrality, the latter is all about the line of flight, seeking to connect with a new intensity. Roughly put, it is about to fight or to flee. That being said, the reason that the sound and the portrait are not opposed to each other is that the form of the portrait is to be deterritorialized by the formlessness of sound. “[T]he firmest and resistant formalizations...will themselves lose their rigidity in order to proliferate or prepare an upheaval in which they fall into new lines of intensity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 6). It has to be emphasized that it is not of the sound, but of sound as unformed material in Kafka’s works that connects the solidity of form to its abolition. The sound as an unformed expression has a tendency to abolish itself to free its content from the act of meaning, and itself

from the act of forming. The content is not the center, but a part of the overall unformed connective expression of sound.

In the context of Carver, it could be seen that expression or the material of the letter-epistle is the letter-trace. It is unformed because of its self-effacement. Carver's letter cannot exist without its absence in the text. At the moment that the letter is expressed or formed in a story, the very expression of the letter abolishes the content in the letter. However, the content of the letter is not only expressed by the trace. It also is about the trace. Aside from the fact that the letter-epistle in "Why, Honey?" is a trace of a movement from the narrative to the letter, the content of the letter is also about a trace. The mother follows the trace of the events in order to find the truth about her son. The first trace is the scene where the cat is killed. The neighbors do not know who kills the cat, but they give her the trait of the suspect: they tell the mother that the suspect runs into her house (p. 129). The second trace is the bundle of money the mother finds in her son pocket, implying that he makes less money than he tells her (p. 130). The third trace is when the school calls the mother about her permission for the son's field trip despite the fact that the son told her about the trip a few days ago (p. 130). There are also other traces of the son that the letter-epistle points to, such as the bloody cloth at the end of the truck, or the news about him on TV and newspaper. Nevertheless, this should be enough to demonstrate that the content in "Why, Honey?" is not only expressed by the trace, but it is also about a trace. These may seem like clues because of their definite, concrete, and meaningful nature. They all point to the son's dishonesty. However, these are not object-clues for they do not point to a specific meaning. At the end of the story, these "clues" do not signify the lying of the son, but the traces for the mother to exercise her motherly desire. The one who suspects is the suspect. She lies to herself and the reader with these objects (the discussion about the mother will be made later). In other words, the clues have traces of something that undermines their stability: the clues of/for the clues. As a result, these objects are traces because they could mean anything and nothing at all – hence, the self-effacement of the trace. They cancel each other.

In "Cathedral," the content in the wife's letter is also about a trace like the letter itself (because it is paraphrased, the wife's letter-epistle exists as a trace. The

formation of the letter is effaced during the process of paraphrasing, leaving only its trace as a letter). The premise that her poem is unfinished and it is about her tracing the feeling which is inexpressible (p. 515) show that what she talks about in the letter is nothing but the act of the trace itself. Lastly, in “Blackbird Pie,” the expression of the letter-epistle is a trace so is its content. The first time the letter is mentioned, the content inscribed by the wife is that “*I want to talk about us...the time has come to admit that the impossible has happened*” (original emphasis, p. 600). Only when the letter is mentioned for the second time that we learn of what she talks about: “...withdrawing farther into...a shell...not to mention the insane asylum” (p. 605) and so on. The wife tries to talk about the trace of the past that brings her and the narrator to this very point when the letter has to be written. The trace of the past that points to nothing and everything. They are all connected as well as separated by the ellipsis. They do not signify the divorce itself, but only lead to the event of the letter (as it has been discussed in chapter 2 that the letter is not written for the purpose of divorce, but to free the narrator’s desire from the limitation of factual history). In other words, the content of the Carverian letter, because the expression of the letter is an unformed trace, is and about the trace.

An Expression without Content

However, the idea of content and the expression could not be applied with a letter-signifier. Unlike the letter-epistle, the content of the letter-signifier is lacking. There is only expression without content. This is not to say that content is overwritten by the expression, but that the letter-signifier forecloses the idea of content. As it has been discussed in chapter 3, one of the characteristics of a letter-signifier is that it is structured by the law of signification. However, the letter-signifier is not written by pairing a signified with a signifier. The letter-signifier is a pure signifier – that is, writing-drawing without a signified. There is only a signifierness of a signifier. The wife’s handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” does not signify the letter as a signified, but it designates the letter as another signifier. That is to say, the letter-signifier marks the act of writing of the letters in Carver’s text. The alphabetical letter by itself also cannot be a signified because it is “*not in its place [manque à sa place]*” (Lacan, 2006, p. 25). Generally speaking, a signified is related to the idea of rooted

meaning that always in its place – that is why Barthes relates a signified to the idea of work with an authorial meaning. Its place is well-defined for the reader to unveil the veiled meaning. Furthermore, expression substances and content substances connote each other, such as the fleeing of the sound connotes the freeing gesture of the straightened head, and the blocking of the portrait connotes the submissive position of the bent head. The letter-signifier, however, does not connote the letter-epistle: they are not essentially connected. The letter-signifier is the event that marks the letter. The act of marking does not imply that what is marked is there in its place. A mark only works when “it” is not there in its place, such as a track that marks the absence of an animal, for the mark is the event of “it,” as “it” in it-is-raining is not its expression per se. To simplify the argument, the letter-signifier is the description of the textual event of the letter, an expression without content, whereas a song, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is an expression with content because the gesture of straightened head is its content.

When it is said that the letter-signifier is an “expression” without content, it should be noted that this is the expression that Deleuze and Guattari have in mind, not the one they illustrate in Kafka’s stories (in the end, it cannot be denied that a letter-signifier and a letter functions as an expression. It is only the game of linguistic and nuance that distinguish one from the other). If the expression is, as Deleuze and Guattari insist, the pure intensity without form, a letter-signifier follows such concept to the letter. However, there lies a problem of how the idea is presented in their book. Musical sound in Kafka’s stories is not the expression that they have in mind (I believe that they use Kafka’s works only as a way to illustrate their political theory in literature). Unlike what they say, music in Kafka’s stories is structured around the materiality that can be quantified. Even though Kafka’s act of music is to negate the materiality of the logocentric history, it cannot escape the ideality of music within this historical framework of the European classical music. What Deleuze and Guattari regard as music in Kafka’s works is driven by the historical force of European classical or traditional music composition. The music is played accordingly to the ideal sound. For example, Gregor’s sister has to play from the musical note brought to her by the father, or the bell in *The Castle* tolls according to the scared

pattern of a holy hymn. It lacks the force that could push the individual on the line of flight. The sound is played acridly to the rule: there is no free play. As a result, the sound of music, according to Kafka, Deleuze, and Guattari, is an expression with logocentric history,³⁷ a material that can be measured by dots and stems on a musical sheet. In this context, it would be otherwise if Deleuze and Guattari used jazz as an example of the expression because it would be an event with intensity: an event with/of a letter-signifier.

