



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

***What We Talk About
When We Talk About
Love and Beginners, by
Raymond Carver: A
Comparison***

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Appendix

Resumen: El objetivo de este Trabajo Fin de Grado es establecer una comparación entre *Beginners* (2009) de Raymond Carver y la primera versión publicada y editada de esta colección de historias cortas, titulada *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) por su editor Gordon Lish.

Palabras clave: historia corta, lector, escritor personaje, versión, diferencia, comparación.

Abstract: The aim of this final project is to establish a comparison between Raymond Carver's *Beginners* (2009) and the edited and first published version of this collection of short stories, entitled *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) by his editor Gordon Lish.

Key words: short story, reader, writer, character, version, difference, comparison.

1. Introduction

This final project is intended to give precise details about the differences that can be established between Raymond Carver's *Beginners* and the edited and first published version of this collection of short stories, entitled *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* by his editor Gordon Lish. It was an authorial issue that arose great interest among different scholars and Raymond Carver's admirers. This is why it is worthy to be discussed in a project such as this dissertation.

Raymond Carver was one of the most celebrated authors of the two last decades of the 20th century. Many critics considered him as one of the best minimalist writers after Hemingway because of his simple, colloquial and informal prose, always hiding a mysterious halo. He was imitated by writers and teachers, who admired his fiction focused on the lives of the American underclass. He wrote about incompatible couples with dysfunctional lives, alienated children, financial problems and characters with addictions. He wrote from the heart because he was from a blue-collar background. However, several years after his death, a number of journalists and scholars found out there were big differences among his earlier works (edited by Gordon Lish) and his later works (without the editing of Lish). Was it an issue of personal and professional progression or a problem of authorship? Since then, many scholars have devoted their time to the study of this double identity question and have concluded that some of the published books whose authority has been attributed to Carver, did not correspond to the original manuscripts written by him. This is the case of *WWTA*¹, which was originally titled *Beginners* by Carver.

This project is structured in two main sections: the first one includes relevant aspects of Raymond Carver's biography and some details about his writing style (which has usually been linked to minimalism and dirty realism). This section also gives a broad overview of Lish's role in the literary world and the controversy sparked by his severe editing of Raymond's Carver works. The second and final section is focused on the general differences that can be established between both works which are classified into two major groups: lexical and syntactical. The last aspect included within this part is devoted to an analysis of eight selected stories included in both versions of the book dealing with these differences and the changes included by Gordon Lish. The stories that will be analysed were entitled by Raymond

¹ Abbreviation for *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (it will be used from this time onwards).

Carver as: “Why Don’t you Dance?”, “Where Is Everyone?”, “Want to See Something?”, “The Fling”, “A Small, Good Thing”, “Tell the Women We’re Going”, “If It Please You” and “One More Thing”.

2. Raymond Carver and Gordon Lish

2.1. Biography of Raymond Carver

Raymond Cleve Carver Jr. (May 25, 1938 – August 2, 1988) was born in Clatskanie, Oregon. According to Carol Sklenicka², Raymond Carver’s closest ancestors became sharecroppers³ and remained in Arkansas moving from one cropland to another (Sklenicka, 2010, p. 6). His parents decided to move to the Northwest and settled in Oregon looking for a better life. Some years later they moved again to Yakima, Washington, where his father worked as saw filer in a lumber mill. It was a place that he would later use as the scenery of many of his stories. A precarious life, the forests, hunting and fishing would mould a young Carver. Despite of that, he developed a great sensitivity and developed a weakness for art.

During the years of Carver’s youth, his father had serious problems with alcohol consumption, his mother was fighting with the father and desperate for the family situation to change and the young Carver had an eating disorder (Sklenicka, 2010, p. 17), which could be an indication that he was channeling his emotions inwardly. This painful setting was a great inspiration for his short stories.

When he was nineteen, he married Maryann Burk and the couple had two children in less than two years. From this moment onwards, Carver felt guilty for several reasons: he barely managed to keep his family afloat and he also considered his own family as a burden that prevented him from being a totally focused writer. As he felt inadequate, he started to drink.

In 1958, the family moved to Paradise, California, where he entered Chico State College. There he was taught by John Gardner⁴ on a creative writing course and this meant a

² Carol Sklenicka is an American biographer and essayist best known for *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*, an extensive and detailed biography of Raymond Carver’s life and writing style.

³ According to the Macmillan Dictionary, a sharecropper is “a farmer who grows crops on someone else’s land and receives part of the money earned from selling the crops”.

⁴ John Edmund Gardner was an English spy and thriller novelist, best known for his James Bond continuation novels.

great deal to him and he felt ready to start to produce short stories and poems in the college's literary magazine. Some years later he enrolled Humboldt State College in Arcata, California, and many respected journals and magazines started to accept his work.

In 1967, he worked as an editor of textbooks for Science Research Associates in Palo Alto, California. However, he was fired some years later because he became a heavy drinker. In 1970, he received a National Endowment for the Arts Discovery Award for Poetry. This together with other monetary awards encouraged Carver to become a more focused writer. In 1972, he began teaching at Stanford University and continued writing short stories and poems. He taught in some other universities but in 1983 he was finally able to devote his full attention to writing.

He separated from his first wife in the 1970's and met the poet Tess Gallagher, with whom he became romantically involved. She helped him to manage his drinking problem and to be psychologically afloat. Carver died from lung cancer in 1988 at the age of fifty.

2.2. Minimalism and dirty realism

"One learns to write through stealing from others and this is why literature is among the commonest crimes"⁵

—Francisco Umbral.

A new type of short story was starting to appear in American publications during the 1970s and the 80s. Its main feature was the presence of unmotivated characters who were implicated in trivial actions characterized by the economy of words. In American literature, some of the most important national and international influences on the minimalist style are Ernest Hemingway and Anton Chekhov. In fact, in an article published in *The Sunday Times* by Peter Kemp, Raymond Carver was defined as "the American Chekhov" (Kemp, 1988). According to an article written by Jacqueline Philips (2008), there are several reasons why both authors have usually been linked in terms of similarity: the humanism that they express in their stories, their sympathetic approach to the alienated underclass and workers from the suburbs, and their weakness for depicting the ordinary and the seemingly "uninteresting". In his essay "On Writing", Carver confessed:

⁵ The translation is my own.

It is possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things— a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring— with immense, even startling power (Carver, 1984).

From Hemingway, according to an article written by Arthur F. Bethea (2007), Carver inherited a direct syntax, a simple diction and the *iceberg theory*, which is strongly connected to the minimalist style, as it conveys the absence of an omniscient narrator to reveal and explain thematic meaning.

Raymond Carver’s literary style has been related to a substantial skepticism and resentment. By means of a direct and plain technique, he depicts a range of anonymous losers alienated from their society, people that belonged to the other America: unemployed, divorced, drifting lonely people who have nothing else to do but watch television ...; they are characters who avoid to look at their inner being and are full of despair. They are not heroes at all and most of them are apprentices of god Bacchus, alcohol and excess without remorse. These features would fit into a sub-category of realism: dirty realism⁶, which is focused on describing the everyday aspects of ordinary life without much ornamentation in language.

Dirty realism is characterized by the simplicity of texts, the absence of adjectives and by minimalism. Carver, for example, avoided reflections and preferred dialogues to depict his characters' profiles (Plaza, 2014). However, there is an extraordinary and intelligent wealth in his stories: those everyday situations reveal a tremendous amount of detail about their characters and their lives, which can be considered as “dirty” and sad most of the times. Carver does not hold the narrator responsible for decoding and interpreting his stories to the reader: he simply shows them to us.

Carver even saw his name turned into an adjective that defined a literary style, “Carveresque” or “Carverian” (Becerra, n.d.), which made reference to the above mentioned features. However, in an interview carried out by Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee that can be found in The Paris Review electronic version, he confessed he never shared the previously referenced label under which many critics knew him: he did not consider himself a “minimalist” writer. And what if he was right, and we were sold a writer who had been invented by another?

⁶ *Dirty realism* was a term coined by Bill Bufford, an American writer and journalist known for his contributions to *Granta* magazine.

2.3. The polemics of Lish's editing

Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? (1976), and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) consolidated Carver's reputation as the most influential storyteller of the genre of dirty realism of his generation. However, according to an article published in *The New York Times* by D.T. Max (1998), critics and scholars realised that there were important differences and gaps when comparing this two early collections with his later works *Cathedral* (1983) and *Where I'm Calling From* (1988). The former are significantly minimalist style with lonely characters, whereas the latter are more optimistic and characters are express to feel love. One may think that the differences between these works are related to a progression that Carver suffered through his development as a writer. Anyway, Max's article cleared up the doubts. This incendiary revelation by the critics gave way to the acknowledgment, of the role that Carver's editor, Gordon Lish, had assumed.

D.T. Max wrote in his article that Lish had been telling some of his friends during the last twenty years of the 20th century (when Carver's literary career was prolific) that he helped Carver become one of the most important storytellers through his editing (transformational editing style). However, there were no evidences to prove this fact since Carver had died 10 years before the article's publication and these were just rumours that attacked the readership's common sense and admiration for Carver. In fact, Lish decided not to speak out about these rumours and became reluctant to give interviews about it over the years. By the way, who was this character Gordon Lish?

