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MASCULINITIES IN SELECTED STORIES BY RAYMOND CARVER

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Introduction

Today, many issues regarding manhood, such as navigating masculinity and its evolving nature in the modern world, as well as toxic masculinity and its impact on all genders, are often debated. Despite continuous increase in gender equality, men still struggle with many problems, frequently stemming from rigid masculine norms permeating different spheres of life. Literature can offer a window into how those norms are addressed by men in their everyday realities and how they negotiate their identities. One of the writers offering an interesting insight into masculine issues is Raymond Carver (1938–1988). Despite the passage of time, many depictions of masculinity in his works still seem relevant, making him an author worthy of continued attention. Carver’s fiction feels rather timely, as the current situation in North America and other western countries in some aspects resembles that of his literary works. Similarly to the late 1970s and 1980s (Bimes 1), current western politics seem to be dominated by populism, which results in “[a] turn to conservatism” (Fan 111). An example of this phenomenon can be found in Donald Trump’s presidency between 2017 and 2021. In the 2016 election, the politician attracted more male than female voters by a rather large, “12-point margin” (Tyson & Maniam 2016). This statistic might highlight the appeal of both Trump’s conservative views and his masculine persona—which appears to be

compliant with hegemonic masculinity and often given as an example of 'toxic masculinity' (Ming Liu 2016)—to the dominant male group.

Both eras—the late 1970s and 1980s as well as the 2010s and early 2020s—seem to be defined by instability and uncertainty. The former was defined by the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, and failures of Reaganomics that affected the disadvantaged portion of the population, such as the 1982 recession and 1987 stock market crash (history.com). Today some of the most important world-wide struggles are the Climate Crisis, refugee crises (unrefugees.org), increasing wealth divide (Horowitz et al. pewresearch.org), and numerous problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as loss of employment (bls.gov). Karwowski *et al.* argue that during the times of uncertainty, the population tends to skew towards more conservative politics (17-18). Anxiety caused by unpredictable circumstances “translates into a stronger personal need for closure” which then results into favoring of right-wing political candidates (Karwowski et al. 17-18). One may assume that this turn is towards the comfort of the known and predictable politics of the past, instead of novel solutions which could deepen the feelings of uncertainty.

Gender roles are social and cultural constructs and, accordingly, tend to reflect the general values of the era. Because of this relation, it is worthwhile to analyze literary works of the past which show similarity to the current attitudes towards ideals of masculinity. By doing so, it is possible to observe what challenges the norms of manhood may pose for men today. Therefore, my intention in this article is to examine selected stories by Carver—“They’re Not Your Husband” (1976), “One More Thing” (1981), “Jerry and Molly and Sam” (1976), and “Cathedral” (1983)—from the perspective of masculinity studies.

Raymond Carver was born in 1938 in Clatskanie, Oregon. He came from a mostly working-class background (Hacht & Hayes 260-261). Carver attended Chico State College and a workshop at the University of Iowa. Over the course of his life, he had several blue-collar jobs, which most likely gave him an insight into the various aspects of working class lives he later wrote about in his fiction

(Hart 112). In his private life, Carver struggled with alcoholism and problems within his two marriages. He passed away in 1988, aged 50 (Hacht & Hayes 261).

Carver is generally referred to as a representative of dirty realism. The term, coined by Bill Buford in 1983, refers to a uniquely American phenomenon, distinct from writing from other parts of the world. Dirty realism usually portrays ordinary Americans, such as “waitresses [...], construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys” (Buford [granta.com](#)). According to Buford, these characters are often depicted in the middle of their everyday activities. He also points out that dirty realists capture moments of characters “[being] in trouble” as scenes describing theft and other similar acts are not uncommon. Buford characterizes dirty realist writing as rather simple and “flat”; however, he also argues that, when compared to older realist novels, dirty realist works seem rather stylized. The critic highlights the importance of the minimalist style, which calls the reader’s attention to what is not explicitly described in the story or uttered by its characters (Buford [granta.com](#)). The genre has been compared to the paintings of Edward Hopper (March-Russel 236). The similarities between them are remarkable, as the protagonists of both Hopper’s paintings and dirty realists’ writings seem to be lonely, isolated individuals living in the 20th century America.