While jazz also carries with it its historicity (the standard piece that the player has to know), its movement with history is to move along the line of flight. The concept of improvisation is not practiced on the idea of “free,” but on the idea of how to play along the standard song’s line of flight. Holland suggest that, unlike the classical music, jazz is “more spontaneous and free-form Jazz musicians ... rarely use a score, and continually depart from well-known melodies in their improvised solos” (Holland, 1999, p. xi). Holland also says that when he asks Deleuze about this comparison, Deleuze does not agree wholly with the idea of jazz as an illustration of schizoanalysis (Holland, 1999, p. xii). This does not mean that either of them is wrong since neither of them is a musician. Holland looks at jazz from the general perception about jazz. He understands the basic concept of jazz, but not the formation of jazz when played. He truly believes that jazz has no limitation. However, according to one of the most well-known free jazz musician Ornette Coleman, jazz improvisation has its own rule like any form of language.³⁸ On June 23, 1997, Derrida conducts an interview with Coleman on jazz, racism, and language. In the interview, Coleman says that improvisation is not essentially an act of freedom. “[M]ost [jazz] musicians use a ‘framework [*trame*]’ as a basis for improvising... it follows the laws and rules of European structure. And yet, when you hear it, it has a completely improvised feel [*air*]” (Murphy, 2004, p. 321). Jazz is not defined by freedom (most of the time the practice and jamming sessions, which are the essence of jazz itself, are overlooked to

³⁷ The idea of history as material and quantification has been discussed in chapter 2 in regard to the idea of history in “Blackbird Pie.”

³⁸ If one is aware of how influential Coleman to history of jazz as whole, especially his dedication to the idea of free jazz, one would be able to see the impact of the word “rule” in this discourse.

emphasize the “freedom” of style in jazz), but by the air of improvisation that gives the music its quality of intensity: a signifier of jazz. It is the “improvised feel” that makes it an event with qualitative intensity. The feel of improvisation cannot be written with stems and dots on a music sheet. While the music can be transcribed, the feel itself cannot. Each time the same player plays the same song, it is changed accordingly to the feel of the event (the other player whom he plays with, the stage position, the direction of the rhythm, and so on). This can be seen vividly in many jazz albums where there are more than one track of the same song that has different feel from each other. The European classical music Deleuze and Guattari use as samples of the expression, is defined by the law of history. Such form of music lacks an intensity of the event like jazz.

Similar to jazz, the event handwriting is an intensive event. It acts as a signifier of the signifier in Carver’s stories. It gives the letters and the act of writing an intensity that cannot be signified. The blind drawing and reading are the quality of the event in “Cathedral” and the handwriting is the intensity of the letter in “Blackbird Pie.” That is to say, they are *the pressure of the moment*. Unlike the unformed expression, the pressure of the moment is the pure intensity of the event. Blindness is not always connected to the writing as sound to the straightened head in Kafka’s work. It is the pressure of the moment of “Cathedral” that marks the quality of the writing and the letter. The quality of the narrator and the wife’s attempt to write/draw is articulated as “something.” However, something with the lack of signified does not mean that it does not follow the law of signification. It is the act of tracing something of something itself that binds it to the movement of a signifier, of tracing the signifier of the blind writing (drawing). On the part of the narrator, the intensity manifests as the negation of sight while he is moving his hand and drawing to search for something. The wife’s pressure of the moment can be seen when her face is written-read by the blind man, which marks her attempt to write a poem. Likewise, the event handwriting in “Blackbird Pie” is literally called by the narrator as the pressure of the event – hence, the origin of the term itself. Moreover, the mark of seeing the seeing, or eye contact is visible in the story also. It marks the dyadic relation between the narrator and the ideal with the historical handwriting as well as his break with such a

relation. The event itself cannot be articulated entirely as the narrator uses the intensity of a car horn as a mark of such an event.

The sound of pure intensity as the unformed expression can also be seen in “Blackbird Pie,” “Cathedral,” and “Why, Honey?”. These sounds as the murmur, the knocking on a door, and the ringing of the telephone, are the expression without the content. Even though there is a content, in this case it is a signified, the signified is overwritten by the intensity of the signifier. The sound only expresses itself. As a result it gives the scene a kind of intensity that is not related to the content-signified of the sound. For example, the ringing of phone at the end of “Why, Honey?” does not signify itself as a sound made by a phone. It expresses itself as an intensity of the moment where the mother is faced with her *jouissance*: she wants to see her son, and yet she is afraid of him. The idea of the telephone, though playing an important role on the faceless communication, is overwritten by the intensity of the sound.

In conclusion, the letter-epistle’s expression is a trace. The trace expresses the “being” of the letter and at the same time overwrites the content of the letter. As a result, the content of the letter is freed of its well-defined meaning. There is no meaning to the letter as the unformed expression erases the content. This does not mean that Carver’s letter-epistle is meaningless in anyway. On the contrary, it is the meaningfulness in the act of the letter that matters to the story. The meaning of the letter, though one could always agree that it matters, is only the imaginary lure for the reader who tries to make sense of the fictional world. He will make sense in reality, but not in the truth of fiction – after all, the whole truth about Carver’s letter is written as fiction. The letter-signifier is and is not the material of what Deleuze and Guattari call expression. It is not because it forecloses a content. Letters, supposedly signified by the letter-signifier, are not content as their material is written as a signifier: a symbol of absence. They are not in their place. There is only an expression of another expression in the letter-signifier. On the contrary, the letter-signifier is considered a Deleuzean expression only when the concept of expression is not linked to the music in Kafka’s works. Even though music by itself has an intensity that is *asignifying*, Kafka’s acts of music, because they are hymn and classical music, lack the intensity.

They are bound by the rule of European classical music. On the contrary, the intensity of expression can only be seen in jazz improvisation. It is not the act of freedom itself that matters, for jazz is about limitation. It is the event of improvisation that is the intensity of jazz. The Letter-signifier can be looked as an expression only if its intensity is that of jazz not European classical music.

Materialistic Destination

Commenting on the police not finding the letter, in “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” Lacan says that the very reason for this is that the police has the “imbecility of the realist” (Lacan, 2006, p. 17). They see things in its ideality only, an ideality of an imaginary. The description of the letter given to them, because there is only one description of it, blinds the police from the letter itself. It does not only act as a lure for the police’s gaze, but also deprives them the ability to comprehend the symbolic object. The letter in the story, to Lacan, is always absent from its place because it is “the symbol ... of an absence” (Lacan, 2006, p. 17). Therefore, when the policeman looks for the letter, they could not find it anywhere. The description of the found letter does not match with the one they are given by the Queen. In other words, they believe that it is to be hidden in a place, without knowing that the “letter has ... relation with location [or at odd with the location]” (Lacan, 2006, p. 16). As a result, the letter to Lacan, “is not to allow of partition. Cut a letter into small pieces, and it remains the letter that it is” (Lacan, 2006, p. 16). Its materiality denies the act of partition for the locality of a signifier cannot be erased. Firstly, even though the letter is misrepresented by the Minister to the policeman’s gaze, changing the handwriting and color of a seal, the letter still remains intact. It is the letter that the policeman looks for. However, because it is not the letter designed and destined for them, they could not find it in its place. This does not mean that the letter is destroyed for the policeman – that is, lost. The fact that they could not recognize the letter shows that the letter could not be torn. If they know that the letter has the other side, the side concealed by the Minister, it would mean that the letter is torn because the letter designed for them, by the Queen, is changed. To them, the letter is sublime, not “[t]he seeming scrap of waste paper [*déchet*]” (Lacan, 2006, p. 18). It is to be well hidden in

the Minister's room, not lying bare in its nakedness. Likewise, even though the letter is figuratively torn by the Minister, it remains intact. It is still the same letter with the same content. The location of the signifier cannot be changed. Lastly, since the police cut the location into places, searching from place to place of everywhere, the letter cannot be found anywhere. It is in the act of tearing the place apart that should be focused. They could not find the letter, not only because the letter is always imaginary for them, but also because the very letter, the pure signifier of the story, resists the act of partition, of being everywhere. As a result, they only find a signified letter, not "the" letter which is not being anywhere. In other words, the Lacanian letter cannot be torn apart since "[t]his materiality is itself odd in that it is unquantifiable" (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, 1992, p. 28).

