Less is More

American Short Story Minimalism in Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme

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by

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ABSTRACT

This work suggests ways in which ‘less’ become ‘more’ in the minimalist approach of three American short story writers, Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme. By ‘less’, I mean minimalism’s tendency to create a pared down, seemingly ‘innocent’ style; to use absence for effect; and to omit vital narrative details. By more, I mean the range and depth of emotional effects minimalism achieves, and the ways in which it demands the reader engage with the text.

Minimalism achieves its effects because, not in spite of, its tendency towards reduction, its reliance on absence. The paring down process creates interpretative indeterminacy, by omitting apparently vital information. Hemingway may be thought of as the originator of the minimalist short story; Carver and Barthelme develop new ways to implicate the reader in the creation of the text, for example by suggesting that the reader is a voyeur, and through the use of the second person narrator. Together, minimalist writing might be reconsidered in light of the ways in which it demands reader engagement.

My reader is an implied one and my choice of writers suggests ways in which the minimalist aesthetic developed; how it might be valued within literary history, and in the history of the American short story in particular. I consider Hemingway in terms of the origins of the minimalist approach in the short story, hence I offer a discussion of how his work developed within the context of literary history, as a reaction to both modernism and tradition. I conclude by suggesting that the status of minimalist
writing in literary history might be reconsidered in light of a renewed understanding of how this seemingly impoverished, restrained and slight writing creates works of great richness, emotional intensity, and intellectual depth.
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INTRODUCTION

How ‘Less’ Becomes ‘More’ in Minimalist Writing

Minimalism has been subjected to hostile criticism by major US critics, from its reception in the late 1970s, until the present day. John Aldridge’s *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-Line Fiction*, for example, is a sustained attack on what he calls pejoratively ‘assembly-line’ fiction, where minimalism is variously criticised for being unoriginal, homogenised and ultimately of little value.¹ His work reflects a concern that the minimalist approach was banal, trivial and inconsequential, privileging form over effect: ‘[Minimalism] suspends all aesthetic innovation in favour of parsing out the most mundane concerns of superficial life’.² Elsewhere, Madison Smartt Bell inverted the notion that less means more when applied to Minimalism, by suggesting instead that ‘less means less’.³ The hostility to Minimalism culminated in 1989, when five critics convened on Minimalism, and under the heading ‘Throwing Dirt on the Grave of Minimalism’, declared that it was ‘dead’.⁴

One result of this sustained criticism is that, despite its prevalence in American short fiction over the last thirty years, critical appraisals of minimalism are disproportionately few, and when they do appear, they are largely antagonistic. Consequently, it appears – with the odd exception, as noted below – that minimalism has not been given the critical reading it deserves. Questions remain as to the origins of literary minimalism, the extent to which it might be valued, and its influence upon future literatures. It is the intention of this thesis to address such questions and in so doing, addresses this critical neglect. This will be done through an analysis of three American short story writers who appear at strategic points along minimalism’s timeline (loosely, at the beginning, middle and now): Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme.

The notion that minimalism’s pared-down, elliptical and inexplicit aesthetic necessarily inculcates an equally underwhelming, impoverished and ultimately valueless effect upon its reader is in need of reconsideration. I refute the equation that ‘less’ does indeed mean ‘less’ by suggesting ways in which less becomes more in the collections of minimalist short stories of these three writers. It is my contention that ‘more’ means a richness of effect, an interpretative polyvalency, an interactive vitality which exists because, not despite of, the ‘less’ which is minimalism’s restraint, its tendency towards reduction, its dependence upon absence for effect. My central argument is that minimalist narrative techniques create an interpretative indeterminacy which asks that the reader make a growing contribution to its meaning, culminating in an awareness of what is revealed, rather than resolved, at the short story’s ending. All literature makes demands upon the reader, but this thesis attempts to determine how minimalism makes specific demands in-line with its specific
narrative techniques: reading ‘less’ demands that the reader do more, because the
minimalist short story refuses to provide easy answers to the many questions it raises.
A renewed understanding of the potential effect upon an implied reader of this
literature might go some way towards developing a renewed critical re-evaluation,
and in so doing, extend a concomitant sympathy towards it.

It has become the task of the supporter of minimalism to defend, rather than praise, its
literature. It is not my intention to sustain this defensive position. Rather, I ask that
readers re-negotiate their reading strategy to encompass this way of writing and all its
techniques, principles and effects; and in doing so re-think the place of the minimalist
short story within American literary history.
Minimalism and Existing Criticism

When Raymond Carver told an interviewer of *Paris Review* that he disliked the term 'minimalist' applied to his work, this represented deep misgivings about the value of minimalist writing:

> In a review of my last book, somebody called me a 'minimalist' writer.
> The reviewer meant it as a compliment. But I didn't like it. There's something about 'minimalist' that smacks of smallness of vision and execution that I don't like.\(^5\)

The 'smallness of vision and execution' are more than problems with the term itself, but point to a distrust of its methods, aims and effects. Frederick Barthelme also appears uncomfortable with the term. In his apologetic article, 'On Being Wrong: Convicted Minimalist Spills Beans', he seems happy to defend minimalism in all but name, and elsewhere seems resistant to the term:

> I don't like being called a minimalist, which I am called I think because my characters don't get up on boxes and shout out their views of the world. This is not because they don't have views on the world but [...] they recognise [...] we produce a great many, but they're not very reliable. So the characters shut up. This pleases me.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Herzinger, p. 9.
These misgivings have been translated into an indifference, a hostility towards or even a rejection of minimalism among some readers and critics. The result is that the minimalist short story of the United States has been either undervalued or even ignored by critics.

Consequently, there are very few full-length studies that focus upon minimalism, and only one at the time of writing that focuses solely upon the American short story. This work, *Minimalism and the Short Story: Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel and Mary Robison* by Cynthia W. Hallett, argues that minimalism develops and extends the tendency in short fiction towards reduction, omission and suggestion. For Hallett, minimalism is merely an expansion of traits already found in the short story tradition: there is little to suggest how minimalism contributes something new and how it undermines or even rejects some of those tenets which are the foundation of the modern short story.

Despite its illumination of the work of its three writers and its promotion of minimalism more generally, Hallet’s argument is limited. Moreover, alone, it cannot hope to address its complexity and so American short story minimalism remains largely misunderstood, unexplored or unjustly evaluated. As a result, fundamental questions about minimalism remain unanswered.

Aldridge’s *Talents and Technicians* is the most sustained attack upon what he terms the ‘new fiction’, within which he includes minimalism. His work contains the most fierce, unbending and provocative critique of minimalism to be found
anywhere, but its themes, criticisms and readings are not unique: they represent the influential viewpoint that the American minimalist short story is not valuable. For example, one of his most vicious condemnations is reserved for what he calls ‘assembly line’ fiction writers. Here, he criticises the burgeoning writing programmes, graduate writing classes and generally writing-through-pedagogy as producing uninspired, unoriginal and homogenised short stories. He attacks minimalism for eschewing social concerns, for its apathy, and for the way in which its impoverished method inevitably inculcates an impoverished effect upon the reader.

Several critics have recognised the degree to which minimalism has been the subject of negative criticism of the kind typically found in Aldridge, or its apparent neglect as a result of such hostility, and have attempted to restore some balance. One such critic, Kim Herzinger, the then editor of The Mississippi Review, wrote to several writers, critics and scholars with an interest in literary minimalism, with a view to devoting an edition of his journalism entirely to a discussion of literary minimalism. Published in winter 1985, its aim was to inspire a discussion which might shed some light of what was then a relatively unexamined and undervalued ‘new’ fiction:

There are many questions about this work, first among which is, are these writers groupable? [...] Individually or collectively, what links these writers with, or separates them from, the irony, the foregrounded language, and reflexiveness of the “postmodernists” of the sixties and early seventies? Are we witnessing a realist revival, or is this
“minimalist” fiction something previously unseen? And what makes the work “minimalist” in the first place?\(^7\)

Herzinger establishes a broadly agreed definition of minimalism. Where critics tend to disagree, however, is in their appraisal of what Herzinger calls the implications, or effects, of minimalist narrative techniques. He suggests that criticism should be developing beyond its definition and instead move towards an analysis of effects: to what end is the minimalist aesthetic? He asks:

the implications of these characteristics, discussions of why, where from, and to what end, is “minimalist” fiction.\(^8\)

In the introduction to the ‘minimalist’ edition, Herzinger variously offers some tentative suggestions as to how these, and several other, questions might be answered. Yet what becomes clear in reading this collection of short essays and thought-pieces, along with the seminal introduction, is that minimalism as a literary phenomenon demands further detailed study. These pieces (sometimes only a page in length) somewhat deliberately act as a taster to a more concerted, thoroughgoing and in-depth study of minimalism, the need for which is plainly implied in his conclusion. Any attempt to discuss what Herzinger calls the ‘implications’ of minimalism demands a smaller, but more penetrating, area of focus. A precise, focused analysis will inevitably shed light upon more general areas, and suggest answers to many of the questions raised by Herzinger et al, including a discussion of minimalism’s

\(^7\) Herzinger, pp. 7-8.
\(^8\) Herzinger, p. 11.
relationship with post-modernism, its affinity to realism, and why it might be
revalued. I am responding to Herzinger’s call.
Defining Literary Minimalism

Herzinger's interest in effect is predicated upon an agreed definition of literary minimalism, and, as Herzinger makes clear, there is a stable critical consensus in how minimalism in the American short story is defined. In the introduction to the 'minimalist' edition, he outlines a brief but decisive definition of literary minimalism in which he makes that consensus clear:

Still, most critics, here and elsewhere, can generally agree as to the salient characteristics of "minimalist" fiction [...] "equanimity of surface, 'ordinary' subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story, and characters who don't think out loud."

I have translated these 'salient characteristics' into several more precise elements as they appear in minimalist writing: a reduced vocabulary; a shorter sentence; a reticence towards the expression of a character's thoughts or feelings; unresolved, even slight narratives which reveal more than they resolve; the use of unadorned language and the rejection of hyperbole; a detached, even 'absent' narrator; a more abundant use of dialogue; fewer adjectives and, when used, not extravagant; showing, not telling as a primary means of communicating information; an interest in the accurate depiction of the everyday; and a focus upon the present tense. It is the purpose of my thesis to expand this definition in terms of the effects minimalist writing makes upon its implied reader.

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9 Indeed, minimalism outside of the short story and the United States adopts a similar position but not without exceptions. For example, Russian minimalism has been largely influenced by its origins in traditional folk tales.

10 Herzinger, p. 11.
It is common to define minimalism in relation to its genre, as does Chris Baldick, in its appearance in a variety of poetic sub-genres, such as the Haiku, epigram, short sketch or monologue. Here, minimalism is defined as a function of its scale. Yet, Hemingway's long novel *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*, is an example of minimalist writing, but minimalist in a way that differs from that found in the short story. The poetics of short-story minimalism are fundamentally different from those in the novel and my focus is the modern and contemporary American short story. I look at some of the ways in which short story structure and short story cycles are affected by the minimalist enterprise, and how the conventional short story structure, culminating in an explanatory *denouement* provides the opportunity for minimalists to thwart expectations by eschewing resolution.

Whilst it is vital that these defining elements are variously present in the work of each writer in order that they are classified as 'minimalist', they are merely the foundation from which to develop a discussion of their effects. This series of defining criteria connects disparate works, and is an important part of the underpinning of my work; it might be rephrased in Herzinger's words as how far these writers are 'groupable', if at all. This is especially important in the case of Ernest Hemingway, who does not appear as part of the Minimalist phenomenon *per se*, but whose writing shares a definite similarity with their work.

The Cultural Uses of the Term 'minimalism'

The term 'minimalism' in its wider cultural use makes it own unique demands upon the critic attempting to define it. It has experienced a controversial past, from its

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beginnings as a cultural-political term, to its contemporary, more diffuse usage as representative of anything 'sparse' or 'uncomplicated'. The history of minimalism as a cultural term helps inform its definition as a literary term.

'Minimalism' and 'minimalist' were first used in the modern world in politics at the beginning the 20th century. It specifically referred to a member of the more moderate section of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party which opposed the extremist tactics of the Maximalists during the 1905 Revolution. The Times records one of its first uses, on 18 October 1906: 'The Bolsheviki, now a minority, are almost indistinguishable from the Minimalists of the Social Revolutionary party'. Such use is now rare, although it did retain some currency in the early to middle 20th century as a political term.

Its first application to an artistic discipline was made over twenty years later, and just four years after Hemingway had published the second edition of In Our Time in 1925 (although the term was not applied to this edition at the time). The earliest use of the term was made by D. Burliuk in 1929 when he wrote of the paintings of the Russian-American painter John Graham (1881-1961) in M. Allentuck's John Graham's System and Dialectics in Art (1971).

Despite its infrequent use in the art world in subsequent years, it re-emerged during the 1960s when its use became increasingly widespread. In a 1967 edition of the New

Yorker, Harold Rosenberg noted that: 'The novelty of the new minimalism lies not in its reductionist techniques but in its principled determination to purge painting and sculpture of any but formal experiences'. Minimalism in the plastic arts caused a shockwave of opinion and remains controversial.

A 2004 exhibition by Donald Judd at Tate Modern reflected some of the key defining criteria of artistic minimalism, namely, an emphasis placed upon purity of colour, form, space and materials. He is famous for his 'stacks', a series of works of columns of coloured Plexiglas blocks. His ambition here was to analyse the interior of spaces and the ways in which light played a part in the development of this, and other, artworks. They have been defined as minimalist although he was resistant to the term.

Its use expanded in the arts beyond painting to apply variously to sculpture in particular, and also to other artistic disciplines, including music, interior design and literature. At the beginning of the 1980s it was applied to the musical works of several composers, including Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Such music is characterised by being composed of an often very simple chordal patterns reiterated during an extended period and with a deliberate reduction of complexity of rhythm, melody and harmony. The term is variously used in architecture and linguistics and its use has

14 The Donald Judd exhibition at Tate Modern ran from 5 February - 25 April 2004. Details of the exhibition can be found at: http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/judd/
15 One particular example of the 'stack's is Untitled, 1990 and is on permanent exhibition at Tate Modern.
become more generalised, to refer to anything which bears evidence of simplicity, starkness or brevity.

One of the first applications of the term minimalism to literature was to the work of Samuel Beckett. The critic Robert Walser said of his work: ‘The spectral ‘minimalism’ of Samuel Beckett, whose writings surely expose the very core of the modern predicament’.16 Beckett falls outside of my focus upon the American short story, but works such as ‘The Expelled’ and his sometimes minimalist approach to theatre could usefully be compared to my work in order to help widen the scope to encompass minimalism in the Western tradition. This is indicative of how I hope my work might inform the work of other critics interested in literary minimalism, and in the final stages of the conclusion, I suggest ways in which some of the areas necessarily omitted might form the basis of future work.

It did not take long before critics began referring to the work of Raymond Carver as minimalist, the earliest writer within the Minimalist phenomenon. In the first edition of Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories (1985), Carver notes that the term minimalist has been applied to him. Since then, it has been used to describe a method, a principle or style of literary writing, as well as those writers who exhibit such characteristics, beginning with the publication of Carver’s Will You Please be Quiet, Please? in 1976 until the present, including Barthelme. The term ‘minimalism’ is problematic for several reasons when applied to writing. The first is that it there appears to be several other terms for which it is synonymous. In the United Kingdom, following the issue
of Granta of the same name, it is variously known by the term ‘Dirty Realism’. 17

Indeed, as John Barth implies in his article ‘A Few Words About Minimalism’ that there are as many definitions of minimalism as there are critics:

[Minimalist writers] are both praised and damned under such labels as ‘K-Mart Realism’, ‘hick chic’, ‘Diet-Pepsi Minimalism’ and ‘post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism.’ 18

One might add, following Herzinger’s introduction to a symposium on the ‘New Literature’ in Mississippi Review, the following terms have been used synonymously for minimalism: Pop Realism, New Realism, TV Fiction, Neo-Domestic Neo-Realism and even Post-Post-Modernism. 19 There are many more but the point remains the same: minimalism as a literary term is problematic because of the multiplicity of methods, aims and literatures which it may describe.

Minimalism has no manifesto, nor have the ‘members’ organised themselves consciously into a group. The work of Donald Judd, Mies Van Der Rohe and Philip Glass (in the plastic arts, architecture and music, respectively) has been described as ‘minimalist’, yet there exists no deliberately organised defining principle or ambition.

17 B. Buford Granta 8: Dirty Realism (London: Granta, 1983)
19 Herzinger, p. 11.
which connects each discipline or minimalist writer. It appears that ‘minimalism’ is a cross-cultural term which stretches to encompass sometimes very different enterprises and this can obfuscate the definition of the term. Although ostensibly linked, for example, by a tendency towards paring down of means, a reductive method and an aspiration towards complexity through simplicity, there is confusion between how minimalism is characterised in each discipline. For example, music and literary minimalism make great use of repetition. Yet, music’s nuanced, subtle changes amongst prolonged repeated phrases is quite different in effect from, say, Hemingway’s quasi-poetic emphasis through repetition, as I will show.

This is not to say that a comparison between minimalism in different fields yields little of interest: a cross-cultural study of minimalism would be an extremely valuable and fruitful enterprise. It is another lamentable result of the neglect minimalism has faced from critics - and writers themselves, who neither assembled as a group with a manifesto, nor welcomed the term when applied to their work - that the term has not yet obtained widespread cultural currency.

Here, a distinction should be made between minimalism as an approach, a ‘style’ of writing that is not pinned to a single period; and Minimalism as a historical literary phenomenon that began in the mid-1970s until the present. I call Minimalism a phenomenon (noting its initial capital letter to show it as a proper noun) because it does not imply the collective agreement of principles and aims a term such as ‘movement’ might. Its counterpart, minimalism (without an initial capital letter) is more generally applied to writing that is not fixed to a phenomenon or trend. This
makes my contention that Hemingway is a minimalist in that his work adheres to the defining criteria of minimalism, less contentious. I do not shoe-horn him into the Minimalist group, but merely suggest that his work shares fundamental and uncoincidental principles, methods and defining criteria with them. Minimalism and minimalism are crucial terms because they, respectively, summarise the difference between the phenomenon as it appears at specific time in literary history and as an approach to writing which transcends a particular era.

Richard Ford, another writer and critic of minimalism to whom the appellation ‘minimalist’ has been applied, focuses upon its use in literary criticism, which he rejects as ‘[...] a critical term foreign to the work [...] It’s at best a convenience for a reviewer too lazy to deal with the good work on its own terms’. 20 If the term minimalism is so problematic in application, why use it? Herzinger tentatively claims it is: ‘what we have’ but I think it is more than that. 21 It is certainly with its problems, but there is an agreement – at least in principle – about how minimalism is defined, and so it is a useful term to employ, even if it is descriptive worth is only partially accurate.

Choosing Minimalist Writers: Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme

My focus is upon a single collection of short stories from each of three writers: Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), Raymond Carver (1938-1988) and Frederick Barthelme (1943-present). I consider the following work of these writers: Hemingway’s *In Our

20 Herzinger, pp. 8-9.
21 Herzinger, p. 8.
Time (1925); Carver’s Will You Please be Quiet, Please? (1976); and Barthelme’s Moon Deluxe (1983). I have chosen each writer because they represent a pivotal moment within the history of American short story minimalism. Hemingway appears at its origins, whilst Carver appears at its zenith during the 1970s and 80s, a time when Barthelme was publishing his version of minimalism, a version that persists until today and so represents some of the most current trends in minimalism. I have chosen the early work of each writer because I am interested in a more restrained, extreme and even ‘purer’ form of minimalism, which is found in their emergent work. Minimalism does not remain stable throughout a writer’s output, and the tendency for each writer to become more expansive as their career progresses means that their early work is more representatively minimalist. As a result I have chosen the earliest short story collections from each writer.

Carver, too, published several short stories and poems before the publication of Will You Please be Quiet, Please? But this was his first full-length collection of short fiction. Barthelme published two collections, Rangoon and War and War. But as he makes clear in his introduction to the selected stories, The Law of Averages, these were subsequently dismissed as largely irrelevant to his mature artistic project: they certainly do not represent the minimalist narrative technique of Moon Deluxe or the later Chroma, and are more aligned to post-modernism than minimalism. In each

\[22\] In each case these collections are the first to be published by each writer. In the case of Hemingway’s In Our Time, there was a previous 1924 edition entitled in our time but it merely contained the vignettes now found in the subsequent 1925 edition, which were largely unchanged and numbered chapters 1-15. These vignettes are vital to our understanding of Hemingway and to the In Our Time of 1925 but they do not in themselves represent a collection of short stories.
case, I provide a more detailed discussion of the publishing contexts of the work under consideration in their relative chapters.

This thesis attempts to illuminate literary minimalism by an analysis of the work of three writers carefully selected as representative of historical moments in the development of minimalism. I attempt to provide an outline of the origins and development of minimalism in the 20th century. Hemingway, therefore, dominates its origins and I contend that his work is minimalist, a narrative technique that later Minimalist writers will at least partially adopt. Carver might be said to represent its re-emergence into American letters, a significant 'high-point' in minimalism’s development. Finally, Barthelme in some ways represents the logical development of many of minimalism’s more salient characteristics, whilst simultaneously providing a glimpse of where minimalism might be going in the future.

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23 My work goes some way in suggesting the contribution made by Hemingway’s ‘apprenticeship’ to the origins and development of literary minimalism. However, this work cannot hope to be an exhaustive survey of this area, given its focus elsewhere but it would certainly prove a valuable and enlightening enterprise for further study.
The Structure of the Thesis
The thesis is divided between comparisons of the three writers under consideration, who appear chronologically: Hemingway, Carver and Barthelme. My method is to contrast and compare the work of each writer. In order to make such comparisons as tangible and explicit as possible, I have introduced three areas of interest which are applied to each writer. These areas of focus and their concomitant sections are: the role of the narrator, the uses of figurative language, the function of omission; and the relationship to literary realism. Each section focuses upon the relevant manifestation of the narrator/figurative language/omission/realism in each writer. So, in the case of my analysis of the narrator, for example, I focus upon the 'absent' narrator in Hemingway, the 'narrator-as-voyeur' in Carver and the use of the second-person narrator in Barthelme. I provide a contextual introduction for each writer at the beginning of sustained discussion, in order to give an idea of the literary or historical concepts they were reacting to, and by doing so, intend that this helps to develop an understanding of minimalism’s place within American letters.

The first chapter is devoted to Hemingway and is divided into two parts. In the first part, it outlines the ways in which his apprenticeship influenced Hemingway’s minimalist approach. Because I see Hemingway at the origin of minimalism in the American modern short story, this also goes a long way in outlining the origins and development of minimalist writing. In the second part of this chapter, I examine the application of this approach to his collection In Our Time.

Chapter two is devoted to a study of In Our Time in relation to literary history, as a product of modernism and tradition, and through an examination of its realist
credentials. It is hoped that, at least for Hemingway’s pivotal work, it will demonstrate how minimalism developed, suggesting several reasons for why it might have developed the methods, interests and principles it has. I address the period between *In Our Time* and Carver’s *Will You Please be Quiet, Please?* by suggesting some ways it might have become less useful as an idiom for capturing modern reality, and introduce Carver as a writer who resurrected the minimalist form.

Chapter three then takes Carver as its focus, and details the ways in which he develops the role of the reader within his work. His most salient contributions of the renegotiation of relationship between reader and text as a fundamentally voyeuristic one; his use of the everyday object as a corollary for the emotional life of his characters; and finally, his use of an incomplete epiphany, which suggests change without realising it.

The fourth chapter deals with Barthelme’s *Moon Deluxe*, a work which, once again, develops the idea of the reader as centred within the text. Barthelme achieves this through the use of the second-person narrator, where the reader is a ‘you’ in the story; through the expansion of suggestive language to include branded objects; and through the wilful sense with which he is content to offer little or no motives for the behaviour of his characters, as a means of exploring the ‘nothing’ which is both the best and worst aspect of contemporary society. One of the most important elements in the development of minimalism is its relationship to post-modern writing. This chapter, therefore, addresses this area by comparing the work of Barthelme to that of his older brother, Donald Barthelme, a central figure in the post-modernist literary group. In the conclusion, I look at a text which provides a useful counterpoint in terms of time and place. *All Hail the New*
Puritans, a collection of short stories by various writers, represents one direction that minimalism might take and as a publication from the United Kingdom, offers some consideration to minimalism as a wider literary phenomenon.

A theme running through the thesis is the relationship between minimalism and realism. Does it represent a re-emergence of a faith in realist discourse, and if so, is such a discourse in any way transformed by the minimalist idiom? Conversely, does minimalism represent a form of realism so far removed from its origins that it might be fairly called a new-realism?

My discussion of minimalism's relationship with realism is informed by George Levine's conceptualisation of the realist ambition as one based upon struggle:

[...] the struggle inherent in any 'realist' effort – [is the] struggle to avoid the inevitable conventionality of language in pursuit of the unattainable unmediated reality. Realism, as a literary method, can in these terms be defined as a self-conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy, to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself.24

In Hemingway's fiction, the realist ambition is intimately tied to what Levine calls the
'moral enterprise of truth telling'. For Hemingway, the truth was the 'sensation' or
emotion created by the primary experience upon the writer. By attempting to accurately
recreate those sensations in the reader, he would provide an authentic account of the
'reality' of that situation, even if the facts of the primary experience were changed.
Moreover, he thought that the traditional models of storytelling and the language they
used were no longer suitable for the expression of the modern experience, and
especially war, which he experienced first-hand. Rather, he introduced a 'new style'
based upon subtlety, restraint and omission, in order to capture and transmit those
emotions, with the necessary understatement to make them appear less sentimentalised,
or merely sensational. This new style was minimalism, yet it introduced a high degree
of complexity, in its manner of writing and for the reader. As such, it represents the
notion made explicit by T. S. Eliot that literature should become more difficult in order
to more accurately represent the complexity of the modern world:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as
it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends
great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing
upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results.
The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive,
more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into
his meaning.25

Eliot wrote this in 1921, just four years before the publication of Hemingway's second edition of *In Our Time*, and is indicative of the kind of ideas that were influencing Hemingway during its writing. Here, the 'complexity of the modern world' is represented throughout the thesis by my analysis of the dynamic between realism and minimalism, found in Hemingway's ambition to fictionalise historical events in order to create the 'truth', as I demonstrate in my comparative readings of his non-fiction and fictional treatments of the same passage. Later, I consider the re-emergence of minimalism, through the work of Carver and Barthelme, in the context of post-modern writing. I contend minimalism was a reaction to the exuberant playfulness, the radical experimentalism and defiant anti-realism of post-modern short fiction. In contrast to Hemingway's complexity, the work of Carver and Barthelme appears to desire a sense of simplicity, even purity, in American literature, evident in a desire for 'quietening' the short story of that time.

Minimalism more precisely develops a mode of discourse based upon an intense focus upon the everyday, even banal, aspects of reality: a shoe, a typewriter, a toy. It remains highly aware of the new relationships forged between objects and people in an increasingly consumer-led society, culminating in the influence of branding and commoditisation in Barthelme's work.

Because minimalism asks the reader to create meaning, it might be concluded that what is made - or interpreted, in the case of literature - more accurately reflects the

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26 As such the title of Carver's collection under analysis, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* acts as an admonishment to his contemporaries, and continues Hemingway's ambition to develop an aesthetic which more accurately captures reality.
subjective reality of those who make it. The notion that what the reader ‘makes’ in his or her interpretation is necessarily more realistic, as is it tailored to his or her unique experience, beliefs and understandings.

Minimalists reduce the amount of significant realistic detail but make great use of what they do include. The comparison with other realists is telling, for it reveals the extent to which small details in minimalism accumulate to suggest more than the sum of their parts. I compare the work of Hemingway in particular to the work of such writers as Emile Zola or Gustave Flaubert. Their aspiration was to write a fiction so detailed, so minutely focussed, that it attempts to create an exact duplication of the real world. Their realist discourse, then, might be considered a ‘maximalist realism’. Conversely, minimalist writers reduce the amount of detail in their expression of reality, so that certain, significant descriptive elements do not merely become part of the totality of accurate representation, but become representative, and aspire to a form of figurative language loosely based upon the symbolic. This comparison might be considered historically, as a contrast between 19th century realism and 20th century minimalist realism which has, in turn, been affected by modernism.

All minimalist writers here struggle to develop a mode of discourse that more accurately captures their everyday reality than that which has come before. As such, Barthelme’s and Carver’s work is no less interested than Hemingway’s in portraying what it means to live ‘in our time’.
Reader Response Theory
This work does not establish a new ‘theory’ of literary minimalism. Rather, it adopts and transforms an existing theory of reader response, applying it to a series of particular works in order to show something as yet undiscovered. In this way, my work might be considered a new approach to understanding minimalist writing. I use the work of Wolfgang Iser as the reader response component of my approach. His work is especially useful because it makes the implied reader the basis for an interrogation of interpretation; secondly, he has done much work on the role of indeterminacy as the foundation for the interpretative act.

The Implied Reader
My reader is conceptualised, or ideal, and not based upon an empirical study of how a control group of readers react to specific texts. Nor does it allude to what might be referred to as ‘reception theory’, in which the reactions of critics become the basis for an analysis. Rather, I use the term ‘implied reader’ following Wolfgang Iser’s definition of the term in such books as The Implied Reader (1974) and The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (1978). In Iser’s model, such a reader is active as well as passive, a status informing the relationship between text and reader. Such a relationship is ambivalent. On the one hand, the text shapes the reader’s interpretation but on the other it is shaped by the reader. A corollary lies in Umberto Eco’s definition of the ‘open’ and ‘closed’ texts (and more distantly, between Roland Barthes distinction between the ‘writerly’ and ‘readerly’ text). Minimalist short

stories are 'open' texts because they are based upon omission, which includes the excision of narrative acts of resolution. As such, the implied reader which an open text creates is necessarily an active one. My work is interested in the ways in which the minimalist aesthetic affects the reader's interpretation, and in doing so, I take an imaginative leap into the role of the implied reader, suggesting ways in which the story might potentially be interpreted. I recognise that the potential for interpretation is not the same as actualised interpretation, and that the implied reader - one perfectly capable of discerning even the most subtle textual nuance - is a theoretical model. To this end, my readings remain illustrative and ultimately subjective, but are aimed towards the possibility that they are in some ways representative of how a reader might respond to the text before them.

Iser's definition of the implied reader requires some attention:

If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better term, the implied reader. He embodies all those predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.28

Initially, it seems that the implied reader/text relationship creates an ideal system that is not duplicated in any actual act of reading.

This certainly is a problem for Iser’s theory, but it is only a problem insofar as any act of interpretation. Speculation must be made and without a definitive survey of reception, no generalisations of textual ‘effect’ could be made. The implied reader is created by the text and so is therefore able to understand all the stylistic devices that the author uses and the text contains. But if this were the case then there would be no interpretative ‘gaps’: the perfect convergence between implied reader and text would leave no room for such slippages.

Or would it? In the case of minimalism, the gaps left are deliberate attempts at revealing more than they resolve. So, a literature that seeks to create interpretative equivocation (such as minimalism) would be understood as such by the implied reader. An implied reader can only understand that there is something missing from the text that it must provide: it cannot fill the gap with an interpretation if the text does not in some way suggest the possibility of a gap. The implied reader is a theoretical concept, devoid of autonomy, which slavishly follows the text. The implied reading is more successful, then, in the case of Hemingway, as he directs the reader towards narrative ‘clues’, in order that they might fill the gaps. However, in the case of Carver and - more explicitly, Barthelme - there is no clue within the text as to how the implied reader might fulfil its meaning. Literature, for Carver and Barthelme, does not require an explanatory function; it is part of life’s quality that there are
certain mysteries that should remain unsolved, or at least with no easy answers other
than those the reader invests in their interpretation.

Iser and Reader Response
Wolfgang Iser is primarily interested in the creation of meaning as a result of the
relationship between reader, writer and text, the basis of which lies in what he calls
the 'phenomenological' theory:\(^{29}\)

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that,
in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only
the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in
responding to that text.\(^{30}\)

More specifically, his work demonstrates a particular interest in the effect of creating
indeterminacy in the fictional text.\(^{31}\) This he sees as inherent in all fiction but, through
the use of specific strategies which he discusses, is more applicable to some texts than
others. In his seminal essay 'Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose
Fiction' Iser states: ‘[…] it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental
precondition for reader participation’.\(^{32}\) If this is the case, then an increase in
interpretative indeterminacy will see a consequent rise in reader participation. Iser

\(^{29}\) For an excellent introduction to the works of Iser and his place within reception theory, see R.Holub,
Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 82-107 and passim

\(^{30}\) Iser, W. The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett
(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), 274.

\(^{31}\) This subject occupies his essay 'Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction' in W.

makes the distinction between: '[...] a text that lays things out before the reader in such a way that he can either accept or reject them [...]' and a text that one that remains indeterminate. Minimalism, with its fundamental principles of restraint, omission and reduction, does just that. In this model, it would necessarily demand some response from the reader that would need to overcome the indeterminacy in order to make sense of the narrative.

How does minimalism remain indeterminate? To answer this question, I focus upon one of the central ways in which interpretative indeterminacy is created through what Iser calls Leerstellen, or 'gaps' or 'blanks'. These 'gaps' need to be filled by the reader during his or her act of interpretation in order to make sense of the text:

[Gaps] give the reader a chance to build his own bridges, relating the different aspect of the object which have thus far been revealed to him. [The reader] fills in the remaining gaps. He removes them by a free play of meaning-projection and thus himself provides the unformulated connections between the particular views.34

Iser is a useful theoretician for my work because I contend that the textual ‘gaps’ he considers are precisely related to the deliberate omissions made by minimalist writers. Moreover, incomplete and unresolved narratives are not peculiar to minimalist fiction. My interest lies where they are the product of minimalist fiction, a literature which

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has at its core an emphasis upon reduction, including the reduction of the narrative function to explain.

**Defining Absence: Narrative Kernels and Omission**

Amy Hempel, a writer to whom the term 'Minimalist' has been applied (although, like Carver, she is uneasy to accept), reflects the ways in which absence informs the narrative technique of minimalism:

A lot of times what's not reported in your work is more important than what actually appears on the page. Frequently the emotional focus of the story is some underlying event that may not be described or even referred to in the story.\(^{35}\)

For the critic, this practice poses a potentially difficult question: how does one decide that a narrative event as missing, especially if it is not referred to in the narrative? This is a more difficult phenomenon to explain, because it invites a certain level of speculation on behalf of the critic. I propose the following condition. An absent narrative event is one whose omission is felt by the reader, so that when a story is read, the reader understands something might well be missing. These are significant narrative events are absent from the narrative. Following the outline of narrative and story employed by Seymour Chatman, these significant narrative events might be

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expressed as 'kernels'. For Chatman, there exists a difference between the 'story' (the overall series of events, described in no particular manner) and the 'narrative', which is the expression of the story in a specific way. A narrative 'kernel' is an irreducible element of the narrative and is an essential part of the story. Consequently, its removal from the narrative would transform the story into something quite different (the opposite of which he calls a 'satellite', which provide description, colouring, etc. but without which the narrative would be different but the story might still be the same). In my approach, narrative kernels are absent, omitted deliberately as a result of the tendency to pare down, with the effect that the reader must fill the interpretative gap left by their absence.

These kernels might, for example, be as varied as missing background information, actual conversations or action, or a general absence of the expression of explanatory thoughts and feelings, including character motive. Whatever form the kernel takes, its absence undermines the ability of the narrative to explain itself, to render itself open to a resolved interpretation. The effect for the implied reader is that removing pivotal narrative events introduces interpretative ambiguity into the story. The reader is presented with a narrative which is incomplete and therefore unresolved. This notion is not confined to literary interpretation: communication per se is dependent upon a satisfactory level of completeness. When the reader is confronted with a narrative that could be resolved with the inclusion of such pivotal events, their removal creates an ambiguity which the reader must overcome in order to make (more) sense of the story. Yet, the receptor might not know exactly what is missing, only that something is

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36 For a full discussion of the terms 'kernels' and associated 'satellites' see: S. Chatman Story and Discourse: Narrative Structures in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)
absent, something that would make complete or partial sense to the narrative. This is my approach.

_Equivocation_

One immediate objection to this is that for Iser, all texts are in some ways indeterminate. However, this is not insurmountable. Although all texts are, to some degree, indeterminate, some texts lend themselves to indeterminacy more readily than others, and some methods are equally more effective. The deliberate tendency to undermine interpretative stability and so create indeterminacy is what is meant by ‘equivocation’. Equivocation does not represent the state of all texts as being ultimately subject to interpretation – this might be termed indeterminacy. Because minimalism is different from other literatures, it has different affects upon its readers: it is the particular effects of a specific literature that I am interested in.

A drawback with Iser’s work is that both open and closed texts contain ‘gaps’ which are necessarily present in fiction, as literature can be neither definitive nor entirely complete. There is no way to distinguish between the deliberate attempt by the writer of the text to create ambiguity (such is the case with minimalist writers) and by a text which does not deliberately attempt to be ambiguous. The theory of gaps, therefore, does not point to an ‘open’ or ‘closed’ text, but merely suggests all texts are the same in that they leave interpretative gaps to be filled. As a result, I use the term ‘equivocation’ to refer to ‘ambiguity’ or ‘interpretative indeterminacy’, and in doing so suggest that it is a deliberate strategy by the writer who understands their omission has the potential to affect the reader. This avoids including reference to coincidental omissions, which are inevitable given that literature will be necessarily incomplete.
Rather, I am interested in those elements which appear to have been wilfully omitted and if included, would resolve some or all of the text's ambiguities.

So far, I have used the terms textual 'ambiguity' or 'indeterminacy' synonymously. Ambiguity is introduced deliberately as a product of the carefully considered omission whereas indeterminacy is a term often associated specifically with deconstructionist criticism, which is not pursued here. So, in order to avoid confusion I have decided to avoid it altogether. 'Equivocation' is more fitting as it suggests the process of 'ambiguity through deliberate means', the means being omission. Iser's emphasis upon indeterminacy is therefore useful only so far, and does not address those texts which make interpretative instability part of their method. As such, Iser's approach is first modified, then gradually replaced as the thesis develops with the notion of equivocation, which more precisely defines the process by which minimalism comes to demand the response of the reader.
Conclusion: A New Approach

Minimalism is a literature dependent upon omission, absence and suggestion to fulfil its aesthetic promise: to reduce, to pare down, and to condense. This is present in many forms, as I have made clear in my definition above, including an absent narrator, a suggestive use of figurative language, and the omission of vital narrative elements, or kernels.

The interpretative process benefits from identifying, absorbing and understanding these narrative kernels if it is to provide a reasonably complete meaning. Because such kernels are missing or ambiguous in the minimalist short story, either as a result of one, or more commonly, several elements in collaboration, a closed, decisive and resolved interpretation is made extremely difficult. The theories of Wolfgang Iser are employed to help re-negotiate the relationship between reader, text and interpretation.

Therefore, minimalism has the effect of introducing interpretative indeterminacy. In keeping with the examples used above, I argue that the absent narrator makes it more difficult for the implied reader to find a source of reliable information about how the narrative might be interpreted; the suggestive figurative language only implies connections between disparate elements, employing unconventional objects and actions with great significance; and the act of omission might, especially in the case of the story ending, remove the potential for interpretative closure, ultimately leaving the story unresolved, and its import sometimes highly ambiguous. A series of highly detailed readings of Hemingway, Carver and Barthelme are used to apply the theoretical approach to the work of writers who hold representative positions in minimalism’s literary history.
Having established minimalism's tendency to create interpretative indeterminacy – or 'equivocation' as I call it, following its specific intention towards ambiguity – the reader must themselves fill the gaps left by the omission of narrative kernels through their active, sustained and imaginative interplay with the text. The result is that the 'less' of minimalism's tendency to reduce creates 'more' in terms of the richness of a reading experience predicated upon a thoroughgoing engagement with minimalism's particular aesthetic. By doing this, I might hope to readdress the imbalance in critical hostility and neglect which I referred to at the beginning of this introduction.
CHAPTER ONE

The Origins and Development of Hemingway’s Minimalist Aesthetic: From Apprenticeship to *In Our Time*

In this chapter I will suggest answers to key questions: where does minimalism come from; and how did it originate and develop as an emergent writing aesthetic in the modern American short story? To answer these questions, I begin with an examination of Hemingway’s apprenticeship - namely, his work as a journalist, and the influences of early experience and of other writers - and discuss how it influenced and anticipated many of the significant elements of the minimalist aesthetic. This important line of enquiry helps determine the extent to which writers such as Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme are indebted to Hemingway’s short fiction, and how far Hemingway’s fiction could be said to anticipate theirs.¹ In the second part, I analyse his emerging aesthetic as it appears in his first major short story publication, *In Our Time*. Here, I discern a trend towards textual ambiguity which I take, following Wolfgang Iser’s model of indeterminacy, as an example of his intention to stimulate the reader, engaging them with a sophisticated and largely un-explanatory text.

¹ This idea is further explored in Cynthia Hallett’s full-length study of minimalism C. W. Hallett *Minimalism and the Short Story* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) and her unpublished conference paper, of which I am grateful for a copy sent: see C. W. Hallet ‘A Clean Well Lighted Fiction: Hemingway’s Poetics and Literary Minimalism’ (unpublished, 2000).
I used the term 'influences' advisedly here. Although direct influence might be
discernible, especially when one considers the style sheet at the *Kansas City Star* or
the 'lessons' of Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, I prefer to think of Hemingway's
minimalist aesthetic as an individual response to a set of problems raised by those
influences. Perhaps 'influence' is too strong a word: it suggests a direct contact,
absorption and transformation of those influences into his aesthetic. Certainly, this
was true to an extent. But the critic's task in trying to establish the exact context into
which he came in contact with his influences is always speculative, as is the process
by which influences become influential. Rather, the development of his minimalist
style is best discussed by suggesting that the influences outlined here were prompts,
an impetus to suggest a path to Hemingway which he could choose to take. No one
influence is responsible for the minimalist aesthetic, but a series of sometimes
contradicting ideas that were interpreted by him, and transformed into his work as we
know it.
Part One: Journalism, Experience and Literary Influence

*Journalism*

Hemingway's introduction to journalism, the short story, and their similarities began early in his life. In his junior year at Oak Park High School in 1916, Hemingway enrolled in a journalism and writing course which placed special emphasis upon the short story. The course tutor, Miss Biggs, ran her course as though it were a newspaper office, working by the principles of solid, if unimaginative, newspaper reporting: "Tell your whole story in the first paragraph; develop details in relation to their importance; leave the least important things until the end." At around the same time, Hemingway began to write short fiction. The school magazine *Tabula* published one of his first stories, 'The Judgement of Manitou' in the February 1916 issue.

Hemingway continued to write for *Tabula*, including a story in the April edition called 'A Matter of Color'. Charles Fenton, scholar of Hemingway's apprenticeship, suggests that it was not until later, however, whilst writing journalism for the school newspaper, the *Trapeze*, that Hemingway's apprenticeship truly began. Indeed, his

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3 All the *Trapeze* and *Tabula* pieces can be found reprinted in another indispensable volume when considering Hemingway's development, M. Bruccoli (ed.) *Ernest Hemingway's Apprenticeship: Oak Park, 1916-1917* (Washington: NCR Microcard Editions, 1971)


6 C. Fenton, p. 20.
early fiction, perhaps unsurprisingly, bore little or no relation to that which he was to write later a decade later. Hemingway chose journalism as his career and upon leaving school joined the *Kansas City Star* as a cub reporter.

*The Kansas City Star and the Toronto Star*

In 1917, the *Star* was one of half-dozen great American newspapers. American journalism was emerging from a period of turgid, heavy prose and the *Star* was one of those keen to carve a new style. In common with other newspapers, the style sheet was an essential component of their practice. Unlike some others, it reads like a manifesto:

‘Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative’. These are the first of over one hundred rules that went beyond the conventional stringency regarding punctuation and grammar normally found in a style sheet. Hemingway responded positively and quickly to these rules, and soon became a competent cub reporter. Later he was to adapt them for use in his early fiction:

They hanged Sam Cardinella at six o’clock in the morning in the corridor of the county jail. The corridor was high and narrow with tiers of cells on either side. All the cells were occupied. The men had been brought in for the hanging. Five men sentenced to be hanged were in the five top cells. Three of the men to be hanged were negroes. They were very frightened. (151)

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7 It is worth noting the regional nature of US newspapers at that time and the widespread intellectual suspicion which resulted from them being considered parochial or regionalist. See J. Carey *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

8 C. Fenton, p. 31.

9 All page references in the text refer to Hemingway’s short stories and can be found in J. Fenton (ed.) *Ernest Hemingway: The Collected Stories* (London: Everyman, 1995).
The story reads like a typical Star newspaper report: it tells the whole story in the first paragraph; the sentences are short and are positively and vigorously expressed; and it aspires to an objectivity of expression, a seemingly detached approach that nevertheless has great power to move the reader. Rule 21 of the style sheet proved to be particularly noteworthy. It asked that the reporter to: ‘Avoid the use of adjectives, especially extravagant ones’. By avoiding extravagant adjectives in this example (‘high’ and ‘narrow’ of the cell are relatively neutrally descriptive and ‘very frightened’ is typically and effectively understated), Hemingway displayed neither an intrusive authorial judgement nor hyperbole, ideas which were to re-emerge in his conversations with Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound, and which would eventually find a way into his fiction. Unlike the newspaper articles destined for a sensationalist-hungry audience which possessed an equally melodramatic style, Hemingway expunged his work of cliché and exaggerated emotion, and instead attempted to use understatement to create effect.

The Star encouraged its reporters to develop a factually accurate and concomitantly objective style, alongside a narrative which placed emphasis upon its intimacy and human impact. The idea was to write something more penetrating and lasting, perhaps by suggesting ways in which it was representative of a more general idea or emotion. An isolated incident might become a more general piece about loss, as we find in this example:

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10 C. Fenton, p. 33.
A well dressed young woman entered the jewelry division of the welfare loan agency yesterday. She presented a worn pawn ticket. It was for a wedding ring pawned nine months before.

"I never intended to come back for that," she said. "I didn't wear it and it always seemed to me just an expression of sentiment and I believed I was an unsentimental woman. But my husband was drafted and I thought I'd like to have the ring to remember him by in case he never comes home." 11

Here, his technique is based upon the inclusion of direct speech in order to make the moment more intimate and immediate, which anticipates his great use of dialogue as central strategy to 'show' rather than 'tell' in his fiction. Reports such as this foreshadow his use of the vignette as a fictional form, which were directly derived from his journalism at the Star. Such examples also serve to directly illustrate his interest in the blurring of real events and fiction.

Not all aspects of his influence became part of his minimalist aesthetic. Hemingway's apprenticeship saw him adopt the ironic 'turn', a discrete 'closed' ending, at the end of his stories, a method he was later to reject. In this example, Hemingway writes of a warrant which charges local businessman Joseph C. Wirthman with supplying liquor during the prohibition:

11 C. Fenton, p. 49.
Herne [the accuser] complained to Shannon C. Douglas, assistant prosecutor, that several men, whom he recognised as Second Ward Politicians, followed him to the Criminal Court Building today and threatened him. Wirthman is a former alderman.12

This ironic ending would be ultimately unsuitable for his ambition to leave his stories open to interpretation. But even here, the simple declarative statement 'Wirthman is a former alderman' ostensibly provides a statement of mere fact, with the aim of removing authorial comment or evaluation. This assumed innocence was highly charged, and by withholding information until the close of the story, Hemingway creates an ironic effect without compromising his 'objective' report. This kind of denouement is all but missing from *In Our Time*. It was too close to the O'Henry technique of the 'twist' ending, a method out of keeping with his ambition to reveal, not resolve, and not subject his fiction to an explanatory commentary or summary.13

Equally significant was the development of a style on the *Star* that combined the short sentence, stripped of any hyperbole, with few or no adjectives and which was precise, terse and straightforward. Hemingway was later to say of his experience at the *Star*:

12 C. Fenton, pp. 44-45.
13 The 'twist' ending appears only once in a similar form, in a story that began its life as a vignette in *in our time* (1924, a collection of vignettes which were eventually reprinted almost unchanged in the 1925 edition of *In Our Time*), and becomes 'A Very Short Story' in *In Our Time*. The unnamed protagonist has been rejected by a 'Dear John' letter from his lover Luz, in preference for a major:

A short time after he contracted gonorrhea from a sales girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park. (84)
Those were the best rules I ever learned from the business of writing [...] I’ve never forgotten them. No man with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them.\textsuperscript{14}

A writer who ‘feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say’ was a lesson learned on the Star, and this provided the basis for the development of an aesthetic predicated upon an aspiration towards an objective, unadorned writing style. Such an ‘innocent’ aspiration towards objectivity was a foundation of Hemingway’s minimalist aesthetic, part of a strategy to move the reader, rather than supply an unemotive, unbiased ‘report’.

Hemingway left the Kansas Star, and joined the Toronto Star newspapers collective in January 1920 and wrote for the Toronto Star Weekly and the Toronto Daily Star for the next four years, selling stories on a freelance basis.\textsuperscript{15} According to the accounts of Charles Fenton and Kobler, it was quite different from the Kansas Star, in that the Toronto Star lacked its demanding standards, placed more emphasis on entertainment of the readers than being precisely informative, and allowed the writer a freedom of expression unimaginable on the Kansas Star. The Toronto Star was also more noticeably market-driven, following the whims of the reader. At the Toronto Star, Hemingway was able to break the rules he had learned on the Kansas newspaper. He would write lengthy and detailed expository ‘essays’ that offered tutorials in how to

\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{15} Many of Hemingway’s Toronto despatches are reprinted in White’s collection of journalism.
fish or camp with little regard for their newsworthiness. In such examples, he
developed his capacity to capture a sense of place succinctly:

A high pine covered bluff that rises steep up out of the shadows.
A short sand slope down to the river and a quick elbow turn with
a little flood wood jammed in the bend and then a pool.

A pool where the moselle and colored water sweeps into a dark
swirl and expanse that is blue-brown with depth and fifty-feet across.\textsuperscript{16}

In almost every short story of \textit{In Our Time} a description, often of the natural world,
occupies the opening passages, often as an emotional or thematic context. At the
\textit{Toronto Star} he developed the process by which he would observe and then recreate
that observation in passages of extreme accuracy, aspiring to an almost photographic
verisimilitude. Indeed, the photographic metaphor is illuminating. At the \textit{Toronto}
Star, Hemingway’s country was seemingly artless, merely a transcript of that which
he found before him, and as such his descriptions of landscapes were like
photographs, attempting to accurately recreate his vision in writing without
imaginative mediation. However, his descriptive approach in \textit{In Our Time}, was more
like painting, the result of a carefully contrived and elaborate method designed to
support his specific ambitions within the story. This simple model represents the
difference between his fiction and journalism. This leads us to a discussion of the
relationship between his fiction and journalism, best explored through a comparison

\textsuperscript{16} C. Fenton, p. 78.
of three treatments of the same event, to which I give the collective title of ‘The Evacuation of Thrace’. Two were published as journalism and one as fiction. The first is from a cabled report to the Toronto Star, the second from a much longer report to the same newspaper sent by mail and finally, the third is from In Our Time. They are presented here in order of publication. The first is an extract from a cable sent to the Toronto offices:

In a never-ending, staggering march the Christian population of Eastern Thrace is jamming the roads towards Macedonia. The main column crossing the Maritza River at Adrianople is twenty miles long. Twenty miles of carts drawn by cows, bullocks and muddy-flanked water buffalo, with exhausted, staggering men, women and children, blankets over their heads, walking blindly along in the rain beside their worldly goods.

This main stream is being swelled from all the back country. They don’t know where they are going. They left their farms, villages and ripe, brown fields and joined the main stream of refugees when they heard the Turk was coming. Now they can only keep their places in the ghastly procession while mud-splashed Greek cavalry herd them along like cow-punchers driving steers.

It is a silent procession. Nobody even grunts. It is all they can do to keep moving. Their brilliant peasant costumes are soaked and

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17 In most cases, the uses of historical events as sources for fiction are especially sustained in the interchapters of In Our Time These first appeared, albeit it in a slightly different form, in the 1924 edition of in our time. This small volume collected the vignettes, or interchapters, which were numbered from 1 to 18. One such interchapter, ‘Chapter 11’ of the later In Our Time, is an example of how Hemingway used the same material as a basis to write different accounts in fiction and journalism.
dragged. Chickens dangle by their feet from the carts. Calves nuzzle at the draught cattle wherever a jam halts the stream. An old man marches bent under a young pig, a scythe and gun, with a chicken tied to his scythe. A husband spreads a blanket over a woman in labor in one of the carts to keep off the driving rain. She is the only person making a sound. Her little daughter looks at her in horror and begins to cry. And the procession keeps moving.  

The second example is an extract from a longer despatch than the cable, again to the Toronto office, that Hemingway sent by mail:

I walked five miles with the refugees' procession along the road, dodging camels that swayed and grunted along, past flat-wheeled ox carts piled high with bedding, mirrors, furniture, pigs tied flat, mothers huddled under blankets with their babies, old men and women leaning on the back of the buffalo carts and just keeping their feet moving, their eyes on the road and their heads sunken; ammunition mules, loaded with stacks of rifles tied together like wheat sheaves, and an occasional Ford car with Greek staff officers, red-eyed and grubby from lack of sleep, and always the slow, rain-soaked, shambling, trudging Thracian peasantry plodding along in the rain, leaving their homes behind.  

19 Kobler, p. 10.
Finally, this is ‘Chapter II’ from *In Our Time*:

Minarets stuck up in the rain out of Adrianople across the mud flats.
The carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road. Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. No end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned. The old men and women, soaked through, walked along keeping the cattle moving. The Martitza was running yellow almost up to the bridge. Carts were jammed solid on the bridge with camels bobbing along through them. Greek cavalry herded along the procession. Women and kids were in the carts crouched with mattresses, mirrors, sewing machines, bundles. There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It rained all through the evacuation. (45)

The key dissimilarity between the journalistic and fictional approach lies in the relationship between the expressions of reality. The journalistic pieces intend to communicate accurate information: this primary aim is to represent the events with fidelity. This is evident in that the first two despatches contain more factual references than the fictional counterpart and there is more information that places the text historically. This tells us that removing the precise historical context was an important step in creating a fictional account. Hemingway, like other modernists, recognises that art could transcend reality, to create – in Hemingway’s own words – something ‘truer than anything true’, something which would address his frustrations with reportage as
limited in scope or longevity. By stripping the fictional account of much of the historical context, Hemingway sought to expand upon the import of the story to suggest something more than the specific difficulties of the local evacuation, and finally towards an understanding of the plight of the dislocated, modern man, born to the 'lost generation'.

