Existential Connections

The Influence of Raymond Carver on Haruki Murakami

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Of contemporary short fiction’s many distinguishing characteristics, existentialism, and the manner in which it functions as a theoretical foundation for many modern short stories, has become an almost archetypal theme, and of the many contemporary short story writers applying the dilemmas of existentialism, Raymond Carver is one of the foremost influential practitioners. William Stull notes this level of influence and suggests that when examining Carver as an influence, we as readers “are likely talking not about individual stories individually assessed but rather about the expectations we bring to (and take back from) one kind of Carver story” (1). Stull’s use of the term “Hopelessville” to portray the landscape of What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, and in some regard Carver’s entire cannon, argues for the perception of a type of Carver story, yet it also draws attention to what some have used to criticize Carver’s work. One aspect of criticism levied against Carver by Charles May is “that his characters are inarticulate and insufficiently realized because they seem unable to explain why they do what they do” (39). An all too familiar claim against most of Carver’s work, the assertion seems to sum up his work a bit too easily and fails to take into consideration the recurring existentialism prevalent in much of his fiction. More importantly, this sort of critique disallows the opportunity to recognize how Carver’s characters, rather than being undeveloped and a bit too easily identifiable, are significant in illustrating influence upon American short fiction, and, even more
so, on all contemporary short fiction, including the short stories of one of Japan’s most renowned writers, Haruki Murakami.

Existentialism as a wide-ranging philosophical concept factors heavily into much of Carver’s work\(^\text{1}\), and, despite Gadi Taub’s suggestion to the contrary, much of it reflects Jean-Paul Sartre’s examination of human exploration into moments of choice and consciousness. The notion within existentialism that individuals are free to make their own decisions, and that these choices ultimately can become a source of anguish, is further investigated in *Existentialism and Humanism*, in which Sartre hypothesizes that, through the act of discovery, the individual is in the process of moving from being in existence to being in the act of discovery and finding his essence. Sartre expounds:

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself (28).

Sartre continues, saying, “[m]an is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism” (28). He further argues that humans must engage themselves in some sort of action to break from a passive and undetermined condition; otherwise, they have no motive beyond their existence—they simply are being. Sartre’s philosophy is evident in Carver’s short stories as one recognizes that the reason Carver’s characters may seem incapable of expressing why they do what they do is because they are in the process of detection, figuring out their actions and their purpose for acting. Their inarticulateness and inaction exemplify the struggle, and sometimes the reluctance, to determine their essence, and, as Stull proposes, the
existential realism that Carver uses, along with the aesthetic, minimalist framework, “suggests a subject as well as a style: Hopelessville. It calls for characters who are more often cowardly than heroic, for Erostratus instead of Achilles” (5). Certain stories, Stull maintains, “end not with a bang but a whimper, a hasty retreat, a failure to connect” (5); this failure to connect ultimately serves as the existential foundation for many Carver stories as his characters strive to relate in environments that may prevent the acts of discovery and engagement.

Unlike Carver, Murakami has gained much critical attention as a novelist, but, within his short stories, he most resembles the existential pattern found in Carver’s work. Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman, a compilation of twenty-four stories published between 1979 and 2005 and translated by Phillip Gabriel and Jay Rubin, features Murakami’s distinctive late-twentieth century characters which Celeste Loughman identifies as individuals who “live exterior lives that are efficient, predictable, and mechanical to create the illusion of purpose and meaning” (91). Loughman’s assertion points to an existential theme similar to that in Carver’s work. Murakami’s characters project an image of “purpose and meaning,” but, beyond the facade, the individuals within his stories recall those within Carver’s work in the manner in which they come to terms with their own existence and an everyday life that is often hostile and incomprehensible. In their daily activities, Murakami’s individuals give readers reason to suspect they are not always in their proper place, and Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman contains several stories that reaffirm Loughman’s claim that “[t]o a certain degree, [his] characters are universal stock figures of contemporary literature, almost a cliché of the existential condition” (88). In “The Mirror,” a janitor gazes at his reflection in the mirror, only to note, “My reflection in the mirror wasn’t me” (58). Elsewhere, a man awakes to find his lover missing, so, in the middle of the night, he searches for her outside, under the moonlight: “This wasn’t me walking
in the moonlight,” he says. “It wasn’t me, but a stand-in, fashioned out of plaster. I rubbed my hand against my face. But it wasn’t my face. And it wasn’t my hand” (“Man-Eating Cats” 123). In yet another story, a man again awakes in the night, this time due to illness. After vomiting, he stands in front of the mirror, washing his face: “His face looked gaunt, wrinkled, his skin the color of dirt. He couldn’t believe this was really his face” (“Crabs” 212). Finally, in “The Year of Spaghetti,” a man receives a phone call from a friend’s ex-girlfriend, and, as he explains that he has little information to offer as to his friend’s whereabouts, he comes to the realization that “My voice didn’t sound like my own” (171). In each of these instances, the individual at the center of attention arrives at a decisive moment; in this dichotomous moment, the individuals are not fully cognizant of their condition. The physical traits (face, hands, voice) that would normally act as reminders of awareness have deceived them, and this deception, coupled with a general lack of full engagement with the issues surrounding them, reaffirms the view that Murakami’s characters serve as representative existential contemporary figures.

