

## Raymond Carver and the Shaping Power of the Pacific Northwest

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Considering Raymond Carver's life and work in relationship to place and, more specifically, to the Pacific Northwest, is a fairly recent scholarly impulse. Carver spent much of his life in small towns throughout Oregon, Washington, and northern California; however, when his writing became popular in the 1970s and 1980s, critics were so preoccupied with his so-called minimalistic style that they overlooked the shaping power of place in his work. In 1981, for example, critic Donald Newlove reviewed *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and called it a collection of "tales from Hopelessville," giving readers the impression that Carver's stories are set in generic locations and void of geographic significance (77). The tendency to disassociate Carver's fiction, in particular, from the places he lived and worked has overshadowed scholarly conversations about the author for nearly thirty years. This remains evident in Nicholas O'Connell's book *On Sacred Ground: The Spirit of Place in Pacific Northwest Literature* (2003), which barely mentions Carver's name in relation to the region, and John M. Findlay's 2006 article, "Something in the Soil?: Literature and Regional Identity in the 20th-Century Pacific Northwest," which dismisses Carver's work from the Pacific Northwest on the basis that his stories "tend not to be set in any recognizable Northwest" (180). If it is true—and it may or may not be—that Carver's well-known fiction offers readers little insight into matters of place and regional histories, then moving beyond his most anthologized works toward lesser known stories, poetry, and essays can provide new contexts for discussing Carver's work in relationship to place and, more specifically, to the complex socioeconomic history and transformation of the Pacific Northwest.

## “My Father’s Life”: The Great Depression and Westward Migration

Raymond Carver is among the most influential short-fiction writers of the twentieth century, but his essays and poetry should not be set aside, particularly when it comes to considering his relationship to the Pacific Northwest. In an essay titled “My Father’s Life,” first published in *Esquire* in September 1984, Carver chronicles the westward migration and laboring struggles of his father, a man who arrived in the Northwest from Arkansas during the Great Depression. When Tess Gallagher, Carver’s second wife, revisited the essay for its inclusion in the 2001 collection *Call If You Need Me*, she described it as “one of the most moving expressions on record of a son’s love for his father” (xii). The essay will continue to stand on its own artistic and relational merit, but when considered alongside recent scholarship such as Carol Sklenicka’s biography *Raymond Carver: A Writer’s Life* (2009), William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll’s biographical chronology in *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories* (2009), and Bob Adelman and Tess Gallagher’s *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver* (2011), readers can begin to grasp ways that Carver’s identity is deeply embedded in the working-class history of the Pacific Northwest.<sup>1</sup>

In *Raymond Carver: A Writer’s Life*, Sklenicka traces Carver’s genealogy and the socioeconomic conditions that caused his ancestors to migrate from Arkansas to the Pacific Northwest during the Great Depression. Carver’s father, Clevie Carver (1913–67), was born into a family of once-prosperous cotton farmers who had been struggling to endure the socioeconomic reconstruction of the South since the Civil War. Economic reconstruction and heavy floods in the South stripped the Carvers of wealth and land, reducing them to “sharecroppers and lumber mill hands” who could be found “migrating from one sharecropping situation to another” (Sklenicka 5). In the early twentieth century, Clevie’s father, Frank, still a teenager at the time, watched his parents, aunts, and uncles lose their land and sink into “further deprivation as the cotton-based Arkansas economy collapsed at the end

of World War I” (5). For years, the Carvers pressed on as itinerant laborers, but as Raymond Carver would later explain, by the time the Great Depression hit Arkansas in 1929, his father and extended family were “about to starve down there, and this wasn’t meant as a figure of speech” (*Collected* 719). Weary of sharecropping and economic uncertainty, Clevie’s older brother, Fred, and his wife headed West, intending to “abandon the economic quagmire of Arkansas” for good (Sklenicka 5). The couple made a cross-country trek to Omak, Washington, where Fred took a job with a lumber company in the Okanogan Valley. When the couple wrote back to Arkansas with stories of “paradise regained,” it fell upon Clevie, only sixteen at the time, to load up an “old, black Model-T Ford sedan” and drive his mother, father, sister, brother-in-law, and their new baby to the Pacific Northwest (5–6).