The reader's expectations are dependent upon how he or she defines the purpose and function of the passage, and in 'Chapter II', Hemingway subtly shifts attention away from their function as reportage, towards the promotion of a more reflective account. In 'Chapter II' the lack of historical context draws attention to the figurative function of the extract. Key to this notion is that the narrator is largely absent: he seems to be there, tentatively, in 'Scared sick looking at it', but it is not solely a personal impression, given the omission of the personal pronoun 'I'. By contrast, in the journalistic example, the narrator introduces his own explicit evaluation of the event. The removal of the narrative evaluation is matched by the introduction of a sparser style in the fictional account; for example, there are fewer adjectives and the sentences are shorter. The fictional account is suggestive and reflective, rather than informative or didactic, and the approach reflects this shift. The development in the extracts shows how Hemingway was becoming less interested in the actual details of factual reportage and more in the process of locating, expressing and eventually recreating in the reader the experience of such events and the search for a method that would fulfil his ambitions. He described the process thus:

20 The notion that an artistic 'truth' could be redemptive was a premise upon which modernism was based. See Bradbury's essay in Bradbury, M. and McFarlane, J. (eds.) Modernism: A Guide to European Literature (London: Penguin, 1991).
I was always working by myself. This is how I would do [it].

For instance I knew I always received many strong sensations when I went to the gym to train or work out with the boxers.

When I would get back from the gym, I would write

[the sensations] down. 21

The emphasis upon ‘sensations’, or the emotions which were aroused by that experience, is telling. It points to an orthodoxy of Hemingway’s fiction, in which he claims that through fiction a reader may re-experience the sensations as if he might have had them him or herself:

Remember what the noises were and what was said. Find out what gave you that emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling that you had. 22

The shift from an ambition to faithfully represent reality in journalism to the authentic recreation of experience within the reader in fiction is a difference that is vital in an understanding of Hemingway’s minimalist aesthetic. This difference points to the primary motive – and concomitant methods – of writing literary fiction for Hemingway:

21 Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 153.
22 Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 155.
In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick or another, you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness [...] but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always. 23

Hemingway’s attempt to recreate experience in the reader begins in actual observation of his subject. Following this careful process, he would then attempt to isolate those ‘triggers’ that prompted his emotion, and to express them as clearly as possible so that they might be recreated in the mind of the reader. This implies that a literary realism based upon correspondence to a ‘real world’ was not his sole ambition. Rather, his aim was to experience its emotional impact, and its expression with fidelity, so that the reader might ‘feel’ it, too, and assimilate it into their emotional world so that it persists far longer than the less important ‘facts’ of what happens and so becomes ‘true’ for them. Hemingway privileges ‘feeling’ over ‘understanding’, and the attempt to recreate this feeling in his reader is one of the central defining moments of the origin of the minimalist aesthetic.

In the analysis of these extracts, his method was in its genesis. Hemingway is beginning to create a style that permits the apparently unmediated, unimpeded expression of sensation as the basis for the re-creation of experience in his reader. In this reading of ‘The Evacuation of Thrace’, he embellishes the distance travelled from

twenty miles in the factual, journalistic example to thirty miles in the fictional 'Chapter II'. Hemingway was fictionalising the account to accurately recreate the 'truth' of their deprivation. The seemingly 'innocent' style or objective reporting is actually predicated on the capture, expression and recreation of an intended highly subjective response in the reader. Paradoxically, it is because the prose is unadorned and apparently unemotive that this emotional response can be recreated; the truth is not based upon factual accuracy, but emotional authenticity.

One of the methods for this was the excision of strong narrative voice, one that would control the reader's perspective. In this example, this notion can be found in the line: 'Scared sick looking at it', found only in 'Chapter II'. Unusually for Hemingway's fiction, this appears to be an interjection of a judgement made directly by the narrator. It at once throws the narrator into the event and marks it as a personal experience. However, the phrase is deliberately incomplete. There is no 'I was', no personal pronoun, to prefix his judgement and this makes the comment ambivalent. On the one hand, it is an intimate idiom that expresses his deepest emotions, rather than the more distancing formal language. Conversely, omitting 'I was' has an impersonal and generalising effect: he is inviting the reader to be influenced by his comments. This is a direct example of the ambition to recreate experience in the reader - it is as much a statement of fact – that the scene would induce the same feeling in anyone.

Hemingway's seemingly objective style was in the employ of recreating subjective experiences in his readers:
All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that it all that happened to you and afterwards it belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was.\(^{24}\)

In her essay on Hemingway’s journalism and fiction, Elizabeth Dewberry notes that Hemingway; ‘[...] suggests that if journalism is ‘true’ when it accurately reproduces the ‘real’ world, fiction is true when it communicates its own world’.\(^{25}\) The kind of ‘truth’ that Hemingway’s fiction refers to is a process: the authentic reproduction of experience in his readers, and that truth is valuable only in the terms created and sustained in his fiction. Hemingway soon became tired of the transitory enterprise of reportage and discovered that a more fundamental ‘truth’ – the truth of the sensation, the real, lived experience that resulted from the event – could only be created in something other than newspaper writing. Consequently, he turned increasingly to fiction, where he would assemble in the most intricate pattern a series of words, paragraphs, events, including those things which are implied but are ultimately omitted – which help recreate the essence of that experience, or ‘truth’, in the reader.

Charles Fenton claimed that Hemingway had an instinctive understanding of his audience.\(^{26}\) Throughout his pieces for the Toronto Star we see this in evidence, especially in his nuanced understanding of the relationship between Canada and

\(^{24}\) Quoted in Phillips, p. 3 (my italics).
\(^{26}\) For a discussion of this, see C. Fenton, pp. 123, 124.
America, where he could easily and subtly switch allegiance. Yet Michael Reynolds epitomises the common critical attitude that the Toronto Star's main influence was that it provided the time and money that made Hemingway's fiction possible. This is in part due to the nature of the work: Hemingway was a freelance who lived in the United States for much of the time. He was not caught up in the everyday running of a newspaper. Instead, he was free to travel, write and absorb literary and cultural influences along the way, elements that proved equally influential upon his writing.

The Influence of Hemingway's Life Experience upon his Writing
Hemingway's biography often plays a central role in criticism of his work, for good or bad. At best, it can provide an extremely fruitful foundation for study of the literary output, and forms the basis for such works as Carlos Baker's book-length study, Ernest Hemingway: Writer as Artist, and William B. Watson's essay 'Old Man at the Bridge': The Making of a Short Story, in which he argues that Hemingway's experiences at the Ebro river in Italy in 1917 are directly responsible for the origins of this story. Many critics have gone to great lengths to establish the biographical connections to his fiction, even if, as they often readily admit, their conclusions must remain speculative. Rather, I am particularly interested in the influence of Hemingway's life upon his development of his minimalist aesthetic.

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27 C. Fenton 124.
30 Benson, pp. 121-137.
In Our Time is permeated with the fictional treatment of his own experiences, particularly those of the First World War. Hemingway was injured at the front during his commission as an ambulance driver in Italy in 1918. The war appears in several of the early interchapters, notably Chapters ‘I’ to ‘VII’, and stories: ‘On the Quai at Smyrna’, ‘Soldier’s Home’ and is implicit in ‘Big Two-Hearted River’. More specifically, he is interested in the injured soldier. In ‘Chapter VI’, the wounded Nick Adams lies against the wall, an image which resonates with the nameless soldier of the next interchapter, ‘Chapter VII’; and the injured protagonist of ‘A Very Short Story’ is taken to the rooftops to Padua to rest before an operation. This character re-appears throughout his fiction, from Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms, to Jake Barnes of The Sun Also Rises. Those injuries would be mental as well as physical. Krebs of ‘Soldier’s Home’ finds it difficult to readjust upon his return home, as does Nick Adams of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’. The cause of the injury expands beyond the war to encompass injuries caused by bullfighting, which occupies several of the latter interchapters.

Following from this, it suggests that first-hand experience forms an integral part of Hemingway’s aesthetic. When confronted with the question of what to write about, it is significant that he chose to discover new experiences above the development of his imagination through educational instruction. As a result, he became a volunteer in a war which, as an American citizen, he could have at that time avoided. Much later, when offering some advice to an apprentice writer, Hemingway said; “You’ve got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it”. Initially, Hemingway felt he needed to experience

32 For a fuller discussion of Hemingway’s choice, see Fenton 1965, p. 55.
33 Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 103.
first-hand the emotional truths that he would write about. But this, perhaps necessarily, gave way to a method of exploring emotional authenticity without experiencing events directly. His allegiance switched from the truth of the scene, a representative of his work in journalism, towards an emotional truth, the ambition of his fiction. In the following example from ‘Chapter V’, that truth is the pity, the pathos of the terrible war:

One of the ministers was sick with typhoid [...] Finally, the officer told the soldiers it was no good trying to make him stand up. When they fired the first volley he was sitting down in the water with his head on his knees. (69)

E. R. Hageman claims this refers to the execution of real ministers at which Hemingway was not a witness. Here, the pity at the indignity of the gravely ill minister who is heinously executed at a hospital is bitterly ironic. A careful structuring of significant observations of a scene would accumulate to transform an objective event into an emotional truth.

Hemingway would often express his capacity to capture authentic emotions as predicated upon an existential authenticity, meaning that he would have to witness them or understand their nature before he could write about them. However, it was more a question of developing the right approach, rather than experiencing events first-hand. Hemingway’s aesthetic is successful not because he lived a dangerous life,
or experienced extreme emotions, but because he found an approach that would recreate appropriate emotions in his readers. The war was extreme raw material that wrote large the emotional world that he wanted to recreate. Such an ambition is not easily attained, and his search for a method was now to be greatly influenced by his acquaintance with some of the early 20th century’s leading literary figures.

**Literary Influences**

Hemingway came into contact with several important literary figures during his apprenticeship, most notably during his stay in Paris, but it is with Chicago that I begin this section, with his meeting with Sherwood Anderson. 35

Sherwood Anderson

Hemingway was introduced to Sherwood Anderson in Chicago just as Anderson was beginning to become well-known for his collection of short stories, *Winesberg, Ohio* (1919). Anderson was of especial interest to Hemingway because he combined a restrained, unadorned style with a subject that Hemingway shared an affinity and background, the lives of unexceptional, rural Americans. He was also seemingly influenced by the idea of a connecting principle, a common thread that is woven throughout the fabric of seemingly disparate and discrete short stories. Anderson’s thread was location: Hemingway’s would be Nick Adams. Anderson was an early

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35 Much has been made of the quotation from *Death in the Afternoon* where Hemingway clearly outlines his ‘iceberg principle’. But the passage which precedes it is also revealing and although specifically directed towards the novel, it could equally encompass the short story. See E. Hemingway *Death in the Afternoon* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 169:

>> Every novel which is truly written contributes to the total of knowledge which is there at the disposal of the next writer who comes, but the next writer must pay, always, a certain nominal percentage in experience to be able to understand and assimilate what is available as his birth-right and what he must, in turn, take his departure from.
influence and his impact can be clearly seen, particularly in the connection between
Hemingway’s ‘My Old Man’ and Anderson’s ‘I Want to Know Why’ (published in
1921 in *Triumph of the Egg*), found here respectively:

I was nuts about the horses, too. There’s something about it, when
they come out and go up the track to the post. Sort of dancy and
tight looking with the jock keeping a tight hold on them. [...] There
wasn’t ever anything like it for me. (131)

If you’ve never been crazy about thoroughbreds it’s because you’ve
never been around where they are much and don’t know any better.
They’re beautiful. There isn’t anything so lovely and clean and full of
spunk and honest and everything as some race horses.36

In both cases, the first-person narrative voice is that of a young man, and is expressed
in their own, tangible vernacular. Thematically, too, the stories share similarities.
Whilst ostensibly about horse racing, they are initiation stories. Both express the
development of a boy who confronts problems of a maturity to which he struggles to
adapt, as he becomes disillusioned with a man whom he once held in the highest
regard. Such are the similarities that Philip Young echoes the thoughts of several
critics when he claims: ‘It does not look like coincidence’.37

37 Young, p. 177.
Yet 'My Old Man' is significant in the context of *In Our Time* because it has a style quite at odds with the rest of the collection. Written from the first-person perspective, it is a personal account with an equally personalised idiom. The sentences are longer and more verbose and eventually prone to rhapsody, as one might expect of a conventional lament. In this sense, it is useful to remember the limits to which Anderson's work is influential, a notion shared by many other critics, including Michael Reynolds. In addition, both stories dangerously approach sentimentality, a mode that Anderson could be criticised as being often drawn to but which is absent from many of the other stories of *In Our Time*. Their methods differed, too. Anderson saw himself as instinctively creative and he claimed that ideas would come to him almost without his deliberate conception. Hemingway was suspicious of such an idea and knew that his own working method was quite different. Rather, Hemingway, like Raymond Carver, made a great many revisions to his manuscripts and laboured intensely at them. For Hemingway, and later for Carver, his creativity seemed less a product of the Romantic inspiration and more a concentrated effort that had at its heart the process of paring down, revising and reconsideration.

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38 Reynolds, p. 182.
Gertrude Stein

During Hemingway's stay in Chicago, the 'New Realism' of Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg was the dominant literary movement. Yet Hemingway turned his attention to Europe, and he was to expand his cultural knowledge during a trip to Paris in December 1921. The emphasis on Hemingway's development was to change here and literary instruction replaced journalism as the dominant form of influence. Hemingway continued to write for the Toronto Star as a roving reporter but as Charles Fenton points out, it was 'bread and butter' work, merely providing the income to support himself and his wife and son and now he was beginning to stagnate. He complained to Sherwood Anderson: 'All this goddam newspaper stuff is gradually ruining me'. In the first instance, Anderson provided the model chosen, albeit briefly, by Hemingway. Now Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound were to choose him.

Gertrude Stein's search for a method to capture contemporary reality made a lasting impression upon Hemingway. This method and its concomitant manifestation in a style of writing can best be encapsulated by a term she herself used: 'concentration'. Upon reading Hemingway's unfinished manuscript for what was to become The Torrents of Spring, she told him to begin it again and 'concentrate'. It was advice that is equally applicable to his short stories. To 'concentrate' can be interpreted in two ways. First, it means to develop a mental process that allowed the active selection of a source from the many available, and second, to observe it and express it with fidelity.

39 C. Fenton, p. 124.
40 C. Fenton, p. 126.
41 Hemingway provides his own account of their influence in E. Hemingway A Moveable Feast (London: Vintage, 1996), as well as several of figures not included here, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ford Madox Ford.
In her own example, drawn from the 1911 volume *Tender Buttons*, she wrote ‘very short things [in which] I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to go around them but to meet them’.

Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen,

Cold cream, best shake, potato, potato and no gold work with pet

[...]

However, despite its focus upon the process of ‘selection’ of various elements, here a collection of nouns and adjectives, this lacks a cohesive structure by which those elements of selection can convene and create meaning. When Hemingway saw he could adopt this method but within the tight confines of a carefully wrought composition, using a framework by which those selections of experience could integrate and interrelate, the more familiar Hemingway minimalist style begin to appear. In answer to his questions about composition, Stein suggested to Hemingway that he approach each new experience as a painter might. She used the example of Cézanne, perhaps because of his meticulous method of concentration and repainting, an intense process augmented by his limited choice of subject matter. Hence, Stein suggested Hemingway might begin by choosing elements for closer observation and compose them in such a way as to render the experience seemingly unmediated by the author, and in a direct apprehension by the reader. Hemingway himself points to the importance of painting as an influence, and especially in the way in which his

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43 Quoted in Bradbury, p. 488.
descriptive composition operated. He claimed that having visiting the Louvre and the Jeu de Paume he:

 [...] was learning something from the painting of Cézanne that made writing simple sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put in them.

We can see Hemingway attempt this method in In Our Time. This is the opening situation of ‘Cat in the Rain’, expressed clearly and unambiguously:

There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. (107)

The couple are distanced from the following description by their ‘second floor’ room which allows them to see what is going on without them interacting with it:

\[\text{In the era of the anti-waste Efficiency Movement Hemingway's terse economical lines brought engineering values into the very sentence itself. [...] The famous Hemingway style was essentially the achievement, in novels and stories, of the engineers' aesthetic of functionalism and formal efficiency. (Flora, p. 157).}\]

Tichi's argument never claims machinery to be the controlling influence on Hemingway's style. But the notion that he sought a functional method has great weight and the metaphor of Hemingway's writing as technically 'mechanical' is in some respects a useful one, if incomplete.

44 Cecelia Tichi, in her essay 'Opportunity: Imagination Ex Machina II' in J. Flora (ed.) Ernest Hemingway: A Study of the Short Fiction (Boston: Twayne, 1989), pp. 157-171 extends the influence beyond the scope of most critical analysis when she writes about the relationship between writing and the machine. She creates an analogy between Hemingway's efficient, modern, tight prose style and engineering design:

Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. [...] It was raining. (107)

The focus of description shifts in a manner evocative of the movement of an eye roving from one spot to another on a canvas. Moreover, the fluidity of such movement invites the reader to create comparisons between each element of that sentence, so that the overall impression of the passage is a product of its configuration, or structure. That structure is expressed here through a series of opposites: the war monument is a symbolic reminder of death, the public garden as fertile and fecund; the sea is evocative of natural beauty, the artists create artefacts; the artists enjoy good weather, yet it is raining. The 'compositional' structure of this passage gives its significance through the creation of meaning through their relationships, a method of recreating ideas through the careful assembly of opposing elements. The notion that separate elements of his aesthetic -- for example, the short sentence, the absence of figurative language, the use of omission -- would operate most successfully in conjunction, anticipates the notion of how, at a precise textual level, less becomes more.

The process of concentration would equally affect Hemingway's style. Susan J. Wolfe's article on Hemingway's early development makes such an idea plain:
For Stein and Hemingway did more than simplify the diction that they used; they also limited radically the number of sub-ordinate elements they included in their sentences. [...] From Stein, who has advised him to limit the description in his fiction, he also learned to limit the range of his sentence structures and his vocabulary.  

This brief but incisive account appears as a prototype to a definition of the minimalist aesthetic. In 'Cat in the Rain' as elsewhere, the sentences are short and uncomplicated structurally and tend towards a single clause. Rather, in keeping with the idea of compositional sophistication, their effect is in combination rather than isolation. The vocabulary is reduced and there is no complicated time structuring, with expression being confined in most cases to the present tense, with events expressed chronologically. Here, the idea of 'concentration' is expressed as both an intensification of the repeated phrase and as the basis for interpretative multiplicity by creating connections between dissimilar ideas. 'The question of repetition is very important', Stein told Hemingway.  

Stein called this kind of repetition 'insistence' and is the most obvious, tangible example of her principle to concentrate. In a story written during his stay in Paris and one that Stein referred to as 'inacceachable' (translated as that which cannot be hung in a public gallery), Hemingway makes use of this 'new' idea:

46 Benson, p. 110.
47 Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 152.
Liz liked Jim very much. She liked it the way he walked over from
the shop and often went to the kitchen door to watch for him to
start down the road. She liked it about his mustache. She liked it
about how white his teeth were when he smiled. She liked it very
much that he did not look like a blacksmith. She liked it how A. J.
Smith and Mrs. Smith liked Jim. (5)

The repetition of ‘She liked’ serves to reflect through language Liz’s strong feelings
for Jim. Here, it might reflect the notion that she is naïve, her simplicity evident in her
inarticulate mantra. Moreover, it reflects the degree of desire for Jim which, combined
with her naïveté, sees her ‘liking’ him in a wholly uncritical and ultimately
dangerously innocent manner. The transformation of perspective from Liz’s to A. J.
and Mrs. Smith’s expands and supports her fondness for Jim and using ‘like a
blacksmith’ reminds us of the other use of the word ‘like’ to mean ‘similar to’. By
contrast, her repeated ‘She liked’ takes on a different perspective, where she might
desire to be more ‘like’ Jim. Stein’s suggestion that Hemingway give up journalism
was not merely directed at the notion that his non-fiction ‘used up all the creative
juices’.48

Stein realised Hemingway’s potential not to copy reality but to recreate it; the ‘less’ of
his concentrated, seemingly objective account could become ‘more’ if it was recreated
in the mind of his reader as a result of its composition in a series of interrelated
frameworks where the single element meant more as a result of its relationship with

48 Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 158.
other elements. The process was not straightforward assimilated into Hemingway’s method, and he wrote to Stein: ‘Writing used to be easy before I met you’.49

Ezra Pound

When Hemingway asked Ezra Pound to read his notebooks, Pound characteristically offered him some very specific, concrete advice.50 Included in his counsel were ideas about what constitutes good and bad writing, and in particular the use of adjectives. Hemingway writes in *A Moveable Feast* that Pound: ‘[...] believed in the *mot juste* [...] he was the man who taught me to distrust adjectives’.51 For Pound, the adjectives implied an aesthetic evaluation that could be better achieved through the creation of an image, which he asserts in *A Retrospect* is: ‘[...] that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’; and continues: ‘Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something’.52 Central here is the notion of the adjective to ‘reveal’, which can be opposed to ‘resolve’. Pound believed that clarity of expression was blurred by the use of adjectives rather than enhanced by them. He sought to replace them with a series of words that create a word-picture more accurately, clearly and sensitively and which therefore made the adjective redundant:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.53

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49 C. Fenton, p. 156.
50 Amongst this advice was what appears self conscious comments about learning from another writer, see Flora, p. 4: ‘Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.’
52 Flora, p. 4.
Hemingway’s similarity in style and subject in the following extract to Pound’s famous two-line Haiku, ‘In a Station of the Metro’ above is not a coincidence:

I have stood on the crowded back platform of a seven o’clock
Batignolles bus as it lurched along the wet lamp lit street while
the men who were going home to supper never looked from their
newspapers as we passed Notre Dame grey and dripping in the rain. 54

Like Stein, Pound eschewed polysyllabic words and used a simple sentence structure that was declarative and short. The single image was expressed with a hard, clear precision rather than imbued with overt, symbolic import, yet appeared to transcend its ostensibly simplistic origins. Hemingway applied Pound’s theory of imagery to operate within a longer narrative, where the influence of other, interrelated images would work together to make more than the sum of their parts. It is significant in the example above that the images in Hemingway’s example (the platform, the street, the men) form a narrative sequence, in which the overall effect is a product of the accumulation of images. Pound effectively rejected the use of expansive figurative language with his claim that ‘[…] the natural object is always the adequate symbol’. 55
This influence culminated in the sparse use of adjectives and when used, they suggest more than they confirm:

54 Quoted in Lynn, p. 166.
55 Lynn, p. 159, my emphasis. The idea of a natural object, as opposed the branded product, is extremely important when considering Hemingway’s suggestive language, as I shall show.
Everyone they met walking through the main street of the town
Peduzzi greeted elaborately. Buon di, Arturo! Tipping his hat.
The bank clerk stared at him from the door of the Fascist café.
Groups of three and four people standing in front of the shops
stared at the three. [...] Nobody spoke or gave any sign to them
except the town beggar, lean and old, with a spittle-thickened
beard, who lifted his hat as they passed. (113)

In this example from 'Out of Season' composed in 1923, Hemingway employs
adjectives sparingly, carefully choosing when and how to use them. When used, they
are realistic, referring to seemingly objective facts of surface-reality description. For
example, the beggar is 'lean and old' with a 'spittle-thickened' beard. These
adjectives reveal more than they resolve because they describe without the tangible
and direct intention of evaluation. 'Lean and old' is different from 'skinny and
ancient', say, because the latter are valued-laden and evaluative rather than seemingly
neutral descriptions. Here, Hemingway attempts to sustain the illusion that he is, like
the reporter he once was, merely transcribing events.

The basis for Hemingway's reluctance to insert a narrative commentary is his
unwillingness to judge the moral behaviour of his characters. The appropriate
approach was not to evaluate his subjects directly through 'telling' via a narrative
commentary, but instead to 'show' through behaviour and dialogue. In our example,
the reader understands that Peduzzi is socially excluded through his interactions with
others; it is shown, not told. Rather, Hemingway had the ambition to create the
illusion that it is the reader who observes Peduzzi's predicament, as if he or she were
approaching the scene without a narrator. This story is about prejudice, without being itself prejudicial; the narrator assumes not a moral high-ground, but a neutrality which provides the necessarily distanced perspective to fairly discuss the theme. The moral authority of the narrator is withdrawn and the notion that Peduzzi is excluded is a product of the reader's engagement with the text, as a result of their observing the textual 'clues'. It points to a difference between the morality of external reality and fictional non-judgement which Hemingway aspired to:

As a man you know who is right and wrong. You have to make decisions and enforce them. As a writer you should not judge. You should understand.\(^5^6\)

'As a man' represents the idea of 'real life', where you know who is right or wrong. But fiction is not concerned with real morals; rather, it should be more concerned with the development of a non-judgemental environment for its characters, a process that nurtures understanding of even the most extreme behaviour. His attempts to 'understand' led him to suggest the following approach to a young writer who asked him for advice: '[...] get in somebody else's head for a change. If I bawl you out try to figure what I'm thinking about as well as how you feel about it'.\(^5^7\)

The 'truth' is something that cannot be 'told' but must be 'shown'. By being shown, through the actions of his characters, it is potentially open to interpretation.

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\(^{56}\) Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 155.  
\(^{57}\) Quoted in C. Fenton, p. 155.
Hemingway’s interest in moral neutrality, therefore, influenced the development of some of minimalism’s most salient characteristics: to withdraw the commentary from the narrator, to show through dialogue and behaviour, and to question the moral assumptions that the reader might bring to their reading. As such, he was asking the reader to engage with his work in ways with which they might well be unfamiliar, and was challenging their assumptions about what literature should be about, and how it should approach its subject. Following Hemingway’s apprenticeship, it meant that it was becoming impossible to write stories such as ‘The Ash Heels Tendon’ or ‘The Mercenaries’, where he is called upon to reinforce a moral code and punish accordingly in the style of some of his contemporaries and he knew he could no longer use the moral figureheads found in these stories.

Hemingway’s writing had developed several minimalist characteristics by the time *In Our Time* was published. The house style of the early newspapers established his short, declarative sentences; by using source material from journalism he practised his fictional style; now, he realised the expression and recreation in the reader of an authentic emotion was paramount. Stein had taught him to concentrate, select and

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58 These stories were some of his first and are reprinted in J. Fenton, pp. 770 and 753, respectively.
59 Hemingway’s compulsion towards fiction was gathering increasing pace. Certain final articles in autumn 1923 were transition pieces between newspaper features and short stories. He told a friend that he had written over a thousand poems some of which he carried around in his coat pocket. Following the disastrous loss of many of his short stories, he had – by accident – only a handful left. Now he was ready to publish them. During this year, Hemingway published his first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*. However, he was not to find a more widespread critical acclaim until the publication of *In Our Time* in 1924. This small volume collected the vignettes, which were called chapters and numbered from one to eighteen. In the following year he published the many of vignettes largely unchanged, but with several undergoing major revision, such as the promotion of ‘Chapter 10’ in *In Our Time* to ‘A Very Short Story’ in the 1925 edition of *In Our Time*. These vignettes now became ‘interchapters’, inserted between the longer thirty-two short stories.
compose; whilst Pound's influence was to inspire him to remove authorial judgement, and so retain a seemingly objective, unadorned style. From all these influences, and more, the minimalist aesthetic in the American short story was developed. But it was not until *In Our Time* that this emerging aesthetic would find a significant example, a collection that would anticipate many of the methods, interests and practices found in the Minimalist work of Carver and Barthelme.
Part Two: Hemingway’s *In Our Time*

I intend to prove the different ways in which a reading of *In Our Time* engages the reader, how the elements of style directly affect the quality of his or her reading experience, and to conclude that - through an employment of the theories of Wolfgang Iser - Hemingway’s minimalist aesthetic creates interpretative equivocation, which is fundamental to a distinctive reading experience. I discuss the effects of Hemingway’s minimalist aesthetic upon an implied reader. ⁶⁰

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*Hemingway and Reader Response*

The role of the reader has found its way into several critical studies of Hemingway’s fiction. ⁶¹ This was the case long before reader response and reception theories gained critical currency. Typically, the earlier studies confined their analysis of the reader to help explain how the ‘tension’ of Hemingway’s seemingly flat, terse and unemotive style could create such variety of interpretations, or emotional intensity. ⁶² More specifically, many critics saw Hemingway’s method as dependent upon the creation of a generalised, non-historical reader, especially in a consideration of his ‘iceberg principle’, which implicitly invited such a reader to fill the interpretative gaps left by the omission of an important detail. ⁶³ Following the development of reader response theories, Iser emerged as one of several critics primarily interested in the creation of

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⁶² This idea is explored further in Tompkins, pp. 169-178.
meaning as a result of the relationship between reader, writer and text. He aligns his approach with what he calls the 'phenomenological' theory:

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text.

His work demonstrates a particular interest in the effect of indeterminacy on the implied reader in fiction. For Iser, indeterminacy is inherent in all fiction to some degree. But - and this is of great significance to my argument - he claims that some texts are more potentially indeterminate than others. It is possible, even desirable, to suggest ways in which specific texts, writers, and even specific literary 'movements' might exhibit this tendency. Iser is a useful theorist because of his distinction between texts that readily avail themselves to indeterminacy and those that do not; his specific focus on the mechanisms for how texts come to be indeterminate; and the subsequent suggestion that an indeterminate text demands an engaged reader response to fill the 'gaps' left in its narrative.

There are three sections to this part which explore different causes for indeterminacy. They are: the detached narrator, the use of suggestive language and omission. In the first section, I discuss how the narrator of In Our Time can be defined as ultimately absent, that is, free from making interpretations about the narrative. This negates the hermeneutic influence of the narrator as a source of reliable knowledge: in the absence of such a narrator, the reader must begin to interpret the text for themselves.

In the second section, I explore the use of suggestive language. Once again, this depends upon the minimalist enterprise of reduction. Evidence of this restraint can be found in the unelaborated descriptive idiom, which appears to function as simply denotative but is in fact highly suggestive. These two ideas form the basis of the next section, which we might consider the most explicit manifestation of the minimalist tendency to reduce: the ‘Iceberg principle’, or what I call the theory of omission. I end this section with a reading that draws all three elements together, suggesting that minimalist elements depend on working together for their effects. Throughout, my aim is to suggest how these significant aspects of Hemingway’s aesthetic contribute to create equivocation in the text, and how this in turn might engage an implied reader.
Section One: The Detached Narrator

In *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Gerald Prince offers a definition of what he calls an ‘absent’ narrator:

A maximally covert narrator; an impersonal narrator; a narrator presenting situations and events with minimum narratorial mediation and in no way referring to a narrating self of narrating activity.67

This definition concurs with the outline given by Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse*:

The narrator may be overt – a real character (Conrad’s Marlow) or an intrusive outside party (the narrator of *Tom Jones*). Or he may be ‘absent’, as in some of Hemingway’s or Dorothy Parker’s stories containing only dialogue and uncommented-upon action.68

The criteria that both Prince and Chatman use for their definition of the absent narrator are entirely consistent with my definition of Hemingway’s narrator as absent in the discussion to follow. The absent narrator does not comment upon the action and dialogue, and examples of showing and not telling are abundant; the

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narrator of *In Our Time* leaves the narrative 'uncommented upon', unexplained. In demonstrating that the narrator of *In Our Time* is absent, I am providing the critical vocabulary for a concept which creates the foundation for the rest of this section.

The absent narrator is a cornerstone of the unwillingness of Hemingway's minimalism to explain itself. Iser is especially interested in the ways in which narrator's affect the creation of meaning, and particularly create indeterminacy. In one such analysis, he turns his attention to the role of the narrator and especially that found in many 19th century novels:

We all notice in reading novels that the narrative is often interspersed with the author's comments on events. These comments are frequently in the nature of an evaluation of what has happened. [...] we might say that here the author himself removes the gaps; for with his comments he tries to create a specific conception of his narrative.\(^{69}\)

This commentary and its 'specific conception of the narrative' have implications for the way in which the reader might respond to the text:

So long as this remains the sole function of the commentary, the participation of the reader in the execution of the underlying narrative intention must diminish. The author himself tells the reader how his tale is to be understood.  

Although Iser used the 19th century novel as the implied example throughout his discussion of narrative commentary, it is equally applicable to the short story. In the following example, from Guy de Maupassant's 'Boule de Suif', the narrator reacts to the presence of a victorious army in a conquered town by providing a sustained commentary upon its effects:

In their darkened rooms the inhabitants had given way to the same feelings of panic which is aroused by natural cataclysms [...] For the same feeling is experienced whenever the established order of things is upset [...] The earthquake burying a whole people beneath the ruins of their houses [...] or the victorious army slaughtering all those who resist [...] all these are terrifying scourges which undermine all our belief in eternal justice and all the trust we have been taught to place in divine protection and human reason.

Significantly, this idea is a response to a central event in the narrative, the occupation of the town. It takes the form of an evaluation of the effects of the occupation upon the local inhabitants. Through comparisons with those 'feelings of panic' afforded by
natural disasters, such as earthquakes, the narrator suggests that we come to question the very fabric upon which our society is based. We might feel, following Iser’s comments, that we can either say ‘yes or no’ to this evaluation and it is posited as a statement of irrefutable fact. The explicit intention of the evaluation is that it is to be regarded as a truism, as the movement from the particular to the general culminates in: ‘all our belief’ and: ‘all the trust’ shows (my emphasis). It is not just a subjective response which acknowledges its limitations as a truth, but asserts itself as the singular and correct way to interpret the affect of the occupation upon the locals. In doing so, it intends to direct the interpretation of the reader, so that the reader might, in the face of such a powerful and universal assertion, concur.

There are no such commentaries from the narrator to be found in In Our Time. Rather, the narrator remains absent and describes the behaviour of the characters without evaluation and without explaining the effect of the narrative. In the following extract, from ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’, we find the immediate reaction by Dr. Adams, following his humiliating confrontation with Dick Boulton:

The doctor chewed the beard on his lower lip and looked at Dick Boulton. Then he turned away and walked up the hill to the cottage. They could see from his back how angry he was. They all watched him walk up the hill and go inside the cottage. (48)

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73 This type of authorial commentary is well established and is a function of most non-dramatic pre 20th century fiction. At its zenith, the reader would be addressed directly. For example, see Spenser’s Faerie Queene and Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress.
74 For an introduction to narratology which includes an analysis of point of view, and the role of the absent narrator, see S. Onega and J. Landa (eds.) Narratology (New York: Longman, 1996).
In the first instance, we come to know the effects of the confrontation upon Dr. Adams through a brief but suggestive description of his behaviour, as he: ‘chewed the beard on his lower lip’. This normally neutral activity is, in the context of this conflict, an indicator of his emotional state, a sign of the agitation the conflict has upon him. Unlike the example from ‘Boule de Suif’, there is no direct narrative evaluation of the action which seeks to direct our interpretation. The Hemingway narrator is defined by its propensity to show and not to tell.\textsuperscript{75} By this, I mean that much of Hemingway’s method can be considered in light of the function of indirect and direct narration in literature. In indirect narration, the narrator tells us what is happening. In many cases this includes an evaluation of what is narrated, as we have seen in the Maupassant example above. However, in the example of direct narration, or speech, the characters show us how they feel because their thoughts and feelings are expressed unmediated by the narrator (although not unmediated by the author, of course; he or she has decided what and how to ‘show’). Much of Hemingway’s indirect narration aspires to the condition of showing. He attempts to demonstrate what the case is without stating it and as such, creates a narrative that is ‘free’ from textual commentary. So we - like the characters who watch the Doctor - are aware of his anger not through what is said but through the highly evocative and extremely subtle observation of his back as he walks away. Here, turning to leave is an equally powerful statement about how he feels to a narrative comment.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} By the time Hemingway wrote \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} (1944), in which we are permitted direct access to the consciousness of the narrator Robert Jordan, he appeared to have abandoned the idea, although it had occupied his thoughts for over thirty years.

\textsuperscript{76} The notion to ‘show’ through the minutiae of behaviour anticipates Barthelme’s great interest in body language in \textit{Moon Deluxe}, to which I shall turn my attention in Chapter Four.
Through such suggestive and slight commentary, *In Our Time* aspires to a condition of neutral detachment, free from passing the kind of comment that we find in 'Boule de Suif' and throughout the dominant form of 19th century realist literature. The ideal of authorial objectivity, based upon his ambition that: 'As a writer you should not judge. You should understand' is aligned with the modernist aspiration to reveal, not resolve. The absent narrator is an embodiment of this principle.

Iser's theory of the commentating narrator needs to be refined if it is to be usefully applied in a more sophisticated analysis of the narrators' influence the reader's response. In many cases, interpretations by the narrator are more subtle, covert and perhaps more seemingly innocuous than Iser's 'commentaries' imply and as the Maupassant example demonstrates. As a result, it is necessary to extend Iser's theory to encompass all interpretative acts made by the narrator about the narrative. Without such refinement, it is all too obvious that many texts do not present the kind of commentaries which Iser focuses upon - those which directly address the reader and posit a universal 'truth' - and in noting this, we run the risk of ignoring the more subtle but equally persuasive influence the narrator might exert in less direct forms of influence. Regardless of these examples, the process by which they influence the reader remains the same: when confronted with an evaluative act by the narrator, the reader is invited to either reject it, or concur. As a result, these acts by the narrator limit the response of the reader; the narrator interprets the story for the reader, undermining the reader's role as creators of meaning.

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77 See Phillips, p. 31.
Hemingway’s ‘A Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’ has an example of a more complex evaluation of behaviour. Initially, we come to know the effect upon Dr. Adams through the characters who observe him: ‘They could see from his back how angry he was’. Rather than merely show his behaviour, as we found in the example above, it is now interpreted. The characters infer that he is angry because they interpret his back as a sign that he is angry. However, just as this transition is made from description to interpretation (from an observation of his back to an assessment of its meaning), so the perspective of the narrative is temporarily transferred from the narrator to that of the characters. As a result, the viewpoint is no longer that of the source of privileged information – the omniscient, third-person narrator – but is merely that of a character within the story. Although there is an interpretation made here, it is made without threatening the impersonality of the narrative because it’s couched in the subjective response of several characters. Even when interpreting the narrative, its authority is undermined. Although this observation is perhaps more covert than a direct expression of the narrator’s omniscience, it amounts to the same principle: it is an interpretation of the narrative. Such examples signal that detachment is more of an aspiration than an absolute condition and it would require a naïve reading of Hemingway and indeed any seemingly absent narrator to assert that detachment was complete. There is no such thing as a simply ‘innocent’ style.

Despite this, we can certainly separate the kind of commentary made by the narrator of ‘Boule de Suif’ and the stories of *In Our Time*. Where the narrator of ‘Boule de Suif’ intends to provide a universal thesis that encompasses all humankind, the interpretation of the example above merely evaluates the behaviour of one man. There is no assertion that this specific scene somehow provides the basis for a deeper
understanding of humanity. Where it occurs, commentary is localised, unelaborated and sparse; it is minimalist, and follows the effect of all the other minimalist methods by reducing the amount of information made available to the reader.

A covert narrator is not present in the narrative, and so there is only one instance of a first-person narrative in *In Our Time* (‘My Old Man’). Whereas a first-person narrator necessarily brings their interpretation of events, the third-person narrator does not. Therefore, using a third-person narrator foregrounds the possibility of objectivity (at least in ambition, since objectivity is an illusion). This is evident in the following example, from Sherwood Anderson’s ‘Death in the Woods’, where the first-person narrator reflects upon events that have taken place some time ago:

Neither of us had ever seen a woman’s body before. It may have been the snow, clinging to the frozen flesh, that made it look so white and lovely, so like marble.

The first-person narrator directly witnesses events and provides an interpretation of them. As such, we cannot question the validity of subjective response: if the corpse appeared like ‘marble’ to this narrator, then we must accept that this is the case. What is implicit in many first-person narratives is that the story exists to illuminate the ‘personality’ of the narrator as much as it does the themes of the narrative itself. This is made explicit in ‘Death in the Woods’:

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The whole thing, the story of the old woman's death, was to me as I grew older like music heard from far off. The notes had to be picked up slowly one at a time. Something had to be understood. […] I am only explaining why I was dissatisfied then and have been ever since. I speak of that only that you may understand why I have been impelled to try to tell the simple story over again.79

It is the character of the narrator that we come to learn about, just as we did in Maupassant, although here in a less direct manner. This also has the effect of creating a personality for the narrator as one, if indeed not the, central character in the story. The narrator's explanation controls or mediates the reader's participation because it provides an unquestionably subjective first-person account; if the narrator tells us that he felt afraid, then the reader cannot refute this. Even for a narrator who is unreliable, - that is, he tells us he is afraid but the text tells us otherwise - the reader cannot prove beyond doubt that the events were otherwise, given that fiction necessarily does not refer to a verifiable set of truths. Rather, we are, like in the Maupassant example, left with an insurmountable truth of the subjective response (although, paradoxically, it is subjective, made truth by the mere force and isolation of its telling). In this example, this occurs because the tension that is created between what the story means and who it means something to is resolved; it exists so that: 'we may understand why I have been impelled to tell the simple story over again'. 80

79 Cochrane, p. 294.
80 Cochrane, p. 294.
The absent narrator rejects the notion of a narrative persona, a narrating 'consciousness' that interprets the narrative. Hemingway intended to strip the narrator of *In Our Time* of any linguistic indicator that the narrator was providing a subjective response, or that the narrator was indeed involved in the act of narration. The absent narrator is entirely un-self-conscious. The detached narrator should possess neither a fictive consciousness nor 'personality'; it is the object of their narration that the reader should be contemplating, not their appreciation of it (as we have seen in the 'Death in the Woods' example above). Central to this method was the employing of an unelaborated, declarative narrative idiom:

The skiers kept to the stretch of snow along the side. The road dipped sharply to a stream and then ran straight up-hill. Through the woods they could see a long, low-eaved, weather-beaten building. Through the trees it was a faded yellow. Closer the window frames were painted green. The paint was peeling. Nick knocked his clamps loose with one of his ski sticks and kicked off the skis. (122)

To compare this with James’ ‘The Turn of the Screw’:

The Story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as on Christmas Eve in an old house a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody
happened to note it as the only case he had met in which such a visitation fell upon a child.  

The length of a sentence helps determine the way information is made available to the reader. The Hemingway short sentence often, but not exclusively, employs a single clause for each sentence. The extract above exemplifies this model. Where a subordinate clause exists it is in direct support of the primary clause: ‘The road dipped sharply to a stream and then ran straight up-hill.’ (my emphasis). This helps convey a sense of a central, unified proposition. Hemingway’s method is to provide an independent, single unit of information expressed without the influence of competing subordinate clauses.  

James’ method of narration is an attempt to capture the processes of consciousness of the narrator rather than the minutiae of what happened. The idea that the story ‘held us [...] sufficiently breathless’ is a direct intimation of the mental state of the narrator as a reaction to the events. The complexity of the syntax in the James’ example - with its clausal ducking and weaving, its feints, delays and hovering suggestions - approximate the consciousness of a complex central character, and the source of meaning in the short story, the narrator. James’ narrator evaluates the story he tells in the process of that telling, and, like the narrator of ‘Boule de Suif’ and ‘Death in the

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82 See Chapter Two, ‘Sentencing the Short Story’ in S. Lohafer Coming to Terms with the Short Story (Louisiana: Louisiana State UP, 1983).
83 It is not my intention to privilege one literature, or writer, above another and I do not suggest that Hemingway was in some way ‘better’ than James or other writers. But I am interested in the different ways in which different literatures create effect, and more specifically, the distinctive qualities that each narrative technique brings to its reading.
Woods', personalises the story at the expense of encouraging the reader to provide their account of the narrative. James' narrative technique is equally as sophisticated as Hemingway's; and even though their methods differ, the highly ambiguous conclusion to 'The Turn of the Screw' demands a great deal from the reader, similar in degree to that of minimalism. Yet, given that each technique is radically dissimilar, the process of indeterminacy differs. The reader of James must pick their way through the various digressions and complexities of a hugely sophisticated mind in order to trace the chain of thought that leads ineluctably to the conclusion. The various digressions, qualifications and asides serve to represent the ebb and flow of the thought patterns of the narrator as he recounts the story. The central proposition spans several ideas and is compiled of several, competing clauses, which hold the reader's attention temporarily until the next serves to colour what comes before and pre-empt what might come next. In one sense, this is aligned to Joyce's experimentation with the stream of consciousness method in Portrait of the Artist (1916) and later in Ulysses (1922).

However, this is not Hemingway's goal; he does not want to explore the mind of his narrator's character. As a result, his short sentence is a more transparent idiom for a detached narrator that wishes to report the scene. We are not told, whether explicitly through direct statement, or implicitly through the use of language, how the narrator interprets the events. The narrative is perceived not through the particular human consciousness, but more objectively, as if it aspired to the condition of an objective
report, where both the creator and narrator have disappeared. Will the audience interpret this artwork in their place?  

Dialogue is perhaps the most fully realised demonstration of the principle to show, not tell, and is a basis for the absent narrator to reject overt intervention in the narrative. Its use creates the illusion that the reader witnesses the direct action of a character unmediated through the interpreting presence of the narrator. It is no wonder that dialogue is used so liberally throughout *In Our Time* (and throughout minimalism in general). In many sequences the narrative is created, sustained and concluded by the characters’ dialogue. This has the effect of displacing the narrator’s position as central in the narrative.

The following example from ‘The End of Something’ is typical of many of the stories of *In Our Time*, in that narrative tension and subsequent denouement is created by the characters through dialogue with little intervention by the narrator:

> They sat on the blanket without touching each other and watched the moon rise.
> ‘You don’t have to talk silly,’ Marjorie said. ‘What’s really the matter?’
> ‘I don’t know.’
> ‘Of course you know.’

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84 As such, Hemingway’s rejection of a strong authorial through his voice is reminiscent, at least in passing, of Roland Barthes ‘Death of the Author’ theory.

85 For an analysis of the narrative idiom of Frederick Henry, narrator of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* which is illuminates the present discussion, see W. Gibson *Tough, Sweet and Stuffy: An Essay on Modern American Prose Styles* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966).
‘No I don’t.’
‘Go on and say it.’

Nick looked at the moon, coming up over the hills.

‘It isn’t fun anymore.’ (55)

The narrator tells us little more than what Nick sees and a pivotal point in the plot of this story is a product of dialogue, not direct exposition by the narrator. One result is that the reader is able to reflect upon Nick’s actions and speech without interference from the narrator. Dialogue gives the reader the illusion of ‘direct access’ into the thoughts of the characters and as such it is highly prized by Hemingway. When dialogue is used extensively, the story might even be said to aspire to the condition of short stage play. It must be noted, however, that the illusion is temporarily suspended when the reader realises it is Nick through whom the narrative is focalised: the aspiration towards objectivity is an illusion, but the overall impression is that the narrator is ‘maximally covert’; in keeping with minimalism subtlety, it is for the reader is discern this highly compromised version of narratorial intervention.

Dialogue is a direct ‘showing’ of character’s thoughts and feelings, but typically it is pared down and incomplete, and although we are permitted direct access to thoughts and feelings, the characters rarely provide a great insight or motive. ‘It isn’t fun anymore’ is the terse and inexplanatory equivalent of the kind of non-disclosive language found throughout In Our Time. The terse idiom of the characters can be equally found in the narrator. The reason for this is that much figurative language,

86 This notion reached it culmination in the apparent short drama, ‘Today is Friday’, Fenton (1995), p. 268
especially adjectives and adverbs, evaluate their subject – which threatens to undermine
the assumed neutrality of the absent narrator. To reject their use, then, is to reject
explicit evaluation. This is precisely the effect we find throughout the stories of In Our
Time and is particularly apparent in the descriptions of physical environments, such as
landscapes, many of which come at the beginning of the short stories in order to
contextualise their mood. The way in which the absent narrator’s idiom prevents direct
judgement is best illustrated by comparison. First, we have a description of Sleepy
Hollow, from the short story ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ by Washington Irving:

Not far from this village […] there is a little valley […] which
is one of the quietest places in the world. […] The occasional
whistle of a quail […] is almost the only sound that ever breaks
in upon the uniform tranquillity. […] I had wandered into it at
noon time […] and was startled by the roar of my own gun, as
it broke the Sabbath silence stillness around, and was prolonged
and reverberated by angry echoes. […] A drowsy, dreamy
influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very
atmosphere. \(^{87}\)

Figurative language like this is explanatory, and is evidence of evaluation by the
narrator. There are several examples of the use of adjectives, which are interpretations
of the quality of their subjects, and as such necessarily evaluate them. The first can be
found in ‘quietest’, shortly followed ‘uniform tranquillity’. Rather than demonstrate

\(^{87}\) Cochrane, pp. 11-12.
its qualities (by example, through ‘showing’), we are told by the narrator directly what these qualities are (through direct description, by ‘telling’). The sub-narrative which tells of the narrator wandering into the valley and disturbing the peace with his hunting rifle, begins to demonstrate by contrast how tranquil this valley is.

However, it does so through recourse to exaggerated figurative language, found in ‘Sabbath silence’ and the personification of the echoes created by his gun as ‘angry’. Finally, the movement from the specific to the general, witnessed in the earlier example from ‘Boule de Suif’, ensures that this evaluation is not merely a subjective, localised impression; the ‘drowsy, dreamy influence’ seems to ‘pervade the very atmosphere’, making it more universal in application. Compare this method of evaluating a description of a physical environment with the following, taken from the opening of ‘The End of Something’:

In the old days Hortons Bay was a lumbering town. No one who lived in it was out of sound of the big saws in the mill by the lake. Then one year there were no more logs to make lumber. […] The big mill had its machinery taken out and hoisted on board one of the schooners by the men who had worked in the mill. The schooner moved out of the bay toward the open lake carrying two great saws, the travelling carriage that hurled the logs against the revolving circular saws, and the rollers, wheels, belts and iron piled on a hull-deep load of lumber. […] the schooner moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything (53)
In this extract, there are few adjectives or adverbs. When they do appear, they are unexaggerated and plain; the saw and the mill are 'big', the logs are 'hurled' and the lake is 'open'. What these and the other adjectives and adverbs have in common is that they are a product of a narrator who refuses to elaborate upon their significance. We are not offered a further commentary upon the significance of the size of the mill, although it is mentioned more than once, or that the logs were 'hurled', the lake 'open'. It is direct because it uses the five senses to observe and express the scene. As a result, adjectives and adverbs such as 'big', 'hurled' and 'open' would be qualified by observation. Unlike 'quietest', 'dreamy', or 'Sabbath silence', they refer to the external qualities of the subjects which they describe, and expressed without further, evaluative description by a neutral idiom. This does not mean that these passages are flat, insignificant, or without figurative import. Rather, the effect of the passage is to be found elsewhere, through the use of suggestive language which is largely independent of a didactic function.
Section Two: Use of Suggestive Language

Hemingway’s use of suggestive figurative language contributed to the complexity of interpretation, and the degree to which the reader must contribute to the text. The reader is asked to make some extremely sophisticated connections between subtle and shifting symbols, the meaning of which are often only apparent in their relationships with one another. The difference between what the text denotes and connotes helps create interpretative ‘gaps’ in meaning:

[Gaps] give the reader a chance to build his own bridges,
relating the different aspect of the object which have thus far been revealed to him. [The reader] fills in the remaining gaps. He removes them by a free play of meaning-projection and thus himself provides the unformulated connections between the particular views. 88

The image of ‘building his own bridges’ is a useful one to keep in mind, because the use of suggestive language throughout In Our Time is the product of relationships between ideas, words and phrases. Such connections are suggestive in Hemingway’s minimalism, because they are a product of the unelaborated, declarative, ‘unsurprised’ style. Faced with this notion and the kind of uninterpreting, absent narrator established in the previous section, the narrative might be considered as unemotive, slight and ineffectual. Yet precisely the opposite is true. Indeed, this is part of the paradoxical quality of literary minimalism, the potential to move the reader with apparently so little means, that less is more. What I want to demonstrate in this section is how the stories of In Our Time make use of suggestive language which

88 Iser (1989), p. 9
initially appears simply declarative but is actually highly connotative and so invites
the reader to ‘make bridges’ between seemingly dis-contiguous ideas. 89

A defining characteristic of Hemingway’s minimalist style in *In Our Time* is its
infrequent use of extravagant figurative tropes and a rejection of metaphor and simile.
These figurative tropes create associations between words that are the basis of poetic
language, transforming language from the merely denotative to the connotative,
something more than merely communicative of descriptions and ideas but also of
emotions. In the absence of such traditional figurative language, Hemingway would
use another method, differently suggestive than the explicit comparisons created by
direct metaphor and simile.

One way we can explain the suggestive effect of Hemingway’s minimalist style is
through an analysis based upon Roman Jakobson’s theory of poetic language. 90 Here, the
distinction is made between two axes of language, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic.
The syntagmatic, which we might visualise as operating along a conceptual vertical axis,
operates by associating contiguous words. I will return to this important function shortly.

The paradigmatic, which we might say operates along a horizontal axis, does so by
substituting one meaning of a word for another. The simile is an example of the
paradigmatic function of language. This works by creating relationships between

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89 See C. Lamb ‘Observations on Hemingway, Suggestiveness, and the Modern Short Story’ *Midwest
Quarterly* (Autumn 1995 Vo. 37 pp. 11-27).
90 Lodge reprints excerpts of Jakobson with an introduction and brief discussion, including ‘The
Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles’ in Lodge, pp. 57-61.
ideas through a direct comparison. In the following example from Herman Melville’s ‘Bartleby’, I have used italics to emphasise the simile:

Turkey was a short, pursy Englishman [...] In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o’clock [...] it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals.91

The simile makes the comparison explicit. In the metaphor, however, there is a more implicit comparison, and it can create a more nuanced connection between disparate elements. Again, from ‘Bartleby’:

The yard was entirely quiet [...] The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.92

The seemingly barren environment of the prison yard in which grass nevertheless flourishes is compared to the ‘heart’ of the eternal pyramids, tombs for the ancient dead, whose massive construction would seemingly resist the fertility of the grass seed. What these explicit and implicit comparisons have in common is that they are 91 Cochrane, p. 77 (my emphasis). 92 Cochrane, p. 111.
interpretations of objects within the narrative; they provide a commentary on their subject. This function in a similar method to adjectives and adverbs in that they also provide and evaluative function. Yet, making such comparisons is the foundation of literary fiction. Without comparisons, or, more loosely, relationships between ideas, Hemingway’s declarative style was in danger of becoming merely reportage. Consequently, Hemingway sought the kinds of comparisons that metaphor and simile invite but without the narrative evaluation that both provide. Therefore, he could not use metaphor and simile directly. Rather, he sought to create comparisons between objects, or more loosely, relationships between them, through other methods.

Repetition
The use of repetition is an important element in the use of Hemingway’s suggestive language. Repetition is a means of creating ‘paradigmatic relationships’ which exist upon the vertical rather than horizontal axis of literary language, but withdraws from using a figurative language that fulfils this function directly. Repetition may occur in grammatical structures, phrases and words but for this discussion, I will focus upon the repetition of words. More specifically, I want to discuss what I call local and widespread uses of repetition. It is an important element in Hemingway’s method because it creates suggestive relationships between seemingly disparate ideas without making explicit invitations to the reader to make those comparisons.