Gordon Lish (1934-) is considered one of the most prominent editors in contemporary publishing. After having worked as a radio broadcaster, a director in linguistic studies in one of the most important laboratories in California and as an English teacher, he was recruited by *Esquire* magazine from 1969 to 1976 (Sklenicka, 2009, p. 549) He was responsible for editing fiction works and was then known as "Captain Fiction". The literary tradition of this magazine began to flourish when Lish started to publish still unknown writers' stories. At the same time, using the influential publication as a vehicle to introduce the new fiction of emerging writers, he promoted the works of several authors such as T. Coraghessan Boyle, Barry Hannah, Cynthia Ozick and Reynolds Price. Of course, Raymond Carver was also

included in this renowned list. In 1977, he left the magazine and became the senior editor of Alfred A. Knopf⁷ (Winters, 2015, p. 10).

Then, he wanted to devote some time to write and produced *What I Know So Far* (1984), a collection of stories that reveals his literary style: fragmented sentences and repetitive narrative monologues, two features that are essential to be taken into account when analyzing *WTA*. Tim Groenland wrote in his article (n.d.) that his literary style was always said to be “experimental” but then it found a place within the minimalist tradition.

Carver and Lish met at Palo Alto, when the author was having serious problems with alcohol. The editor was interested in his writing style and this is how everything started. However, his relationship ended after Lish had edited three of Carver’s books.

Very frequently, the figure of the editor has been seen as a negative influence on the author when his editing has not been ethically carried out. This was the opinion of Carver’s second wife, Tess Gallagher, with respect to the editing work that Lish did with her husband’s books. In literature, there have been many cases in which the widow, another family member or a friend of a writer who has died, usually looks after his work. They are usually known as “executors” and are responsible for deciding what to do with the writer’s works. Together with some of Carver’s scholars, William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, she struggled to publish the manuscript version of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, under the title *Beginners*. After a hard-wearing fight against Knopf, Tess Gallagher was able to publish the unedited book in 2009 (Wood, 2009).

What D.T. Max found out in the Indiana University left him astonished: all Carver’s manuscripts were full of marks, whole paragraphs were added to the stories and others were just cut. He also had the chance to look at the personal correspondence between the writer and his editor, dated from 1969 to 1983. When reading these letters, a feeling of confusion and betrayal may overwhelm the reader. A small and illustrative excerpt from one of those written by Carver addressing Lish in 8 July in 1980 says:

Please hear me. I’ve been up all night thinking on this, and nothing but this, so help me. I’ve looked at it from every side, I’ve compared both versions of the edited mss—the first one is better, I truly believe, if some things are carried over from the second to the first—

⁷ Alfred A. Knopf is a publishing house of distinguished fiction and non-fiction works.

until my eyes are nearly to fall out of my head. (...) [M]y very sanity is on the line here. . . . I feel it, that if the book were to be published as it is in its present edited form, I may never write another story.

Carver, after reviewing Lish's editorial cuts, was in anguish and could not bear the changes that Lish did to *WETA* (as it can be deduced after reading the last letter's excerpt), which were now almost unrecognizable. In an article written by Giles Harvey (2010), there are precise details about the changes that can be seen from the formal point of view: "Lish had cut the length of the book by over 50 percent; three stories were at least 70 percent shorter; ten stories had new titles and the endings of fourteen had been rewritten. 202 pages compared to 103 in the present volume. Lish's published version is 4,800 words, or about half as long as Carver's." His despair was totally understandable.

Carver's wife and friends had already read the manuscript and he was worried because they would find out a completely different work (Armitage, 2001). Anyway, the editor did not take this very seriously and, according to Motoko Rich (2007), Lish seemed to ignore his pleas. The book was published with all the cuts and changes carried out by the censorial scissors of the editor. This was the last of Carver's works that was edited by him.

Undoubtedly, both Carver and Lish started to have slight differences which then became irresolvable and a problem of authorship caused the end of their relationship. But one thing is clear: they both suffered, Carver having to live with a feeling of guilt, of being eternally indebted to Lish and overwhelmed by a lack of personal confidence, and Lish having to live between the shadows of another writer and using others' manuscripts to develop his skill.

3. Differences between *Beginners* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*.

3.1. General changes

It is possible to make a distinction between both versions in general terms. This would imply dealing with the main formal changes that can be observed in the edited version, With respect to this, it is possible to say that they can be classified into lexical and syntactical changes (Monti, 2007). Before commenting on them, it would be important to deal with differences related to the title.

- Title of the book.

This collection of short stories was originally titled *Beginners* by Raymond Carver. It makes reference to one of the main stories of the book, which has the same title. Two couples talk about their love experiences. They note that the term “love” means different things: surrender, sex, isolation, coexistence, violence, tenderness, resentment, hate... They talk while drinking gin. They talk without any aspiration to understand or justify. They clearly do not understand what love is though the protagonist is a cardiologist. He is used to deal with the contractile organ where Western culture insists on locating that feeling. This brief summary points at one thing: they are beginners in love and do not know anything about it, the same as the couple in “Why Don’t you Dance?”, or the protagonist in “Gazebo. As Claudio Zeiger wrote in his article (2010) these characters are “beginners” in life and love.

However, it is possible to say that the edited title, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” is catchier by means of repetition and reveals one of the main themes of the collection: love.

- Lexical changes:

Lish’s aim was to simplify language as much as possible and to introduce a more colloquial language style (Monti, 2007, p. 63). This is why we see there has been a replacement of some expressions used by Carver in order to make the register closer to the lower and middle-classes. An example of this is found in “Why Don’t You Dance?” where the word *faucet* has been replaced by *spigot*, more frequently used by common speakers. In the story “Gazebo”, the word *decide* is replaced by *make up our minds* in order to make the speech of the character more informal. Besides, those cases that Lish considered that could be politically incorrect or offensive for the reader were also replaced by softer expressions or just eliminated (the word *hippie* in “If It Please You” was replaced by *folk* in “After the Denim”). Moreover, Lish also eliminated some cultural references that were introduced by Carver in the story “Where is Everyone?” where the public figure Neil Armstrong is not mentioned in its counterpart version.

According to the speech used by the characters, Lish replaced the softest dialogues and monologues by others which got to the point and lacked compassion. It would be a suitable moment to introduce here the story that gave the title to the book, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”:

“There’d been this thing out on the interstate. Drunk kid, teenager, plowed his dad’s pickup into this camper with this old couple in it. They were up in their mid-seventies, that couple. The kid—eighteen, nineteen, something—he was DOA. Taken the steering wheel through his sternum. The old couple, they were alive, you understand. I mean, just barely. But they had everything. Multiple fractures, internal injuries, hemorrhaging, contusions, lacerations, the works, and they each of them had themselves concussions” (WWTA, 122).

However, in original version of this story titled “Beginners”, Mel, who was a doctor, gives a warmer report and differs from the previous one, which is more similar to a telegram message:

“A drunk kid, a teenager, had plowed his dad’s pickup into a camper with this old couple in it. They were up in their mid-seventies. The kid, he was eighteen or nineteen, he was DOA when they brought him in. He’d taken the steering wheel through his sternum and must have died instantly. But the old couple, they were still alive, but just barely. They had multiple fractures and contusions, lacerations, the works, and they each had themselves a concussion” (Beginners, 187).

Moreover, Lish also eliminated several temporary references⁸:

Example 1: *She was kissing back, and the TV was going on the other side of the room. (It was Sunday, about five in the afternoon)*⁹ (“Where is Everyone”, 13).

Example 2: “*But it was all over in a minute or two*” (“The Fling”, 46) vs. “*But it was all over in no time at all*” (“Sacks”, 36).

Example 3: *(It was Saturday morning. The days were short and there was chill in the air). I was getting a haircut.* (“The Calm”, 161).

Probably, Lish wanted to give more reliability to the text through the cutting of temporary references, because when a person evokes old times, it is difficult to give specific details about them. Something seems obvious when taking into account this type of changes: Lish’s desire to remove all that information that lacked importance or could be seen as distracting.

- Syntactical changes.

⁸ More examples are shown in the appendix.

⁹ Brackets are used to indicate what Lish eliminated in the edited version.

Lish was interested in reducing the sentences to a minimum to create a more abrupt effect when reading them. In this way, as there are shorter sentences, the editor had to increase the amount of punctuation marks. Nevertheless, one of the features of the Lish's minimalist style was to repeat some words when this device was unnecessary at all in order to add a more colloquial touch to the writing. We find an example of this in the story "One More Thing": "Keep your noise out of things you don't know anything about," L.D. said. L.D. said, "I can't take anybody seriously who sits around all day reading astrology magazines" (WWTA, 130). The content of this excerpt contrasts with the original one in which "L.D. said" is not repeated twice. We also find the repeated use of "I said"/ "he said" in several instances of other stories.