In “My Father’s Life,” Carver speculates that when his father migrated to the Pacific Northwest he was not “pursing a dream,” but was merely “looking for steady work at decent pay” (*Collected Stories* 719). This may only be partially true. During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal reform was stirring dreams of westward migration and economic hope. The Carvers arrived in the Okanogan Valley at an ideal time, just as regional landowners were using the power of irrigation canals and dams to transform the semi-arid landscape into rolling orchards of agricultural prosperity. As historian Carlos Schwantes explains, by the 1920s central Washington was struck with “apple fever” and families like the Carvers were among the earliest migrant laborers to reap the benefits of federally sponsored irrigation (171). Clevie also benefited from Roosevelt’s commitment to transform the infrastructure of the American West through the construction of massive hydroelectric dams. As Carver explains, after arriving in the Northwest his father “picked apples for a time” but kept an eye out for bigger and better opportunities and soon “landed a construction laborer’s job on Grand Coulee Dam” (*Collected Stories* 719).

By 1935, Clevie’s economic prospects were stable enough to return to Arkansas, where he married a “tall country girl” named Ella Casey

and then moved additional family members out to Omak, Washington (*Collected Stories* 720). Clevie's sense of optimism was understandable. President Roosevelt had allotted New Deal funds in excess of sixty-three million dollars for the construction of Grand Coulee Dam. By the time Clevie and Ella settled down in Omak, in a place "not much bigger than a cabin," this massive dam was beginning to rise from the dust just fifty miles southeast of their home (*Collected Stories* 720). Clevie, who became part of a team of more than twelve thousand laborers, was present at the dam in 1937 when Roosevelt visited the site with words of progress and encouragement. Journalist Richard Neuberger recalls how the president was the "hero of at least three-fourths of the laborers" at Grand Coulee, men who kept his posters, newspaper clippings, and buttons on display in their bunkhouses (69). Interestingly, Clevie was part of a critical minority who "never bragged about his own work at the dam" (Sklenicka 8). According to Carver, his father was embittered that the president "never mentioned those guys who died building the dam . . . men from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri" (*Collected* 720).

Despite the dangers and ambivalence that came with working on Grand Coulee Dam, Clevie had temporarily improved his economic condition by migrating to the Pacific Northwest. Decades later, Carver would capture his father's newfound sense of optimism and purpose in a poem titled "Photograph of My Father in his Twenty-Second Year." Written one year after Clevie's untimely death in 1967 and later included in the essay "My Father's Life," Carver imagines his father's sense of hope through a photograph taken during his early days in Washington State when his father was "still working on the dam" (*Collected* 720). On the surface, the poem depicts Clevie as an optimistic laborer who arrived in the Northwest to reap the benefits of Roosevelt's New Deal. He leans against the fender of a 1934 Ford, a car he purchased with money earned as a "farmhand-turned-construction worker" and offers the photographer a "sheepish grin" while posing with his young bride (720). In one hand, he holds a bottle of Carlsbad beer, the other a stringer of

fish—both signs of the good life. He wears a “young man’s face” and poses “bluff and hearty for his posterity” with an “old hat cocked over his ear” (726). But this is not the whole story. As Carver explains in “On Writing,” there is power in absence, in elements that are “left out, that are implied” to the reader (732). And here, even with the sense of youth and promise in the photograph, there are looming indications of “a sense of menace” working beneath what Carver like to call “the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things” (732).