Detailed studies of Carver’s fiction by scholars such as Viola Kita (385–394) and Michael Hemmingson (2008) have primarily focused on the convention of dirty realism. Vanessa Hall (173–188) in turn approaches Carver’s stories through the lens of masculinity studies and socioeconomic reality of the 1970s and 1980s. However, while her research is centered on Carver’s constructions of what she refers to as “crisis in masculinity” (Hall 175), in this article I intend to focus on various types of masculinity presented in four stories by the American author through applying the theoretical framework of masculinity studies. In what follows, I attempt to define masculinity, relying, to a large degree, on Raewynn Connell’s works. I attempt to demonstrate how Carver’s

protagonists oscillate between complicit and marginalized masculinities in “They’re Not Your Husband” and “One More Thing” while trying to remain faithful to its traditional models. By contrast, I approach the characters in “Jerry and Molly and Sam” and “Cathedral” as undermining the patriarchal ideals of manhood and performing their masculinities in alternative ways.

Masculinity—Theoretical Considerations

The definitions of masculinity might differ, depending on the field in which the term is used. However, in this article, the focus shall be put on how it is understood through the lens of gender studies. In the *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*, Gabriele Griffin defines masculinity as “traits and qualities conventionally associated with boys and men” (2017) and points out that those can be exemplified by various physiological qualities. Masculinity tends to be seen mostly as a social construct and, as a result, it is regulated “by the norms applied to boys and men in a given culture” (Griffin, *A Dictionary*). Therefore, masculinity has a significant degree of artificiality. It is something that is “produced, and reproduced,” not truly natural (Kimmel et al. 3).

As mentioned earlier, the traits associated with masculinity might differ depending on various factors, such as culture. However, for the purpose of this article, the emphasis will be put on how masculinity is understood in Western countries. The traits defined as masculine enumerated by various researchers quite often overlap. Jodi O’Brien claims in the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* that a considerable portion of literature defines masculine traits as those that “[reflect] agency or instrumentality” (33), for example “tak[ing] control and hav[ing] power” (34). O’Brien also points out other attributes frequently seen as masculine, such as “assertiveness and self-protection” (34). Another source of features traditionally seen as desirable in men is *Bem Sex Role Inventory* in which the author highlights such characteristics as aggressiveness, dominance, individualism, being at ease with making decisions, taking risks and taking a stand, as well as physical fitness (O’Brien 59; Bem

156). The image those features create seem to adhere to a rather monolithic standard.

In her ground-breaking work *Masculinities* (2005), originally published in 1995, Raewynn Connell divides masculinities into four groups: hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, complicit masculinity, and marginalized masculinity. The division of masculinities into categories arose initially from the necessity to recognize different types of manhood; however, it was only the first step. As Connell (76) writes, it is also crucial to “examine the relations between [masculinities]” in order to “keep the analysis dynamic,” as well as prevents the masculinity groups from “collapsing into a character typology”. Therefore, it is important to note that the models of masculinity are not fixed and invariable (76).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was inspired by Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of the relations between social classes (77). The term ‘hegemony’ “refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (77). Therefore, this specific form of masculinity tends to dominate over other types. Hegemonic masculinity is defined “as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the current accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). The men representing the hegemonic model of masculinity are usually those at the top of the hierarchy in branches such as the business world, the army, and government offices (77). Hegemonic masculinity is a fluid concept, prone to change over the years. Connell stresses that it “embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy” (77) of being a man. If the pillars of a certain hegemonic group crumble, a brand-new hegemonic group may emerge and take the place of the previous one (77). Raewynn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt elaborate on this concept in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005). Their approach to this aspect of theory is optimistic, as, in their view, it opens the door for the possibility that one day hegemonic masculinity could

become “more humane [and] less oppressive” (Connell and Messerschmidt 833).

Subordinate masculinity is the second group of masculinities distinguished by Connell. This group operates within the social order in which the hegemonic group is the dominating one. As the scholar suggests, “there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men” (Connell 78). An example illustrating this point is the relation where heterosexual men dominate over homosexual men, a power dynamic which is characteristic of the societies of modern Europe and North America (78). According to the scholar, “gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices” (78) such as excluding the former from the spheres of politics and culture, putting in the position of economic disadvantage, and being targets of prejudice. As one might notice, “oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men” (78). However, it is important to remember that the concept of gayness represents anything that is “symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (78), ranging from personal taste to sexual preferences. As a result, not only gay men but also “some heterosexual men and boys” who share these characteristics can be “expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (79).

The third model of masculinity discussed by Connell is complicit masculinity. As Connell contends, the group of men who actually meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity is, in fact, rather small. However, many men still profit from hegemony, i.e. they “benefit from the patriarchal dividend” (79) and women’s subordinate position in society. The complicit group is rather large, as it refers to “men [who] have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity”. The recognition of “the relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project” is crucial. While complicit men gain from patriarchy, they are not its “frontline troops”. The position of such men is not characterized by conflicts and uncertainties; on the

contrary, it is safe and comfortable. It can be noticed that the complicit group is rarely challenged, as opposed to the hegemonic group (79).