Local repetition occurs when a word is repeated within a single sentence or passage. This extract is from the opening of ‘Big Two Hearted River’:
The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber. Nick sat down on the bundle of canvas and bedding the baggage man had pitched out of the door of the baggage car. There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country. The thirteen salons that had lined the one street of Seney had not left a trace. The foundations of the Mansion House stuck up above the ground. The stone was chipped and split by the fire. It was all that was left of the town of Seney. Even the surface had been burned off the ground. (143)

The use of the word ‘burnt’ and its variations repeated throughout the passage create associations between ideas that are not explicitly made by metaphorical language. The first use of the word appears while the train is ‘out of sight’ from the perspective of the town and introduces the suggestion of its destruction, although as yet it is confined to the burnt timber. As Nick leaves the train, the reader temporarily assumes his perspective: there is ‘no town, nothing’ because it has been ‘burned-over’, an evocative image about which this passage will turn. There follows more specific examples, the salons and the Mansion house, culminating in its stone that was ‘chipped and split by fire’. Finally, the perspective becomes once again more distant, as the narrator describes the surface that was ‘burned off’ the ground. The repeated word ‘burnt’ and its alternatives create a pattern of association between non-figurative observations in the text so that the reader is invited to create relationships between seemingly disparate elements. One of those elements is the link between past and present. Part of the effect of this passage is achieved by comparing how Seney was
before it was destroyed by fire and how it is now. Such shifts in time are echoed by shifts in perspective: Seney is at first 'out of sight', then it is shown implicitly through Nick's perspective, through to a specific focus upon the different components of the former town, towards what appears a general summary. What assures continuity between these are the associations created by the word 'burnt'. Importantly, the notion that Seney is 'burnt over' introduces an explicit connection with the implicit source of Nick's distress, the war. Repetition is a form of 'composition', a skill Hemingway developed from his work as journalist and through the influence of Pound and Stein, by placing ideas in proximity as to invite a comparison between them.

A less common form of repetition is its widespread use, where a word can be found repeated several times throughout the short story, almost as a motif. In the following example, from 'Mr and Mrs. Elliot, the word 'tried' is used repeatedly:

Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it. They tried in Boston after they were married and they tried coming over on the boat. They did not try very often on the boat because Mrs. Elliot was sick as Southern women are sick. (101)

The frequent repetition of 'tried' is a figurative evocation of their repeated copulation. That they 'tried very hard' implies a sense of toil and suggests that such repetitive sex is both joyless and monotonous, culminating in the unambiguously
A transformation in the relationship between Mr and Mrs. Elliot is expressed through the use of the rhyming 'cried': 'She cried a good deal and they tried several times to have a baby before they left Dijon.' (102) 'Cried' has augmented 'tried' as the repeated word, shifting the emphasis from a seemingly futile attempt at conception to the unhappiness that is its result.

A further shift in Mrs. Elliot's relationship is once again expressed through a rhyming word. Crying is now something that she can share with her girl friend: 'Mrs. Elliot became much brighter after her girl friend came and they had many good cries together' (103). Later, this forms a comparison between her relationship with her husband and her girl friend:

He and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby in the big hot bedroom on the big, hard bed.

And in the following paragraph:

Mrs. Elliot and the girl friend now slept together in the big medieval bed. They had many a good cry together. (103)

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93 One of the primary motives for using repetition with Hemingway's stories is for what Stein called 'insistence'. The repetition reinforces the idea by repeating it; the more it is said, the more it becomes true. It is also a notable aspect of D. H. Lawrence's prose.
Through the connection between repeated rhyming words, Hemingway offers us a linguistic representation of theme; the direct comparison between the two couples. The transformation of the central idea of the story – that Mr. and Mrs. Elliot ‘tried’ for a baby – into the notion that Mrs. Elliot shared her unhappiness with her new girl friend and ‘cried’ on the married couple’s bed shared is at the heart of this interpretation of the story. At a local level, the repetition reveals the extent of the frustration at unsuccessful and continual attempts at pregnancy and as such represents repetition as monotonous. But as it appears throughout the narrative, it is transformed into something that eventually replaces it, a sadness shared by the women as they cry together; ‘trying’ inevitably leads to ‘crying’. The subtle interrelationship between language and meaning is highly sophisticated and demands the reader is able to recognise the changing meaning of a phonetically similar term. It represents a shift away from a direct and controlled indicator of meaning towards a series of complex interactions. For Iser, this kind of complexity would render the text indeterminate; for my purposes, it is another way of demonstrating how Hemingway’s text displayed a highly-wrought poetic language as a foundation for a sustained engagement on behalf of the reader.

Minimalism and Imagism
By focusing upon the compositional elements of Hemingway’s style and the precise use of figurative, or ‘poetic’, language and rhyme, I am suggesting an analogy with poetry. The comparisons between Hemingway’s minimalist style and both the theories and practices of Imagist poetry are illuminating. The critic and editor F.S. Flint sought to define Imagisme in a series of principles, which he outlined in the
March 1913 edition of *Poetry*, and which were supplemented with further information by Ezra Pound:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

They held also a "Doctrine of the Image," which they had not committed to writing.94

By using this approach, through a comparison of an example from *In Our Time* and an Imagist poem, I hope to reveal how suggestive language operates in respect of the singular image as source of meaning. This following extract comes from the opening story of *In Our Time*, 'On the Quai at Smyrna':

> All those mules with their forelegs broken and pushed into the shallow water. (38)

Compare this with H.D.'s 'Oread', a poem considered by Pound to be one of the most fully-realised Imagist poem:

> Whirl up, sea –
> Whirl your pointed pines,

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Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.\textsuperscript{95}

Returning to the first point of Pound's 'manifesto', I understand the 'direct treatment of a thing' to reflect the desire to recreate a concrete image, an idea which both Hemingway and Imagism share. In both cases, there is no obscurity or abstraction and the image is both striking and singular, allowed to stand alone without the influence of competing ideas.\textsuperscript{96} It is expressed in plain language, without simile or overt symbolism and both exist initially as a description of the very object they describe rather than being displaced by becoming symbols for another phenomenon. The sea, like the mules, are literal before they become symbolic. This represents Hemingway's intention to capture concrete experience. In the following quotation Hemingway was referring to his novella \textit{The Old Man and the Sea}, but his suspicion of symbolism can be equally applied to the stories written much earlier in \textit{In Our Time}:

There isn't any symbolysm [sic]. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. [...] What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{95} Jones, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{96} Raymond Carver makes great use of the single striking object as a feature of his work, and its interpretation is often a guide to the meaning of the story in which it appears.
\textsuperscript{97} Quoted in Phillips, p. 4.
In light of this, how are we to explain the symbolic function of the cat in ‘Cat in the Rain’, or the swamp in ‘Big Two-Hearted River’? An insight is offered by Hemingway during the short exchange between Nick Adams and his friend Bill in ‘Three Day Blow’ regarding what they have been reading:

'It's a swell book. What I couldn't ever understand was what good the sword would do. It would have to stay edge up all the time because if it went over flat you could roll right over it and it wouldn't make any trouble.'

'It's a symbol,' Bill said.

'Sure,' said Nick, 'but it isn't practical.' (61-62)

The implication is that a successful symbol should be fundamentally 'practical', that is, its representation in the narrative is consistent with its function and presentation in external reality. This is what is meant by 'The sea is the sea' and 'The old man is an old man'. In the example above, the sword is unsuitable as a symbol because it is inconsistent with its use as a real object: in the real world, it would roll over flat and its edge would no longer act as a barrier. Here, the 'sword' is not a sword, because their ontologies are different; the symbolic sword does not behave like a real sword because it only has a symbolic function. The symbolic function usurps and replaces its primary function as a practical object; it becomes not a literal sword but the symbol of a sword. This undermines the concrete power of the literal imagist object, because in the examples above, one would not be looking at a mule but the symbol of a mule, not
the sea but its symbolic representation. Hemingway's suggestive language, then, is predicated on a plausible object, which possesses meaning in conjunction within a wider framework of suggestive language.

The second part of the Imagist manifesto was that the poet use no word that does not contribute towards presentation. This is analogous to describing Hemingway's pared down minimalist style. In the following example from 'Big Two-Hearted River', we find Hemingway's language exhibits a tendency simultaneously to treat the object directly and to convey an impression of its suggestiveness:

As the shadow of the kingfisher moved up the stream, a big trout shot upstream in a long angle, only his shadow marking the angle, then lost his shadow as he came through the surface of the water, caught the sun, and then, as he went back into the stream under the surface, his shadow seemed to float down the stream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge where he tightened facing up into the current.

Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling. (143-144)

At one level, the passage shows a meticulously accurate description of external reality. Yet it also constitutes a metaphor of Nick's psychic state. The trout develops a
shadow as a result of its ‘shot’ upstream, whereupon its shadow is lost as it comes to the surface of the water. As the passage continues, the shadow displaces the trout as the focus of the description until finally, it waits under the bridge, ‘facing up’ to the current of the water. Several elements are symbolic. The water, which Nick like the trout must face, is symbolic of the cleansing and restorative process that he must undertake in order to heal himself of his mental distress; its symbolic value is a product of its opposition to the swamp. The Kingfisher, a predator, waits and observes the scene and there is an ever-present danger of which the trout, unlike Nick, is unaware of; the trout/kingfisher relationship informs Nick’s dilemma, that he must face the swamp to find redemptive clear waters. That the water also carries a ‘current’ is evocative of the difficulty such a process entails, for such currents are difficult to overcome. It is no coincidence that the source of his pain is expressed later in the story as swampland, a more thoroughly viscous manifestation of the ‘current’ found in this example. Nick has, like the trout he observes, become a ‘shadow’, a man diminished by his traumatic experiences. If he is to restore his mental health, he needs to ‘come to the surface’ and address those problems that have so far caused him pain and like the trout begin ‘facing up’ to the current. The bridge is symbolic of the transition he must make in order to move away from his pain towards mental equilibrium. What is significant here is that the literal scene retains its realist integrity whilst simultaneously appearing a highly sophisticated symbolic description of Nick’s distress, because of an internal logic of associations, meaning little alone, but highly suggestive in combination. This complicates the reading process, demanding that connections between seemingly disparate elements are key in interpreting the narrative.
In the third principle of Imagism, rhythm is considered. The short sentence, like the poetic line, provides the opportunity to create associations between several lines. This operates by undermining the syntagmatic function of the work. Here, the short sentence provides a kind of staccato effect which isolates it from those that have gone and those that are to follow. The shorter sentence refuses to exploit the momentum of meaning from those that have come before and continually demands that the reader pause before they move on. As such, the rhythm of the shorter sentence asks that the reader identify each sentence and pause. As a result, the reader is able to connect it not just with what has come before or after — the syntagmatic function which operates along the vertical axis of meaning, creating relationships between disparate ideas — but its relationships with the story in its entirety. The notion of loosening the rhythm of poetry implied by point three was partially realised in the use of free verse. Indeed, this idea became principle in a later expression of the Imagist credo, in the preface to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915):

To create new rhythms — as the expression of new moods [...] We do not insist upon ‘free verse’ as the only method for writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. [...] In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.98

Poetry no longer had to incorporate the traditional metrical patterns and structural conventions and in doing so, grew closer to prose as a means of expression. The short

sentences of *In Our Time* created rhythmic patterns that could be more aligned to the rhythms of poetry. Arguably, free verse is not the sole preserve of poetry, rather, its forms, rhythms and patterning can be found in Hemingway’s prose, which aspires to the condition of poetry in its highly evocative series of relationships between words. It was created with many of the principles of writing verse and, as such, might be read using a similar strategy to that employed in reading poetry. 99

Hemingway anticipates a significant trend in Minimalism by focusing his attention on the highly suggestive use of the everyday object, or scene. In the majority of stories, the attentive descriptions of landscapes and environments also serve to represent something more profound than might initially be apparent. Although not as common as the example of landscape, Hemingway also uses the everyday objects as the focus of his suggestive language. In this example, the reader’s interpretation of the mental state of Dr. Adams in ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’ rests upon his interaction with a shotgun and its shells:

He was sitting on his bed now, cleaning a shotgun. He pushed the magazine full of the heavy yellow shells and pumped them out again. They were scattered on the bed. (49)

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99 I am aware here of the fine balance the reader must make between a slow and deliberate reading which isolates each sentence and image in turn, and a reading which takes into account the relationships between each idea whilst reading them at a conventional pace. Part of the problem of asking that Hemingway’s stories be read as poetry is that they might become disjointed, and each line and image held in isolation. However, this could be countered by the contention that Hemingway’s elements of style - repetition, the short sentence, the concrete image, etc. - work in unison, and their effect is more than the sum of their parts, just as it is with poetry.
Initially, this behaviour of Dr. Adams might seem incidental, trivial even. This seemingly trivial, or even coincidental, introduction of fine detail is part of the reason why minimalism is so demanding: what the reader nominally takes as 'colouring' is actually an integral part of the story’s narrative. Technically, following Seymour Chatman’s discussion, we might consider this process as transforming narrative ‘satellites’ (solely descriptive material that does not inform the plot) into ‘kernels’ (vital elements of the narrative). What was before incidental now must be carefully considered. Thwarting the reader’s expectations would become a premise of Carver and Barthelme, especially in their subversion of the resolutory ending.

We are confronted with the question of why, given the very short space devoted to the narrative, we should witness Dr. Adams in such a seemingly insignificant, everyday activity. This question soon suggests several answers. In one reading, it might be suggested that Dr. Adams cannot face the humiliation following his confrontation with Dick in the wood and so denies it by taking up a seemingly comforting, undemanding pastime. But the tools of this ritual are themselves significant and through them the reader might begin to understand the effect the humiliation has upon Dr. Adams. The shotgun is symbolic of control and of great potential devastation, either for another or for oneself (the latter echoing the suicide he has previously seen). However, the weapon has been emptied of the shells, rendering it ineffective. Those yellow shells, their colour resonant of his perceived cowardice, lay inert on the bed, unused. He has lost power and as a result control. Nowhere are we told as such directly, or does the reader feel it as strongly.100

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100 For an analysis of the everyday object as a corollary to experience, see May (2002), pp. 62-83.
Suggestive Language and Polyvalency

One might consider the tension created between the declarative and suggestive functions of Hemingway's minimalist style as an expression of his desire to create a style that was an authentic realisation of experience yet at the same time highly symbolic and emotive and therefore memorable and lasting. Historically, this places Hemingway and *In Our Time* at a complex intersection of conventional realism and modernism. An important aspect of Hemingway's use of suggestive language is the demands it makes upon the readers who must interpret its intricacies and sophistication. Readers have to work harder if they are to make sense of a Hemingway narrative, because the relationship that creates significance is not stated directly but are merely suggested by the text. Also, the significant interpretative events within the narrative are ostensibly trivial, as we have seen in the example from 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife'.

Even the shortest example, comparable to Pound's Haiku, is deeply suggestive. Employing some of the ideas above, it is a useful reminder of how a single line — both in isolation and in comparison with a longer passage — yields a potential for a rich response. It is from 'Chapter V':

All the shutters of the hospital were nailed shut. (69)

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101 M. Stewart uses this criteria to define Hemingway as a modernist in M. Stewart. *Modernism and Tradition in Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time* (Suffolk: Camden House, 2001).
There are no metaphors, similes, extravagant words, or other immediately recognisable figurative tropes here. Yet despite their absence, the reader is still able to interpret the sentence as expressing more than a direct literal statement upon the status of the windows of the hospital. In the first instance, the reader might sense connotations that are based upon the choice of words. This choice is suggested by repeating the word ‘shut’ in ‘shutters’. As a result, the reader might interpret the ‘shutters’ as a metonymic reduction of the hospital, which in turn is a source of health and the potential to save lives. Having been ‘nailed shut’, an image evocative of the coffin, the hospital can no longer fulfil its healing function. The language is suggestive because it creates connections in the absence of metaphor and simile, and the vehicle for that connection is repetition.

Secondly, the image is suggestive because of a wider, thematic reading in its connection with themes found throughout In Our Time. That the ministers were killed against a hospital wall is a visual echo of the image of Nick lying injured against the wall of the church in the next interchapter, Chapter VI. The irony of the circumstance of the characters, dead and injured and their location, the hospital and church, is suggestive of an overall tone of ironic pessimism that pervades the collection. In Our Time provides continuity in the characterisation of Nick Adams, and this permits the reader to make an ongoing connection between the events in Nick’s life.
So, his laying injured against the wall might have been the experience that so markedly distresses Nick, which is the cause of his anguish that occupies the focal point of the later story, ‘Big Two-Hearted River’.\(^{102}\)

\(^{102}\) Even equivocal texts can provide an illusion of freedom of interpretation whilst actually clearly control the response of the reader. This is precisely the case in \textit{In Our Time}. The complexity of Hemingway’s figurative language gives the impression that the reader is creating meaning for themselves. But, because the suggestive language is actually highly controlled and tautly structured, and appears within the compositional framework of chapters and interchapters, the reader’s interpretation is largely directed. The ‘clues’ that Hemingway provides to fill the gaps left by equivocation mean that if the reader follows them, then they will be aligning themselves with Hemingway’s intention. Hemingway, more than either Carver or Barthelme, directs his reader’s interpretation in this way. Just as we have seen that Hemingway’s intention to create an absent narrator is ultimately illusory (because be the very process of choosing what to narrate they privilege some ideas over others), so is the idea that a highly-wrought suggestive language is truly freely open to interpretation.
Part Three: Omission in Hemingway's Short Story Endings

The short story ending has the most tangible potential for resolving narrative problems raised by the text. The refusal for them to do so remains one of his most significant expressions of equivocation. Iser notes such potential, and uses an example drawn from the serialised novels of Charles Dickens to show how the 'dramatic interruption' which occurs just as the story appears to be resolved, to demonstrate how omission might encourage the reader to respond:

In view of the temporary withholding of information, the suggestive effect produced by details will increase, thus again stimulating a welter of possible solutions. Such a technique arouses definite expectations that, if the novel is to have any real value, must never be completely fulfilled. ¹⁰³

The serialised work defers the reader's gratification, creating suspense in order that the reader return to discover how the narrative is resolved in the next instalment. Omission in Hemingway operates differently from such serialisation in that the narrative problems raised by omission are never completely resolved. What Iser calls the 'temporary withholding of information' becomes indefinite, and only through the accretion of narrative clues can the reader assemble evidence that will reveal potential conclusions, which are never fully verified by the text.

¹⁰³ Iser (1989), p. 11
In the following section, I want to explore the use of omission in *In Our Time*.

Omission is the extension of minimalism's tendency to pare down, but here the reduction continues until disappearance. As such, it is an extreme example of Hemingway's ambition to undermine the classic realist position of providing motive and significance. The reader must replace the missing narrative element, be it motive, identity, a resolutory act, etc, with an interpretation garnered from a literature that provides the barest of evidence through its suggestive language, told by a narrator largely absent and so with little or not intention to verify his or her reading.

The consequence of such equivocation is the encouragement of an active reader response. Iser makes such a claim quite clear. In the seminal essay 'Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction' he states: '[...] it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation'.\(^{104}\) If this is the case, then a rise in interpretative indeterminacy will see a consequent rise in reader participation. Iser makes the distinction between: '[...] a text that lays things out before the reader in such a way that he can either accept or reject them [...] ' and a text that one that remains indeterminate.\(^{105}\) It is in the latter example that the reader is encouraged to more actively participate in the creation of meaning in a text. It is my task in this final section, therefore, to demonstrate through a reading of *In Our Time* how omission establishes an aesthetic of equivocation and in doing so, encourages an active participation by the reader.

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Hemingway first expressed his ‘new’ theory of omission through the now famous metaphor of the iceberg in *Death in the Afternoon*. But before I begin a definition, I would like to say what omission is not. To begin with, the omission is not that made by textual excisions as a result of manuscript revision. Such excisions come in the form of actual deleted passages that are not incorporated into the final version because the author thought them unsuitable. That we might use these to discover hidden depths, or interpretative significance, is not the subject of this study, and has been well covered elsewhere. As Hemingway’s theory was a deliberate strategy, I am only interested in intentional omission. We might become aware during our reading that in ‘A Big Two-Hearted River’, for example, that the cause of Nick Adam’s distress has not been stated directly despite it being a significant element in the process of interpreting the narrative.

All else being equal, could we reasonably argue that this was left out by accident? It seems unlikely, given the care that Hemingway takes in sustaining equivocation by not directly mentioning the war and by the ‘traces’ he leaves to direct our reading in that direction. Moreover, in the case of ‘Indian Camp’, he makes explicit the notion that one could ponder over the suicide’s motives by having Nick voice them. And if it

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106 Phillips, p. 77.
107 Several scholars of Hemingway, most notably Susan F. Beegel in her study *Hemingway’s Craft of Omission*, look to the manuscripts to question the effects of excluding such passages. It may be the case that such internal omissions are the result of Hemingway’s actual manuscript revisions. Perhaps in a former version he clearly expressed the cause of Nick’s distress, the husband’s motive and the identity of the cat. For example, we know that Hemingway wrote a more substantial and informative ending to ‘A Big Two Hearted River’ which, upon the advice F. Scott Fitzgerald, he then cut from the final version (this excised section was later published in the *Nick Adams Stories* and can be found in Fenton (1995), p. 623 entitled ‘On Writing’). This ending goes some way in suggesting reasons for the cause of Nick’s anguish and possible ways of overcoming it. But the fact that it was not included in the final published story as we find it, makes it external to the text and as such, impossible to predict if we are only going to look at the story before us.
was not left out by accident, and assuming that such an important element would not be left out in error, it follows that it was deliberate. The reader is left wondering at the motive of the husband's suicide in 'An Indian Camp', or the identity of the cat in 'Cat in the Rain' because both are deliberately omitted from the text.

The kind of omissions that can be 'found' throughout In Our Time in the handful of stories which I shall analyse, omit a central element in the narrative, the presence of which is implied by that narrative. In the introduction, I alluded to the work of Seymour Chatman and his theory of narrative 'kernels' as being an essential element in a narrative, without which it would be a necessarily different narrative. In light of this, I argue that Hemingway omits narrative kernels. He points us towards their non-existence through implication: the reader interprets the story as missing a vital 'clue' that would help resolve textual ambiguity. It is as if the reader understands that certain key problems raised by the text could be resolved if the writer would only include some 'clue', or direction as to how they might be interpreted. The reader, instead of dismissing the literature as a nonsense which cannot be resolved, finds that there are certain gaps — narrative kernels omitted — that would help resolve the narrative should they be found. This is achieved either by drawing the reader's attention to them without explicit statement; or because an expectation is aroused in the reader which is unfulfilled by the text. By omitting narrative kernels Hemingway sought to create interpretative equivocation in his stories. The reader does not have enough information to resolve the competing interpretations created by omission. His story 'Cat in the Rain' is a supreme example of this technique.
Omission in ‘Cat in the Rain’

‘Cat in the Rain’ creates interpretative equivocation by deliberately omitting the identity of a central element and fills the ‘gap’ left by its omission with a flexible symbol that is highly suggestive. In this story, ‘the American wife’ (who remains nameless) notices a cat caught in the rain and is determined to rescue it. When the cat has disappeared, she is disappointed and tells the maid that she ‘wanted a kitty’. At the story’s end, the maid reappears, holding a ‘big tortoise-shell’ cat, under instruction from the padrone to give it to the American wife. Offering the cat provides one type of conclusion: she wanted a cat and has been given one. But as readers we might feel this conclusion unsatisfactory. This arises because we are unsure whether the cat given to her is the one she originally wanted to rescue. By extending the symbolic function of the cat, it might be considered that the cat represents in this context her desire for happiness in spite of current dissatisfaction. The narrative, then, is not ‘about’ the identity of the cat, but about the happiness or otherwise of the woman.

Less becomes more through the direct omission of a pivotal narrative element, here, the cat’s identity. But the identity of the cat, that is the narrative kernel, has been deliberately omitted. ‘Cat in the Rain’ appears to possess a plot of resolution (she gets the cat) when in fact it is a plot of revelation (we do not know which one it is).

Hemingway creates what appears to be a traditional realist story – with a chronological plot, apparent cause and effect, and an emphasis on the material world – and then thwarts the expectations of the reader by refusing to remain determinate upon a crucial element, and in so doing unsettles the reader’s expectations that the story will be clearly resolved.
Had Hemingway continued the story just a moment or two longer, or made the cat she is given the same as that which she desires, he would perhaps offer answers to the questions raised by the text. Instead, the text obstinately remains unspecific, with even the title avoiding a particular; it is simply ‘Cat in the Rain’. The use of a variety of different stylistic elements – the absence of figurative language; ‘realistic’ use of narrative time; a seemingly denotative, ‘uncommitted’ style; the third-person absent narrator and the malleable narrative perspective – all converge to remove the potential for the narrative to explain itself. As such, the story is a determined attempt at equivocation through omission.108

Such omission stimulates symbolic polyvalency; the identity of the cat is so equivocal, that the reader may provide several readings of its symbolic value. It may, for example, be a symbol for the kind of comfortable bourgeois security that the wife desires. These desires are explicitly stated later in the story; for longer hair, for silver on her dining table, desires to which her husband appears indifferent. The cat may even represent a displaced desire for a child. The whole of Hemingway’s enterprise as described in this chapter, from the role of elements such as the objective, non-judgemental narrator, to the suggestive power of his connotative language, through to his theory of omission are present in this example.

108 For a study of indeterminacy in another, although very different ‘minimalist’ writer, Samuel Beckett, see M. Perloff Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1999).
The result is one of obstinate equivocation, leaving the reader unable to clearly resolve the meaning, given the variety of competing suggestive, interpretative choices.\textsuperscript{109}

As with 'Cat in the Rain', many stories use omission at their end, reflecting the modern short story's unwillingness to be resolved, and more particularly anticipates Carver's interest in the thwarted epiphanic ending. The end of a short story provides the opportunity to answer any questions raised by the narrative and to help clarify any ambiguity. Conversely, it can also been seen as an opportunity to equivocate strongly. Indeed, we might say that it is because we expect the narrative to be resolved that makes possible its equivocation and Hemingway subverts what had become typical reading patterns to encourage active reader interpretation.

One modernist theory of the open, unresolved story ending is that it more accurately reflects reality. Traditionally, the short story neatly collected the narrative problems at its end and resolved them. In this model, the implication is that our lives are neatly divided into sections for which there are a discrete, identifiable significance. Writers of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century began to question this and one notable example is Katherine Mansfield, whose 'slight' narratives (by which I mean that they often had circumscribed plots, or focused upon seemingly minor happenings) were defiantly inconclusive and established new directions in short story narratives. For writers like

\textsuperscript{109} Scholars are not exempt from interpretative equivocation and as readers they, too, provide a variety of sometimes incompatible interpretations. Carlos Baker claims there is only one cat, and so there is no question of its identity: '[The cat] is finally sent up to her by the kindly old inn-keeper'. John V. Hagopian (quoted in Furst, pp. 148) disagrees: 'It is not clear whether this is the same cat as the one the wife had seen from the window – probably not'. In the absence of its identity, it becomes symbolic: [The cat] is an obvious symbol for a child'. David Lodge is critical of the methodology that Hagopian's interpretation presupposes. On the question of the cat as a symbol, he claims: 'It would be a mistake, therefore, to look for a single clue [...] to the meaning of 'Cat in the Rain'. See Furst, pp. 148-153.
Mansfield, the boundaries of those apparent sections dissipate to leave something more like a process, where endings and beginnings merely dissolve into one another. Such an idea underpins James Joyce’s use of the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique, and especially that of Molly Bloom’s soliloquy in *Ulysses*, where process was as important as result.

If the writer’s ambition is to begin to express reality, then he or she must reflect this in the structure of their work. Perhaps the most significant was the rejection of a closed ending and its replacement with an unfinished, incomplete and ambiguous story ending. However, some critics have gone further and suggest that the open ending reflects not just any reality, but more specifically the reality of the 20th century. In Hemingway’s case, the open, incomplete story was a reflection of isolation, disillusionment and on-going struggle. This was a series of attributes that go towards a definition of the modern literary situation following the destruction of the First World War and its subsequent diasporas. In this sense, Hemingway was a spokesman for what has become known as the ‘Lost Generation’, a term coined by Gertrude Stein to refer to a group of Americans in Europe, at the end of the First World War but more generally applied to a group of writers and artists, disillusioned by the senselessness of the Great War and hostile to the morals and mores of Victorians.

So complete was the ambiguity, and so incongruous was the reading experience with the seemingly straightforward, declarative style, that Hemingway confounded many of his earliest critics by employing the open, incomplete story ending in *In Our*

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110 For an analysis of this aspect, see H. E. Bates *The Modern Short Story* (London: Methuen, 1941).
None of the stories printed in this collection offer a closed ending, the kind of which we find in such ‘traditional’ stories as ‘The Lady of the Tiger’ by Frank Stockton, ‘The Gift of the Magi’ by O. Henry or ‘The Necklace’ by Guy de Maupassant. These stories with their dependence on the ‘shock’ of the dénouement that closes them are extreme examples but illustrate the tendency to resolve a story clearly. ‘Gift of Magi’ for example, tells the story of a young man called Jim who sells his pocket watch to buy hair combs for his partner Della. More or less simultaneously, she sells her hair to buy a chain for his watch. This extract follows shortly after Jim has seen his combs useless, as Della cut her hair:

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

[...]

“Dell,” said he, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ‘em awhile. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

Carlos Baker provides an exchange which clarifies how even the most seemingly perspicacious critics may have missed the point: ‘During one of the colloquies of Dean Gauss, [F. Scott] Fitzgerald, and Hemingway in the summer of 1925, ‘Big Two Hearted River’ came up for consideration. [...] Half in fun, half in seriousness, they now accused him of ‘having written a story in which nothing happened’, with the result that it was ‘lacking in human interest’. Hemingway, Dean Gauss continued, ‘countered by insisting that we were just ordinary book reviewers and hadn’t even taken the trouble to find out what he had been trying to do’. See Baker, pp. 45-47.

Hemingway had abandoned the ironic coincidences that closed many of his juvenile short stories in *In Our Time*, found in such juvenilia as ‘Judgment of Manitou’ and ‘Sepi Jingan’.

The story ends after a brief commentary by the narrator in which he praises the notion, put simply, that it is the 'thought that counts' when offering gifts. Their life goes on but the episode is finished and it has been given an interpretative closure, rather like a musical coda. Let us turn back now to the ending of the first part of 'A Big Two-Hearted River':

Out through the front of the tent he watched the glow of the fire, when the night wind blew on it. It was a quiet night. The swamp was perfectly quiet. Nick stretched under the blanket comfortably. A mosquito hummed close to his ear. Nick sat up and lit a match. The mosquito was on the canvas, over his head. Nick moved the match quickly up to it. The mosquito made a satisfactory hiss in the flame. The match went out. Nick lay down again under the blanket. He turned on his side and shut his eyes. He was sleepy. He felt sleep coming. He curled up under the blanket and went to sleep. (150)

This is a sophisticated mix of what we might call a satisfactory and unsatisfactory ending. This is a satisfactory ending because it provides a readily recognisable point of thematic and linguistic closure. We have seen previously how repetition operates in Hemingway's short fiction. Here, in repeating the word 'sleep' and its derivatives, emphasises its importance. Hemingway is using repetition as a device for insistence, or emphasis, following Stein. Patterns of repetition have the effect of creating expectation in the reader. At the end of this story, the effect is ambivalent. On the one hand, the repetition creates a rhythm that we expect to continue, but which is abruptly cut off with the very word that is repeated. The story ends in spite of our expectations; the rhythm is cut short, the conflict unresolved. But by using repetition to create
expectation, the story’s end suggests that Nick’s process of coming to terms with his problems is unfinished for him if not for us.

If our minds are poised in anticipation, then so is the story. Our reading of the final paragraph of short, simple sentences, which create a rhythm culminating in the chant of ‘sleep’, creates a linguistic echo of the end of the story. Nick’s story is unfinished in the literal sense that this is the end of the first part of a two-part story. Further, the repetition of ‘sleep’ resonates with Nick’s repeated, ritualistic behaviour found elsewhere in the story. In the careful, measured and precise descriptions of Nick trekking through the woods, making his camp or eating, the mantra of ‘sleep’ reminds us of the harmony Nick shares with the natural world. Sleep, like death or the return of something lost, are traditional signposts of the end of a short story. Nick’s untroubled falling to sleep prompts us to recognise that this chapter, at least, is closed, if not the story complete.

The ways in which this story does not adhere to the conventional structuring of the short story is illustrative here. In a simplistic model of conventional short story structures, the initial exposition gives way to a conflict that is finally resolved, whereupon the denouement makes clear exactly how that resolution might be interpreted. \(^{114}\) In the example of, ‘The Gift of the Magi’ the narrative is resolved when each learns of their actions, and the narrative problems created are thus

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\(^{114}\) For a sophisticated approach to the short story ending and structure see Chapter Five, ‘Getting out of the Short Story’ in S. Lohafer (1983)
resolved. However, Hemingway’s stories reject the conflict/resolution model because either the conflict is unclear, the resolution unsatisfactory, or both.

The absence of character motive undermines the reader’s ability to readily distinguish exactly where the conflict exists. In ‘A Big Two-Hearted River’ the reader is uncertain as to exactly why Nick finds himself in the woods, other than he feels an anxiety which his surroundings seem to placate. With a further reading – and based upon an interpretation which is never completely verified by the absent narrator – the reader might interpret the conflict as such: Nick Adams must encounter and overcome those psychological scars left by his experiences in the war. But the grounds for conflict are unclear: the war is never mentioned. However, the evidence is not to be found in the story, but in a previous interchapter. In the preceding interchapter, ‘Chapter VI’ (‘Nick sat against the wall’), the vignette tells of an injury suffered during a battle. The following vignette, ‘Chapter VII’, may provide some continuity. Again, a soldier has been injured and pleads with God to save his life. The story that follows, ‘Soldier’s Home’, tells of Krebs, who finds the readjustment to life after WWI difficult. Carlos Baker suggests persuasively that this is Nick Adams in all but name. The connection for the reader, however, is undermined by omission – here, as in ‘Cat in the Rain’ – by the clear stating of identity. The reader is left to assume, not resolve, the connection between the interchapters and the main stories.

But how is that conflict expressed in the story? What is it that Nick must overcome? Hemingway transforms the source of Nick’s anxiety into a symbol, once again

removed from its literal meaning. The memory of the war is expressed as a swamp, and the conflict is between clear flowing water and the swamp. If the river represents something like the familiar, former life, of redemption, clarity and replenishment, then the swamp is something other, a dark, strange place which represents in its murky, dangerous waters the hitherto unexplored regions of Nick’s damaged psyche. By literally moving through the swamp, Nick can overcome his fears, but as the story ends, only the possibility of navigating them remains. By expressing the conflict in symbols that cannot possess motivation — the clear water, the swamp — Hemingway’s ambition has been find a sophisticated structure for human anxiety that undermines conventional patterns of short story telling. The minimalist ambition towards reduction can be equally found in the omission of vital components of conventional short story structuring as it can be in its paring down of stylistic elements.

Omission and Equivocation

In the examples above, I have demonstrated the central aim of omission, i.e. to resist closure and refute the convention of resolving conflict. But omission is not peculiar to Hemingway, nor to minimalist writing. Katherine Mansfield did not write in a recognisably minimalist style but in some stories omission was a central part of her methodology. The longer short story, ‘Prelude’ contains a series of omissions, whose qualities and characteristics can be compared with that of Hemingway’s. The central omission in ‘Prelude’ is an explicit statement that Stanley and Beryl are having an affair. It is an omission because its existence is implied throughout the narrative by suggestive clues, which present the reader with a series of questions the text fails to resolve. An early introduction to the notion that Stanley and Beryl might have a more intimate relationship than is explicitly stated occurs when the family sits down to eat
following their recent house move. Stanley, Linda’s husband and Beryl, her sister, eat together while Linda sits alone by the fire. When asked by Stanley if she will join them she replies: ‘“The very thought of it is enough.” She raised one eyebrow in the way she had’. At this stage it is far from apparent that her lack of appetite means anything more than Linda’s evident isolation. The ‘it’ that she cannot bear to think about is potentially ambivalent: it may refer to the food, in which case she has no appetite; or it may express her knowledge of her isolation in the face of a growing intimate relationship between them, the thought of which is understandably distressing. Moreover, by raising her eyebrow she is performing a gesture that is traditionally representative of suspicion.

The key difference is the role it plays in the strategy of the author. In Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River’, the omission is not ‘known’ to Nick because he is a character in the story. Although the idea of omission is analogous to his feelings about what has happened to him, the omission is from the structure of the narrative, the excision of one of the central elements in the plot. In Mansfield’s omission, it is known by the characters.

It points to a flaw in their character, as a product of a moral ambivalence and uncertainty about self-identity. One part of the ambivalence is often left unsaid, and affects relationships even though it is not explicitly stated until quite late in the story. Linda considers the ‘hatred’ which she feels for Stanley, ‘just as real as the rest’ of her feelings: ‘She could have done her feelings up in little packets and given them to

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Stanley'. Similarly, Beryl understands that she is ambivalent in her behaviour with men, by referring to her ‘false’ self:

She even kept [playing the guitar] up for Stanley’s benefit. Only last night when he was reading the paper her false self had stood beside him and leaned against his shoulder on purpose. Hadn’t she put her hand over his, pointing out something so that she could see how white her hand was over his brown one.

How despicable! Despicable! ¹¹⁸

What is omitted here is a state of affairs created by flaws in characters. Its denouement is explicit and complete: we finally know about the nature of the omission because the narrative tells us explicitly. In both respects, this differs from the omission employed by Hemingway. Here, the omission is part of the sequence of important narrative elements which are never resolved by explicit confirmation.

In the case of ‘Cat in the Rain’, the interpretative gap can never be closed, unlike ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ in which our understanding of the Nick’s personal history and the ‘clues’ implied by the text help fill the omission:

He could not remember which way he made coffee. [...] He remembered now that this was Hopkins’ way. He had once argued

¹¹⁷ Davin, p. 77.
¹¹⁸ Davin, p. 81.
about everything with Hopkins. [...] They had never saw Hopkins again. That was a long time ago on the Black River. (149-150)

That these stories are fragments of experience is evident in the irresolution. But it is also in evidence from their antecedents. Causality is omitted in 'An Indian Camp', 'Soldier's Home' and 'A Big Two-Hearted River'. In 'Indian Camp', the motive for the suicide of the husband of the woman in labour is uncertain. We know that the war acts as a determining factor in 'Soldier's Home', but we are led to believe that something more specific has happened to Krebs to cause the apparent hostile behaviour. Finally, we are more certain that war is the cause of Nick Adams' distress in 'A Big Two-Hearted River'. The burnt town of Seney and the personal tragedy resonant in the remembrances of his lost friend Hopkins all point towards the war as a significant cause for Nick's trauma. However, as in 'Indian Camp', a clear sense of causation is deliberately omitted. The young Nick Adams makes explicit the implied reader's questioning of his motive:

'Why did he kill himself, Daddy?'

'I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess.' (44)

The father's ambivalence is intriguing, rather than conclusion, although the notion that life is unendurable might certainly have resonance for the young Nick. Yet the question of motive remains, even if shifted why he could not stand things, and is one to which Hemingway is careful to not to give any straightforward answers. We are asked to interrogate the narrative to find evidence of why the man might have killed
himself. As we presume his motive might have been formed before the narrative begins, we are only left with the ‘traces’ of his intent as they appear within the text. One ‘trace’ is that the husband might have been shamed by his injury, or he feels useless by it, or through some link to the birth of the child. Hemingway invites the reader to invert the normal process of interpretation by investigating not what comes after the story but what comes before. He does this by drawing our attention to the cause of the central character’s predicament. His narratives beg the question of why these characters behave the way they do, what has happened and how did they end up like this? Presented with the effects of their behaviour, the implied reader is encouraged to find a central determining factor. In doing so, Hemingway provides a compelling reason for the reader to actively participate in the text by interrogating not only what comes after, but what might have come before.

Hemingway’s theory of omission demonstrates the emergent minimalist aesthetic at the core of his writing. It is a crystallisation of the minimalist aesthetic to pare down and to affect by suggestion without explicit commentary. It is, therefore, the most prominent example of how *In Our Time* invites the reader to respond in a way qualitatively different from the conventional short story. In minimalist omission that which is unwritten assumes a central part in the narrative.
CHAPTER TWO

Minimalism and Literary History:

Bridging the Gap from Hemingway to Carver

This chapter shifts its focus towards a discussion of the place of minimalist works within literary history. By doing so, I hope to suggest answers to many of the questions asked at the beginning of this thesis, including: 'where does minimalism come from?', and 'what is its relationship with realism?'; and suggest ways in which the minimalist approach might be valued within literary history in general and specifically within American letters.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part addresses Hemingway’s place within literary history by suggesting how In Our Time is both traditional and modernist; and through a discussion of its relationship to literary realism. The second part attempts to suggest what happened to minimalism during the fifty one years between the publication of In Our Time in 1925 and Raymond Carver’s Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? in 1976. Finally, it ends by contextualising Carver’s work, and by introducing Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?
Part One: Modernism and Tradition in *In Our Time*

One of the important questions about minimalist writing is 'where does minimalism come from?' I hope to have suggested some answers to those questions in the opening section of Chapter One, regarding the influences of journalism, literary figures and biography upon Hemingway's minimalist writing. Now, I will consider how *In Our Time* might be contextualised within literary history, and more specifically, as a product of both modernism and tradition.

This contextualisation is difficult, and answering where minimalism comes from is no small matter. It has implications for how minimalism is read, and it might be considered another way in which minimalism remains complex, because it is more difficult to pin down what kind of writing it is. I suggest that the difficulty in classifying *In Our Time* within a literary-historical period undermines the efficiency of the interpretative process and so helps undermine the certainty with which its interpretations might be resolved. This difficulty I see as partially the result of *In Our Time*'s relationship between tradition and modernism.¹

Gertrude Stein summarised the dual tendency in Hemingway's work to be both modern and traditional with her remark that: 'Hemingway looks like a modern but he smells of the museums'.² At once assimilating and rejecting the traditions of the past, in sometimes extremely sophisticated ways, *In Our Time* resists a fixed label.

Hemingway's contemporary reviews cite several examples of confusion of the early

¹ See T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929). He concluded that the only way to make new art was to possess a detailed sense of tradition.

reader of *In Our Time*, in which the stories were criticised for not closing the plot, or for their paucity of characterisation, criticisms which continue today. ³

*Modernism: Experimentation and the Interchapters*

Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1925) was published during a high water mark of literary modernism. Works such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), the poetry of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (*The Waste Land*, 1922) and Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) helped revolutionise modern literature.

The short story was irrevocably affected by the enormous transformations that took place, but its identity within literary history was already problematised by its ambivalent relationship with its traditions. The idea that tradition and modernism could co-exist can be demonstrated by the publication of two very different works published within ten years of one another, O’Henry’s *Cabbages and Kings* (1904) and Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914). *Cabbages and Kings* retained many of the elements of the traditional short story or tale found in the 19th century, such as the anecdotal tone, linear structure which has strong emphasis on a resolved plot and a faith in a cohesive, realist representation.

Conversely, *Dubliners* demonstrated a more modern aesthetic, which moved towards a representation of fragmented, personal experience, in which plot was secondary to mood and which created significance through the careful patterning of detail. This

duality continued throughout the twentieth century, albeit transposed to a contemporary milieu. William Faulkner's highly personalised, mythic realm can be found alongside Hemingway's sparse, naturalistic expression; Eudora Welty's hallucinatory landscape, possessed by unconscious dreams and desires sits alongside Katherine Anne Porter's Joycean exploration of consciousness, dreams and memory; Flannery O'Connor's moral parables of the rural South are in contrast to John Cheever's realistic evocation of modern, urban middle classes. Their affinities with tradition and modernism are not, of course, as clear and faithful as these brief comparisons suggest; but the implication that the influence of tradition and modernism simultaneously persists in the short story genre remains persuasive, and informs the notion of how tradition and modernism could co-exist within In Our Time.

In his analysis of the language of modernist fiction, David Lodge outlines four defining elements of modern fiction. 'First', he claims, 'it is experimental or innovative in form, exhibiting marked deviations from existing modes of discourse'. One of the most striking and immediate indicators of modernist experimentation can be found in the use of the interchapters that are positioned in between the longer stories of In Our Time. Their inclusion complicates an already demanding collection because it introduces an element of discontinuity into the movement from one story to another, whilst inviting the reader to make connections between the sometimes dissonant interchapters and the collection as a whole. Paradoxically, this discontinuity is a product of their common ground. The interchapters of In Our Time often expand the focus of their interest to encompass a more distanced perspective, one which is

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4 Bradbury, p. 481.
less concerned with a detailed examination of specific lives, and functions more as context for the longer stories in-between which they rest.

Hemingway acknowledged this idea in his letters, in which he claimed that their positioning was deliberate and carefully calculated.⁵

Finished the book of 14 stories with a chapter on [of] *In Our Time*

[the vignettes of *in our time*] in between each story – that is the way they were meant to go – to give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail. Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it with 15X binoculars. Or rather, maybe, looking at it and then going in and living it – and then coming out and looking at it again.⁶

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⁵ This visual metaphor is expressed several times throughout *In Our Time*. For example, in a story that was deemed too offensive for inclusion in *In Our Time* and was omitted at the request of the publisher, ‘Up In Michigan’:

From Smith’s back door Liz could see ore barges way out in the lake going toward Boyne City. When she looked at them they didn’t seem to be moving at all but if she went in and dried some more dishes then came out again they would be out of sight beyond the point. (6)

Later, a similar idea appears near the end of the collection in ‘Big Two-Hearted River’:

He could hardly see them [the blue hills], faint and far away in the heat-light over the plain. If he looked too steadily they were gone. But if he only half-looked they were there, the far-off hills in the height of land. (144-145)

This alternating shift in distancing can be found throughout. For example, in ‘Chapter VII’, a soldier prays that he might be saved from the bombardment:

While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. (85)

The interchapter provides a more distanced perspective than the stories that accompany it because it provides a geographical context of Fossalta, as well as suggestive of longer chronological duration in the idea of bombardment and stretching of time from the final ‘never told anybody’. It focuses upon one component, the prayers of the terrified solider, who significantly remains nameless: this is one, presumably of many. This movement from the particular to the general can be found elsewhere in the interchapters. For example, in , ‘Chapter V’, six cabinet ministers are executed by firing squad. They remain nameless and exemplary of a larger movement suggestive of painful death:

There were pools of water in the courtyard. There were wet dead leaves on the paving of the courtyard. It rained hard. (69)

The rain, like the snow of Joyce’s ‘The Dead’, expands beyond the local to suggest something of more universal application. The subject of that expansion is death, where the ministers’ execution is rekindled by the phrase ‘wet dead leaves’, bonding rain with death, which in turn culminates in ‘It rained hard’: death, like the rain,
encompasses all in this bitter, savage world. If the interchapters 'give the whole', then the longer stories fulfil their promise to '[examine] in detail'. In the case of 'Chapter VII', the short interchapter is followed by 'Soldier's Home', a story about the effects of the war upon an injured soldier. Now named Krebs (and not Nick Adams, who left to fight), we find a comparatively detailed account of his attempts to come to terms with his experiences in a world which is ostensibly peaceful, but which is increasingly indifferent to his and others veterans' experience:

By the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late. [...] There had been a great deal of hysteria. Now the reaction had set in. (87)

The story continues with the difficulties of returning to his family, and deciding upon his future. It is a personal story, one which speaks of the experiences of a single man and his own unique situation, in the way that the evacuation of Thrace, the execution of six ministers and the prayers of an unnamed soldier speak of a more wide-ranging context.

The notion of one text directly informing another within a single collection aspires to sophistication normally found in the relationships between chapters in a novel. The stories are not merely discrete fictional objects to be overcome through closed interpretation, but exist within a framework of meaning, where meaning in one translates and is affected by meaning within another. In this way, Hemingway avoids
an interpretative cul-de-sac often found in the short story, the kind of which we find in traditional tales with their resolved endings. Moreover, it is the quality of the connections between each story that leave a trace, rather than an outline; a whisper, rather than a shout. In doing so, the relationships between interchapters and the short stories are configured in such a way that they hint at possible connections without making them completely clear. Once again, it is for the reader to decide how significant their connections are, if at all.

The Interchapters and the Meditation upon Violence
A focus upon a series of interchapters with a shared theme provides an illustration of how form creates interpretative equivocation, and how Hemingway’s minimalism was a reaction to a tradition of violence as sensational, hyperbolic and even desirable in all its grotesqueness.

The interchapters share a thematic interest, a meditation upon violence. This meditation can be divided into three forms. In the first section from Chapters I-VII it focuses upon war and its effects; the second, upon bullfighting, from Chapters IX to XIV; and the third, that of violence crime, which can be found in Chapters VIII and XV. Violence is expressed differently in these interchapters.

‘Chapter I’ does not include an actual act of violence, but its focus upon the war and its debilitating effects on the combatants are prophetic of the explicit depiction of

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7 ‘L’Envoi’, the final interchapter, is a special case, because it suggests a synthesis of the thematic concerns which divide the interchapters: war and crime.
violent war found in subsequent interchapters. Champagne takes on a cruel irony when one considers the historical background to the campaign. ‘Chapter II’ shifts its emphasis to the aftermath of war, but it is not until ‘Chapter III’ that the violence of war is directly expressed. Chapters ‘III’ and ‘IV’ share a similar situation. Both refer to ‘potting’ and sniping of enemy soldiers, in the first as they came over the wall and in the second as they attempt to climb a barricade. The idea of killing a soldier by ‘potting’ him is suggestive of the mechanical way in which modern warfare might dispense with the enemy, without dignity and heroism, and with terrifying ease. In both cases one soldier follows another to their death, as if on a production line. Almost as shocking is the delight in which the narrator accepts their fate. For him, their death can be welcomed without remorse because war has pitted them against one another until death. The subtle shift from surprise in “Chapter III’: ‘We shot them. They all came just like that’(51) to relish in ‘Chapter IV’: ‘It was an absolutely perfect obstacle [...] We were frightfully put out when we heard the flank had gone, and we had to fall back’(57). Man has become the enemy of man, and his mannered tones reflects the transition: ‘frightfully put out’ seems a particularly strained and artificial idiom when referring to the obstacle as a trap to kill another man, and is more suited to the trapping and killing of an animal. Moreover, the emphasis remains upon themselves, and all thoughts for their fellow man has vanished: the word ‘we’ is repeated several times in this short sentence, becoming almost incantatory. War strips humans of their humanity, not just those on the battlefield but the world over. The First World War brought violent death to the lives of millions around the world in ways unimaginable at the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the horrors of

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8 As E. R. Hagemann points out, Champagne was not the favoured wine, but a battle in which the French suffered huge numbers of casualties during a frontal assault of German offensives in 1915, in Benson, p. 193.
Boer and Crimea wars. Many critics of modernism have attempted to demonstrate how the mood of optimism following the turn of the century was shattered by the War, of which Hemingway’s *In Our Time* was specifically emblematic.

What is significant here is that the origins of the war were no longer attributed to a supernatural force of evil, but that they began and ended with man, found here in modern, mechanised warfare. This could be contrasted to the Gothic idea that men were consumed by an evil which must be overcome. In Edgar Allen Poe’s fiction, like many others of the time, violence was a product of the evil that permeated the universe, a supernatural force that led men to unnatural acts. In a memorable metaphor, Poe uses the narrator’s observation of the House of Usher to represent such a source:

> I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of the soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than the after-dream of the reveller upon opium.⁹

Considering Hemingway’s representation of violence in relation to Poe’s, the violence of the stories – the swinging blade in ‘Pit and the Pendulum’, the vengeful murder in ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ and great fire of ‘Hop-Frog’ are expressed with a

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hyperbole that borders upon sensationalism. Here, the tortured dwarf of 'Hop-Frog' takes his revenge upon the court by burning it down:

Owing to the high combustibility of both flax and the tar to which it adhered, the dwarf had scarcely made an end of his brief speech before the work of vengeance was complete. The eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous and indistinguishable mass.¹⁰

The grotesque spectacle is meant to provide a fitting end to a court that has in turn persecuted the dwarf and his companion and the reader is invited to condone the vengeful act. Hemingway self-consciously moved away from this exaggerated form of expression, noting in his metaphor that: ‘Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over’.¹¹ In other words, fiction which focused upon the horrors of violence were no longer appropriate following the war; sensationalism was obscene:

The kid came out and hid to kill five bulls because you can’t have more than three matadors, and the last bull he was so tired he couldn’t get the sword in. He tried five times and the crowd was quiet because it made a good bull and it looked like him or the bull and then he finally made it. He sat down in the sand and puked [...] (99)

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¹⁰ Galloway, p. 376.
Throughout *In Our Time*, death is expressed with understatement, distance and without hyperbole yet it retains a clarity and focus that confronts its horrors: Dr. Adams rolls the Indian over in 'Indian Camp' to find he has quietly cut his own throat; the soldiers of the interchapters 'pot' their enemies; a cabinet minister, sick with typhoid, is shot as he sits. In the example above, the spectacle and glamour of the bullfight is inverted to show how pathetic, distasteful and savage it can be. As in the tales of Poe, in *In Our Time* death is everywhere but it is nowhere found to be expressed with overstated melodrama.

Rather, the extremes of violence in *In Our Time* demonstrate how the minimalist principle towards understatement may have developed. In particular, the high ideals of chivalry, honour and grace upon the battlefield were no longer appropriate following the development of mechanised warfare, which included the first wholesale use of poison gas and the armoured tank. Hemingway recognised as such in his war novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Following a faltering conversation with an ally about losing the war, the narrator Frederick Henry ponders on those words which are now uncomfortably ill-suited to his experience of the war:

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain. [...] Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates.\(^\text{12}\)

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As those ideals of glory, honour and courage were eroded by the experiences of modern warfare, they had no currency. The fiction writer needed a new vocabulary in order to express the horror of war and the social fragmentation of its aftermath. The reduced vocabulary of the minimalist style was in part developed as a response to the loss of faith in idealised concepts such as honour, courage and glory, following the atrocity of the First World War. What replaced them were not only the names of streets, towns and rivers but silence: the narrator begins by saying nothing in the example above. The idea of silence is foregrounded as an important element in expression and becomes not merely a phenomenon that appears when nothing else does, but an element which can be consciously and deliberately included. Indeed, silence, understatement's logical conclusion, helps inform the definition of the minimalist theory of omission. Throughout In Our Time there are examples where silence seems the only possible reaction by its characters; what can be said in the face of such events? In 'The End of Something', Nick cannot speak to Majorie until pressed and even then he remains inarticulate; in 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife', Dr. Adams can only react to Dick Boulton's threats with silence, as he turns and walks home; when the psychologically and physically scarred Nick Adams finds himself in the forest alone in 'Big Two-Hearted River', he finds regeneration in the woods: 'His voice sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again.' (148). Hemingway echoes the feeling for many of his modernist contemporaries that an anti-heroic treatment of war was the best idiom for expressing its horrors. Yet hope is not lost and silence does not inculcate nothingness. Wing Biddlebum from the story 'Hands' from Anderson's Winesberg, Ohio, falls victim to the loud, brash false accusations of immature voices. When words fail him, he lives in silence and replaces those empty, false words with something more suggestive, tender and yet equally
powerful: ‘The nervous expressive fingers [...] might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary’.13

Short Story Cycles and Tradition
In this section I want to suggest that another significant structural strategy is evidence of a more traditional influence of In Our Time. The short story differs fundamentally from the novel in that it offers a complete and unified aesthetic experience because it can, unlike the novel, be read at one sitting. The idea of unity has a long tradition in the short story, and was at the centre of Edgar Allen Poe’s definition. Aligned to the unity of experience that the form offers, Poe claimed that the writer of the short story should: ‘[...] conceive, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out’.14 The method should be equally united to this aim: ‘In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design’.15

The short story cycle offers the writer the opportunity to retain that sense of unity in single stories whilst developing themes and ideas across several, interrelated stories. This is precisely the effect found in the structuring of In Our Time. Here, the stories adhere to the single effect that Poe describes and each can be read independently of the others in the collection. However, some stories – and particularly those towards the end, such as ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ – make more sense if read in the light of previous stories, where a personal history of the character has already been established. This is particularly true of Nick Adams,

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15 Allen, p. 11.
and in many senses, the collection can be read as his *bildungsroman*. The grouping of several short stories through internal linking or external framing has a long tradition in the short story.