He wants to create a certain distance and coldness between the reader and the story, he does not want him/her to be totally involved. Lish achieves this not only by rewriting sadder endings but also through simple details which have to do with syntax. As David Miller highlighted in his article (2010), he eliminates commas in several occasions and turns them into full stops, dividing one sentence into two. This is something that makes the speech colder. For instance, in the story "Gazebo": "Then she was out of bed and threatening to climb out of the window in her undergarments. I had to get her in a hold. We were only two floors up. But even so." (WWTA, 18).

Again, it is possible to mention another example of this feature included in the edited version of "Where is Everyone?" which was then titled "Mr Coffee and Mr Fixit". In the original version we find: "He was a little guy, not too little, and he had a moustache and was wearing a striped jersey, waiting for a kid to come down the slide" (*Beginners*, 13). This long clause containing several coordinated sentences was then replaced by: "Ross was a little guy. But not too little. He had a moustache and always wore a button-up sweater" (WWTA, 14). Every narration that Lish considered too long was fragmented into different parts.

A final example related to this can be found in "So Much Water So Close to Home", where Lish again eliminates coordination and chooses to economise language through the use of full stops. We can compare both versions:

My husband eats with good appetite but seems tired, edgy. He chews slowly, arms on the table, and stares at something across the room. He looks at me and looks away again, and wipes his mouth on the napkin. He shrugs, goes on eating. Something has come between us though he would like to believe otherwise. (*Beginners*, 116)

My husband eats with a good appetite. But I don't think he's really hungry. He chews, arms on the table, and stares at something across the room. He looks at me and looks away. He wipes his mouth on the napkin. He shrugs, and goes on eating. (*WWTA*, 67).

A tone of solemnity and conciseness is added to the edited passage through fragmentation, the woman describes the scene she is looking at as if each aspect of it were a flash inside her head occurring one after the other, without stopping a long time on their description. Again a more telegraphic and matter-of-fact syntax is used to deal with a serious topic, the death of a young woman. This allowed Lish to tell a lot without saying much.

3.2. Selection of stories and comments on their differences

Once the general changes suffered by the original stories written by Carver in *WWTA* have been mentioned, it would be important to make a deeper analysis of some stories included in this work to understand the different conception that Lish had about literature and the feelings he wanted to provoke on the reader. In this way, I was forced to make a selection from the seventeen stories included in the book due to this project's length constraints. In my selection I was mainly governed following the criterion of material cut.

The stories that will be analysed were entitled by Raymond Carver as: "Why Don't You Dance?", "Where Is Everyone?", "Want to See Something?", "The Fling", "A Small, Good Thing", "Tell the Women We're Going", "If It Please You" and "One More Thing".

3.2.1. Original "Why Don't You Dance?" vs. edited version.

Before dealing with the differences, I will briefly describe its plot. A man has emptied all his belongings from his house into the driveway and has organized and arranged them the same way they previously were inside the house. It seems the man has not just improvised but has thought meticulously about the arrangement of the objects. A young couple comes around this organized and intimate street market and they show interest in buying some of the man's belongings. When they are trying the bed, the man comes back and invites the couple to drink and turns on the record player. He encourages the couple to dance while he keeps on drinking and he finally dances with the girl, who closes the story telling other friends about the strange scene.

Something that should be discussed before analysing the differences between one story and the other is the following: the reader is not given the reason why the man acts like that in both the edited and the original version of this particular short story. We could assume that he once had a family or, at least, a wife, who probably abandoned him, this is to say, we face here a broken marriage, a couple that does not share their lives anymore, and the consequences that this breakup has had on one of the partners, in this case, the man. This is why it is difficult to find a moment in which the protagonist is not drinking, which leads us to think that alcohol is a central theme in this story. It is seen as a “pain reliever”, obviously not of a physical pain, but of a psychological one for the man is going through a mental breakdown. He is in a depressive mood and alcohol works as a release for the protagonist from his everyday life’s problems.

The reason to introduce a couple that is too young is probably to establish a parallelism between a relationship which has just finished (the man’s one) and another which is just beginning (the couple’s one).

Making a rough approximation of the amount of words that were cut by Lish in this story, we can say that he cut about 9% of the eight-page original version of “Why Don’t You Dance?” (*Beginners*, 217). The main and most important differences observed between both versions are related to:

- Proper nouns.

On the one hand, in the case of the story included in *WWTA*, the speaker does not mention the protagonist’s name, probably in order to establish a colder relationship between the character and the reader. He always makes reference to him as “the man”. Besides, we only get to know the boy’s name, Jack, but the narrator usually refers to him as “the boy”, and to his partner as “the girl”. I personally think that this way the story becomes more unreal and distant to the reader. Lish's goal was to prevent the readers from developing an intimate relationship with the characters by refusing to provide details about them. Another reason would also be related to the editor’s belief that this situation could happen to anyone, a situation that could constitute an episode in our lives, no matter what our name is.

On the other hand, this stands in opposition to what happens in the version included in *Beginners* since we are given the protagonist’s name: Max. Moreover, we are also provided

with the couple's names (Jack and Carla) and with some personal background of them: "they were only twenty years old, the boy and girl, a month or so apart" (*Beginners*, 5).

- Context and characters.

Regarding the scene and the context, I would dare to say that the atmosphere is softer and kinder in the case of the original version. The speaker says: "He looked at them as they sat in the table. In the lamplight, there was something about the expression on their faces. For a minute this expression seemed conspiratorial, and then it became "tender"— there was no other word for it. The boy touched her hand." (*Beginners*, 6). Therefore the situation is not made as tense as it is in the edited version, where we are not given any details about the kind of relationship this young couple has.

Regarding the characters, the girl in *WWTA* seems just worried about lowballing the man on the furniture:

"I was thinking fifty dollars for the bed," the man said.

"Would you take forty?" the girl asked.

"I'll take forty," the man said.

(...)

"How about the TV? The boy said.

"Twenty-five."

"Would you take fifteen?" the girl said" (*WWTA*, 6).

And it is here where Lish decided to change something apparently insignificant. While in *WWTA* the price of the TV is 25 dollars and the girl decides to bargain it with the man and reduces it to 10 dollars, in the original version, the price is reduced in 5 dollars. This emphasizes that the lady is just focused on getting the belongings as cheap as possible, and she does not care about the man's personal situation. But the scenario is slightly different in the story from *Beginners* for she is more humanized. A point that reinforces this idea lies in the following lines: *She could see the evening star* (*Beginners*, 4) vs *she thought she could see a star* (*WWTA*, 4). In the former sentence, the concept of the evening star implies a more romantic setting and atmosphere than the one expressed in the edited version.

Lish also changes the personal profile of the man by deleting phrases: “Max came down the sidewalk with a sack from the market. He had sandwiches, beer, and whiskey” (WWTA, 5). But Carver’s version is full of details:

Max came down the sidewalk with a sack from the market. He had sandwiches, beer, and whiskey. He had continued to drink through the afternoon and had reached a place where now the drinking seemed to begin to sober him. But there were gaps. He had stopped at the bar next to the market, had listened to a song on the jukebox, and somehow it had gotten dark before he recalled the things in his yard. (*Beginners*, 3)

Readers here are able to know about Max’s alcoholism and the song played in the jukebox represents in a way a sort of distraction and a way of evading from his messy and chaotic life that is a consequence of ending a love relationship. This stands in opposition with Lish’s deletion of details so that readers cannot make conjectures about the protagonist’s life.

Besides, as Molly Fuller realised (2014), Lish does not only delete some sentences that make it difficult to establish an intimate relationship between the reader and the character, but there is also a lack of human connection in this version among characters. This can be seen when the man invites the girl to dance together: “The girl closed and opened her eyes. She pushed her face into the man’s shoulder. She pulled the man closer. “You must be desperate or something,” she said” (WWTA, 8)

In the original version, Carver wants the characters to live a moment of intimacy and the result is:

She closed and opened her eyes. She pushed her face into Max’s shoulder. She pulled him closer. “Jack,” she murmured. She looked at the bed and could not understand what it was doing in the yard. She looked over Max’s shoulder at the sky. She held herself to Max. She was filled with an unbearable happiness. (*Beginners*, 5)

It may well be true that this “unbearable happiness” is the consequence of having drunk too much whiskey during the whole evening but the writer gives both characters an opportunity of experiencing a moment of human connection. Furthermore, both paragraphs are not only different because of the deletion of words but also because of the insertion of others. Lish’s inclusion of the girl’s remark about the man’s desperation constitutes something that Carver never wrote.

If we continue with the lack of human connection, it is possible to say that some changes also affect the readers' notion about the way that the couple interact with each other. Here is an example from the edited version:

She turned on her side and put her hand to his face.

“Kiss me,” she said.

“Let’s get up,” he said.

“Kiss me,” she said.

She closed her eyes. She held him.

He said, “I’ll see if anybody’s home.” But he just sat up and stayed where he was, making believe he was watching the television. Lights came on in houses up and down the street.
(*WWTA*, 5).

In Carver’s version, it is possible to see a different kind of interaction between both characters, a more passionate and humane one:

She turned on her side and put her arm around his neck.

“Kiss me,” she said.

“Let’s get up,” he said.

“Kiss me. Kiss me, honey,” she said.