The mechanisms of complicit masculinity are quite intricate and complex. Many areas of “complicit” men’s lives are not characterized by obvious and blatant patriarchal domination and unquestioned authoritative position (79). On the contrary, their everyday reality tends to “involve extensive compromises with women” (79). Men who benefit from patriarchy are often at the same time respectful towards the women they know intimately, such as their family members. According to Connell, complicit men also tend to do their part of housework duties and are providers of income for their households (79-80).

Marginalized masculinity is the fourth, and last, masculinity model introduced by Connell. It differs from hegemonic, subordinate, and complicit masculinities which “are relations internal to the gender order” (80), while marginalized masculinity is influenced by other factors, for example class and race. The term “‘marginalization’ is used here to refer to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes and ethnic groups” (80). In order to discuss marginalized masculinities, it is important to understand the concept of marginalization itself. As a general idea, marginalization may be used to refer to people or groups outside the “‘mainstream society’, [people] living at the margins of those living in the center of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare” (Sciffer & Schatz 6 in Haywood & Johansson 5). As Chris Haywood and Thomas Johansson suggest, the concept can also be understood by means of a simple scale showing whether a person or a group possesses power or not. One of the key criteria of marginalization is a lack of opportunities in various areas of life (Haywood & Johansson 5).

Traditional Masculinities in “They’re Not Your Husband” and “One More Thing”

“They’re Not Your Husband” is a story about a married couple, Earl and Doreen

Ober. Its beginning takes place in a café where Doreen works. While waiting for his order, Earl hears other men's negative comments about his wife's body. The next morning, Earl starts criticizing his wife's appearance and tells her to lose weight. Doreen obediently follows the instructions. As a result, she loses a considerable amount of weight, resulting in, paradoxically, more unhealthy appearance and lack of energy. Earl goes to the café again and asks another man about his opinion on Doreen. Much to Earl's disappointment, the stranger ignores him.

Three models of masculinity can be observed in "They're Not Your Husband": the hegemonic, the marginalized and the complicit ones. Hegemonic masculinity is represented by the two male patrons. They are wearing "business suits" (Carver 1985: 27), which suggests that they might hold important positions, for example in a corporation or a law firm. The men seem to be very confident as they sit comfortably with their elegant, but now nonchalantly disheveled clothing. They also make negative comments about Doreen's figure which, according to them, is too plump (27). These comments can be seen as evidence that these men assume a position of power, which allows them to make judgments about other people's, especially women's, appearance. These remarks also expose the characters' misogyny, as they suggest that the men only see women as physical objects to be looked at.

The character of Earl, on the other hand, seems to occupy a place in-between two types: marginalized and complicit. It can be rather safely assumed that the Ober family are members of the working class. Earl is described in the story as a temporarily unemployed "salesman" (27), therefore, he can be assigned to the marginalized group on the basis of his socio-economic status. Earl's unemployment further highlights his unprivileged position. Another argument in favor of this classification is his attitude towards other men, especially those in higher social positions than his. The lack of reaction to other men's objectifying remarks made about Doreen is surprising. One would expect the husband to be deeply and, as a result, to stand up and start an argument, or

even a fight, in order to defend his wife. Earl, however, stays silent and walks away (28). It may be assumed that the main character is truly intimidated by the visitors. Earl most likely feels inferior to the men holding a higher social and financial status than him. Therefore, he refuses to confront them. The fact that he accepts the men's comments as true also highlights his insecurity. He sees their views as important and lets them change his opinion on his wife's appearance. As the character himself says, "[Doreen's weight] never felt [like] it was a problem before" (28). It is quite clear that the comments he heard about his wife made him reconsider his own previous opinion.

While, as it has been suggested, the main character can be seen as representing marginalized masculinity, this is not the only group he seems to belong to. Earl also displays some characteristics of complicit masculinity. In the story, he assumes a dominant position over his wife. Earl advises Doreen to lose weight, gives her instructions, and measures her on a scale (29). It is important to remember that his concerns with the woman's appearance do not prioritize her health. Earl seems to want Doreen to become thinner so he could appear better in the eyes of other men. It can be assumed that Earl would like Doreen to be a trophy wife, a woman of beautiful, youthful appearance often kept by her partner as a symbol of social status (Stevenson & Waite 1547). However, no matter the reason for Earl's behavior, he still exercises dominance, which seems to be one of the key components of mainstream masculinity. Therefore, he can be seen as partially belonging to the complicit group as well.

