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Cochrane, "Taking the Cure": Alcoholism and Recovery in the Fiction of Raym

# "TAKING THE CURE": ALCOHOLISM AND RECOVERY IN THE FICTION OF RAYMOND CARVER

Hamilton E. Cochrane

Alcoholism plays a major role in modern American fiction; it serves as a reminder not only of a serious social problem, but also of an underlying and even more troubling malaise. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, is famous as an alcoholic novel, full of drinking and drunkenness, quarreling and remorse. Considered by Jung to be a misdirected spiritual craving, described by a member of Alcoholics Anonymous as the attempt to fill a "bottomless neediness,"<sup>1</sup> the abuse of alcohol serves as a powerful metaphor for the thirst of modern man that cannot be quenched with material drink: Jake and Lady Ashley and the rest drink and drink, but are never satisfied.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on this metaphor, we see Hemingway's novel—and much of American fiction depicting alcoholism—as a prose companion to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the modern epic poem of spiritual dryness.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Hemingway's most brilliant and influential heir was Raymond Carver, whose stories, recently collected in *Where I'm Calling From*, have been described as "tales of Hopelessville, its marriages and alcoholic wreckage."<sup>4</sup> Like Hemingway, Carver writes in a spare style that tells nothing, but shows everything; Carver likewise depicts those who inhabit a kind of modern wasteland, characters who, in his own words, "would like their actions to count for something" but "know it isn't so." They discover that "it doesn't add up any longer."<sup>5</sup> Frustrated and confused, they seek the solace of alcohol, and their drinking in turn only makes the possibility of it ever adding up, of their actions ever counting for something, more and more remote.

Before his death in August 1988, Carver had written and spoken candidly about autobiographical elements—including alcoholism—in his fiction. He admitted that he was himself alcoholic, that his drinking "made a wasteland out of everything" in his own life, and, though declining to discuss specifics, told an interviewer: "Let's just say, on occasion, the police were involved and emergency rooms and court rooms" (202). With the help of several treatment centers and AA, Carver quit drinking for good in 1977 and this experience, he said, brought about a fundamental shift in his outlook on life. He expressed a kind of faith and joy in living that from the author of the bleak stories in his first two collections is surprising. Though not a religious man, Carver said he came "to believe in miracles and the possibility of resurrection. No question about that. Every day that I wake up, I'm glad to wake up. That's why I like to wake up early" (212-213).

We expect the work of a writer whose method is so strongly autobiographical to show evidence of such a profound shift, and Carver's most recent stories are in fact different, both structurally and thematically, from his earlier stories. Described by critics as "more generous," as displaying "a larger scope of reference,"<sup>6</sup> the stories in *Cathedral*, for example, signal a change, according to Carver, that is personal as much as literary: "I suppose it [*Cathedral*] reflects a change in my life as much as it does in my way of writing" (210). Attempting to link Carver's new way of writing and his new way of living, Mona Simpson asked Carver whether the "spoken con-

fessions” he heard at AA meetings had any influence on his stories. Carver dismissed the idea (“I can’t honestly say I’ve ever consciously or otherwise patterned my stories on things I’ve heard at meetings” (206), but she had noticed something significant: AA and a number of Carver’s latest stories are concerned with the restoration of those who are suffering, those for whom it doesn’t add up any longer. Carver depicts alcoholism and its attendant spiritual ills—self-absorption, isolation, the inability to make sense of one’s experience—but he also depicts a recovery process, the healing of broken lives, and, metaphorically, a spiritual rebirth based on the principles of community, service, and the telling of one’s story—principles just as capable of redeeming modern man as curing an alcoholic.

To appreciate these stories, it is necessary first to examine the earlier work. One representative tale of Hopelessville from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* is “One More Thing”: the story of L.D., an alcoholic who is thrown out of his house by his wife, Maxine, after she returns from work to find him drunk once again. The story consists of bickering between L.D. and Rae, his fifteen-year-old daughter; accusations exchanged by L.D. and Maxine (“This is a nuthouse.” “If it’s a nuthouse, then that’s what you made it.”<sup>7</sup>); and L.D.’s packing as he prepares to leave. The story’s title suggests that this is simply one more in a series of such episodes, what Maxine calls “another tragedy in a long line of low-rent tragedies” (156). It is, however, not a tragedy strictly speaking; it lacks the coherence and shape of a satisfying literary structure—exposition, rising action, climax.<sup>8</sup> Rather, this is merely “one more thing,” just another episode in a life that is one damn thing after another, yet another adventure in the alcoholic picar’s life.

