Metaphorical Structure in
Raymond Carver’s “Distance”
and “Everything Stuck to Him”

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"Distance" by Raymond Carver first appeared in the early short
story collection *Furious Seasons*. It was then greatly revised, shortened
and retitled “Everything Stuck to Him”, for inclusion in the 1981 collection
*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Carver then decided to
rework the *Furious Seasons* original for the miscellaneous collection *Fires*,
where it appears along with other stories, some early essays and previously
unpublished poems. That he considered the latter a final version is clear
from his choosing it for the new and selected stories collection entitled
*Where I’m Calling From*, published in 1988. In this essay I will analyze these
revisions by focusing on the stories’ metaphorical elements and their
structural functions. Broadly speaking, “Distance” and “Everything Stuck
to Him” tell the same story. But in the latter the second-degree narrator’s
diminished control over his means of expression results in a shift of emphasis
from storytelling as a process of introspection to storytelling as a record of
alienation. The narrator is less articulate and appears in the end to be
trapped, while in “Distance” he is at least able to give a deeper and
richer account of his failures.

All versions of this short story are characterized by two distinct narra-
tive voices. There is the narrator proper, or first-degree narrator, who remains
covert throughout and recounts the present from an extradiegetic point of
view and in heterodiegetic relation to the story. In other words, he tells
somebody else’s story and is not himself a character in the action. Then
there is the second-degree narrator who recounts events that happened in the past from an intradiegetic perspective, and his true relation to them is undoubtedly homodiegetic even though he purports it to be heterodiegetic. Thus, while he appears as a character in his own story, he appears in it not in the first but in the third person. The first-degree narrator sets the scene, which is in an apartment looking out on the city of Milan. The time is the present, during the Christmas holidays, and we are immediately introduced to a man, the second-degree narrator, who is being urged by his daughter to recount an incident that involved them both and happened twenty years ago.

At that time the narrator was married and his daughter was just a baby. One day, around Christmas, he arranges to go hunting with his friend Carl. Suddenly, the night before the expedition, the daughter seems to be taken sick. The boy and girl (i.e., the narrator and his wife) take turns in tending her, but nothing seems to soothe her crying. The mother is afraid something is wrong with the baby, and gets nervous because she does not know what to do. Towards morning the husband starts dressing up, determined to keep his engagement with Carl and go hunting. When the girl understands what he intends to do she vents at him the anger she has built up during the night, and recalls him to his responsibilities as husband and father. The boy gets into his car and leaves anyway, but when he reaches Carl’s place he tells his hunting buddy that he cannot go. He returns home to find both the wife and baby quietly asleep. As he undresses she wakes up and is happy to see him there. She then tells him that there was nothing seriously wrong with the child and, as they exchange apologies, she offers him a breakfast of waffle and eggs and bacon. The story within a story ends when he dumps it all into his lap and they start laughing. This accident brings them together again and they embrace, thus renewing their marriage vow.

The opening section of “Distance” is characterized by a succinct exchange between father and daughter of a markedly dialogic nature. The third-person extradiegetic narrator is identifiable as an independent observer in the use of tags introducing reported direct speech (“she says; he says; he asks”) and in the descriptive passages, while the play of focalization from daughter to father and vice versa results in a dynamic sense of point of view. The palpable tension in the opening moments comes from the fact that each character’s perspective is focused upon the other in an extremely rapid switching of points of view based on an equally clipped verbal exchange
between them: “She’s in Milan for Christmas and wants to know what it was like when she was a kid. Always that on the rare occasions when he sees her” (Fires 131; Stories 264; my emphasis). In “Distance” especially, this opposition of third person pronouns in the first two sentences sets a pattern for the whole first section, until the second-degree narrator takes over. Also, the daughter’s aggressive inquisitiveness in getting her father to talk foregrounds the importance of the events about to be narrated. She “eyes him closely”, following him through the telling and goading him on whenever he strays from the point. The third sentence of the incipit shifts the narrative focus to him again, for here she is being seen through her father’s eyes as “a cool, slim, attractive girl, a survivor from top to bottom” (Fires 131; Stories 264).

“Everything Stuck to Him” begins the same way but differences appear very early. It soon appears that the incipit in the shorter version relies even more on dialogue by curtailing the purely narrative passages. Thus, the reference to the second-degree narrator’s apartment and its precise location has been dropped from the middle of the opening section with the result that her perspective is strongly privileged over the father’s. Likewise, the sentence “Always that on the rare occasions when he sees her” has been cut, and along with it the second-degree narrator’s first appearance as a character in the story. The daughter becomes the only source of a subjective perspective and the narrative focus cannot but be centered on her as he passively suffers her gaze. The father as subject, capable of performing acts like “seeing her” in the suppressed phrase, has been substituted with the father as object, who now undergoes her close scrutiny. Thus the symmetry and balance characteristic of the Furious Seasons and Fires versions are diminished in the shorter text from the very beginning, indicating a looser structuring of the text.