She closed her eyes. She held him. He had to prize her fingers loose.

He said, “I’ll go see if anybody’s home,” but he just sat up.

The television set was still playing. Lights had gone on in houses up and down the street.

He sat on the edge of the bed. (*Beginners*, 2)

The main differences lie in the place where the girl put her arm (“in his face” vs. “around his neck”), in the deletion of an endearment (“kiss me, honey”), and the way the boy reacts to his partner’s wish for a moment of privacy (“But he just sat up and stayed where he was, making believe he was watching the television” [*WWTA*] vs “The television set was still playing. Lights had gone on in houses up and down the street. He sat on the edge of the bed” [*Beginners*]). In the case of Carver’s version, the atmosphere is less tense and tenderer than in the edited one.

Finally, the endings in both versions should be undoubtedly discussed for they are also different. In Carver's version, the story ends this way:

The girl said later: "This guy was about middle-aged. All his belongings right out there in the yard. I'm not kidding. We got drunk and danced. In the driveway. Oh, my god. Don't laugh. He played records. Look at this phonograph. He gave it to us. These old records, too. Jack and I went to sleep in his bed. Jack was hungover and had to rent a trailer in the morning. To move all the guy's stuff. Once I woke up. He was covering us with a blanket, the guy was.

This blanket. Feel it." . . .

She kept talking. She told everyone. There was more, she knew that, but she couldn't get it into words. After a time, she quit talking about it. (*Beginners*, 6)

Here I would highlight the image of the blanket. Max's gesture of covering the couple with the help of a blanket is similar to that of a father, so the girl is praising the man's behaviour and has a feeling of sympathy towards him. However, in the edited version, Lish eliminates this sentimentality and even uses some pejorative words:

Weeks later, she said: "The guy was about middle-aged. All his things right there in his yard. No lie. We got real pissed and danced. In the driveway. Oh, my God. Don't laugh. He played us these records. Look at this record player. The old guy gave it to us. And all these crappy records. Will you look at this shit?" . . .

She kept talking. She told everyone. There was more to it, and she was trying to get it talked out. After a time, she quit trying. (*WETA*, 9).

The girl is not happy anymore and says she was just drunk, she does not admire the man and repudiates everything related to him: *crappy records* and *shit*. These previously mentioned differences during the girl's final intervention minimize the story's sentimental content, separating the characters through an establishment of a colder relationship between each other and eliminating the chance of enabling a more private connection between reader and character, which was something that Carver apparently had in mind in his version. He wanted to emphasize the importance of social relationships to achieve happiness.

3.2.2. Original "Where is Everyone" vs. "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit"

Another story that deserves special attention is called "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" in the edited version. The original title was "Where is Everyone?" From the formal point of

view, the original story is four times longer than the edited one, that is to say, it originally was a fifteen-page manuscript which was then cut by 78 percent when included in *WWTA (Beginners, 218)*.

The story focuses on a dysfunctional family and deals with two important themes: infidelity and alcoholism. The narrator and his wife can be defined as alcoholics, and she has had an affair with a man that she met at her Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings named Ross, an unemployed aerospace engineer. The narrator usually makes reference to Ross as Mr. Fixit, since he had cars that were no longer useful. However, despite all the pain that this relationship could cause to the narrator, he does not feel like taking vengeance on Ross although it has destroyed his family forever. Their children are growing up alone, in an unhealthy environment where mum and dad are absent or under the influence of alcohol and where they are not able to understand the damage they are causing to their children. An example of this is found in the unedited version:

Once Mike locked his mother out of the house after she'd stayed overnight at Ross's house...I don't know where I was that night, probably at my mother's.

(...)

She stood aside his window and begged him to let her in— please, please, so she could dress and go to school, for if she lost her job what then? Where would he be? Where would any of us be then? He said, "You don't live here anymore. Why should I let you in?"

(..)

He let her in and she swore at him. (*Beginners, 16*).

We can see in these lines a total misunderstanding of the family situation on the woman's part. The boy feels lost and nobody can help him. Alcohol is obviously seen as one of the main sources of dysfunction.

- The title.

In the original version, Carver decided to entitle this story as "Where is Everyone?" which was inspired by a paragraph that was deleted by Lish in the edited version: "I'm not at home", I said. "I don't know where everyone is at home. I just called there" (*Beginners, 21*). As Randolph Paul Runyon realises, the title alludes to the very ending of the story in which

we see a lonely man, whose wife has left him and decides to stay at her mother's home (1993, p.100).

With respect to the edited story, the title is a different one and it was pulled out by the company's offices where Ross used to work as an engineer (*Mr. Coffees in every office*, 16) and by the pejorative nickname that the narrator gave to Ross (Mr. Fixit) because he used to repair things once he lost his job. Therefore, the title alludes in an ironic way to Ross's previous life and to his current one, which has nothing to do with the former: from a successful and happy life to one in which failure is the only thing that is worth commenting.

- The characters.

The names of the characters suffered changes in Lish's version: Cynthia, the narrator's wife, is Myrna in *WWTA*; the daughter is originally named Kate but then Melody, and Lish deleted all the references that were made to Mike, the narrator's son. Not only the names but also the vocabulary that characters use are different in both versions. In *Beginners*, when the narrator felt threatened by Ross' intention of interfering within his family, he literally said to his wife: "I'm going to kill him!" (13), but what we find in *WWTA* is the following statement pronounced by the same character: "I think I'll get a Smith and Wesson" (14). The latest one defines a more morbid and grimmer mental profile.

In Carver's longer version, the narrator talks more extensively about his family's life being destroyed by alcohol: how the fact of being intoxicated most of the time interfered in his relationship with his son up to the point of pronouncing words that a child should not hear, such as the comparison the narrator makes between an imaginary family of a novel he read and his own family, showing his intention of hitting his children before the moment of his death and insinuating that there was always a hint of violence surrounding him when he was drunk. Moreover, Lish deleted something that could be essential to understand some of the reasons for this man's alcoholism:

My dad dies in his sleep, drunk, eight years ago. It was a Friday night and he was fifty-four years old. He came home from work at the sawmill, took some sausage out of the freezer for his breakfast the next morning, and sat down at the kitchen table, where he opened a quart of Four Roses. (*Beginners*, 20).

This passage did not appear in Lish's version and it could help the reader find out what moved him to drink. It could have been something he absorbed from childhood and became a normal thing to do in his life.

To close this section, the narrator's wife is described as more humane and compassionate woman in the original story. Here we see again that Carver did not intend to depict a world where people do evil with no basis in fact. It is just the other way round: in his stories, characters, after doing evil, show a feeling of remorse. This is the case of Cynthia, who after having been unfaithful to her husband, recognises the following:

Sometimes Cynthia and I would talk about things— “reviewing the situation,” we'd call it. (...) One afternoon we were in the living room and she said, “When I was pregnant with Mike you carried me to the bathroom when I was so sick and pregnant I couldn't get out of bed. You carried me. No one else will ever do that, no matter what. We'd loved each other like nobody else could or ever will love the other again” (*Beginners*, 17).

- The ending.

Finally, the drastic surgery that Lish applied to this story also affected its ending. In the case of *WETA*, both the narrator and his wife appear reconciled and they are reunited again but in *Beginners* nothing similar to this happens at all. The narrator just lies on the sofa where her mother used to make love with other men, in a state of almost paralysis, in a state of frustration, knowing deep inside that he will never recover his wife's love. Just three different lines and Carver made the story much sadder but more realistic perhaps.

3.2.3. Original “Want to See Something? Vs. “I Could See the Smallest Things”

The third story we are going to discuss was originally entitled as “Want to See Something?” It was an eleven-page manuscript that was cut then by 56 percent when edited by Gordon Lish (*Beginners*: 218).

Both stories focus on a couple, Nancy and Cliff. One night, she is unable to sleep and thinks she has heard her house's gate opening. She gets up and goes to the yard. There she sees her neighbour Sam killing insects. He and Cliff were once very good friends but their friendship was spoiled after a quarrel. In both stories, Sam regrets what happened and seems to miss his friend.

Although this story was not drastically changed by Lish, its ending should be a matter of discussion for its total difference from the one that Carver chose.

- The title.

From “Want to See Something?” it was then changed to “I Could See the Smallest Things” in *WWTA*.

- Nancy and interior reflection.

This point really deserves an analysis in depth for Lish decided to get rid of a memory by Nancy (when Sam’s son was born and they found out he was an albino). He also removed a lot of Nancy's internal and mental pondering that is important to understand the central theme of the story. Lish also eliminated the final monologue in which Nancy admits her deepest thoughts.

It is possible to say that Lish’s version remains on the surface, there is not any kind of interior reflection and Nancy seems finally just worried about sleeping. However, we do not see this in Carver’s story, where Nancy realises how she misses the old and loved friendship with Sam and his wives (this is why Carver inserted that episode of Sam’s son and Nancy also remembers his first wife’s death). She is melancholic for the past and wishes good times to come back. Moreover, something that Lish also considered too “sugared” and, therefore, eliminated, is found in the following lines within the original version:

Millie, Sam’s first wife, was a good friend of mine up until she died. (...) When Sam ran out of the house, he found her dead. Sometimes at night we’d hear a howling sound from over there that the must have been making. We’d look at each other when we heard that and not be able to say anything. I’d shiver. Cliff would fix himself another drink (*Beginners*, 35).