However, Derrida believes that Lacan's letter could be deconstructed. In his comment of the seminar, he starts by saying that psychoanalysis "[w]hen it finds, supposedly, it finds itself/is found-something" (Derrida, 1987, p. 413). Despite the fact that psychoanalysis (Lacan and Freud) often use works of fiction or literature as their illustration of theory, in which sometimes it is the psychoanalysis reading itself that brings out the meaning of the text, Derrida believes that such theory and meaning have always been there in the text. The psychoanalyst does not unveil the meaning for the text has already interpreted itself. What the psychoanalyst does is only iterating the text. For example, despite the fact that Freud uses "The Emperor's New Cloth" as his illustration of *Einkleidung*, such concept is already an apparent theme of the fairy tale itself (Derrida, 1987, p. 418). Unlike scientific texts or non-fiction, literature "can produce...place on stage...and put forth something like truth. Therefore, it is more powerful than the truth of which it is capable" (Derrida, 1987, p. 149). Derrida's argument about the letter is to attack the psychoanalytic reading as a whole, not of Lacan's reading of Poe's story. The very reason for this is that the psychoanalyst often marginalizes the fictionality of the text they read. They do not read the text as fiction, as a text with its own formation, but read the text for its illustrative value only. As a result, Derrida criticizes Lacan's reading of Poe's text in "Le Facteur de la Verité" on the premise of fiction as a text, not an illustrative work.

Aside from Derrida's critique on Lacan's argument on the materiality of the letter as a full-speech,³⁹ implying the idea of logocentricism in (Lacanian) psychoanalysis (for example, if the subject's unconscious is the other's, does this mean that the subject relies on the presence of the other?), the relevant idea of the letter that will be focused is of the letter as an object that could be torn apart. Derrida starts by saying that there are two types of remainder (letter). The first one can be destroyed because it is a surplus while the other cannot because of its repetitive and insistent characteristic (Derrida, 1987, p. 423). The latter one is the Lacanian letter, a signifier of the unconscious. It cannot be destroyed because it is bound to the designation (an idea that will be discussed later). The former letter, on the other hand, is the letter neglected by Lacan. It is the letter that is a surplus to the story. At the beginning of the story, after the Minister D- takes the letter, he leaves another letter for the Queen, "the letter, left on hand by the Minister, which the Queen is now free to crumple up" (Lacan, 2006, p. 8). Within this context, it can be seen that the surplus (Derridean) letter undermines the structure of Lacanian letter. According to Lacan, the idea of the letter in Poe's story is not subjected to partition since the psychoanalysis letter (signifier) always returns with its own repression. However, the supplement, said by Lacan himself and made manifest by Derrida, demonstrates otherwise. The text, as a text of fiction, negates the psychoanalysis theory. The letter is not only left as a litter letter, but it also does not return in anyway (it should be kept in mind that, at this moment, such a letter, the crumbled up one, returns in Derrida's discourse. Its insistence and repetition cause the chain of signifiers in Derrida's criticism). In other words, Derrida points out that Lacan reads Poe's text only to serve his own agenda. As a result, Derrida attacks the logocentricism of the letter by saying that "[o]nly the ideality of a letter resists destructive division...the ideality of the signifier" (Derrida, 1987, p. 464). Psychoanalytic reading of Poe's letter treats its object as something transcendental, if an object is the Lacanian letter. The materiality of the letter, hence, is always present even though it is in deferral. It ignores the letter as seen in the text, as a material which can be crumbled into a litter and could not return. In a way, this

³⁹ Full speech, to put simply, is a discourse uttered by the subject of unconscious (the analysand) without trying to "impress" the ideal-ego or ego-ideal. It is when the analysand puts "I" as a subject in his discourse, as an active agent, such as "I did..." or "I am..." not as an object of event, such as "this or that happens to me."

can be read as Derrida's subtle way of saying that it is not the policeman only but also Lacan himself who is the witless realist. His gaze is restricted by the ideality-ideology of psychoanalysis, blinding him from the text that is in front of him. In other words, for Derrida, the letter is subject to partition because its materiality is not ideal. While Johnson argues that Lacan and Derrida are both correct in their own ways because they do not share the same frame of reference, implying that their idea of the letter should not be read literally (Johnson, 1988, p. 240). In this context the two letters will be read as concepts of the letter itself, neither as an agenda for psychoanalysis nor a text of fiction.

Both Derrida and Lacan's materiality of the letter is tied to the letter's destination. When Lacan says "a letter always arrives at its destination" (Lacan, 2006, p. 30), it does not only imply that the letter is always on its course, but also that the letter is indivisible. It is the insistence and repetition of the signifier in the unconscious that is both the material and the letter's formation for Lacan. The letter arrives wherever it arrives (Johnson, 1988, p. 248). In Poe's story, even though it can be assumed that there is only one letter in the story, the purloined one, each addressee receives a different letter according to their relation to the letter. This could be seen from the three types of gaze and subject position in the story as commented by Lacan. There is no possessor of the letter, only its holder, for the subject is the place holder for the letter (Lacan, 2006, p. 20). The letter possesses the characters – that is, according to Lacan, whoever has the letter assumes a feminine position because the letter is the castrated phallus of the mother. Because of the repetition and insistence of the letter, apart from the Queen, Minsiter D– and Dupin also take the feminine (famine?) position. Nevertheless, the main point of the seminar is to illustrate the "nature" of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis theory on the signifier of the unconscious. The traumatic event,⁴⁰ though deeply repressed as unconscious, will always return to determine the subject. "[T]here is no repression previous to the return of the repressed" (Žižek, 2001, p. 14). Hence, the circular movement of the signifier or the letter in relation to destination is its materiality.

⁴⁰ Traumatic in this case does imply significant event, not the memory of violence.

However, Derrida criticizes Lacan on the surplus of the letter's movement: the immobility of the letter. Derrida says that Lacan ignores the surplus of Poe's letter that could be destroyed, that the partition is the supplement of the letter's structure. "[A] letter can always not arrive at its destination. Its 'materiality' and 'topology' are due to its divisibility, its always possible partition" (Derrida, 1987, p. 444). For Derrida, the (in)famous "letter always arrives at its destination" (Lacan, 2006, p. 30) is the formation of the letter's movement, written on the idea that there is always a surplus characteristic of the letter that subjects it to partition. There is always something that slips from the formation of law and always haunts the law itself. Consequently, the law always tries to arrogate this loop hole. The obvious example could be seen from how any system of law (re)appropriates itself as whole and complete, as something that sh/could not be broken to escape its own partition. Law can only survive on the lawlessness, despite the fact that it is the law itself that breaks the Real law in the first place. Without the idea of "criminality," philosophy of law would be more troublesome than it already is. Likewise, "without this threat, the circuit of the letter would not even have begun" (Derrida, 1987, p. 444). Derrida calls this "[a] transcendental reappropriation and a transcendental readequation fulfilling an authentic contract" (Derrida, 1987, p. 437). "The Purloined Letter," in a way, could be described as a story about the reappropriation of law. By breaking the law in front of the blind Law (the King), the Queen tries everything to keep the law intact, of erasing any trace that would lead her to the point of breaking the contract herself. She possesses the position of the law protector as well as the law breaker. If she had not broken the law, she would not try to preserve it. That is to say, the letter has always been broken. Most importantly, Derrida says that if the letter's materiality is its location, its destined place, "this letter does not only escape partition [escape its surplus], it escapes movement, it does not change place" (Derrida, 1987, p. 464). If the letter cannot move, how could it arrive, as a movement, at its destination? If it has only one "destination," would this not break the letter for its lack of movement? The fact that "the signifier must never risk being lost, destroyed, divided, or fragmented without return" (Derrida, 1987, p. 438) demonstrates that there is never a movement of the letter, which would put the letter to its partition. It has to be in its one place in order to exist. For Derrida, the letter's repetition and insistence to return to its

destination and to escape its divisibility suggest that the letter cannot arrive at its destination as the letter has always been divided. Hence, it always misses its destination of being whole.

