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“Exiles at Home”: Raymond Carver, Bob Dylan and the Language of the Dispossessed

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“Exiles at Home（在宅の流刑者）”：レイモンド・カーパー、ボブ・ディランと漂泊者の言語

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Abstract

This essay attempts to revisit and reread one of Raymond Carver’s finest short stories, “Where is Everyone?” by placing it in conversation with three late-career songs from Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan—“Tryin’ to Get to Heaven,” “Mississippi,” and “Workingman’s Blues #2”—in order to help understand the suffering of what has come to be called the “non-college-educated, white working class,” particularly men, in the US. It draws heavily on the groundbreaking work of Timothy Hampton, who has written eloquently of Dylan’s importance in understanding the stereotypical “Trump voter,” and argues that Carver’s work, which he produced in the early stages of our “post-industrial, globalized economy,” can be productively read in tandem with Dylan’s recent songs.

Keywords: Raymond Carver, Bob Dylan, Masculinity Crisis, “Where is Everyone?”

I. Introduction: “Exiles at Home”

Irving Howe once described Raymond Carver’s characters as “plebeian loners struggling for speech” (“Stories of Our Loneliness”). Indeed, many of them are blue collar or working class—though it is doubtful that Carver himself or his fictional people would ever have used the word “plebian”—and, true enough, most of them are inarticulate. Take “L.D.,” for example, from the story “One More Thing,” who struggles to explain how he feels to his wife, Maxine, and daughter, Bea, then winds up threatening them, throwing a pickle jar through the kitchen window, and bullying Bea for trying to make sense of their lives through her belief in astrology, or “Sandy’s husband” in “Preservation,” who has been laid off and now spends his time on the sofa, watching TV and reading a book called *Mysteries of the Past*, as his wife’s

respect for him—and his respect for himself—slowly crumbles. Neither of these men have even been granted the dignity of a name ("Sandy's husband" remains exactly that, and we never find out what "L.D." stands for), as if to mirror the many indignities that they have suffered after losing their jobs and sense of purpose. These are men in need of help, though they will first need to sober up or get off the couch: that seems to be, in part, what Carver is saying. At the same time, it is too easy to judge and condemn them, and Carver almost always treats his characters with sympathy. Shaming them is surely not why Carver wrote about their lives. But then, why did he? And why should we, as readers, care about them?

To understand why Carver sympathetically portrayed such unsympathetic characters, it would be useful to consider the work of Timothy Hampton, who recently wrote an essay entitled "Bob Dylan in Trumpland," drawing upon his important monograph, *Bob Dylan's Poetics: How the Songs Work* (2019). Following Hampton, we might say that Carver's people, like Dylan's, are those who have been passed over, forgotten or left behind by traditional politics and the so-called "globalized economy." I am reminded of this each time I see footage of a Trump rally, wondering what could drive a person to support such an obvious hatemonger and charlatan. The answer lies in their fear, anger, and frustration, of course, all of which are vividly depicted not only in Dylan's more recent work, but in Carver's, as well, which predates it by a decade or more. To explore this idea, I propose to closely read one of Carver's finest stories, "Where is Everyone?" and one prose-poem, "Our First House in Sacramento," alongside three of Dylan's recent songs, which I have selected from his work since 1997's *Time Out of Mind* album, considered to be a turning point in his career (marking yet another "comeback"). These are songs that Hampton has also identified as being linked, thematically and stylistically—he tells us that they belong to "a suite of songs about the experience of the modern worker in a post-industrial, globalized economy" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland")—offering listeners "stories of lost souls, exiles at home, abandoned people struggling to find their way in a bleak economy, cut off from the past, from community, from stability" ("Murder Most Foul"). In the following essay, I would like to expand upon Hampton's suggestive remarks and explore in detail how these three songs, alongside some of Carver's work, sets about doing precisely this—and, in the process, helps us to better understand what might push a person to embrace rightwing populism.