The *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* are structured around the external framing device of collections of oral anecdotes told for a purpose, in the latter example as part of a contest, all on interconnected themes for each different day. Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, with its interconnected Arthurian stories, represents an example of internal linking, where the stories contain a common thread, such as a theme, or the reappearance of the same character. These short story cycles have a modern counterpart in Anderson’s *Winesberg, Ohio*, whose setting in time and place are constant throughout and in which characters appear more than once, albeit transitorily. Hemingway had, in his apprenticeship, produced a series of sketches which resembled the cyclical characteristics of *Winesberg, Ohio*, as well as containing many of its themes. In November 1919, he began work on what went on to become his ‘Crossroads’ sketches.\(^\text{16}\) They were ordinary sketches of ordinary people, based upon real inhabitants of his home of Oak Park:

Old Man Hurd has a face that looks indecent. He hasn’t any whiskers, and his chin kind of slinks in and his eyes are red rimmed and watery, and the edges of his nostrils are always red and raw. (763)

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\(^\text{16}\) The ‘Crossroads’ sketches are reprinted in Fenton (1995) pp. 762-765
The focus upon a single character for each sketch resembles Anderson’s method, and in his collection the story titles include the names of the characters they focus on. The stories’ interest in unexceptional lives and their aspiration towards a plainer diction gave stimulus to Hemingway’s development. Indeed, it was a watershed when one considers them in relation to the usually young, usually heroic ‘outsiders’ from stories written about the same time, such as ‘Punk Alford’ and ‘The Ash Heel’s Tendon’. However, they do not retain a sense of interdependence which would become so important to the interchapters of In Our Time to which they are so obviously a precursor. In a sense, that reflected Anderson’s structure. Although connected by place, there was little to suggest to the reader that this relationship had a significant function that was highly revealing, other than a convenient principle under which he could collect his stories.

James Joyce’s Dubliners, in which the location once again remains constant, is another example of such continuity. Hemingway read Dubliners in manuscript and the notion of a thematically connected and structurally unified collection of stories would further create an impression upon him. Dubliners is an interesting example because the stories do not share a temporal continuity or many of the same characters, yet the sustained focus upon Dublin and its metaphorical paralysing effect bring the stories together in a way that suggest they are part of a cycle. What is apparent from reading Dubliners is the way in which the short story cycle connects seemingly disparate events and ideas through the shared focus of Dublin, which in turn is a metaphor for disconnection, growing unease and, paradoxically, hope. The collection is not just set in Dublin, it is about Dublin. This idea culminates in the snow of ‘The Dead’, that framing device which connects those stories that have come before. Hemingway was
to develop the idea of the cycle, but rejected the notion of connecting place or time. Rather, his stories are connected through the development of a single character. The repeated appearance of the Nick Adams in several of the stories aspires to the kind of character development normally associated with the novel. The ‘Nick Adams’ stories are arranged chronologically, and chart Nick’s progress from childhood to a man confronting his fears, having been wounded literally and emotionally during the war. In the first story, ‘Indian Camp’, Nick is a small boy who ‘[...] felt quite sure that he would never die’ (44). In ‘The End of Something’ it appears that he has aged as he breaks off a romantic relationship, a separation which occupies his thoughts in following story, ‘The Three-Day Blow’ and marks the beginning of the transition from childhood to adulthood which culminates in the ‘rites of passage’ story, ‘The Battler’ which follows it. Nick is now absent from the stories until he reappears in ‘Cross-Country Snow’ but he continues to appear in the interchapters. ‘Chapter VI’ details Nick’s injuries during the war, during which he sits against the wall of the church having been hit in the spine. Although the character of ‘Chapter VII’ is unnamed, the reader is left in little doubt that it is Nick Adams because the story focuses upon the next stage in the event we have witnessed in a previous vignette, as he prays for his survival during a artillery shelling. Nick’s reappearance occurs six stories along in ‘Cross-Country Snow’ and the claim that: ‘I can’t telemark with my leg’ (122) reminds us of the injuries he has sustained. In his final appearance, Nick attempts to come to terms with those injuries, both physical and mental, he sustained during the war in ‘Big Two-Hearted River’.

17 Hemingway was to write several other Nick Adams stories after In Our Time, both those in which he is explicitly named such as ‘The Killers’ and those in which his identity is arguably implicit, such as ‘Hills Like White Elephants’. The stories have been collected as The Nick Adams Stories in 1972 with a preface from the Hemingway critic, Philip Young. See Fenton (1995), pp. xiv-xv.
The short story cycle is a traditional strategy found since Chaucer, and makes a reappearance in its modern form in the notable examples of *Dubliners* and *In Our Time*. The latter represents the development of a single consciousness over a period of time. Some critics, and in particular Deborah Moggach, have concluded that Nick’s consciousness is the central unifying principle of the work.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, in a passage added to ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ and later rejected by Hemingway, Nick Adams tells us that he was the writer of many of the stories in the collection. As David Lodge notes, modernist writing can be defined in terms of its interest in the accurate portrayal of consciousness, the inner lives of its characters.\(^\text{19}\) By focusing upon the psychic life of Nick Adams, Hemingway was transforming the traditional mode of the short story cycle, just as Anderson had with *Winesberg, Ohio* and Joyce had with *Dubliners*. *In Our Time* was a modernist experiment in expressing the consciousness of a character over time. For the reader, this meant that a series of often very short stories would expand to encompass several years and thus broaden the scope of what might appear localised, particular events. The short story cycle was integral to our understanding of *In Our Time* as a modernist work that attempts to draw the reader into making connections between specific events, just as the interchapters did.

*Realism and In Our Time*

One of the most fruitful ways of examining the development of Hemingway’s minimalist style is through a discussion of its relationship with realism. Realism was the dominant mode of discourse in the American and European novel of the latter

\(^{18}\) Benson, pp. 17-33.

\(^{19}\) Bradbury, p. 481.
19th century but it was not until stories like Herman Melville’s ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’ that the short story began to adopt realism in a more sustained manner.\textsuperscript{20} Even then, this story still retained a sense of romantic mystery associated with the traditional tale and which was not typically found in the realistic novel. Bartleby reappears despite the best efforts of his employer. Eventually, his constant presence threatens the very sanity of the employer, who invests in Bartleby an almost supernatural significance.

Literary realism is difficult to define not least because at least one of the key premises upon which it rests — that there is an observable, knowable ‘reality’ — is equally contentious. Yet, the possibility that fiction can somehow represent reality is a common consideration for authors and readers, as it was to Hemingway: the title \textit{In Our Time} reflects his interest in offering a critique of his contemporary world. In his preface to the second edition of \textit{Therese Raquin}, Emile Zola outlines a ‘naturalist’ method, an extension of realism’s ambition to capture reality with fidelity in both an adherence to an unadorned form and a focus upon the everyday. Naturalism narrows the focus of realism by aspiring to a ‘surgical’ dissection of contemporary society combined with an equally clinical vocabulary:

I hope that by now it is becoming clear that my object has been first and foremost a scientific one. [...] I had only one desire: given a highly-sexed man and an unsatisfied woman [...] then thrown them

\textsuperscript{20} For a history of realism in the short story, see C. May \textit{Reality in the Modern Short Story} (Style: Fall 1993, Vol. 27 Issue 3, p. 369) and C. May \textit{The Short Story: The Reality of Artifice} (New York: Routledge, 2002).
together in a violent drama and note down with scrupulous care the sensations and actions of these creatures. I simply applied to two living bodies the analytical methods that surgeons apply to corpses.\textsuperscript{21}

Initially, Hemingway's minimalist style of \textit{In Our Time} fulfils many of the criteria set by what is known as the correspondence model of Zola's naturalism, which begins with the premise that reality is knowable and so can therefore be expressed:

\begin{quote}
[The correspondence theory] involves a naïve or common-sense belief in the reality of the external world [...] and believes that we may come to know this world by observation and comparison.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

In the first instance, realism has been defined by the representation of this reality with fidelity. The following extract from 'Soldier's Home' demonstrates how Hemingway was a realist in this respect:

Before Krebs went away to the war he had never been allowed to drive the family motor car. His father was in the real estate business and always wanted the car to be at his command when he required it to take clients out into the country to show them a piece of farm property. The car always stood outside the First National Bank

\textsuperscript{22} D. Grant \textit{Realism} (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 9.
Building where his father had an office on the second floor. Now, after the war, it was still the same car. (88)

Krebs and his father are fictional characters but their behaviour is in keeping with our understanding of human behaviour: they act like real people. That Krebs has travelled and 'went away to the war' and his father wants to keep his car nearby in case it was needed are plausible rather than fantastic events. Moreover, the passage gestures towards elements which exist in external, knowable, concrete reality. These include the war, the motor car and jobs in real estate. The story’s locale is representative of the kind of locations the reader might readily recognise as components of external reality, especially in the first quarter of the twentieth century in the USA. The passage begins and ends with a reference to time and the notion that elements of the narrative exist within time are realist traits. Representations of real events, people, objects that apply by the realistic rules of existing through time and of cause and effect are indicators that, in terms of the correspondence theory, Hemingway’s *In Our Time* was realist literature.

Hemingway attempted to forge a style which would express life with authenticity and without using 'tricks', or gimmicks of literary style. Roman Jakobson developed his theory of realism by claiming that it had specific linguistic properties. In his study of Hemingway’s modernism, David Lodge quotes Jakobson on the relationship between this method and realism:
Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting of place and time. He is fond of synecdochic detail.  

The following example, from 'A Very Short Story' demonstrates how this definition of realist discourse can be applied to the stories of In Our Time:

One hot evening in Padua they carried him up to the top of the roof and he could look down out over the top of the town. There were chimney swifts in the sky. After a while it got dark and the search-lights came out. The others went down and took bottles with them. He and Luz could hear them below on the balcony. Luz sat on the bed. She was cool and fresh in the hot night.

Luz stayed on night duty for three months. (83)

In the first of Jakobson’s observations, the digression from the plot to ‘atmosphere’ appears to alternate: they carry the presumably wounded figure up to the rooftops to look over the top of the town (plot); shortly after the sky becomes dark and the search-lights appear (atmosphere); the others went down and took bottles and that he

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and Luz could hear them (plot); Luz is described as ‘cool and fresh’ (atmosphere); finally, Luz stays on duty for three months (plot).

The second set of relationships described by Jakobson, the movement from characters to the setting in space and time, is equally evident in this extract. However, the process is reversed: ‘Padua’ appears as the setting long before the passage introduces the ‘others’ who go down and finally the couple. Having established the characters and place, the narrative turns once again to a reference to setting. This is made by reference to the time, where ‘Luz stayed on night duty for three months’. Finally, the passage fulfils the syndeochal tendency to which Jakobson refers. The town of Padua is represented by the town, the town by the houses, and the houses by the ‘chimney swifts’. This patterning occurs frequently in Hemingway’s *In Our Time*.

Jakobson’s theory implies that realist fiction could partially be defined by its mode of discourse, a mode which is dependent upon the relationships between contiguities, as outlined above. This extract demonstrates that Hemingway’s minimalist style, with its initial tendency to declare, follows this model. In this respect, *In Our Time* can be defined as realist because it attempts to represent the ‘real world’ through an innovative stylistic medium.

However, there are limitations to this realistic mode of discourse. Hemingway found that the experiences he underwent in Italy could not be easily expressed by conventional realist strategies, a difficulty faced by Kreb’s in ‘Soldier’s Home’.
Indeed, Krebs’ dilemma provides a fictional model for Hemingway’s theory of the inadequacy of naturalistic discourse:

Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. (87)

The ‘lies’ that he invented meant that a realistic transcription of events was no longer appropriate for a reader, either because they had tired of their repetition or because their compassion had been diminished. The text alerts the reader to these lies, too (‘he had to lie’) in order to make his dilemma appear more feasible, and to foreground the notion that factual accuracy was necessarily the premise for realistic reportage. In

24 Reynolds notes that at the conclusion of his lecture circuit in front of the entire Oak Park High School student body, Hemingway added new details to his heroic deeds. See Reynolds, p. 57:

“One man near [Hemingway] whose leg had been shattered was crying openly, calling his mother’s name. Lieutenant Hemingway told him with characteristic Yankee repression to ‘Shut up with that noise.’” Waiting for the stretcher bearers to arrive, “He threw away his revolver, the temptation to finish the job was so acute.”

Hemingway augments this account by adding “Then I did the only brave thing I did in the whole war – I told them to take the other guys first.” (Reynolds, p. 57). In his story he was elevated to a First Lieutenant in the Italian Army, fighting in three major battles. None of this was true. Nor was the claim that Hemingway would have carried a pistol – Red Cross men, delivering chocolate and cigars to men at the front, were not issued revolvers. Reynolds notes: ‘The pain had been true, real and deep; now the audience knew, from the fictive revolver, just how deep’ (Reynolds, p. 57).
other words, the realist mode of discourse was neither 'new' enough nor useful for expressing the kind of experiences that Hemingway wanted to express.

Hemingway now had assumed his contemporary modernist's belief that the power of art, and more specifically fiction, could transcend a factual or 'naturalistic' account to create a literature that was, in his words, 'truer than anything true' — or, more likely to recreate the experience in his readers. (This was a tension he found in attempting to make his journalism profound and memorable, as I have shown above, which for a younger Hemingway seemed an oxymoron.) This idea is best expressed as a reaction against the psychological expression in 19th century tale, again represented by Poe. Here, that limitation is found in the notion that it remains difficult for more general patterns of significance to emerge from the basis of the behaviour of a single character. Hemingway's ambition was to transcend the specificity of 'reportage', of which realistic characterisation is an example. This idea can readily be found within his fiction. In 'Big Two-Hearted River', Nick notices that the grasshoppers he finds along his path are not ones he recognises. Rather, they are coloured black:

As he walked along the road, climbing, he had started many grasshoppers from the dust. [...] These were just ordinary hoppers, but all a sooty black in color. [...] Now [...] he realized that they had all turned black from living in the burned-over land. He realized that the fire must have come the year before [...] He wondered how long they would stay that way. (145)
The grasshoppers, like the swamp of the story, are described realistically by Hemingway. However, here they deviate from the norm of coloured with ‘yellow and black or red and black wings’ that Nick recognises by being burnt black. In doing so, they are not simply an innocently descriptive element but become symbolic of the destruction of the war, especially when one considers them in the light of the blackened town of Seney detailed at the opening of the story. The process of transformation from realistic detail to symbol function can be seen here. Hemingway applied the combination of naturalism and symbolism in his characterisation, and as such provides an interesting contrast with pre-20th century literature. In the romance tale, for example, the characterisation did not aspire to roundness, sophistication or realism (in the sense of verisimilitude). Most characters were archetypes, Princes or Knights, Serfs or Villains, whose characterisation was merely an extension of the plot. Charles May makes the distinction between this idea and that held by the new short story.  

In the older, pre-nineteenth-century romance form, character was clearly a function of plot, and plot itself was a symbol of the psychological, metaphysical, and moral mysteries of universal human experience. [...] Whereas the old romance story says, ‘this is the way people are,’ the new realistic story says, ‘this is the way people act.’

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25 Stein offered an interesting example of this traditional form characterisation when she attempted to create stereotypes. She says of her study The Making of Americans that she wanted to: ‘[... ] make a description of every kind of human being until I could know by these variations how everybody was to be known’ (C. Fenton, p. 155). The approach was pseudo-scientific, permeated with the modernist’s trust in a systematic method and reflected the contemporary interest in personality types and consequent behaviour. Stein adapted it for her own ends and suggested Hemingway use it, too.

Many of the stories of Edgar Allen Poe are examples of the romance form of characterisation in that central characters are conduits of Poe's theories of psychology: he is telling us that 'this is the way people are'. In this example, that theory is of 'perverseness' which he outlines in the essay/story 'The Imp of the Perverse' but it is better expressed in application, during one of his most famous tales, 'The Black Cat'. Here, the narrator defines 'perverseness' as that 'spirit' which makes us do what we know to be wrong, simply because we know as such:

Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgement, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such? 27

The narrator thus hangs his beloved cat, ' [...] because I knew it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence'. 28 What is at question here is not the sophistication of Poe's psychological theories in comparison to Freud's (although one might reasonably conduct that argument) but how Poe's theories dominate his method of characterisation. In 'The Black Cat' and elsewhere, the central character is merely a conduit for the theory. Accordingly, his actions cohere to the 'single effect' of Poe's intentions, to outline, demonstrate and prove his theory of 'perverseness'. Hemingway's characterisation would not offer so complete and explicit indication of their mental state. Rather, he would, along with his predecessor Chekhov, seek to find a method that could combine his interest in naturalist descriptive 'authenticity' and

27 Galloway, p. 322.
28 Galloway, pp. 322 - 323.
the evocation of mood. Both Hemingway and Chekhov were interested in action independent of motivation, an important aspect of Barthelme’s work, as I shall demonstrate later in this thesis.

Chekhov’s style shares several similarities with that of Hemingway. It is simple to the point of innocence, stripped of any verbosity, with a limited vocabulary and structurally uncomplicated and often shorter sentences. Like Hemingway’s, Chekhov’s stories can be characterised as possessing slight narratives with little or no overt action. Where incident occurs, it may appear trivial or coincidental, although it is often weighted with huge significance. For example, the cabby of ‘Heartache’ fails to make an impression upon his customers with news of his son’s death. In the final scene, he is found telling his news to his horse, a scene which on the surface appears slight but which through careful rendering reveals the incommunicable nature of grief. As a result of what appears to be such impoverished narratives, demands are placed upon the reader to fulfil the stories’ potential. It may be that major events or climaxes are not explicitly stated, with the reader supplying them instead. Often, the stories lack a clear, authoritative narrative voice which in turns diminishes authorial judgement. In some cases, this takes the form of multiple voices offering equally valid opinions, such as the magistrate and accused in ‘The Malefactor’. Here, the two sides argue about the legality and morality of the theft of several bolts from the railway lines, used by the accused for fishing. Each offers a persuasive argument, until Chekhov finishes with the subtle hint that although illegal, the theft might be practically and morally innocuous.
One of Chekhov's central contributions to the development of the modern short story was the evocation of a character's state of mind. In this, Chekhov was influenced by symbolism. Symbolism, especially that found in works of French poets such as Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud was a reaction against the dominant forms of realism and naturalism. Significantly, the symbolist poets attempted to recreate experience in the reader through their poetry. More specifically, it was against the more 'objective' descriptive tendencies that culminated in the aspiration to objectivity found in the work of the Parnassian movement. Conversely, symbolists valued suggestion, implication and evocation above the aspiration towards detachment and symbolism had at its basis the notion that the personal mood or experience of the poet could be recreated in the reader through language. Symbolism exercised influence over several of the leading figures of modernism, including Pound, Joyce, Eliot and Woolf.

Chekhov's aspiration towards detachment meant that the narrator should not provide a commentary on how his characters might feel. Rather, he sought to find an objective equivalent to their subjective state, a selection of concrete details that would recreate the experience of character without recourse to authorial intervention. In the case of the story 'Misery' (1886) and variously translated as 'Heartache' or 'Lament', the structuring of Iano's various conversations objectify a complex emotional response. Iano is the driver of a horse-drawn cab who begins the story waiting to take a fare. His strong need to discuss the recent death of his son soon asserts itself but his faltering lament is met with indifference by his first customer. Similarly, the three young men who comprise his second fare are equally unsympathetic: they chide him for not being quick enough and one strikes him on the neck. As Iona attempts to tell them more
about his son’s death, they arrive at their destination and quickly depart before he can tell them. Understanding that his attempts to communicate his grief have failed, he resorts to tell his uncomprehending horse, a monologue which barely begins as the story ends. Chekhov creates in Iona a sense of the incommunicable nature of grief through the structure of three conversations. The first two develop an increasingly unresponsive attitude to his loss as a result of rejection: his customers could listen if they wanted, but they choose not to. In the first instance, this is because the customer lacks sufficient sympathy: ‘Iona] looks at the officer several times, but the latter keeps his eyes closed and is apparently indisposed to listen’. 29 In the second case, the ‘revellers’ are too absorbed by their quarrelling and desire to get to their destination to be interested in Iona’s grief. When Iona attempts to tell them, the hunchback replies fatalistically: ‘We shall all die’. 30 The final example of speech is a monologue, which ends with the projection that: ‘Iona is carried away and tells her everything’. 31 It would appear that Iona could articulate his grief when given the opportunity but because he tells his story to an uncomprehending horse, his monologue only serves to reinforce the idea that grief is incommunicable, even if those words can be found to begin to express it. ‘Misery’ expresses the idea that grief is incommunicable through the accretion of detail within the assembled framework of conversations. Grief is thus aligned to Hemingway’s notions of honour, courage and duty, ideas which have largely lost meaning since the War.

29 A. Yarmolinsky (ed.) The Portable Chekhov (New York: Penguin, 1975), p.120.
30 Yarmolinsky, p. 122.
31 Yarmolinsky, p. 125.
As such, Hemingway shares Chekhov’s interest in finding a selection of objective elements through which he can express a character’s emotional life, a life that does not easily lend itself to explicit and direct expression.

Katherine Mansfield’s story ‘The Fly’ (1923) is also thematically interested in the nature of grief and shares with ‘Misery’ its expression through selected concrete details. Like ‘Misery’ the narrator remains firmly detached and does not provide a direct evaluation of the boss’s mental state. Rather, this is suggested in a typically Chekhovian way through the seemingly trivial conversation with his old acquaintance and the manner in which the boss toys with the fly before killing it. Like ‘Misery’, ‘The Fly’ uses objective, concrete detail to communicate complex states of feeling. The key difference with this story is its reliance upon a single symbol as the focus of interpretation. ‘The Fly’ invests its expression of the boss’s inner reality through the single symbol of the fly. As a result, the meaning of this story hinges upon its interpretation:

The last blot fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the dragged fly lay in it and did not stir. [...] The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste-paper basket. But such a feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened.  

Variously, the killing and disposal of the fly might represent several possibilities: the deliberate cessation of grief by the boss; furthermore, its cruel death might signify that

life has become less important for the boss, not more, following his son’s death; finally, it might suggest that its literal drowning is a metaphor for the ways in which the boss figuratively ‘drowned’ his son by attempting to manipulate his life, as he does with his employees. In each case, the emotional state of the boss is expressed through a specific concrete detail which is ostensibly unrelated to his personal difficulties and so is ‘objective’ in that it is seemingly detached. However, as the example shows, his recognition that he was ‘positively frightened’ links his emotional life with the death of fly. This story works not so much upon the configuration of events, as in the ‘Misery’ example, but the tension is instead channelled through the symbol of the fly.

Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ possesses a thematic concern with grief but is notable for the deliberate overt omission of the cause of that grief. In some senses, this omission is suggestive, therefore, of more than one cause of grief, as the reader is left to find clues as to its cause. Nick grieves for himself, as he has become shattered by his experiences during the war and like the trout which becomes ‘tightened’ as he faces the stream, so: ‘Nick’s heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling.’ (144). This explicit link (in ‘tightened’) makes clear the link between the real world of objective observation and a character’s inner feelings. Nick has to face his past in order to overcome his distress. One cause of such anxiety is the loss of comrades, one of which he remembers when he makes coffee: ‘They never saw Hopkins again. That was a long time ago on the Black River’. Like the blackened town of Seney and the sooty-coloured grasshoppers, the river is evocative of the death and destruction which war brings. There exists a combination of the techniques of Chekhov and Mansfield. The idea of black is, of course, an ancient symbol with which light is normally opposed to suggest the battle between evil and goodness. But
something more is suggested by the repetition of the word: black means the war and its destruction and by locating his friend Hopkins within the environment of the black river. The text is inviting the reader to apply that symbolic value to the present example but without explicit instruction. As a result, the reader may feel that Hopkins has been lost during the war because the text directs the reader there through the structuring of similar ideas. The result is a product of the symbolic use of the term ‘black’ but is also a product of its configuration within the story. As it appears, it assumes a role that the reader must subsequently recognise in order to make sense the narrative, following Hemingway’s deliberate omission. In doing so, the story expands beyond personal significance to represent the grief for what became known as ‘the lost generation’, those whom found life difficult following the First World War. In each case, the symbolic function of black co-exists with its naturalistic function. Hemingway’s plausible symbols are always in-keeping with their realistic function. As such, this represents an example of his ambition to marry the specific requirements of a realistic discourse with a symbolic function. As David Lodge notes:

What Hemingway learned from his exposure to modernist literary theory and practice and from his own trials and errors in those crucial Paris years, was to refine and complicate the basic devices of vernacular narration so as to give his writing something of the magical, incantatory quality of symbolist poetry, without losing the effect of sincerity, authenticity, of ‘the way it was’ – in short, to combine realism and modernism in a single style.33

33 Lodge, p. 158.
The shift in characterisation necessarily leads to a transformation in the ways through which the reader must come to understand the character. Indeed, this shift often causes problems for readers. The problem of whether the minimalist style creates sophisticated, realistic characters is often expressed in terms of the ways in which they address the world through the things they say and do, given we have little access to what their inner feelings are from a limited omniscient narrator. It is felt that because the reader is not informed of how the characters are feeling directly by the narrator (as they are in the extreme example of Poe’s thesis of the ‘pervasive’) then they must somehow be flat and psychologically impoverished. I would counter this by arguing that they are flat if the criteria for successful representation of character is solely dependent upon the narrator for providing a psychological assessment. This would be akin to reading the characters of modern fiction with a traditional perspective. Modern literature called for new ways of reading, as the example of characterisation shows. This is one of the principles upon which this study rests: that the minimalist approach to writing was especially demanding for the reader.

Realism as Reader-Created
The notion that any account was incomplete, informed the ways in which Hemingway represented reality in his fiction. Rather than appeal to a referential model by describing objects with fidelity, Hemingway sought to recreate the structures of experience in his fiction. This is akin to the modernist tendency to create a structure in fiction that reveals more than it resolves. Here, this meant in practice the use of ‘open’ endings, where interpretative equivocation replaces the ‘closed’, resolved endings. The idea was that this kind of open, unresolved conclusion was closer to the ways in which ‘actual’ life was lived. Life, according to this model, was not composed of the
kind of discrete components about which one could readily come to a fixed, conclusive interpretation. Rather, as exemplified by such stories as Virginia Woolf’s modernist ‘Kew Gardens’, it was more faithfully represented by a continuum in which one impression connects with another and about which no final conclusions might be made. By including omissions as part of his theory of writing, Hemingway was alive to the potential to recreate the structure of the ‘new’ theory of modern experience as something that was incomplete and fragmentary. As he came to know through his journalism, any account is necessarily incomplete. By emphasising this idea of partiality through omitting vitals elements of a plot, he drew attention to this fact and to the process by which we come to make sense of the world. Here, we can locate the missing element in ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ by creating relationships with other elements. So, we come to know about Nick’s cause of anguish – the war – by examining what we find in that story, as well as his personal history in the interchapters.

Furthermore, the concept of showing not telling, established through the use of the absent narrator and suggestive language, is analogous to the process by which we confront the world. There is no narrative voice which tells us how to interpret what we find before us. In this way, we can call Hemingway’s minimalist style realistic because it more accurately represents in terms of its theory of knowledge the process by which we confront the world and especially through the way character is represented. Kim Herzinger is speaking about Minimalist writers, but the idea could equally be applied to Hemingway:
The reader of 'minimalist' fiction is being asked to face the characters in the story the way we face people in the real world, people who do not – in my experience at least – ordinarily declare their personal histories, political and moral attitudes, or psychological conditions for my profit or understanding.34

Hemingway omits a central explanatory element of realist discourse – cause and/or motive – and in doing so, attempts to create a convention more attuned to the norms of social interaction: like Hemingway's description of his characters, we are not (often) privy to a 'personal history' upon meeting someone. This was a deliberate strategy. In the example from 'Soldier's Home' of the office building discussed above, representation was not confined to a fidelity in the description of objects such as the car, or the building. Rather, it reflected universal natural laws, such as cause and effect. Hemingway often deliberately omits cause or motive from his stories, noting that he wanted to write a story about war with no mention of the war in it, which he did in 'Big Two-Hearted River'. By omitting cause, it would appear that he rejects one of the elements that make his fiction realistic. But this is illusory, because by omitting the cause only serves to emphasis it; its absence means the reader must somehow renegotiate with the textual evidence to help reinstate it as a presence or more precisely, they must fill the gaps left by omission. The reader must look for it and in doing so, must recreate it. That part which has been omitted, the war, becomes more real because the reader has created it themselves. This was entirely in keeping with Hemingway's desire to prompt his readers to consider and re-evaluate the role of the war in everyday life, a notable theme of A Farewell to Arms.

34 Herzinger, p. 17.
It is this creation of interpretative equivocation that is the heart of his realism. Here, we are reminded of Iser’s assertion that it is that which we make ourselves that appears to us as more real. If our sense of reality is ultimately our own making, then any text that is partially our creation is therefore realistic to us. Literary minimalism, which creates such interpretative equivocation through its practice of omission (in ways that texts which do not depend upon omission do not) is realistic because we, the reader, have recreated in our own terms; it is realistic because the reader has imposed their individual consciousness upon it as if they recreated it for themselves. Realism, in this sense, is not a convention for more accurately expressing the contemporary reality, an objective reality expressed in an objective matter separate from the text and present in the concept of a knowable, external reality: it is the preserve of the individual consciousness, the subjective response to that external reality. It is also very much an emotional reality, given that Hemingway was intent on recreating emotional truths that might be at odds with their representation in external reality. As such, the external response - the interpretation - represents the realism of the text, not the text to which it is intended.
Part Two: Bridging the Gap from Hemingway to Carver
This part aims to address two areas. First, to suggest what happened to minimalism during the period of publication of *In Our Time* in 1925 and the publication of Raymond Carver’s *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* in 1976. Second, it attempts to contextualised Carver and his work to help position him in minimalism’s literary historical development, and in so doing introduce his work. I’ve shown how important it is to understand the origins and developments of the minimalist style for Hemingway and now I attempt, albeit more briefly, to do the same for Carver.

The Hemingway Legacy
Outside of minimalism, Hemingway’s influence upon literature has been immense and well documented. Scott Donaldson in his essay ‘Hemingway and Fame’ argues that Hemingway’s ‘fame’ is as much a product of the man as the fiction, passed through the media-machine that hungers for news and sensationalism.\(^{35}\) Hemingway’s flirtation with Hollywood, his several marriages, and his well-known propensity for ‘heroic’ pursuits such as big-game hunting and deep-sea fishing, earned him a reputation that was part a creation of his writing, part a creation of the man. Bloom suggests that the man and his work fuse to create something larger than the sum of their parts:

> The final effect of the work and the life together is not less than mythological [...] Hemingway now is myth, and so is permanent

as an image of American heroism, or perhaps more ruefully the American illusion of heroism. 36

Such a legacy was widespread as it was pervasive. In one such example, Jeffrey Meyers notes the influence upon genre fiction:

Hemingway’s life and work, which taught a generation of men to speak in stoical accents, had a profound influence on a school of hard-boiled writers – Chandler, Hammett, Cain, Caldwell, Farrell, O’ Hara, Algren, Shaw, Jones, Kerouac – who were affected not only by his style and technique, but by his violent content and heroic code. 37

He adds several names to the list which might be included within the canon of major American writers, including Norman Mailer, whose noteworthy story ‘The Time of Her Time’: ‘would be inconceivable without Hemingway’. 38 Hemingway’s style seemed so well-suited to an expression of his generation, that it became viewed as the pre-eminent modern literary style, a point made by Matthew Stewart in his study of In Our Time:

Any present-day difficulties in identifying the importance of Hemingway’s influence can be attributed to the fact that he has been subsumed into the literary culture. Rather than being seen

as an imposing or, at least, prominent feature on the literary landscape, his work is subject to being taken by uninformed contemporary readers as 'natural', as the way good fiction writers write.\textsuperscript{39}

Paradoxically, Hemingway’s style was considered so innovative and successful that several writers were concerned that their work might absorb and reflect it and as a result, it may well appear unoriginal and disappointing in comparison. One such writer is John Cheever, who is quoted in Scott Donaldson’s biography as saying that Hemingway, along with Faulkner and Fitzgerald, was a strong influence. One of the early manuscripts for a novel, for example, is rejected because of its close resemblance to Hemingway’s style:

He has started a novel at Yaddo [...] but now Cowley [editor] had read the completed chapters of this novel [...] and found them disappointing. They read too much like stories, Cowley thought, each chapter reaching a dead end. And they sounded too much like Hemingway – particularly the Hemingway of ‘Cross Country Snow’ – both in style and theme.\textsuperscript{40}

Rejecting the idiom of Hemingway, but acknowledging his debt, Cheever is one of several writers that help bridge the gap between Hemingway and Carver. In his


stories, there is genuine sense of the wider social world whilst they remain focussed, on the whole, with domestic matters.

John Cheever and Domestic Desperation
Cheever represents a movement away from an interest in the more extreme themes and locations of Hemingway towards an interest in the domestic lives of those living in moderately affluent suburban America. This focus on an interest in interpersonal domestic relationship acts as a precursor to Carver, who was similarly interested, although his work focused upon the working-class lives of men and women, often in dire circumstances.

One of his more notable stories, ‘The Swimmer’ (1964), focuses upon the tension between the pacifying nature of middle-class suburbia and the sometimes torrid emotional lives of his characters.

He had been swimming and now he was breathing deeply, stertorously as if he could gulp into his lungs the components of that moment, the heat of the sun, the intenseness of his pleasure.41

There are several dissimilarities with the minimalist style here, including the inclusion of complex words, the longer sentences, and the intrusive narrator’s commentary, and I do not suggest that his work is minimalist. However, it does act as thematic link to Carver, a writer who also rejected Hemingway’s style and subject. In Cheever’s story,

the protagonist Neddy Merrill discovers during his swim that: '[... ] by taking a dogleg to the southwest he could reach his home by water'. And so he begins his journey towards his home and his wife and children by visiting the swimming pools of friends' houses along the way. He is described as feeling 'clean' as he swam, and it appears it has a redemptive effect upon his emotional life, not unlike the cool clear waters of 'The Big Two-Hearted River' for Nick Adams.

Yet as he swims from one garden to the next he appears increasingly desperate, evident from a series of nuanced comments, inflections and subtle references that undermine his initial promise. One of those is the advance of an impending storm, expressed as: 'The stand of cumulus cloud – that city – had risen and darkened' which anticipates the desperate ending that will follow. The tension again is between the redemptive quality of the waters and the oppression of the city, which threatens his 'natural' equilibrium. As he swims, he meets the owners' of the various swimming pools, ostensibly his friends. One owner tells him she is terribly sorry to hear of his misfortunes, which he denies:

‘My misfortunes?’ Ned asked. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Why, we heard that you’d sold the house and that your poor children…’

‘I don’t recall having sold the house,’ Ned said, ‘and the girls are all at home.’

42 Cheever, p. 777.
43 Cheever, p. 778.
44 Cheever, p. 784.
In the final passage, having swum through the suburbs, the forces of the thunderstorm have destroyed part of his house and he returns home to find the gutter hanging across the front of the door:

The place was dark. [...] The house was locked, and he thought the stupid cook or the stupid maid must have locked the place up until he remembered that it must have been sometime since they employed a maid or a cook. He shouted, pounded on the door, tried to force it with his shoulder, and then, looking at the windows, saw that the place was empty.45

My interest in this story, and Cheever more generally, is the focus upon the domestic lives of modern Americans as a valid subject for serious literary writing. It seems Hemingway scoffed at Mr and Mrs Eliott’s attempts at conception and domestic matters – such as the wife’s dissatisfaction in ‘Cat in the Rain’ – might be considered equally trivial. There is an element in Hemingway that saw the writing of domestic scenes as intrinsically ‘unmanly’ and unfit for a subject of serious fiction. This was not always the case and in later stories like ‘Hills Like White Elephants’, Hemingway explored the emotional lives of two young people caught in a domestic human dilemma.

In ‘The Swimmer’ we find many of Carver’s areas of interest pre-figured. Ned represents the kind of protagonist found in some of Carver’s early writings, as someone who has been robbed of their self-determination as a result of a domestic

45 Cheever, p. 788.
upheaval. Ned, too, feels the pressure of his peers to conform and succeed, as do so many of Carver’s failing characters, especially in terms of their material success. Moreover, there exists a tension between what the character knows and what they can reveal to themselves and Ned’s denial of his troubles is a precursor to Carver’s bewildered, inarticulate and un-self-conscious ‘anti-heroes’. In essence, Carver rejects the themes and areas of interest of Hemingway’s writing in favour of the kind of focus upon everyday, domestic issues found in Cheever, whilst allowing himself to be influenced by Hemingway’s style. Indeed, the relationship between Carver and Hemingway remained strong and it is to this ‘influence’ that I now turn.

*Hemingway’s ‘Influence’ on Carver*

Several studies of minimalism or minimalist writers include Hemingway as a defining influence on Minimalism but stop short of suggesting that his work is minimalist. In one sense, this is entirely understandable. In its common literary currency, Minimalism refers to a loosely collected group of writers from America of the 1970s to the present day. As such, Hemingway would be excluded on historical grounds. But there are many other reasons while critics are reluctant to compare the writers in any significant way. Jay McInerney summarises some of these concerns in his comparison of Hemingway with Raymond Carver, a writer more readily associated with the Minimalist group:


47 As I make clear in my introduction, minimalism as an aesthetic and Minimalism as a phenomenon might be fairly distinguished by the specific use of an initial capital letter: as an aesthetic, with a small ‘m’ and, as phenomenon with an initial capital ‘M’.
Encountering Carver’s fiction in the early 1970s was a transforming experience for many writers of my generation, an experience perhaps comparable to discovering Hemingway’s sentences in the 20s. In fact, Carver’s language was unmistakably like Hemingway’s – the simplicity and clarity, the repetitions, the nearly conversational rhythms, the precision of physical description. But Carver completely disposed of the romantic egoism that made the Hemingway idiom such an awkward model for other writers in the late 20th century.  

What McInerney calls Hemingway’s ‘romantic egoism’ is largely responsible for the rift between his writing and that of those with whom he shares so much in common. As a result, analysis of Hemingway’s connection with Minimalism is largely incomplete, and is often dismissed as being evident in only a few elements of style: the short sentence, the repetitions, and so on. But there is more to minimalism that merely a writing style, and more to understand regarding the connection between Hemingway and Minimalist writers. Minimalism is underpinned by particular methods, practices and principles, which create their own implications and effects. Through an analysis of these effects, I suggest ways in which Hemingway’s work might be more fairly compared to writers normally associated with Minimalism, such as Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme.

It is worth noting that Hemingway and Carver’s lives overlap, and Hemingway was still writing shortly before the conception of Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?

Although Hemingway's critical reputation fluctuated during his lifetime, even just shortly before his death in 1962 he was still an immensely powerful force in American letters. Indeed, his works still attracted both popular and critical attention late in his career, although many were considered to be weaker than his early output. Following his death a handful of notable posthumous publications were approved, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964) and *Islands in the Stream* (1970) and many of his manuscripts became available for scholarly analysis for the first time. Collectively, this means that Hemingway the writer continued to be a strong presence — even after his death — in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, those who might be tempted to assimilate his style might have been put off by the fact that they were competing with the 'real thing'.

Of the several figures who occupy Raymond Carver studies, Hemingway appears frequently as a source of comparison and influence. Indeed, throughout Carver scholarship there are many comparisons made between these two figures, both implicit and explicit. Several critics have pointed out that the very title of Carver's collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* is evocative of the plea made by the girl in Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants?' to her partner: 'Would you please

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49 Notable exceptions include the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which was followed in less than two years by his award of the Nobel Prize in 1954.

50 Although I am discussing minimalism as expressed within the American short story, it has become commonplace in other countries. For its appearance in French literature see Warren Motte's excellent study, *W. Motte Small Worlds: Minimalism in French Literature* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). See also A. Wanner *Russian Minimalism: From the Prose Poem to the Anti-Story (Studies in Russian Literature and Theory)* (Northwestern University Press, 2003) for a study of minimalism in Russian form, which has a particular and atypical definition of minimalism.

51 There have been several articles which focus upon direct comparisons with the work of Carver and Hemingway, for example Graham Clarke's comparison of Carver's 'Pastoral' and Hemingway's 'Big Two-Hearted River'; see "Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence." in G. Clark (ed.) *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature Since 1970* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), pp. 107-111.
please please please please please please stop talking?".\(^{52}\) Raymond Carver's widow Tess Gallagher, in her introduction to *Furious Seasons*, notes that the early Carver story 'The Aficionados' was a parody of Hemingway and is a story to which I shall shortly turn. At twenty-four, Carver had, she felt, never seen a bullfight: ' [...] except in Hemingway's fiction'.\(^{53}\)

There are more extended comparisons made in some of the full-length studies on Carver. Of these Adam Meyer makes the most of the connection between Carver and Hemingway.\(^{54}\) His analysis extends to individual story comparisons, including an analysis of an early story 'Pastoral' found in *Furious Seasons* which he calls: ' [...] perhaps the most Hemingwayesque piece of all his works'.\(^{55}\) Comparing it to Hemingway's 'Big Two-Hearted River', he quotes William Stull's consideration that: ' [...] following Hemingway's practice, Carver shapes the story as an 'iceberg', its marital conflict seven-eighths submerged'.\(^{56}\) In a more recent discussion, the critic Cynthia Hallett draws a comparison between Hemingway's and Carver's work in a paper delivered at a Hemingway conference. She notes, amongst other things, that


\(^{55}\) Meyer, p. 81.

\(^{56}\) Meyer, p. 81.
their work was similar in that they: ' [...] communicate by indirection, suggesting much by saying little'.

Despite their similarities, critics seem equally aware of their great differences. I have already drawn attention to writer Jay McInerney's work. Accepting the similarities of style, McInerney goes on to suggest that Hemingway's 'romantic idiom' made such an awkward model for writers in the late 20th century. John Aldridge, in his account of contemporary American literature, demonstrates through several readings the great disparity in effect, range and method that lies between them, consistently favouring Hemingway. Carver himself may have, either consciously or otherwise, encouraged comparison, despite his claim that although he has read and enjoyed Hemingway, he would not consider him an influence whilst recognising the similarities in their work. Yet Carver's admiration for Hemingway's writing, if not the man, comes through in his review of two Hemingway biographies. More generally, it is easy to see why any writer would try to minimise the extent to which his or her work is influenced by the work of another.

Finally, Hemingway's work itself makes a brief cameo appearance in the story 'Night School', where 'the other woman' of the pair whom the narrator picks up in a bar,

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says: "I'd like to read Hemingway and things like that [but her teacher] has us reading stories like in Reader's Digest". One of the ways in which Carver and Hemingway can be usefully compared is through their relationship to their contemporary world and especially their attitudes towards women. Hemingway has long been vilified by feminist critics for his treatment of women. In Our Time is no exception. Women are either absent ('A Big Two-Hearted River'); are weak and changeable ('Mr and Mrs Elliot'); or their desires are seen as fickle and trivial ('Cat in the Rain'). Hemingway was partly a product of his culture, which possessed hegemonic patriarchal attitudes especially towards women. Carver, too, is a product of his culture, and hence his stories bear witness to feminism, which has influenced his attitude toward women. As we shall see, Carver held a more enlightened position and if not ideal, represented a positive movement towards a more inclusive set of beliefs. Yet, his stories are permeated with marital conflict and irreconcilable relationship difficulties. More generally, Carver more fully embraced the domestic, everyday world, and it is to a context of his work I now turn.

Carver in Literary History
In this part, I would like to more precisely place the work of Carver in minimalism's history by looking at his historical and publishing context. I also explore the relationship between his work and creative writing programmes. This context is necessary because it develops a more refined sense of where literary minimalism

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63 I want to divorce minimalism from the kind of hard-drinking, womanising machismo that Hemingway has (sometimes erroneously, others justifiably) been associated with.
stood in the 1970s, and suggests some of the reasons why it developed into contemporary Minimalism.

Several critics, including John Aldridge, have bemoaned the idea that Minimalist writers do not actively engage with wider social and political issues:

[Thus,] in their isolation from the larger social issues of their time and their apparent blindness to their environment, these writers seem, on the evidence of their work, to be left with one essential subject, the personal life [...] But over and over again in their fiction these writers tend to treat the personal life as if it were a phenomenon existing totally apart from society without connotations that would give it meaningful relevance to the general human condition or dilemma.⁶⁴

Whilst it is certainly true that *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* does not appear to deal directly and explicitly with the huge social transformations that were taking place in the United States of the 1960s and early 1970s, this does not mean the stories are without political implications. Rather, there was a shift in emphasis from the macro-political to the private, individual, micro-social. Howard Zinn notes the deeply-rooted effects of the larger historical moments on the people of the United States during the 1960s:

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⁶⁴ Aldridge, pp. 40-41.
From a long-range viewpoint, something perhaps even more important had happened [than the US losing the Vietnam war]. The rebellion at home was spreading beyond the issue of the war in Vietnam.65

Carver’s early work is not as much interested in exploring the wider political reasons for that rebellion, but to discuss its effects upon ordinary people. Despite the huge political, economic and social changes that were taken place during its conception, I feel it is more fruitful to consider Carver’s work as a reaction to the changes in the structure of American family life. More specifically, he is interested in the dissolution of the family and especially marital breakdown.

In *Divorce: An American Tradition*, Glenda Riley notes of the changes that took place in legislation for divorce during the 1960s and 1970s in America. In a chapter aptly entitled ‘The Revolving Door’ she notes one of the principal reasons why divorce became more easily attained:

As the century progressed, the spread of divorce affected American Law and society on many levels. [In 1970] California adopted a no-fault divorce. By the early 1980s, one out of two marriages ended in divorce.66

The ‘no-fault’ divorce adopted in California soon spread throughout the whole nation. As Riley notes, by 1977, only three states had failed to introduce the bill: ‘As divorce increased, it became one of the most widely studied phenomena in the nation’. At the time of the writing and publication of *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, divorce was an important issue in America. Of the twenty-two stories in the collection, over half deal with divorce or the breakdown of relationships and even more hint at it. Stories like ‘Nobody Said Anything’ and ‘Are These Actual Miles?’ deal directly with relationships teetering on the edge of failure. The title story traces the implications of a past sexual infidelity which the central character, Ralph, has subsequently repressed, while ‘Night School’ examines the effects of a definite separation. This was a theme that occupied centre stage in Carver’s next major publication: *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, which continues his interest in family strife.

It seems Carver was able to separate his macro-political views from his personal life and his writing. Jay Karr, who knew Carver at the beginning of his career, writes of a man politically committed:

> I mean, always, under that thin membrane of the taciturn that carried him through the ordinary obligations of the day was that volcanic core. [...] There was a variety of targets: [...] and most ferociously there was the Vietnam war. In that Humboldt State setting, it drove Ray nearly crazy to be almost the only anti-Vietnam militant [...].

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This is seemingly quite different from Hemingway’s approach. *In Our Time* has at its heart an aspiration to capture what it felt like to be alive in the post-First World War United States. It is, in part, a self-consciously historical document with its concomitant historical dates and names. In doing so, it comments directly upon actual historical events, most notably the First World War.

But Carver, unlike Hemingway in ‘A Big Two Hearted River’, never acknowledges the way war might have shaped his characters or their society. The reader is left to speculate if characters like those of the volatile family in ‘Nobody Said Anything’ are left dysfunctional by the war and its consequence. Unlike the source of anxiety for Nick Adams of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’, no omission of cause is implied by narrative ‘pointers’ or clues. Carver instead seems to translate these socio-economic problems into more local, domestic issues. When the reader learns of Al’s increasingly desperate situation at the beginning of ‘Jerry and Molly and Sam’, it is caused by his work; his employers are ‘[…] laying off when they should be hiring. […] He was no safer than anyone else even though he’d been there two years going on three’ (111). Ultimately, his focus remains steadfastly upon the everyday lives of everyday people.

*Carver and the Creative Writing Programme*

If Hemingway learned to write through journalistic experience, Carver did so through education. The prevailing interpretation of his early life seems to suggest that Carver appeared from nowhere, following a harsh life in a rural part of the mid-West, scraping together enough time and money to fulfil eventually his ambition to become a writer. Later, in what appeared to be an almost spiritual conversion, Carver gave up
alcohol and began a new life with the poet Tess Gallagher. This impression is certainly left if one considers the few publications on Carver’s life in the absence of a full biography.⁶⁹

However, as Robert Rebein points out, things might not be quite so simple:

For although Raymond Carver indeed hailed from humble origins and experienced more than his fair share of hardship – much of it self-inflicted – he is also perhaps the first major American writer whose entire career was informed and shaped by the world of the university.⁷⁰

This is perhaps an exaggeration (and even erroneous, if one thinks of Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop, who, like many of their contemporaries, spent much of their careers as visiting writers on American campuses) but it does emphasise Carver’s adherence to writing programmes. Carver was first a student in an undergraduate creative writing group led by the novelist John Gardner (of whom he writes affectionately in the essay ‘John Gardner: The Writer as Teacher’ in Fires) and later as a post-graduate in a group run by Dick Day.⁷¹

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⁶⁹ The closest there is to a biography is the collection of remembrances and anecdotes collected in Stull and Carroll. Also useful is William Stull’s ‘potted biography’ of Carver published at the following web address: http://people.whitman.edu/~lucetb/carver/biography1.html. A collection of photographs also reveals much of Carver’s environment Bob Adelman and Tess Gallagher (eds.) Carver Counlry: The World of Raymond Carver (New York: Scribner’s, 1990).


Later, he was to meet another controversial figure, Gordon Lish, who was the fiction editor at *Esquire* magazine and later Carver's editor. Carver has been accused of being part of an empty, mass-produced literary commodity with no lasting value. Whatever one feels about the manner in which creative writing courses effect literary standards, it is true that many of minimalism's most established figures are a product of university writing courses, including Frederick Barthelme.

If John Aldridge's account of the affects of the creative writing programme on contemporary literature is to be believed, then this would leave Carver with serious shortcomings. Aldridge endorses an idealised view of apprenticeship of a young writer, which seems to echo that of Hemingway's own beginnings:

> The process by which a young person traditionally awoke to the discovery that he had somehow become a writer was until now always a mysterious, painful and lonely one. There had occurred at some unknown time in the turbulence of his psychic life an

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72 This study does not have the space to examine the role Lish played in Carver's career but it remains controversial. Conventional wisdom suggests that Carver's 'epiphany' following the meeting of Tess Gallagher was the direct cause of his writing becoming more expansive as he developed a more personal sense of spirituality. Others attribute the radical transformation to the removal of Gordon Lish as his editor, who some critics claim might have been responsible for the earlier, more severely pared-down style. D. T. Max's article 'The Carver Chronicles' aroused suspicions as to the exact origin of his minimalist style, implying Lish was more responsible than first thought; see D. T. Max 'The Carver Chronicles' in *The New York Times Magazine*, August 9, 1998; http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/081098carver-mag.html. Replies include D. Bowman 'Lashed by Lish' in *Salon* September 1st 1998 (see http://www.salon.com/media/1998/09/01media.html ) and D. Bowman 'Typing for the Dead: Carver Reviews Gordon Lish' *New York Observer*, November 23, 1998. For a summary of these arguments, including a suggestion that Max's so-called 'exposé' was based on information known for some time in Carver circle; see Rebein 2001, p. 26.

73 See Aldridge, Introduction and Chapters 1-3.
accidental conjunction of experience and temperament that brought
the discovery about.\textsuperscript{74}

According to Aldridge, this idealist view of creation has been eroded by the
emergence of creative writing programmes. Aldridge criticises such programmes for
producing too many works with too homogenised interests and themes:

But much of the fault is obviously inherent in the premise on
which creative writing programs base their function. [They ]
do not, as a rule, require their students to learn specific
techniques [...] It would appear that the writing programs
have not yet devised a way to reproduce or incorporate into
their curricula the conditions that are best suited to the creation
of writers.\textsuperscript{75}

There has yet to be written a major study on the effects of the creative writing
programme on literary minimalism. However, the notion that writing cannot be
taught, as exemplified by Aldridge’s account, means that those who choose
pedagogy as opposed to raw experience can be considered somehow less successful,
or at least less authentic. This is one of the central reasons why Minimalism,
especially as a late 20\textsuperscript{th} century literary phenomenon, might be considered as a
literature of impoverishment, whose paucity of means equates with a paucity of
effect, as critics like Aldridge make clear. There is clearly a post-Romantic

\textsuperscript{74} Aldridge, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{75} Aldridge, p. 26, 28.
conception of the creativity in Aldridge’s account. Indeed, the argument that writing can be taught successfully is one that encompasses much wider ideas and debates, including those on the nature of pedagogy in teaching art and the notion of experience and education in the development of talent. Those who are taught to write possess a more artisan approach, where the writer is more a craftsman than divinely inspired.

Carver’s Early Fiction: ‘Aficionados’ and ‘The Cabin’
I have drawn several comparisons between Hemingway and Carver and now I want to turn to how Carver absorbed the influence in his fiction. Carver’s ‘The Aficionados’, written under the pseudonym John Vale in Humboldt’s State College literary magazine Toyon, is one of Carver’s earliest stories. Published in 1963, it pre-dates the 1976 edition of Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? by over a decade. Carver’s minimalism was still developing and this story reflects less of a direct influence and more of a parody of Hemingway’s style and interests.

It begins with a stereotypical scene from an imagined Hemingway story, a conversation between a man and a woman between which there is an underlying, but palpable tension, expressed with an impersonal, coolly detached style:

They are sitting in the shade at a small iron patio table drinking wine out of heavy metal cups.

“Why should you feel this way now?” he asks her.
"I don't know," she says. It always makes me sad when it comes. [...]"