The title also points out the protagonist’s intense desire to invest his experience with significance and his absolute inability to do so. After a bit of stalling (“ ‘This is it,’ L.D. said. ‘This is goodbye.’ ”), on the verge of leaving his home and family, L.D. makes one last attempt to mark the occasion: “I just want to say one more thing” (159). This promise, however, is unfulfilled. The next line of the story is the last: “But he could not think what it possibly could be” (159). This comes as no surprise. L.D. is capable only of childish retorts and gestures of impotent rage: throwing a jar of pickles through the kitchen window, slamming his hand on the table, kicking a chair, stealing a soap dish, ashtray, and eyelash curler when packing. This conclusion reflects the unfinished business that is L.D.’s life. L.D. can make no sense of it—can make no connections, draw no conclusions—and the fragmentary and inconclusive form of the story itself seems to reinforce this. In an autobiographical essay, Carver makes this same connection between the order of a literary form and the order of life; he describes his preference for the short story over the novel at a time when his own experience was chaotic and confusing: “To write a novel, it seemed to me, a writer should be living in a world that makes sense, a world that the writer can believe in . . . a world that will, for a time anyway, stay fixed in one place.”<sup>9</sup> The fragmentary form of the stories in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* mirrors the world Carver lived in, “likely to go up in smoke,” a world “that seemed to change gears and directions, along with its rules, every day.”<sup>10</sup>

Several of Carver’s stories collected in *Cathedral*, unlike “One More Thing,” are not fragmentary accounts of alcoholic deterioration; they are instead stories of hope and health, based, it seems, on Carver’s own recovery from alcoholism. While his experience with AA may not have provided him with specific details, with content for the stories, it must certainly have underscored the restorative power of narrative.



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Both AA's program of recovery and Carver's *Cathedral* are informed by a belief that telling one's story initiates the healing process. Even more important, AA stories—the forty-three narratives printed in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the so-called Big Book, as well as the countless others told at meetings—provide a coherent structure, a way to make sense of even the most painful and chaotic alcoholic experience. The AA "drama" has been called "as simple and straightforward a container of meaning as the mind could devise."<sup>11</sup> According to the Big Book: "Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now."<sup>12</sup> Organized in this way, alcoholic excesses (the "drunkalogue") are progressive symptoms of the disease of alcoholism; one follows another predictably and necessarily until the alcoholic "hits bottom"—is so threatened by death or insanity that he seeks help.

Like myths of death and resurrection, of journeys to the underworld and back, these stories embody both a tragic and comic movement. That one should lose family, friends, career, and self-respect to alcoholism is certainly tragic, but the story does not end there: "what happened" signals a reversal and there follows an archetypal rebirth, a return from hell. "We were reborn," the Big Book exclaims. "The age of miracles is still with us. Our recovery proves that!" (153) Obviously, AA stories are not great literature, nor are Carver's stories simply AA stories. To examine his fiction, however, in light of the AA experience is illuminating and more accurate than locating his new sensibility in some other, say, Christian perspective.<sup>13</sup>

In "Where I'm Calling From," a story narrated by a resident of a drying-out facility in northern California, Carver presents a memorable image—what Eliot would call an objective correlative—of the alcoholic experience. J.P., another resident, tells the narrator about the time he fell down a dry well when he was twelve years old: J.P. wet his pants, he was so frightened, "suffered all kinds of terror in that well," "hollered himself hoarse before it was over."<sup>14</sup> He always remembered how different the world looked: "Way up at the top, he could see a circle of blue sky. Every once in a while a white cloud passed overhead" (130). Finally, J.P. was rescued: "Then his dad came along with the rope, and it wasn't long before J.P. was back in the world he'd always lived in" (130). Like the boy in the well, J.P. and the narrator have suffered their own terrors in the course of their own descent; at present they too suffer a kind of dislocation, their perspective on the world and themselves having been wrenched as they quit drinking and entered a community of strangers in the woods; and they are likewise hoping to return to the world they have always lived in. Who, though, will throw them a rope? What kind of rope will pull them out of the physical, emotional, and spiritual hole they are in?