Howe's perceptive comments, from his review essay of *Cathedral*, early on singled out a crucial element of Carver's work. He claimed that Carver is "showing us at least part of the truth about a segment of American experience few of our writers trouble to notice" while "probing [...] the waste and destructiveness that prevail beneath the affluence of American life." Further,

> [i]t's a meager life that Mr. Carver portrays, without religion or politics or culture, without the shelter of class or ethnicity, without the support of strong folkways or conscious rebellion. It's the life of people who cluster in the folds of our society. They are not bad or stupid; they merely lack the capacity to understand the nature of their deprivation. ("Stories of Our Loneliness")

These people, Carver's people—and, as I will argue in the following pages, Bob Dylan's people, at least as we encounter them in his music of the last two decades, a period which overlaps with the era of Neoliberalism and "Globalization"—lead a "shapeless life," according to Howe, "drifting from job to job, town to town"; they find that "[o]rdinary life is threatening; ordinary life is the enemy of ordinary people"; and, most importantly, they "lack a vocabulary that can release their feelings, so they must express themselves mainly through obscure gesture and berserk display." This is precisely what we see happening with Dylan's characters, as much as with Carver's: these "plebian loners" struggle to speak, to give expression to their feelings of confusion and bewilderment, then make violent threats, sometimes exploding into anger, usually before retiring to bed and the comfort of dreams (or, in Carver, alcohol), retreating into memory, sentimentality, remembering a time when they were part of a family or community, when "things made sense." In doing so, as Hampton demonstrates, Dylan reveals to us "a breakdown of knowledge, of language, of the self, which cannot grasp or understand its own alienation." Dylan's songs on these late-career albums "feel like fieldwork, a deep dive into the very language of the dispossessed, an imaginative excavation of the ruins of the self in confusion, lost in a ruined landscape, devastated by greed and polluted by rumor." Dylan, he argues—and, I would concur, while adding Carver—"chronicles the struggle of daily life [...] as the everyday grappling, not only for dignity and a living wage, but also for a language that would give voice to suffering" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland"). This brings me to the first movement in how these "exiles at home" begin their "everyday grappling" for a language in which to make sense of and express their feelings about what is happening to them.

II. "Feeling Like a Stranger"

The first moment of this dynamic occurs when Dylan and Carver's workingmen register the shock and confusion of losing their jobs, of finding out that their skills are not required, or of discovering that what they have to offer is no longer of value in today's "marketplace." Hampton asserts that, in "setting [these songs] in desolate mill towns and rural landscapes," Dylan "explores a feature of small-town life that overlaps with the larger culture in the age of Trump, Fox News, and Breitbart." Carver does something similar: what has come to be called "Carver country" is truly, in Hampton's words, "a small-town world of gossip and whisper, in which reliable information cedes to hint and conspiracy [...] as lives are destroyed by seemingly impersonal 'market trends' or 'innovation' happening out of sight, somewhere just over the horizon." All the characters know about their "imperiled lifestyle" is "what 'they say' or what 'I heard.'" Carver, like Dylan, "registers the impact of this chaos on the individual." "Through the movement of his very language," Hampton continues, "Dylan enacts the confusion of the worker who is dispossessed and cannot quite grasp why" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland"). This is an environment that is marked by a "predominance of rumor, of fragmentary knowledge, of bits of information that no one can master," of gossip and hearsay.

As Dylan sings, "I've been walking through *the middle of nowhere*"; "*They tell me* everything is gonna be all right / But *I don't know what* 'all right' *even means*"; "I'll close my eyes and *wonder* / If everything is as hollow *as it seems* / When *you think that* you've lost everything / You *find out* you can always lose a little more" ("Tryin' to Get to Heaven," emphasis added). Or, in "Mississippi": "Walking through the leaves, falling from the trees / Feeling *like a stranger*, nobody sees [...] Some people will offer you their hand and some won't / *Last night I knew you, tonight I don't*" (emphasis added). In one of his most powerful recent songs, his narrator tells us that "[t]he *buying power* of *the proletariat's* gone down / *Money's* getting *shallow and weak*"; "*They say* low wages are a reality / If *we* want *to compete abroad*"; "Now *they* worry and *they* hurry and *they* fuss and *they* fret / *They* waste your nights and days"; "*Some people* never worked a day in their life / *They don't know* what work even means" ("Workingman's Blues #2"). Here, we see the repetition of the structure, "they" (or "I") "don't even know what _____ means." It is as if language itself no longer makes sense to these people; once familiar words have lost their meaning.

Carver's poem, "Our First House in Sacramento," features a similar dynamic. There is confusion at three points in the narrative arc of the poem. The first is when "a man appeared one night with a baseball bat. And raised it. I was not the man he thought I was"; later, "I lost the grocery money to a stranger," playing poker, and the stranger "went on to quarrel with his wife" before driving his fist through the kitchen wall and "disappear[ing] from my life forever"; finally, when the narrator and his family leave their home "at midnight with a U-Haul trailer and a lantern," he asks, "Who knows what passed through the neighbors' minds when they saw a family leaving their house in the middle of the night?"