She leans forward and reaches for his hand but he is too quick for her. 76

This opening exchange is reconfigured several times in this story, as they walk amongst the streets and remember the past and look, fatalistically, to the future. As they talk, they touch upon the fringes of the mysterious event which is not revealed until the story’s final moments. Carver appears to have great fun by assimilating and then subverting Hemingway’s style and interests. In fact, this story crams into so short a space many of Hemingway’s most salient attributes: the use of repetition, most notoriously in the use of ‘dirt’ and ‘dust’, 77 the cosmopolitan locations; and always, the gender battles between a fatalistic, indifferent man with a caring, potentially hysterical woman.

This culminates in the opposition of men to women in a literal public arena, not unlike those of Hemingway’s bullfights, in which a human sacrifice must be made. Its focus upon such extreme behaviour is unlike that of the later Carver, where the commonplace replaces the extreme. Indeed, the immediate future to which the story intends is strongly subversive. The sacrifice represents in literal terms the figurative disempowerment of men by women found in such stories such as ‘The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber’. Hemingway’s perceived fears of emasculation have been fulfilled, as the man forgives his partner even as she kills him and holds his heart to the ‘lustrous’ sun. In another sense, it subverts the tradition of Hemingway’s

gender relationships by sacrificing the male and in so doing, empowering the woman, in a final and most brutal of acts.

'The Aficionados' has a 'trick' ending favoured by O. Henry and typical of the conventional tale, which, subverts convention by making the man the victim of the woman. As a parody it is a raw example of how Hemingway might have influenced Carver and as such its usefulness is limited. But it is an important document nevertheless because it shows how, by parodying specific elements of his style and themes, Carver sought to write outside of Hemingway's influential shadow. This progression follows, in an equally coarse and basic manner, through Harold Bloom's path away from the anxiety of influence: to assimilate and then dispose of those 'strong' writers to which one might be particularly indebted.\(^78\)

Another of Carver's early stories provides a firm basis for comparing Hemingway with Carver. Carver claimed that 'Pastoral' was his first published story.\(^79\) Although it was left out of Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?, it did find its way into a later collection, Furious Seasons, and finally became anthologised in Fires where it is reprinted as 'The Cabin', and this is the version I would like to discuss here.


\(^79\) See Campbell, p. 4.
In his essay on Carver's minimalism, Michael Trussler notes:

"Carver is even more "minimalist" than his mentor, Hemingway. Comparing [...] 'A Big Two-Hearted River: II' [...] to [...] 'The Cabin', [the critic M. M. Clarke] finds that Carver's story undercuts the mythological and symbolic unity he perceives to be present in the Hemingway. [...] Carver's fiction "deconstructs the codifying myths even as it re-inscribes them into a context which exposes their pretensions to significance". 80"

The story is a lament for a history that might have never existed. As such, it is an oblique reference to a fictional past that seems strangely out of kilter with the present. In a telling detail, Carver seems to be suggesting that the stories of the Native Americans, who appeared so regularly in several of Hemingway's short stories, have now been consigned to history, stripped of their mystery and cultural vitality. The almost passing detail of the Frederick Remington reproduction, which shows 'Indians' hunting buffalo, represents their assimilation into a contemporary cultural artefact. 81 The picture is a metaphor for the kind of outdated belief in the Old West associated (correctly or not) with Hemingway's fiction, which itself, (as Jay McInerney has made clear), is an outmoded idiom for the expression of the final decades of the 20th century. The vandalised garage which Harrold sees is a literal reminder of the destruction of the past, a notion that pre-empts the denouement. 82

80 Campbell, pp. 103-104.
Harrold recognises, during a moment of epiphany that anticipates much of Carver’s later method, that the loss of his fishing rod represents the deeper loss of something heroic, which nevertheless existed only in his nostalgic reveries of a fantastical past. Ewing Campbell quotes from an interview in which Carver reveals how objects in ‘The Cabin’ might be interpreted:  

This might mean including as part of the scene a television or a table or a felt-tipped pen lying on a desk, but [...] these things [...] shouldn’t be inert [...] You want to give them some weight, connecting these things to the lives around them. I see the objects as playing a ‘role’ in the stories. 

The rod has a dual role. In a Freudian reading, it may represent the phallus and so determine a diminished sexual drive or proclivity. It may also function (and especially significant in terms of a comparison with Hemingway), as symbol of a hunter, a fisherman who has lost his rod and is impotent as a huntsman. As I hope to show in the following chapter, stories such as ‘Nobody Said Anything’ explode the myth of the heroic hunter. Indeed, it is Carver’s assimilation and the rejection of many of Hemingway’s most salient attributes as a writer that provides the most illustrative comparison of their minimalist narrative techniques.

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83 For a detailed reading of this story and its place within the development of Carver’s method, see Campbell, pp. 4-8.

84 Campbell, p. 6.
Choosing Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?
I am interested in emergent forms of minimalism in the early writing careers of all three writers and Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? more than any other demonstrates this style in its development. Like Carver, Hemingway and Barthelme’s output is not uniformly minimalist. In the example of Hemingway, works like the late ‘Winner Take Nothing’ reject many of the central tenets of his earlier, minimalist approach. A similar case applies to Frederick Barthelme, whose first collection Moon Deluxe (1983) differs in theme and style, albeit subtly, to his later work Chroma (1987).

Second, I focus on publications designed by the writer as single, coherent volumes. Carver’s major publications are: Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?, What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, Cathedral and Elephant. (I have excluded Furious Seasons, which although early, it has been unpublished for several years, is extremely difficult to obtain). Finally, I am interested in the experimental, avant-garde quality of emergent minimalism. I find the consistent interest in formal experimentalism to be of central interest in my analysis. Hemingway, Carver and Barthelme were finding their voices in their early fiction. There were several experiments, more or less successful, that were to characterise minimalism as an aesthetic in the early fiction. This suits my definition of minimalism as experimental writing. That is not to say that I ignore the later work. In the case of Carver there is much to be learnt from looking at his later writing as a means of testing how his

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85 Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories is a collection of essays, poems and stories which borrows from previous volumes. It is not an original collection of short fiction. However, like ‘Where I’m Calling From’, it does contain several stories not found elsewhere; ‘The Lie’ and ‘Harry’s Death’, ‘The Pheasant’, ‘Where is Everyone?’

86 However, of the eight stories that comprise Furious Seasons, we can piece together much of the collection if we look for those stories published elsewhere. For example, Where I’m Calling From includes the stories ‘Distance’ and ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’. Fires contains ‘The Lie’ and ‘The Cabin’ (originally entitled ‘Pastoral’ in Furious Seasons). Finally, Call If You Need Me publishes the title story, ‘Furious Seasons’.
minimalist style is in evidence, and a comparison of both earlier and later periods is highly revealing for both.\footnote{87}

Adam Meyer supports the assertion that Carver’s early output is a more extreme example of minimalism in that Carver’s oeuvre is best represented by the figure of an hour-glass rather than an inverted pyramid. By this he means that Carver began his career with an open, loose style that converged into the extreme minimalism we find in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, only to further loosen the minimalist style in *Cathedral*.\footnote{88} The minimalism aesthetic – present in the style of the pared down sentences, absent or thin use of figurative language, and a sustained interest in dialogue – are present and unsurpassed in terms of their sometimes extreme minimalist method.

Hemingway’s legacy was so powerful that it was said to have left many American writers with a choice of whether to write like him or not. Most chose not to, perhaps because they feared being considered unoriginal or because his style was considered to be so complete that nothing of value could be added. During the period between publication of *In Our Time* and *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, post-modern fiction was beginning to become the dominant form of short story style and minimalism can be considered as a reaction against this. In this chapter, I have shown how Hemingway’s style was no longer suitable for the expression of a post-World

\footnote{87} The comparisons between minimalist and non-minimalist writings from the same writer are an invaluable way of discovering just what constitutes and sustains this method. But ultimately, it is my goal to settle upon a collection of minimalist writing for each writer and compare them.

\footnote{88} Extreme minimalism might be said to refer to an even more reductive method, where the elements of style are further pared down. Most commonly, it refers to the pessimism, the concise characterisation, and the tendency to streamline plots until they are present on in their basic elements.
War II society with its emphasis upon a heroic individualism, and instead writers like John Cheever chose to look closer to home for their inspiration, finding abundant material in the very homes, streets and suburbs where they lived. This, in turn, can be seen in the work of Carver who wrote about the lives of ordinary people during the backdrop of the Vietnam War. In the next chapter, I want to examine more closely Carver’s relationship with Hemingway’s minimalist style, to demonstrate how he developed or rejected some of those elements which made Hemingway’s style so difficult to copy, and in doing so, suggest some of the ways in which Carver’s minimalist style equivocates and so solicits the response from the reader.

The ability to draw a distinction between those texts that invite the reader to respond actively and those that merely demand a passive reception of ideas have been made by several critics, as I have noted in the introduction. It might various be called the distinction between an ‘open’ and ‘closed’ text, or one that, more specifically in the ideas of Iser, one that helps create interpretative equivocation.
CHAPTER THREE

Raymond Carver’s *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*

Seeing and Being Seen

Raymond Carver’s *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* demonstrates how the minimalist style solicits the potential for a demanding reader engagement; and as an extreme example of the minimalist style it forcefully suggests ways in which less might become more. I demonstrate this by a thoroughgoing comparison to Hemingway’s *In Our Time*. Carver develops and extends Hemingway’s tendency for equivocation by renegotiating the relationship between writer, reader and text.

Carver contributes several important aspects to literary minimalism and I touch upon some of them here. In the first section on the narrator’s contribution to the minimalist aesthetic, I explore the ways in which Carver extends the notion of an absent narrator by suggesting the reader (and writer) is a voyeur, necessarily implicated in the creation of the narrative. This is a method that, like Hemingway’s, draws the reader into taking part in the active creation of the narrative. Carver’s central contribution to minimalist equivocation was his interest in the everyday object as a significant element in revealing important, suggestive details of the characters within the stories.
I analyse this in the second section, on figurative language and touch upon it again in the final section on realism, which discusses Carver’s interest in everyday reality. Between figurative language and realism, I discuss perhaps Carver’s most vital contribution to minimalism; his interpretation of epiphany as a means of subverting conventional reading patterns. Typically, the epiphany offers an insight which might help resolve the problems of the narrative but Carver’s does not, suggesting only the possibility of an undiscussed change. I argue this device creates interpretative equivocation and, like so many of effects created by Carver’s style, one that demand ‘more’ from the ‘less’ that Carver appears to offer.
Part One: The Narrator as Voyeur

In the first chapter, I noted how Hemingway’s third-person narrator was absent, refusing to comment upon or evaluate the narrative and instead aspired to be a merely objective, distanced reporter of events. This narrator’s perspective created the effect that the reader had to engage more critically with the narrative, given there were fewer clues as to what it might mean because an authoritative commentary was missing. Carver uses a similar narrative perspective in several of his stories. For example, the opening of ‘They’re Not Your Husband’ reflects the disappointment and isolation of the protagonist Earl Ober without explicitly stating it:

Earl Ober was between jobs as a salesman. But Doreen, his wife, had gone to work nights as a waitress at a twenty-four-hour coffee shop at the edge of town. One night, while he was drinking, Earl decided to stop by the coffee shop and have something to eat.

[...]

‘What are you doing here?’ Doreen said when she saw him sitting there.

[...]

‘Any chance of, you know?’ he said to her and winked.

‘No,’ she said. ‘Don’t talk to me now. I’m busy.’¹

¹ R. Carver Will You Please be Quiet, Please? (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), p. 16. All subsequent page numbers within the text refer to this edition.
The effect of the interaction is found largely in dialogue and Doreen's obvious irritation is evident in her curt speech: the reader understands how she feels because it is shown in their interaction. However, unlike Hemingway in *In Our Time*, Carver does not exclusively use the third-person absent narrator. For example, in the opening of 'Neighbors', the narrator explicitly and unequivocally tells us how the characters feel:

Bill and Arlene Miller were a happy couple. But now and then they felt they alone among their circle had been passed by somehow, leaving Bill to attend to his bookkeeping duties and Arlene occupied with secretarial chores [...]. It seemed to the Millers that the Stones lived a fuller and brighter life. (6)

We have direct access into a character's life through the use of such terms as 'felt' and 'passed by'. However, the difference between Hemingway's and Carver's third-person narrator is one of a degree of absence. Although Carver does not strip his third-person narrators of evaluation, his narrative serves to contextualise the emotions of his characters, a method that is similar to Hemingway's in that little of significance is revealed by commentary. More often, the narrator assumes a passive role, keen to 'overhear' or 'glimpse' the action that actually demonstrates the story's significance. All of the pivotal events of the narrative are described without commentary. The denouement of this story is expressed without authorial intervention:
“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. (11)

This technique resembles Hemingway’s in that the focus remains on the telling details of behaviour, rather than an insightful description of their mental state. Until now, Hemingway and Carver coincide in their use of detached narrative perspectives. However, where Carver and Hemingway begin to differ is in the great variety of narrative idioms that Carver brings to his fiction. From the unnamed, candid first-person ‘confessional’ of ‘Fat’, to the third-person narrative that nevertheless assumes the perspective of its central character, or focalises through her, as can be found in ‘The Student’s Wife’; and finally to the more traditional third-person detached narrator of ‘Neighbors’, Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? is more flexible, more experimental in the uses of the narrator.

One of the more refreshing consequences of Carver’s intention to explore many perspectives in his fiction is that it gives women characters a voice in a way that is clearly absent from Hemingway’s fiction. As I have suggested in Chapter Three, this was in line with his interest in domestic politics and the influence of the women’s rights movements in the 1960s. Conversely, in Chapter Two, I have touched upon the apparent misogyny found in many of Hemingway’s stories, such as ‘The End of Something’ and ‘A Cat in the Rain’. This most often took the form of removing their voices from the stories. There are no women narrators in his short stories. Carver’s
work begins to address this. The first story in the collection, ‘Fat’ is told by a woman, and later, women also narrate ‘The Idea’ and ‘Why, Honey?’. In some cases, although a female character does not narrate the story, the story is focalised through a woman. The impersonal narrator, so highly prized by Hemingway and developed by Carver, does not intervene to undermine such focalisation. An example is ‘The Student’s Wife’, in which Nan’s increasing desperation is the focus. The vignette-like ‘The Father’ is told in an impersonal, gender-free idiom but the voices that dominate the narrative are those of the three women, Phyllis, Carol and Alice.

The difficulty in assuming the perspective of another person is one that thematically interested Carver, as is found in the attention paid to the perspectives in ‘Put Yourself in My Shoes’. Where Hemingway wanted to explore the changing consciousness of one character - Nick Adams - over a period of time, Carver, instead, wants to explore the perspectives of several different characters over a single period. The accusation, made by some, that Carver’s work is too parochial, concerned only with working class, white Americans in the late 20th century forgets the primary strategy that Carver aspires to; to capture, with fidelity, the lives of others.

Equally significant is the notion that, unlike Hemingway’s In Our Time, Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? employs a great variety of first-person narrative perspectives; the woman narrator of ‘Fat’ and the epistolary ‘Why, Honey?’; the young boy in ‘Nobody Said Anything’; and the elderly man in ‘What Do You Do in San Francisco?’. Such an array of disparate characters bring a variety of first-person
perspectives. In terms of the use of first-person narrators, the overall effect is unlike Hemingway’s stable, informed but distanced narrators, as those in Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? often have an intimate relationship with the events of the narrative. Their narratives, then, may be fairly considered to encourage a reading strategy of a different kind. I have discussed how the first-person account often focuses on development of the narrator’s character. But the first-person narrator in Carver’s work is not subject to such a method, and does not comment on themselves or their environment. They aspire towards a narrative absence, despite their place within the narrative, as this example from ‘What Do You Do In San Francisco?’ shows:


The postman remembers his round in detail but without overt commentary. As the example shows, it is possible to have a first-person narrative without an intrusive, explanatory narrative voice which constrains the reader’s interpretation. Characters seem either unwilling or unable to comment upon their situation of themselves, and their inarticulacy anticipates a trend in minimalism for its characters to be sketches, their motives and desires unexplained, their articulacy perhaps their most salient
aspect. Yet Carver goes beyond this notion to suggest something more problematic in the relationship between author, text and reader. He introduces the idea of the reader and writer as a voyeur and in doing so transforms the ways in which his fiction demands to be read.

Voyeurism is presented as a theme of the stories through which the reader is made aware that his or her relationship is implicitly similar to those who do the watching in the stories. As a theme it is abundant and varied in the collection. The stories that most immediately suggest voyeurism are ‘The Idea’ and ‘Neighbors’, found together at the beginning of the collection. Yet voyeurism can be found in a more covert form without a diminished effect. ‘They’re Not Your Husband’ takes voyeurism as its cue for action as Earl Ober watches customers in the restaurant who in turn watch his wife as she works as a waitress. The first-person narrator of ‘What Do You Do in San Francisco?’ is essentially a voyeur, who observes the behaviour of residents on his postal route by reading the addresses on their letters and through the brief glimpses he has of them as he delivers the mail. It is a self-consciously literary story, which, like ‘Fat’ and ‘Put Yourself in My Shoes’, provides a commentary upon the act of reading and writing. Carver switches the perspective in ‘Are These Actual Miles?’ Here, Leo is watched by his neighbour Ernest Williams, as he desperately tries to find his way out of bankruptcy. Finally, in perhaps the most sustained example of self-observation in the collection, the gaze is turned upon the characters themselves. Arnold Breit watches himself in the mirror, as he undergoes the beginnings of an epiphany in ‘Are You a Doctor?’. The mirror also provides the locus for AI in ‘Molly and Jerry and Sam’, as he considers his behaviour immoral when he finally faces himself, literally and metaphorically, in the
mirror. In this section, I want to discuss the narrator as voyeur and in doing so outline how Carver implicates his readers in the narrator's acts of voyeurism.

The Reader as Voyeur

*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* aspires to illuminate the ways in which the reader, writer and characters are all voyeurs in one form or another. My overall aim is to demonstrate how interpretation is affected by the concept of the reader as voyeur. The first step is to understand Carver's definition of a voyeur. Here, Carver foregrounds the idea of voyeurism as an active experience which must be considered an activity in its own right. It is not merely the passive observation of the object but an experience which one undergoes, which deserves — and in Carver’s collection, receives — detailed discussion. In their study of voyeurism in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, Boxer and Phillips make this idea clear:

> Looking itself becomes experience, not merely vicarious experience.
> It is a transforming act, one which changes the character of that which is seen. This notion is operative, in different ways, both for the reader, whose understanding of the text is tied to his own way of perceiving, and for the writer, who takes his observations and shapes them as he wills.²

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The focus of examination has shifted not to what is being watched, although that is important, but who is doing the watching – and how. This notion is explored in arguably the collection’s most explicit treatment of voyeurism, ‘The Idea’. This is achieved through the use of ‘double-voyeurism’, where one voyeur watches another. This enables Carver to analyse the role of someone watching someone else and in implication, the role of the reader. Here, the process of ‘double voyeurism’ is aligned to the act of reading, where a reader watches the author watching a character. By re-negotiating the relationship between reader and story, Carver implicates his reader in the creation of its meanings, most notably by appealing to the reader’s moral principles.

In this story, the unnamed narrator and her husband Vern settle down most nights to see if their neighbours will begin their elaborate foreplay: the neighbour goes onto the porch and watches his wife undressing as a prelude to sex. Without the narrator and her husband’s determined approach, they might miss the spectacle: ‘If I hadn’t been watching, I wouldn’t have seen him’ (12), reveals their active participation in the event. Yet the object of their observation is not the focus of the story, nor the source of its meaning. Rather, it is the discussion of voyeurism as a performative act made by the couple who watch their neighbours, which occupies centre stage in this story.

The narrator’s evaluation of the effect of their participation in this voyeuristic ‘circle’ is ambivalent. The narrator notes that she feels certain that her husband enjoys it: ‘Vern’s a little embarrassed about watching, I think. But I know he enjoys it. He’s said so’ (12).
However, she also confesses that it makes them ‘jumpy’ (14) and their uneasy meal and the events that follow confirm their ‘dis-ease’. That they kneel to watch implies a sense of the stealth and ensures she cannot be seen, but is also evocative of the reverential quality of their voyeurism. It certainly represents a significant moment in their relationship.

Yet when she considers being watched herself by someone else, her reaction is aggressive and unreserved: ‘Anybody comes looking in my window […] they’ ll have the cops on them. Except maybe Cary Grant’ (14). But in her confession that she has a strong appetite for food ‘about this time of night’ having watched the voyeuristic spectacle, she implies that it has stimulated her sexually. As such, this aligns her to the couple whom she seems to disparage. The sexual element of voyeurism is revealing, because it suggests that the seemingly impotent narrator and Vern project their sexual desire onto food; their sudden change of appetite can be linked to a change in the sexual dynamic. When Vern tells her that he would prefer to eat cornflakes and brown sugar rather than the extensive feast she has laid before him, he consequently reveals a great deal about his sexual proclivity, and more specifically, his flagging desire for her.

Watching, or reading, is an act of consumption, based upon desire.

Finally, her disgust overflows into a metaphor that suggests the consuming potential of the couple that live next door: ‘Someday, I’m going to tell that trash what I think of her’ (13). Notably, her accusation is levelled against the woman, the object of the gaze, not the voyeur and her disgust aimed at a threat from outside. It is not altogether surprising that her aggression should turn to the woman, since she is being sexually exhibitionist and gratified in a way that the narrator isn’t. The narrator has managed to repress her desire to watch and so distance herself from her own obsessive voyeurism.
However, the connection between those who watch and are watched is closer than she realises: both she and the voyeur connect as they simultaneously turn on all the lights in the house, reminiscent of the opening section of the story, where the house ‘blazes’ with light; with the lights on, the watcher can potentially become the watched. Here, the light represents both the sudden clarity of vision but also the inability to hide as her complex implication within her neighbour’s voyeurism has been exposed.

‘The Idea’ foregrounds voyeurism as a way of reading Carver’s stories. In this approach, the reader plays an active part in the experience, just as Vern and the narrator do in their watching of their neighbours. Conventionally, the reader might consider his or herself a passive receptor of events - as the narrator does at the beginning of the story - but as the ‘light blazes’ the reader, like the narrator, has been exposed as intimately linked with what they are watching. Indeed, the narrator - like the reader - creates the specific experience of seeing and being seen through their observation. Carver, through the process of the narrator’s self-realisation, reminds the reader of the impossibility of a neutral position in observation. He suggests that, just as the narrator creates her own interpretation, impressions and significance based upon her observations of the voyeur, then the reader too brings his or her responses to the interpretation of the narrative. By taking part in the process of watching, reading becomes a creative process rather than a passive one. In doing so, Carver is laying out his foundations for what is essentially a theory of reader response and what began as a reference to the notion of presumption, the story’s title ‘The Idea’ now points to something more fundamental: the ‘idea’ is the way in which Carver’s fiction adopts the voyeur as a reading strategy.
What Carver does in the story is undermine the notion of an absolutely objective observation. He does so by transforming the narrator's voyeurism from a comfortable, stable perspective into an unravelling, disjointed disequilibrium. This is both an implicit criticism of Hemingway's absent narrator, a position which Carver's stories suggest is untenable, and of the narrator of traditional realism. Carver is implicitly interrogating the relationship between what is seen and who is seeing; or, by extension, between the reader and the text. In doing so, he implicates the reader into the story with a third act of voyeurism, for the reader (like the man who watches his wife and the narrator who, in turn, watches him in 'The Idea') observes this intimate situation. As such, the reader becomes necessarily implicated in what he or she observes, rather than remain comfortably distant from it. Despite their fundamentally different approach, both Hemingway's and Carver's narrator demand the engagement of the reader by, in Carver's case, omitting the primacy of third-person, absent omniscient narrators.

'Fat' is another story about seeing and being seen, and like 'The Idea' represents in its thematic interest an analogy between the act of reading and an act of voyeurism. Carver introduces a character who is symbolic of the reader who is intent on finding a complete closure at the end of a narrative, but who has her expectations thwarted by a narrator who suggests that change, not stability, is revealed. When the unnamed narrator finishes telling her story of the fat man dining, her colleague Rita seems at first expectant then disappointed by its irresolution:
What else? Rita says, lighting one of my cigarettes and pulling her chair closer to the table. The story’s getting interesting now, Rita says.

That’s it. Nothing else. (4)

Later, having relayed the story about feeling fat when in bed with Rudy, the narrator remarks:

That’s a funny story, Rita says, but I can see she doesn’t know what to make of it.

I feel depressed. But I won’t go into it with her. I’ve already told her too much.

She sits there waiting, her dainty fingers poking her hair.

*Waiting for what?* I’d like to know. (5)

It is significant that this story, with its implicit criticism of traditional interpretative strategies, appears at the beginning of the collection. Carver seems to be pre-empting the idea that these stories will not conform to conventional structures: the reader that waits for the conclusion to appear clearly at the end and tie up the loose interpretative ends will be, like Rita, left waiting. Moreover, Carver seems hostile to such a reader, or least their readings. Rita’s ‘dainty fingers’ that are ‘poking her hair’ suggest
something of a self-interested absorption, a superficial gesture which shows her more concerned with her appearance than her colleague’s candid and intimate story. That the narrator regrets that ‘she has told her [Rita] too much already’ seems to confirm that this anecdote, although hugely significant for the narrator, is merely another, albeit puzzling and flawed story for her audience. At the outset of this collection, Carver seems to be outlining the ways in which he hopes his stories will be read in light of the subversion of conventional expectations.

It is not until the treatment of this theme in the largely self-referential story ‘Put Yourself In My Shoes’ that the idea become more explicit. Myers, like Carver (indeed the name is suggestive of their close proximity as his name begins with the personal pronoun ‘My’), had worked in a publishing house and is attempting to write a novel. Finding himself an outsider in the festive celebrations, he receives a call from his partner Paula, inviting him out for a drink. Eventually he reluctantly agrees to visit the Morgans, a couple whom, the reader learns later, they rented an apartment from. The suggestion that Myers being a writer might reveal something about the writing process is confirmed when talk turns to stories. There are four narratives that are directly presented as smaller stories rather than occurrences in the plot, or sub-narratives, in this story. This is a method which Carver would employ throughout his career and equally successfully in the next volume (especially in the title story) What We Talk About When We Talk About Love. The first sub-narrative is told by Paula as she relates the story of the suicide of a mutual acquaintance. Myers considers her story:

 [...] He tried to remember Larry Gudinas and recalled a tall, stooped
man with wire-frame glasses, bright ties, and a receding hairline. He could imagine the jolt, the head snapping back.

"Jesus," Myers said. "Well, I'm sorry to hear that." (97)

It is too simplistic to suggest that the narrator is a complete reflection of the author. However, Carver here seems to suggest that this method of observation – to collect carefully the small, objective details of external appearance and cause and effect, a method resembling Hemingway's and Carver's own – are at least suitable methods for writing fiction. That the narrative demonstrates an empathy with Myers, particularly following his confrontation with the Morgans, is evidence of Carver's bias toward Myers, and the narrative is focalised through him. The second sub-narrative is related by Edgar Morgan and concerns the story of a domestic affair concerning the end of marriage, which is concluded by an incredible event:

But just as the fellow was leaving, his son threw a can of tomato soup at him and hit it in the forehead. It caused quite a concussion that sent the man to hospital. The condition is quite serious. (103)

Edgar Morgan's idiom is quite different from Myers and is deliberately composed in opposition, in the same manner that Hemingway sought to reveal great significance through the configuration of such oppositions. His story is told with prevarication,
commentary and hyperbole; it was a ‘torrid’ affair about which ‘You can imagine’ how the ‘fool’ woman seemed inevitably to act: ‘[...] On that day – it was in the evening – he announced to his wife – they’d been married for twenty years – he announced to his wife that he wanted a divorce.’ (103). It is reminiscent, albeit in parody, of a hectoring moralism, where the narrator attempts to impose his values upon the narrative. Carver, by implicitly comparing narrative idioms in examples from both Myers and Edgar Morgan, is suggesting that he favours the method for all the reasons that the Edgar Morgan is bad: it is pompous, heavy-handed, imbued with self-congratulatory commentary and is overly theatrical.

In the third sub-narrative, Myers can no longer keep his opinions submerged. Here, he listens to Edgar relate the story of the women whom the couple met in Germany. This stranger returns Mrs. Morgan’s purse and then promptly dies on the couch. Myers begins to laugh uncontrollably:

“Is that funny, sir?” Morgan said. “Do you find that amusing?”

Myers nodded. He kept laughing. He wiped his eyes on his shirt sleeve.

[...] “I can’t help it. That line ‘Fate sent her to die on the couch of our living room in Germany.’ I’m sorry. (108)
His laughter reveals contempt for the kind of carefully concluded denouement which resolves a narrative in a single phrase, the ‘punch line’. If Carver is making this story an edict for an understanding of his fiction, the subtext is that there will be no easy interpretations to his stories, unlike Morgan’s conventionally resolved tales. However, it is not until the final sub-narrative that Myers reveals his tendency towards distanced observation, a form of ‘artistic voyeurism’, which renegotiates the relationship between writer, reader and text. Having listened to Edgar Morgan’s heavy-handed and misplaced accusation of his guests, (which says much more about him than it does about Myers and Paula), the couple leave to drive home:

"Those people are crazy," Paula said.

Myers patted her hand.

“They were scary,” she said.

He did not answer. Her voice seemed to come to him from a great distance. He kept driving. Snow rushed at the windshield. He was silent and watched the road. He was at the very end of a story. (110)

In Myers, and by implication Carver’s, model the process of creation begins with a careful observation of events. The hyperbole of ‘crazy’ and ‘scary’ is meaningless in their distance from Myers, who prefers the concrete world of appearance and significant detail to hyperbolic imaginings. As such, he is cast in the role as a voyeur, carefully watching his subject. Carver seems to suggest that the writer is like a
voyeur, who overhears or glimpses the source of the story from some distance.
Moreover, by favourably comparing Myers' method to Morgan's, he outlines a theory
of fiction which the title of the collection might encapsulate: *Will You Please Be
Quiet, Please?* Here, Myers is able to create a story carefully observing another story,
that of Morgan's. But he does so by rejecting it, in the same manner that Carver
rejects the overblown, self-important and closed narrative of traditional tales. The
theme of the story, like in 'The Idea' is suggestive of Carver's method.

The postman in 'What Do You Do in San Francisco?' is, like Edgar Morgan, held up
for scrutiny to reveal more about the reading process. Here, a more obliquely self-
referential form of voyeurism can be found. The postal worker Henry Robinson tells
the story of a couple who live along his postal route. His voyeurism takes the form of
speculating upon the addresses and routing of their mail, listening to local gossip and
through brief observations and infrequent and fragmented conversations with them.
Unlike the voyeurs in 'The Idea', however, he allows himself to intervene with the
subjects of his observation. The postman constructs a moral commentary on the lives
of other characters which the story refuses to validate. Having come to various
conclusions about the couple, he meets the man along his route and:

> I called out, "She's no good, boy. I could tell you that the minute I
> saw her. Why don't you forget her? Why don't you go to work and
> forget her? What have you got against work? It was work, day and
> night, work that gave me oblivion when I was in your shoes" (88)
In his outburst, Robinson demonstrates an essential principle of the reader’s relationship with the characters. This is a warning for those who think they can fully understand someone by ‘reading letters’ about them and come to firm conclusions about what they should do. ‘Reading letters’ is Carver’s most explicit representation of the reading process and therefore this story asks the reader not to be too judgmental in the moral lives of the characters they read especially when based upon the incomplete evidence of the story before them. The idea that one should not judge but understand was a foundation of Hemingway’s fiction and in this critically neglected, but highly significant story it is suggestive that there will be no easy answers in Carver’s fiction.

There is a significant twist in the relationship between voyeur and subject in the story ‘Are These Actual Miles?’. Here, the narrative perspective is Leo’s, who waits for his wife Toni to return from selling their car in a desperate bid to rescue them from bankruptcy. A neighbour Ernest Williams has been watching Leo and the story reveals how Williams had caught Leo in a presumed infidelity:

Once, last winter, during the holidays, when Toni and the kids were visiting his mother’s, Leo brought a woman home. Nine o’clock the next morning, a cold foggy Saturday, Leo walked to the woman’s car, surprised Ernest Williams on the sidewalk with a newspaper in his
hand. Fog drifted, Ernest Williams stared, then slapped the paper against his leg, hard. (151)

Williams’ accidental voyeurism transforms him into a deliberate voyeur, who is keen to watch and judge Leo. At one stage, his contempt for Leo is clear as he spits when he watches them. From Leo’s perspective, this adds to his unease: someone close by knows something he does not want them to know. It also adds an irony to the story of Toni’s presumed infidelity as Leo has himself been unfaithful. In the denouement, Williams’ appearance is represented by a light going on and the shades rolling up, a reminder of the light that burns throughout the house in ‘The Idea’. His presence reminds Leo that his behaviour has not been morally upright. In light of my reading of ‘What Do You Do in San Francisco?’, this might be an indication that the reader should not judge those until he has judged him or herself (a principle reminiscent of Hemingway’s aspiration towards a moral non-judgement). It is notable that the reader might feel that the judgement made by Williams is more valid than that made by the postman, given that Williams does not interfere as he keeps his judgement more or less to himself.

By fusing the reader and the author, Carver is effectively reducing the distance between the two. Gone are the over-arching, omniscient modes of expression of Hemingway’s narrator and have been replaced by a writer who, like the reader, is merely a voyeur of events. It is a question of privilege and by reducing the writer into a mere spectator Carver is aligning the writer to the reader, as voyeurs. As such, it
seems impossible that such a writer could provide the kind of commentary that prevents the reader from an active, sustained interpretative act. Furthermore, the reader is placed in a privileged position in this narrative. The reader’s role as voyeur is aligned to that of Williams, as the reader knows something that Toni does not: that Leo has been unfaithful. The reader has become like Williams, intent upon watching from afar, in their ability to know those things that the characters cannot know. The voyeur learns through observation but what he or she learns is intimately involved in the character’s lives. Carver is imposing limits upon the role of interpretation by discussing and encouraging a specific moral imperative as part of the strategy he wishes the reader to take. This interpretative strategy coincides with an interest in moral behaviour in his stories. Or rather, with an interest in how moral values might shift if one is the observed or the observer. In the last section of this discussion of voyeurism, Carver turns the gaze upon itself.

Voyeurism and Self-Insight
In ‘Are You A Doctor?’, Carver uses a form of self-observation aligned to voyeurism to reveal the inner thoughts and motives of Arnold Breit, the central character. The two occasions that Arnold stares into the mirror are hugely revealing of his self-apprehension and precipitate significant action. In the first example, Arnold excuses himself from an enigmatic but enticing telephone call and begins to contemplate the situation he finds himself in. He lights and smokes a cigar, providing the first moment for calm consideration. But the moment becomes more urgent when he begins to look at himself in the mirror and is forced to confront himself and his own motives. He removes his spectacles, as if to strip himself of any superfluous influence on his
clarity of vision, so that he might see himself truly. The result is that he desperately wants to continue the conversation: ‘When he returned to the telephone, he was half afraid she might be off the line’ (24). This fear is translated into the more ambiguous: ‘I thought you might have hung up’ (24). While it may remain true that the conversation of the characters reveals little about their psychological state, Carver is careful to expand their emotional lives beyond their own levels of direct communication; much of what they learn about one another is a result of what is not said, and his acceptance of her – he should say ‘no’ – is an indication of his desperation. The second and final example of mirror-gazing confirms Arnold’s motives and consequent action:

He slowly took off his gloves and then his coat. He felt he had to be careful. He went to wash up. When he looked in the bathroom mirror, he discovered the hat. It was then that he made the decision to see her, and he took off his hat and glasses and soaped his face. He checked his nails. (26)

The practised, comfortably commonplace ritual of undressing and washing is shattered by the ‘discovery’ that he has not removed his hat. This destabilising of his

3 It is worth noticing that later in the story, perhaps in the desire to achieve a similar level of distance and contemplation, Arnold asks Clara if he might smoke a cigar. She appears hesitant and unsure and he decides not to smoke it. Thus a moment of perspective, in which he might carefully weigh up the situation, is denied to him.
routine echoes a larger upheaval in his life, the result of his conversation with Clara. Arnold has literally forgotten himself, just as he has forgotten to remove his hat. But rather than be frightened by such a powerful moment he embraces it: ‘It was then that he made the decision to see her [...]’ (26). The mirror has a dual function. It acts a dramatic device, enabling Arnold to see that he has not removed his hat. But the previous use of the mirror reminds us of its power to provide the character a moment of unmediated access into his psychological life. The look in the mirror is akin to the soliloquy in drama, and makes direct genuine expression possible, even if that expression is incomplete. The process represents the function of Carver’s minimalist aesthetic regarding his characterisation: to hold a mirror to them and watch their reflection. It operates on a imagistic basis, and is an extreme form of how the inner lives of characters might be revealed unmediated. In the first example, the reader learns he was afraid she might not be on the line and in the second he says nothing but decides to act. In both examples, the mirror enables Arnold to see the workings of his authentic inner life, and act accordingly. If everyone at some level is voyeur, then the appearance of mirrors in Carver’s fiction (and almost every story has one in this collection) alerts the reader that there is also a moment for intent introspection. The mirror is the locus around which this strategy operates, just as the windows, another figure frequently used by Carver, enables the voyeur to look upon the wider world.

The previous story in the collection, ‘Neighbors’, demonstrates that voyeurism is not merely a passive observation, but a preparation for vicarious experience, or the

4 This moment is the central epiphany in the story, but like most of Carver’s epiphanies, it is not without qualification.
expansion of the character's own self-identity. Here, Carver quite typically offers no conclusive explanation for why the Millers might find the Stones' house exciting, although it is implied that Bill is sexually stimulated by dressing up in Mrs Stone's clothes. Or, rather, the seemingly obvious reasons are not admitted to one another by the Bill and his wife. The wife simply says: 'It's funny [...] to go in someone's place like that' and the husband agrees: 'It is funny' (10). This is another story about the fascination of entering and exploring somebody else's secret inner lives and, albeit temporarily, transforming your own identity. Bill's fantasy of changing place with his neighbours is present in the moment Bill blinks into the mirror: when he opens his eyes, his identity will be transformed. His obvious dissatisfaction with his own life, spelled out for the reader directly at the beginning of the story, leads Bill to have the desire to assume a new personality. The mirror in this case is a device for recognising and reconstructing one's personality. Yet, the Millers are not allowed to revel in this fantasy for long. At the end of story, they find themselves in limbo, stuck in the corridor between the house they live in and their neighbours, between their former lives and a vision of a new identity, respectively. The wind which they face suggests there will be no easy answers to this problem.

The mirror appears as a motif in several of the short stories. It reminds us of the photographs Hemingway uses in 'Soldier's Home', tangible objects that exist in the present but that have also captured the past. In the mirror, objects - faces - change as in accordance with the viewer. It is a place where people can find a reflection of their truest selves, its laws of science unmediated by opinion, or - as in the case of Bill in 'Neighbors' - it is a place where one can begin to reconstruct identity. It is once again
notable that the mirror depends upon vision, more evidence of Carver's central obsession; vision, and its object and subject.

What this analysis points to is Carver's 'obsession' with seeing and being seen and the potency of the visual image. If one considers the central aspects of his fiction - the voyeur, the epiphany, the imagery - and their frequent manifestations in his fiction through mirrors, windows or televisions, then the notion of watching becomes very important. He extends his interest in a tangible, physical reality by using the everyday object as a central element in his approach to suggestive language.
Part Two: Suggestive Language and the Everyday Object

Carver shares Hemingway’s obsession with the accurate depiction and suggestive power of the concrete image. In an example I drew on for a discussion of suggestive language in the first chapter, the following extract, from the vignette ‘Chapter II’ of *In Our Time*, Hemingway provides one striking image after the other:

Minarets stuck out of the rain out of Adrianople across the mud flats.
the carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road. Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. No end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned.5

Compare this to the use of the striking image in Carver’s ‘What’s in Alaska?’:

The cat carried a mouse into the living room, stopped to look at them, then carried the mouse down the hall.

Carl turned the hall light on. The cat carried the mouse out of the hall and into the bathroom.

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The cat dragged the mouse under the coffee table. She lay down under
the table and licked the mouse. She held the mouse in her paws and
licked slowly, from head to tail.

They watched the cat eat the mouse. (66-67)

In both extracts, the physical world is rendered without using the common tropes of
figurative language and there are no similes or metaphors and few adjectives. Physical
actions are described in a similar fashion; carts are hauled, the cat drags the mouse.
Both methods of expression have as their basis an aspiration towards objective
reportage, as each absent narrator merely reports what they have 'seen' as an
eyewitness to events, despite their (differently) unusual or extreme subjects. However,
their observations are far from neutral, as I have shown and instead they create
patterns of significance that are less direct and more implicit than their basis in
empirical descriptions might suggest. Such implication, or suggestion, in Carver's
minimalist style is the focus of this section and its effect upon the reader.

Despite their similarities of expression, fundamental differences exist. The first is the
subject matter. Few contemporary readers would witness the kind of mass exodus
Hemingway is describing in this vignette. Yet the cat catching the mouse, even if not
experienced first-hand, would at least be more readily imaginable. The power of
Hemingway's imagery depends largely upon it being extreme or uncommon, at least
for his implied reader. Such images are widespread and integral to Hemingway's use
of figurative language. These are often unforgettable images, such as the execution of six cabinet ministers (‘Chapter V’), or baggage animals, their legs broken, thrown into the shallow water (‘On the Quai at Smyrna’). The image is in part powerful because its subject is strange to the reader. Hemingway’s ‘exoticism’ might undermine the reader’s sense of identification with the scene and transform their reading experience. Carver, then, chose images that could be immediately identified or experienced first-hand. The subjects of his images were, even more than Hemingway’s ‘everyday object’, more mundane, banal and commonplace.

In her review of Where I’m Calling From, Marilynne Robinson suggests a template for Carver’s short fiction. In her focus upon ‘So Much Water So Close to Home’, she tells us of its ‘striking and simple visual paradigm’ which is the rest of the story’s job to explicate.⁶ This, she claims, is ‘pure Carver’, the implication being that Carver had a method that took the ‘striking image’ as a starting point. In the first story, ‘Fat’, the ‘striking image’ is the description of narrator dreaming that she becomes as fat as the client she had served earlier. The image of half the fish in the creel in ‘Nobody Said Anything’; the couple holding each other in the doorway ‘[…] as if against a wind […]’ in ‘Neighbors’; and Mike, asleep in what appears to be the foetal position, knotted amongst the bed sheets in ‘The Student’s Wife’ all serve such a central purpose. In the story ‘They’re Not Your Husband’, an image propels the narrative into action. Visiting his wife Doreen as she works as a waitress, Earl Ober notices two men looking at her as she bends over to scoop some ice cream:

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⁶ M. Robinson ‘Marriage and Other Astonishing Bonds’ New York Times May 15 1988, p. 44
The white skirt yanked against her hips and crawled up her legs.
What showed was a girdle, and it was pink, thighs that were
rumpled and gray and a little hairy, and veins that spread out
in a berserk display. (17)

This striking image is the initiator of events and represents a distillation of Earl
Ober's dissatisfaction with his life which, the reader will learn, he projects onto his
wife's appearance. In the final denouement, the image once again appears as is Earl's
plan: he wants men to admire her appearance in order to elevate his status. But in
doing so, he is caught by her colleagues encouraging lechery in what appears to be an
innocent customer:

The other waitress came straight to Doreen. "Who is this character?"
she said.

"Who?" Doreen said and looked round with the ice-cream dish in
her hand.

"Him," the other waitress said and nodded at Earl. "Who is this joker,
anyway?" (21)

As the role of observer and observed are inverted, Earl can do nothing but literally
grin and bare it. The image of Doreen as an object of sex, yet who unselfconsciously
goes about her work, has been replaced by one of a humiliated Earl. In the section on
voyeurism, I noted that the relationships between reader, writer and text are constantly
being interrogated by Carver’s method. It is fitting, therefore, that an image should be
the focus of his fictional method, given, as it is, to being observed.

Most stories contain a single, unique striking image which it is the reader’s option to
interpret into a pattern which reveals the overall significance of the story. Moreover,
the idea that it appears at the beginning of the story, as is found in Robinson’s
approach, is one that requires reconsideration. Many of the central images in Will You
Please Be Quiet, Please? appear late in the story, or even at the end. Most do not so
much explain the story as confirm or deny interpretations that it may have aroused.
For example, in ‘Are These Actual Miles?’, Leo traces the stretch marks on Toni his
lover’s body:

They are like roads, and he traces them in her flesh. He runs his fingers
back and forth, first one, then another. They run everywhere in her flesh,
dozens, perhaps hundreds of them. He remembers waking up the morning
after they bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, in the sun, gleaming.

(157)

Appearing at the very end of the story, this subverts the fictional process that so many
of the epiphanic endings suggest in this collection. Rather than look forward with the
promise of change and redemption, he is forced to look back, to wonder – as he has
done in his recollection of the causes of his bankruptcy earlier - how they could have
ended up where they are (153). The bright, hopeful promise of the new car ‘gleaming’
in the sun has ended with disappointment as all the roads lead nowhere. The stretch
marks, suggestive of the roads they could have taken and choices they could have
made, provide an image that simultaneously suggests the promise of choice and a
reminds us that these choices have long disappeared. This striking image, coming at
the end of the story, helps consolidate rather than explain the events of the story. If the
reader felt there may be little hope for Leo and Toni, then this image confirms it. That
Carver makes the central, strange image an integral part of his method points to
Hemingway and his contemporaries’ fascination with the image as expressed in
Pound’s Imagist movement. In Carver, that image is powerful and memorable,
aspiring to a quasi-autonomy which has ‘life’ outside of the narrative. However, it is
actually, like Hemingway’s ‘applied image’ an integral part of his method. This is
best explained in one of the most sustained use of a central image in this collection,
the shoe in ‘What’s in Alaska?’

A Developing Symbolic Value: The Shoe in ‘What’s in Alaska?’

I’d like to suggest how two important elements – repetition and figurative language –
work together in Carver’s ‘What’s in Alaska?’. This story contains several examples
of the more general use of repetition. Most notable is the use of the word ‘shoe’. It
resembles the phrase ‘tried to have a baby’ in Hemingway’s ‘Mr and Mrs Elliot’ in
that it runs like a thread throughout the story. However, as I have shown, Hemingway
retained the symbolic value of the repeated phrase throughout the story, so its
repetition was a strategy to reinforce, or insist on, its significance. Carver does something more ambitious. He changes the context of the word as it appears throughout the story, shifting the emphasis from 'insistence' to 'transference', where its value changes each time it reappears.

The word 'shoe' appears in the second sentence and then again three times in the second paragraph. Upon Jack's return home, the conversation immediately turns to his purchase. Mary is unsure about Jack's choice, claiming she dislikes the colour but adds approvingly, '[...] but I bet they're comfortable' (58). Although the word 'shoe' appears several times in these opening paragraphs, the repetitions are not placed in the kind of close proximity found in the Hemingway patterning, and so does not appear to be so immediately an explicitly rhetorical device. Indeed, at this point it merely reflects an everyday practice - buying shoes and talking about them; there is little to anticipate their central role in the narrative. Yet the shoes here are just shoes; but they might soon mean something else: the boots, which he carries under his arm, have changed to shoes. Those boots are aligned to his work (referred to 'work boots' in the opening paragraph) and the shoes, as Mary implies in her appraisal that they look 'comfortable', represent leisure (the implication is that they cannot be both comfortable and fashionable, and fashionable clothes is one of the themes I turn to in the chapter on Barthelme). Even in this seemingly insignificant detail, the potential for change is present. Minimalism is based upon the accretion of the acuity of such detail and here Carver develops the value of a seemingly innocuous object until it is the pivot around which the story turns. During the party, Jack feels compelled to raise the subject of Mary's comment about him being 'on a bummer':
"What did you mean when you said I was on a bummer?" Jack said to Mary.

“What?” Mary said.

Jack stared at her and blinked. "You said something about me being on a bummer. What made you say that?"

“I don’t remember now, but I can tell when you are,” she said. “But please don’t bring up anything negative, okay?"

“Okay,” Jack said. “All I’m saying is I don’t know why you said that. If I wasn’t on a bummer before you said it, it’s enough when you say it to put me on one.”

“If the shoe fits,” Mary said. She leaned on the arm of the sofa and laughed until tears came.

“What was that?” Carl said. He looked at Jack and then at Mary. “I missed that one,” Carl said. (61-62)

There are two examples of repetition here. In the first, Jack repeats his concerns first raised at the beginning of the party. When Mary says to the party that Jack is: ‘ ‘[...] on a little bummer tonight,” ’ Jack responds: ‘ ‘Why do you say that?” ‘ ‘That’s a good way to put me on one.” ’ (60). The repetition here represents a continuing concern of the character as Jack is troubled at what he perceives to be a sustained criticism from Mary, so troubled that he stores her comments and raises it when they have a moment alone. The repetition insists upon a salient theme, Jack’s dissatisfaction.
The context and the shoe has changed upon its reappearance during their conversation. Mary says: ‘If the shoe fits’, a play on the proverb ‘if the cap fits, wear it’, meaning that the easier path be taken if offered. She means something like ‘If Jack is acting like he’s on a bummer, then he deserves to be accused on being on one’ (the accusation of ‘being on a bummer’ being the cap that Jack ‘readily’ wears). But it also points to the shoe that Jack has chosen earlier in the story, where she expressed her distaste for it but softened her criticism with the idea that it seemed comfortable.

Now, under the influence of drugs and in the company of friends, her inhibitions have all but evaporated. The shoe has become the focus for her criticism, as she transfers her feelings about Jack onto it, and physical objects become a representation for inner emotional states, prefiguring the conclusion. Later in the story, the shoes reappear in another significant moment:

Jack held his glass out and Carl poured it full. Jack set the glass on the coffee table, but in reaching for it he knocked over the glass and the soda poured on his shoe.

“Goddamn it,” Jack said. “How do you like that? I spilled it on my shoe.” (64)

The new shoes have been ruined by his clumsiness and he confirms this shortly after:

“They look comfortable,” Helen said a long time later and handed Jack a towel.
“That’s what I told him,” Mary said.

Jack took the shoe off and rubbed the leather with the towel.

“It’s done for,” he said. “That cream soda will never come out.”

Mary and Carl and Helen laughed. (64)

He appears isolated from the rest of the group and the damage to the shoes is something he takes seriously. He is upset by them being ruined by his own ineptitude and has no sympathy from the others. Jack attempts to rally himself but in looking more closely, only sees his isolation more clearly:

Jack worked the shoe back on. He put both feet under the lamp and looked at his shoes together. (65)

This seems like an attempt by Jack to retain his composure by maintaining a singularity of purpose, by collecting together the loose ends of the evening, here figuratively expressed in the comfort of symmetry between both shoes. Being under the lamp gives him the opportunity to reflect with clarity: ‘He put his feet under the coffee table. Then he moved them out under the light once more. “Who wants a new pair of shoes?” Jack said.’ (65). Here, Jack recognises (following the ‘light’ that is shed, a motif in Carver’s fiction, designating revelation) that the shoes are no longer any use, and attempts to off-load them to his peers. Figuratively he is trying to cast them off and reinsert himself into the social dynamic. In the final section, the role of
the shoe changes once again. Now there is a direct comparison between his and her shoes: ‘They moved slowly on the sidewalk. He listened to the scuffing sound her shoes made. [...] He could feel the dampness in that shoe.’(68). In another act of emotional transference to an object, he considers that her shoes are more valuable than his. This echoes the theme of the last section, in which the shoe becomes prominent:

He kept staring and thought he saw it again, a pair of small eyes. His heart turned. He blinked and kept staring. He leaned over to look for something to throw. He picked up one of his shoes. He sat up straight and held the shoe with both hands. (69)

This is the culmination of the use of the shoe symbol in the story. To begin with the shoe meant something like an escape from work to leisure. But Mary’s criticism of them reminds Jack that their attitudes are at odds, perhaps because of the disagreement over their proposed move to Alaska. Jack’s unhappiness with this prospect is illustrated not merely in his dialogue, through the patterning of the figurative value of the shoes. Moreover, the small pair of eyes found at the end of the story could be evidence of Mary’s desire to move, settle and have children. Jack is so against this idea that he wants to throw his shoe at the eyes. At this point the shoe means something like the last shred of individuality, self-determination and integrity that he possesses. The shoe, although damaged, is still his own. This is a supreme
example of how the subtle act of showing might be found in the most obscure object, through a series of highly nuanced suggestions which reflect a complex state of mind in flux, exposing the permutations of a complex consciousness.

The notion that the symbolic reading is in flux, subject to the specific context of the moment in which it appears, is a development of the traditional use of the symbol. It is also highly equivocal, and undermines the stability of association between symbol and its value which is an important element in the reader's interpretation. Carver does not use the same store of symbols as Hemingway – the shoe has no stable corollary, no fixed Freudian reading – but instead he is more intent upon demonstrating how the emotional state is suggested in the appearance of his everyday objects. This focus upon a single element of Carver's method may, at first, seem a little pedantic. The reader might be confused by the centrality of the seemingly banal object, the constant reappearance of which seems significant, but does not easily reveal itself as such. It could not reasonably be claimed that 'What's in Alaska?' is 'about' a shoe. But if pedantry is merely a pejorative term for focussing on detail, then Carver is certainly guilty of such focus. For it is in the detail, and more pointedly the details in objects found in everyday life, that Carver uses as a basis for creating a greater significance. In this example, Carver endows a shoe with what he calls an 'immense, even startling power' partly as a result of its changing context as it is repeated in different terms through the story. It is unnerving to the reader not because of its inherent strangeness (there is little strange about a pair of shoes) but because of its value as a product of its changing place within the narrative. Like Hemingway (and Chekhov before him), the function of the symbol is largely determined by its place within a composition or
configuration. Here, the everyday object has become estranged from its literal, everyday value, transformed into a potent symbol of the desire to escape. Such highly sophisticated methods are at the heart of how minimalist fiction paradoxically uses the everyday to suggest something far greater, more moving and lasting; the less of the everyday becomes the more of the emotive and challenging journey his character takes. Meaning is expressed through a series of inflections, of subtle relationships, or fleeting glimpses and minute detail which all point to minimalist reduction; it asks the reader to loosen the restrictions on what they consider the ‘proper’ stuff of the literary fiction, and to adapt their reading strategy accordingly.