One instrument of regeneration is sympathy, one of the keys offered by Eliot at the conclusion of *The Waste Land*. *Alcoholics Anonymous* declares that self-centeredness is the root of the alcoholic's troubles (62) and a suggested prayer implores God to relieve "the bondage of self" (63). In the fellowship of AA and in these stories of Carver's, one learns to sympathize simply by listening. "Elpenor," an alcoholic writing under a pseudonym in *Harper's* about his recovery, states that one of "the great virtues" acquired by members of AA is "the capacity to listen, without making assumptions or jumping to conclusions, without analyzing, categorizing, glossing or comparing . . . but with appetite, imagination, and sympathy."<sup>15</sup> (It is interesting that one of the bleak stories in *Cathedral*, "Careful," focuses on the attempt of a man with a serious drinking problem to unclog his ear, which is stopped with wax.) Frank Martin, the proprietor of the treatment facility in "Where I'm Call

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ing From,” offered by the narrator, “I can’t help it. If you want help and want to listen to what we say” (138). The majority of the story consists of the narrator doing just that—listening—as J.P. tells his story: how he met and fell in love with his wife, Roxy, when she came to clean a friend’s chimney, how he married her and became a chimney sweep himself, how his drinking increased and his behavior deteriorated gradually and inexplicably until Roxy had an affair and broke J.P.’s nose and J.P. dislocated her shoulder and cut her wedding band to pieces with a wire cutter—“Good, solid fun,” the narrator remarks (135). The narrator says very little during J.P.’s story. He encourages him: “Don’t stop now, J.P.” (132). “‘It’s all right,’ I say. And I mean it’s okay for him to tell it. ‘Go on, J.P.’ ” (135). He comments on the benefits of listening: “It’s helping me relax for one thing. It’s taking me away from my own situation” (134). This relationship re-enacts what AA members consider the critical moment involving the fellowship’s two founders: “In the kinship of common suffering, *one alcoholic had been talking to another.*”<sup>16</sup>

Listening to J.P., paradoxically, seems both to take the narrator away from his own pain and, at the same time, to offer a paradigm that brings him back to his own experience with new understanding. It is only after he hears J.P. out that the narrator sets down his own story, what brought him to Frank Martin’s: his earlier visit with his wife, and his more recent experience with his girlfriend—the news of her positive Pap smear on Christmas Eve, followed by a drunken Christmas, several days of living on bourbon and salted nuts, and, finally, the long sad car trip back to Frank Martin’s in a rainstorm, listening to the car radio and drinking champagne. The common element in their story—helplessness with alcohol—bridges the gap between these men in these unlikely circumstances and forges a bond that cannot be found anywhere else, not even among family members. (The comfort found in Carver’s fiction is “improbable,” according to Anatole Broyard, “found in incongruous places.”<sup>17</sup>) The residents of Frank Martin’s laugh when one of them describes a drinking bout because, says the narrator, “We’d all done things just as bad and crazy, so sure, that’s why we laughed” (128). Suffering and calamity are the basis for the fellowship that makes change possible; *Alcoholics Anonymous* describes its members as those who, having survived a shipwreck together, commence a common journey (153).

“Where I’m Calling From” concludes with a glimmer of hope, with the possibility at least of resurrection, on New Year’s Day, a fitting time for new beginnings and symbolic rebirths. The night before, the narrator, J.P., and the other men had welcomed the new year and marked their own sense of community with cake (“HAPPY NEW YEAR—ONE DAY AT A TIME”) and Coke. The following morning, J.P.’s wife, Roxy, the former chimney sweep, arrives for a visit, and the narrator requests and receives a good-luck kiss. Soon after, alone, “thinking about chimney sweeps,” the narrator recalls a happier time in his life. He was asleep with his wife on a Sunday morning when he heard something outside his window. He pushed the curtain aside and discovered his landlord—“this old guy in white coveralls” (145). He studied the man, unshaven and wearing a baseball cap, and suddenly felt happy to be alive in that moment, glad to be who he was, where he was: “Goddamn it, I think, if he isn’t a weird old fellow. And a wave of happiness comes over me that I’m not him—that I’m me and that I’m inside this bedroom with my wife” (145). Having reclaimed this memory, the narrator decides that he will try again to call his wife, then his girlfriend: “‘Hello, Sugar,’ I’ll say when she answers. ‘It’s me.’ ” (146). This simple declaration suggests hard-earned self-knowledge and self-acceptance, the foundation on which



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the structure of a new life may be erected.