This movement is even clearer in Carver's stories, such as "Where is Everyone?" (originally published, in far inferior form, as "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, where it had been cut by more than half by overzealous editor Gordon Lish: this story, along with "The Bath," later republished by Carver in *Cathedral* as "A Small, Good Thing," was one of the few stories not improved by Lish's cuts—even dramatically diminished, if not ruined, by them). It begins with the vague statement, "I've seen some things" (11). Carver has been criticized for this opening line, accused of forfeiting some measure of authorial control over his fictional creation by lapsing into clumsy, empty, or exceedingly ambiguous language. However, would it not be more useful to view this as a deliberate strategy on his part, which mirrors the confusion and passivity that his characters experience on a daily basis? In other words, they have no words for what they see and feel; they struggle to articulate what is happening to them, which seems, precisely (and this is the very point of the vague language), to be something that happens *to* them, something over which they have little or no control. They are rendered passive, bewildered, overwhelmed, and unable to express themselves or understand the world around them.

We can see this confusion at work in this story, for example, in Carver's deliberate repetition of the word "crazy" (or a related word, "madness"). "I was out of work, drinking, and crazy," the narrator tells us, and his kids, his estranged wife, and her lover were also "crazy"

(11). He goes further, claiming "I don't know what we were all thinking in those days," before telling us that "Things lurched on" (11). Put differently, we might say that life did not proceed in a straightforward, logical or understandable way. The narrator cannot make sense of the past; he lapses into ambiguous language and the passive. The narrative trajectory, itself, jumps between past and present, out of chronological sequence, "lurching" (and that is precisely the correct word) between three, then eight years ago, then the present, then back again, and so forth. But isn't this how our minds work? When the narrator finds photos of his wife's lover, while rifling through her purse, he is taken aback by one of them: "In the other picture [her lover] was standing against a house—my house? I couldn't tell" (11). Whose house is this? Whose children? Whose memories? The narrator is at a loss, as are we.

The lover, Ross, for his part, has lost his job "in the aerospace industry" and now spends much of his time in and out of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), avoiding his first wife (who once shot him and had him jailed), tinkering with broken-down cars and appliances, and telling people's fortunes. His past seems as murky and unverifiable as the photo the narrator found in his wife's purse. Was Ross really an "aerospace engineer" who had once worked on the "moon project shots" for NASA (and was "close friends with Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong," 17), but was now "repairing things" and "collect[ing] antique cars" (12)? The narrator doubts it and sardonically dubs Ross "Mr. Fixit," to belittle him in the presence of his estranged wife and, more desperately, his children, who are quickly drifting away from him. But he is unsure of whether his wife actually takes what Ross says at face value: "Even now," he tells us, "I don't know if my wife believed that stuff or not, about antique cars and such" (12). When the two met, at an AA meeting, the narrator (who, himself, had been "in and out of AA"), had begun drinking a lot: "a fifth a day of anything I could get my hands on" he tells us (13). In this confused state, he overhears his wife, Cynthia, "say [something about his drinking and AA] to someone over the phone about me" (13), and his life begins spinning out of control. He quarrels with his children, "threatens to kill [his] son," and calls it all "madness," "general bedlam," and "craziness on every side" (13). He concludes relating this sad episode by telling us that he and his wife merely "bungled along," in a kind of disastrous "show" that his kids exploited in order to "r[u]n things their way" (14). Here, he slips into the passive—speaking of "the lurid details of what was happening to me and their mother"—before ending with another vague, cliché-like understatement, "It was something in those days" (14).