In the final stanza, Carver prods beneath the photograph’s optimistic surface to expose his father’s longing and inability to transcend an expendable working-class identity (*Collected* 732). Despite the appearances of security, Carver states that his father’s hands and “eyes give him away.” They tell the story of a man who “wanted to be bold” and “would like to pose brave and hearty for his posterity” but was merely performing a temporary dream (726). Using the poem to read the past, Carver imagines the years before his own birth, when his mother and father’s dreams would begin to slip away. Shortly after the photograph was taken, Clevie’s job at Grand Coulee Dam would end, sending his parents in search of work again. They would head several hundred miles down the Columbia River to Clatskanie, Oregon, where Clevie and his brother would take jobs with the Crossett Western Company, part of an Arkansas based timber conglomerate. That same year, Raymond Carver would be born in that “little town along the Columbia River” (720). And as Sklenicka suggests, it would be the region’s rivers, orchards, and industries that would shape the young writer’s life for decades to come:

Living near the [Columbia River] and remembering the hardships at Grand Coulee, the Carvers could see the paradoxes inherent in the economic development of the Northwest. In light of such knowledge, Raymond Junior’s birth by the side of the great northwestern river seems auspicious. The salmon and the dams, the forests and sawmills, the orchards and the fragile human settlements of the Columbia Basin would shape this boy just as Arkansas had shaped his parents. (9)

The Carvers moved again in 1941, this time to Yakima, Washington, where Clevie and his brother took jobs as saw filers with Boise-Cascade Lumber Company and the women worked in the orchards and fruit-packing plants of the Yakima Valley. With that move, the Carvers set roots in a landscape that would shape a young boy's mind for years to come.

### **“Nobody Said Anything”: Growing up in the Yakima Valley**

Raymond Carver lived in Yakima, Washington, from 1941 until his graduation from Yakima Senior High School in 1956. The rivers and irrigated valleys of the region inspired early stories such as “Furious Seasons” and “Sixty Acres” as well as poems such as “Bobber” and “Prosser,” imaginative re-creations of youthful days spent fishing and hunting. When reflecting on his early work, Carver explained that “that’s what excited me in those days, hunting and fishing. That’s what made a dent in my emotional life and that’s what I wanted to write about” (Gentry and Stull 33). Yakima was also the place where Carver fell in love with Maryann Burk, his first wife and mother of their two children. However, growing up Yakima was not always so carefree. In 1986, for example, when pressed about the ways Yakima had shaped his youth, Carver became reticent and evaded the question by stating, “I don’t know what else to say about Yakima. I’m glad I left” (Gentry and Stull 135). The region had “its own particular beauty,” but Carver insisted that “it was much too small a place” and that he had to leave in order to become a writer (Gentry and Stull 135). It is this tension between affection and the need for escape that emerges in much of Carver’s work about the Yakima Valley.

When Clevie and Ella moved to Yakima in 1941, they rented a house in the Fairview District, a section of town that was identifiable by its rundown condition and outdoor toilets. Many of Carver’s relatives were finding economic stability at the Boise-Cascade lumber company, but according to Ella, “money burned a hole” in her husband’s pocket and it

was not long until “everybody was better off” than they were (*Collected* 721). The family went without a car for years, until Cleve came home with the “oldest car in town” that Carver remembers “threw a rod the first week” they had it (722). Carver’s memories of youth often indicate feelings of shame about his family’s social class and living conditions, as well as his anxiousness about his father’s drinking, particularly nights of drunkenness when his mother poured “whiskey down the sink” (721).

In the 1986 poem “Shiftless,” Carver recalls and critiques the circumstances that led to the sometimes embarrassing poverty of his youth. However, rather than promoting societal advancement through physical work, the child narrator resists the vision of prosperity that his mother and father hoped to inherit by migrating to the Pacific Northwest. Instead of planning to work in timber mills with his father, the boy vows “always / to be shiftless” (*All of Us* 175). In the boy’s mind, everything around him is disposable:

The people who were better than us were *comfortable*.  
They lived in painted houses with flush toilets.  
Drove cars whose year and make were recognizable.  
The ones worse off were sorry and didn’t work.  
Their strange cars sat on blocks in dusty yards.  
The years go by and everything and everyone  
gets replaced. (175)

The boy persona explains that his “goal” is not to attain comfort, but to remain “shiftless” since everything will be replaced in time (175). Rather than inheriting the socioeconomic status of his mother and father, the boy embraces an alternative path, one that favors leisure and introspection over industrial progress:

I liked the idea of sitting in a chair  
in front of your house for hours, doing nothing  
but wearing a hat and drinking cola.