The possibility of rebirth through the powers of community and narrative is explored elsewhere in Carver's recent stories not directly concerned with alcoholism. The protagonist of "The Fever," for example, is not an alcoholic, but he does experience "deflation," confront his own powerlessness, and find that it no longer adds up.<sup>18</sup> Carlyle is a high school art teacher whose wife has left him and their two children to go to California with one of his colleagues. Carlyle is devastated, torn between wishing she would return and wishing never to see her again, faced not only with his own grief, but also with such practical problems as where to find a responsible babysitter. He is consoled not at all by his wife's late-night calls, full of optimistic pronouncements about his karma and where his head is at. He is, however, genuinely grateful when she calls to say that she knows babysitting is a problem and that she has arranged for a Mrs. Webster to call. Mrs. Webster does call, and is a god-send, the bringer of loving order to Carlyle's household.

The climax of the story occurs when Carlyle tells his story to Mrs. Webster. After a day in bed with a high fever, his head aching and his sense of time disturbed, Carlyle gets up and speaks with her. She tells him that she and her husband will be moving soon and he must find a new babysitter. Just then, his wife calls with more clairvoyant knowledge—"You're sick, aren't you?" (180)—and more advice—"Try writing about what it's like . . . You've got to translate it into something usable" (182). Carlyle concludes that she is insane. Nevertheless, he does follow her advice; he translates his life into something usable, a story: "He cleared his throat. 'Mrs. Webster, there's something I want you to know. For a long time, my wife and I loved each other more than anything or anybody in the world'" (184). Carver does not include the specifics of his story; they matter less than the fact that he is shaping them and offering them to Mrs. Webster just as J.P. offered his story to his friend at Frank Martin's:

Carlyle went on talking. At first, his head still ached, and he felt awkward to be in his pajamas on the sofa with this old woman beside him, waiting patiently for him to go on to the next thing. But then the headache went away. And soon he stopped feeling awkward and forgot how he was supposed to feel. He had begun his story somewhere in the middle, after the children were born. But then he backed up and started at the beginning, back when Eileen was eighteen and he was nineteen, a boy and girl in love, burning with it. (184)

Mrs. Webster is an encouraging listener ("Go on . . . You just keep talking, Mr. Carlyle" (185)); she sees this talk as therapeutic ("you're going to feel better afterwards" (185)), and stresses that she understands because she has suffered the same pain: "Something like that happened to me once, something like what you're describing. Love. That's what it is" (185).

Like "Where I'm Calling From," this story concludes with a new beginning, a symbolic rebirth. Carlyle goes down with a fever, but rises again, stronger and wiser. Closure—something absent from the lives of most of Carver's characters and from the stories themselves—is here achieved both in Carlyle's life and in Carver's story. Carlyle waved goodbye to Mrs. Webster and "felt something come to an end" (186). He thought of his marriage: "he understood it was over, and he felt able to let her go. He was sure their life together had happened in the way he said it had. But it was

something that had passed” (186). While one may explain in psychological terms just how Carlyle achieves this insight, there is still something that defies rational explanation. What about Eileen’s ability to know what is happening to Carlyle and to communicate just what he needs to know in her static-filled, late-night calls? Eileen’s knowledge, like Roxy’s kiss, suggests a sense of mysterious good in the universe that is manifested from unlikely sources—a chimney sweep’s tradition, the insights of a California psychobabbler—what the religious might call grace, what members of AA would describe as the workings of “a power greater than ourselves.” Perhaps the single most important tenet of AA is that alcoholics suffer “an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.”<sup>19</sup> The nature of this experience is as various as the members of the fellowship. Not necessarily religious in any conventional sense, this experience is based on a belief in “God as we understand him”—interpreted as a cosmic force, the Judeo-Christian God, or simply the power of the fellowship.<sup>20</sup> Thus loosely defined, Carlyle does experience a spiritual awakening, accomplishes something he could not do for himself, is restored not through his own efforts.