Carver creates effect from an accretion of minute but highly significant detail throughout the collection. In ‘Are You A Doctor?’, Breit talks to Clara about how they could have met, he admits that this occurrence is confusing: ‘This is still very much of a mystery to me,’ he said. ‘It’s quite out of the ordinary, I assure you.’ (28). Clara promises to solve that mystery; ‘You’d probably like to hear the story of how I got your number?’ (28). Carver then draws our attention to events outside of the conversation at the moment when the promise of a confession is imminent:

They sat across from each other waiting for the water to boil. He could hear the television. He looked around the kitchen and then out toward the balcony again. The water began to bubble. (28)
The sensory impact of the television and the water boiling reinforce the idea of the kind of overwhelming impressions this strange meeting leaves upon Breit. The boiling water is suggestive of the rising anticipation of this strange meeting, as both wait for answers. His eyes are unable to rest upon Clara, despite her sitting across from him, and they shift from the room to the balcony, their path tracing a subconscious line of escape from the room and this difficult situation. The staccato rhythms of the short sentence promote this sense of fragmentation, rising to the point at which the emotions rise and the water bubbles. This short sentence is perhaps the most abundant and immediately obvious evidence of a minimalist style, and serves to foreground the process by which small elements come together in a carefully contrived pattern to mean more than the sum of their parts. Carver’s sentences are mostly short, often containing a single clause. This is a typical example, from the story ‘Night School’:

My marriage had just fallen apart. I couldn’t find a job. I had another girl. But she wasn’t in town. So I was at a bar having a glass of beer, and two women were sitting a few stools down, and one of them began to talk to me.

“You have a car?”

“I do, but it’s not here,” I said.

My wife had the car. I was staying at my parents’ place. I used their car sometimes. But tonight I was walking. (70)
The overall effect has similarities with the Hemingway short sentence, in the first instance by clarifying and emphasising the key proposition. While the sentence remains uncluttered, the focal point for our attention is abundantly clear. The sentences retain a strict logical structure, moving from one idea to the next, and often bringing us to a conclusion expressed in a longer sentence that acts as a coda for what has come before and a beginning of what is to come. In this example the fifth and final sentence of the opening paragraph is much longer than those preceding and summarises the narrator's dilemma: he has just broken up with his wife. The short sentence dictates the pace of the reading, another direct way in which the minimalist style determines the reader's experience. Carver's short sentences produce a staccato effect, a stuttering from line to line, echoing the kind of rhythms found in Hemingway's prose. Rhythm is not simply produced by the single sentence but a combination of several strung together.

The shorter sentence is abundant, but is not found everywhere. In 'Neighbors', the third person narration is written in a largely different, more expansive, idiom:

Bill and Arlene Miller were a happy couple. But now and then they felt they alone among their circle had been passed by somehow, leaving Bill to attend to his bookkeeping duties and Arlene occupied with secretarial chores. They talked about it sometimes, mostly in comparison with the lives of the neighbors, Harriet and Jim Stone. It seemed to the
Millers that the Stones lived a fuller and brighter life. The Stones were always going out for dinner, or entertaining at home, or travelling about the country somewhere in connection with Jim’s work. (6)

With the exception of the first sentence, the sentences are long and contain multiple clauses. The syntax is also rather strained, for example in the phrase ‘But now and then they felt they alone among their circle’. They certainly seem at odds with the notion of clarity of expression, emphasis through isolation and the creation of rhythms through an accretion of short, staccato propositions. Carver sought news of inviting the reader to respond to his text that did not rely solely upon this extreme short sentence (this more expansive style anticipates his later work, such as Cathedral). However, the speech patterns of Bill and Arlene display a distinctly minimalist structure:

“Bill! God, you scared me. You’re early,” she said.

He shrugged. “Nothing to do at work,” he said.

She let him use her key to open the door. He looked at door across the hall before following her inside.

“Let’s go to bed,” he said.

“Now?” She laughed. “What’s gotten into you?”

“Nothing. Take your dress off.” (8)
The short sentence seems to have a dual function in the stories of Carver. When it is applied to the exploration of the physical world or for narrative purposes, it seems uniquely successful. It is reminiscent of the use of Hemingway's short sentence, in that it clarifies and emphasises ideas single ideas within a single clause. However, when used in dialogue to express the thoughts and feelings of the characters, it displays their ability to articulate themselves or to communicate clearly with one another. It is not so much that they are inarticulate but that their motives remain unclear even to themselves.

In the example from 'Night School', the short sentence of the opening direct narration displays the same clipped, terse sentences of the dialogue that we find in Hemingway. It, too, has this function in the work of Carver. But Carver extends the notion of the short sentence as evidence of his character's inability to express themselves. If the short sentence, with its concomitant rejection of metaphor and relatively small vocabulary is the ideal tool for making the physical world manifest, then it appears sadly lacking when used to articulate the thoughts and feelings of his characters. In the final chapter on Barthelme, I will discuss his claim his characters are not those to 'shout from the rooftops', meaning that they do not discuss their motives, beliefs or deeper feelings. This certainly seems the case for much of Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? as the title evinces.
Part Three: Omission and the Interrupted Epiphany

The use of the epiphany in Carver’s work is aligned to that in some modern short fiction in that the epiphany is revelatory, capable of providing the kind of insight that might help those who experience it to overcome his or her problem, but does not see the change through. Suggesting the possibility of positive change whilst refusing to fulfil its potential to resolve the narrative conflicts is one of Carver’s most important contributions to minimalism, and one of the key ways in which the text ends equivocally but subverting the reader’s expectations.

In his analysis of the epiphany in Carver’s fiction, Gunter Leypoldt criticises these stories for not fulfilling the promise of resolution they suggest. In this examination of ‘What’s In Alaska?’, he draws attention to the seemingly banal conversation that takes place about cream soda and points to a strategy the reader must adopt in order to make sense out of these seemingly trivial moments:

One finds oneself rereading these passages in an attempt to identify any hidden meanings that would contribute to a thematic pattern, a central conceit towards which the narrative could be said to move.

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8 Leypoldt, p. 537.
This, I have argued, is precisely the process Carver's minimalism demands. Indeed, what does it mean to write a literature which is full of, and reliant upon, lines such as the following?:

Her breath produced itself on the glass, then went away. (128-129)

The collection is full of what may, at least at first reading, be considered incidental detail and obtuse, incoherent and impressionistic observation. Yet, it is the focus upon the minutiae of everyday life that is so important for developing an understanding of this collection and of minimalism in general. Out of context, this might reveal something about the transience of human life. But it is only when it is considered within the pattern of the collection as a whole and within this particular story does its significance develop into something extraordinary. In order to make sense of this epiphany, it should be considered within the entire context of the narrative.

In this example, the closing door figuratively closes communication between the couple and she is left alone, talking 'to the window' (128). Indeed, the conversation that has begun: 'I feel alright' is now continued without his presence, making her isolation more powerfully felt. Tantalisingly out of reach, she watches him as she reveals her innermost feelings: "'I just hate to have you gone all the time. It seems like you're gone all the time," she said to the window.' (128). The window provides a channel of visual communication but also acts as a barrier to speech, a symbol of how
the couple remain connected without satisfactory communication. It is a partial method of communicating, where everything can be clearly seen without being clearly and mutually understood. Her breath upon the glass, which rises then fades, is evocative of the words she uses to try to communicate her isolation in his absence. These words only leave a small and temporary imprint on the glass as her plea, unheard by him and but ironically read by the reader-voyeur, fails to make any difference on his actions. As Boxer and Phillips make clear, the window functions as a direct indication of voyeurism:

If the mirror is an emblem of Carverian dissociation, the window, appropriately, is a complementary symbol of voyeurism.  

Leypoldt fails to find the patterning that should, he feels, be situated at the final epiphany:

[...] the epiphanic moment with which the story concludes does not achieve even minimal congruence of theme [...] suddenly he [Jack] fancies he sees 'something in the hall' with 'a pair of small eyes'

[...] [Jack's] vision is evidently a form of subliminal unease rather than offering recognition.  

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9 Boxer and Phillips, p. 77.

10 Leypoldt, p. 537. He erroneously replaces 'Jack' with 'Carl' in his discussion and for the sake of clarity, I have corrected the quotation, placing 'Jack' in square brackets.
What Leypoldt fails to recognise is the congruence between the epiphanic moment at
the end of the story and the central and strange image of the story: the cat and mouse.
Although Carver leaves unsaid exactly who these eyes belong to, it might certainly
point to that image which is introduced so violently into the story. One must speculate
upon what this patterning means. This patterning could suggest that Carl feels he is
the mouse to his partner's cat and as such, is subject to the whim of the forces evident
in her behaviour towards him. Moreover, it points once again to the notion of being
watched as a source of anxiety, as a way of reminding the characters that they have
responsibilities that require fulfilling. At the end of this story, the voyeurism, the
strong central image and the epiphany come together to create a powerful moment of
unease, which embodies several of Carver's characteristic devices.

James Joyce was at least partially responsible for the introduction of the epiphany into
modern literature and Carver's use of epiphany is related to the Joycean model.¹¹
Hemingway rarely used the epiphany in this form. Rather, Carver's use of the
epiphany is best considered in relation to the Joycean. Derived from the Greek
epiphainein, meaning to manifest, the epiphany has long been associated with the

¹¹ I am indebted to the following studies of the epiphany in literature: A. Nichols The Poetics of
Epiphany: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Modern Literary Moment (Tuscaloosa: University of
Alabama Press, 1987); M. Bidney Patterns of Epiphany: From Wordsworth to Tolstoy, Pater and
Barrett Browning (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); M. Beja Epiphany in the
Modern Novel (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971; and W. Tigges (ed.) Moments of
Moment: Aspects of Literary Epiphany (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). The latter is an especially useful
collection of essays from a variety of perspectives and Tigges' introductory essay offers an interesting
typology of the epiphany. For articles specifically on Carver's epiphany see Leypoldt; Clark; A. Meyer
‘Epiphany and Its Discontents: Coover, Gangemi, Sorrentino, and Postmodern Revelation.' Journal of
manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi in early Christianity.

Its definition has been transformed until it has come to mean any sudden and important revelation or realisation, without the necessary manifestation of a divine or supernatural being at its cause. Joyce appropriated the term to define his new literary device in the novel Stephen Hero. Here, Stephen Daedalus discusses his desire to collate the mundane objects and incidents which reveal a moment of unique intensity into a collection of what he calls epiphanies: 'By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of a gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself'.

The salient criteria are the cause — the mundane, everyday artefacts and events — and its central effect, a transcendent, quasi-spiritual revelation, or a moment of clarity. Joyce's use of the epiphany is can be illustrated by his Dubliners story, 'The Dead':

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. [...] It was falling, too, on every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. [...] His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

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12 Nichols, p. 8.
Here, Gabriel experiences an epiphany that begins with him watching the snow falling and ends with a vision of unity of all the living and all the dead. The epiphanies of Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? begin, like Gabriel’s, in an observation of the commonplace, but inevitably end in something far less profound in lyrical expression:

As she looked, the room grew very light and the pale sheets whitened grossly before her eyes.

She wet her lips with a sticking sound and got down on her knees. She put her hands on the bed.

“God,” she said. “God, will you help us, God?” she said. (96)

The student’s wife in the story of the same name begins to see more clearly as the night brightens into day: ‘By stages things were becoming very visible. She let her eyes see everything until they fastened on the red winking light atop the radio tower atop the opposite’ (96). Yet this emergent visibility, a literal manifestation of the epiphanic power of insight, brings with it torment, isolation and despair, as the red warning light on the tower prophesises.

Whereas the Joycean epiphany leaves those who experience epiphany self-consciously richer, Carver transforms the epiphany as a source of clarity and understanding into a realisation of confusion, bewilderment and even a resignation
that change brings with it despair, as well as hope.\textsuperscript{14} Ironically, the epiphany demonstrates to those who experience it how limited their vision might be.

Elsewhere this subversion is evident. Although certain that her life will change, the narrator of ‘Fat’ is uncertain as to what that change might bring, only knowing that she can ‘feel it’ (6). Unlike that of Joyce, the positive implications of the epiphany are not discussed, and what remains is in incomplete groping after meaning in otherwise seemingly ‘meaningless’ lives. At best, those who experience the epiphany do not understand its significance.

At worst, insight brings despair. In the absence of a positive effect that is clearly understood, Carver’s protagonists recognise that the only thing they can be certain of in light of their epiphany is that they will be changed somehow. This passive acceptance is illustrated in the final story, from which the collection takes its name:

He held himself, he later considered, as long as he could. And then

he turned to her. He turned and turned in what might have been a

\textsuperscript{14} Carver describes a personal epiphany in the essay ‘Fires’ from the collection of the same name, where he comes to recognise that responsibility for his children is the most tangible ‘influence’ upon his writing. He says of the experience: ‘I’d had, I’d realized later, an insight. But so what? What are insights? They don’t help any. They just make things harder.’ See R. Carver Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories (London: The Harvill Press, 1994), pp. 32-33.
stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marvelling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him. (181, my emphasis)

Both character and reader understand that a tangible change has taken place, but the nature of that change and the effects that it will have remain indefinite.

The Epiphany and Short Story Tradition

Carver’s frequent use of the epiphany helps contextualise Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? in terms of the history of the short story. The short story critic Clare Hanson integrates the development of the epiphany with the development of the short story:

The emphasis of modernist short fiction was on a single moment of intense or significant experience. [...] The short form is clearly suited to the presentation of a single incident, with a central ‘moment of significance’.

In her analysis of closure Susan Lohafer suggests that: ‘We would need another diagram to fit the modern notion of ‘epiphany’’. In her analysis of the endings of the

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16 S. Lohafer Coming to Terms with the Short Story (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 82.
short story in the chapter ‘Getting Out of Story’, Lohafer provides an outline of the structuring of a traditional short story.

She draws attention to John Barth’s account of the short story structure which:

 [...] fits the traditional concept of conflict-and-resolution, ‘rising’ and ‘falling’ action, and final ‘denouement’. Stories end when this pattern is completed.¹⁷

The traditional notion of a beginning, middle and an end has a corollary in short story theory with the respective concepts of exposition, conflict and denouement¹⁸. In the conventional tale, and much short story telling before modernism, is how completely the denouement interprets the central conflict in order to resolve any interpretative questions remaining. Formally, it is a convention used to conclude, the sudden climax to a narrative. In many manifestations, it provides a conclusion to an established premise, that the conflict between two parties can be resolved through this newly acquired insight. Almost as significantly, there exists a moral resolution in the

¹⁷ Lohafer, p. 82.
¹⁸ Carver was familiar with conventional short story structuring, but he does not appear to be interested in using it in his fiction. He recalls his introduction to the concept of structure during his time as a student in a creative writing programme taught by his early mentor, John Gardner: ‘I think his [Gardner’s] idea of short story […] was something that had a recognizable beginning, middle and an end to it. Once in a while he’d go to the blackboard and draw a diagram to illustrate a point he wanted to make about rising or falling emotion in a story – peaks, valleys, plateaus, resolution, denouement, things like that. Try as I might, I couldn’t muster a great deal of interest or really understand this side of things […]’: Carver (1994), p. 43.
traditional tale: the bad have been punished and goodness prevails. Such stories follow a structural pattern which Carver’s stories do not.

The first story in the collection, ‘Fat’, follows a traditional structure of exposition and conflict but its denouement does not satisfy a resolved conclusion. Telling the story to her friend, the narrator recounts how following her encounter with the customer, she feels ‘terrifically fat’ as her and her partner Rudy have sex: ‘When he gets on me, I suddenly feel I am fat. I feel I am terrifically fat, so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all.’ (4-5) Such change anticipates the epiphany where she pronounces: ‘My life is going to change. I feel it.’ (5) The epiphany she has experienced, however, is not conclusively linked with her dilemma. This conclusion does not resolve the conflict, such as it is, that has emerged throughout the story. Rather, it is suggestive of the potential of a powerful change without clearly and directly claiming what that change might be or what the implications of that change are. The traditional signposts of closure are indeed omitted and replaced with promise, potential and change, which might be fairly considered the elements of beginnings, not ends.

In ‘Nobody Said Anything’, there is a more sophisticated exposition / conflict / denouement structuring, and one that, importantly, is not completely resolved. The story begins with a clear exposition, and a sense of place, time and situation is tangible from the opening page: ‘I could hear them out in the kitchen. I couldn’t hear what they were saying, but they were arguing’ (33). Feigning illness, the boy narrator is allowed to have the day off school and decides to go fishing at the nearby creek.
Here, he meets another boy who is fishing and there begins a second, sub-narrative. The boys argue about who should keep the fish they have caught. Unable to decide who shall keep it, they cut it in half in compromise, each boy taking his share and that is where this sub-narrative ends. Excited by the prospect of showing his parents his catch, the narrator returns home to find his parents arguing once again. At this late point in the story, the central conflict is fully realised: the boy is isolated from his wrangling parents, yet he is determined to help reconcile them. His anticipated conclusion is that his catch might become the catalyst from which the family might reunite: 'I unslung the creel so I could raise the lid and get to march into the house, grinning' (45) It is here that the theme of seeing, of which the epiphany is its most powerful and extreme manifestation, becomes vitally significant. Notions of seeing are foregrounded in the argument between his parents. The husband begins: ‘[...] “You’ll see.” She said, “I’ll see nothing. If I thought that, I’d rather see them dead first.”’ (45) The metaphor is extended when the son appears, once again grinning in optimistic anticipation, with the creel in his hands: ‘“You won’t believe what I caught at Birch Creek. Just look. Look here. Look at this. Look what I caught.”’ (45) The verb ‘look’ is repeated four times in quick succession, reinforcing the boy’s urgency and excitement and also an entreaty to understand, to accept and tolerate: to see is to understand. But neither of his parents can see what their son can see, either through ignorance or through choice:

 [...] she finally looked in. “Oh, oh, my God! What is it? A snake!

 [...] Please, take it out before I throw up.”

 [...]
I said, “But look, Dad. Look what it is.”

He said, “I don’t want to look.”

[...] He looked into the creel and his mouth fell open.

He screamed, “Take that goddam thing out of here! [...]” (45-46)

Repeating ‘look’ twice, the father rejects his plea, choosing to remain ignorant of his son’s catch and so undermines the boy’s hope. Having gone outside, a reminder of his isolation, the boy sees clearly what is in front of him:

I went back outside. I looked into the creel. What was there looked silver under the porch light. What was there filled the creel.

I lifted him out. I held him. I held that half of him. (46)

The ‘silver’ appearance, made so by the light of sudden understanding, is suggestive of its high value and even symbolically as a comparative vitality, when one considers it in comparison with the green, sickly fish the boys had previously found. This is in direct contrast to his parent’s horror and when the story culminates in the boy lifting the half of the fish out of the creel and holding it, the boy acknowledges the promise that even an incomplete fish – a gesture, a beginning at reconciliation – offers. He is able to see clearly, but what is left is partial and unrewarding. This boy and what remains of his catch held the promise of redemption, now sadly rejected, and his holding him is a pathetic attempt to reclaim his parent’s approval.
This moment, like so many other epiphanies in the collection, appears at the end of the story. As Gunter Leypoldt notes of ‘What’s in Alaska?’:

As a result of the story’s juxtaposition of de-hierachized material, plot closure hinges on the extent to which the final, climactic epiphany resolves the data into a meaningful pattern.¹⁹

The epiphany which comes at the end of the story promises to draw together the loose ends and provide a closed, resolved finale which diminishes interpretative indeterminacy. When the reader interprets the character’s epiphanies, such as those found in ‘The Student’s Wife’ or ‘Fat’, there is no such resolution: change is possible but the change which comes about is indefinite and so does not address the specific interpretative problems that the narrative raises. For example, a reasonable speculation in ‘Fat’ would be to suggest that the epiphany permits the narrator to see clearly how her relationship with Rudy is unsustainable and so she must act accordingly. Carver’s insights in Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? rarely, if ever, offer such promise.²⁰

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¹⁹ Leypoldt, p. 537.

²⁰ ‘This is not true of his later fiction, where the epiphany, in accordance with his more positive and expansive attitude, often resulted in a clearly discernible course of action for his characters. For example, in ‘Fever’, found in Cathedral, the protagonist comes to terms with his wife’s absence as the result of an epiphany following an encounter with his maid: ‘But he understood it was over, and he felt able to let her go. [...] And that passing [...] would become part of him now, too, as surely as anything else he’d left behind.’ R. Carver Cathedral (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 173.
The brief analysis suggests two ideas. Firstly, by appearing at the end and offering a possibility of positive change that might resolve the conflict assembled in the narrative, the epiphany in Carver’s stories represents a structural climax. Something is certainly learned at the end of the stories, and as a result, a conclusion to the progress from exposition through conflict to resolution is made. But it is not an interpretative one. The epiphany whilst suggesting the possibility of change, does not directly make clear what that precise change will be. Will the narrator in ‘Fat’ be determined to leave her partner as a result of her epiphany? Carver’s epiphanies omit the stability, clarity and insight of the traditional Joycean model. As a result, a course of action that might resolve that interpretative problem remains. Indeed, this is Carver’s great omission, akin in significance to Hemingway’s ‘iceberg theory’, in that the epiphany appears to be structurally well-positioned at the end of the story, but is interpretatively equivocal because it does not offer a resolution to the narrative. Rather, it offers promise and dashes it, often only creating bewilderment, confusion and even despair for a reader grasping to understand why the epiphany is incomplete. The epiphany represents a formal resolution but not an interpretative one.

*The Unresolved Epiphany and Reader Response*

Like the notion of voyeurism found elsewhere in this collection, there is an implied relationship between what is experienced by the characters on the page and what might be experienced by the reader. As such, the epiphany, perhaps along with the theme of the voyeur, is the closest Carver comes to introducing an explicit, conventional literary strategy into his work. In the absence of metaphors, similes and the abundant self-conscious experimentation of post-modernist writer, the epiphany
demonstrates that Carver’s (and minimalism’s) ‘innocent style’ of no tricks is merely another style. As Arthur Saltzman argues:

Epiphany is an anthropomorphic distortion, as could well be said of metaphor, analogy, or any of literature’s ploys for rendering the world hospitable. 21

This can, on occasion, effect the ways in which Carver’s style is transformed during the direct expression of the epiphany. As the moment of insight approaches, the idiom often becomes more expansive, the imagery more intense. I have already recounted the example of Leo tracing the paths of Toni’s stretch marks and the manner in which this vital image subverts his hope of redemption, a conventional function of epiphany. This is equally true of the resolutory epiphany in the entire collection, found in the title story and which points to Carver’s, used later in such stories as ‘Fever’ in Cathedral:

Her hand moved over his hip and over his stomach and she was pressing her body over his now and moving over him back and forth over him. He held himself, he later considered, as long as he could.

And then he turned to her. He turned and turned in what might have

21 Saltzman, p. 500.
been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marveling at the
impossible changes he felt moving over him. (181)

His perspective is crucial: his distance from the moment (‘[…] he later considered’) meant that the effects of the epiphany could still be felt, as he ‘was still turning’. Because the epiphany is presented in a complex interaction of tenses, it appears at once immediate and of the past. As such, the reader will understand that Ralph has had the time to absorb these changes and so be able to ‘marvel’ at them.

The notion of character was also undergoing change […] The idea of a fixed and fully knowable identity […] was abandoned by many writers of the post-Freudian era. In its stead came a sense of external personality as an ever-changing, infinitely adjustable ‘envelope’ surrounding the real self.22

Carver’s many-faceted epiphanies demonstrate his adherence and subversion of conventional literary devices. He pared down his subject to focus intently upon the commonplace and even the banal. In his exploration of voyeurism, he suggests that everyone involved in his fiction - the reader, character, writer - are voyeurs of some sort or another, implying an intimacy with his fiction that his distanced, ‘absent’ minimalism style does not imply. In his use of imagery and figurative

22 Hanson, pp. 55, 56.
language, he aspires to an innocent style, which, is of course, merely another style itself. Finally, in his epiphany he used a traditional device to close his stories without providing interpretative closure. This paradoxical quality of Carver’s fiction, the melding of two seemingly ambivalent traits, is evidence of minimalism’s power to create significance from seemingly incoherent, incomplete and impoverished means.
Part Four: Carver's Everyday Reality

Critics of Carver's short stories reflect his work's problematic relationship with the conventions of realism. Many would consider that it reveals a genuine interest in an exploration of the American underclass, and more particularly, in the domestic lives of couples, either tenuously together or recently parted. Kirk Nesset notes of minimalism: ' [...] the fiction constitutes above all a strikingly resurgence of the realist mode'. Adam Meyer supports the notion of a 'resurgence' of realism following post-modern fiction's departure from realist conventions:

When Carver was first beginning to write, the dominant literary mode [...] was a kind of experimental postmodernism. [...] The style is marked by [...] an abundance of writing whose main concern is writing itself.24

So convinced are several critics of minimalism that they are realists that the term itself becomes part of the movement's alternative titles. In the United Kingdom, minimalists are also known as 'Dirty Realists', for example, following a publication of several of the short stories in a special edition of Granta and this implies an integral relationships between realism and minimalism. Variously known as 'new' or 'neo-realism', 'hyper-realists' and 'K-Mart Realism', the inclusion of the term would

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24 Meyer, p. 27.
suggest it should be placed within the conventions of realist writing. Assessing Carver in terms of his relationship to realism is the focus of this section and I shall, along with the critics above, suggest ways in which Carver’s work can be viewed as working within the traditions of realism. His realism is an important element in itself, but here it represents Carver’s—and minimalism’s—ongoing interest in the ordinary subject.

Several critics have asserted that this relationship is less straightforward than it might appear. In his study of contemporary American short fiction, John Aldridge accuses Carver of failing to address social issues:

It is not a response to, nor does it represent an attack on, any specific social or political injustice. [...] In fact, a startling characteristic of such writing is that it expresses absolutely no discernible attitude toward society as a whole.  

These opinions often coincide about a single work, creating an ambivalent relationship between Carver’s short fiction and realism. Noting that his stories: ‘[...] are like stark black-and-white snapshots of lives lived in a kind of quiet, even silent

desperation"^27, Charles May goes on to claim most of the stories: '… have the
- ambience more of a dream than of everyday reality'.^28 Indeed, it is May that comes
closest to the ambivalent quality of Carver’s short stories in terms of their
relationships with the conventions of realism. That transformation of the concretely
real into the dreamlike is the product of a suggestive minimalist which creates a
myriad of nuanced relationships between the everyday and the fantastic.

Of the twenty-two stories in this collection, over half directly concern marital
relations. Most of these couples are out of work, are blue-collar workers or at best
low-status white collar workers. Bill and Arlene Miller of ‘Neighbors’ are a
bookkeeper and a secretary; the narrator of ‘Fat’ works as a short order waitress; the
narrator of ‘Collectors’ is unemployed and waits for a invitation to work; whilst Leo
and Toni of ‘Are These Actual Miles?’ are reliant on the sale of their car to rescue
them from bankruptcy. As a result of their employment status, several find themselves
in financial difficulty and because of these kinds of lifestyle, many of the relationships
are fraught and some are even in the process of fracturing. If realism is a convention
through which the writer sheds light upon the world (at least in the conventional
understanding of realism), then the world that Carver throws light on is a particular
one and one that is relentlessly and exclusively exposed.

^28 May, p. 94.
‘Are These Actual Miles?’ and ‘Signals’ are companion pieces, appearing consecutively in the collection. Both are about strained relationships, and focus on break downs of communication between the couples. As Leo in ‘Are These Actual Miles?’ is left at home, uncertain of whether Toni might use sex as part of selling the car, he remembers what the idea of bankruptcy used to represent:

He recalls when he was a kid his dad pointing at a fine house, a tall white house surrounded by apple trees and a high white rail fence.

“That’s Finch,” his dad said admiringly. “He’s been in bankruptcy at least twice. Look at that house.” But bankruptcy is a company collapsing utterly, executives cutting their wrists and throwing themselves from windows, thousands of men on the street. (152)

However, the everyday reality of bankruptcy is more urgent, humiliating and banal for Leo and Toni. Threatened with a potential order to repossess goods, they have to send, among other things, their children’s bicycles to his mother’s house ‘for safekeeping’ in order that they not be taken. His thoughts then turn on the cause of their debt, the ‘fine travel’ and the ‘thousands on luxury items alone’ (153). In this small remembrance, Carver presents the past, present and future. The latter appears as a ominous presence, as a threat over their lifestyle as they face bankruptcy. It is reminder that the ‘reality’ of financial ruin is very far removed from the ideal of Finch and his resurgence. Carver is stripping nostalgia and sentimentality from his fiction. Rather, it is a bleak, troubled time and those events which caused it now return to
torment him. As Leo finishes recalling how they came to find themselves in this situation, he begins with a faint nostalgia, but ends with his undershirt soaked with sweat, as he considers whether: ‘[...] he should hang himself with his belt’ (153).

The threat of ruin is projected onto thoughts of suicide and later, direct towards Toni when he suspects she has been unfaithful. As she returns:

She works her lips, ducks heavily and sways as he cocks his fist.

“Go ahead,” she says thickly. She stands there swaying. Then she makes a noise and lunges, catches his shirt, tears it down the front.

“Bankrupt!” she screams. (155-156)

Even when the moment becomes violent and immediate, it is expressed with the same pared down ‘unemphaticness’. Violence is threatened but rarely occurs. When it does, as in the example above, it is pathetic, banal and inconclusive. Unlike Hemingway’s ‘code’ which expresses the violence of war and bullfighting, Carver’s violence is present by threat, and is never valorised or dignified as it sometimes is in Hemingway’s later fiction.29 When it does occur as part of the central narrative, in such stories as ‘Bicycles Muscles Cigarettes’ it is incredible, a hardly believable end to a series of increasingly strange events:

29 The Hemingway of In Our Time thus seems quite at odds with the later Hemingway of Death in the Afternoon, who by then was keen to write approvingly of horrible death. It might be the close proximity with his injury that explains his overall reticence to glorify war; but certainly violence is captured as part of the mechanics of war, and its terrible effects are outlined with sympathy for Nick Adams in ‘A Big Two-Hearted River’.
“Watch out now, get out of my way!” Berman brushed Hamilton’s shoulder and Hamilton stepped off the porch into some prickly cracking bushes. He couldn’t believe it was happening. He moved out of the bushes and lunged at the man where he stood on the porch. (146-147)

The sense of ‘menace’ is more prevalent than the actual act of violence. Such menace is something Carver considers valuable in a short story, as he claims in the essay ‘On Writing’: ‘I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories’. He adds that what creates this prized sense of threat or menace is the ‘concrete words’ on the page but also ‘the things that are left out, that are implied’. What Carver more often leaves out is violence, despite its threat being felt. This excision represents a further movement away from the extreme locations and events characteristic of In Our Time. When Jay McInerney suggested that Hemingway’s idiom was no longer suitable for the expression of contemporary life, the treatment of violence in Hemingway is a good example; Carver would reject Hemingway’s ‘romantic egoism’ when expressing violent acts. The movement from Hemingway, through Carver to Frederick Barthelme and his contemporaries is a refinement of the use of everyday situations. From Hemingway’s war and bull-fighting, to Carver’s bleak, urban and suburban desperation, to Barthelme’s shopping malls, condominiums and pool parties, the trend has been to focus ever more intently upon the most commonplace activities of contemporary

American life. This is one reason, along with the interest in the clear expression of the surface details of description, that minimalism has become linked with a 'hyper-realism', a tendency to express the banal with a seemingly equally banal idiom.

The Realistic Character

Carver makes people, his characters, the centre of his work. In doing so, he is placed within the realist tradition of those who seek to show life with fidelity. This also makes him at odds with what Robert Rebein, amongst others, notes was the dominant mode of expression at the time of publication of Will You Please Be Quiet Please?, where the main focus was on language. Carver himself was critical of post-modernism and especially its reflexivity and experimentalism. In his unfavourable review of Donald Barthelme’s collection of stories, Great Days, he says of post-modern fiction:

In these short fictions [...] there is, almost without exception, a serious lack of interest and concern on the part of the author for his characters. [...] They are never to be found in situations that might reveal them as characters with more or less normal human reactions. [...] In a word there is absolutely no value to anything.

Hemingway almost always opens his stories with a vivid description of a sense of place and time. This is often missing in Carver's work, and is replaced instead on the context of the character. Despite the obvious clues, such as place names, this strips the stories' locations of their particularity. The effect for the reader is that the focus is widened and therefore more easily recognised: these stories widen their scope to encompass much of Middle America and even elsewhere in the Western world. Many of his stories could have taken place at roughly the same time. Unlike Hemingway's stories of exodus, or war, they do not contain much in the way of overt historical contextualisation. One suggestion for the reason for this difference is their genesis: Carver's work came out of pedagogy, of writing groups and post-graduate seminars, rather than Hemingway's journalist apprenticeship and background in the war. Their areas of interest and ambitions are quite different. Carver's realism, then, is a fidelity to realistic characterisation which avoids an overt interest in a specific historical location or time or a reference to current affairs. In doing so, he retains much of Hemingway's idiom while avoiding Hemingway's subject.

Carver's immediate world is smaller than Hemingway's but no less concentrated: in these seemingly small lives there exists a grander significance. Carver is quick to move on to the situation of the individual. For example 'Collectors' begins with an emotional scene setting:
I was out of work. But any day I expected to hear from up north. I
lay on the sofa and listened to the rain. Now and then I’d lift up
and look through the curtain to the mailman. (76)

There is no clear sense of place or time, only of character situation. This is common in
Carver; stories like ‘Are You A Doctor?’ and ‘Fat’ also exemplify this development.
Because of this focus on character he is quickly able to move into the initial conflict that
instigates and sustains the narrative momentum of the story. In the case of ‘Collectors’,
that conflict is between the narrator and the salesman. Carver replaces the wider
geographical contexts of Hemingway with a more local one, a strategy that immediately
informs us of his realist ambition to focus more intently upon the commonplace. In his
essay ‘On Writing’ in *Fires*, Carver tells us about his ambitions as a short story writer:

V.S. Pritchett’s definition of a short story is ‘something glimpsed
from the corner of the eye, in passing’. [...] First the glimpse.
Then the glimpse given life, turned into something that illuminates
the moment and may [...] have even further ranging consequences
and meaning. The short story writer’s task is to invest the glimpse
with all that is in his power.34

The glimpse implies that the reader encounter the story directly, without the kind of contextualisation found in Hemingway. Although they adhere to the forms and conventions of the short story by providing an extract from what is an otherwise larger story, Carver’s ‘glimpse’ is more focussed upon the specific moments in the life of his characters. This narrowing of focus leads us to another important difference between Hemingway and Carver. The focus becomes so intense that the reader finds single characters under scrutiny in Carver’s work. Hemingway’s stories mostly depend upon the conflict between characters; Carver’s often develop the conflict within a single character. The initial conflict is often a product of multiple characters. But the rising action (that moment that moves inevitably towards the finale, or denouement) is often expressed within a single character. This has much to do with the nature of the character in the stories of Hemingway and Carver. Hemingway’s characters seem to maintain their integrity, especially in the case of Nick Adams. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Hemingway presents Adams as heroic, whose struggle is not merely against himself but against external forces. In ‘A Big Two-Hearted River’, for example, the reader find the demons that haunt Nick expressed as a phenomenon that exists outside of Nick, the dark swamp into which he fears to venture. There is little suggestion that Nick is in part responsible for his fear: it is caused by an external force acting upon him. However, in Carver the protagonist is often anti-heroic, and is often confused, unmotivated and disinterested. In ‘Are These Actual Miles?’ Leo is found attempting to come to terms with his own anxiety about his financial situation which he fears might disturb his relationship with Toni. After a long afternoon drinking and thinking about Toni, he becomes desperate:
He sits on the step with the empty glass in his hand
and watches the shadows fill up the yard. He stretches, wipes
his face. He listens to the traffic on the highway and considers
whether he should go to the basement, stand on the utility sink,
and hang himself with his belt. He understands he is willing to
be dead. (153)

Like Nick in ‘A Big Two-Hearted River’, Leo is attempting to come to terms with
events that have spiralled out of his control. But the conflict is within himself. In the
main part of the story, Leo is alone, anaesthetising himself with alcohol and turning
his anger and frustration against himself. His uneasiness with the outside world,
illustrated later in the story with him not being able to understand what is being said
when watching the television (154) is in sharp contrast to Nick’s harmony with the
natural world. Moreover, Leo is trapped in that he only dimly understand how he
might overcome his difficulty, whereas Nick seems fully aware that he must address
his problems directly even though he is reluctant to act. Facing an existentialist
dilemma, Leo can only turn upon himself in order to find a way out of his troubles.

Arthur Brown divides Carver’s early and late career in to ‘existential realism’ and
‘humanist realism’ and explains how and why his work became more expansive, most
notably with the publication of Cathedral.\(^{35}\) In this early collection, the solitary man

\(^{35}\) A. Brown ‘Raymond Carver and Postmodern Humanism’ *Critique* 31.2 Winter 1990 pp. 125-136
dispossessed by God, compelled by ennui and desperation, obsessed by self-
determination yet without a sense of metaphysical morality make Brown’s definition
a useful one.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘If You Can Do Anything, Then You Can Do Nothing’

Frederick Barthelme’s Contemporary Minimalism

This chapter aims to bring us to contemporary minimalism in the form of a writer who still writes stories in the minimalist style, Frederick Barthelme. Following the structure of this thesis thus far, I shall divide this chapter into five parts. In the first part I approach Barthelme’s work in terms of its literary historical, historical and publication context. In the second part, I demonstrate how the use of the second-person narrator problematizes the relationship between author and implied reader. Such confusion surrounding who the narrative addresses undermines the normative function of literature to explain the significance of the narrative. In the third part, I discuss how Barthelme’s use of the brand-named everyday object is drained of any figurative significance and is instead replaced as an indicator of commercial status. Objects no longer operate solely within the norms of figurative language but instead function as commodities within a discourse of marketing and advertising. Next, I analyse several of the endings of the stories and how they develop minimalism’s resistance to provide a satisfactorily resolved ending (following Hemingway and Carver) by revealing very little, either. I suggest Barthelme’s Moon Deluxe represents an ever increasing tendency towards an extreme minimalist style, where many of the methods of equivocation found in Hemingway and Carver are present in a more
severe form. Barthelme’s fiction is an example of the contemporary trend to further reduction in Minimalism and as such, solicits a relatively demanding form of reader response. In the final part, I focus on Moon Deluxe as a fundamentally realist collection of short stories, with especial reference to the ways in which the discourse of marketing objectifies his characters.

Barthelme’s Moon Deluxe is also a concerted example of minimalism’s tendency to demand an engaged interpretation through omission. It pursues, almost in its very fabric, a will towards equivocation. This makes it, following Iser’s work on ambiguity, a demanding read. There are a variety of reasons for this but they can all be encompassed under a single principle: Moon Deluxe rejects the normative function of literary fiction to explain. How this operates in practice and how it illuminates our understanding of minimalism and its effect upon the reader is the subject of this chapter.
Part One: Contextualising *Moon Deluxe*

In his defence of minimalism, ‘Convicted Minimalist Spills Beans’, Frederick Barthelme reveals his perspective on the origins and development of his minimalist style. Recounting the intellectual environment in which he began to develop his own voice, he remembers how minimalist writers such as Raymond Carver were reacting against post-modernist fiction:

> A couple of people had already turned the post-modern on its head.
> Raymond Carver, who must’ve thought, “Well, if you can do *anything*, maybe you can do *nothing,*” did.¹

Describing Carver’s method as: ‘[...] a brilliant idea: self-imposed poverty of means, the inverted image of the usual proliferations’,² Barthelme describes how minimalism developed not merely as an appendage to post-modernist fiction but as a reaction against it. Barthelme’s *Moon Deluxe* was published in 1983 just two years after what many consider to the masterpiece of minimalist fiction, Raymond Carver’s *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. If *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* had introduced a new voice – and the re-emergence of the minimalist style following Hemingway’s innovations – *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* consolidated several of the criteria by which minimalist fiction of the latter twentieth century would be defined. Stylistically, Carver further honed his methodology of paring down the syntax, vocabulary, sentence structure and figurative language to produce a prose that appeared sparse, unadorned, even plain. Plots and scenes were suggested with the

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merest of sketches, their conclusions vague, the significance of their endings inconclusive. The effects upon the reader were proportionally stark. Faced with such apparent paucity, the role of the implied reader became more demanding, necessarily watchful of the smallest detail (such as the changing patterning of ‘shoes’ in ‘What’s in Alaska?’), not unlike that of the reader of poetry. Carver’s minimalism appeared to take to extremes the notion that his enterprise was one of constraint, dependent upon omission for its effects. Indeed, critics tend to agree that What We Talk About When We Talk About Love is an even more extreme example of the minimalist tendency to strip back its prose and reduce it means of effect than anything that came before.

In his defence of his practice and methods, Barthelme offers his own definition of this kind of minimalism, or at least a definition based upon that of how it is seen in the literary pages of newspapers and magazines. What he calls ‘the new, faulty literature’ can be partially defined as a literature:

[...] about things left out and whole tenses turning up bum, not to mention indictments for excessive reticence, moral snorkeling and too much time in a grocery store.³

What this tongue-in-cheek tone belies is several important criteria of literary minimalism as Barthelme and his contemporaries understood it. As I have shown, minimalism is, paradoxically, ‘about’ things left out. Indeed, such omissions define minimalist fiction. Barthelme’s ‘excessive reticence’ points to the absent narrator,

whose effacement often leaves one with the sense of another of his presumed criteria, ‘moral snorkelling’, implying that the narratives often refuse to outline a moral theory or judge the behaviour of its characters. One of the more prominent effects and indeed deliberate principles of this style was the invitation for the reader actively to participate in the creation of the text’s meaning. When minimalist writers omit certain details – as I have shown in my analysis of Hemingway’s ‘iceberg’ principle, or Carver’s interrupted epiphany without closure – the reader is left with an interpretative gap which they must fill. As a writing of restraint, minimalism continually reworks the premise of omission, and invites the reader to participate in the text in ways other literature not dependent upon this breadth and depth of omission do not. As Barthelme notes of his enterprise:

Tell them that you prefer to think you’re leaving room for the readers, at least the ones who like to use their imaginations; that you hope that those readers hear the whispers, catch the feints and shadows, gather the traces, sense the pressures, and that meanwhile the prose tricks them into the drama, and the drama breaks their hearts. Just like old times.⁴

One of the most pervasive examples of Barthelme’s iconoclastic ambition can be found in his rejection of what he calls ‘extraordinary circumstances’, the subjects of what he sees as conventional fiction:

⁴ Barthelme (1998), p. 27.
For good measure, I added this twist — literary types [...] always seemed to write about people in extraordinary circumstances.

Cultural issues, personal crises, drug addictions, terrible accidents, diseases, wars, deaths, rapes, violence of every kind, magic times, epiphanies, et cetera.⁵

The idea that the interpretative significance of the narrative is partially a function of the 'extraordinary' quality of the central action is missing from *Moon Deluxe*. As a result, it is thoroughly immersed in the everyday world of urban, white America during the late seventies and early eighties. Nothing much happens (at least, by the standards of conventional short stories and especially when compared to either Hemingway or Carver) and when it does, events are so prosaic that they seem trivial, even banal. Ultimately, the methods of the minimalist style converge with an interest in 'minimal' experience, that is, the commonplace, seemingly unprofitable areas of interest for literary fiction.

One suggestion critics make is it that there is 'nothing' left and that the lives of its protagonists (and by extension, our lives) are empty and insignificant. This critical response to *Moon Deluxe* in particular and to the minimalism it in general represents is commonplace. Here it is reflected in a review of *Moon Deluxe* by David MacFarlane:

> Although [his] effects often have the nightmarish quality of Kafka, there is seldom anything fantastic about his stories. [The character's]

peculiar fate is simply to be dropped headlong, without explanation, into the shopping malls, apartments, offices and homes of the latter half of the 20th century. In such a world the connections and relationships that fiction is so often built upon simply do not exist. Boy does not get girl. Reasons do not become clear. In fact [...] nothing much ever happens. [...] Why should stories add up, Barthelme asks, when the world they are written about does not?  

It is the final line of this critique which informs my overall appreciation of Moon Deluxe and is consequently worth repeating: ‘Why should stories add up, Barthelme asks, when the world they are written about does not?’

Moon Deluxe (1983, US) has been described as the first and the third of Frederick Barthelme’s publications. In the introduction to the new and selected short stories Law of Averages Barthelme describes how he came to put together his first collection.  

His brother Donald, at that time in 1969 a successful writer and editor, was asked to write an experimental work: ‘[…] a book in a bag – loose sheets, read ‘em in any order, that sort of thing’. Donald declined but Frederick took it up. That commission from Winter House was published under the title Rangoon (1970 US), in the form of what Barthelme calls: ‘[…] a hybrid of stories, faux stories, nonstories,'

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7 Law of Averages is a title that does much to suggest his interest in the ‘average’ life of his characters and settings, as well as his interest in gambling.

drawings, photos, diagrams, lists, assertions, visual art games and whatnot.\(^9\) A similar collection appeared under the guise of a novel, called War and War (1971), a 'patchwork of lifts' from several different sources. Barthelme says of these early experiments: 'They weren't literary works of any kind, really [...] These books were Dumpsters for half-digested information, half-realized ideas.'\(^10\) Barthelme's literary method seems, at least in principle, to connect broadly with some literary idea of the late 1960s, as he makes clear in his part biographical sketch, part defence of minimalism, 'Convicted Minimalist Spills Beans'. As Barthelme himself points out, his first publications, Rangoon and War and War have become collectors' items, and although of great interest to the dedicated Barthelme collector, have little direct significance in the study of his development of minimalism and appear to be more aligned to post-modern experiments with fiction.\(^11\)

When he began to put together the first book proposal, it was his agent Andrew Wylie who suggested that they 'simply not mention these two first books and instead start over with a new collection of New Yorker stories'.\(^12\) These stories were published together in what was ostensibly his 'first' publication but it was technically his third, Moon Deluxe. Barthelme followed this successful publication with two novels, Second Marriage (1984, US) and Tracer (1985, US), before he published his second collection of short stories, Chronia (1987, US). After publishing five novels, including the critically acclaimed Natural Selection (1990, US), he published Double

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\(^11\) A future study could suggest ways in which these two texts represented a precursor to his minimalism; they certainly seem to have prefigured his interest in experimental and avant-garde forms of writing, which is present in his minimalist writing.

\(^12\) Barthelme (2000), p. xii.
Down (1999, US), a non-fiction account of his gambling losses and subsequent accusation of cheating and charge with fraud, which resulted in his acquittal. A collection of new and selected stories was published in 2000 under the title The Law of Averages (2000, US). He has also written the text for a collection of photographs by Susan Langer called Trip (2000, US), which demonstrate his interest in describing the commonplace world.

In keeping with my interest in the emergent minimalism of each writer under consideration, I would like to focus upon Moon Deluxe. Typically, I have used as a justification for my choice the notion that early work often displays a purer form of minimalism, one that eventually expands and therefore loosens as the writer’s career develops. This is certainly the case with Hemingway and Carver, as I have shown. But more than either Hemingway or Carver, Barthelme has persisted with a more uniformly minimalist style, resisting the temptation to become more expansive in later work, without edging towards either a quasi-spiritualism or sentimentality that is found in the later Carver, especially Cathedral. In the final story to be published in Law of Averages and therefore the most recent example of his fiction ‘Elroy Nights’, Barthelme retains his minimalist credentials. Moreover, his novels also exhibit many of the elements of the minimalist style, a reminder that a definition of minimalism is not dependent upon scale. Indeed, in his introduction to the Law of Averages, he tells of a method that seems to suggest that there is little difference, at least initially, in prose found in his novels and short fiction:

13 Those ‘credentials’ do not remain constant in all areas, however, and some of the stories in Chroma move away from his adherence to ‘ordinary’ subjects to contain stories on such extreme subjects as incest and murder.
This is to say I have no qualms about hacking up my work and putting it back together to suit different purposes. If I like something in a story I'll use it as a story, then sometimes redo it for use in a novel.¹⁴

That many of the stories were once intended for novels and vice versa tells us how interchangeable his approach is, equally applicable to the short story and novel; and minimalism is style of writing suited to both the novel and the story, although as this thesis attempts to claim, it has special manifestation in the short story.

Although there is a danger of too simple a corollary, it does appear that Barthelme's method changed to reflect an influence in developments in short fiction. During the time of composing Rangoon and War and War, several collections of post-modern fiction were published. 1968 was a particularly significant year, which saw the publication of John Barth’s Lost in the Funhouse, Donald Barthelme’s Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts; Welcome to the Monkey House by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and In the Heart of the Country by William H. Gass. Both Rangoon and War and War reflect some of the attributes of post-modern fiction, and for contemporary critics were very much aligned to the movement. When Barthelme was writing Moon Deluxe, there were several publications that moved steadily away from post-modernism towards a more realistic representation. As we have seen, John Cheever’s The Stories of John Cheever (1978), represented something of a transitional point, mixing fantasy with realism. Two years earlier Carver had published Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? (1976) and it is possible that Barthelme had read What We Talk

*About When We Talk About Love* (1981). Even if he had not, then he most surely could not have ignored the great deal of attention Carver was getting from the critics and readers alike.

**Donald Barthelme: Post-modernism and Minimalism**

The influential study *American Fictions 1940/1980* by Frederick R. Karl includes a chapter called 'The Possibilities of Minimalism' in which Donald Barthelme is the focus:

The 1960s and 1970s have produced a small body of minimalists, of whom Donald Barthelme is the most practiced, and his *The Dead Father* the most expert example.  

Karl is one of several critics who refer to Donald as a minimalist, further confusing the definition of minimalism and so undermining a straightforward contrast between minimalism and post-modernism. As late as 1989 in John Kuehl's *Alternate Worlds: A Study of Postmodern Antirealistic American Fiction*, fourteen years after Raymond Carver first published *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* and six years after *Moon Deluxe*, Donald was still being called a minimalist. In this extract by Donald Barthelme from *The Dead Father* we notice how his use of a terse, elliptical syntax is similar to that found in much minimalist writing:

A halt. The men lay down the cable. The men regard Julie from a distance. The men standing about...Edmund lifts flask to lips.

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Thomas removes flask. Protest by Edmund. Reproof from Thomas.

Julie gives Edmund a chaw of bhang. Gratitude of Edmund.¹⁷

*The Dead Father* is a novel which exhibits an often extremely sparse, even fragmentary, idiom the short sentences of which often omitted subordinate clauses, adjectival colouring or qualifying statements. As we see from the example, it also uses repetition and avoids an obtrusive narrator. As such, it can be aligned to several defining elements of minimalism. Yet, as Frederick illustrates in the introduction to *Law of Averages*, the divisions between his work and his brother’s, were a particular example of what was taking place on a more general level: writers were reacting against post-modernism. Before the ‘New Fiction’ of Carver, Frederick Barthelme and Bobbie Ann Mason had established themselves as representative of a group of writers who came to be called Minimalists, it was possible to be both a postmodernist and a minimalist. As Minimalism developed a more sophisticated approach and definition, postmodernism and minimalism became increasingly mutually exclusive, until it became no longer tenable to be both a postmodernist and a Minimalist.

Donald Barthelme’s fiction exhibits a number of defining criteria for minimalism, namely the use of the short sentences which are unqualified and unembellished by the narrator and an infrequent use of adjectives/adverbs and when used, are not extravagant. However, his work contains a number of elements that do not square with my definition of minimalism. Frederick Barthelme details some of those most important elements in his exposition of how he reacted against his brother’s work.

¹⁷ Kuehl, p. 104.
Those elements align Donald more closely with post-modern fiction and Frederick with minimalism, and they form the basis for my comparison. One central element against which Frederick reacted was the primacy of what he calls ‘the big L-language’ in post-modern fiction. He writes: ‘I came to think that character was a richer kind of language than language itself’.  

This is at odds with Donald’s theory of language, upon which his post-modern style is founded. For Frederick, reality is based upon authentic characterisation; for Donald, realism is predicated upon language. Frederick is a conventional realist in the sense that he considers language a transparent medium for the representation of reality; whereas Donald is a post-modernist in that he sees language as a medium which confines what we know and defines what is ‘real’. In his study, The Short Story: Reality of Artifice, Charles E. May suggests the premise upon which Donald’s interest in language: ‘For [Donald] Barthelme, the problem of language is the problem of reality, for reality, he implies, is the result of the language process’.  

Frederick maintains a fundamentally realist mode of discourse. As May makes clear, Donald’s stories display an interest in how the media and language manipulates characters, rather than expressing them as individuals:

[Donald] Barthelme is not really interested in the personal of his characters; in fact, few seem to have personal lives. Rather, he

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wishes to present modern men and women as the products the
media and the language that surround them.\textsuperscript{20}

In the extract from ‘The Dead Father’, human interaction is parodied, reduced to a set of terse, almost inhuman processes: ‘Protest by Edmund’, ‘Reproof from Thomas’.

Indeed, the whole conceit in Donald Barthelme’s story ‘The Balloon’ serves as an example of how he undermines realism by supplanting it with fantasy. The story is about a balloon that has overshadowed the city, to which people react and try to explain. At the end of the story, we come to learn that the balloon is a metaphor for the protagonist’s feelings, an objectification of his inner mental state. The use of an object to represent a subjective state can be found throughout minimalist fiction and indeed, throughout short fiction. However, the key difference is that Donald’s object could never exist as an object in the real world. It exists only as an object within the fictional world, as a metaphor and consequently is not what Hemingway would consider a plausible symbol; it would be impossible to fit a balloon around a city in the real world. Frederick Barthelme recognised the post-modern interest in fantasy and the traditional stories’ interest in unusual circumstances and rejected it, as I will show. The Post-modern interest in language games and its anti-realist enterprise sees it divorced from it minimalism, which is a literature committed to a realism.

\textit{Historical Context}

Barthelme’s interest in realism saw him absorb and address the issues of his contemporaries, and they are worth briefly considering. Howard Zinn cites numerous examples of a muted civil unrest, most of which are demonstrated through protest and

\textsuperscript{20} May (2002), p. 88.
campaign. He explains this as a result of the Vietnam war: ‘Undoubtedly, much of this national mood of hostility to government and business came of the Vietnam war, its 55,000 casualties, its moral shame, its exposure to lies and atrocities’.\textsuperscript{21}

One such ‘lie’ was the Watergate scandal, which saw President Richard Nixon faced with impeachment, only to resign in 1974. Since the mid-1960s, people were becoming increasingly suspicious of large governmental organisations and big business. Yet in the 1970s the sit-ins, protests and violent riots had all but disappeared. As Snowman and Bradbury point out:

\begin{quote}
The new tone of the post-Nixon Seventies – less confrontation, less public drama, more emphasis on personal integrity and local self-help – was found not just in politics but in many of the broader currents of national life [...]. Now emphasis was on matters more directly affecting the individual [...] Small, in the words of a book title that became a political slogan, is beautiful [...] The Seventies were much more muted that the Sixties.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

By 1980 when the former film-star Ronald Reagan took over from Jimmy Carter as the president, the United States was in a full-scale recession. Inflation was extremely high and growing; gross national product was in decline and unemployment figures rose to over 9% of the workforce:

Perhaps much of the general dissatisfaction was due to the economic state of most Americans. Inflation and unemployment had been rising steadily since 1973, which was the year when, according to a Harris poll, the number of Americans feeling ‘alienated’ and ‘disaffected’ with the general state of the country climbed.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Moon Deluxe} was written at a time of great economic difficulty for the United States which was paradoxically combined with origins of early microprocessor technology and a rise in the number of electronic consumer items. People were beginning to question where such developments in new technology might lead and its benefits, just at a time when the acquisition of thousands of retail outlets and real estate by large corporations led to building developments, including shopping malls, which have homogenised the American landscape. The growth of the power of the commercial brand was a significant part of these changes:

Until the early seventies, logos on clothes were generally hidden from view [...] In the late seventies, when the fashion world rebelled against Aquarian flamboyance, the country-club wear of the fifties became mass style for newly conservative parents [...] These logos served the same social function as keeping the clothing’s price tag on: everyone knew precisely what premium the wearer was willing to pay for style [...] By the mid-eighties [...] the logo was transformed from an ostentatious affectation to an active fashion accessory.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} Zinn, p. 545.
Minimalist realism, with its intense interest in the accurate depiction of the surface of everyday reality, observes that the everyday object now bares a brand name. Naming the brand is part of the minimalist enterprise in accurately describing everyday reality. But for Barthelme it has a literary function as colouring the imagery of everyday reality. Pound’s Imagism, with its emphasis upon the accurate expression of a single image has been updated in Barthelme’s minimalist world, by branding it and making it a commodity.