These examples owe some debt to Carver, because in a majority of his fiction, Carver employs the same kind of existential isolation, most recognized in his career-spanning collection Where I’m Calling From. David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips articulate the notion of existential isolation, labeling it “disassociation” and defining it as “a sense of disengagement from one’s own identity and life, a state of standing apart from whatever defines the self, or of being unselled” (75). Due to this disassociation, Carver’s characters live overwhelmed by menace and a deep sense of uncertainty. At different stages in Carver’s career, fear is a marked emotion; characters feel detached from their environments, and their response to this sensation is to admit that they are afraid. In an early Carver story, “The Student’s Wife,” Nan, a young wife, is unable to fall asleep. Lying in bed, “She touched the wedding band on her ring finger and with her
thumb. She turned onto her side and then onto her back again. And then she began to feel afraid” (41). Nan’s next action is to pray, an “unreasoning moment of longing” (41) that serves only to provide temporary relief from the anxiety she feels. Beyond the Sartrean existential connections, a convincing feminine existentialist association evolves here as well, most notably through the perspective argued by Simone de Beauvoir in Second Sex, where de Beauvoir states that “[woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with references to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other” (xxii). Nan seems displaced in her role as wife and mother as her husband reads to her in bed, her passivity a sign of a lack of engagement and subordinate position as the “Other.” Only in her visions does she contemplate the possibility of discovery: “But I like that, flying in airplanes,” she says. “There’s a moment as you leave the ground you feel whatever happens is all right” (39). Her dream of flying translates to an aspiration of discovery, of becoming, a notion de Beauvoir emphasizes when stating, “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267). The act of engagement and the act of becoming cause Nan to fear the uncertain, prompting the existential dilemma she has at the conclusion of the story.

Years later, in “Blackbird Pie,” Carver presents the demise of a marriage caused by the reluctant and stubborn narrator, again revealing the acts of engagement and becoming. The narrator’s wife, whose assertiveness prompts the end of the relationship, slips a goodbye note under his door just before leaving one night. Reading the letter, the husband refuses to believe his wife is the writer of such a note, and, when he grows suspicious, he opens his door to look down the long hallway where his wife would be: “At that moment I found myself afraid—afraid, if you can believe it, in my own house!—to walk down the hall and satisfy myself that all was well” (498-99). The narrator perceives the menacing situation and, rather than confront the
issue, he retreats; like Nan, he has disengaged himself from his own identity and life due to an overwhelming fear of what will follow. His wife, conversely, illustrates de Beauvoir’s view of one “becoming” a woman by escaping the failed marriage and the futile masculinity of her husband, who is left disassociated from his surroundings. The pattern of disassociation in Carver’s stories connects to Murakami, whose characters also experience physical and emotional trials that separate them from a customary, harmonious existence. Furthermore, the existential themes prevalent in Carver’s short fiction, primarily the notion that characters are in some way displaced—through gender roles, physical changes in surroundings, unfamiliar conditions—and have an opportunity to discover themselves—to define (Sartre) or to become (de Beauvoir)—signal a strong correlation to Murakami and offer the possibility of viewing Carver as an influence upon Murakami’s short fiction.