The In/divisibility of the Letter

Before discussing the in/divisibility of the Carverian letter, it is apt to begin with the gesture from Derrida's discourse. Like Lacan's seminar, the letter-epistle and letter-signifier in this study as a whole overlook the "reality" of Carver's text. The origin of the two ideas, despite the attempt to read Carver's minor work with a new approach, steams from the question in chapter 1 whether Carver's texts are more than the realistic and minimalistic texts. Are they more than just a reflection or representation of American life during the Reagan period? Ultimately, was Carver a theorist author? With these questions, the study aims to synthesize some of the tangible ideas from the three texts. The political aspect of Carver, an aspect that is significant to his *oeuvre*, is repressed in return. The lack of the face-to-face communication, substituted by a letter, is read as a "new" concept in Carver's text and not an illustration of the cultural mind set of the blue collar during 1970s and 1980s (as seen by Carver).

Unlike Lacan's reading of Poe, the two concepts are originated from a fiction, making them a fiction based concept. The idea of the letter-trace is strictly the phenomenon that could be seen in Carver's text. It is a characteristic of a fictional letter (a materialistic letter is either there or not-there, not both). This could be seen from the fact that the idea of trace comes from the idea that the letter in a text cannot "be" (w)hole. It can only exist when it is absent. For example, the letter in "Blackbird Pie," despite the fact that the whole letter is there in the beginning, it is only the trace because the other part is effaced by the letter itself. Likewise, the letter-signifier is conditioned by Carver's text. Fundamentally speaking, it is the mark for the letter-signifier. Even though the letter-epistle is ~~present~~, it is the textual material, as a remainder, that marks the being of the letter in the text. The characters usually talk about what happens to the letter or the subject of the letter, but not the letter itself. It is as if the character repressed the being of the letter, by marking the letter with the event surrounding it because they know that it always returns in the form of a trace.

The narrator in “Cathedral” does not talk about the letter, but the event relating the act of the letter is made by the narrator and his wife; and the mother in “Why, Honey?” talks about the events in a first-person narrative form, despite the fact that she talks in the expression of a letter. Nevertheless, the letter-signifier has a possibility to be a concept about the letters by itself – hopefully speaking. Because of Carver’s narrative frame, the fiction allows the textual event of the act of letter writing to be studied closely.

Defamiliarizing the familiarized is what literature allows the eyes to do. It gives the writing an intensity that could not be signified. However, it could be expressed. Such intensity could be seen in, for example, the writing/reading/drawing of the blind man and the narrator; the seeing/reading/writing of the wife’s face by the blind man; and in the event handwriting of the letter writing-reading. It is this event that is *assignifying*; the event of the letter that cannot be transcribed.

The most tangible illustration for such an event is the jazz improvisation. Despite the fact that any session of jazz could be transcribed, from the drum to the trumpet’s score, with stems and dots on pages, it is the intensity of the event, of the hands, that always slips from the grasp of the symbolic. For example, while it is not hard to find the transcription of Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue*, it is impossible to transcribe the intensity of the “first take.” One could only describe, nominally, but one could not demonstrate. The first take is Miles’s philosophy of jazz recording in which he and his band members will play, as a free play or improvisation, the piece only once and put it on the album. The reason for this is that the first take would be the moment of intensity in which the players have to play the piece that they never have played before. This does not mean that the following take would reduce the intensity. Each take or session would have different feel to it, as the player becomes closer to the piece. However, the intensity of each take that could never be recreated illustrates the kind of intensity or the textual event of the letter-signifier. To put this in Deleuze and Guattari’s context, Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blues* is a line of flight from bebop (bebop itself once was, and still is, a rupture of intensity in music history as a whole). It moves from the improvisation based on chord progression to the modal improvisation.

In other words, while a letter-epistle is a pure fictional letter, a letter-signifier has a possibility to be more: a signature mark of Carver's writing. The lettering of the letter, thus, is not how Carver the author composed stories about a letter and in an epistle form. It is the reading-writing with the other frame of reference that letters Carver's letter. The letter is not written by Carver, but by the other reading. As discussed in Chapter 3, the other reading-writing is the letter-signifier that materializes the words "letter," "epistle," and "signifier," with their new meaning positions, in the narrative discourse of a thesis.⁴¹ However, without the designation of a literature, the other reading of Carver's text would not be able to achieve this position. As Derrida says, "a literature...can produce...place on stage, and put forth something like the truth. Therefore, it is more powerful than the truth of which it is capable" (Derrida, 1987, p. 419). Because the other reading is one of the formations of the phenomena called literature. Ultimately it is Carver's letter that letters itself, with the concept of letter-epistle and letter-signifier, finding itself in its nakedness.

Lastly before the subject of materiality is being discussed, it is inevitable to say something about the idea of blindness in the frame of reference. While Johnson insists that "the theoretical frame of reference" makes the individual blind to his "interpretative insight" and since "the reader is framed by his own frame," the frame "prevents his vision from coinciding with itself" (Johnson, 1988, p. 240), her vision on sightlessness is blinded by her framed gaze. She neglects the other form of blindness: the seeing of *punctum caecum* of the other reading. It is the moment in which an individual could see the seeing (of the other) which, in turn, renders him blind to imaginary meaning. Unlike the Johnson's framed blindness, the seeing of seeing, while blinding the individual, allows him to see the other's seeing and his own seeing. He is able to see the limit of his sight. For Johnson, her concept of blindness is the act in which the individual is overwhelmed by the ideal meaning-image of his own. Hence, s/he is blinded to the structure of the gaze. However, the seeing of seeing, while rendering one blind to the historically constructed image, allows the individual to see the structure of seeing – it is a seeing that functions as writing and

⁴¹ Greimas' quest-form narrative is also something that a mainstream academic thesis follows rigorously.

reading. This could be seen from how the characters in “Blackbird Pie” and “Cathedral” are blinded to their mundane imaginary and historical world, by seeing the other’s seeing: the blind man’s and the wife’s. Specifically, the narrator of “Blackbird Pie” could see his theoretical frame work as historicized thinking, when he could see the blind spot in his memory at the end of the story. The other reading of Carver’s letter, though blinded to the ideal reading of Carver with a focus on genre and culture, acknowledges its castration effect. In short, while Johnson’s theory of the frame could not be undermined at the moment, it is her usage of blindness as a metaphor that disrupts her intention. *Punctum caecum*, as a surplus of the gaze, is the kind of blindness that binds itself to both the metaphor of seeing and unseeing.