This means that Cliff, unable to find any words of consolation for his friend, had to drink in order to forget or to stop listening to his friend’s weeping. Therefore, it is easy to assume that not only Nancy but also Cliff would regret having had words with Sam as they all were tied by a strong bond.

- The ending.

Unlike the ending in the original version, Nancy goes to bed without pronouncing any words: she just realised that it was too late and she needed to sleep, so she did not practise any

kind of internal reflection. This differs from what closes the story included in *Beginners*. When going to bed and by pronouncing words that are related to regret, Nancy addresses her husband, though he is deep asleep.

Furthermore, the act of sleeping could be related to paralysis, characters do not feel the necessity of changes as Dermot McManus argues (2013). This totally affects the way both stories end. In the case of the original version, Nancy feels the need to dedicate some minutes to think about her loved ones and is not obsessed with the idea of going to sleep. So, probably her inner thoughts involve a need for a change, and this change would be prompted by regret and forgiveness. However, with respect to Lish's ending, Nancy does not feel that need or any feeling of remorse because the only thing she is concerned about is falling asleep.

Lish removed the ending that could help us grow as people and become better individuals by forgiving and saying sorry.

3.2.4. Original “A Small, Good Thing” vs. “The Bath”

The fourth story in which many differences from one version to another are visible is “A Small, Good Thing”. It originally was a thirty-seven-page manuscript which was cut by 78 percent for inclusion in *WETA (Beginners. 219)*, in other words, the original is five times longer than the edited version. Lish titled the story “The Bath”.

I consider it almost impossible to offer a common summary of both stories as they have nothing to do with one another. But generally we could say that it is the story of a family of three: a mother, a father and their son. The mother is ordering to have a cake made for a party since it is her son's birthday. However, that party never takes place as Scotty, the son, is hit by a car and seems to have a brain injury. In both stories, the baker makes continuous calls to the house to remind them about the cake.

- The title.

On the one hand, Carver decided to give more emphasis to the “small”, “good” and, perhaps, one of the only things that could restore a little the painful couple's hearts: eating. The baker empathizes with the couple and gives them freshly baked cookies. In this way, the writer thought that he was a central character within the story. However, Lish decided to eliminate all existing goodness and depicted the baker as an unpleasant person who is

responsible for disturbing the couple's life in one of the most terrible situations a person has to endure.

On the other hand, Lish entitled the story "The Bath". He focused on the "baths" that both parents had when they got home. The father was first and then it was the mother's turn. From my point of view, this title lacks intensity as I do not consider this daily activity really important. But one thing is for sure: Lish had the purpose of making the story as sad as possible, and it was when the mother went home in order to have a bath when she received a call. Probably it was someone from the hospital announcing Scotty's death. Moreover, when one thinks about a restorative bath, we refer to a colder one because it is able to force us to wake up, to endure and face reality, no matter how hard it is. Perhaps it was chosen by Lish in order to represent metaphorically that these parents have realised now that life is no bed of roses.

- Use of proper nouns.

In "The Bath", the two only characters with names are the child, Scotty, and the mother, Ann. However, most of the times, the narrator refers to her as "the mother". We find the same situation with her husband, the narrator talks about him as "the father". This makes the characters more indefinite, as if they could be anyone.

In the case of "A Small, Good Thing", both parents have a name, Ann and Howard, and even the doctor is named too, Dr. Francis. Carver wanted to give this story a name, with the idea of placing it within a specific family and making the readers get involved in a higher degree when reading it.

- Characters.

With respect to "The Bath" (*WVTA*), it is possible to say that almost all characters lack compassion. If we start with one of the first characters that appears in the story, we would have to make reference to the baker (the narrator does not give us his name). Firstly, when the mother enters the bakery, she is so excited about how her son's cake will look like and his birthday that she begins showing off about his son just as any proud mother would do. However, it seems that the baker does not care about this woman's life in the least. Secondly, when the baker realises that no one has entered the bakery to pick up the cake and pay him for it, he starts to call several times to the couple's home. These calls sound threatening and are really badly-timed. Although the baker is unaware of the couple's situation, he is responsible

for something that is continuously harassing them and making the environment tense. He resembles a kind of evil shadow that is added to the couple's nightmare.

The baker in "A Small, Good Thing" (*Beginners*) is a different character than the one depicted in "The Bath" (*WWTA*). More time is dedicated to describe his profile. Although he also uses the telephone to remind the couple that there is a cake which needs to be picked up, he does not use a menacing tone. The writer uses the figure of this character to say that there are still good people and, despite of the annoyance that his repeated calls caused, he empathizes with the couple once he finds out their misery and invites them to eat something that will restore a little their sorrowful souls, an invitation that was used later by Carver to give a title to this story: "'You probably need to eat something', the baker said. 'I hope you'll eat some of my hot tolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this,' he said" (*Beginners*, 81). The couple accepts and stays in the bakery until dawn. The baker has contributed to minimize their sorrow and loneliness and Carver has introduced the possibility of redemption.

In the same line of need of harmony permanent in the edited version, the little child who, on his way to school together with Scotty, is the only witness of his friend's accident. Instead of staying there or running to get help he just "stood holding the potato chips. He was wondering if he should finish the rest or continue on to school" (*WWTA*, 40).

In contrast to the previously stated, in the original story, Scotty's friend walks him to his house and he even asks him a question which would be typical of a boy of his age: "Scotty wouldn't answer when his friend asked him what it felt like to be hit by a car. He walked straight to his front door, where his friend left him and ran home" (*Beginners*, 57).

In "The Bath", at the hospital, both the doctor and nurses seem to lack the same compassion. They do not say any words of consolation to the parents and do not show support for their situation. They just pace around and burst in the hospital room whenever they consider it necessary and communication between them and the couple is very limited.

But in the original version, Dr. Francis feels guilty because of Scotty's death and feels he has the obligation to give comfort to his parents, who are in anguish: "Dr. Francis put his arm around Howard's shoulders. 'I'm sorry. God, how I'm sorry'. Then he let out and held out his hand" (*Beginners*, 76).

Even the relationship between the couple in “The Bath” is colder and more distant: “They sat like that for a while, watching the boy, not talking. From time to time he squeezed her hand until she took it away” (WWTA, 44). When something terrible breaks into our lives, our family ties tend to become stronger but both the father and mother seem to be foreigners to each other. Probably they just feel isolated and have a feeling of displacement.

However, in the original version, we perceive they are strongly joined and united and we are aware of their suffering with more intensity. There is a higher degree of introspection since we have access to Ann’s inner thoughts (something that cannot be seen in the edited version) and they reveal a character in despair, a person who, though she never used to pray, now begs God to intercede for her son’s health. We even see there is a progression in her feelings: at the beginning of the story, she is full of happiness because of her son’s birthday, then she feels terrified when Scotty is in hospital, she remains in shock when her son dies, she is terribly angry when she finds out the mysterious caller’s identity, and finally she feels relieved once she has forgiven the baker. However, in “The Bath” we are not allowed to go inside her head and this makes us think that she is a colder person for she apparently does not seem to show her feelings. In the original version included within *Beginners*, Ann’s humane and loving behaviour could be universal and this gives the story a much more realistic touch.

Regarding the father, Howard, in “A Small, Good Thing”, the situation is similar. In the original version, we see a man who is continuously reducing the situation’s seriousness in order not to worry his wife. At the end, we see a desolate man, invaded by grief, because of the loss of his only child: “Howard took the box out to the garage where he saw Scotty’s bicycle. He dropped the box and sat down on the pavement beside the bicycle. He took hold of the bicycle awkwardly, so that it leaned against his chest” (*Beginners*, 77).

Some characters also deserve special attention is the black family. In “The Bath”, they are also at the hospital waiting for news about their son’s condition who is being operated on but the narrator does not reveal their race so we do not know whether they are black or not. Moreover, we are not given any explanation about the reason why the child’s state is so serious and we do not find out if he finally dies or not.

However, in the original version, we are told by the narrator that Ann saw a “Negro family” (67), something that nowadays would be defined as “politically incorrect”. There is a special connection between Ann and this child’s father since they feel identified with one another because of the situation they are going through: they feel extremely worried and have

the need to look for mutual support. Here we see again the presence of a writer who loved life and thought that love and compassion between individuals were essential to make life meaningful and more bearable.

- The ending.

The ending of “The Bath” is able to make the reader feel out of place. It is an open-ended story as we never find out if the caller was the baker who keeps on tormenting the couple or it is someone from the hospital who wants to announce news about Scotty’s condition, probably bad news for the tone and words used by the speaker: ““Scotty”, the voice said. “It is about Scotty”, the voice said. “It has to do with Scotty yes”” (WWTA, 47). It is clearly ambiguous and more intriguing than that included in the original version.