This aspect also reflects in Carver’s use of visual breaks in the Fires version of “Distance” and in “Everything Stuck to Him” to separate the two narrator’s discourses. With “He comes back from the kitchen with drinks, settles into his chair, begins”, the two versions coincide again and the first-degree, extradiegetic narrator hands the baton over to the second-degree, intradiegetic narrator who, like many first-person narrators in Carver, remains unnamed throughout. At this point, in both versions dealt with here, a spatial gap in the page layout marks the narrative switch into the past, and will eventually mark the return to the present and to the first-degree narrative voice as well. In this last instance the leap back to the present is in both
versions equally abrupt and the visual break works as a pause, a silence
signifying the second-degree narrator’s deep emotional involvement and
distress due to the memories evoked in the framed story.2

In the Fires version of “Distance” the gaps in the page layout serve
visually to divide the text symmetrically between two narrative voices and in
two different textual blocks — respectively, the frame and the story within
the story. No intrusion of the first-degree narrator’s voice into the second-
degree narrator’s domain is allowed. Likewise, the intradiegetic narrator’s
overt presence in his narration is negligible, and it is concentrated in the first
two pages. He becomes overt in only a few instances where the conversational
filler “you see”, used twice, and the colloquial expression “I’m telling you”
are inserted in an otherwise third-person narrative to indicate a first-person
speaker (Furious 30; Fires 131-32). Surprisingly, there are no more such
narratorial intrusions after these, and when, at the end, the second-degree
narrator has finished his story, only the gap in the page layout marks the
switch back to the first-degree voice.

In “Everything Stuck to Him” the distinction between extradiegetic and
intradiegetic narrator is not as clear cut as it is in “Distance”. This is primarily
due to the fact that the gaps are more frequent: six versus two. Unlike the
first and last breaks, the remaining four do not separate the story within the
story from the frame which contains it, but suggest emotions and attitudes
that are expressed in words in the original. Thereby Carver attempts to com-
promise for the deletion of some passages, at the cost of demanding a greater
imaginative effort on the reader’s part. Of course, such a frequent use of visual
breaks in the shorter text necessarily conditions the effectiveness with which
the first and the last ones separate the two narrators’ respective narrative
domains and compromises the structure of two narrative blocks peculiar to
both the original version of “Distance” and its improved rendition in Fires.

Indeed, “Everything Stuck to Him” is divided neatly into more thematic
compartments, each dealing with a segment of the story. Gaps one and two
delimit the section describing the couple and the development of their
relationship up to the time of the story within the story, the boy’s telephone
conversation with his friend, Carl, and their arrangement to go hunting, as
well as the digression about the girl’s sisters. The block between gaps two
and three deals with the short prologue to the story incident and is devoid of
digressions or dialogue. The block between gaps three and four focuses on
the incident in which the baby is protagonist. The block between gaps four and five deals with their quarreling. It is the most dramatic point in the story, when the boy, torn between family and friend, is forced to choose. Gaps five and six mark off the section in which he makes up his mind and the story reaches its would-be cathartic ending. Gap six also marks the return to the first-degree narrative in which the possibility of a catharsis is negated.

As a result of the frequent gaps inserted in the much shorter “Everything Stuck to Him” for narrative effect, a strict distinction between storytelling and frame would only increase the fragmentation of an already visually divided text. So, as in the *Furious Seasons* original, the extradiegetic narrator has been allowed to extend his hold across the first gap into the intradiegetic narrator’s domain. His trespassing is substantiated in such indicators of reported direct speech as “Are you getting the picture? ... I am, she says ... That’s good, he says”. (*Stories* 264; my emphasis). This is followed by a brief return to the narrative present when the second-degree narrator interrupts his story and walks to the window to watch the snow. This move might just as well have been separated from the intradiegetic narrator’s discourse with gaps. But the repetition of a gesture first reported in the frame is so evident — the last thing the reader saw the second-degree narrator doing was sitting down — that it is unnecessary to give any further visual emphasis.

The second-degree narrator’s relation to his story is similar to that of his first-degree counterpart, for his narration can also be subdivided into two parts. The first is introductory and informative, while the second contains the narration proper, starting with “One Saturday night” (*Furious* 28; *Stories* 265; *Fires* 132). Most of the information the first part is packed with will not be given again: that the two were “very much in love”, repeated twice in the space of three short paragraphs; that they were very young, “kids themselves”; that they were forced to marry because she was pregnant (which is suggested with a touch of irony in “Not all that long afterwards they had a daughter”) and finally, that they had “great ambitions” and were “wild dreamers ... always talking about the things they were going to do and the places they were going to go” (*Furious* 27-28; *Stories* 264-65; *Fires* 131-32).

We are also provided with clues to complete the picture of what might have happened “later”, which is what the daughter asks after having heard her father’s account. Thus, we learn that they were too poor to afford the things they were dreaming about. They had to make a living out of odd jobs,
like maintaining the lawn during the summer, shoveling snow in winter and cleaning a dentist’s office in exchange for the rent they were probably unable to pay otherwise. This is certainly not enough to provide a solid family income, not to mention fulfilling wild dreams and great ambitions. The narrative frame rounds the picture off by informing the reader about the end of the marriage. In its sad aftermath the boy, now a man, lives alone like Carl Sutherland, his hunting and fishing companion. Like Sutherland, he is not given to casual talk but is nonetheless forced by his grown-up daughter to remember the past and recount it. It is certainly ironic that he went alone to places like Milan, Italy, after the marriage had broke up.