This connection between Carver and Murakami’s fiction has drawn the attention of critic Naomi Matsuoka, who chooses Murakami’s novel *A Wild Sheep Chase* rather than his short stories to view the impact of Carver and American literature on Murakami. Matsuoka acknowledges the tone of disengagement in both Murakami’s novel and Carver’s “Blackbird Pie,” detecting that “[t]heir language is limited to the description of concrete objects, emphasizing the detachment from emotions” (425). Further noting the corresponding existentialism in each text, Matsuoka comments that the protagonists in each story “realize through self-reflection their alienation from . . . society” (425). Matsuoka’s assertions certainly provide insight into the association between Carver and Murakami, yet additional research concerning the relationship between the short stories by Murakami and Carver may provide even further points of connection.
The earliest stories found in the chronologically arranged *Where I’m Calling From* identify individuals who, because of their isolated condition, look into the lives of others as a way of forming their own sense of identity. This voyeuristic tendency is one that Boxer and Phillips include in their argument concerning disassociation; voyeurism, they claim, is recognized as a “wishful identification with some distant, unattainable idea of self,” and they note that Carver’s characters, in an attempt to reach out to others, discover “sudden, hideously clear visions of the emptiness of their lives; even the most familiar takes on the sharp definition of the strangely unfamiliar. They become voyeurs, then, of their own experience” (75-6). An early highlight of Carver’s canon, “Neighbors” offers a startling example of what Boxer and Phillips contend. A young couple, when asked to take care of their neighbor’s apartment, find their lives stimulated by the chance to live their neighbor’s lives, yet they ultimately discover the distress of such an act. Feeling as though they have “been passed by somehow” (86) in their circle of friends, Bill and Arlene Miller immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the apartment across the hallway where they revive their marriage by mimicking a life more attractive than their own. In existential terms, Bill and Arlene may be attempting to make something of their lives by the process of claiming their essence; however, what they encounter at the conclusion of the story is despair, defined by Sartre as when “we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills” (*Existentialism* 39). Returning from across the hall, Arlene realizes she has locked the key to the neighboring apartment inside, forcing the two of them to linger in the hallway:

He tried the knob. It was locked. Then she tried the knob. It would not turn. Her lips were parted, and her breathing was hard, expectant. He opened his arms and she moved into them.
“Don’t worry,” he said into her ear. “For God’s sake, don’t worry.”

They stayed there. They held each other. They leaned into the door as if against a wind, and braced themselves. (93)

Having adopted the lives of their neighbors, Bill and Arlene neglect their own existence, and, without the key to the apartment, they are without means to retrieve the life upon which they have grown dependent. Bracing against the door, they sense the emptiness of their lives and realize they have very little beyond each other. Kirk Nesset observes that

What both Bill and his wife leave behind are, in fact, themselves: shreds of the identities they have been trying self-destructively to nourish in their daily visitations across the hall—shreds that have grown, visit by visit, increasingly malnourished. Finally locked out of their new paradise, and too jaded in the end to appreciate the old quiet ways of the past, they are in “limbo” (as Boxer and Phillips put it), and thus, “dissociated from both lives, the Millers only have each other.” (13)

In “limbo,” the Millers personify the concept of bad faith explored in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* as when the individual “is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth” (49). Sartre’s theory of bad faith rests on the notion that in order to deflect the feelings of emptiness or despair, the individual imagines himself as not being free, a self-deception, Sartre posits, that triggers the very emotions the individual wishes to avoid. By ignoring the principle that he is free, the individual begins to abstain from making any decisions at all, thus leaving himself passive and unwilling to engage in life. Sartre presents this concept of bad faith in the example of a young woman who, while out with a man, must determine what to do when the man places his hand upon hers: “To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to
engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm” (55). By doing neither, Sartre asserts, the young woman acts in bad faith. She would be in the state of limbo, the passive condition Boxer and Phillips observe the Millers to be in at the end of “Neighbors.” Since the Millers participate in the voyeuristic exploration of another’s life, they are merely spectators rather than participants, and, in the end, they fail to engage in action. Their passivity—they choose to indulge in others’ lives rather than participate in their own—exposes them as acting in bad faith. Eventually, the Millers must make a decision, and while one might argue that this decision would allow them to break from their act of bad faith, one must remember that the Millers have been acting in bad faith for longer than just at the conclusion of the story. If Sartre defines the act of bad faith as concealing a displeasing truth as a form of self-deception, “Neighbors” must be read as a story of a couple living in bad faith, and in the end, embodying the struggle of existentialism.