In “A Small, Good Thing”, the narrator shows us along the story how life can take away something that you love a lot and how those who remain here have to learn to live in a completely new way. This story clears all doubts about Scotty’s death we may have in the edited version. He dies, the parents know it and the baker too. During the first night the couple live together without the presence of his son, they receive another call from the baker. Ann, maddened, asks her husband to take her to the bakery. There she swears at him and she tells the baker the reason why the cake has not been picked up with tears interrupting her words. The baker begs for their pardon and pleads them to eat some sweets. The couple feels the consolation provided by a stranger who can understand their situation, who sincerely listens to them and also opens his heart to them. This scene closes such beautiful story.

It is not my intention to say that the ending included within “The Bath” is worse than the original: it was rewritten by another hand and is just related to another kind of writing style (minimalism). However, in my estimation, the descriptive details in “A Small, Good Thing” regarding characters expand the possibility of reading a more realistic story. Despite the death of a little child who always will inspire us sorrow and grief, the world depicted by Carver is not so harmful. It is a much more pleasant and gratifying story because we undergo a tragedy but also the redemption of a person whose personality we initially considered destructive.

3.2.5. Original “Tell the Women We’re Going” vs. edited version.

Once we have dealt with a story that makes us believe in the goodness of humanity, here we will discuss the content of another one that, according to Lish's changes, will make us develop a negative view of human race. It was titled "Tell the Women We're Going" by Carver and originally was a nineteen-page manuscript cut by 55 percent by Lish (*Beginners*, 219).

Bill and Jerry have been close friends since childhood. Both of them are married and they met their wives and children as often as possible at Jerry's home. One Sunday, after lunch, both friends decide to go for a drive and in their way they see two young girls riding on their bicycles. A car chase and then a pursuit along a rocky landscape after these girls leave not only the characters but also the readers breathless.

The previous paragraph is a general summary of both stories although I did not include how the writer put an end to them because Lish rewrote a completely new ending. In fact, not only the ending but also the psychological description of characters was also reduced to the bare minimum. Through dialogues, we usually get to know the inner thoughts of characters, but Lish did not want us to know which dark forces lead a man to behave like Jerry did and this is why we see there is little dialogue among characters.

- Symbols.

In the original version, where both men arrived at Painted Rocks to wait for the girls, there was a road sign: "NACHES 67—GLEED WLIDCATS—Jesus saves—Beat Yakima" (*WWTA*, 89). The expression "Jesus saves" offers a chance for Jerry to redeem.

In the edited one, Lish wanted to make this sign even more meaningful by including the final phrase "Repent Now". The story itself reminds us of two authors of the Southern Gothic Tradition, Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner (Amir, 2010, p. 15), who also focused on the study of the grotesque and the dark forces that lead men to act in an evil way. Particularly, the theme of redemption and the continuous opportunities offered to the main character to save his life along the story are also considered by O'Connor in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"

- Characters.

In the original version, we are told by the narrator that they had been very good friends and shared same tastes. But in one of these weekend meetings organized at Jerry's house, Bill

started to see something strange in his friend's behaviour. He was getting darker and barely talked to anyone. Moreover, the narrator gives us clues that make us think that Jerry's intentions are not totally sincere and pure but there is something insane hidden in them:

"Guy's got to get out now and then or he gets stale. Know what I mean? "He looked at Bill. "Can't be all work and no play. You know what I mean."

Bill wasn't sure (*Beginners*, 85).

These lines may also be analyzed as way of foretelling the future and telling the reader that nothing good can happen within the story. Bill is used by the narrator as the balanced version of the human race who is always calming down his friend's evil intentions and who is also able to forecast the future: "Bill looked at his watch and then sat down on a rock, took off his dark glasses and looked again at the sky" (*Beginners*, 91). As if he already knew the fatal consequences of Jerry's behaviour and is begging God for redemption and forgiveness.

Moreover, something that reinforces the previous point lies in the following line: "Jerry didn't like to be told what to do. Bill didn't mind" (*Beginners*, 83). The story includes hints that indicate what we can expect in the ending. Carver talks about a boy who gets drunk in Bill's wedding, tries to seduce the bride's godmothers very rudely (which could mean that he is not happy with his married life) and fights with the hotel staff. Dealing with the *carveresque* dialogues, they are even harsher in the original version:

Jerry drove another mile and then pulled off the road at a wide place. "Let's go back. Let's try it."

"Jesus. Well, I don't know, man. We should be getting back. That stuff's too young anyway. Huh?"

"Old enough to bleed, old enough to... You know that saying."

"Yeah, but I don't know."

"Christ sake. We'll just have some fun with 'em, give 'em a bad time." (*Beginners*, 87).

Furthermore, it is possible to establish a parallelism between the tragic ending and the moment of the day that Carver uses to indicate the presence of evil within the story. The narrator makes reference several times to the fact that it is getting darker, the same as the content of his story.

But in the edited version, we do not know anything about Jerry's background. This description would have been important in order to understand the ending of the story, and both the deletion of details regarding this character and the shortening of dialogues contribute to make the story more abstract.

- The ending.

In Carver's version, the narrator depicts the pursuit of the girl as an example of Jerry's inner frustrations: the girl was his prey and had to hunt her and it was something that was making him angrier. Once he caught her, she was raped and, fearing that she could say what happened, he crushed a stone against her face several times in the cruelest way. When Bill got to see the dead girl lying on the rocky ground and his friend holding a stone, he is motionless. Jerry, regretting his act of madness, finally cries on his friend's shoulder.

There is enough to make the reader feel a stench of violence and tragedy from the beginning of the story. And when tragedy is set in the story, it lengthens five pages and is reconstructed step by step, explained step by step, with a logic that makes us tremble but in which each detail is necessary, and it seems, finally, almost natural: because violence here is the result of a lifetime's behaviour.

However, in Lish's version not only one but the two girls are killed by the same character. Explained in just five lines, this ending is more abrupt and more difficult to understand, focused on an event of gratuitous violence, without any explanation. Here we are dealing with an innate and pure drive for evil. Lish seems to be claiming that Latinism used by Hobbes: *homo homini lupu*. By contrast, Carver's ending deals with a humanized evil, which includes remorse and compassion after being exercised by the uncontrolled impulses that remain hidden in our inner selves.

3.2.6. Original "If It Please You" vs. "After the Denim"

There is another story that Lish also changed. It was titled "If It Please You" by Carver and it originally was a twenty-six page manuscript cut by 63 percent when was included in *WETA* with a new title, "After the Denim" (*Beginners*, 219).

Both versions tell the story of an elderly couple, James and Edith Packer. They arrive at the community center of their town in order to play bingo, one of their favourite pastimes. However, they see that a young hippie couple have taken the places where they normally sit. James is unable to concentrate on his bingo cards because he has been flustered by the presence of the couple and the situation gets worse when James finds out that the hippie man is cheating. During the game, the man's girlfriend wins the jackpot and this absolutely makes James angrier. Moreover, Edith says to her husband that she is "spotting" and she is worried about her health. Fear is added to anger and James finds several ways to endure this new situation depending on the version. Therefore, Lish again was responsible for rewriting a new ending for this story.

- The title.

As previously mentioned, in the original version the story was titled "If It Please You". This statement is nowadays an archaism in the English language but it was usually employed in a religious context when addressing God in our prayers. What we could infer from this is the importance religion could have within this story, considered as a way to help people have hope.

However, Lish's title, "After the Denim", is addressed to the young couple who are occupying the Packers' seats. Denim wear is usually linked to young people (it was fashionable during the 80s) and, when James is told by his wife that they will have to go to the doctor to find out the reason of her bleeding, he remembers this couple, in their youth, totally oblivious to the others' problems. He would like to tell them how their future will look like, when they grow up, "he'd tell them what was waiting for you after the denim and the earrings, after touching each other and cheating at games" (*WWTA*, 66).

- Characters.

We observe a more affective and closer relationship between the elderly couple in the original version. Edith seems to be sweeter and James is a thoughtful man who is constantly looking after her. Besides, the effect that the news about Edith's possible illness has on them is more tangible.

In the edited version, dialogues between the couple are again reduced and there are not many details about the psychological profile of both characters. Lish's changes also affected value judgements as he did not want to include in his stories anything that could be

“politically incorrect”. In this way, he replaced the word “hippie” by the expression *young couple in denim* (the same could be seen in the story previously analyzed “The Bath”, when he eliminated the adjective *negro* in order not to hurt anyone’s feelings). It would also be important to take into account that the denim has been a material typically linked to North America so, probably, Lish was more interested than Carver in giving a voice to his country’s working class and in depicting the true American spirit (something typically found in Hemingway’s works).

- The ending.

The ending is the part where both stories more differ from one another. In “If It Please You”, when the couple comes back home, Edith says to James she will go to the doctor to see what is wrong within her and asks him to leave her alone in the bed. James’ first reaction has to do with the young couple they saw in the community center, he remembers them when cheating in the bingo game and this makes him furious, but there is something else: ““Why Edith? He wondered. Why us? Why not someone else, why not those hippies tonight? They were sailing through life free as birds, no responsibilities, no doubts about the future”” (*Beginners*, 109).