This cycle of hearsay, confusion, and ensuing chaos is perhaps best viewed through the prism of Ross' life. We are told that "Ross loved Cynthia, but he also had a twenty-two-year-old girl named Beverly who was pregnant with his baby, though Ross assured Cynthia he loved her, not Beverly [...] He wept when he told all this to Cynthia. He was drunk" (16). "I can imagine the scene," adds the narrator, who is all-too familiar with this cycle. At one point, Ross' life seems to have been stable, even upper-middle class: he was a white-collar engineer who had graduated from the prestigious California Polytechnic Institute (CalTech), and he worked "at the NASA operation in Mountain View" (in today's fabled "Silicon Valley," California) for ten years, "until it all fell in on him" (16). Here, we encounter the passive voice

again, signifying the mysterious workings of Fate; however, all of this is hearsay. The narrator admits, repeatedly, that he had never actually met Ross. They had spoken on the phone several times, once when the narrator was drunk, but most of his knowledge of Ross comes from Cynthia or the kids: Ross was "something of a fallen hero to my kids and to Cynthia too, I suppose, because he'd helped put men on the moon. He'd worked, I was told time and again, on the moon project shots, and he was close friends with Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong. He'd told Cynthia, and Cynthia had told the kids, who'd told me, that when the astronauts came to town he was going to introduce them. But they never came to town, or if they did they forgot to contact Ross. Soon after the moon probes, fortune's wheel turned [...] He was laid off, or else he quit—nobody could ever give me a straight answer when I asked" (17). So, Ross "kept drinking," then "commenced working on ruined appliances and doing TV repair work and fixing cars. He was interested in astrology, auras, *I Ching*—that business" (17): in other words, he turns to alcohol to numb himself and to astrology, and so forth, to make some sense of what has happened to his life.

At the end of the story, the narrator calls home from a bar and has an angry exchange with his daughter, who asks him for money. When he next telephones a recent lover, whose marriage has been seriously strained, perhaps ruined, by their affair, she asks him, "How did all this happen to us? [...] We started out good people," before promising to pray for him (19). The narrator then calls home, "but this time no one answered," so he dials his mother's number. She picks up, then proceeds to tell him about her boyfriend, "Old Ken," a braggart who tells tall-tales. It sounds as if she does not believe his stories; in fact, it sounds as if she can't stand the man. However, as we know from the beginning of the narrative, the narrator walked in on them embracing and kissing on her sofa. Is she telling the truth? Is "Old Ken"? It hardly matters. Carver is depicting a world in which gossip, rumors, hearsay and confusion reign. The narrator's mother welcomes him home—to her home, where this story began, and where the narrator's own story very likely began, as well, his childhood home—where he is dressed in his late father's pajamas and treated very much like a child. "Honey, I don't want to be the one to tell you this," his mother suddenly says. "It hurts me to tell you, but even the kids know it and they've told me. We've talked about it. But Cynthia is seeing another man" (20). The story has run full-circle now, the strange scene that began this "lurid" tale—the frame story, as it were—now makes more sense, and the narrator, now infantilized and "at home," at last, settles down to watch TV, then sleep. This seems to be his way of escaping his troubles. His plan for the following day consists of moving from the sofa, where he is currently sleeping, to sleeping in his parents' bed (oddly enough, the very place his father had died, drunk, in his sleep, eight years earlier). "I don't have much to do tomorrow," he pathetically admits to his mother (who apparently still has a job, at the age of sixty-five, waitressing at a coffee shop), so "I might sleep in a while after you go" (20). Sleep, however, is only one of the ways these men cope with the confusion and uncertainty in their lives. In the next section, I will look at fantasies of violence.

III. "Some Feeling of Threat or Sense of Menace"

In his essay, "On Writing," Carver famously wrote "I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories" (26). The threat of violence, the "menace" that distinguishes Carver's work, can likewise be seen throughout Dylan's songs of the period 1997-2006. The narrator of "Ain't Talkin'," the final song on *Modern Times* (2006), sings that he is "still yearnin,'" but what these men yearn for is not love; it is, in Hampton's words, "justice and vengeance." In this same song, Dylan sings, "If I catch my opponents ever sleeping / I'll just slaughter 'em where they lie." Hampton reads this line as follows:

> Here is the voice of the workingman who at last has had enough. Here is the barely contained rage of the rural laborer, who has had his fill of fancy talk and excuses from 'the ladies in Washington,' as Dylan calls them elsewhere on the album [*Modern Times*]. The link between the confusion of the workingman and this concentrated violence, as the Trump era has taught us, is not coincidental" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland").