Murakami best replicates the existential themes found in “Neighbors” in “A Perfect Day for Kangaroos,” first published in 1981. Murakami introduces a young couple searching for the right day to visit the zoo and catch sight of the baby kangaroo, yet in their hesitation, a month passes before their visit, and the baby has grown beyond its infant appearance. While the narrator fails to recognize the importance for such a trip, his girlfriend places a great emphasis on the event:

“If I don’t see the baby kangaroo now I don’t think I’ll have another chance to. Ever,” she said.

“I suppose not.”

“I mean, have you ever seen one?”

“Nope, not me,” I said.
“Are you sure you’ll ever have another chance to?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s why I’m worried.” (96)

The couple finally sees the baby kangaroo, albeit in its mother’s pouch, a sight, the narrator admits, that “definitely made our trip worth the effort” (98). This declaration might make for a positive assessment of the couple’s trip to the zoo; however, the trip to the zoo, just like the Millers’ constant trips across the hall, appears to be nothing more than a distraction from a monotonous life. The fact that they delay their visit until the baby has outgrown its infant appearance attests to their being busy, confirming how little the visit really means. Their passivity, and practice of acting in bad faith, intensifies at the conclusion, where the couple prepares to leave the kangaroo exhibit:

It looked like it was going to be a steamy day, the first hot one we’d had in a while.

“Hey, you want to grab a beer somewhere?” she asked.

“Sounds great,” I said. (99)

Through their interaction and nonchalant attitude, the couple exists in a state of limbo as they aimlessly move from event to event; much like any other event the couple casually could engage in, the kangaroos offer nothing in the way of a lasting impact. All said, the narrator’s observation on the couple’s being busy at the onset of the story bears substantial consideration because what appears to be their busy life is in fact an inactive one. The couple is never engaged; instead, they exist without purpose in a life lived in bad faith, much like the Millers in “Neighbors.” Furthermore, the women in each story suffer through the anxiety of “becoming.” The persistent themes of motherhood and pregnancy introduced in “A Perfect Day for
"Kangaroos” illustrate the existential dilemma the girlfriend undergoes while visiting the zoo, whereas in “Neighbors,” Arlene’s visits across the hall, while an act displaying the basis of bad faith, reveals a woman’s desire to become another, more successful, woman. Both cases exemplify the anxiety of becoming as well as present acute examples of bad faith.

The behavior of the couple in “A Perfect Day for Kangaroos” is representative of the conduct displayed by many others found in the early 1980s work by Murakami, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. Stories such as “The Year of Spaghetti” (1980), “The Mirror” (1982), and “Crabs” (1983) concentrate on characters at odds with their emptiness, many of them unable, or unwilling, to remedy their problems. The narrator in “The Year of Spaghetti,” who receives a phone call from a friend’s ex-girlfriend, chooses to continue fixing spaghetti rather than carry on a conversation. He defends his choices in the conclusion, noting, “I want you to understand my position though. At the time, I didn’t want to get involved with anyone. That’s why I kept on cooking spaghetti all by myself” (173). He opts to remain isolated, working industriously at the one comfort he has—spaghetti. At the conclusion of “Crabs,” the young man, who has spent the entire night awake with illness, arrives at this own hideously clear vision of emptiness: “His heart felt enclosed by something formless, surrounded by a deep, soft mystery. He no longer had the faintest clue where his life was headed, and what might be waiting for him there” (214).

Murakami’s conclusion, with its allusions to fear and uncertainty, echoes the conclusion of “The Student’s Wife,” where Carver focuses on the anguish of Nan, who desperately longs to sleep. While the young man in “Crabs” wants “to sleep soundly and wake up to find that everything had been solved” (213), Nan, in her desperation, ultimately pleads to a higher power in an attempt to solve matters: “‘God,’ she said. ‘God, will you help us, God?’ she said” (43). Like Carver before him, Murakami’s characters are displaced in situations where they must confront
the terror and uncertainty of life, and, whether by the definition of Sartre or de Beauvoir, the existential condition his characters endure is often not immediately rectified. Stories like “Neighbors” and “The Student’s Wife” show Carver leaving characters at an impasse in decisions, much like the way in which Murakami corners his own characters in “A Perfect Day for Kangaroos” and “Crab,” for the characters in these stories come to no clear resolution or positive revelation; thus, their existential unease continues.