Perhaps the best way to understand just how Carver’s recovery influenced his writing is to examine “The Bath,” a story published in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, but revised and expanded and included in *Cathedral* as “A Small, Good Thing.”<sup>21</sup> “The Bath” opens as Ann Weiss orders a birthday cake for her son, Scotty. On the way to school, however, Scotty is struck by a car and is later hospitalized. The story describes the ordeal of the parents, Ann and Howard, after Scotty slips into a coma: they wait at his bedside, interrogate the doctor, and make quick trips home to feed the dog, bathe, and change clothes. At home, they receive several disquieting telephone calls, apparently from the baker of the forgotten cake. The story breaks off before Scotty’s fate is known—once again, no closure—and seems to illustrate what Anatole Broyard calls Carver’s fascination with “disconsolateness and the precariousness of human happiness.”<sup>22</sup>

Carver introduces the theme of human connection through language early in the revised version as a kind of appetite, a longing to know someone else’s story. When Ann orders her son’s cake, she studies the baker—a silent, older man with a thick neck and a white apron—and feels uncomfortable. She is curious about him and wonders “if he’d ever done anything else with his life” (60). She makes up a story about him: he must be a father himself, he must have experienced the rituals of children’s birthdays—“there must be that between them” (60) However, under these circumstances, one of a hundred daily transactions that consist of “just the minimum exchange of words” (60), Ann can only speculate about the baker; her desire to know his story remains unfulfilled.

In the world of “A Small, Good Thing,” as in the world of AA, it is suffering that leads people to a higher power and to their fellows. In both versions of the story, Ann meets a black family in the waiting room and explains why she is there. In the revision, the father responds; he tells Ann about his son, Franklin, knifed at a party and now on the operating table. Ann longs to exchange words that articulate their common suffering. She watches Franklin’s sister as she prays: “Ann saw the lips moving silently, making words. She had an urge to ask what those words were. She wanted to talk more with these people who were in the same kind of waiting she was in” (74). Despite this longing, she is unable to connect: “Yet she didn’t know how to begin. She stood looking at them without saying anything more” (74).



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"A Small, Good Thing" is a continuation of "The Bath," which ends inconclusively but ominously with an anonymous phone call to Ann. She asks if it concerns Scotty: "'Scotty,' the voice said. 'It is about Scotty,' the voice said. 'It has to do with Scotty, yes'" (56). The conclusion is disturbing partly because the voice remains unidentified, disembodied—misdirected, disconnected, and wrong-number calls recur in Carver's stories, symbols of missed connections—partly because it offers no sense of closure. The parents of the child in a coma, as well as the readers, crave a definite outcome, good or bad. Instead they are like figures in a nightmare version of Keats's Grecian urn, forever waiting, forever anxious.

"A Small, Good Thing" is, as it has been described, a more satisfying story than "The Bath"; it offers a genuine conclusion, a completed action, and it also connects language, the voice on the telephone, with the suffering human being behind it. The resulting life story is the real small, good thing. In Carver's revision, Scotty dies. After some perfunctory words of consolation from the doctor, the grieving parents return home, only to be harassed with more phone calls, obviously from the baker. Enraged, they drive to the shopping mall where, in the middle of the night, surrounded by ovens and the smell of fresh bread, they confront him. "My son's dead," Ann tells him. "He was hit by a car Monday morning. We've been waiting with him until he died. But, of course, you couldn't be expected to know that, could you? Bakers can't know everything—can they, Mr. Baker? But he's dead. He's dead, you bastard!" (86)

Ann's fury is spent, and the baker offers them chairs. He apologizes. He offers them warm cinnamon rolls and coffee, like the cake and Coke at Frank Martin's, a form of communion. He tells them, "Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this" (88). At this point, the baker tells his own story. Like Ann and Howard's, like J.P.'s in "Where I'm Calling From," like Carlyle's in "The Fever," like those told at AA, it is a story of suffering and endurance:

... he began to talk. They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say. They nodded when the baker began to speak of loneliness, and of the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years. He told them what it was like to be childless all these years. To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty. The party food, the celebrations he'd worked over. Icing knuckle-deep. The tiny wedding couples stuck into cakes. Hundreds of them, no, thousands by now. Birthdays. Just imagine all those candles burning. He had a necessary trade. He was a baker. He was glad he wasn't a florist. It was better to be feeding people. This was a better smell anytime than flowers. (88-89)

Here again is what has been described as the fundamental "dynamic" of AA: "the shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged."<sup>23</sup> People in a strange setting, wracked with recent suffering, stripped of their usual perspective and inhibitions, tell their stories and listen, just listen, and so provide a service to one who needs to give shape to his life and grief, while the act of listening extends their range of sympathy. If alcoholics survive the shipwreck of their disease—a fairly specific kind of suffering—and commence a common journey, this couple and the baker are survivors of a more universal type; they have suffered the shipwreck of common humanity and bear the most familiar pains of the human condition: death, loneliness, limi-



tation, isolation. In this unlikely community, they are fortified, receive strength to face a new day, strength they could not bestow on themselves: "They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high pale cast of the light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving" (89).