What's wrong with that?  
Drawing on a cigarette from time to time.  
Spitting. Making things out of wood with a knife.  
Where's the harm there? Now and then calling  
the dogs to hunt rabbits. Try it sometime. (175–76)

Carver's youthful remembrance and critique of life in the Yakima Valley extends into his fiction as well. As in the poetry, his stories recall a contradictory place that provided him with a winsome freedom to explore, fish, and wander the community, while also keeping his family and the larger working class economically oppressed.

In a short story called "Nobody Said Anything," which was first published in 1973 as "The Summer Steelhead" and collected in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), a young narrator skips school and heads out on a fishing trip to nearby Birch Creek. While walking, the boy gives explicit directions on how to navigate the rural neighborhood in order to reach the creek. In a letter to his friend, photographer Bob Adelman, Carver tells how the town in "Nobody Said Anything" is geographically modeled on Yakima and that walking to Birch Creek is reminiscent of Carver's "growing years" when he used "to walk to the fishing holes at Bachelor Creek" (25). The boy narrator sets out for the creek and provides a telling commentary on the unspoken secrets of his small town. It is a significant passage that provides readers with the title line to the story, as well as the emotional contradictions that Carver experienced while growing up in Yakima, a national seat of agriculture that promoted itself as the "fruit bowl of the nation" (Burk 9). Carver's narrator remembers:

It was nice out. It was fall. But it wasn't cold yet except at night. At night they would light the smudgepots in the orchards and you would wake up in the morning with a black ring of stuff in your nose. But nobody said anything. They said the smudging kept the young pears from freezing, so it was all right. (*Collected* 38)



The image of smudgepots to prevent pear trees from freezing left the child narrator with a dirty sense of unspoken defilement. In this regard, the division between what is said and unsaid, known and unknown in Yakima, haunts the larger mood of the story, which, according to Sklenicka, speaks of the narrator as a “divided child and divided self” (27). In the overall story, nobody says anything—nothing about the child skipping school, his own sense of sexual curiosity and guilt, his desire to reconcile his parents’ downward-spiraling marriage—all of these anxieties are suppressed to make everything appear as though “it was all right” (*Collected* 38). However, the sensation of dirty secrets swirling through the narrator’s youth is not merely a backdrop designed to create atmosphere. It is also an important commentary on the socioeconomic secrets of Yakima, a place that was envisioned to be a promised land of agricultural prosperity, but for some became a socioeconomic nightmare that trapped its inhabitants into a marginalized existence.

“Sixty Acres,” an early story written in 1969, follows directly after “Nobody Said Anything” in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* It is perhaps Carver’s most critical narrative of life in the Yakima Valley. It addresses economic and environmental injustices from the perspective of Lee Waite, a marginalized and struggling Yakama Indian farmer.<sup>2</sup> In order to comprehend the *weight* that Lee Waite carries, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the history of the region. When the Yakima Valley was settled by Euro-Americans in the early twentieth century, the federal government targeted the region as a site of agricultural prosperity and began transforming local watersheds for irrigation and settlement. The federal reconstruction of the valley began much earlier, in 1855, when the United States government negotiated treaties with Mid-Columbia River tribes, including the Yakama Nation, a confederation of fourteen tribes and bands that have inhabited the Columbia Plateau for millennia. After relegating the tribes to a federally managed reservation, the engineering efforts of the federal government transformed the Yakima Valley into one of the most heavily irrigated and agriculturally productive regions of the United States.