Let us now turn to the daughter’s function in the story. As the intradiegetic narrator points out at the beginning, the child’s importance is “minor”. Indeed, the baby and its implacable crying work as catalysts of a tense situation in which the young father must choose between his family and going hunting. This domestic drama, which ends in reconciliation, is told by a character who is also part of a narrative frame that offers a broader understanding of the incident and its consequences, and in which the grown-up daughter plays a major role, for Catherine (the daughter’s name is mentioned in “Distance”, though not in “Everything Stuck to Him”) acts as a catalyst in the frame as well. It is entirely due to her and her inquisitive pursuit of a past she is said to have “survived” that there is a story at all. Meeting her, we are told, is a rare enough occasion and the leitmotif of all such encounters, “always that on the rare occasions when he sees her”, is her desire to learn more about her infancy. However, she is not so interested in biographical details (i.e., what happened then) as she is in sensations, feelings, atmospheres, or “what it was like then” (Fires 131; Furious 27; Stories 264).

The story within a story proves to be rather open-ended, a story that he considers “not much of one”. Her reaction in “Everything Stuck to Him” is indicative: “I was interested, she says” (Stories 268). In “Distance” she is more generous, for she says, “It was very interesting if you want to know” (Furious 36; Fires 139). Here she shows she is determined to get all she can out of him, and is very careful to provide the unwilling narrator with a full glass so he would not “have to interrupt half way through”, or, in “Everything Stuck to Him”, “stop in the middle” (Furious 27; Stories 264; Fires 131). Note that the second-degree narration itself takes place in the time of having a drink, between “he comes back from the kitchen with drinks, settles into his
chair, begins” and “he gets up from his chair and refills their glasses” (Furious 27/36; Stories 264/268; Fires 131/139). As much as drinks are prominent in the situation which gives way to the framed story, there is not a single reference to alcohol being drunk once the second-degree narrator takes over. A sharp contrast is thus established. Family life is centered around food: from the milk the baby demands to the waffle and eggs and bacon which the boy dumps into his lap. Singles, like the father, and survivors, like the daughter, drink.

In urging him on to tell the story, the daughter is in both revisions relentless. She repeats the clause “tell me” four times in the incipit, in the space of half a page, and when he gets up from his chair to look out the window, she again says, “Tell the story” (Fires 132; Stories 264). In the original “Distance” she goads him on with the same words, but segments that have been dropped out of both later texts seem to abate her determination. One of the “tell me” clauses reads: “Tell me, she says and claps her hands with anticipation. But first get us another drink, please, so you won’t have to interrupt half way through” (Furious 27; my emphasis). The underscored parts suggest a girlish attitude towards her father’s story. Here she is not the sober listener she appears to be in the other versions, nor the daughter who keeps her father from distraction with curt remarks. The desire to know is still there, though not the urgency and the tension it produced. Indeed, another such instance in the original reads, “Tell the story, she reminds gently” (Furious 28; my emphasis). Carver dropped these remarks and the father’s smiling at his daughter in the opening (“It involves you, he says and smiles at her”), preferring to let the characters speak for themselves. In this way he builds up greater emotional tension. He also deleted the too overt and obvious “Do you want to hear about their first real argument?” (Furious 27).

Once the daughter’s role in both the frame and the story within the story is made clear, the intradiegetic narrator takes over. What we would legitimately expect at this point is a narrative in the first person, but when the second-degree narrator starts speaking he chooses, instead, to take a heterodiegetic stance. He proceeds to mask his presence behind third person pronouns and the noun “the boy”. Thus he forces the reader to make a considerable adjustment. The very abruptness with which the passage from frame to story is effected is, however, a startling means to express the second-degree narrator’s attitude towards his own
narrative. In order to understand why so much pains have been taken to introduce this interplay between narrative voices, we must now turn to the original story’s title, “Distance”.

Carver’s titles are seldom descriptive. They are usually taken from the story itself and are either a phrase a character utters or a significant symbolic object. This is also the case with the word “Distance” which appears in the text when the boy is on his way to Carl’s place: “Driving, the boy looked out at the stars and was moved when he considered their distance (Fires 137; my emphasis). The whole gamut of meanings is relevant: from the essential “[amount of] space between two points or places” to its metaphorical extension over the field of storytelling and human relations. Such is the breadth of the metaphor that both alternatives are applicable: distance as remoteness and distance as detachment. Distance as remoteness is the readily apprehended surface sense: its denotation. Indeed, the two characters are in Milan, far from the States and the places where the incident forming the story’s inner nucleus took place. Then, in close connection with the spatial comes the temporal remoteness of “That was a long time ago. That was twenty years ago, he says” (Fires 131; Furious 27; Stories 264). And he can be sure of the time when it all happened for it approximately coincides with his daughter’s birthday. Incidentally, the storytelling itself occurs roughly twenty years after the critical events recounted in the story within a story. The calculations are easy enough to make: considering the fact that “The baby came along in late November” and that she “was about three weeks old at this time”, the obvious conclusion is that it was around Christmas that this young father wanted to abandon his ailing baby and worrying wife to go out hunting with a friend (Fires 131-2; Furious 28; Stories 264-5).

The young couple’s first Christmas together was certainly poor but was probably happy anyway — once they made up after the hunting incident. Twenty years later there is no family and the father, no longer a husband, exposes his own responsibilities by talking about the past to his daughter, herself defined a “survivor”. The reader can tell the distance is all there, visible in the changes time has wrought: “Things change, he says. I don’t know how they do. But they do without your realizing it or wanting them to” (Fires 139; Stories 268-9). This small paragraph in which the second-degree narrator answers his daughter’s question about what happened later is slightly different in the Furious Seasons text, which is more prolix and perhaps
more apologetic: “Things change, he says. Kids grow up. I don’t know what
happened. But things do change and without your realizing it or wanting
them to” (Furious 36). Here the second-degree narrator is apparently at a
loss, unable to grasp fully what happened to him and his wife. In the revisions,
on the contrary, we get the idea that the father is holding back a secret that
cannot be shared, but only acquired through experience. When Carver
eliminated the clause “Kids grow up” and substituted the phrase “I don’t
know what happened” (suggesting helplessness) with the more assertive “I
don’t know how they do”, he made a decisive move away from letting his
second-degree narrator submit passively to circumstances. Circumstances
are always heavy on Carver’s characters, but at least part of the
responsibility always lies with them, and they know it. Both revisions
have certainly gained from this change.