In the introduction of *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*, Murakami, discussing his method of short story writing, notes: “One more nice thing about short stories is that you can create a story out of the smallest details—an idea that springs up in your mind, a word, an image, whatever” (viii). The attention to detail, particularly the focus on precise images to create the foundation of a story’s meaning, lends further weight to associating Murakami with Carver, whose stories often revolve around a single image meant to draw much of the focus. Most notably, “Cathedral” provides an exemplary illustration of just this kind of story and image, and one can see a correlation between “Cathedral” and Murakami’s “Hunting Knife”: two stories that rely on central images to present men who have the potential to break from their existential isolation.

The narrator of “Cathedral” certainly experiences emptiness in his life, since he seems to lack a substantial relationship with his wife or with any kind of real friendship in the outside world. When his wife invites an old friend to visit, the narrator gets a sense of his wife’s past, as well as the connections she has made, particularly with Robert, the visiting blind man. Upon Robert’s arrival, the three eat and converse, yet Robert and his wife dominate the conversation, leaving the narrator to listen for mention of his name:
They talked of things that had happened to them—to them!—these past ten years. I waited in vain to hear my name on my wife’s sweet lips: “And then my dear husband came into my life”—something like that. But I heard nothing of the sort. More talk of Robert. (364-5)

The narrator feels a great sense of disassociation as he has been ousted, “unselfed,” in his own environment, yet once the wife leaves the narrator and Robert together in the living room, the two watch television and talk. This act of connection shows the narrator attempting to ease his existential dilemma by associating with Robert, and, when the narrator finds Robert unfamiliar with the subject on television, he attempts to describe the cathedrals, yet his words fail to convey meaning. In place of talking, the narrator allows Robert’s hands to follow his as he draws a cathedral on paper. The ensuing moment reveals the two men finding a commonality, and this helps the narrator eliminate his existential despair and isolation: this becomes apparent at the conclusion of the story as he remarks, “My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn’t feel like I was inside anything” (375). The sense of uncertainty lingers only briefly, for the narrator then verbally admits, “It’s really something” (375). In saying this, he does not feel deceived, but rather he acknowledges his existence, and, in doing so, he appears finally capable of realizing his essence—a sign acknowledging that, as a male protagonist, he can fulfill Sartre’s belief that a man can making something of himself. With phallic images abounding in the final scene (the cathedral, the pen, the rhythmic movement of the pen), “Cathedral” becomes a story in which the significance of masculine discovery leads to a deterioration of the underlying existential isolation.

The parting images in “Cathedral” provide further evidence of Carver’s influence on Murakami, whose “Hunting Knife” ends with a similar bonding experience between two men.
Unable to sleep, the Murakami’s narrator leaves his sleeping wife to explore the surroundings of their vacation lodge. Coming across a wheelchair-bound young man at an outdoor bar, the narrator strikes up a conversation in which he learns that the young man has a hunting knife he has never used. Physically incapable of putting it to good use, the boy, wondering if the knife is any good, asks the narrator to cut a few things. Like “Cathedral,” “Hunting Knife” revolves around two men, one of whom is in some manner physically impeded, and he other who is impeded socially. On their vacation, Murakami’s narrator and his wife must determine many things, including “whether we should move to a new apartment when we got home, what we should do about jobs, whether or not to have kids. This was the last summer of our twenties” (82-83). Despite the need to attend to such matters, the narrator discusses very little with his wife; instead, he seems adrift and shares insignificant conversations with strangers on the beach. His encounter with the young man in the wheelchair, however, offers him the same sort of possibility of reduced existential isolation previously allowed the narrator in “Cathedral.”