Returning to the subject at hand from the temporary blindness, the in/divisibility of the letter in Carver’s text is related to the quality of the letter’s destination itself. Even though in Chapter 2, it has been stated that the letter’s “being” is determined by its self-effacement as a trace, in this chapter the idea of trace will be approached with the idea of materialistic destination, to see the articulation of Carver’s text with the other. Unlike the concept of the other, the destination of Carver’s letter is neither the law of the signifier nor the surplus of structure, but literature as a text of fiction. As a result, there are two destinations for Carver’s letter: narrative and text.

At a narrative level, the letter-epistle arrives at its destination as it is the narrative material. The letter is made substantial because of its place in the narrative. Nevertheless, looking at Carver’s stories about the letter as a whole, it could be seen that the missing or destroyed letter is the narrative material. The missing of the letter plays a big part in the story and on the characters. It is not a repressed or marginalized idea; it is what structures the movement of the narrative and not a surplus to the structure. If the letter in Carver’s stories is not (partially) erased, they would not “be” in the story: the letter is designed to arrive at the destination only on the condition that it will not be there. In “Blackbird Pie” and “Cathedral,” the moment the characters take hold of the letter, the artifact is erased (divided) immediately. The narrative structure of “Blackbird Pie” forbids the narrator to finish the letter, “[b]efore reading further in the letter, [he] got up” (p. 603) and later “lost it, or else misplaced

it” (p. 598). The destination of the letter, here, is its absence from its place. As a result, the letter does not exist for the narrator. It can even be said that the letter is destroyed by its destination. Despite the fact that it is re-created, the narrative does not protect the letter from its divisibility. Similarly, the letter of “Cathedral” has to be lost or destroyed for the climactic moment of the narrative. After the letter-tape is divided by the knocking of the blind man, “[the narrator and his wife] didn’t get back to the tape” (p. 516). It is lost – and destroyed – by the destined addressee(s). Lastly, if the letters are not lost in the oblivion of postponement, the story as the letter would not be written by the mother in “Why, Honey?” The mother does not know whether her son receives her letters or not: “I wrote a letter every few months, there never was an answer” (p. 133). While it could be argued that the letter cannot be destroyed in the story for the narrative form is written as a letter, the nature of the letter is undermined with the title of the story and the story-ness of the narrative. Hence, the letter of “Why, Honey?” is subject to divisibility by the fact that it is not wholly a letter. In other words, if the letter is located in Carver’s narrative, it is subject to divisibility when it reaches its narrative destination.

However, Carver’s letter is not subject to partition if its destination is its textuality. As a surplus of the story, though the story is structured to erase the letter, a narrative cannot avoid writing about the letter in a story. The fact that the story tries to flee from the indivisibility of the letter demonstrates that the letter has always been indivisible. The act of saying that the letter is missing (destroyed) does not erase the letter, but only confirms the materiality of the letter on the textual level. The little trace of its “being” is ample to appropriate its continuation. The insistence and repetition of such a discourse only intensify the longevity of the letter. Nevertheless, its place is not in the story as a narrative material, but in the text because it is ~~written~~. It is the written as an intensity of a text, a free floating *air* of the written letter. Žižek notices that “every trace [Derridean writing] is condemned to its ultimate effacement” (Žižek, 2001, p. 21). While Žižek uses Derrida’s idea in order to illustrate his concept of the Real as the last destination of the letter, in this context such saying confirms that the letter destined to be a text is visible only when it is a surplus. The indivisibility of the letter is its place. While the divisibility of the letter is

structured by its place in a narrative, the invisible letter is de-structured by a text. This is one of the main features of literature where it allows its own partition in order to be a literature. As a result, the indestructible letter ~~exists~~ as the effect in a text. The reader could not read about it, but s/he acknowledges it as a *punctum caecum* of the narrative structure: the seeing of seeing. The textual designation of the letter designs the letter with its indivisibility. This does not mean that a text could not be dissected,⁴² but that Carver's letter as a text could not be dissected because its materiality is the locality itself.

The fact that the letter has two destinations that determine its materiality differently shows that the letter-epistle found in Carver's text is a trace with destined movement. Unlike what has been said in Chapter 2 that the origin of a trace could not be defined,⁴³ with this approach, we can, at least, see the destinations of the letter-trace. As a whole, it is the movement of the letter from one place to another. Those places are the letter's destination as they are designed by the law of fiction: narrative and text. Hence, the materiality of the Carverean letter is determined by its movement and the locality of its destination. As a trace, the letter does not move by the actual movement, but by its self-effacement. If the letter escapes its presence in order to be, does this mean that the letter always arrives at its destination? On one hand, yes, it does arrive, because the letter's materiality is signed by its place. However, the destination cannot hold its place for the letter always tries to escape its destination. It will always be on the line of flight as long as it is structured by the law of fiction. On the other hand, it can never arrive at its destination. This is not simply because the letter's trait is written with movement, but that if the destination is designed in advance, would this mean that the letter has never moved in the first place? The two places are not actually the point of departure and arrival, but the walls to contain the letter in its place. However, there is always a surplus of destination. It could be, for example, the destination of the letter according to the fiction's relation to an author and culture. This would not only undermine the whole letter-trace, but also the other reading of Carver's minor works. The surplus and the structure of the letter-

⁴² That a text could not be undermined.

⁴³ The trace only explains the phenomena of the letter-epistle in Carver's works.

epistle as a trace is only possible because Carver's letter is a fiction letter, a letter of literature, neither a letter of truth nor a scientific letter.

Before moving on to the last discussion about the letter, one might wonder why the meaning of the letter has not been mentioned. The very reason for this is that the concept of meaning could not be applied with the letter itself. It means what it means according to wherever it arrives. Nevertheless, if one is obsessed with the juvenile game of puzzle solving, the meaning of the letter is its movement. The letter means to move as the writer writes the letter, so the letter could move... The letter also means to move the addressee(s). That is to say, because its expression has an intensity of the event, its content is overwritten by its expression: a trace of the line of flight. As it could be seen, the narrator in "Blackbird Pie" is moved from historicity position to ahistoricity; and the narrator of "Cathedral" is moved from his seeing position to the unseeing position. In the end, this might not be the meaning one is looking for. The only way to find one, if one is content to do so, is to wait/look for one to arrive at its destination, if it will ever arrive. But what one is, one will have to wait to know?