The passage of time and its baleful influence on the characters, especially
the father, receive greater emphasis in the two versions of “Distance” than
they do in “Everything Stuck to Him”. The first to suggest the sense of
remoteness is the daughter in the opening: “Tell me what it was like then”
(Fires 131; Furious 27; my emphasis). Soon afterwards it is his turn, “That
was a long time ago” (ibid.). However, both instances are still perceived by
the reader as referring literally to a temporal distance alone. It is only with the
last reference to the passage of time, the one in the closing section, that the
two allusions in the opening acquire their proper weight. “But he stays by
the window, remembering that life” (Fires 139; my emphasis), says the
extradiegetic narrator, delving with this description into his extradiegetic
counterpart’s soul to a depth unachieved until this last paragraph. The
original version is even more explicit, though maybe less suggestive and
more ostensibly lyrical, referring as it does to “that gone life” (Furious 36).
As always with Carver, conclusions go deeper down the well of the darkest
and most commonly shared experiences than the narratives leading to them
would legitimately make us suspect. And in doing so, they acquire the
intensity of poetry. In “Everything Stuck to Him” Carver seems to have
wanted to spare the extradiegetic narrator the pain of participation and
sympathy, revising the last paragraph’s opening sentence to “But he stays
by the window, remembering”, thereby substituting “that life” with a period
that functions as a colon and quotation marks that introduce the character’s
own thoughts (Stories 269).
Distance connoted as detachment comes next and it is intimately connected with the writer’s craft. Carver wrote in his essay “On Writing”, “If the words are heavy with the writer’s own unbridled emotions, or if they are imprecise and inaccurate for some other reason — if the words are in any way blurred — the reader’s eyes will slide right over them and nothing will be achieved” (Fires 25). To aspire to the status of art a story has to be told from a distance, though not so great as to impair the writer’s involvement. A critical mind is necessary to purge the story of all that stands between the idea and clearness of expression. This rule applies preeminently to Carver himself, who remarked that though his stories are not autobiographical, yet they are always referential. And this is also true of the intradiegetic, second-degree narrator in “Distance” who, not content with — or not confident enough in — the incident’s temporal remoteness, decides to narrate the circumstances in which he was himself involved as if he were not involved in them. But utter detachment is hard to maintain and the emotions associated with these events overwhelm him in the concluding paragraph: “But he stays by the window, remembering that life. They had laughed. They had leaned on each other and laughed until the tears had come, while everything else — the cold and where he’d go in it — was outside, for a while anyway” (Fires 139; Stories 269).

This play of denotation and connotation, of distance in space and time, gives us an interpretive key to unlock the metaphorical potential of the title as we realize that the main sense of distance is that which the intradiegetic narrator, imprisoned as “the boy” in his own storytelling, craves. It alone is capable of moving him for, having renounced it in marriage, he can no longer attain it. The boy can be moved by the star’s detachment from earthly matters because he, on the contrary, is chained to them. He is experiencing the physical closeness marriage imposes upon both husband and wife, and the mutual interdependence ensuing from it that demands the sacrifice of personal freedom in order to keep it going. Eventually, this closeness he tries rebelling against enters the story in the form of metaphor.

When he meets his wife, after he has made his choice and returned home (or “back in”, depending on which version we are reading), their reconciliation is taken for granted by them both as they exchange a few brief words of apology (Fires 138; Furious 35). Then the girl tells him Catherine is fine, that there was no real danger, and therefore no substantial reason for him to stay home. Thus his renunciation is made to weigh against both the
love he feels for his wife and child and his sense of responsibility. The young husband is being tested, and he apparently comes through with flying colors, although, from the frame, we are aware that a failure must have occurred somewhere between discourse time and story time. But the test is not over yet. Next his patience is also put on trial. She prepares a swell looking breakfast and calls him to it: "But as he started to cut into the waffle, he turned the plate into his lap" (ibid.). In the boy’s reaction to this accident, “distance” as a metaphor of the tension at the story’s moral core reaches its full. The boy looks down at himself and breaks into a cathartic laughter which works as a safety valve, letting off the steam that was built up during the night. It signifies his wholehearted acceptance of a situation in which remoteness and detachment — “distance”, — cannot be afforded. Indeed, the pieces of waffle and bacon and eggs clinging to the syrup and to him actually represent the title’s opposite, that closeness which seemed to smother him and make him crave for “distance”, whether perceived as detachment or remoteness. The metaphor is binary and works on a distance/closeness axis, with the “distance” pole emphasized in the version so entitled.