In "Tryin' to Get to Heaven," Dylan opens the song ominously: "The air is getting hotter / There's a rumbling in the skies / I've been wading through the high muddy water / With the heat rising in my eyes." He continues, "When I was in Missouri / They would not let me be / I had to leave there in a hurry / I only saw what they let me see." There is an ominous sound, once again, but this time it issues from the human heart: "People on the platforms / Waiting for the trains / I can hear their hearts a-beatin' / Like pendulums swinging on chains." In "Mississippi," the threat of violence or sense of menace is more explicit: "Every step of the way we walk the line / *Your days are numbered, so are mine*"; "Time is pilin' up, we *struggle* and we *scrape* / We're all *boxed in, nowhere to escape* / City's just *a jungle*, more *games to play* / *Trapped* in the heart of it, *trying to get away*"; "*Sky full of fire, pain pourin' down*"; "Well my ship's been *split to splinters and it's sinking fast* / I'm *drownin' in the poison*, got *no future*, got no past"; "Well, the *emptiness is endless, cold as the clay* / You can always come back, but you *can't come back all the way*." It is a bleak picture indeed.

We find menacing threats scattered throughout "Workingman's Blues #2," beginning from the second verse: "My *cruel weapons* been laid back on the shelf"; "I'm just trying to keep the *hunger* from / Creepin' its way into my gut"; "You can hang back or *fight your best on the front line*" (this is part of the chorus, which is repeated four times). In one version of the lyrics, Dylan's narrator says, "Leaving everything behind / If I stay here I'll lose it all / *The bandits will rob me blind*", while in the studio version, he sings, "Tossed by the wind and the seas / *I'll drag them all down to hell and I'll stand them at the wall / I'll sell them to their enemies*." Scenes of fighting and the rhetoric of warfare are ubiquitous: "Now the place is ringed with countless foes / Some of them may be deaf and dumb / No man, no woman knows / The hour that sorrow will come"; "Sleep is like a temporary death"; "*They* burned my barn and *they* stole my horse / I can't save a dime / It's *a long way down* and I don't want to be *forced / Into a life of continual crime*"; "I'll punch my spear right straight through / Half-ways down your spine" (in the "official lyrics," but not on the studio version); "*They* will lay you low /

They'll break your horns and slash you with steel / I say it so *it must be* so"; "The battle is over up in the hills / And the mist is closing in" (again, in the "official" lyrics; on the studio recording, "Now I'm down on my luck and I'm black and blue"). For Dylan, sleep is now "like a temporary death," echoing the odd ending of "Where is Everyone?" but also, and perhaps more importantly, providing a respite from the "foes" and combat that rages all around his weary everymen.

As mentioned earlier, in his poem, "Our First House in Sacramento," Carver describes a similar scene of confusion-turning-to-violence: "even then *our days were numbered* [...] a man appeared one night with a baseball bat. And raised it. I was not the man he thought I was. Finally, I got him to believe it. He wept from frustration after his anger left him" (67-68, emphasis added). The second scene of violence follows the next episode of confusion and shame: "I lost the grocery money to a stranger. Who went on to quarrel with his wife. In his frustration he drove his fist through the kitchen wall" (68). The narrator revisits these violent scenes near the end of the poem when he tells us "I saw firsthand what frustration can do to a man. Make him weep, make him throw his first through a wall" (68).

In "Where is Everyone?" we see this same dynamic at work, repeated throughout the story: a sense of confusion and/or menace, followed by a violent threat or outburst. Near the start of the narrative, the narrator tells us that his wife was "having a 'thing'" with a man who had "five or six kids" (the narrator does not know how many, exactly) and who "walked with a limp from a gunshot wound his first wife had given him. He didn't have a wife now; he wanted my wife [...] More than once in those days I mentioned weapons. I'd say to my wife, I'd shout it, 'I'm going to kill him!'" (11). Later, the narrator explodes into actual violence: "One afternoon I screamed and got into a scuffle with my son. Cynthia had to break it up when I threatened to knock him to pieces. I said I would kill him. I said, 'I gave you life and I can take it away.' Madness" (13). He characterizes his home life as a "crumbling situation," one marked by "threats and bullying [...] violence and dismay," and confesses that, after reading a novel in which a dying man, with the last of his strength, slaps his son across the face, he, too, fantasizes about a deathbed scene in which he slaps each of his children and curses them before dying (13). In a heartbreaking scene that clearly shows the result of this kind of domestic violence, his son, Mike, locks Cynthia out of their house one day, after she stays overnight at Ross' house, and she begs him to let her back in, in order to get ready for work. She pleads with him until he "let her in and she swore at him. Like that, he punched her hard on the shoulders several times—whop, whop, whop—then hit her on top of the head and generally worked her over" (14). Later, Mike's pent-up rage explodes when he fights with Ross; "there'd been a pushing and shoving match out in [Ross'] drive in the early morning hours and Mike had thrown [Ross] down on the pavement" (16). Ross and the narrator agree on one thing, as a result of Mike's violence: he was considered "a dangerous character" by the two of them and needed to join the military in order to "learn respect and manners" (16), which is a common enough reaction in this kind of situation. However, where—better yet, from whom—did Mike learn such behavior? The narrator recognizes the danger of Mike's actions, but he