It almost seems as if he feels envy for the young couple and their carefree lifestyle. He does not understand why good people like him and his wife have to suffer terrible punishments as an illness can be and thinks that other people of a less moral constitution are the ones who deserve such pains. But something prevents him from continuing with those thoughts: praying. He remembers when he used to pray for her son when he was fighting in Vietnam and it also became something to which he gripped when he was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. These prayers become even more meaningful to him when he includes the hippie couple, expressing that they are just young, they have to live and enjoy life as much as they can, no matter if they are wrong or make mistakes because, in the meanwhile, others like James will be praying for them.

We deal with a completely different ending in “After the Denim”. In this version there are no prayers so the protagonist does not experience any epiphany or revelation about the young couple. We just find a man showing resentment towards the young couple’s careless attitude. He just wants to give a lesson to the young man and would like to tell him what will happen *after the denim* (decrepitude and death). It is possible to say that the conflict he feels about these people is not resolved at all and the same can be said about his feeling towards his

wife's illness. He has not yet assimilated what can happen to his wife as I think he is quite immature.

The final image we get from the story is really meaningful as well: James starts sewing and uses blue thread (which reminds us of the blue colour of the denim). All of a sudden he remembers the photograph he saw in the bingo hall: it may be used as a symbol by Carver to establish a similarity between the man that appears in it, standing on the keel of a boat and waving, and James himself, who is now aboard a different ship, going to who knows where, probably not waving, but asking for help with his hand. He remains defenceless and unable to get used to the fact that his wife is ill.

3.2.7. Original "The Fling" vs. "Sacks"

In the same line of family ties and relationships, Carver wrote "The Fling", a story that was then titled "Sacks" and cut by 61 percent when edited by Lish (*Beginners*, 218). It is one of the few stories in the book that has a first person narrator, named Les Palmer. He has not seen his father since his parents got divorced and organises a brief encounter with him. His father uses this meeting to tell Les about the affair he had with Sally Wain, which was the reason that broke up his marriage. Again, the original ending differs from the edited one.

- The title.

The story was originally titled "The Fling". A fling is related to a short love affair and, in this case, it is associated with the short love relationship between Les's father and Sally Wain, a friend of Les's mother who used to go to their house to sell cleaning and household things. In this case, the title refers to this affair as the only conversation established between both characters has to do with it. Not only does the father talk about the affair in general terms but also explains to his son which the consequences of this illicit liaison were.

However, in the edited version called "Sacks", Lish seems to give more emphasis to another element: the sacks that, at the same time, can have a double interpretation. Lish may refer to the sacks with different sweets that the father gives to his son to share with his wife and children (whom, we could guess, he has not seen for some years). The father insists on the fact that Les should not forget to take these sacks before the plane takes off. By contrast, the reader is also told that when Les's father saw Sally for the first time, he was holding a sack with something inside. This is probably due to Lis's wish to establish a parallelism

between the way that Les's father knew Sally and what this first encounter meant for him (the beginning of a new love relationship) and the way that the father wants this first encounter with his son to be after so many years (to establish a new relationship with his son full of affection and love). Further details of the choice of this title will be given in the section about the ending as it is strongly connected to it.

- Narration.

We have the same narrator in both stories but Lish eliminated and altered some vocabulary used by this character. In the original version, the story starts with Les saying: "From my hotel room window I can look out and see much of this gray Midwestern city" (*Beginners*, 40). Lish changed this into: "From my hotel window I can see too much of this Midwestern city" (*WWTA*, 31). Here we see again his emphasis to minimalise syntax but not only this. The statement "I can see too much" reminds us of another title that Lish gave to another story: "I Could See the Smallest Things".

Moreover, the ending of the edited version is also completely different from the original one. Lish makes reference to the fact that Les remembered on his way home that he had forgotten to take the sacks that his father had given to him. We are dealing with "remembering" and "forgetting", and this can be perfectly linked to the ending of the same story above mentioned, "I Could See the Smallest Things": "It was then that I remembered I'd forgotten to latch the gate" (*WWTA*, 30).

- Characters.

During the whole narration in both versions, the father is trying to make his son understand the love affair he had with a woman younger than him. He gives his son all kinds of details, from how they met each other to the way they put an end to this secret and illicit relationship. However, in the original version, there is more internal reflection on Les's mind which has to do with the boredom that his father's story is provoking on him: "I lit another cigarette, glanced at my watch, and crossed and recrossed my legs under the table. The bartender looked over at us, and I raised my glass. He motioned to the girl who was taking an order at another table" (*Beginners*, 45). This is something that cannot be seen in Lish's version although we are still told that Lesh takes a glance at his watch.

This introspection in the original version also allows us to understand that the narrator perfectly knows his father's intention: they have been separated for many years and now it is

time for reconciliation: *He wanted something. He was trying to involve me in it somehow, all right, but it was more than that, he wanted something else...Maybe simply a gesture on my part, a touch on the arm, perhaps* (*Beginners*, 53).

- The ending.

The reason why Les's father tells him about his adultery is different in both versions. The father feels guilty not only for having broken a family by getting divorced from his wife but also feels responsible for Sally's husband death, Larry. This character found out his wife's extramarital relationship and, unable to bear this burden, Larry decided to kill himself through delivering several stabs on his stomach. Carver focuses here on the need to open up that human beings sometimes have. Les's father guilt is enormous and he needs to confess it to his son. The fact of giving Les a sack full of sweets and telling him all the details of his affair together with the dramatic consequences it had, portrays the character as a victim, or at least the reader's reaction is that of feeling sorry for him despite his wrong past behaviour. The writer is dealing here with the human need for reconciliation and forgiveness. The father wants his son to understand him or to see some expressions of support on his part. But nothing of this can be appreciated along the story.

The original story ends with the narrator telling us that he forgot to take his father's gifts, which can be metaphorically used to express that he does not care about his father's desperate situation. The ending reveals that there is no forgiveness nor understanding despite all the father's words of anguish and the encounter has provoked a situation of estrangement between both characters. We are talking probably about the only original ending that was even more disturbing than the one edited by Lish: "He hasn't written, I haven't heard from him since then. I'd write to him and see how he's getting along, but I'm afraid I've lost his address. But, tell me, after all, what could he expect from someone like me?" (*Beginners*, 55).

In the edited version, the father only tells a part of the story: "The man went all to pieces, is what" (*WWTA*, 38). He stops telling anything else related to this issue because the father knows Les will never understand him. He is always asking the wrong questions and the father gives up: "You don't know anything, do you?" my father said. "You don't know anything at all. You don't know anything except how to sell books" (*WWTA*, 38). Anyway,

both the narrator and the reader realises there is something implicit which has not been mentioned, something that has to be induced, as in most of the stories edited by Lish.

The final sentence is very significant since it highlights the point previously mentioned:

On the way to Chicago, I remembered how I'd left his sack of gifts on the bar. Just as well. Mary didn't need candy, Almond Roca or anything else.

That was last year. She needs it now even less (*WWTA*, 38).

Both the narrator and his family do not need any kind of fondness related to Les's father. The fact that the narrator forgot to take the sacks full of sweets from his father suggests that he has also forgotten his father. In fact, that was the last time he heard about him. In this version, Les's lack of compassion is minimized because he is ignorant of the dramatic consequences that his father's affair had on a man. Still, we see a son who refuses to accept his father's declaration of remorse.

3.2.8. Original "One More Thing" vs. edited version

The last story I have analysed is called "One More Thing" and Lish did not make any change regarding the title. Anyway, he cut the 37 percent of the original seven-page manuscript written by Carver (*Beginners*, 221).

"One More Thing" is a story about conflict and the consequences that alcoholism can have for a family. L.D. has lost control of his life and is unable to stop drinking as he considers it an illness. His daughter, who has a different name in both versions, says to him that alcoholism can be treated through the use of one's willpower. L.D.'s wife, Maxine, is fed up of arguments, which are always caused by his husband's alcoholism, and tells him to leave the house. Again, Lish rewrote a new ending that differs a lot from that proposed by Carver.

- Characters.

There are not many differences related to characters in both versions: there are three and all of them play the same role within the two stories. Anyway, in the version edited by Lish, there is just one difference that can be observed in L.D.'s behaviour that was added by the editor. When Maxine tells him, to leave their house, L.D. puts several items of personal hygiene into his shaving bag, including his wife's eyelash curlers. This could be important to understand that L.D. is still dependent on his wife and needs to feel she is with him though he will live alone from this time onwards.

- The ending.

Lish again reduced the ending to the minimum, creating a perfect atmosphere in this case, and provoking different feelings than those the reader can experience when reading the original version. It is very shocking if we compare both versions from the formal point of view:

Raymond Carver's ending:

L.D. put the shaving bag under his arm again and once more picked up the suitcase. "I just want to say one more thing, Maxine. Listen to me. Remember this," he said. "I love you. I love you no matter what happens. I love you too, Bea. I love you both." He stood there at the door and felt his lips begin to tingle as he looked at them for what, he believed, might be the last time. "Good-bye," he said.

"You call this love, L.D.?" Maxine said. She let go of Bea's hand. She made a fist. Then she shook her head and jammed her hands into her coat pockets. She stared at him and then dropped her eyes to something on the floor near his shoes.