Revising the text the first time, Carver decided to excise the reference to “distance” along with the paragraph containing it. Thus he was unable to use it as a title and still be consistent with his habit of employing words and expressions taken from the narratives themselves for that purpose. He did not, however, abandon the binary metaphor. He only emphasized its other pole, thereby endowing the shorter version with a sense of claustrophobic closeness. The title is changed to its opposite, “Everything Stuck to Him”, and what was prominent in the earlier version now becomes implicit. The rule of fishing for titles in the stories’ word-pond has also been respected in his reworking of the phrase describing the mess the boy had made, which now reads “He looked down at himself, at everything stuck to his underwear” (Stories 268; compare Fires 139). The decision to substitute in the title “everything stuck to his underwear” with “everything stuck to him” turns a mere kitchen accident into a metaphor revealing the boy’s basic interior conflict. Moreover, the “everything” of the title refers to more than the mere components of his breakfast, it also includes a broader sense of experience, which the narrator views as a personal, encroaching nightmare.

The foreboding quality of the accident in “Everything Stuck to Him” builds as the moment of cathartic laughter is deferred, and the segments of
dialogue and comment that helped relieve the tension are omitted. The most salient characteristic of the revised text lies in the conciseness of the verbal exchange between husband and wife, which is reduced to the essential. Although this clipped, emotion-charged language stems from the harmony of the two experience after their jarring quarrel, the many deletions significantly transform the revision. As a first act of reconciliation, she “put her arms around him”, and this is described in roughly the same terms in the two versions. In “Distance”, however, his response is more generous and caring, notably in the particular of her touching the stove, omitted from “Everything Stuck to Him” (compare Fires 138 and Stories 268). She answers with equal generosity admitting that some of the things she had said earlier were, if not inappropriate, a bit too harsh and dictated by a motherly concern for the baby’s health. This has nothing to do with justice and all to do with peacemaking, so each takes on him- or herself the blame for what happened, implicitly acknowledging the other’s innocence. Of course, they are both culpable to some extent, just as they are both, in a typically Carverian way, innocent.

Yet, the climate in “Distance” is much more jovial than in “Everything Stuck to Him”. The two are more earnestly in love than they appear to be in the latter. The strongest evidence supporting this lies in the deferment of the cathartic laughter at the story’s end. In “Distance” the young husband starts laughing as an answer to her “Don’t be mad with us” (Furious 35; Fires 138). He laughs again in the suppressed section where she puts “on a record that they both liked” and, as she closes their bedroom door she jokes, “We don’t want to wake that one up again” (ibid.). When he quite comically turns the plate into his lap, she not only begins, but keeps on, laughing at both the accident and the expression on his face. He joins her immediately after, looking down at the mess he has unwittingly caused. In “Everything Stuck to Him” it is only at this point that the laughter comes in, and it is only the girl who laughs. Even the remark “I was starved”, which she finds so amusing, is only arguably jocular, while its counterpart in “Distance” is obviously so. In the latter the boy is repeating what he said before the accident, when anticipating the rich breakfast she was making for him. The repetition of the same words after the mishap clearly adds a touch of self-mockery and irony. Standing alone as it does in the revision, it sounds like a whimpering complaint (Stories 268; compare with Furious 35-6 and Fires 138-9).
In "Everything Stuck to Him" we never see the boy laughing, except in the last paragraph when the extradiegetic, third-person narrator describes the incident’s true conclusion through the second-degree narrator’s recollection of it: "They had laughed. They had leaned on each other and laughed until the tears had come, while everything else — the cold, and where he’d go in it — was outside, for a while anyway" (Stories 269). It is difficult to reduce the ambiguities of laughter to a precise meaning. But when it comes to tears, it is reasonable to presume that such laughter is laden with strong emotion, and not necessarily of a cheerful nature. Although in this final paragraph the two revisions almost totally coincide, the effect is greater in "Everything Stuck to Him", which is less generous in using laughter than the Fires version of "Distance". In the latter, laughing has been deprived of its full cathartic potential by the frequency of its occurrence. However, the emotion that really matters here is the one we witness in the intradiegetic narrator. At this point he is no longer in control of the narrative and is overwhelmed by memories that give rise to the unbridled feeling the extradiegetic narrator expresses for him in the repetition “They had laughed. They had leaned on each other and laughed”, and in the paragraph’s broken rhythm brought about by the interpolated reference to the cold and his eventual going out into it (Fires 139; Stories 269).

What has just been said about the final rendition of "Distance" and its relation to "Everything Stuck to Him" holds for the original version as well. Except that the concluding paragraph in the latter is more prolix than in the other versions. The conciseness in the revisions is certainly an improvement from which the whole story has benefited. In the later texts Carver used laughter to pinpoint the release of tension in a way that he didn’t, or failed to do, in the Furious Seasons original. In the latter the catharsis is directly connected to the comical accident at breakfast by the clause “they laughed about the waffle”. This connection is iterated in the remark “they laughed about it until tears came” in the final sentence (my emphasis). After these have been changed, the laughter proves more efficacious, has greater power to transcend the momentary, and retrospectively influence our understanding of their relationship. It also adds some mystery to the period between story-time and narration-time that is absent from the original version, since in the latter the first-degree narrator (more intrusive than in either revision) plainly tells us about other men and women who entered the couple’s troubled life.
(Furious 36). In “Everything Stuck to Him” and in the final rendition of “Distance” it is repetition that accords the sentence “they had laughed” its efficacy. But too many repetitions, as is the case in the original would only diminish, if not nullify, the cathartic moment’s impact upon the reader. Thus, when he revised, Carver eliminated from the final paragraph all repetitions except the one concerning laughter. In the original there are too many objective corollaries for the same emotion, namely dancing, clinging to each other, and laughing. With only one objective correlative left to signify their deep emotional involvement, the concluding paragraph is in its revised version far superior to the original (compare Furious 36; Stories 269; Fires 139).