This required retaining and diverting water away from the Yakama Reservation and toward towns made prosperous by irrigation—places such as Yakima, Prosser, and Grandview.

In “Sixty Acres,” the agrarian vision of federal irrigation certainly benefits some, but it proves to be bankrupting for Yakama Indians such as Lee Waite. Carver communicates the socioeconomic disparity between the Yakama Nation and other, presumably white, farmers by focusing on the size and stature of Waite’s house, land, and farming equipment—possessions that suggest anything but prosperity. Carver describes Waite as “a small thin man with a thin face” who lives in a small house with a crowded porch (*Collected* 49). Neighboring white farmers have invested in modern agricultural technologies, but Waite farms with “old yokes and harnesses” and “a row of rusted hand tools” (49–50). Waite’s problems are compounded by the fact that his farm and constraining house barely meet the needs of his growing family. Two children sleep in one room, while Waite and his wife share an attached room with his mother. When Waite surveys his land, he sees only the “wavy flatness of sugar-beet fields” and “an inch or two of grainy snow,” all of which give a mocking and “foolish look to the stripped rows of beanpoles in front of the house” (*Collected Stories* 51). As Waite struggles to manage his federal allotment of reservation property, Carver leaves his readers with a vision of a man on the verge of a mental breakdown, a man who is finding it impossible to make an adequate living on the Yakama Reservation.

This sense of constriction and the need for escape ultimately shaped Carver’s decision to leave Yakima in search of an identity and a career as a writer. After graduating from high school in 1956, Carver tested the waters of millwork for six months, but hated it and knew he “didn’t want to do that for the rest of [his] life” (Gentry and Stull 34). A year later, he married Maryann Burk, a sixteen-year-old girl from Yakima who was carrying their first child. Carver, only three years older than Burk, knew one thing for certain: He wanted to be a writer. And this meant getting out of Yakima and away from timber mills and orchards. Burk was tired

of working at the local fruit-packing plant, stacking “rows of little cherries just so,” and Carver, already sick of millwork, was certain that no one in Yakima knew much about writing (Burk 82). So, with little more than dreams in their pockets, the young family set out to find their own version of paradise by leaving Yakima behind them.

### **Returning to the Pacific Northwest: *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water***

In 1983, Raymond Carver was awarded a Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award, a renewable five-year fellowship intended to support the full-time writing of fiction. At that point, Carver resigned from a teaching position at Syracuse University and moved to Port Angeles, Washington, to take up residence with Tess Gallagher, the woman who would become Carver’s second wife. Upon his return to the Pacific Northwest, Carver went back to writing poetry. The collection *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water* (1985) was completed in only six weeks and was followed by *Ultramarine* (1986), *In a Marine Light* (1987), and the posthumously published *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989). When asked about the outpouring of poetry he wrote in the 1980s, Carver was unable to articulate how or why the poems came so quickly. He suspected, however, that “it had something to do” with his return to the “landscape and the water” of the Pacific Northwest, as though the region itself was revising the style and content of his work (Gentry and Stull 170). Upon returning, Carver noticed that his life and work were reconnecting to place. When asked about the newfound optimism and resurgence of natural imagery in his poetry, Carver explained:

The water has been coming into these poems, and the moon, and the mountains and the sky. I’m sure this will make a lot of people in Manhattan laugh! Talk of the tides and the trees, whether the fish are biting or not biting. These things are going to worth their way back into my fiction. I feel directly in touch with my surroundings not in a way that I haven’t felt in years. (Gentry and Stull 116)

Carver's preoccupation with images of water was far more than an aesthetic exploration. His return to the Pacific Northwest also marked the poet's reengagement with questions of place, spirituality, labor, and the socioeconomic plight of the working class.