Dislocating the Addressees(s)

Unlike Derrida and Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the letter is determined by the subjects, not the letter's materialistic movement and destination. The subjects for them are not only the placeholders for the letter, waiting to be possessed. They determine the movement of the letter to interact with the other. The two subjects regarding the letter are "a subject of enunciation as the form of expression that writes the letter, and a subject of the statement that is the form of content that the letter speaks about (even if *I* speak about *me*)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 30).⁴⁴ The very first aspect of the letter, according to them, is that the subject of statement replaces, by being a movement of fiction, the real movement of the subject of enunciation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, pp. 30-31). Although, Kafka met with Felice once and could not even see her, it is his act of sending and writing letters

⁴⁴ It could be seen obviously that Deleuze and Guattari's idea is influenced by the Lacanian theory of subject of the unconscious and subject's ego.

that substitute Kafka's seeing and being with her. He does not have to physically move his body, as the letter and the postman move for him. This substitution of movement is not the same with deferral of the subject. Deferral implies that the subject of the letter, though withheld, will eventually see the addressee arriving at the destination. However, Kafka's arrival is not only withheld but removed entirely from the scene. There is only a movement of the letter and the subject of statement that will arrive at the destination. The subject of content is a subject under the law of deferral, as it is the letter, while the writing subject is not. Hence, "this exchange, or this reversal of the duality of the two subjects...produces a doubling⁴⁵" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 31). The second characteristic of the letter is "'The Description of a Struggle'...make[ing] a topography of obstacles instead of fighting against destiny" (original emphasis, Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, pp. 31-32). As a consequence of the first characteristic, Kafka's letter often includes details of his struggle to arrive at the destination, of why he could not be there. It is the role of the subject of content to remove the struggle, by saying that he would do anything to be at the destination. However, because the subject of enunciation is the one who creates the condition of struggles, the subject of content only feigns the deferral of the meeting. As a result, "[i]t allows one to posit the innocence of the subject of enunciation, since he can do nothing and done nothing...the subject of innocence for he has done everything possible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 32). The last characteristic of Kafka's letter is that it could not "immediately prevent the return of guilt" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 32). As it could be seen, the purpose of Kafka's letter is to make up a story as an avoidance of confrontation, that the letter could only arrive when all of the subjects are innocent in this regard: after all, the movement and the struggle of the subject of content are but a fiction of the enunciating. The letter, hence, will always try to return to its sender, as a guilty conscience. "[N]othing stops the return of destiny" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 33). The interaction of subjects via the act of the letter is best seen by the blind spots in the functionality of "Why, Honey?"

⁴⁵ Derrida also talks about the rivalry doubling of the narrator and Dupin, and Dupin and Minister D—(Derrida, 1987, pp. 490-492).

The first blind spot is the movement. The letter “Why, Honey?” is immobile because its movement is fictive. The letter does not move from one hand to another as in other stories. While it has been discussed above that the letter-trace moves from the order of narrative to text, according to the law of fiction and literature, the real movement of the letter has not been discussed. Simply put, the real movement of the letter is how the letter moves from one hand to another. In “Cathedral,” the letters move from the sender’s hand to the addressee’s. The blind man sends the letter to the wife, who forwards it to the narrator. The characters are immobile as the letter changes its location. The change of the narrator at the end of the story, however, does not imply his mobility. What moved is only his subjective position, from seeing to unseeing, but his objective position is still the same. The letter in “Blackbird Pie” also implies the movement of the letter from the wife’s hand to the narrator. Likewise, the narrator’s subjective position is shifted by the letter. He later becomes an ahistorical subject at the end whereas his objective position is still the same. One of the reasons that structures the movement to be as such is the presence of the reading scene and writing scene. The letter is visibly written by the sender. Visibility here does not imply that there is a scene of writing, but that the presence of the sender is affirmed in the story. The scene of reading, as the name suggests, is the moment in the story where the letter is read not by its sender. Even though the reading is not of the whole letter, as it is partially read as a trace of the letter, it cannot be denied that the letter arrives at its destination. However, the real movement of the letter, the scene of reading and writing by the characters is not inscribed in “Why, Honey?” Since it is an epistolary fiction, it could not address its objectivity: being read and written. The mark of the letter at the beginning of the story “Dear Sir:” and at the end “Yours Truly,” is written according to the assumption of the letter. The letter is to be read by the unknown addressee, the mother assumes. Deferral is itself a gesture of the movement, implying the absence of the subject, while assumption is of the structured subject for an assumption is only possible with the presence of the subject.

As it could be seen, the letter in the other two stories only defers the meeting of the writer of the letter with his/her addressee. After reading the letter, the

narrator of “Blackbird Pie” is confronted with the author, his wife. Also, the blind man finally meets the wife and the narrator in “Cathedral” after the series of blind letters. Unlike Lacan and Derrida, deferral is not of the symbolic and the postal system, where the letter is put on hold by the system. In this case, the deferral is of how the letter becomes the deferment itself that puts the meeting between the two subjects on hold. It is a pure movement of the letter, not the subject. That is to say, the subject moves according to the letter; without the subject, the letter still functions this way. In the case of “Why, Honey?” the letter, however, is assumed to be read by the addressee because the mother does not want to see the other. If the subject of enunciation is the mother that writes, the subject of content is the narrator of the letter. As a result, as a way of not seeing the other, the writing mother (author) hopes that she could transfer her movement on to the reading mother (content). Her fear is of seeing the other – hence, the reason why she moves her address. The letter, the subject of content, is assumed by the subject of enunciation to be read by the other according to the grammar of the letter. That is to say, by writing, the fear of seeing the other or moving is transferred onto the letter. It is the subject of content that will “see” the other, not the subject of enunciation. Nevertheless, unlike Kafka, the mother’s letter, and her other letters to the son, do not arrive at her implied destination. The only destination of the letter is to be written. While one could argue that this is the deferral for the movement of the letter, as it will eventually be read by the unknown addressee, one should be aware that such an argument is based on the idea of an assumption and that, like Kafka, the mother has no desire of meeting the addressee. Simply put, the only movement of the letter is fictive since the scene of reading is canceled by the epistolary form of the letter; and the mother does not have any desire to see the addressee.

Secondly, because the movement of the letter is fictive, its scene of reading is a meta-scene. It is not read by other characters; the letter reads itself: the place of the letter is the letter. The subjects who read, in this case, are none other than mother and the reader. Because the letter is the subject of content, the moment that it is read, the voicing of the narrative is achieved by the narrator (the contented subject). The voicing of *I* is the lettered *I*. It (she) talks about itself (herself). While the content

of the letter focuses on the history of the mother and her son, it also talks about itself as the letter. It addresses itself as the letter of reply, that it is a respond to the unknown addressee. “I was so surprised to receive your letter asking about my son” (p. 129). And when the content says that “[t]hank you for writing. I wanted someone to know. I am very ashamed” (p. 133), it implies the desire of the mother for lettering the letter, to enjoy herself with the letter. Her reason for not using a telephone should be that voice evokes the immediacy of the presence of the other while writing could put the presence on hold. In a way, it can even be said that there are two kinds of enjoyment at play here: the enjoyment of the other (the presence) and the other enjoyment (the absence). The subject of enunciation, because she wants to express herself, to find the enjoyment from the other, and to talk to someone, writes the letter. However, as she does allow the other’s presence in her sanctuary, she bars out the other by writing. That is to say, she desires the other kind of enjoyment.⁴⁶ In order to enjoy this expression fully, the letter cannot be sent. Even though the movement of the letter is already fictive by the transference of movement, it has to be meta-fictive to prevent any other presence. As a result, the mother’s letter is read by the mother, a masturbatory enjoyment. The reading voice of the mother, though a form presence, is none other than her other self, the narrating and reading self. She stares at the letter and reads herself her own letters, enjoying herself. The reader, with voyeuristic eyes, witnesses her pleasuring herself, observing the scene from a vicarious distance. The reader could imagine/fantasize the meaning of the scene, but it would not affect the desire of the mother.