Another instance in which substantial differences between “Distance” and “Everything Stuck to Him” emerge is the passage in which the two tease each other on the subject of the girl’s sisters. As the intradiegetic narrator confesses, the boy (thus the narrator) was a little in love with them. The wife obviously takes it as harmless teasing, for she “enormously [enjoyed] this conversation he could tell” (Furious 30; Fires 133). But how far can we go in trusting his judgment of his wife’s reactions? Again, it depends on which version we are reading. The repetition of the modal verb “used to” in “Everything Stuck to Him” indicates this was as a recurrent game between them (Stories 265). But such teasing also suggests the boy still fantasizes about himself as free to flirt. As always, dilution weakens the original qualities.

The opposite is true of “Distance”. In the Furious Seasons text the narrator plainly says that this joking about the girl’s sisters refers to a single instance, and not to habitual teasing. He says, “Joking once he’d said to the girl...” (Furious 30). Revising the story again for inclusion in Fires, Carver decided to delete the adverb of frequency and not refer to this revealing exchange between husband and wife as a joke. Differently from “Everything Stuck to Him”, here the tense used is the past perfect, “He’d said to the girl” and “the girl had said”, which becomes the simple past when the talk between them is presented in full (Fires 133). The length and detail with which this almost wholly dialogical exchange is presented is in itself a sufficient indicator that what is being reported is a single, undiluted and, for him, strongly compromising instance. Apparently, it is only a digression that does not further the story, while in fact it sheds considerable light on the boy’s unstable character. This is especially so in the two renditions of “Distance”, where
the passage is much longer and obviously the product of more generous narratorial intentions on Carver’s part. In the shorter revision it was reduced to a fourth of its original length.

In “Distance”, but not in “Everything Stuck to Him”, latent tension is again released by laughter. The boy gives his reasons for preferring one sister over the other, “Sally over Betsy”, and this sufficiently alarms the girl and makes her feel the need to draw her companion’s attention to herself. She does so by offering three possible escape routes from the potential embarrassment her husband’s flirting could give rise to. These are voiced respectively in “Who’s your wife?”, the socially binding institution, “Who do you really love?”, which probes the depth of his feelings, and “Who do you love most in all the world?”, which restates a trite romantic formula (Fires 133). Of the three, he opts for the first, which is also the least romantic. So doing, he betrays an attitude to marriage in which social sanction has precedence over sentiment and love. Then, trying to make up for his blunder, he resorts to a simile with Canadian geese, which mercilessly exposes him. This too appears only in “Distance”.

The first term of comparison, their choosing a mate early in life, is certainly appropriate for the couple whose youth and immaturity have been stressed since the beginning: “They were kids themselves” (Furious 27; Stories 264; Fires 131). Likewise, the nouns “the boy” and “the girl” that the intradiegetic narrator uses throughout have the same function, and his choice is not casual for, indeed, they have been selected from a set of equally plausible possibilities also listed very early on in the story: “The boy and girl, husband and wife now, father and mother” (Furious 28; Fires 131; Stories 264). Curiously enough, the adverb “now” is separated by a comma from its most logical setting, which would be “The boy and girl, husband and wife, now father and mother” (my amendment). As it is, it breaks the linear sequence of the listed states and events. Qualifying “husband and wife”, it puts the child’s conception before its being sanctioned in marriage, thus validating the thesis of an unplanned, if not unwanted pregnancy. The second term of comparison is harder to uphold. In the case of the partner’s death the surviving goose will never betray the other’s memory. It will either live alone among the rest of the flock or off by itself, but it will never remarry. The story frame presents us with the now grown-up husband living alone and, indeed, there is no mention of any relationship with another woman going on. One is led to
ask, what was it that separated him from his former wife? The direct answer to this is only present in the *Furious Seasons* text, and it reads: “After that morning there would be those hard times ahead, other women for him and another man for her” (*Furious* 36). Since it has been deleted from the *Fires* version, we need to extrapolate all we can from the clues the extradietetic narrator gives us.°

When the second-degree narrator’s daughter, who is as curious as we are to know what happened later, asks her father about it, he “shrugs”. Then, after a moment’s pause, he answers, “Things change...” (*Fires* 139). Although evasive, this reply still states that a change occurred in their marriage that destroyed it. Contrary to the original version of “Distance” in which the final paragraph summarizes all that happened between story-time and discourse-time, the last paragraph in the *Fires* version is completely focused on the young couple’s temporary happiness, opposing it to the cold outside and the boy’s eventual going out in it: “... everything else — the cold and where he’d go in it — was outside, for a while anyway” (*Fires* 139; *Stories* 269). In the original the same segment reads, “[W]hile outside everything froze, for a while anyway” (*Furious* 36). Here it is not clear what the adverb phrase “for a while” refers to. It seems to suggest that the freezing outside is only temporary and that things will change soon. On the contrary, the revised versions stress the menacing quality of this cold which can be kept outside only “for a while”. Thus, the reference to the boy’s going out into the cold (also absent from the original) is counterbalanced by the cold’s besieging the couple’s home. Thereby Carver lays equal stress on both the boy’s own responsibilities and the pressure of circumstances. Thus, it becomes apparent that the cold has to be read as a metaphor of the solitary world the intradietetic narrator, male and single, inhabits, in opposition to the warmth and coziness of family life. The terms of the metaphor are spread across the text and they make their first appearance in close connection with the baby’s birth and its coincidence with the waterfowl season, “in late November during a severe cold spell” (*Furious* 28; *Fires* 131; *Stories* 264).