These stories recall a conceit used by one member of AA to describe how that program works. Drinking alcoholics love stories, he writes; they build ladders of words, one end propped on the clouds, the other floating on water: "The fellowship exists to ground the drunk's ladder on solid earth, on common ground, and whether we extend one end of it back into the heavens or simply lay it down to bridge the chasm between ourselves and others, it is still a ladder made of words."<sup>24</sup> It is a memorable image of fiction at its best: a ladder of words that brilliantly bridges the chasm between writer and reader, makes sense of our suffering, enlarges our sympathy, strengthens us, makes us believe in miracles.

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NOTES

- 1 C. G. Jung, Letter to William Wilson, 30 January 1961, quoted in Robert Thomsen, *Bill W.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 362-63. "Elpenor," "A Drunkard's Progress," *Harper's*, October, 1986, 45.
- 2 In the biography of Bill Wilson, one of the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, there is his account of an insatiable desire for something he could not specify, an inner voice saying, "I want, I want." *Bill W.*, 164. Readers of Saul Bellow will recognize that this is the same demand that plagued Henderson.
- 3 According to the historian Ernest Kurtz, an underlying insight of Alcoholics Anonymous is that the alcoholic's "thirst for transcendence had been perverted into a thirst for alcohol"—a confusion of spirit and spirits. *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1979), 205. For a discussion of alcoholism as a metaphor of modern alienation and anomie, modeled on Susan Sontag's analysis of tuberculosis and cancer, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Random House, 1978), see Kurtz, 199-230. For an excellent discussion of alcoholism in modern literature, see Thomas B. Gilmore, *Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1987).
- 4 Donald Newlove, "Fiction Briefs," *Saturday Review*, April 1981, 77.
- 5 Interview with Mona Simpson, "The Art of Fiction LXXVI," *Paris Review* 25, No. 88 (Summer, 1983), 192-221. Further remarks by Carver quoted in the essay are from this interview and will be noted parenthetically in the text.
- 6 Simpson, "The Art of Fiction," 211; Irving Howe, "Stories of Our Loneliness," *New York Times Book Review*, 11 September 1983, 43.
- 7 Raymond Carver, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 159. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.
- 8 While discussing "The Bath," another story from the same collection, William Stull notes Forster's distinction between story and plot. Most of the other stories in the collection, including "One More Thing," could likewise be said to be lacking a plot. "Beyond Hopelessville: Another Side of Raymond Carver," *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985), 6.
- 9 Raymond Carver, "Fires," *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories* (Santa Barbara: Capra, 1983), 26.
- 10 "Fires," 26.
- 11 "Elpenor," 47.
- 12 *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd edition (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, 1976), 58. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.
- 13 See Stull, 11-13.
- 14 Raymond Carver, *Cathedral* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 130. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.
- 15 "Elpenor," 44.
- 16 *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, 1957), 59.
- 17 "Diffuse Regrets," *New York Times*, 5 September 1983, 27.
- 18 "Deflation" is the term Bill Wilson, one of the co-founders of AA, used to describe what William James presented as the common denominator of conversions in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. See *AA Comes of Age*, 64.



- <sup>19</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 44.
- <sup>20</sup> On the difference between the spiritual dimension of AA and religion, see "Elpenor," 48, and Kurtz, 178-188. For a discussion of "unearned and unexpected" gifts, of "a kind of grace" in *Cathedral*, see Mark A. R. Facknitz, "'The Calm,' 'A Small, Good Thing,' and 'Cathedral': Raymond Carver and the Rediscovery of Human Worth," *Studies in Short Fiction* 23 (1986), 287-296.
- <sup>21</sup> For further discussion of Carver's revision of this story, see Stull, Irving Howe, "Stories of Our Loneliness," *New York Times Book Review* 11 Sept. 1983, 1, 42-43; and Jonathan Yardly, "Ordinary People from an Extraordinary Writer," *Washington Post Book World* 4 Sept. 1983, 3.
- <sup>22</sup> "Diffuse Regrets," *New York Times*, 5 Sept. 1983, 27.
- <sup>23</sup> Kurtz, 61.
- <sup>24</sup> "Elpenor," 43.