However, like the self-portrait, the letter “Why, Honey?” cannot maintain the dyadic reading relation of the two mothers, the masturbating (enunciation) and the masturbated (content) mother, because it is a ruin. “Ruin is...this memory open like an eye...that lets you see without showing you anything *at all*, anything *of the all*” (original emphasis, Derrida, 1993, p. 69). Like the letter, the object in the self-portrait

⁴⁶ In this context, the idea of enjoyment is not a psychoanalysis one. It only refers to how the mother would rid of her discomfort with herself. The enjoyment of the other refers to the fact that she can only enjoy herself when the other is present – hence, the enjoyment of the other. The other enjoyment, as the name suggests, is another way of expressing herself without much interference from the other’s presence. Also, the other here does not refer to symbolic other for any subject could not escape from the other unless s/he suffers from either psychosis or perversion.

draws itself. The draftsman stares at the object as it also stares back at him. However, he could not see himself in the image as he “blindly contemplates himself” (Derrida, 1993, p. 69). It is only a ruin of himself as the image becomes less and less him, the total him. However, in this context, the focus of ruin is at the moment when the drawing is seen by the spectators. Because the audience’s gaze is posited at the same location of the draftsman, the audience is the ruin of the draftsman and of the drawing. The audience could not see the whole image as the presence of the draftsman is erased by the fictive movement in front of the audience. Furthermore, as the self-portrait is looked by the other eyes, it becomes less and less a self-portrait, but the other image (a self-image implies the presence of the object-image in the drawing). What preserves its trace as a self-portrait is the name under the drawing. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the audience’s gaze is the parasite gaze. It is written as a part of the structure of the self-portrait, as it has been discussed in Chapter 3 about the two gazes in Fantin-Latour’s self-portrait.

In the context of the letter “Why, Honey?” the dyadic reading of the two subjects is broken by the reader. Firstly, the letter would not be able to read itself without the meta-reading scene of the reader. That is to say, the reading scene is not written in the story because it is the event of the epistolary story. The reader sees the letter from the same point of view of the subject of enunciation. The reading of the subject of content is possible because of the reader. Nevertheless, the letter is turned into ruin for the ideal relationship between the two subjects is broken. Unlike any voyeuristic scene, the voyeur stares at the masturbated subject from the same masturbating subject. He becomes the masturbator who can affect the fantasy of the masturbating subject. The reading of the reader, though sharing the same position, does not have the same quality of the subject of content. While the subject of content reads accordingly to the subject of enunciation, the reader appropriates the voice of the subject of content with his/her own disposition. This means that when the letter is read by the reader through the voice of the subject of content, the ideality of the letter is ruined. Whereas the narrator blindly contemplates herself on the letter, the reader dissects the letter, turning a close letter into an open letter. Hence, the unknown addressee implied by the letter is the reader. This is not to say that the reader is the

same “addressee” that the mother writes to. The unknown addressee, unlike the unknown reader, is a part of the story for he writes to the mother. He is, which is could be said, a necessary imaginary subject in the letter. Without the (imagined) addressee, the mother would not find the reason of existence for her letter. On the contrary, the reader is addressed by the letter, not the mother. As Lacan says, the letter will arrive at its place. In this case, its place is the reader’s masturbating hand. To be read is to (be) enjoy(ed).

However, this does not mean that letter is mobile. While this might be true in the case of the letter-trace, as the letter arrives at the reader as a textual artifact, in this context, the movement of the letter is still fictive. The very reason for this is that the letter arrives at the reader as a fiction, an epistolary fiction, not as a letter. It cannot move as the letter which could be seen from the real movement in “Blackbird Pie” and “Cathedral” where the letters in the stories arrive at the addressee’s hand as letter. In other words, because of the dislocating of the addressee(s), the letter “Why, Honey?” is a ruin/ruined. The reader becomes the ghost that haunts the letter.

The last blind spot is that the subject of enunciation is not free of guilt. On the surface, the mother is innocent. The victimization of the mother could be seen clearly in the letter. Her maternal pain is caused by the mother’s realization of the son’s dishonesty. Nevertheless, her painful discovery is inevitable because any lie is considered to be one when it is exposed. A discourse of lie is a retroactive event. It can only be a discourse of lie when the past is misappropriated by the present. In this case, a lie is exposed as one because of the traces leaving behind by the son, such as the money in his pocket, the calling from the school, and the bloody shirt. They oppose the son’s past narrative. As a result, these signifiers, unconscious remainders of the subject, resurface at the point of the mother’s utterance “[w]hy, honey?” (p. 132). The mother does not want to know what the son tries to hide from her (the present meaning of the lie), but the causes of the action (the past). The son replies: “Kneel is what I say, kneel down I say, he said, that’s the first reason why” (p.132).

Unexpectedly, the outburst of the son implies that his lying habit is a retaliation of the law of the mother. On the first reading, it is clear that the son asks her to submit to him by kneeling down. While this might refer to the mother’s

submissive nature, the paradox of *I*, a subject that can be assumed and spoken by anyone, in the son's speech shows that he emulates the law of the mother. Even though it is not obvious as the son's trace, the mother's trace of lie, an innocent one, appears momentary throughout the story. For example, her implied disappointment shows her maternal controlling. The son does not act as she desires. Even though she realizes that "he was an excellent student, you know that about him if you know anything" (p. 130), she is not content with the fact that "he bought a shotgun and hunting knife" (p. 130). Despite the fact that the son meets his/her desire of being the successful individual at the end of the story, she leaves no room for the freedom of his goals and his movement. He has to "kneel down" to her every desire, the all-powerful and violent desire that controls by speculating his every move. Lying is the one of the solution of freedom that could free the son momentary from the grasp of mother's desire. The desire to control, as it could be seen, is rather subtle for it is presented as a trace in her innocent action.

One of the reasons that the son is tortured by the mother's desire of law comes from the fact that there is no third subject in this relation, namely the father figure. The third agent, or the paternal function, is rather important since it nullifies the mother's desire "viewed by Lacan as potentially very dangerous to the child, threatening to engulf it or swallow it up" (Fink, 1995, p. 56). Nevertheless, in the story, it could not be said wholly that the relationship between the son and the mother lacks the third agent. When the mother says to the son "[h]ere's the man of the house" (p. 129), it could be seen that the son is also the third agent in this relationship: the absent father. With this in mind, when the son lies to her, he does not lie to her from the position of a son, but from the position of the father (the symbolic agent). The language is used as a way of temporary castrating the son from the mother, freeing him-self from her violent law of desire. The son's words are the words of the father, the evocation of the Name-of-the-Father in his relationship with the mother. This could be seen from his outbursts because such a powerful utterance of a full speech in which the *I* assumes both the mother and son enables the son to break free from the grasp of the mother's desire, through the father's No. Unlike the son, the mother's

speech is empty not only because her *I* is an imaginary one (the subject of content), but also because the speech is between her and her-self.