The next reference to the cold relates it to the outside in the same way the closing paragraph does: “It was cold and overcast outside” (*Fires* 134; *Furious* 30; *Stories* 266). And, finally, when he leaves the house to meet Carl we are told, “The temperature had dropped during the night” (*Fires* 136; *Furious* 33). Note that this sentence does not appear in “Everything Stuck
to Him”, for in the latter the whole segment describing the boy’s leaving home to meet Carl has been cut. The metaphor is then completed in all versions with the reference to the warmth the boy finds inside the house when he comes back, takes off his heavy garments, and remains in “his socks and woolen underwear” (Fires 137; Furious 34; Stories 268). When she wakes up and finds him in the kitchen, she embraces him and leans dangerously towards the stove. Introducing heat both literally and metaphorically he says, “Hey, don’t catch your robe on fire” (Fires 138, Furious 35). And so we have mention of the stove she was touching and of the warmth their relationship has attained with their renewed closeness. In “Everything Stuck to Him” the boy’s verbal reply to her embracing him appears shortened to “Hey, the boy said” (Stories 268). As a result of the deletion heat is, at best, present only metaphorically, and the metaphor demands a much greater imaginative effort on the reader’s part, since the “familiar” warmth has to be deduced from its context, represented in this case by the boy’s shedding of his outdoor outfit and their eventual reconciliation. Then, after the breakfast scene the metaphor reaches its final stage in the symbolic representation of the boy’s stripping himself of the last hunting garments that were so strongly associated with his troubling excursion into the cold outside: “He peeled off the woolen underwear and threw it at the bathroom door” (Fires 139; Furious 36; Stories 268). Thus he symbolically throws off his single-young-male’s prerogatives. But the allusion to “the cold and where he’d go in it” in the closure evidences his failure to keep this implicit promise and be true to the comparison with “Canadian geese” that he himself used to describe their union.

The central role this simile plays in “Distance” and its absence from “Everything Stuck to Him” account for important differences between the two versions. Especially since in “Distance” it is extended to such a degree that Carver must have thought it embarrassing and felt the need to amend the text for the 1988 selected stories collection Where I’m Calling From. All the changes are closely related to the subject of marriage. “They only marry once” becomes “They only mate once” (Furious 30; Fires 133; Where 154). The girl’s question “Have you ever killed one of those marriages?” is also heavily amended, since the word “marriages” is dropped and the relative pronoun “those” is made the subject of the verb clause (Furious 30; Fires 134; Where 154). Thus the verb “to kill” is deprived of the metaphoric connotations it has when extended from the animal world to that of human relations. Even with these changes, however, the
simile remains a powerful source of insight into the boy's responsibilities for the "killing" of that union. And indeed for the girl his shooting of mated geese is a source of concern, while he remains indifferent.

The disastrous effects his passion for hunting has had on their family life beyond the incident narrated in the story are further suggested in the metaphor of milling. When a "married" goose is shot down, the boy explains to the girl, its companion would "begin to circle and call". The image is developed later when a car drives by and he hears "sand grinding under the tires". He then imagines "geese milling in the air over his head, the gun plunging against his shoulder" (Fires 134; my emphasis). The participle of "to grind" gives an aural image of a car speeding on sand and it is not applied to geese. It is, however, related to the participle of "to mill" with which it shares the same verbal form and the same semantic field. This verbal form also connects them with the participle of "to plunge", which refers to the gun's recoiling. A link is thus established between the image of a grinding mill and that of a gun shooting at geese circling in the air, and the idea one gets of the boy's imagining tomorrow's goose hunt is that of a slaughter.

The geese are victims that seem to obey human institutions and have human feelings, such as the love that makes them circle and call a dead companion. What is being ruthlessly ground in the mill of gunfire is, following his own simile, the boy's marriage. Not giving much thought to the consequences of his deeds, he accepts the contradictions that make a person destroy what he most profoundly loves: "You see, I love everything there is about geese ... But there are all kinds of contradictions in life. You can't think about the contradictions" (Fires 134; Furious 31). That the killing of something more than fowls is at stake here emerges from the description of the scene that meets the boy's eyes as he steps outside the house where "The grass, what there was of it, looked like canvas, stiff and gray under the street light" (Fires 134; Furious 31). Stiff and gray as a corpse. In the tighter economy of "Everything Stuck to Him" the simile does not appear, even though the narrator's remark about the grass is present. All its other traces have also been wiped out in favor of a more neutral report. This is also the case with the reference to sand grinding under the tires which becomes: "he heard sand under the tires". As for the geese, they are no longer "milling in the air", reproducing that circular movement associated with the companion's death, but "beating the air" in a straight flight (Stories 266).
One more aspect needs to be treated. If the already examined cold/warmth metaphor represents the two narrators' moral outlook on the subject of the intradiegetic narrator's storytelling, there is also another metaphor that relates the two narrative situations to one another: that based on the opposition of light and darkness. Given the peculiarity of its terms, it establishes a moral hierarchy in which the situation after the reconciliation appears superior, or preferable, to the situation preceding it. In the intradiegetic narrator's account, the progress from conflict to reconciliation is accompanied by a corresponding passage from darkness to light. This contrasts with the passage from light to darkness in the extradiegetic narrator's frame narrative, when the second-degree narrator's present situation is exposed in all its gloomy sadness. Thereby the metaphor also bridges the gaps that separate the two narrators' discourses, thus performing a structural function as well. But let us follow these changes of light.