The Second-Person Narrator in *Moon Deluxe*

Amongst the three writers under consideration, Barthelme is the only one to use the second-person narrator. This method of narrative perspective appears in four of the seventeen stories, ‘Shopgirls’, ‘Moon Deluxe’, ‘Pool Lights’ and ‘Safeway’. In second-person narration, the narrator addresses ‘you’, a fictional ‘you’ that constitutes an implied reader, a generalised readership, or the narrator addressing him or herself. Indeed, it might change within a single text, or hover between more than one identity simultaneously. In this section, I suggest ways in which this instability of address undermines the capacity of these stories to communicate explanations and undermines the narrator’s role as the provider of significant experience.

The study of the second-person narrator has developed greatly since Wayne C. Booth declared in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* that: ‘[…] efforts to use the second-person have never been very successful […] and that] it is astonishing how little real difference even this choice makes’.25 Scholars such as Monika Fludernik, Gerald Prince and more recently Matt DelConte have responded to the growing number of second person narratives by exploring the ways in which it is defined and the effects its use might have. I demonstrate how their work can be applied to a reading of the second-person narrator to show how the identity of ‘you’ can refer to, in turn, the implied reader, a homogenised readership and finally, the central protagonist addressing himself.

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'You' as the Implied Reader
To begin with, I focus on the ways in which the 'you' might refer to the implied reader directly. This is best illustrated by comparison to other second-person narratives found elsewhere. In the following extracts, the first is from the opening of 'Shopgirls' in Moon Deluxe and is typical of the way in which the second-person narrator is employed throughout the collection:

You watch a pretty salesgirl slide a box of Halston soap onto a low shelf, watch her braid slip off her shoulder, watch like an adolescent as the vent at the neck of her blouse opens slightly – [...]
She catches you staring and gives you a perfunctory but knowing smile, and you turn quickly to study the purses on the chrome rack next to where you stand.26

Compare this to the kind of second person narrator used in Italo Calvino's novel If on a Winter's Night a Traveller:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveller. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room.27

In the first example, the use of the second-person narrator creates the illusion that the implied reader is a part of the narrative. The 'you' the narrator refers to is the implied reader. As a result, the actions of 'you' become the actions of the implied reader. The implied reader temporarily assumes the role of the central protagonist in the story, given that the address 'you' is always at the centre of the story.

In contrast, in Calvino, the 'you' directly communicates with an implied reader and acknowledges their identity as an actual reader. In doing so, this second person narrative addresses an implied reader who it seems will not be assimilated into the narrative but will be necessarily separate from it. The physical process of reading, including several references to the particularities of creating the right physical environment in which one might read, is foregrounded, effectively reminding the reader that he or she is a reader, not a character within the narrative. In a sense, it shares a similar principle to Bertold Brecht's 'alienation effect', where the audience is reminded that what they are watching is a fictional drama, lest they become too involved in its dramatic expression to become unmoved by its ideological critique.

The difference between second-person narrators found in the extracts above is an important one, for each type has its concomitant effects. Matt DeConte makes the distinction between 'intradiegetic addressee' and 'extradiegetic implied reader'. Here, diegesis means the 'telling' of the narrative. It is opposed to 'mimesis' which refers to the 'showing' of the narrative. More specifically, it is used by narratologists to refer to

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28 There are many different types of second-person narrator, each with their own effects. For example, Ron Butlin's 'The Tilting Room' has a consciousness addressing itself in the second-person. See DelConte, p. 6 passim
the primary narrative and the narrative ‘world’ created as a result. Thus, ‘intradiegetic’ refers specifically to elements within the main story whilst the ‘extradiegetic’ refers to elements outside of it.

In the example of the ‘you’ referring to the implied reader, he or she becomes the intradiegetic addressee because they exist within the world created by the central narrative, that is, they assume (albeit temporarily) the identity of the central protagonist. As such, minimalism’s potential to involve the reader in the very fabric of the narrative is being further developed by Barthelme’s use of the second-person narrator, which explicitly encourages involvement through the rhetorical device of intradiegetic addressee second-person narration. In the example from Calvino, the ‘you’ refers more directly to the implied reader who exists outside of the narrative, that is, in an extradiegetic sense. As a result, the extradiegetic implied reader of Calvino is notably distanced from the illusion of participating in the events of the narrative as he or she is specifically signposted as reading it, and so are necessarily removed from it. As such, the Calvino extract can be expressed as a form of metalepsis, defined by narratologist H. Porter Abbott as:

A violation of narrative norms [where the diegesis] is invaded by an extradiegetic entity of entities, as for example when a ‘spectator’ leaps on stage and becomes part of the action, or the ‘author’ appears and starts quarrelling with one of the characters.29

Rhetorically, the use of the reader as an intradiegetic addressee as a result of the use of the second-person narrator is an important foundation for the ambition of directly implicating the implied reader in the events of the narrative, a development of Carver's voyeur to ask the reader to become an active, not passive, receptor. In the example from 'Shopgirls', it creates the illusion of the implied reader as protagonist. In this example, the minimalist style reduces any descriptive quality to help outline a character that aspires to anonymity. Barthelme's minimalist style effectively depersonalises the 'you' by stripping its actions of adverbs, interiority, and its own idiom: like Carver's characters, they are either unwilling or unable to articulate their thoughts. This depersonalisation is a necessary foundation for the assimilation of the intradiegetic addressee into the narrative: if the 'you' of the narrative is too completely coloured, too narrowly defined, then it becomes increasingly difficult for the intradiegetic addressee to converge with the actions of what has become a specific character, necessarily different from themselves. The 'you' aspires to the kind of absence that Hemingway's narrator achieves, in that it is covert, does not intervene or comment on the narrative and shows rather than tells. The richer the character becomes, the more its specificity undermines the role of the generalised implied reader, the less able the intradiegetic addressee is able to sustain the illusion that it is they who are taking part in the narrative.

This anonymity, the stripping of any specific references, the removal of motive and local colouring, or of interiority, is one of the most compelling reasons why Barthelme's characters cannot function as a vehicle for the expression of the explanation of the narrative. Bereft of motive, reasoning and development, they remain inert, and do not show any signs of development as the narrative progresses. In
the example from ‘Shopgirls’, as I shall show, there is a ‘circular’ narrative structure so that the second-person narrator is shown to learn nothing: the story ends as it has begun, with the narrator having learned nothing but to rescue the process of voyeurism. As such, he reveals himself as an accessible vehicle through which the reader can experience the story and in doing so, implicate the reader at its core.

The use of the second-person narrator is, in itself, a rejection of the traditional normative function of the narrator to impart an explanation of the narrative. By using the second-person narrator to implicate the intradiegetic addressee within the narrative, Barthelme undermines the convention of the narrator as impartial, even absent, who reliably explains the significance of the narrative, as well as narrates it. If Hemingway’s absent narrator directed the reader toward a definite interpretation by drawing their attention to the ‘gaps’ deliberately and significantly left, Barthelme’s second-person narrator implicates him or her directly within the narrative without a distanced, reliable and knowing narrator to inform his or her reading. Theoretically, the method seems to inculcate a sense that intradiegetic addressee’s own motives must replace those of the character they temporarily ‘possess’. In such an enterprise, there is little reason to explain why the voyeur spies upon the shop assistants, or discover how they have come to value so considerably the surface appearance of reality over depth. These question, it seems, are raised by the narrative and directed at the intradiegetic addressee. It makes no claims as to why the characters do as they do but instead asks the question of the intradiegetic addressee: why are you watching the girls? Why do you favour appearance over depth?
Naming 'You': Barriers to Active Reading

As 'Shopgirls' progresses, the intradiegetic addressee learns more about the actions of the character whose role he or she temporarily possesses. This undermines the notion of protagonist's anonymity, and provides a basis for the creation of the addressee as protagonist. Monika Fludernik, in her study of the second person narrator, describes the impossibility of sustaining such anonymity:

As has been observed, many second-person texts start out with a passage of what appears to be a generalized or 'generic' [...] 'you,' a 'you' with which the reader in the role of '(any)one' can identify, but then the text proceeds to conjure up a very specific 'you' with a specific sex, job, husband or wife, address, interests, and so on, so that the reader has to realize that the 'you' must be an other [...]²⁰

The literal naming of the character is an example of what might be learnt about the 'you' of the narrative. This moment is wholly significant because it represents a turning point in the extent to which the implied reader assumes the identity of the protagonist. The moment the 'you' is named, he or she possesses an identity which reminds the reader that the 'you' is no longer the intradiegetic addressee. In 'Shopgirls', Barthelme is very careful to maintain that anonymity, always making the association between the implied reader and protagonist at least ostensibly plausible:

³⁰ M. Fludernik 'Second Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism' Style 28 (3) 1993, pp. 9-10.
‘[...] “My name’s Andrea, what’s yours?”
You don’t want to tell her that. “Wiley Pitts,” you say. It’s a
football player’s name you saw in the morning paper. “I’m
thirty-six years old.

[...]

“Is your name really Pitts?”

“Robert,” you say sheepishly. ‘Robert Caul. I’m sorry about
the other.” But Robert Caul is not your name either. (25, 27)

The narrator here mirrors a process that Barthelme asks his reader follow. Firstly, he
or she reads something (the story / ‘in the morning paper’) and assume his or her
identity (in this example, ‘Wiley Pitts’, a name suggesting both cunning and
debasement). The narrator’s ‘identity’ is no more than a temporary fiction – precisely
the kind of creation that Barthelme invites us, the reader, the ‘you’ of the story to be.
However, in keeping with Fludernik’s description, Barthelme cannot sustain the
illusion that it is the reader who is participating. In this example, the narrative remains
plausible, at least in the sense that it is possible to watch a person perform these
actions as an objective state of affairs (watching, getting caught, turning away) and
record it.

But the inclusion of the sentence: ‘You are embarrassed.’ might give the implied
reader pause (23). The narrator indicates explicitly that he is omniscient (or, as I shall
show below, the narrative is really an expression of the mind of a first-person talking
to itself) and so the illusion of the implied reader’s implication within the narrative is
undermined. The narrator could not possibly have knowledge of how the intradiegetic
addressee might feel, even though it remains a plausible suggestion that embarrassment follows from being caught in a voyeuristic act. Yet even before the implied reader reaches this point he or she realises that he or she can never be truly ‘you’. The specificity of the character evolved in ‘Shopgirls’ cumulatively undermines the sense that the text might be directly addressing each reader. The implied reader cannot share that character’s particular actions and motives: he or she has never watched a girl move that brand of soap and if, by coincidence he or she has, the implied reader hardly feels Barthelme was watching them, ready to introduce them into his fiction. Moreover, the implied reader understands that the ‘you’ is non-specific in that it refers to anyone who chooses to read it. The illusion has been shattered. There are limits to which the implied reader can be transformed into the intradiegetic addressee and as such, Barthelme’s method of second-person narration is only useful so far in encouraging the active participation of the implied reader. But it is an important step in suggesting the possibility that the reader must engage with the text.

‘You’ as the Readership: Satirising Society
What is found in this example and others is an interrogation of the role of the implied reader of his texts. In ‘Shopgirls’, the ‘you’ of the narrative begins by referring to the single implied reader. But as the narrative progresses it becomes apparent that the second person pronoun is not referring to a single reader, but a readership. By the end of the story, ‘you’ means the general implied reader of his text, and by extension, becomes representative of contemporary society. Barthelme uses this phenomenon to draw not a single reader into his narrative but to comment satirically upon society as a whole. The intradiegetic addressee thus eventually becomes a homogenised implied
reader, stripped of their unique personas, through a determined querying of the
illusion of individuality. 'You' is not a unique individual but part of a homogenised
grouping of readers who want more or less the same things, at the same moment in
history, in the same manner. Moreover, the places the characters (and by extension,
the implied readers) inhabit are equally homogenised. Barthelme's evocation of
contemporary, urban America is one of its strongest qualities. The shopping malls,
diners, wide boulevards and supermarkets, all contribute to notion that Barthelme's
American landscape is merely a series of ubiquitous urban sprawls:

His landscape is not changing at all. The organizing conceit of
his narrative is that no other world exists. His suburbs are not
juxtaposed against the city [...] the conceit is in effect that the entire
country looks like this. 31

Even Carver's locations juxtapose the rural and the urban. Yet in Barthelme, no such
differentiation exists. The ubiquitous commercial buildings are the places Barthelme's
characters live in: by implication, his readers occupy the same uniform locations. One
satirical point is implied in the progression from 'you' as single, intradiegetic
addressee to generalised implied reader. The 'you' necessarily refers to a
homogenised society, one that has had its individuality stripped, so that the 'you' of
the narrative can equally represent both the actual protagonist in the narrative and
Barthelme's entire readership. Madison Smartt Bell makes this point in his criticism
of Barthelme's second-person narrator:

Fiction 31.2 (Spring 1994), p. 179.
We actually do live in a world where the identical apartment and department store can be found from Seattle to Miami. In the face of such fearsome homogeneity, our individuality is hard to preserve. Barthelme's narrator speaks frankly [...] telling the reader there is no important difference between 'me' and 'you'.

Bell sees this more as typical of the minimalist impulse to reduce the characters to 'simulacra of one another', and that includes the reader and writer, an echo of Carver's reader/voyeur relationship. As such, he represents several critical opinions that conclude that the characters that people *Moon Deluxe*, and especially the protagonist, are merely several incarnations of the same person. The places of Barthelme's fiction are not merely non-specific and bland, but can be seen as an emblem, and a cause, of the homogenisation of his characters.

In most cases this critique is directed at the reader and his or her contribution to a decadent consumer culture. In 'Pool Lights', Barthelme isolates the themes of his contemporaries' fascination with commodities:

At midnight Friday you go into the small living-dining room and click on the overhead light. There, in neat low stacks along three walls, is the summer project: piles of *Time, Rolling Stone, Sports Illustrated, Money, Road & Track, Stereo Review, American Photographer, Skin Diver*, and *Vogue*. All from American Educational Services at terrific discount. When they started piling up unread,

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32 M S. Bell 'Less is Less: The Dwindling of the American Short Story' *Harper's* April 1986, p. 68.
they became a collection. [...] Reading every word seemed at first a possibility, but finally the idea was exhausting. (119)

Compare the use of the second-person narrator to that found in Jay McInerney’s novel *Bright Lights, Big City*:

You are the stuff of which consumer profiles – American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model – are made. When you’re staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn’t it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theatre in your private limousine?33

Barthelme, like McInerney, uses the second-person addressee ‘you’ as a way of suggesting that the reader engages in the same practices as the characters within the narrative. Rather than sustaining the illusion of the implied reader as intradiegetic addressee, the ‘you’ refers to an implied reader, but one whose behaviour can be readily associated with the central protagonist rather than implicating him or her within the narrative directly. In this sense, the use of the second-person narrator holds a mirror to its readers and implicitly criticises them by criticising the behaviour of the characters who represent them.

In ‘Pool Lights’, Barthelme satirises the impulse to collect. Content - knowledge and information - no longer becomes as important as having a complete collection. The ‘you’ of the story, now transformed into the implied reader, consumes and collects

rather than absorbs and reflects. Note, also, how they are magazines, not books and
moreover, they are unread. Barthelme seems to be suggesting that the behaviour of the
character satirises the kind of reader who has neither the time nor the attention span to
acquire knowledge from more conventional sources, or focus upon more serious
subjects than those that can be found in *Vogue* or *Stereo Review*. Barthelme
generalises from the behaviour of a single character to satirise his readership by
suggesting that the 'you' is representative of more general trends in Modern America.

This is a significant departure for minimalism because it has begun not merely to
satirise society through a single reader but through the homogenised implied reader.
Much of Hemingway's early fiction had a satirical agenda and, as I have made clear,
this was made more potent by his intention to declare it without hyperbole, so that the
reader might, for example, understand more clearly the horrors of war. Carver, too,
seemed to demonstrate existential despair by examining the effect of economic and
social problems on several characters and by drawing the reader closer through
strategies such as the implied reader as voyeur, so that they might more readily
empathise with the victims of social pressures.

By writing about shopping, eating, buying, going to social gatherings, etc
Barthelme, in a more concerted way than either Hemingway (with his focus upon
extreme situations such as war), or Carver (with his interest in social disillusion,
sometimes extreme), appeals to a wider readership through a ready identification
with the everyday. The reader might more readily recognise themselves in
Barthelme's fiction, a premise on which his satirical ambition to criticise the 'you'
in the fiction rests. For a literature that wishes to encourage such readers to identify with the narrative so that they might more fully engage with it, this is an extremely important element for its effects on the ways in which his implied reader responds. The more readily the implied reader can associate with the diegetic function of the narrative (the world-view created by it), the more quickly they can become assimilated into the narrative as protagonists in the second-person story. By attempting to ensure the reader readily identifies with the 'you' of the narrative, the reader is more likely to be able to participate in its creation, rather than reject it as unfeasible.

‘You’ as the Narrator

For Frances Taliaferro, the second person means a way of the narrator addressing him or himself in Moon Deluxe. After suggesting that ‘reading them [the stories in Moon Deluxe] is like watching the television with the sound off’ 34 (an account which I take to mean that it provides an undiscussed series of images that only begin to make sense), she turns to the narrator’s role:

Sometimes the narrator refers to himself in the second person.
The effect is one of passivity and disjunction; the narrator becomes his own object, noting the separate image as if he were watching himself on the tube. 35

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34 T. Taliaferro ‘Moon Deluxe Review’ Harper’s 267 (1600) 1983, p. 51
35 Taliaferro, p. 51.
In Taliaferro, the use of the second-person narrator is an example of a first-person narrator addressing themselves: when ‘you’ is used, it is self-referential and the story is an interior monologue. This has interesting implications for my analysis of *Moon Deluxe* as a literature that refuses to explain its motives because in its use Barthelme has spurned the opportunity to explore the workings of a single mind and directly show those things – motives, beliefs, emotions – explain why characters act like they do. Monika Fludernik defines this phenomenon by what she calls the ‘reflector-mode’ narratives:

> [...] reflector mode narratives can be determined best at the very beginning of texts where they immediately establish a deictic center [...] on the part of the protagonist and relate all deictic expressions to that deictic center. One therefore usually encounters familiarizing articles, referential items relating to the subjectivity of the focalizer, and expressions of subjectivity at the very beginning of reflector-mode texts.\(^{36}\)

In this approach, the ‘you’ is the narrator and the narrative is an expression of their consciousness.\(^ {37}\) It is a ‘reflector’ narrative in that it is an expression of the thoughts and considerations, or reflections, of a single consciousness. Consider this example from ‘Moon Deluxe’:

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36 Fludernik, p. 3.

37 The ‘dettic center’ of Taliaferro is considered to be the source of the world view, the sustaining principle on which it rests. Here, it is derived from an individual’s consciousness.
You're stuck in traffic on your way from work, counting blue cars, and when a blue metallic Jetta pulls alongside, you count it—twenty eight. You've seen the driver other evenings; she looks strikingly like a young man—big, with dark, almost red hair clipped tight around her head. [...] You look away, then back. (61)

The narrator refers to himself as 'you' in the reflector mode model. This approximates a kind of first-person narration directed at the self, but which the implied reader can 'listen in to'. Like Carver's 'eavesdropping', we are presented with an intimate account of a character's life, and the reader encounters it almost as if he or she is a voyeur. This relationship approximates Carver's suggestion of the reader as voyeur, and it is no coincidence that the second-person narrator stories in the collection focus upon the act of voyeurism:

First you see the woman's beautiful hair, steel gray and cut to brush the shoulders of her vanilla silk blouse. [...] You pass behind her and stop thirty feet away, facing the low-fat milk, for a second look. [...] You go to the front of the store, see where she is, keep your distance. (201)

The intradiegetic addressee is cast in the role of the voyeur. However, Barthelme's procedure differs from Carver's. In 'Safeway', no such personal epiphanies occur but rather, the character comes to see both himself and others in terms of a reflection:
The glass in the store windows is covered with transparent tinted Mylar – blue; waiting for the woman to return, you look at your reflection. You tug on your collar to straighten your tie, then look at the reflections of the two men. (203)

The voyeur waits for the woman to return and as he does so, begins a process of observation that encompasses him and the men he sees at the mall. What this suggests is that the ‘you’ begins to understand people, at least initially, in terms of their reflection, through their appearance and behaviour. Like Carver’s couple in ‘The Idea’, the reader-protagonist of ‘Shopgirls’ and ‘Safeway’ is also watching whilst being watched. Instead of truly reflecting upon themselves, the characters more completely look elsewhere, towards a meditation upon surface reality. This outside world – the world of appearances, and the objects which are components of it – is the subject of the next section.
Part Three: Suggestive Language and the Poetry of Consumer Objects

Minimalism, like much modern short fiction, makes use of the everyday object as means of expressing the inner lives of its characters. For Hemingway and Carver, this meant imbuing those objects with a figurative significance.

Barthelme’s everyday objects are also highly significant. The branded commodity in *Moon Deluxe* is drained of figurative significance and more often than not represents *status* within a consumer culture, rather than as an effective means of expressing a character’s inner workings. This refutes Chekhov’s (and Hemingway’s and Carver’s) approach which uses the configuration of objects to suggest an emotional state. It is in keeping with Barthelme’s enterprise to undermine the traditional function of literature as an explicative medium; objects means little more than their role with the continuum of consumer transactions, and reflects a character’s social status more than an interior environment. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, Barthelme replaces the language of modern fiction (and especially its metaphorical function) with the language of advertising, marketing and commodity culture.

The object, in Barthelme can be considered in the light of post-modern theory and especially that of Jean Baudrillard. John Lechte outlines Baudrillard’s theory of the product in contemporary society, a theory which seems closely aligned to Barthelme’s use of the everyday of object:

> With his semiotic interest in the object, Baudrillard [...] endeavours to show that no object exists in isolation from others. Instead, their
differential, or relational, aspect becomes crucial in understanding them. In addition, while there is a utilitarian aspect to many objects, what is essential in them is their capacity to signify status. [...] To be emphasised here is that objects are not simply consumed in a consumer society; they are produced less to satisfy a need than to signify a status, and this is only possible because of the differential relationship between objects. 

Stripped of its figurative power, drained of its utility, the object as commodity in Barthelme sits among others in the continuum of commodity status. By using objects to 'signify a status', Barthelme is suggesting that short story discourse (and indeed that of modern fiction) has shifted from an interest in the dynamic between good and evil (in the traditional short tale); through to a communicator of an authentic 'truth' (in Hemingway); and as a means to suggest the potential of change (in Carver). Barthelme satirises the discourse that has replaced all these in his contemporary society: the trivial and disposable language of marketing.

_Barthelme's Everyday Object: the Brand_

A brand name is a value statement and is never innocent of value, nor can it escape saying something about the status of the product to which it refers. A brand appears within a continuum whose function is to draw attention to it status. When a brand name is found in the text, the reader begins to place it, however loosely, amongst that continuum of products. Barthelme frequently asserts the power of the brand name. In

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‘Grapette’, the central characters use the lament for a product which has become obsolete as a simple analogy to a sense of loss they feel, both at their own relationships demise, and of growing older in general:

“No Grapette,” I say, scanning the ceiling.

“What is it?”

“The end of the world as we have known it.”

“Oh.”

“Little purple bottle, six ounces.” I wave my hand and twist my head to one side so I can see her on the couch. “Grapette kind of went away, I guess. I hate that.” (148)

Products and their names function differently in different stories. The use of the brand name, or branding, takes two distinct forms. In the first instance, the product retains its generic name whilst the brand name is added. In ‘Box Step’ there is an ‘Izod shirt’, ‘Lowenbrau beer’ and ‘Pier I glasses’. In the second instance, the brand name replaces the generic name completely. When Henry in ‘Box Step’ refers to his electric typewriter, he calls it the ‘Selectric II’ and the blinds in his office are only referred to as ‘Levelors’.

Both have implications for the ways in which the implied reader interprets the text. In the first instance, the brand name augments the description of an object. Given that the brand is evaluative it is not merely colouring the implied reader’s perception of an object but reinforces ideas about its value as a product and in turn, the consumer who
uses it. In ‘Box Step’, Felicia teases Amos: ‘“He’s wearing this Izod shirt, did you notice? He’s very style-aware.”‘ (12). The brand name is the point around which the meaning of the sentence pivots. It is used ironically and the implied reader assumes it would appear somewhere at the lower end of the branding continuum that there is something risible about Izod shirts. ‘Izod’ carries the weight that an adjective might. The brand might well be replaced directly with an adjective, so ‘Izod’ would become ‘fashionable’ or ‘expensive’.39

The result of this is that Barthelme sometimes rejects the use of adjectives in favour of a reference to the objects he finds in the real world. This is an important part of Barthelme’s strategy, and is essential for understanding how the use of branding creates interpretative equivocation. Indeed, this gets to the paradox at the heart of Barthelme’s minimalism: rather than providing less information, it provides more. But it does so in order to demonstrate that the everyday object has been replaced with a commodity. As such, the object itself has no value except that which is its market value. The process remains one of omission (the object disappears) and is replaced with a brand name. Barthelme thus creates a new vocabulary of experience by assigning objects brand names in the absence of their actual function as objects.

The creation of a new vocabulary can be found more completely in the second instance, where the brand name replaces the generic everyday object. With this device, Barthelme explores the phenomenon where a product becomes synonymous with its brand name. In the United Kingdom this has its equivalent in brands such as

39 In the opening to this chapter, I drew attention to Naomi Klein’s brief history of designer labelling. Izod Lacoste was one of those original labels that were worn as sportswear in the 1950s.
‘Hoover’, a proprietary term which has replaced ‘vacuum cleaner’ in modern usage. The transformation from object to product is so complete that there they become indistinguishable. This reduces the presence of everyday objects to their place within the commodity market by defining the object in terms of its product name. One of the reasons for its use is that it is a mode of discourse that reflects his society’s interest in the consumer object and its place within the language of marketing, and how this influences the behaviour and values of his characters.

Charles E. May claims that the modern short story, despite depending on what he calls ‘metonymic sequence and verisimilitude’, still can create a metaphoric sense of reality:

The metonymic style of realism in the modern short story compels the reader to transform sequence into equivalence and to spatialize the temporal in order to make metaphorically meaningful that which at first seems merely contiguous. The process of ‘sequence into equivalence’ suggests that the contiguous – in this example, the everyday object and more specifically, the toy dinosaur in ‘Box Step’ – are not merely representations of an external reality but are metaphors that are created by a process of what he calls ‘repetition and parallelism into meaningful patterns’. The external world in Robinson Crusoe (to use May’s example) exists as an ‘external resistance to be overcome’: and the swamp in ‘A Big Two Hearted River’ is an

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41 May (2002), p. 7. For a similar approach, see Cynthia. W. Hallett’s special use of metonymy and metaphor in C. Hallett Minimalism and the Short Story (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), pg. 6 and the process of ‘metonymic matter [is] transformed into metaphorical signifiers’ on p. 11, ibid.
'objectification of Nick's psychic distress'. The process of transforming the metonymic detail into metaphoric significance is a product of the selection and repetition of certain details.

Barthelme's use of the object is a particular example which reflects a more general trend within society to replace their language with the discourse of consumerism. The Pier I glasses, imported Lowenbrau beer, and Izod shirts all represent nothing more than the display of consumer power. Saying something is 'Izod' has an adjectival quality, meaning it is not valued. Similarly, importing 'Lowenbrau' beer is a short-cut for suggesting the 'user' (or 'consumer', rather than person) is cosmopolitan, well-informed and fashionable. In Barthelme's work, the language of the modern short story has, therefore, been replaced with the language of advertising, marketing, of commercialism.

The Figurative Function of Branding
I have argued that minimalism throughout the arts is based upon absence and restraint for its effects. Yet Moon Deluxe contains many episodes or details that appear, at least on a cursory reading, as entirely superfluous. What does it mean to include the names of typewriters, the brand of shirts or drinking glasses? Critics have ascribed a 'hallucinatory' quality to Barthelme's short fiction. One explanation for this is the effect created from an obsessive focus upon the everyday. In one sense, a stringent focus upon such objects begins to remove the illusion of what functions these objects have in external reality. This fiction asks that the product is considered more closely,
and when this is done, it reveals itself as what it actually is: is bizarre, strange and extraordinary. It attempts to suggest the process by which we find the familiar strange, those moments when the absurdity of our lives suggest themselves. There are times when one considers how amazing and unusual it is to be hurtled around in a small tube at high speed, or, to fly; or, more prosaically, how odd it might seem that we sit together in a room to watch a small, flickering box, or watch television. Barthelme’s *Moon Deluxe* makes the everyday uncanny, so that his objects become strange, even sinister.

The transformation from the everyday is apparent when one considers a sustained look into the mirror. When the viewer looks in the mirror, he or she recognises something seen most days of his or her life. It is perfectly commonplace and although he or she may occasionally note changes, they are imperceptible, and the viewer is left in little doubt they are extremely familiar with what they see. Yet, when the viewer takes a longer look, and retains his or her intense focus upon the face, something changes. The familiar begins, equally imperceptibly, to become unfamiliar. If the viewer looks hard and long enough at even the most ordinary things they seem to become unusual, strange, even sinister and bizarre. This is predicated upon a belief of Barthelme’s which is the subtext for *Moon Deluxe*. For Barthelme, culture does not merely contain such branded objects, culture is branded objects. In his introduction from his *Law of Averages*, he makes the claim explicit:
[...] The idea came to me in the form of a barbecued chicken of the type you buy precooked at the grocery store. I bought one, one summer day. And it amazed me. I was thrilled by how wonderful and grotesque this prefab, plastic-wrapped, aluminum-panned, shrinking, falling-apart, sweet-smelling chicken was. Somehow it was the culture.43

Such everyday objects do not exist to illustrate a depth greater than their surface attributes: they have no metaphorical significance. The qualities of their existence, those elements that can be seen, touched, heard, tasted and smelled are enough to occupy a central place within Barthelme's world. Carver's fiction held no such ambivalence. His romanticism saw such banality as a thing to be held off, not embraced as representative; the everyday was cruel and grim and escape from it problems - alcoholism, divorce, estrangement - should be the goal. Barthelme's characters have little or no suggestion of an inner life because they are economically constructed. The focus from character in Carver to economic culture in Barthelme is a significant development in the minimalist aesthetic of these writers.

But what happens if you do not understand the language of late 20th century capitalism, the lexicon of the branded object? When the brand name becomes synonymous with the object there is a danger that the use of branding may impede understanding if the reader is unable to identify the brand name used. In the title story, this idea is explicitly raised as the two women offer the narrator a cognac, the history of which is described:

“Tony’s grandfather, who was a war correspondent or something, sent us this bottle of cognac – very fancy, very special. Both of us hate the stuff, so we’ve lugged the damn bottle with us everywhere, waiting for the chance to use it on some bobo. The trouble is, the stuff is too fancy, nobody every heard of it.

“It’s very nice,” you say.

“Might as well be Ripple,” Antonia says mournfully. (69-70)

When the brand name context is lost, the brand becomes useless. In this case, there exists confusion about what is important. Antonia says: “‘Might as well be Ripple’”, alluding to a non-speciality, commonplace liqueur. Its status is a direct product of the brand name – and if that name is lost, then the status is lost, regardless of its utility. The television news stations CNN and ABC found at the beginning of ‘Violet’ (36) were for a long time only available in the United States as was the K-Mart, or ‘Ripple’ liquor. Although the reader unfamiliar with the brand might use internal evidence to interpret the value of the brand, it does not offer a precise method of understanding the text. For example, an Izod shirt had been used above to represent a risible quality. In fact, for a large part of the 1980s, it was expensive and highly desirable. The interpretation cannot be based upon internal evidence alone.

The use of brand names relies heavily on the reader’s knowledge of that specific brand name, which is culturally unique. It follows that Barthelme had a very particular reader in mind when he creates the stories, one that would understand such a specific cultural reference. In the first instance, some of the references would make little sense to anyone outside of the United States. Those objects that can be found elsewhere may
well have become additionally unfamiliar through time. For example, when Henry refers to his ‘Selectric II’ in the opening paragraph, the reader might fail to recognise it as one of IBM’s early electric typewriters, as it has become technologically obsolete. Whilst it is true that the global spread of homogenised cultural products from America, including such major brands as McDonalds, or Coca-Cola, might be familiar to readers all over the world, Barthelme chooses instead brands that will both date quickly or those that are only familiar to a smaller community of implied readers, namely the readers he wishes to satirise.

This point illustrates a particular danger with the use of brand names, and more generally the drive to become more and more focussed upon the particularities of everyday contemporary life, in minimalist fiction. Minimalism has often been accused of being parochial in its outlook, ignorant of the wider world of politics and social issues, as I have explored in Aldridge’s discussion of minimalism’s poverty. By using brand names, Barthelme runs the risk of further narrowing the focus until only a very few may grasp the full import of his work. In this case, his ideal implied reader seems to be a well-informed urban, American of the 1980s. Perhaps the greatest danger lies in that a reader unfamiliar with the cultural references is less inclined to participate more completely when they are encouraged to re-create meaning in the text, or even bother to read him at all. One of the reasons why Carver deliberately reacted against the unusual, even ‘exotic’, locations and events of Hemingway’s short fiction was to make his fiction more accessible to a wider readership. But for some readers of *Moon Deluxe*, the inclusion of K-Mart and Ripple, of Selectric II and Levelors, of CNN and ABC is as exotic as Hemingway’s murders, the shellshock and the mass exodus. The difference between the identity of the reader might be expressed as the difference between Barthelme’s ‘ideal’ implied reader, who
understands the cultural references, and brand names and the actual reader, as one who might be separated from the story either by time and place, and as a result does not fully comprehend the commercial allusions found throughout. Barthelme's continued focus upon the accurate depiction of his contemporary world creates an implied reader who must be equally focussed to pick up on those references.

_The Discourse of Marketing and the Influence of the Brand_

The pervasive and sinister power of the branded object to influence its owner is explored throughout _Moon Deluxe_. In 'Box Step', the toy seems to influence Henry's behaviour:

At home with Ann and Gillian I turn it upside down, spilling wonton soup and rice out of its hollow inside onto my place mat. I ask the dinosaur if it wants a Gelusil, then wipe the toothy mouth with a napkin. The women laugh.

"He's a jerk," Gillian says.

"He had too much to eat," Ann says. She starts to clean up the mess I've made, but I elbow her away and clean it myself, wiping at the soup with a napkin, sweeping the rice into my palm from the edge of the polyurethaned white-pine tabletop.

"Henry I mean," my sister says. (12)

Henry appears to be regressing into a childlike state of play, using the dinosaur as a child might use a doll. He is beginning to assume the role that playing with a toy might invoke: his object is defining his social role, or, beginning to own him. This reflects an opinion of a more general trend in American society, and according to Deborah Gimelson, and it pervades the rest of the book:
Among America’s least flattering national characteristics, for example, is the tendency of many of us to live in a state of adolescent self-preoccupation far beyond the age when that is appropriate or excusable.  

The toy acts as a link between Henry as an adult and as a child, enabling him to relive the past and simultaneously avoid the present and future. Henry is one of several characters in Moon Deluxe that exhibit nostalgic tendencies and a concomitant rejection of the present. In ‘At Heart’, as the narrator watches Clare perform a ‘shallow curtsy’ and jump to the beach, she tells him: ‘‘Yes, sir,’’ she says. She squats and duck-walks across the sand. ‘‘I’m just a girl at heart. I don’t want to hear anything about adults’’ (160). Certainly, there is a suggestion throughout Moon Deluxe that the fear of ageing and the responsibility that it entails is reason enough to seek solace in the past and avoid the present. In ‘At Heart’, the first-person narrator seems preoccupied with growing old:

I must look glum. Sylvia slinks up beside me and says, ‘‘Why so forlorn?’’

‘‘It’s worse when you’re forty,’’ I say. ‘‘It’s really ridiculous.’’ (151)

At other times, the reason for such regression appears uncertain. When Ann complains of feeling nervous, Henry replies: ‘‘Me too, all the time. I don’t know why.’’ (11). This kind of free-floating anxiety may well prompt Henry into the safety

45 In ‘Grapette’, Carmel confirms the suspicions of several men in Moon Deluxe: ‘‘Men are dorks at forty. They don’t know what’s good for them.’’ (137).
that the toy provides. Frank in ‘Lumber’ tries to stave off his loneliness by buying things from the lumber shop (163-164). But Henry goes further than use the toy as a source of comfort. In his presentation of a new toy dinosaur to Ann during a meal, it develops an altogether more complex figurative power:

“I forgot something,” I say, sliding my chair away from the table. I go out to the car and retrieve the T. G. & Y. bag from the floor in the front seat; there’s a little chain of perspiration on my forehead when I get back to the table and make the presentation. The appetizers arrive. Ann loosens the staple at the top of the bag with her fingernails, hands me the receipt, opens the bag and peers inside.

“I deserve this,” she says. (20)

Henry seems to suggesting that toy is not merely a crutch with which he can support his frightened ego, but a tool for creating a relationship, in which that toy might be equally useful for both partners. The reader might be tempted to think that this is merely a shortcoming on behalf of Henry. But Ann colludes with the charade, playfully personifying the toy and claiming it is a fit reward, even if that claim is tinged with sarcasm. Only Felicia has the sense to recognise this behaviour as some kind of regression:

Ann shakes hands with the dinosaur the way one shakes hands with a dog; then she feeds it one of her tiny white shrimp. She says, “Welcome to America, Rueben.”

“Welcome to the Romper Room,” Felicia says. (20-21)
What is found in the use of a toy is a similar method to Carver, in that the object does not have a static symbolic nature, like the swamp in ‘A Big Two Hearted River’, but one that is liable to change. It is unusual in that, unlike the branded object, it possesses a symbolic value outside the language of discourse. Like Carver’s objects, Barthelme’s are always products. As such, his use of such objects and its effect upon the reader is aligned to Carver’s method. Yet Barthelme is keen to demonstrate their value as commodities: in ‘Box Step’, Henry tells us a great deal about who made his toy dinosaur and where he got it from. Despite its obvious dissimilarities, Barthelme had in *Moon Deluxe* ambitions that Hemingway and Carver had: to define what it is like to live in our time.
Part Four: Omission, Characterisation and Endings

As I have noted in the previous chapters on Hemingway and Carver, the ending of the story provides the opportunity to answer the questions raised by the narrative and to provide the potential for interpretative closure. Like Hemingway and Carver, Barthelme exploits this pivotal function of the story ending by refusing to provide normative narrative closure. However, unlike his predecessors, Barthelme rejects even the potential for the story to provide closure. Instead, in the same way that Hemingway and Carver rejected the notion of 'resolution', he in turn replaces the concept of 'revelation' immanent in their story endings with suspension: the story, like the lives it describes, resolves or reveals little or nothing. What is left in Barthelme's endings is a reminder that life experience cannot encapsulated into a discrete moment of resolution which offer even the potential for meaning in an otherwise banal, incomprehensible universe. As such, it is one of the most tangible realisations of his ambition to reject the conventions of traditional literature and replace them with a gesture towards a literature that above all aspires to verisimilitude of contemporary life. This method has attracted much criticism. Peter La Salle's review is a typical example:

There is an old joke about the New Yorker story: You write a normal story, then just chop off the last couple of paragraphs, to leave the reader in that fashionable limbo.

In keeping with my definition of the short story and its components, I use the term 'ending' to imply a neutral description of the place where the text ends. In doing so, I avoid the associations of narrative closure which terms such as 'conclusion', 'denouement' or 'finale' implies.

This may indeed be the initial impression left with a cursory reading, especially in stories like ‘Monster Deal’ which ends:

My steak is still cooking. I pour a fresh cup of coffee and start to read the newspaper, but then I don’t want to read, I just want to look at the headlines. (200)

This type of deflated ending seems to wilfully reject the conventional method to provide some kind of significant commentary or narrative closure. But here, as can be found elsewhere throughout the collection, the story ends, like T. S. Eliot’s ‘Hollow Men’ with a whimper, not a bang. The impact of the conflict upon the narrator of ‘Monster Deal’ leads not the kind of ‘impossible changes’ found in Carver’s title story ‘Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?’ but instead leaves him slightly aggrieved, to the extent that concentrating upon the newspaper is temporarily difficult. But this indifference is Barthelme’s point. He strips the ending of his stories of their significance in order to show that the lives of his characters cannot have significance imposed upon them when their overall attitude is one of emotional coldness, indifference and detachment. Barthelme’s endings are a coherent element in his overall enterprise to demonstrate that contemporary life in Moon Deluxe is relatively insignificant, comprised of a series of missed opportunities, thwarted desires and unease. His is a world of greys; it is ambiguous, indistinct. In this section, an analysis of story endings is accompanied by an analysis of his sketchy characters.

There are several ways in which Barthelme subverts the convention for using the story ending to resolve issues in the characters’ lives. All of them are dependent upon
omission. One of the most persistent manifestations of the omission is Barthelme's thoroughgoing immersion in everyday experience, expressed as an omission of the normative areas of interest of conventional literature. Barthelme expresses as such:

My idea [...] was to write about ordinary people in plain circumstances - going to the store, dinner with the neighbors, people at the pool, time at the office, camping in the backyard, sitting in the parking lot at the mall. [...] the world as reflected in details of our routine lives.48

I noted at the start of the chapter how Barthelme sought to represent a reality which was quite unlike the 'artifice' of reality that he saw as endemic in much contemporary writing. Amongst his strategy for re-representing reality was to focus upon the everyday lives of everyday people. Amongst those 'extraordinary circumstances' that people experience in so-called 'realist' texts were: 'drug addictions, terrible accidents, diseases, wars, deaths, rapes, violence of every kind, magic times, epiphanies, et cetera'.49 I have emphasised epiphanies because they appear frequently in Carver's works but are not found in any of Barthelme's short fiction. In Carver's fiction, the epiphany often thwarts the potential to reveal something about the character who experiences it. This is often figuratively translated into the image of a character looking into the mirror. Barthelme rejects even the potential for self-realisation. This is how the narrator of the title story, 'Moon Deluxe' observes himself:

49 Barthelme (2000), pp. xv-xvi, my emphasis.
You look at your teeth in the bathroom mirror. They need brushing.

You strip, start the water for a bath, and carry your clothes into the bedroom. You stand in front of the full-length mirror for a few seconds, looking at your skin.

Typically for Barthelme, the emphasis remains upon the surface. The character looks not in the eyes, or at the entire person (despite their being naked in a full-length mirror) but the surface aspect, the skin. The examination is fleeting, lasting only ‘seconds’. When the narrator does come to any conclusions following the examination of his teeth, he reveals the banal: ‘they need brushing’. There is no epiphany here, just a getting ready before a ‘date’. Barthelme’s language of experience demands that the reader look to behaviour and become fluent in the signs and signals that they find represented. The reader, rather than finding a quasi-mystical significance in an epiphany is left to decide what is meant by the actions and words of the characters who refuse to explain their motives.

*Subverting the Epiphanic Ending*

There are examples in *Moon Deluxe* that appear to end in the similar manner to Carver’s short stories by providing the potential for ascribing significance to the narrative, or at least providing some sort of narrative resolution. However, upon closer inspection, they merely reinforce the idea that such potential merely represents the false imposition of a hopeful interpretation upon an otherwise insignificant moment.

In final scene between the narrator and his ‘date’ Lucille in ‘Rain Check’, they share a furtive exchange about what might happen next:
“Do you want some breakfast?”
The invitation sounds tired but sincere, so I say, ‘Not now. Maybe I’ll take a rain check.”
“A what?”
“Another time.”

Lucille says haltingly, “So. What about a shower?” I give her a long look, letting the silence mount up. (240)

The idea of the ‘rain check’ (also the title of the story) is significant in that such a pivotal moment (Lucille asking him into her apartment, possibly as a prelude to sex) ends with a rejection using terms that she does not understand. This epitomises the poor communication that exists between them, quite possibly a result of their age difference. As she presses the issue by increasing the terms of intimacy by asking him if he wants a shower, there begins a long passage during which the potential for narrative conclusion is suggested:

Maybe we’ve been there longer than two minutes, but when the smile comes, I see her lips a little bit apart and her slightly hooded eyes, and she traces her fingers down my arm from the elbow to the wrist and stops there, loosely hooking her fingertips inside my shirt cuff, pinching my skin with her nails. (240)

In a simple sense, the implied reader might interpret the story end as a choice between whether the narrator and Lucille will have sex. It resembles Carver’s method in that it creates the potential for change without explicitly confirming the direction that change will take. Moreover ‘when her smile comes’ represents a pseudo-epiphanic moment: it appears to the narrator as a moment of clarity. Yet it is not the significance of the
situation which becomes immediately clearer as a result of this ‘seeing anew’: it is merely that he can see her lips and her eyes. Her provocative gesture of running her fingers down his arm echoes that of the hands moving over the body of the narrator in ‘Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?’. Yet this example is missing both the expressive language and profundity which that image provides. Rather than feel ‘impossible changes’, he feels, instead, a pinch of his skin. This is not a profound change but a bittersweet moment during which their fate will be decided. She appears to one of many ‘dates’ that may have ended this way, it seems, implied by his recollection that he has be taking women ‘to their doors better than twenty years’ (240). There is no special significance to this moment, just one banal date amongst a continuum of others.

Elsewhere, Barthelme deliberately creates and then thwarts the potential for conclusive endings. In ‘Safeway’, the second-person narrator watches Sarah Garner during a trip to the supermarket. They finally meet and go for something to eat. Both uncertain of where it might lead, each leaves small clues as to their intentions. Initially, Sarah rejects his offer of paying for the meal:

“I thought that this was my treat,” you say.
“Wrong.” She starts to put on her coat, and in the bending and pulling you notice that she has opened the neck of her blouse. (216)

Her rejection of his offer to pay, an offer which she has implicitly accepted earlier in the narrative, combined with her abrupt, single word response to this offer signals the
beginning of her uneasiness. Shortly following this, she appears hesitant when the narrator asks if she wants to follow him in his car:

“You go ahead,” she says. “Forest Royale, right? I forgot something at the store. I forgot I’m completely out of facial tissues. Just give me the apartment number.” She looks at the truck in the corner of the parking lot. (216-217)

Her desire to return to the store for something so trivial seems like the actions of someone uncertain about what to do next, making excuses. It is a drama of modern sexual manners. Her glance at the truck reveals why. It belongs to the two men she has met in the supermarket, men which she appears to be attracted to, or at least intrigued by. The narrator, until this point, appears keen on the rendezvous. Yet, like Sarah, his actions are at odds with his thoughts and he lies to her. He gives her a false number of his apartment, one which is arbitrarily reads from a vehicle license plate. In the final paragraph, their uncertainty coincides in a drama of awkward insincerity:

At the door to the Safeway she turns, sees that you are still watching, and waves. You wave, too, in a quick, jerky movement, then step out into the parking lot, whistling, looking over the tops of the sparkling cars for your black Mazda. (217)

What is significant about this ending is that it appears on the surface to suggest the couple will meet but the subtext is that they will not. Barthelme simultaneously suggests the surface possibility of conclusion with a significant moment but on the
other hand rejects it through the careful inclusion of a subversive subtext. Once again, there is no significance to this moment — only the arid, on-going transactions between the sexes. Like 'Rain Check', the conflict which gives rise to the story ending is the question of whether the couple will have sex. This appears to be one of the central preoccupations in this collection. In the most basic way, Barthelme seems to be suggesting that this question is one that preoccupies not only his narratives but the narratives of the lives of his contemporary Americans.

The Circular Structure: 'Shopgirls'
The process of a seemingly closed ending being thwarted has already been hinted at in 'Rain Check', where the narrator's taking women home for over twenty years implies a predictable inevitability to the story's outcome. In 'Shopgirls', this idea is made much more explicit. In the opening section, we find the second-person narrator voyeuristically watching the girls. The story continues until he joins two of the women at their apartment. At the end of the story, following Andrea's confession that her father killed himself, he finds himself daydreaming:

You imagine yourself leaving the apartment on a sunny day in the middle of the week. Three beautiful women in tiny white bikinis lift their sunglasses as you pass them in the courtyard. They smile at you. You drive to the mall in a new car and spend two hours in Housewares on the second floor. You do not remember having been on the second floor before. Kitchen equipment is exquisite, you believe. You buy a wood-handled spatula from a lovely girl with clean short hair. (35)
The narrator has come full circle and returns, at least in his imagination, to the point at which he is found at the beginning of the story – a voyeur of the girls in the department store. The key difference here is that everything is renewed in his imagination. Yet he has apparently learned nothing from his experience: he will resume his sexual surveillance of salesgirls. Barthelme’s point here seems to be that even the most profound experiences – those that would, in conventional short fiction, invite the epiphanic moment in those that hear them – are stubbornly rejected by his characters. The narrator had the opportunity to learn something from Andrea’s confession. But he does not consider his surveillance as morally dubious as a result of his profound interaction with one of the girls he watches. He reverts to his former behaviour, reminding the implied reader that such potentially significant moments in our lives do not produce profound change in others. There has been no epiphany, nothing learned by the narrator.

The central male protagonists in *Moon Deluxe* are similar to the extent of becoming homogenised. They are average men, unremarkable, typical of the way in which the minimalist content is aligned to the minimalist approach. Margaret Atwood writes of the such protagonists:

These men are, on the average, 35 to 40. With one exception, they are either single or divorced. They have no offspring and appear to have no progenitors. They live in apartment complexes with swimming pools and questionable décor, they spend a lot of time in cars, and they feed on restaurant meals and TV dinners. […] They exist in an eternal present consisting of the weather,
furniture, cars, other people's appearances, scraps of conversation.

Probably they have feelings, but we aren't always sure.\(^{50}\)

Her summary highlights a process which has led several critics to argue that the fictional world of Barthelme is notable for its lack of depth, even if that is his deliberate intention. It certainly seems that by using a similar configuration of characters – and especially the central character – he runs the risk of repetition to the point of monotony. If he is simply trying to demonstrate the lack of variety between most people in contemporary America, then he runs the risk that he will invite the same kind of criticism of his writing that he himself suggests in his censure of such a state of affairs – his fiction, like the world he attempts to criticise, is homogenous, dull and banal. By omitting any detail through which the reader might identify the uniqueness of each character Barthelme reveals that he is more interested in the evocation of experience \textit{per se} than he is in individual characterisation. Even the idiosyncrasies of individual characters are ironed out when repeated several times throughout the collection. Indeed, it may be considered that the characters are merely thin stereotypes, ciphers for his particular take on human behaviour.

The minimalist enterprise to describe painstakingly the phenomena of everyday reality finally finds its corollary in this use of characters. The person has become an object, stripped of personality and can only be differentiated by their behaviour. Individuality of both character and reader is illusory, and both are restrained by the commoditisation that governs them. The effect this might have on the implied reader

is to dissolve the boundaries between reader and character, between the real and the fictional world.

*The Inexplicit Ending and Nothingness*

The ending of ‘Feeders’ represents the convergence of the inability of the narrator to make sense of the narrative with the narrative refusing to be adequately resolved. In both cases, the narrator’s thought process and the story itself are suspended when an unforeseen event takes places, thwarting the meditations of the narrator as the implied reader assumes he is about to make sense of the narrative:

I hear her talking to Iris, whispering, but I can’t make out what’s being said. I wonder if I should just go ahead and leave without saying goodbye, but I decide that would be worse than staying, so I sit and drink my coffee. I shoot the lantern beam around the room, then out the window, where it hits one of Mrs. Jaymar’s feeders. I play the light out there for a few minutes, thinking about Iris and me, how we used to roughhouse together and how we used to do certain things – like wear heavy coats inside in the winter. That’s when I spot Cecil, wrapped in a lime-green parka, hugging the trunk of the willow. (231)

Barthelme shows a playfulness in his approach to the ending, a sense of humour that runs throughout the collection of stories. Here, the confusion about what to do is quickly replaced by the beginnings of understanding that casting the lantern into the garden brings. He is both literally and figuratively illuminating his situation and as he does so, he begins to consider his relationship. One of his memories is of him and Iris
wearing ‘heavy coats’ inside. But when he shines the light around the garden, it picks out Cecil. He is in a heavy coat, possibly indicating that the narrator’s life has been usurped by the strangeness and isolation that Cecil represents.

In several of the stories discussed above the narrator provides some indication of conclusion by providing a commentary which, albeit obliquely, addresses the potential of the story to resolve the conflict. This kind of commentary, as I have shown in my readings of Hemingway’s endings, is the most expedient way of providing narrative closure. In stories such as ‘Exotic Nile’, the narrator’s commentary is completely omitted and replaced with dialogue. The capacity of the narrator to ‘tell’, or at least hint at where he might have been, is a significant moment had it not been rejected out of hand, and is missing as a result. This is how ‘Exotic Nile’ ends:

“Pleased to meet you.” I said. I swept my menu off the table, opening it with a flourish that rocked the empty wineglass. Lorraine caught the glass before it hit the table. “Thank you,” I said.

“We’ll just get the girl a snack,” Nassar said. “Then speed by the blimp ruins on the way home. You know about the blimp ruins? Out past the Air Force base? It’s crazy out there at night.” (186)

In the absence of the narrator’s commentary, this might be considered in terms of how it functions as a dramatic moment of conclusion. How does this dialogue modify our expectations of interpretative closure? In this particular story, Nassar, the owner of the
apartments where the narrator lives, introduces the narrator to his wife's younger sister, Lorraine. This seemingly innocent party begins to form an increasingly strange dynamic when Lorraine flirts with the narrator with the tacit approval of Nassar. In the final scene, they sit at a table and Nassar invites them to go to the abandoned Air Force base, where he says: "It's crazy out there at night." (186). The ending is an example of interpretative equivocation because it does not fully explain the exact dynamic that exists between the three people. The notion of 'showing' what is happening through dialogue further complicates, rather than elucidates, their relationships. It asks the reader to answer such questions as: what does Lorraine mean when she claims that: "Mariana's crazy," she said. "He's just a regular guy" (185) or: what does the cryptic introduction by Nassar of the narrator to Lorraine mean: "See," Nassar said to Lorraine. He opened his hand toward me. "Angel of Mercy."