The connection between Carver’s “Cathedral” and Murakami’s “Hunting Knife” revolves around invitation, specifically the invitation from the physically impaired to the socially inactive. In “Cathedral,” when the narrator finds the task of describing the cathedral on television too difficult an endeavor, Robert presses the narrator to find alternative ways to communicate. The narrator notes:

It was then that the blind man cleared his throat. He brought something up. He took a handkerchief from his back pocket. Then he said, “I get it, bub. It’s okay. It happens. Don’t worry about it,” he said. “Hey, listen to me. Will you do me a favor? I got an idea. Why don’t you find us some heavy paper?
And a pen. We’ll do something. We’ll draw one together. Get us a pen and some heavy paper. Go on, bub, get the stuff,” he said. (372-3) Robert urges the narrator to fight through his inarticulateness and act, rather than speak. Once the narrator begins drawing, Robert continues his encouragement: “‘Swell,’ he said. ‘Terrific. You’re doing fine,’ he said. ‘Never thought anything like this could happen in your life, did you, bub? Well, it’s a strange life, we all know that. Go on now. Keep it up’” (373). What follows is the moment that draws the narrator out of his existential dilemma, for the narrator’s admission that “It’s really something” reveals the altering effect Robert has had on him. Whether the moment is a fleeting glimpse or an incident of true discovery—and some would argue it makes no difference—Robert’s insistence that the narrator take action, to do a “favor,” illustrates how one man is capable of inducing another out of the emptiness of life.

With “Cathedral,” then, it seems Carver introduced the possibility of change in the lives of his characters, and this story offers an instance where characters work beyond the existentialism and disassociation of their lives; these attributes are still evident, yet Carver also allows the potential for engagement. Murakami also leans toward this trend toward the possibility of change in “Hunting Knife,” which replicates the final scene of “Cathedral” by focusing on one man provoking another into action. Like Robert, the young man in the wheelchair is unable to participate actively in a normal life due to physical limitations, and he prompts the narrator to act in his place by using the knife:

“I wonder if you could do me a favor,” he said. “Could you cut something with it?”

“Cut something? Like what?”
“Anything. Whatever’s around. I just want you to cut something. I’m stuck in this chair, so there isn’t much I can cut. I’d really like it if you’d cut something up for me.” (93)

The narrator proceeds to slash the knife through several objects around the bar. The use of the knife, another phallic symbol, mirrors the use of the pen in “Cathedral” in showing another man in the midst of the Sartrean notion of making himself; just as the narrator in “Cathedral” is in the works on constructing a new self, the narrator in “Hunting Knife” slices away his old self as a way of allowing a new self to become. The narrator’s enthusiasm and movement contrast with his earlier, languid behavior of lying on the beach, and he admits, “This knife’s fantastic” (93). Recognizing the narrator’s amazement, the young man encourages him to continue:

“Cut some more things,” he urged me.

I slashed out at everything I could lay my hands on. At coconuts that had fallen on the ground, at the massive leaves of a tropical plant, the menu posted at the entrance to the bar. I even hacked away at a couple of pieces of driftwood on the beach. When I ran out of things to cut, I started moving slowly, deliberately, as if I were doing Tai Chi, silently slicing the knife through the night air. Nothing stood in my way. The night was deep, and time was pliable. The light of the full moon only added to that depth, that pliancy. (93-4)

The narrator finds the moment with the knife exhilarating, and, like the narrator of “Cathedral,” he too has responded to a request for a “favor” from another individual and has experienced a moment of transcendence. His acknowledgement that “This knife’s fantastic” verbalizes the wonder at his involvement. Like the narrator of “Cathedral,” he appears to break from his existential isolation, and, whether this break is longstanding or transitory, the significance lies in
the deed of discovery and the connection with another person, thereby eliminating the disassociation in his life.

The existentialism in Carver and Murakami’s work does not automatically link them, nor does it force readers to see Carver as the sole influence on Murakami’s short stories. It does, however, prompt readers to scrutinize the already well-documented connections between the two. Despite Murakami’s reluctance to admit Carver as an influence, the patterns of character displacement and disassociation make Carver’s influence on Murakami’s work recognizable and easier to accept, showing that the influence Carver has on contemporary short stories extends beyond the boundaries of American fiction.

Notes
1 Proof of existential ties in Carver’s work can be found in “The Stories of Raymond Carver: The Menace of Perpetual Uncertainty” (Powell, 1994) and “On Small, Good Things: Raymond Carver’s Modest Existentialism” (Taub, 2002).
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