As a first-generation migrant laborer in the Pacific Northwest, Cleve Carver experienced nature through physical labor. He made a living near water, working at the Grand Coulee Dam and mill towns such as Clatskanie, Oregon; Klamath, California; and Yakima, Washington. As a second-generation inhabitant of the region, Raymond Carver's expressions of work also came through water as evidenced by his numerous books of poetry influenced by water. The comparison is provocative to consider. When Carver's father was employed as a construction worker at Grand Coulee Dam, the federal government was committed to rerouting and restraining western waterways in order to create jobs, irrigate crops, and generate hydroelectricity. In *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, Carver also performs the work of reclamation, only here the poems gather together the life-narratives of people with binding socioeconomic pasts in order to release those histories into a revised vision of health and generosity. This is particularly evident in "My Dad's Wallet" and "The Trestle," two poems about Carver's father that appear in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*.

"My Dad's Wallet" is certainly Carver's darkest poem about his father's working-class existence in the Pacific Northwest. Interestingly, before its publication in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, the poem appeared alongside journalist Bruce Weber's memorable 1984 *New York Times Magazine* article "Raymond Carver: A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair." The poem situates Carver's father in Klamath, California, right after he has died while making a last-ditch attempt to find economic stability as a saw filer in a timber mill. In the poem, Carver and his mother, Ella, have arrived in a dark and dusty mortuary to grant Cleve a final wish: "to lie close / to his parents" in Yakima, Washington, and near those who migrated with him to the

Pacific Northwest. Carver and Ella were aware of Clevie's last wish, but as Carver states:

when the breath  
left his lungs and all signs of life  
had faded, he found himself in a town  
512 miles away from where he wanted most to be. (*All of Us* 89)

In order to grant Clevie his final journey home, mother and son must enter into the game of capital exchange concerning the economics of death. Upon hearing the family's request to return the body to Yakima, the mortician says he can "arrange it, not to worry." However, as critic Arthur Bethea observes, once the undertaker proceeds to pull out his pad and pen, his calculations for food, lodging, and fuel indicate that he is "more concerned about his fee for transporting the corpse than the bereavers' feelings" (Bethea 242). According to Maryann Burk, Carver's first wife, the events depicted in the poem are closely based on actual events. As she remembers, after the funeral the family followed the mortician's hearse from northern California to Yakima. Shortly after they left town, the undertaker "stopped at a drive in" to eat. "Not only did that give us a sad start, but for Ray, the writer and elder son, it was a dramatic, ironic experience to travel across three states, on the same route with his dad's coffin. He kept saying, in tears, 'I just wish I could go take my dad and bury him'" (qtd. in Sklenicka 135).

In "My Dad's Wallet," while Ella and Carver wait for the mortician to return from the back room, Carver describes waiting in an office lit with "poor light" that fell on a "poor place on / the dusty floor," highlighting a condition that is indicative not only of setting, but the dire economic circumstances that this mother and son face (*All of Us* 98–99). The mortician calculates the cost of a journey from Klamath to Yakima and presents the Carvers with an uncompromising scenario:

He took out his pad and pen and began  
to write. First, the preparation charges.  
Then he figured the transportation  
of the remains at 22 cents a mile.  
But this was a round-trip for the undertaker,  
don't forget. Plus, say, six meals  
and two nights in a motel. He figured  
some more. Add a surcharge of  
\$210 for his time and trouble,  
and there you have it. (*All of Us* 90)

After hearing the cost, Carver writes that the undertaker “thought we might argue,” but instead—out of socioeconomic habit—Ella complies with the conditions set forth on the table. She nods in agreement with all of the calculations, although her son knows that “none of it had made sense to her, beginning with the time she left home / with my dad. She only knew / that whatever was happening / was going to take money” (*All of Us* 90). In an attempt to fulfill her husband’s last wish, Ella pulls Clevie’s “old and rent and soiled” wallet from her purse. At that moment, the mortician and Carver “stared at the wallet for minute,” but said nothing; they only watch as she “opened / it and looked inside. / Drew out / a handful of money that would go / toward this last, most astounding trip” (91).