In the interpolated return to the frame, early in the text, when the second-degree narrator stops awhile to watch the snow and the first-degree narrator takes the lead again, the snow is described as falling "through the late afternoon light" (Fires 132; Furious 28). The dark, in other words, is already coming on but is not there yet. But it is Saturday night when the intradiegetic narrator's account begins and when, after dinner, the boy goes out to notice the grass "under the street light" (Fires 134; Furious 31; Stories 266). Then the baby wakes them up in the middle of the night, and it is still pitch dark when they quarrel and he leaves the house, his wife, and his daughter to go to Carl's place. On the way there, it is still dark enough to see the stars, and when he reaches his destination he observes that "Carl's porchlight was on" (Fires 137; Furious 33-4). After explanations and apologies, the boy drives back home to find the living-room light on. Once he is back where he belongs, however, the second-degree narrator tells us, "Soon it began to turn light outside" (Fires 137; Furious 34). This phrase and the journey to Carl's place do not appear in "Everything Stuck to Him", where the passage from night to day is lightly implied in his reading the morning paper and in the preparation of breakfast. But these omissions do not affect the validity of the metaphor in this version, even though they weaken its force. A symmetry as marked as we have in "Distance" would certainly be too conspicuous in as short a text as "Everything Stuck to Him". Thus, the metaphor is not abolished but attenuated.
Then, in all versions, the whole atmosphere becomes lighter, both more luminous and, psychologically, less heavy. But as soon as the story-within-the-story has reached its conclusion and the first-degree narrative voice has taken over again, the switch away from daylight and brightness is effected with “It’s dark now but still snowing” (Fires 139; Furious 36; Stories 268). This sentence capsizes the situation by setting up an opposition between that specific moment in the past when the incident and reconciliation took place, flooded in the morning light, and the narrative present in which it has become dark outside. Mentioning the snow it also links the two major metaphors that embody the story’s moral core: cold/warmth and darkness/light. This connection is then reinforced with the final reference to “the cold and where he’d go in it” (Fires 139; Stories 269). Nevertheless, in spite of the gloomy conclusion, the story ending rings a timidly hopeful note when the daughter, Catherine, a “survivor from top to bottom”, has the capacity to overcome the darkness surrounding her family: “Then she raises her head. Speaking brightly she asks if he is going to show her the city, after all” (Fires 139; Stories 269; Furious 36). But as soon as it is conjured, the luminosity she brings is vanquished as the extradiegetic narrator focuses on the father, who is now staring out the window and into a darkness where his daughter’s brightness cannot reach him.

Note, Notes, Anmerkungen

1) This happens in “Distance” only. In “Everything Stuck to Him” the boy never makes the trip to his friend’s place, but returns into the house soon after going out.

2) No gaps mark the switch from one narrative voice to the other in the Furious Seasons version of “Distance”. In the latter the return to the first degree narrator is effected with the phrase “This was about eight o’clock in the morning, a cold Sunday in December”. Reminding us of the temporal limits of the story within a story, the narrator recalls the original narrative situation in present-time Milan, in which a father tells his daughter about an event from their past family life she cannot possibly remember. This makes the passage from story to frame much
smoother, while making the separation of the two blocks less marked than it is in the bettered version of “Distance”.

3) In the early *Furious Seasons* version and in “Everything Stuck to Him” it reads “On this one Saturday night”, which sounds more like a continuation than a new start.

4) In “Everything Stuck to Him” the baby is three months old, and not three weeks as in the original. But when Carver revised the story for *Fires*, he decided to keep the baby's age at three weeks.

5) Carver employed a similar distancing technique in the poem “Gravy” from his last collection *A New Path to the Waterfall*, which he managed to complete, but not see published. Indeed, it came out posthumous in 1989 (Carver died on 2 August 1988) with the eerie and irrevocable subtitle *Last Poems*. Just like the father to his daughter in “Distance”, in “Gravy” Carver speaks about himself in the third person. In this case, too, the third person is a distancing agent, which is especially needed in this poem, since it is about things as personal and intimate as striking the balance of one's life and coming to terms with the fear of death. Carver wrote the poem when he was fighting the cancer that would kill him, and so he was forced to regard death not as an abstraction but as a hard reality that was closing in on him. The third person helped him separate the poet from the man so he could give us the man in the poem with the precision he so highly valued.

6) In his introduction to John Gardner's book *On becoming a novelist*, Carver attributed this idea to his former mentor: “It was [Gardner's] conviction that if the words in the story were blurred because of the author's insensitivity, carelessness, or sentimentality, then the story suffered from a tremendous handicap”. This reference comes to me “second hand” through Jay Woodruff’s contribution to a composite biography of Raymond Carver (Woodruff, 138).

7) For Carver’s remarks on the relations between stories and real life confront Bonetti, 60.

8) Here too deletion meant improvement since the phrase suggests a connection between “those hard times” and their unfaithfulness, which partially relieves them of their responsibilities.

9) In the early *Furious Seasons* text the boy says he loves “everything there is about hunting geese” eliminating thus part of the contradiction.

10) In the *Furious Seasons* original it reads “through the weak afternoon light”. The same paragraph in “Everything Stuck to Him” makes no reference to the light outside (*Stories*, 264).
Opere Citate, Works Cited

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