In other words, the victimization of the mother is her guilt, her fear and desire that drive the son away. This does not mean that she is consciously guilty. Her victimization works two ways. On one hand, she is “victimized” by her son according to the subject of content: her own self-portrait. She is lied to and betrayed. On the other hand, it is the son that is the victim of her motherly desire. In order to flee from her law, he moves away. The mother is guilty because of her innocence and of wanting the best for the son. Her “built up...fears” (p. 133) is not only of her son, but also of her shame as a mother, the shame of her own innocence and motherly desire (love). The letter, as a result, is her expression, or confession of her own guilt. “Thank you for writing. I wanted someone to know. I am very ashamed” (p. 133). However, the letter of confession, as Deleuze and Guattari say, could not prevent the return of guilt. In this case, the return comes from the mother’s fear of her own guilt: a shame. Because “the subject of the self-portrait becomes fear...*makes itself into fear, makes itself afraid*” (original emphasis, Derrida, 1993, p. 70), it avoids the other’s gaze by “seeing-oneself-seen-without-being-seen” (Derrida, 1993, p. 70). Likewise, as discussed above, the letter “Why, Honey?” does not address anyone but the subject of enunciation and content. The fear of the mother – oh, the shame! – prohibits the subject from confessing her guilt to the other. Consequently, she expresses her guilt to her-self, confessing to one-self about one’s guilt. The subject of enunciation writes to the subject of content about her guilt while the subject of content [narrator] reads about the subject of enunciation’s guilt. In this way, hoping that she could rid herself of the guilt, she confesses without performing a confession, but an imaginary and private confession. Nevertheless, “the flux of the letter changes direction; it turns back on its sender; and so on” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 33). Her confession confesses itself to the other. There is always the other’s gaze that speculates the letter: a letter is publicized by its privatization. In this case, as it has been discussed above, the letter can only be read only when it is put in a relation with the reader; when the location of the addressee is dislocated (almost always maturation relies on the third agent). As a result, the guilt of the mother is exposed. While the letter, confirming and justifying

her ideal narrative, implies that the mother is the victim of her son's dishonesty, the letter as fiction demonstrates that it is the mother who is the victim of her own desire and guilt.



CHAPTER 5

POST-LETTER

In this study, we have seen the unseen spots on Carver's paper. These marks are written with/about the letter and as a letter. They are often veiled by the white part of the paper. But stains will always stain. In relation to the primary readings of Carver, these letters are not as outlandish as I have assumed. In terms of the other, the letter is itself the other among criticism on Carver. The letters have always been repressed by the dominant cultural and genre criticism. However, as it could be seen, the letter also functions accordingly to the idea of the otherness in Carver's world. It undermines the subject position of the characters by breaking them from their daily routine, such as the historical addict in "Blackbird Pie" and the habit of seeing in "Cathedral." In the aspect of postmodernism, the letter becomes a trace, or the leftover of the letter. Its self-effacement not only negates the idea of presence but also signification. The meaning is lost, what is left is only the intensity of the letter: the letter-signifier. Likewise, and unexpectedly, the criticism of the gaze can also be found in the letter. It is on the letter itself but it relates to the letter as a textual event. The characters could see the seeing of the other (and their other self) because of the letter and letters. While the concept of minimalist as genre criticism could not be discussed, the letter "Why, Honey?" shows that it can be approached as a new genre among Carver's works. Because it is an epistolary fiction, it does not share the same narrative formation as the others (this does not mean it lacks Carver's signature).

All in all, this study shows that even though the short stories about the letter are not often read for the sake of the letter, the epistolary approach echoes the already existing schools of criticism. The surplus, after all, is an essential part of the structure. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these are all the schools of criticism regarding Carver's work for there is much that is not listed in Chapter 1, such as the feminist, cultural, and comparative criticism. This means that we could look at how the letters are perceived during the time of Carver. What is its main function? In term of feminism, it does not imply the orthodox view of the repressed gender for that is the dead language. The relationship between female and letter come from the fact that

all three studied stories relate female characters to the letter. The letters are all written by the female. While this may seem trivial, if one looks back at Lacan's "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," one would be able to notice that the idea of female sexuality is significantly related to writing and letter. Hence, it would be a good idea, in the future, if Carver's letter could be read with theories of sexuality (again, not the general feminism). In terms of comparative study, since it could be seen that the theory of letter in Kafka's work can be applied to Carver's letter, this should open up a way of looking at Kafka's works from Carver's perspective and vice versa. As Lainsbury says that the theme of grotesque body and alienation in Carver's "The Hair" is influenced by Kafka (Lainsbury, 2004, pp. 63-64), other Carver's stories, such as "Neighbors," "The Father," "The Ducks," "I Could See the Smallest Thing," "Feathers," and so on, could be compared to Kafka's style and theory.

Ultimately, whether Carver is a theorist or an anti-theorist cannot be answered. But what could be said is that his text of fiction is not a close letter. It is not designed to be read strictly as a work of fiction. It opens up a possibility of theoretical discussion while still maintains itself as a text of fiction. Even though Carver's works are not written as a fiction of idea, which is mostly written by postmodern authors, they present ideas through the discourse of a minimalist, such as the idea of the other and voyeurism. The text does not try to hide this aspect; it is only that such theoretical aspect of the text is well-connected to the narrative. In this case, the two concepts of the letter, letter-epistle and letter-signifier, are strictly related to studied texts. The letters are written with the subtlety of a minimalist to not overwhelm the fiction. One could ignore those ideas wholly and still understand their importance in relation to the stories. For example, the idea of event handwriting in "Blackbird Pie," despite its complexity and nuance, does not break the flow of the Carver-style narrative. Nevertheless, this does not imply that Carver himself intends to write about the event handwriting, for we could never know that, but that it is the composition of a text of fiction that provides a theory without being theoretical. That is to say, fiction is not to illustrate truth, but express truth in its own way. It does not represent; it only represents. As a surplus of this study, what matters is not the theory of the fictional letter, but literature as a whole that breaks the boundary between truth and fiction.

While Lacan, as seen by Derrida, holds psychoanalysis theory before fiction, in this study, literature undermines the opposition between non-fiction and fiction – hence, this might be what Lacan has in mind for he does not literally use Poe’s text as an illustrative tool.

In the end, the letter always arrives at its place. Carver’s texts are read as they are placed on my hands. They have not changed for they are designed and destined to be read as such when they arrive. If they arrive to other hands, they would not be read as such. This does not mean that these texts are mine. The texts are still Carver’s, but the reading itself is mine, the reading that also re-writes the text. The meaning of the text is almost always dictated by the reader. But little do we know that it is us who is dictated by the text. We are not spoken when we try to work with the text but only at the moment we talk about the text. What we talk about when we talk about the text is us being “dead” by the text.

Will this be helpful to the others? I cannot answer. I can only wait. It is always the post-letter, the moment after the letter is posted, or the posted letter itself, that is the most troublesome to the addressee and the sender.

**EPILOGUE:
YOURS, TRULY**

...the letter always cannot arrive at my destination because it is truly yours. The letter. Yes. It is always about those damn letters. They are never in their place. The letters also always complicate the simplest things. You from your, marking the end of the letter, imply a relationship with me. But I am not the “you” that you have in mind. I am not yours. I know that you did not write those words. Those are the letter’s words. They are always there at the end of the letter, staring at me and you. The letter says for itself that it is yours: I am yours. It forces your hand to write one, to be its holder. And now having arrived at my hand, it looks blindly at me, and whispers “I am yours truly.” Is it you, who say these words, or is it the letter? I cannot answer as now it forces me to say that I am too yours truly. But what am I “yours” to you? The yours that implies a certain object without reference and context. A free floating yours. Am I your letter, addressee, writer, or just yours? The free word....and now you are a silence after a co(m)ma. Why keep me waiting, putting me on hold? The comma! Oh, now I see. The signature at the end. That signature is yours truly. But I do not know you. How could you be mine? Do you even know that I am here? ... A word would be nice, to break the sound of silence. But why would your signature be there if I am the one that writes the letter. Am I addressing myself? But you, you are the one I write about. These are all yours truly. Your stories. Your little anecdote of epistle and fiction. I cannot make it mine, and I know, for some time, that they are not truly yours because I am yours, after all.

“Yours Truly,” (p. 133)

Event Signature

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