fails to see the cause or to reflect on his own behavior. In this way, the cycle of violence is perpetuated.

IV. "The Place I Love Best"

More often than threats or outright violence, however, we see Dylan and Carver's people retreating into sleep, dreams, memory, or sentimentality when faced with confusion, shame, indignity, and humiliation. Hampton calls them "moments of dream or comfort," "the most intimate experiences" that are in fact "remaining traces of stability and intimacy—the memory [for one of Dylan's narrators] of 'the place I love best,' the fantasy of a lover's touch—to shore up the self in an economy that thrives on psychic disorientation" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland"). Here, Dylan—like Carver before him—reveals to us his people's "interiority and emotional economy," a point to which I will return.

In "Tryin' to Get to Heaven," we find a pattern of confusion followed by nostalgia and reverie: "Every day your memory grows dimmer"; "You broke a heart that loved you / Now you can seal up the book and not write anymore"; "I tried to give you everything / That your heart was longing for"; and in the final verse, "Gonna sleep down in the parlor / And relive my dreams / I'll close my eyes and I wonder / If everything is as hollow as it seems." We find the same pattern in "Mississippi," with the first half of each verse describing menacing threats, rumors and gossip, or confusion (or an amalgam of all three), immediately followed by a retreat into memory or sentiment, as in the following: "Some people will offer you their hand and some won't / Last night I thought I knew you, tonight I don't / *I need somethin' strong to distract my mind / I'm gonna look at you 'til my eyes go blind*"; "Well my ship's been split to splinters and it's sinking fast / I'm drownin' in the poison, got no future, got no past / *But my heart is not weary, it's light and it's free / I've got nothing but affection for all those who've sailed with me*"; "My clothes are wet, tight on my skin / Not as tight as the corner that I painted myself in / *I know that fortune is waitin' to be kind / So give me your hand and say you'll be mine*."

In "Workingman's Blues #2," the pattern is even more pronounced. After repeating the phrases he has heard somewhere, lamenting the decline of "the buying power of the proletariat," the narrator invokes "[t]he place I love best is a sweet memory / It's a new path that we trod," and in the next line, after relaying hearsay regarding low wages and "compet[ing] abroad," he tenderly informs us that "[m]y cruel weapons been laid back on the shelf / Come and sit down on my knee / You are dearer to me than myself / As you yourself can see." The song continues in this way, with oscillating movements between confusion and fantasies of violence or fits of nostalgia, as the narrator tells us "I'm trying to feed my soul with thought / Gonna sleep off the rest of the day"; "In the dark I hear the night birds call / The hills are rugged and steep / I sleep in the kitchen with my feet in the hall / If I told you my whole story you'd weep" (in the "official" lyrics; however, in the actual studio recording, it runs as follows: "In the dark I hear the night birds call / *I can hear a lover's breath* / I sleep in

the kitchen with my feet in the hall / *Sleep is like a temporary death*"); "How I wish you were here to see / Tell me, am I wrong in thinking / That you have forgotten me"; "Them, I will forget / You, I'll remember always / Old memories of you to me have clung"; "Gonna give you another chance / I'm all alone and I'm expecting you / To lead me off in a cheerful dance." Dylan's elegiac songs follow this same pattern.