The closing lines and sense of finality rendered in “My Dad’s Wallet” suggest that Carver has closed the final chapter of his father’s hardscrabble life as a laborer in the Pacific Northwest. However, this is not the case. In the final section of *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, the life-narratives of many people from Carver’s personal history are reclaimed from socioeconomic and spiritual drought and gathered into a revised confluence of optimism, health, and generosity. Clevie Carver is among those whose life is reclaimed and released through images of water.

In a poem titled “The Trestle,” Carver uses a railway trestle, a dominant image of western labor and industry, to reconfigure his father’s relationship to the watersheds he worked within as a millworker for more than thirty years. The connection between water and work surfaces in the opening lines, when Carver rises one morning to confess that he has “wasted his time” and is ashamed of the lack of work he has completed. The poem shifts to events that happened the night before, when the poet “went to bed . . . thinking about [his] dad” (*All of Us* 136). Falling asleep, he remembered days they worked together at a mill in Chester, California, and how they spent their free time at “a little river [they] used to fish—Butte Creek— / near Lake Almanor” (136). Lulled to sleep by memories of water, work, and companionship, Carver wakes the next morning to remember another time when he was a kid, “sitting on a timber trestle, looking down,” watching his father in the water far below. Imagining the days when Cleve arrived at Omak from Arkansas, Carver tells how, from the very beginning, his father “loved / this country where he found himself. The West. / For thirty years it had him around the heart, and then it let him go” (*All of Us* 137).

Through the labor of writing, “The Trestle” is a monument of relational reclamation, a place where Carver can find his wandering father in a state of spiritual and socioeconomic health. Carver explains that even after death he can return “to [his] desk back to childhood. And from there it’s not so far to the trestle. / And from the trestle I could look down / and see my dad when I need to see him. My sweet father” (*All of Us* 137). According to Arthur Bethea, this poem, the last one Carver wrote about his father, “imaginatively resurrects his long dead parent,” endowing him with “holiness and a sense of emotional rejuvenation” (242). This transformation is particularly evident in the closing lines, when Carver reflects on the triviality of his own line of work—its telephone calls, deadlines, and appointments. In such moments, he imagines his father at the trestle and, through writing about water, joins him in a baptismal form of renewal. Seeking realignment

and regeneration to history and place, Carver writes: “I want to plunge my hands in clear water. The way he did. Again and then again” (*All of Us* 137).

Despite an early death in 1988, Raymond Carver lived and worked many places in his life. After growing up as the child of Great Depression laborers in the Pacific Northwest, he left Yakima, Washington, and managed to reside in almost every region of the United States. He worked and taught at places ranging from New York’s Syracuse University and the University of Iowa to the University of Texas at El Paso, and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Along the way, while attempting to balance his commitments to family, writing, and teaching alongside the ongoing pressures of alcoholism and looming bankruptcy, Carver’s short stories revived public and scholarly interest in an almost forgotten genre. The influence and scope of Carver’s prose and poetry certainly transcends the Pacific Northwest, but behind the failures and successes of this memorable writer resides the voice of someone whose life and work was shaped by the scenic power and socioeconomic history of the Pacific Northwest.

## Notes

1. In addition to these books, the following articles consider Carver’s work in relationship to the Pacific Northwest: Angela Sorby’s “Teaching Carver’s Voices through Pacific Northwest Music,” in *Carver Across the Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (2011); Tamas Dobozy’s “Raymond Carver in the Viewfinder,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41.3 (2011); and Chad Wriglesworth’s “Stepping onto the Yakama Reservation: Land and Water Rights in Raymond Carver’s ‘Sixty Acres,’” *Western American Literature* 45.1 (2010).
2. In 1994, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation officially changed the spelling of their name from Yakima to Yakama. This chapter uses the word Yakima when referring to the city and its surrounding valley, while Yakama is used to refer to the indigenous peoples and the Yakama Reservation.



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