(186).

The narrator's perspective is a product of the several, overlapping conversations that take place throughout the story. We learn little of the narrator's comprehension of them. Rather, like the narrator, the implied reader witnesses a series of events that appear to make little sense. In the absence of any explicit, forceful narrative commentary – missing here because, unlike Hemingway's narrator, the first-person narrator is confused and bewildered – the implied reader shares the uncertainty of the narrator. Once again, the mystery of this relationship encourages the reader to ask the questions left unanswered, indeed even unconsidered, by the narrator: what do Nassar and Lorraine want from the narrator? Barthelme complicates Moon Deluxe by introducing the possibility that behaviour or surface descriptions leave the possibility for misinterpretation. When Barthelme is not using the second-person narrator he
adopts a narrator similarly absent to that found in much of *In Our Time* and frequently used in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*. Such a narrator, I have argued, does not interpret the text he or she narrates and as a result the meaning of the text is less explicitly stable. Barthelme draws attention to the innate instability of meaning in texts with absent narrators throughout *Moon Deluxe*. His method is to draw attention to those places where interpretative slippage might occur, that is, where an element of ambiguity is deliberately introduced.

So far I have focused upon the endings of Barthelme’s stories in *Moon Deluxe*. In the conventional model for short story structure, referred to by Lohafer *et al.* as the ‘conflict-and-resolution’ model, this pivotal moment resolves the conflict set up in the story. It is worthwhile considering, therefore, exactly the quality of this conflict. Throughout the collection, that conflict circulates around a simple question: will the couple in question have sex?

‘Open’ endings have long been a part of the Modernist principle to reveal (as opposed to resolve) a significant moment in the life of the central character. This made the short story particularly suited to the ‘epiphanic’ revelation, the brevity of which maintained a focus upon the idea of intense, but short-lived, moment. As I have made clear in the previous chapter, Carver is working within the modernist tradition of short fiction by hinging his stories around such moments.

Yet Barthelme refuses to adhere to this convention. Rather, the endings of his stories sustain the idea expounded throughout the narratives: that experience is not
necessarily meaningful, any more than it can be of the behaviour it describes. Endings are like beginnings for Barthelme, in some cases almost literally: they have no special narrative function other than to as a more or less arbitrary starting point. Consider the ending of the title story ‘Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?’:

And then he turned to her. He turned in what might have been a stupendous sleep, and he was still turning, marvelling at the impossible changes he felt moving over him.51

The results of those ‘impossible changes’ are not made explicit, in keeping of Carver’s method suggesting change. But it is quite clear that this is a highly significant moment in the protagonist’s life. It fulfils the potential of the conventional story ending to express an ‘epiphanic’, profound moment. Compare this to the ending of Barthelme’s ‘Trip’:

She opens her purse, closes it again, then comes away from the door and stands in front of him.

“I don’t know how to explain all this,” he says, smoothing the skirt at her hip with his fingers. Mrs. Kiwi is coming across the oyster-shell lot swinging a plastic bag full of biscuits.

Fay slips her glasses into place. “When’s your birthday? she says.

“I want to get you something nice for your birthday.” (116)

Banality replaces profundity. Despite the mystery of Harry's awkward confession that he doesn't know how 'to explain it all', the story ends with a thoroughly prosaic response, expressed in the most clichéd language. Mrs. Kiwi's appearance anticipates the shift from the potentially significant moment raised by Harry's admission to the trivial question with which it is met. If there was a moment when this narrative could have asserted the significance of this 'trip' in the lives of Fay and Harry, then it is stubbornly resisted. I do not consider Barthelme's endings in *Moon Deluxe* to be 'open' in the traditional, modernist sense. Being 'open' suggests the possibility of significance, as yet unrealised in the story as it ends but which potentially can be 'closed' by the imposition of a given interpretation. Rather, Barthelme's method seems to suggest that there is no foundation upon which the ending suggests and 'open' quality. However, following Lohafer, this is not necessarily a negative enterprise. She suggests that ending without resolution might reflect the 'modern' predicament:

H. E. Bates and Nadine Gordimer, who argue that the story has been influenced by the 'new' clichés: modern malaise, occasioned by loss of faith in orderly and contained systems of thought, leading to a view of life and art as fragmented and inconclusive.52

She continues:

[...] the closing off of possibilities is not the only way in which a story may grant that equilibrium of information and assimilation.

52 S. Lohafer *Coming to Terms with the Short Story* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 85.
The reader may also be brought to an awareness of ramified implications. We do not need to feel that the obscure has been made plain. Mystery is not confusion; it is the outline of wonder.53

It is not necessarily a failure of Barthelme’s that he rejects the traditions of conventional literature to explain. But as Lohafer hints at, it certainly makes for a more challenging reading.

Arguably, Barthelme wrote about ‘nothing’ as an antidote to what he saw as the extraordinary lives of conventional fictional characters. Hemingway suggested that he knew a great deal about his subject, a knowledge that would be present within the text without being directly alluded to. In contrast with Hemingway’s ‘iceberg principle’, Barthelme’s fiction provides a meticulous attention to surface detail without suggesting that this detail need to explain anything. In most cases what you see is the product of one corporation or another. Understanding the real world, then, is to understand the language of what you see around you – the commodity. The contemporary world is comprised of exactly what you see on the surface: what you see is what you get.

53 Lohafer, p. 97.
Part Five: Barthelme's Contemporary Realism

Barthelme certainly uses branded objects as part of his realist enterprise. As such, his branding of objects represents a movement towards a more accurate depiction of the objects of everyday reality, an ambition which can be found in both Hemingway and Carver. Barthelme's fiction aspires to this kind of 'perfect reproduction', or 'hyperreality'. Excluding name brands would be at odds with such an ambition.

But unlike either Hemingway or Carver, Barthelme cites a quasi-political reason for his interest in the everyday. He says in the introduction to Law of Averages that: 'I grew fond of the mundane because of the way it spoke of us all'. The focus upon the everyday has caused some critics to suggest a smallness of vision, and that such detailed attention to the everyday becomes prosaic, dull and unworthy of literary attention. In the introduction to Law of Averages, Barthelme asserts that: 'You also find a polite anarchy here, a deep-background political spine masquerading as disinterest [...].' One reason why Barthelme may have chosen to include brand names is to reflect more accurately the way in which society talks about everyday objects. Certainly, if Barthelme is seeking a fidelity to realistic speech patterns, for example, he would have to include certain brands as we use them.

Barthelme's attitude towards his contemporary consumer society is ambivalent. At once the superficial world is both trivial and beautiful; and he further seeks to fuse these to suggest the trivial is beautiful. His most considered and sustained reading of

this appears in his discussion of the differences between beauty in the natural and artificial worlds: beauty can be found in the everyday *man-made* world around you, rather solely in the *natural* world:

The way you figure is, it’s your world. [...] so instead of waiting for this world to change, instead of looking for major natural beauty to jut up, [...] you look around and let yourself be touched. Part of it is physical, part graphic, part symbolic, part connotative.\(^{56}\)

Barthelme rejoices in his contemporary consumer society, a reality that he recognises as transitory, further detached from nature and therefore artificial. His fiction attempts to demonstrate the beauty within the unnatural world of malls, diners and supermarkets, of toy dinosaurs, ant farms and odd socks. In this sense, his fiction encompasses an acute, minimalist attention to the surface reality without it being predicated upon a natural world which gives it value. What can be found on the surface of the everyday world is enough for Barthelme’s fiction.

Barthelme is a post-modern writer in that he is especially interested in the ways in which the language of commodity culture helps to construct his characters and his readers. Barthelme’s refusal to allow the everyday function of the everyday object as indicative of social status to be replaced by the rhetoric of assigning emotional corollaries with objects has a peculiarly post-modern inflection. Like his post-modern

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\(^{56}\) Barthelme (1998), p. 27.
contemporaries, he is concerned with the function of language to shape identity, in his case, the discourse of commercialism.

Realism and the Objectification of Characters
Barthelme begins ‘Box Step’ with a theme that is present throughout this collection, the relationship between the natural and the artificial. Despite Ann being ‘pretty’ she was unsuitable for fulfilling a career as a product model because of what are perfectly natural, common features – fair skin and freckles. Ann does not conform to the standards set by the commercial world of advertising. The implication is that our notions of the natural and the attractive are being eroded by commercial imperatives. She is being evaluated in terms of her function as a salesperson for this product and she is useful only in terms of her relation in a role as a commodity. This has a knock-on effect. Like her now defunct role as a product model, our introduction to her refers both to her appearance and her sexual and marital availability; she is ‘pretty’ and ‘divorced’. The objectification of Ann in the commercial world can be equally applied to Henry. But Barthelme does not condone such a position: rather, he holds it up to be satirised. His ambition is to identify, then deconstruct, the potential for the discourse of advertising to objectify its consumers.

The description of the office interior decoration introduces other instances of Barthelme’s interest in appearances. Barthelme lavishes great care upon its description, his enthusiasm for the world of surface realities is apparent. Colour is especially important in understanding the way in which Barthelme uses objects and their appearances. In this example, Henry tells of three colours that have been used to decorate his office; ‘charcoal’, ‘chipboard-gray’ and ‘gunmetal’. These variations on
grey tell us something about the function of the decoration. Grey is both conventionally a dull colour, functional in its use as a bland and non-specific background for the working world. The windows are even tinted, to hold the world of colour outside at a distance. The only bright colour in the room is the salmon of Ann’s shirt. There is a corollary here between the imposition of colour in the room and colour in Henry’s life.

‘I feel like I’m inside a felt hat’, she says, which vividly conveys her claustrophobia. She continues to voice her opposition to the environment: elsewhere, she stands by the window and shortly after ‘[…] swings one of the gray Italian visitor’s chairs around to face the window’(9) and so reject the interior, and she has arranged the trip to Biloxi, because of the ‘[…] beach, the Gulf, the rest of that’ (9). Once again an opposition is set up: Ann seems more intent to explore the outside world, whilst Henry seems more reluctant. His ant farm suggests that he desires not to bring that outside world inside, but to control it. That the ants kill and eat one another is a reminder of the ultimate impossibility of his futile attempt at control. The emphasis upon colour continues: “Your socks don’t match, Henry”, she tells him. That the designs don’t match each other would be the usual implication but there is also the suggestion that the socks do not match the rest of the room. Ann is gently mocking Henry and simultaneously gently criticising the dangers of conformity in an overtly homogenised environment. He says, as if in clarification: ‘She meant they don’t match each other’ (10). Henry uses this mismatch as a justification for her having a drink with him: ‘“I need help with these,” I say, pointing at the socks.’ (10). Colours have become not only important for the reader as literary trope, useful for contrasting
the status of the characters, but as a yardstick for those characters themselves. The mismatch of colours is seen as a symptom of social inadequacy.

Objectification and Gender Conflict
In a review of *Moon Deluxe*, Margaret Atwood notes that several of the women in the collection are tall. In some cases they are a lot taller than their male counterparts and exhibit imposing physical characteristics: ‘Antonia is the woman you saw in the traffic; she’s huge, extraordinary, easily over six feet. Taller than you.’ (68). In a straightforward sense, these physical characteristics reflect the power and elevated status of the women in *Moon Deluxe*. Moreover, when one considers our first introduction to Antonia, another effect becomes clear: ‘You’ve seen the driver on other evenings; she looks strikingly like a young man – big, with dark, almost red hair clipped tight around her head’ (61). Women are beginning to exhibit attributes conventionally held by men. If Duncan and Billy of ‘The Browns’ represent an uneasy and somewhat forced alliance, then Cherry and Lois of ‘Lumber’ are more natural and closely bonded. When Lois is having what she describes as a ‘crisis’ it is Cherry who spends much of the night speaking to her in an attempt to be supportive.

Around such power, men become uneasy. In ‘Rain Check’ a man suffers over using his Visa card at dinner with a date: perhaps she will think that he’s over his credit limit, and she’s previously looked at him as if he’s already failed to impress. These small moments are the expression of the profound desire at the root of several of

57 Atwood, p. 1.

58 There are more than one examples of this kind of sisterhood. In ‘Feeders’, the young women Iris and Polly have developed a close friendship which protects them from the sinister Cecil Putnam.
Barthelme’s male protagonists. The narrator in ‘Safeway’ imagines making love to a woman ‘in response to firm commands’. Barthelme wants to demonstrate how some men, and by extension of the second-person narration, the reader and his or her society, might negotiate this sometimes difficult gender-gap. The final stage of ‘Shopgirls’ provides one of the most sustained and powerfully effective critiques on the objectification of women found with Moon Deluxe. Finding himself somewhat reluctantly in Andrea’s apartment, the narrator and voyeur listens to Andrea recount a story about her father:

“Once, when there was a hurricane coming [...] my father required that we make all the preparations [...] He carefully plotted the storm’s course on a chart he cut out of the newspaper. [...] At eight in the morning the radio announcer read a bulletin from the weather service: Elsie has started to move again, but she had reversed her course and was now headed southwest, straight for Mexico. [...] He was a big man, a powerful man physically, and I remember him filling that doorway between his study and the living room of our house, I remember the way his voice sounded and how his eyes looked when he told us, and I remember watching him retreat into his study and close the door. He shot himself in the temple with a twenty-two-caliber pistol”. (34)

Through this story Andrea is transformed from the object of the narrator’s voyeuristic desire into an individual, whose humanity is evident in her pain, her personal history, and her place within a family. But as the illusion of her objectification breaks down,
the narrator ceases to become attracted to her. His desire is based upon people as objects and as glossy surfaces, not as individuals. His desires are aligned to this mode of discourse and when a character becomes more rounded and explicitly expresses some depth, the protagonist has no way to respond or reciprocate. He has been ‘produced’ by the society which envelops him. Typically for Barthelme, this revelation is expressed through an image of Andrea’s appearance:

You notice for the first time that one of Andrea’s eyebrows is plucked too much, and that the brows are not symmetrical with respect to the bridge of her nose. [...] Once you have seen this tiny imbalance, you cannot stop seeing it. [...] Her face looks wrong suddenly, almost deformed. (35)

The narrator ironically considers himself tactful when he asks himself: ‘You wonder if you should ask Andrea about Sally and Jenny, but decide that it might hurt Andrea’s feelings, so you say nothing.’ (35). That he could think such a thing is in itself an indicator of his callousness. The key here is his failure to recognise his prejudice, his almost pathological desire for female objectification. The narrator’s behaviours are products of what he considers to be the correct thing to do, rather than stemming from a natural feeling, or inference. His actions are ‘artificial’ like the objects that surround him. The language of persuasion, of the desire above all to sell themselves, to present the idealised product of themselves implies that the discourse of advertising has permeated their lives.
Humour plays a serious role in *Moon Deluxe* and it is often used to undermine or implicitly criticise the position of the male protagonist. In ‘Lumber’, it is used to isolate Frank. As the two women come together in a hug, so Frank is falls to the ground. As the girls hug:

> [...I back up a little, trying to get out of the way, trip over the record boxes, and then, to avoid falling, do a kind of somersault onto the couch. The women pause in their embrace to look.]

> “He an acrobat of some kind?” Lois says. (167)

The laconic, sarcastic punch-line from Lois makes Frank the butt of the joke. He has contributed to their debasement of him by performing in just the way that they might expect from their inferior. Temporarily he has become their clown and it will prove incredibly difficult for Frank to overcome this during the rest of the story. Despite their obvious power, their lives are not as straightforward for the women in ‘Lumber’ and their desires are fraught with ambiguity. Lois throws the clothes of her violent lover in the street, but upon looking at him, thinks him ‘beautiful’ so she takes them in. A striking and interesting interaction where gender conventions are overturned comes at the beginning of ‘Rain Check’: ‘Hoping for a quick intimacy, I start telling Lucille things I’m afraid of’ (232). However, Lucille, in keeping with the figure of an empowered woman, rejects his scheme: ‘Lucille says she is not afraid of anything, so I shut up about loneliness’ (232). Once again, there is a lonely man (like Henry in ‘Box Step’ and Frank in ‘Lumber’) whose loneliness makes him behave strangely. Lucille is sexually predatory: in the final sequence, it is she who initiates the possibility that they might have sex (240).
In these examples, Barthelme inverts the gender bias in a way that the other minimalistic writers in this study do not. Hemingway’s gender bias remains unpalatable, and despite Carver’s efforts to introduce women more completely into his narratives, it is Barthelme who more completely asserts their power, even at the expense of his male protagonists. Part of Barthelme’s enterprise is satiric and his subject here satirises the ‘gender wars’ of his contemporary world. In most cases, women triumph and men are seen to be on the whole the weaker sex, as can be found in their interactions with one another, as I will show below.

**Hemingway’s Nick Adams and the Central Protagonists of Moon Deluxe**

I suggest that there exists an affinity between Nick Adams in his stories of *In Our Time* and the central protagonists of *Moon Deluxe*. In the chapter on Hemingway, I demonstrated how using the same character several times gave Hemingway the opportunity to express something of an evolution, almost in aspiration to the way a novel shows character development over time. The same could be said about the central male protagonist of *Moon Deluxe*. These protagonists are like a series of different Nick Adams, faced with several slightly different problems. Despite character similarities, the context of the stories can be differentiated: Henry of ‘Box Step’ as frightened of responsibility and regressive; the narrator of ‘The Browns’, married with a child; the narrator of ‘Shopgirls’, a voyeur who escapes reality via fantasy. Yet, unlike Nick Adams, none of them exhibit any development, moral or otherwise. Henry of ‘Box Step’ appears to have changed little by the time Ann drags him into the traffic at the story end. His furtive attempt to reassure the daughter of his friends is disastrous and so, once again, he regresses into a childlike state. As I have shown, the circular structure of ‘Shopgirls’ implies the second-person narrator
Indeed, Barthelme’s men seem unsteady, perhaps a central reason why they are unable to develop emotionally. Henry in ‘Box Step’ complains of feeling nervous ‘all the time’ (11). In ‘Exotic Nile’, the narrator is paranoid that his landlord’s wife might not be taking him seriously: ‘I’d gotten the impression that Mariana thought I was silly, but there wasn’t any evidence that that’s what she thought.’ (177). More extremely, Polly’s warning that ‘Cecil’s a caution’ (229) is realised when the narrator watches him from the window: ‘That’s when I spot Cecil, wrapped up in a lime-green parka, hugging the trunk of a willow’ (231). One way the male character deals with the apparent power of women is to retreat into fantasy, as I have shown at the end of ‘Shopgirls’. The dream-world of the voyeur is contrasted to the hard detail of the external, banal reality of the shopping mall. One such outlet for his characters, like Henry in ‘Box Step’ is escape. Escape is a principle which dominates several of the characters in *Moon Deluxe*. However, this is not analogous to quasi-spiritual dimension of Carver’s epiphanies. Rather, it is the reverse: when things become too tough for the characters, they tend to become introspective and regressive.

Barthelme’s vision of the human character, tied to consumption but necessarily detached from it, provides a tension that runs throughout his collection. Through the understanding of a central motif such as this, stories which might appear inconsequential now take on a deeper significance for the reader.
For these men, the kind of strength that women exhibit in *Moon Deluxe* seems to undermine them, making communication even more difficult. 'The Browns' is the story of an uneasy relationship between two neighbouring couples, whose relationship experiences further tension after their dogs fight. Duncan, the husband of Pilar, is often described in passive terms. He shuffles across the carpet, and suffers from sinus pain that keeps him in bed. Pilar says of him and their dog: "Between him and Jupiter I've got my hands full'" (80). He was also ill with sun-poisoning when the Browns spent a week in Key West and was confined to bed whilst Pilar and Jupiter 'went for long walks on the beach' (79). In order to escape this isolation, he repeatedly invites Billy, the narrator, and Allison, to their house for drinks. Duncan pounces upon the opportunity to confide in the narrator once they are alone:

When Allison was out of sight, he grabbed my arm and pulled me back to the couch. "All the women I ever slept with were lousy lovers," he said. "[...] I asked Bert and he said it was the same for him, but that's the kind of thing he always says."

"Bert?" I said

"My analyst," Duncan said. (84)

Unhappy with what he thinks is an insincere relationship with his analyst, Duncan takes this opportunity to turn to the narrator as a replacement. Immediately, he launches into the kind of story found conventionally of interest to psychoanalysts, an episode from his childhood. It is both deeply self-revelatory and obviously greatly intimate:
"You know," Duncan said, "when I was a kid, I played priest all the time. I made altars out of cardboard boxes covered with sheets. My mother had this pewter cup I used as a chalice, and I used the Columbia Encyclopedia for a missal. (84-85)

In relating this story, Duncan creates an uncomfortable intimacy with Billy; the reader learns from the beginning of the story that the couples have only spent the evening together twice before. When he asks Billy a leading question, the latter feels compelled to acquiesce: "[...] You do that? Cut bread slices with a glass and mash them flat?" "I did that," I said. "Sure."" (85). However, this is only the preamble to what appears a far more serious story:

"[...] I wanted him [Del, his son] in a Catholic school, but I get the feeling they aren’t what they were. I mean, I had to go to class for six weeks in the convent in fifth grade because I threw an eraser at this pig of a nun who lied to the Mother Superior about me, told her I’d made remarks about her ‘sexual apparatus’” [...] Duncan [...] grabbed my knee again. “I had this teacher named Miss Phantom when I was in school; Del’s got Sister Susie. What good is that? Nuns used to sneak around in those habits, and now look at ‘em.” (85-86)

Duncan appears increasingly angrier throughout his story and his anger seems directed primarily at women. Barthelme has Billy break from this increasingly strange
and hostile conversation through body language not through words – he stands up and removes himself physically from Duncan's immediate presence, despite saying, with little obvious commitment, that he agrees with him. The language of behaviour, our gestures, facial expression and the like, is equally a non-verbal one and here it augments what has already been a narrative full of dialogue. The distance between these two men illustrates a trend in minimalist fiction, the difficulty in connecting two people through language. This points to a larger concern for *Moon Deluxe*, the ways in which meaning is prone to slippage, from pen to paper, from text to reader.
Each section in this chapter outlines how elements – the second-person narrator, the branded object and the story endings and characterisation - contribute to Barthelme’s ambition to reject the normative function of literature to suggests motives and explanation. This function is directly linked to Iser’s concept of ambiguity, or what I call equivocation (following the notion that it is the result of a deliberate strategy, rather than merely accidental - an idea especially relevant to Barthelme). As such, Moon Deluxe creates a series of interpretative problems as a result of a wilful omission of literary conventions. It is perhaps the least conventional, most experimental collection in my study. As such, it represents a culmination in minimalism’s tendency towards active reader engagement.

One result of the sustained use and description of everyday objects and the foregrounding of products is that characters are dwarfed by objects. This is in part Barthelme’s intention. A central aspect of all minimalist writers is their interest in satire. For each it differs in method and effect in accordance with their historical context. Yet in doing so, Barthelme invites a dangerous comparison. Unless he finally asserts that people are more important than their possessions, then he could be said to be maintaining a status quo. I hope to have shown how Barthelme assembles some configurations of gender relationships to begin to demonstrate his great interest in creating an authentic character, even if it this is at the expense of expressing a character which is sometimes flat, uncommunicative and flawed. Barthelme says of his interest in the representation of reality as: ‘the world as reflected in the details of our routine lives’ and this emphasis remains present throughout Moon Deluxe.59 Unlike Hemingway and Carver, Barthelme’s minimalism does not attempt to convey

a greater truth that 'sits behind' the surfaces that he describes, although this does
sometimes assert itself through reader participation, but instead wants to simply
describe those things themselves and thereby express a world at a particular time,
through particular sets of characters. The world to Barthelme is enough; like the
precooked chicken wrapped in cellophane, it has its own mysteries which neither the
writer nor the reader can stand apart from and wholly understand.

There is an interesting paradox at the heart of Barthelme's ambition in *Moon Deluxe.* I
have shown how by using the second-person narrator Barthelme seeks to invite the
reader to respond to his work directly, as he or she is transformed from an implied
reader to an intradiegetic addressee. However, Barthelme seeks to undermine the
traditional normative function of fiction by removing the 'extraordinary
circumstances' and replacing them with a thoroughgoing immersion in the everyday
of modern America. This poses a problem for the actual reader. When he or she is
directly implicated within the narrative in an environment where the normative 'rules'
of fiction have been rejected, traditional reading strategies become useless and instead
are replaced with strategies derived from their experience in the real world. In the
example from 'Shopgirls', this means that the actual reader must not interpret the
fictional model it implies (because those rules of fiction have been destabilised) but
instead must interpret the situation as if they encounter it in the real world. By
rejecting the normative rules of fiction he undermines the reading strategies that his
actual reader might have as part of their reading skills. As a result, reading his fiction
is demanding in a way quite different from fiction that retains a firm sense of the
normative function of literature to explain.
Barthelme progressively focuses upon the object until it moves from the natural to the artefact and finally to a specific product. In doing so, he presents the object as a product, drained of figurative significance, representative only of its status as a brand. In doing so, he is interrogating the differences between the natural and unnatural, between the man-made and the artificial:

You look more closely at the purse, twisting the lip a little so you can see the label, on which, in very small print, it says: MAN-MADE MATERIALS. (23)

Barthelme's fictional world of Moon Deluxe is one in which his 'fabulous, grotesque' pre-cooked chicken is the culture. The elements of the reality which he seeks to describe are man-made: realism, then, is a mode of discourse which seeks to capture this man-made element of the real world.
CONCLUSION:

The Past, Present and Future of Literary Minimalism

My study ends in 1983 with Barthelme’s *Moon Deluxe* but the phenomenon of minimalism continues, indeed flourishes, and now I wish to turn to how it might develop. So, I focus upon one of the most historically significant, if artistically less successful, collections of short stories, *All Hail the New Puritans*. 
Part One: Looking Back

My thesis has been an attempt to unravel the paradox at the centre of literary minimalism: how can a literature that deliberately endorses and adopts reduction, elision and absence solicit such a full, complex engagement from its readers.

At the heart of my answer is a simple equation: the more the writer leaves out, the more the reader must put in. The work of Wolfgang Iser, although not based on a specific study of minimalism, did much to suggest itself as a suitable basis for application to this question. But the notion of interpretative indeterminacy, which Iser sees as inherent in all texts I argue is more present in some texts than others. Such texts include minimalist short stories; and because their meaningful concision leads to indeterminacy which is deliberate and controlled, I employ to the term ‘equivocation’ to suggest a deliberate ambiguity from the writer and responsibility of the reader to resolve it.

An analysis of the extent to which equivocation is controlled led me to an important discovery. There appears to be a trend from Hemingway to the present day in the extent to which the reader is encouraged to respond. Hemingway was more prone deliberately to direct the reader’s interpretation through the use of his ‘iceberg’ theory of omission of pivotal narrative elements. Carver and Barthelme adopted a less strict approach, where the reader’s interpretation is less directed and freer-roaming. In other words, omissions occur not at those significant moments but instead can be found in the reticence of a character to voice his or her feelings; in the development of confined set of significant objects, whose symbolic function changes as the narrative progresses; in the tone of the work, where it represents a spiritual malaise unexpressed
by the large gesture but is instead something overheard, something glimpsed at the edges of the narrative, something which may appear trivial but which the text encourages the reader to see as pivotal.

Taken to its logical conclusion, however, this 'equation' becomes meaningless. An empty page (or no book at all) would be the culmination of the tendency to 'leave out'. Rather, I have suggested ways in which the writer leaves interpretative gaps, which might more prosaically be considered clues, and to when and how the reader might introduce his or her interpretation. A discussion of this sophisticated phenomenon occupies a large part of my work. As such, this thesis not only contributes to our understanding of literary minimalism but to any literature which makes especial use of the minimalist principle to pare down, imply or reduce. To this end, I hope my analysis of such elements as purposive omission might be useful to other writers, even those not considered strictly minimalist.

Hemingway

Certainly there are limits to which Hemingway can be labelled as a minimalist. Unlike either Carver and Barthelme, Hemingway sought to control the reader's interpretation of his omissions. The period in which he wrote, too, would exclude him from being part of the Minimalist phenomenon of the late 20th century. Yet there remains compelling reasons why his work might usefully be compared to that of Minimalist writers and that is what I have done here, in a more complete way than has come before.

I have suggested ways in which minimalism developed to engage with its contemporary issues, ideologies and literary trends. This was demonstrated through a
consideration of the ways in which the writers present consumer products. This begins with Hemingway's fascination with the minutiae of the banal, commonplace object; through Carver's recognition of the 'immense power of the everyday [object]'; and which culminates in Barthelme's meditation upon the power and affect of the brand-name product.

Perhaps the most significant contribution made by grouping Hemingway with later minimalists is the light it sheds on the origins and early developments of minimalism. I contend that Hemingway began to use a prototype of the pared-down style employed by Carver over fifty years later for three major reasons. First, whilst working as a reporter for various newspapers Hemingway was greatly influenced by the journalistic idiom which sought to report news impartially, and with attention to detail. The style sheets of the various newspapers were an integral part of Hemingway's apprenticeship and, as I have shown, the distinction between his fiction and reportage were often blurred.

Second, Hemingway, like countless others of his generation, sought to find a mode of discourse which would to convey contemporary experience of the First World War. He stripped his fiction of language which he considered to have been made bereft of meaning through the war: words such as 'honour', 'courage' and 'duty'.

This was partially responsible for the minimal style, where hyperbole is rejected in favour of commonly used, shorter words. This minimalist idiom was also the result of the influence of other writers, most notably from Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound and the Imagist movement. Their influence on Hemingway was significant,
and they taught him to adopt several of those elements that have come to have been known as minimalist. Pound’s Imagism forced Hemingway to focus his attention on the figurative resonance of a single, integral image, a device which was used most significantly to create an emotional context and tone at the beginning of his stories. Such advice augments Stein’s insistence that he find a ‘method’ by which to approach all his fictional subjects, ‘concentration’ which prefigures the spirit of latter Minimalism.

Carver
Carver developed the role of Hemingway’s absent narrator by making his narrator a voyeur of the scenes he or she narrates. The effect of this was contradictory. On the one hand, this meant that Carver’s narrators refused to impose on the meaning of the story because they were not omniscient, reliable and authoritative third-person narrators but were fallible, first-person narrators whose interpretation was presented as less than definitive. Conversely, it was these very qualities which meant they were more heavily implicated within the narrative and so narrowed the gap between writer-narrator, the narrative and reader. Carver exposed the narrator’s, and by extension the writer’s, role as one that was both heavily implicated in the creation of the narrative and prone to idiosyncratic interpretations. The narrative no longer appeared as if it were a news report but was an interpretation of events.

Yet the epiphany represents Carver’s most significant cause of interpretative equivocation. In most cases the epiphany would be experienced by a central character at the end of the narrative. It would create the perfect device to engage the reader: it would imply a fundamental and significant change but without resolving exactly what that change might be. In many senses, Carver’s use of the epiphany echoes most
closely the modern short story tradition. In this model, the short story focuses upon a single moment in the life of a central character who undergoes a radical transformation. This transformation is clearly understood and its implications can be speculated upon, even if the story does not discuss them directly. However, in the case of Carver, the nature of the epiphany and the effects it might have are often merely vague grounds for further speculation. How the story ends is a crucial moment in the reader's interpretation of the story.

One of the major differences between Hemingway and Carver is their attitude toward everyday reality. Hemingway was intent on addressing the more extreme examples of human behaviour during times of great social and political upheaval such as the First World War. Carver demonstrates his allegiance to the everyday world by making its objects the source of figurative resonance. Prosaic artefacts as shoes, records, keys and mirrors become troubling symbols. They are not just the cause of change, but their symbolic value is also prone to change. A new pair of shoes becomes a sinister symbol of invasion; a record begins life as token of friendship between neighbours and is later inverted into a symbol of their division. It is notable that these objects are man-made commodities. This contrasts strongly with Hemingway, who mostly used natural or non-commodified 'objects'.

Both Hemingway and Carver inherited Chekhov's use of the everyday object as potentially displaying a corollary for the emotional state of their characters. If Hemingway suggested that this object be natural or non-commodified, then it was Carver who introduced the changeable, significant everyday *product* into minimalism. In his own way, Carver too was interested in extremes. Most of his characters are in
some way living at extremes. Carver’s interest is the interplay between societal pressure and the individual, individuals who are shown to be largely unaware of what they want or why.

Barthelme's ubiquitous use of the brand-name product represents the culmination of minimalism’s project to capture everyday reality with as much fidelity as possible. It also draws sustains the ambition, most cogently advanced by Carver, that the everyday object is capable of the most emotive figurative power. In Moon Deluxe, the brand-name is a detail used to capture reality more accurately and, perhaps more importantly, to provide the basis for that product’s evaluation. A brand name is not value-neutral – it appears at a point in continuum of brand-names, from the most to the least prestigious. Barthelme’s characters interact with such brand-names as a means to reveal more about their attitudes and beliefs. Brand-names colour Barthelme’s psychological realm and external, reality.

Moon Deluxe represents the culmination of an enterprise hinted at in the work of Hemingway and Carver. This ambition was to erode the explanatory function of literature. This might be viewed as a logical extension of the modern short story’s
desire to illuminate experience rather than resolve, or explain the significance of, the narrative. By radically undermining the role of literature to explain, Barthelme creates an interpretative vacuum which must be filled by his readers. Unlike Hemingway, he gives few clues as to how this interpretative might begin: there are no central omissions which, when replaced with an interpretative act, resolve the conflicts assembled by the narrative. Rather, in keeping with the Hemingway narrative, his work suggests that there is little to be found of the iceberg above the water as character motivation, mental life or beliefs are not forthcoming from reticent, unassuming and often silent characters.
Part Two: Minimalism in the 21st Century

Minimalism and The New Puritanism

Minimalism continues to be a major area of interest in contemporary literature of the United States. Indeed, the first full-scale text on the subject was Cynthia Whitney Hallett’s *Minimalism and the American Short Story*, published as recently as 2001. Despite this fertile ground, one of the most interesting developments in short story minimalism has taken place outside of the United States. Calling themselves ‘The New Puritans’, this British movement are a group of writers who have published a manifesto outlining their principles and practices along with a collection of short fiction which attempt to employ these beliefs (see Appendix). So far, this collection, entitled *All Hail the New Puritans*, has been its sole publication yet it has been responsible for arousing much critical interest. However, it has not been completely successful in its aims (indeed, its aims are in themselves problematic) and in what follows, I suggest some of the ways in which New Puritanism falls foul of some of the problems posed by the minimalist aesthetic.

Although it does not signal any explicit allegiance to American minimalism, their debt to their American forebears is undeniable. The following extract, from the ‘Better Than Well’ by Daren King, is reminiscent of early minimalism’s use of repetition:

Leaning forward, he picked up a photograph from the desk. He looked at the face in the photograph and smiled. [...] He looked at the face and smiled. The face smiled, too. It had been smiling before he smiled and would continue to smile if he stopped. The person had
been smiling before the photograph was taken and the smile had
gone into the photograph.¹

There are other connections. Point four from the ten point manifesto has perhaps the
greatest resonance with the definition of minimalism: ‘We believe in textual
simplicity and vow to avoid all devices of voice: rhetoric, authorial asides’ (iii). One
can see why this might be considered the literary manifestation of their desire to be
‘puritanical’. One of their most explicit ambitions is to return to a kind of innocent,
‘pure’ storytelling devoid of what they consider to be the ‘tricks’ of a large part of
contemporary literary fiction. In doing so, Hemingway’s ‘iceberg theory’ would be
anathema, given that it was a strategy for imposing a directed reading, which might be
considered manipulative. However, later minimalism loosened the role of the reader
to become freer in his or her interpretation. The Puritan ideal is the logical extension
of the development of literary minimalism’s developing aim towards interpretative
freedom. Yet, its aim is a little naïve and perhaps restrictive for the writer intent on
moving their reader.

In the pursuit of such simplicity, the New Puritans sought a language that would,
without influence or mediation, address the reader directly in an idiom which captures
the ‘purity’ or authenticity of the common voice. This ‘common voice’ translates into
a rather unsubtle and ultimately trivial liberal use of so-called ‘bad language’. As if
willingly trying to shock a reader comfortable with the mores of conventional
literature, bad language is meant to serve the dual purpose of both shocking the reader
and capturing the idiom of their time.

numbers in the text refer to this edition.
Ben Richards' 'A Ghost Story (Director's Cut)' introduces an interesting variation upon the paucity of some adjectives to describe a key idea whilst at the same time inverting the normal value of expletives. The word 'fucking' is used promiscuously to colour all manner of experiences. The narrator says "This toast is fucking delicious." (23); and responds internally 'Too fucking right, Karen' (25). During its introduction to the story, the narrator explains its use as an adjective:

One thing I did like about Clitheroe [...] was the big fucker of a hill that lay behind it. Words like 'unfriendly' and 'moody' came to mind but these words were inappropriate because they were human qualities and there was nothing human about Pendle Hill. (21)

The deliberate rejection of a hyperbolic, adjectival descriptive language but with the emphasis upon description is aligned to minimalism's objectives. In itself, it is an interesting moment in the minimalist enterprise to capture real life authentically. In one sense, it merely continues Hemingway's attempts to adopt a vernacular in order to find a means of expressing reality with more fidelity. As such, it is in direct line with the colloquialism, equally contentious at the time, employed throughout Huckleberry Finn's stories by Mark Twain (a favourite of Hemingway's). Critics have noted that Carver's work contained little about their contemporary American society, consisting of a homogenised white, blue collar workers all pursuing - yet failing to find - the American dream. However, when employed in several of the New Puritan stories, it seems as gratuitous as the narratives seem sensationalist. Indeed, it seems to betray one of the New Puritans primary aims, to strip their stories of 'tricks'. Bad language is the New Puritans most ubiquitous trick, and while it serves to colour some of the
conversations, it rarely aspires to providing the kind of alternative adjectival quality described in the quote from ‘A Ghost Story (Director’s Cut)’, above.

The search for an authentic, untainted puritanism in the New Puritan doctrine is not without further problems. As I have shown in the opening chapter on Hemingway, the absent narrator does not commit to single perspective, allowing a freedom of interpretation that has the potential to become amoral. Where there is no authorial or narrative presence (or ‘voice’ as it is phrased here), there is no central authority upon which to base an interpretation of the text. One such result of this ‘freedom’ is the creation of a moral vacuum, where all moral choices are potentially permissible. As a result, this leads to a moral ambivalence as the precursor to a kind of sensationalism present in other contemporary artistic endeavours, such as the Young British Artists’ ‘Sensation’ art exhibition of 2001. In many stories the intention is to sensationalise, as the opening lines from the first story, ‘Mind Control’ by Scarlet Thomas serves to illustrate:

Mark got his Dreamcast five minutes before he died. His mother wanted it buried with him.(1)

Mark’s death informs the entire story yet we never know how he dies. Rather, the story is a discussion of the effects it has upon his family and friends. The parents of the dead boy consequently break down emotionally, in ways strange, darkly comical and pathetic. The mother becomes a recluse, never leaving her bed and lives solely upon ice-cream. The father becomes equally reclusive and only ever leaves the house to tend the fish pond, which has become an obsession. The fish in the pond disappear much to his horror and when they reappear, both he and the narrator are left puzzled:
"Weird," I say. "Do you think someone returned half of them for a reason?"

"Who knows," he says, rubbing his eyes. "Who knows." (8)

From Hemingway to Barthelme, the path of minimalism's tendency is to reject its role to explain. In this story and elsewhere in the collection, the cause of events is largely irrelevant and what appears subsequently does little or nothing to explain them. This is partially the result of the intention to capture the moment in which events unfold. The New Puritans extend the short story's focus upon a brief period by rejecting the past and future as essential, explanatory contextualisation. The slight narratives of minimalism are replaced with sensational events and situations that exist in a vacuum. In one story, ironically entitled 'The Puritans', by Toby Litt, a group of young men and women rent a country cottage in order to mass-produce pornographic video tapes. Pornography and celebrity, as I will show, is in many ways the logical conclusion to Barthelme's prophetic interest in the commodification of people and the things which eventually, paradoxically, 'own' them.

Much of the collection seems to be steeped in a knowing, self-consciously humorous tone. In this respect it is singularly successful at capturing the post-'Generation X' laconic indifference, fuelled by irony and ambivalence. In turn, this has more in common with the playful, irreverent comedy of much postmodernism than the sometimes turgid gravitas of minimalism.2 For the New Puritans, such humour is a result of the juxtaposition between the seriousness of the subject with its underplayed, even trivial, treatment. 'Three Love Stories' by Bo Fowler departs suddenly from the

2 One such moment occurs when the writers within the group turn upon themselves. In Ben Richard's story, the narrator watches one of Dogme's seminal films, The Idiots. Rather than an endorsement, however, the narrator finds the film so 'tedious' that it makes him sleep.
realist mode into a thinly fleshed out surrealism or magic realism. The narrator’s girlfriend, whom he tells us has pen nibs instead of nipples, writes long and obscure messages over his duvet during sex. He tells us: ‘It cost me a fortune in dry-cleaning bills’ (123). The relationship ends when she finds another long and obscure passage written in the same style but this time: ‘It was in red. Her sister had written it.’ (123).

An implied principle of the New Puritans is that the distinction between ‘commercial’ or popular and ‘literary’ fiction should be broken down. Popular fiction is often dismissed by the literary establishment whereas, to these writers, plot is paramount. They seek to be the antithesis of the previous generation of writers. As a contemporary review claims:

[...] They believe that the last generation of writers (the Puritans refer to them only as the ‘show-off’ writers) write predominately for other writers and for the publishing industry. They also believe that London is far too often the focus of recent fiction, and have made a deliberate attempt to provincialise the tales. Hence we have stories set in places as diverse as Bedford, Preston and Cirencester.3

What is interesting here is the attempt to re-establish the relationships between the reader, the literary world, the publishing industry and the writer. In this case, it is by reasserting the primacy of plot – in their model, an element of literature frowned upon by other writers whom merely write for one another – and in so doing, placing the reader at the centre of literary creation. Yet it is noticeable also that in several of the short stories in The New Puritans, the plot is not as much a ‘page-turner’ in practice

as it is in principle. But as I have argued throughout, plot need not be the most effective nor expedient method for encouraging reader participation. The Puritan effort to engage the reader by offering him or her a series of clearly signposted plots seems unsophisticated when compared to the complexity of the minimalist ambition to implicate the reader in the narrative. And it is here that minimalism and the New Puritan ideal part company. Minimalism is an experimental literature, which makes complex demands on its readers, and with its sophisticated methods of sustaining reader interaction, it might well be considered part of the elitist model New Puritanism rejects. Perhaps the New Puritans recognised a tension at the heart of the minimalism ambition: the very strategies and methods it seeks to help engage the reader with might also introduce a distancing effect, and put readers off because it is sometimes so difficult to make sense of.

*Time and Voyeurism*

Once again, the influence of minimalism (implicit, for they never mention the term, nor any of its writers) is written large over their New Puritans: ‘We believe in grammatical purity and avoid any elaborate punctuation’ (iii) The fantasy of Bo Fowler’s story is contrasted to the muted understatement of much of the writing, here found in an extract from the opening of ‘The Puritans’ by Toby Litt:

Their bungalow was called Sea-View Cottage. It was located on the Suffolk coast, about seven miles south of Southwold. The walls of the bungalow were whitewash white. [...] They had moved into the bungalow in November. It was now almost April. (165)
As I have stated, this story details the mass production of pornography. Unlike minimalism, the most ordinary environments are the locations for some at least unusual, at best extraordinary, occurrences. However, in the face of such bizarre events, the New Puritans face a problem which they rarely overcome: how to write a literature based on the purity of everyday experience, with a language of simplicity, when the events you write about are fantastic, uncommon and are sometimes designed to shock. As we have seen for some of Hemingway's more extraordinary events and environments in the war, the inclusion of uncommon occurrences might introduce a distancing effect, preventing the reader from fully engaging with a text so committed to difference.

The New Puritan endorsement of simplicity is demonstrated through their dual desire to write about a contemporary society in linear narrative time:

4. In the name of clarity, we recognise the importance of temporal linearity and eschew flashbacks, dual temporal narratives and foreshadowing [...] 

[...] 
8. As faithful representations of the present, our texts will avoid all improbable or unknowable speculation about the past or future. (iii)

This differs in some important respects from minimalism. Much of Hemingway's treatment of the past served to illuminate the present, and an understanding of what had gone before was an important part of understanding what takes place in the present. The burnt town of Seney at the beginning of 'Big Two-Hearted River' was an immediate, urgent and potent symbol of the destruction of the war that leaves Nick Adams troubled. Its corollary is the 'burn out' felt by Nick Adams' anxious, probing
mind. But where the photo of the young soldier Krebs in ‘Soldier’s Home’ at once creates relationship between the past, present and future, the photographs taken by the narrator in Alex Garland’s ‘Monaco’ of the grand prix merely capture the pure spectacle of the moment:

The girl saw me taking her picture. I zoomed in a little on her and she pouted outrageously and looked surprised. [...] She squirmed and wriggled and showed me a full range of facial expressions. *Why are you taking my photo?* *Oh, I feel shy. Surely you don’t think I’m so pretty? Oh, you do. Now I’m embarrassed. Now I’m angry. But I forgive you.* Here’s my smile.

She was as comfortable with a camera as that. (11)

The innocence of the relationship between photographer and subject is all but lost. Garland’s narrator recognised the seemingly complex stages in the girl’s reaction and lists them without elaboration, almost disinterested. This relationship echoes that between the voyeur and his or her subject, but like most things in *All Hail the New Puritans*, it is more knowing, more self-conscious, and more aware. Indeed, the relationship between voyeur and object of desire is explored in a way hinted at in Carver and developed in Barthelme. But here the crucial relationship is not, as we might find in a story like ‘Shopgirls’, between the voyeur and the focus of desire but between the subject of desire and the camera. Garland is exploring celebrity, albeit in a modified and slight form, the commodification of people as opposed to the commodification of objects so relevant to the stories and readers of *Moon Deluxe*. This story like several other here represents a development in the dynamic between voyeur, reader and object.
One could go on with the connections between the Puritans and minimalism and the ways in which a limited application of minimalism's ambitions undermines success. The opening point of the manifesto outlines their position as 'primarily story tellers' and that: 'Prose is the dominant form of expression' (iii), is implied by the central adoption of short fiction by minimalist writers and New Puritans. That prose is the dominant form of expression seems to immediately connect the New Puritans with the minimalism I've been writing about. But, as I've made explicit in the section on Imagism, and is implicit throughout, is the deep connection between minimalism and poetry.

Like Jean-Paul Sartre's belief that poetry was flawed as a vehicle of meaning because it could not accurately convey political belief and therefore would not revolutionise its readership, the Puritans' political enterprise eschews the poetic for the prosaic (their choice of representation, a manifesto, is evidence of their 'political' ambitions). And in doing so, New Puritans undermine the quality that makes minimalism so singularly successful in its endeavours. It also points to a radical difference in how these stories are read.

In contrast to the privileging of prose in the New Puritan stories, the reader might adopt the reading strategies of poetry in a reading of minimalist short stories, paying attention to the rhythm of the stark vocabulary, the density of phrase, the seemingly unending richness of interpretation (this is unsurprising when one considers that Hemingway's minimalist technique was developed as a result of his acquaintance with Ezra Pound, or that Carver himself was a distinguished poet). In this respect, minimalism and the New Puritans have never been so divergent.
Some of the ideas and themes which remain implicit in minimalist work are made explicit in the New Puritan collection. The games developer of 'A Short Guide to Games Theory' is accused of transposing his profession into his interpersonal relationships:

Duncan says, 'That's always your problem – thinking people are playing games with you.'

I cannot see him, but I sense he is down there: a dark, dense figure.

He is right about me though. (47)

Such an explicit affirmation of a complex character insight is often not revealed so lucidly in minimalism. Part of the reason for this is that the character is unable or unwilling to make those types of insights. For Carver and especially Barthelme, characters seems fundamentally estranged from their motives and beliefs and barely understand their behaviour except for the moment of sudden insight. These stories make motive an irrelevance; life is a game, and writing about it is 'game theory'. Moreover, it is immanent in minimalist writing that the kind of simplistic emotional corollaries such as 'a games developer is like the games he plays' rarely appear so explicitly affirmed because minimalism relies upon ambiguity for effect. To resolve the motives of the character would not be in keeping with its determination to hint, suggest or imply, especially when that translation is so simplistic.

*Cultural References*

The collection is littered with cultural references, most of which are titles or characters from television programmes and the cinema, but also include the names of computer games, catchphrases and advertising slogans. In one sense, this augments
the minimalist tendency to evoke the real world with fidelity and such details certainly locate the narratives within a specific time and place. As I have written in the Barthelme chapter, culturally specific references require knowledge of that culture to make sense to the reader. It would appear that even now, just four years after this collection was published, some of those references are lost. Indeed, one could imagine that many of them would have made little sense to someone unfamiliar with British popular culture at the time of publication.

I have described the other function of the inclusion of cultural references, mostly through the use of brand-names in *Moon Deluxe*, is to fulfil a symbolic function. But this function seems all but lost in the fiction of the New Puritans. Although its power to render the immediacy and cultural place of the stories is more acute, the power of them to sustain a symbolic power is all but lost. For example, what does it mean that girl plays a computer game called ‘Shenmue’ (on the aforementioned ‘Dreamcast’) or that they sit at the television to watch ‘Neighbours from Hell’. The obvious answer is that, like Barthelme’s product references, they are attractive to a contemporary audience who understands them.

In several stories, specific references to computers are made. Matthew Branton’s ‘Monkey See’ begins with a detailed exposition of the creation of a list using software such as ClarisWorks and QuickTime. Tony White’s ‘Poct’, describes in minute detail the use of word-processing software to create a diagrammatic template for the writing of hundreds of sonnets, the description of which includes the reprinting of the template. One explanation is that these details are less important in their specificity
than their general import. These stories acknowledge the hegemony of other media such as television and computers above literature.

Certainly, the allusions will quickly become as obscure as many find those of T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. But unlike this poem they serve little purpose other than colour the world in which the narrative is set. One might argue that Eliot's references were conservative in that they tried to 'improve' the reader by asking them to refer to a series of other texts in order to make sense of his work. New Puritans, on the other hand, use allusions that are readily accessible and do not ask the reader to become more culturally sophisticated in order to understand them. It seems that with the recognition that their fiction – and the cultural references which populate it – are fleeting, then the references no have significant central function. It appears as if the New Puritan ideal recognises that it is ultimately ephemeral, destined to become less valued, if remembered at all. This is explained in the expanded notes to the manifesto. Matt Thorne addresses point three of the manifesto, which outlines their intention to: ' [...] move towards new openings, rupturing existing genre expectations.' (x). In doing so, the group seem to accept that they, too, have a sell-by date which will render their collective unserviceable. It is part of their enterprise, to dissolve notions of a timeless 'literature' which serves to illuminate how far minimalism rejects or accepts notions of literary value. All Hail the New Puritans is not merely a cautionary tale for how minimalism might end up if some of its central ambitions are not maintained. Rather, it is an illuminating example of how contemporary writers have interpreted the legacy of minimalism alongside other writings, in order to fashion it into something that represents a literature more suitable for expression of their everyday, using strategies,
Methods and principles which might more accurately capture their contemporary world. This is, in turn, exactly what minimalism set out to do.
Part Three: A Future of Literary Minimalism

These issues beg interesting questions about minimalism. Re-phrased, we might ask how far literary minimalism is the product of the literary world or rejects that world. One such response would be to assess the impact of creative writing programmes on minimalism specifically and on literature in general. I have touched upon this in my study with a comparison to Hemingway and Carver, using Aldridge’s lament for natural ‘genius’, but a more comprehensive study of this could shed a great deal of light upon minimalism. Could those writing schools attended by Carver and Barthelme be responsible for a sea-change in writing styles, harking back to Hemingway’s aesthetic because it was simply more practicable? One of the effects of engaging the reader so completely in the creation of their work is to suggest that the reader believes, at least on the first reading, that minimalist literature might be easy to write. There is often a feeling in the reader of minimalism I have spoken to that ‘I could write like that’. It is akin to the pejorative claim of modern and contemporary art that ‘A child could have painted that’.

I have noted the example of Carver suggesting he wrote short stories because this was all he had time for, between his job and picking up his children from school. The New Puritan dis-establishment of such lofty concepts as literary genius might be useful here: a notable literature comes from hard work and study in formalised classes, woven into the fabric of people’s everyday lives. It is not a higher function, reserved for only the most natural talent. ‘Can minimalism be taught?’ reworks the question of whether writing can be taught.
The effects of postmodernism on minimalism are of great interest to the scholar of modern and contemporary American literature. Several writers have touched upon this, but there are no full-length studies which survey the area. ‘Does minimalism reject or embrace postmodernism?’ is still a question worth asking and might help explain the re-emergence of minimalism in the latter part of the 20th century.

Many scholars and critics give a very short answer to the question of the future of minimalism: minimalism is ‘dead’ and so it is ‘going’ nowhere. In the article ‘Digging the Grave of Literary Minimalism’ published in the 1990s, Madison Smartt Bell would have it that minimalism’s time in the sun had already passed. For some, the time of its demise cannot come too soon. Minimalism is an avant-garde movement, one based upon experimentation, a radical extension of some of the most basic tenets of short story methodology – concision, elision, suggestion – and as such tends to draw the more extreme reactions in those that read it.

Nevertheless, minimalism lives on. Those very people whom it was written for – the reader – continue to read it and enjoy it and for many it represents a literature which empowers them. It does not do so because it is didactic; in fact, it might be considered, following Hemingway’s absent narrator, anti-didactic. Rather, it enables the reader to help themselves because it has a richness that is there to be explored. Given the subsequent dearth of secondary material, it still remains an area largely unilluminated by devoted critics.

I hope my study, which began with a love of this complex and paradoxical literature and developed into an intense interest to attempt to explain its effects, helps to suggest
ways in which it might be read and enjoyed with a renewed understanding of its literary effects.
Appendix to Conclusion:

The New Puritan Manifesto

1. Primarily storytellers, we are dedicated to the narrative form.

2. We are prose writers and recognise that prose is the dominant form of expression. For this reason we shun poetry and poetic licence in all its forms.

3. While acknowledging the value of genre fiction, whether classical or modern, we will always move towards new openings, rupturing existing genre expectations.

4. We believe in textual simplicity and vow to avoid all devices of voice: rhetoric, authorial asides.

5. In the name of clarity, we recognise the importance of temporal linearity and eschew flashbacks, dual temporal narratives and foreshadowing.

6. We believe in grammatical purity and avoid any elaborate punctuation.

7. We recognise that published works are also historical documents. As fragments of our time, all our texts are dated and set in the present day. All products, places, artists and objects named are real.

8. As faithful representations of the present, our texts will avoid all improbable or unknowable speculation about the past or the future.

9. We are moralists, so all texts feature a recognisable ethical reality.

10. Nevertheless, our aim in integrity of expression, above and beyond all commitment to form.
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