In the poem, "Our First House in Sacramento," Carver likewise ends with his narrator getting caught up in dreams: "I saw firsthand what frustration can do to a man. Make him weep, make him throw his fist through a wall. *Set him to dreaming of the house that's his at the end of the long road. A house filled with music, ease, and generosity. A house that hasn't been lived in yet*" (68, emphasis added). Due to its complicated back-and-forth motion between past and present, this same movement—from confusion, through violence and into memory—is more complicated in "Where is Everyone?" and yet it is also there. The first time we encounter this is just after the long opening section, bookended by "I've seen some things" (11) and "It was something in those days" (14), when the narrator decides to leave his mother embracing "Old Ken" on the sofa and go for a drive. He then recalls a simpler, happier time: "Sometimes Cynthia and I would talk about things [...] One afternoon we were in the living room and she said, 'When I was pregnant with Mike you carried me to the bathroom when I was so sick and pregnant and couldn't get out of bed. You carried me. No one will ever do that, no one else could ever love me in that way, that much. We have that, no matter what. We've loved each other like nobody else could or ever will love the other again" (15). Lish hated this sentimental aspect of Carver, and usually edited it mercilessly, but we can now perhaps appreciate why it was there in the first place—and why it was absolutely necessary.

After recalling his father's sad death, the narrator calls collect to his lover, "a good woman who, the last time I'd seen her, had said she would pray for me" (19). The woman accepts the charges, asks him where he is, how he is doing, and then says that she still loves him, despite the fact that their love affair ruined her own marriage (to a former friend of the narrator's), and that she would "continue to pray for [him]" (19). The narrator pointedly asks about her estranged husband, clearly out of a sense of guilt, and he accepts her offer: "Pray for me," he says, "Yes" (19). This leads to the final scene, back at his childhood home, with his mother—a scene that completes the frame story and literally entails nostalgia, a painful longing for "home" (from the Greek *nostos*, or home, and *algos*, or pain). The problem is, of course, that the adult narrator can never return to his childhood home, since he himself has grown up, and grown old, and his father has passed away. As Hampton wrote, he is an "exile at home," not at home in the world nor even when he is, quite literally, at home. "Where is Everyone?" is the title of the story and it is also part of a line that Carver himself cut from one version of this story, when he reprinted it (restoring it to almost its exact original form, before Lish edited it): when he telephones his mother, before the crucial closing scene, she asks him, "Are you calling from home?" to which he replies, "I'm not at home [...] I don't know where everyone is at home" (19). That last part, "I don't know where everyone is at home," has been part of a mystery in studies of Carver's fiction. Why did he himself edit it, this one line, from his

reprinted version (in *Fires*)? And what could it possibly mean? Given that the narrator had just telephoned home, spoken with his daughter, Katy, who told him that her mother was not there, then asked him for money, it doesn't make sense—unless we reconsider who the "everyone" might be and what or where the phrase "at home" might mean. Is he speaking about his estranged wife and children, or about Ross and his family, or about his lover and her family, or, quite possibly, about his own parents and his childhood "home"? There is some slippage here and perhaps Carver noticed it: it's not that the sentence makes no sense, but rather that it could possibly make too much sense, so to speak. In other words, it could be read in multiple ways. But for my purposes, I would like to read it in a way that allows it to stand for any and all of those places, those "homes" and those people, "everyone." The narrator does not feel at home; rather, he feels a sense of uncanniness, what Freud called *das Unheimliche* or "the Uncanny" (literally, "Un-at-home-ness")—and this is why he lapses into a kind of childish fantasy.

V. Conclusion: the Language of Dispossession

According to Hampton, Dylan "sings of a world in which the traditional virtues of hard work, craftsmanship, and devotion to community have been rendered economically irrelevant" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland"). He argues that these people "belong to a group that Donald Trump has claimed as his own, the non-college-educated working classes. Through poetry and song [and, in Carver's case, I would add, through stories], he gives us something that scholars and philosophers cannot [...] By exposing the psychic toll of dispossession, his songs suggest why art in our own moment—if it is to matter at all—needs to account for the suffering found there" ("Bob Dylan in Trumpland").

In Carver's odd closing scene, the narrator is truly infantilized: his mother orders him to "[w]ash [his] hands" before feeding him, then has him wear his late father's pajamas. She makes up a bed for him on the sofa, then kisses him goodnight as he watches TV and drifts off to sleep. Like Dylan's narrators, Carver's is not sleeping in a bed, but somewhere else—in this case, a sofa, much as Dylan's (out of-) workingmen sleep "in the kitchen" or "in the parlor"—and this reveals their humiliation and sense of dispossession and defeat. "I might sleep in a while," Carver's narrator says to his mother, echoing Dylan's words, "Gonna sleep down in the parlor" and "Gonna sleep off the rest of the day." For these exiles at home, "sleep," as Dylan sang, "is like a temporary death" indeed.

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