It came to him with a shock that he would remember this night and her like this. He was terrified to think that in the years ahead she might come to resemble a woman he couldn't place, a mute figure in a long coat, standing in the middle of a lighted room with lowered eyes.

"Maxine!" he cried. "Maxine!"

"Is this what love is, L.D.?" she said, fixing her eyes on him. Her eyes were terrible and deep, and he held them as long as he could (*Beginners*, 204-5).

Gordon Lish's version:

L.D. put the shaving bag under his arm and picked up the suitcase.

He said, "I just want to say one more thing."

But then he could not think what it could possibly be (*WWTA*, 134).

Starting with the latter, I think it is a much more realistic ending than the one proposed by Carver. It is the expected ending if we take into account the character's words and behaviour detailed along the story. He does not show any sign of love or affection for his family and feels that he has lost the course of his life, not sure about which step to take next.

He realises that he does not play anymore the role of father and husband in this family as there is a clear lack of communication among them: there is not a quiet conversation on alcohol and nobody gives suggestions to normalise this dysfunctional family situation. Moreover, L.D. is unable to think about what else to say at the end of the story, which proves that he feels lost and is unable to admit his alcohol problems.

With regard to the longer ending of the original story, L.D.'s final attitude shows that he is regretful. We see an earnest love declaration addressed to both his daughter and his long-suffering wife. He is a braver person than the one observed in the edited version since he is able to face reality and to realise how destructive he has been. However, unlike other stories previously analysed, this is a superficial ending (although more touching) because it almost seems ridiculous that in such a brief instant of time, L.D. has been able to find the suitable words to show forgiveness. On the contrary, in the edited version we find a man whose whole life of frustration and misfortune is revealed in a single sketch. Lish again accomplished his goal to depict the underclass of the American society removing all sentimentality and describing it as it is, leaving the reader in a state of grief and despair.

4. Conclusions

To finish, I would like to express some reflections from a more subjective or point of view. The history of literature is full of examples where many writers have shared their skills with other people who, at the same time, have helped them find a place within the literary landscape. These are the editors, who have played a fundamental role regarding some writers' works (Maxwell Perkins in the case of Hemingway or Ezra Pound's editing T.S. Eliot's work). However, editors should be aware of the fact that they are dealing with other writers' work. A book is a piece of art, the result of an arduous task carried out by its author (writers usually revise their writings countless times before giving them to the editor). It should be respected by the editor, whose work should be respectful, and not the prey of a censorial hand.

An editor's traditional work has been technical regarding the editing of writers' work. But never before had the editor's task gone so far. We are facing here a really complex issue and there is disagreement on Lish's work on *Beginners*. While many scholars show themselves disdainful to an editorial transformation which can be considered by some unethical or immoral, if not illegal, Gordon Lish's licence crossed the boundaries and created something new from something which had already been created. Others, however, claim that

Raymond Carver's work would have never been published and, consequently, would have never enjoyed the prestige that being called a "minimalist" offered him. Many critics and experts agree that Lish's work was good and even superior to Carver's, something that reveals that Carver was not the new Chekhov but Lish. Whatever our position may be, we are definitely talking about a completely different book when referring to *WWTA*.

Lish's action showed in a way that he was a writer behind a disguised editor. And what if he used Carver's writings in order to test himself as a writer? Behind Carver's work there was probably a frustrated writer who undoubtedly showed he had enough skills to devote his life to writing.

Writers should take into account the editor's useful opinion on technical matters before publishing their book. However, only the author himself knows the entrails of his own work. Literature is subtle and personal creation, and a small change within a particular part would affect the whole book in a way that only the author would be able to recognize. In this case, because of the editor's aggressive intervention, Carver's creation and his pride must have felt seriously hurt, despite Lish's acknowledged talent as a writer.

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Appendix

Titles of the stories in both books:

- “Why Don’t You Dance?” (*Beginners*) – “Why Don’t You Dance?” (*WWTA*).
- “Where is Everyone?” (*Beginners*) – “Mr Coffee and Mr Fixit” (*WWTA*).
- “Want to See Something?” (*Beginners*) – “I Could See the Smallest Things” (*WWTA*).
- “A Small, Good Thing” (*Beginners*) – “The Bath” (*WWTA*).
- “Tell the Women We’re Going” (*Beginners*) – “Tell the Women We’re Going” (*WWTA*).
- “If It Please You” (*Beginners*) – “After the Denim” (*WWTA*).
- “The Fling” (*Beginners*) – “Sacks” (*WWTA*).
- “One More Things” (*Beginners*) – “One More Things” (*WWTA*).

Point 3.1. General changes:

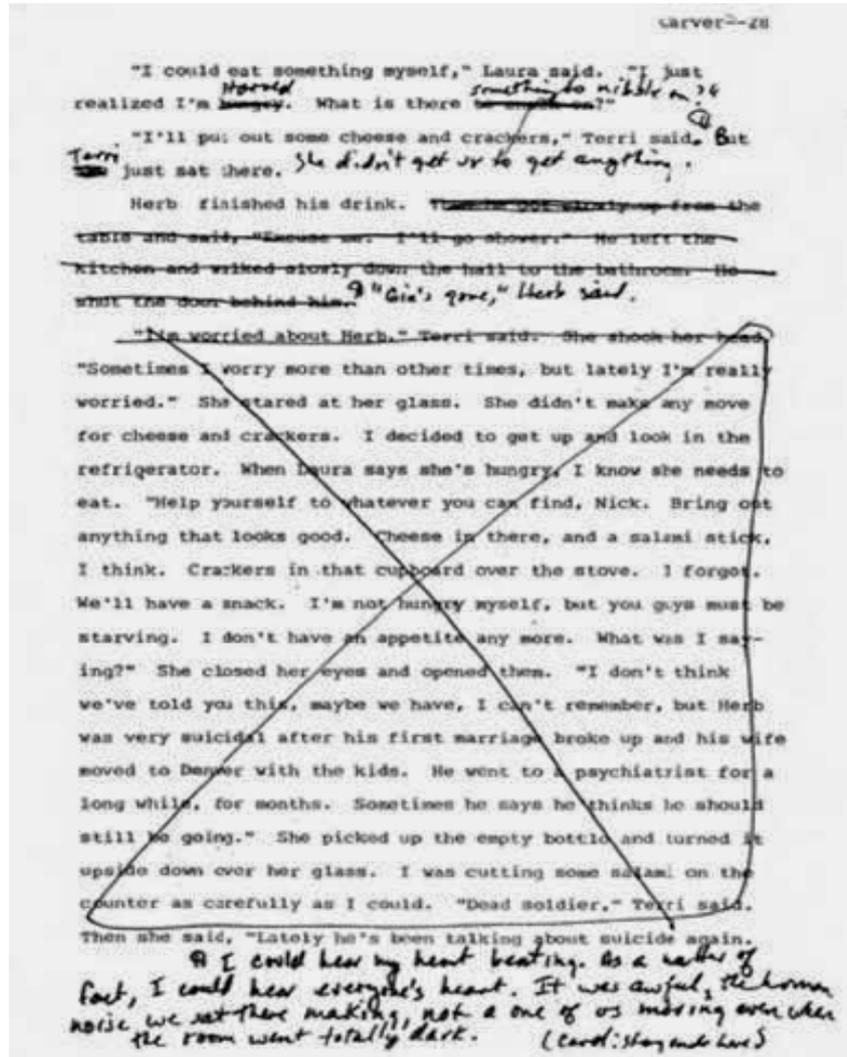
- Lexical changes (temporary references), pp. 10-11.

Example 1: (“A lot has happened since that afternoon), and on the whole things are better now (“Where Is Everyone”, 13)

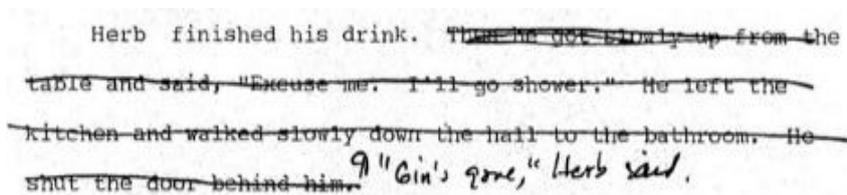
Example 2: “The last time he’d been jailed, a month before that Sunday, I found out from my daughter that her mother had gone bail for him” (“Where Is Everyone”, 14) vs. “His one wife jailed him once. The second one did.” (“Mr Coffee and Mr Fixit”, 14).

Example 3: Ex: “The four of us were sitting around his kitchen table drinking gin. (It was Saturday afternoon). Sunlight filled the kitchen from the big window behind the sink”. (“Beginners”, 179).

Examples of Raymond Carver's manuscripts edited by Gordon Lish:



A page from "Beginners" already edited by Lish.¹



Detail of the previous image.²

¹ Image retrieved from <http://www.criticalletteraria.org/2015/08/principianti-di-raymond-carver-einaudi.html>

² Image retrieved from <http://afflictor.com/2015/05/17/carvers-life-and-work-inspired-faith-not-skepticism/>