Men's authority over women and the objectification of female bodies seem to be the key themes of Carver's short story. The men at the bar make comments about Doreen, such as: "Look at the ass on that. I don't believe it" (27), which is the evidence of male characters' misogynistic attitude towards women. They look at Doreen as a sex object: they stare at her body and harshly judge her appearance. It can be assumed that Doreen is a middle-aged woman, based on the descriptions of visible, grey veins on her thighs. However, the men talk about her as if they wanted all women to stay young forever, just so they

could appeal to the 'male gaze' (Mulvey 19). The term describes, as explained by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, how within patriarchal societies the act of "looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19). This power imbalance leads to objectification and sexualization of women for the sake of a male onlooker's pleasure (19). The men in the story, behave similarly and set unrealistic expectations which cannot be fulfilled. The sexist attitude displayed by the characters is also highlighted by the usage of offensive language. The men refer to Doreen as "quim" (Carver 1985: 27), a vulgar word used to describe a vagina; using a body part name when referring to the woman furthers her dehumanization, objectification, and oversexualization. Men's conduct can be examined through the lens of Timothy Beneke's theory of 'proving manhood,' which argues that sexist behavior allows men to prove their masculinity (41). Beneke states that another way of proving manhood is the use of vulgar or offensive language, as it tends to be thought of as masculine (42). Both elements are illustrated in Carver's story.

Earl's behavior also exemplifies a man's dominance over a woman. Here it is shown through his relationship with his wife, particularly in his encouragement of Doreen's weight loss. In the story, hearing other men's criticism about his wife prompts Earl to take action. The male protagonist tells Doreen: "I think you better give a diet some thought" (Carver 1985: 28) and then continues saying that she "could lose a few pounds" (28). The woman seems to be surprised by Earl's sudden change of attitude towards her appearance, but reluctantly agrees to follow his instructions. This first scene relating to Doreen's weight loss already shows that Earl dominates his wife. He appears to think that his opinion about the woman's looks is more important than her feelings. It is possible to infer that previously she did not think about her weight much and felt comfortable with her appearance. However, Earl's comments seem to spark a feeling of discomfort in Doreen. Earl places more importance on himself, his opinions and feelings, than on those of his wife. This

situation illustrates of the Bergerian notions of the male *surveyor* and the female *surveyed* (Berger 46–47), which refers to the act of a man looking critically at a woman. Quite similarly to Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze, John Berger’s idea points to the power imbalance between men and women regarding looking and being looked at. Berger explains that under patriarchy every aspect of a woman is scrutinized (46). As a result, the woman often internalizes the male gaze which leads her to become both, her own surveyor and surveyed (46). This process can be noticed later in Carver’s story when the couple discuss various diets, none of which seems to be suitable for Doreen. Earl appears to be frustrated and tells the woman to “quit eating [...] for a few days” (Carver 1985: 29). The man’s words seem to be an order and can be seen as yet another example of Earl assuming the position of authority. Given that radical fasting is known to pose significant health risks, Earl’s stance reveals callous lack of concern for his wife.

Earl’s insistence on measuring his wife’s body further emphasizes her objectification and the man’s need to control the female body. He buys a scale for measuring Doreen’s weight, tells her to undress and looks at her body with disgust while weighing her (29). Afterwards, he writes down Doreen’s weight. The whole process is humiliating for the woman. She is made vulnerable by Earl, as she stands before him undressed, subjected to his critical gaze. The husband increases her discomfort further, as he does not answer her questions and stays rather quiet. The scene exemplifies female objectification. As Ann. J. Cahil states in *Overcoming Objectification*, such practices deprive a woman of her humanity and “reduc[e] [her] to mere flesh” (84). When Earl finds Doreen eating breakfast, the man openly expresses his disgust and disappointment at the woman’s behavior. He calls her a “slob” (Carver 1985: 30) and shames her for eating food. While scolding Doreen over fulfilling basic human needs, Earl exercises control over her body

Later in the story, Carver depicts how others see Doreen’s weight loss. Doreen is described as losing a great amount of weight, resulting in the woman

becoming extremely thin, to the point where her clothing no longer fits (30). Doreen's co-workers seem to be worried about the changes in her appearance and behavior (30). Her husband, however, dismisses these concerns. He tells Doreen not to "pay any attention to [her colleagues]" (30), as he possibly does not want his authoritative position to be undermined. Earl says: "they're not your husband. You don't have to live with them" (30) once more asserting his dominance over his wife. He seems to try to establish his opinion as the only one that has any merit and importance.

The story shows that ultimately taking control over a female body does not provide a man with the desired feeling of self-confidence and pride. At the end, Earl once again visits Doreen's workplace and orders food where he ends up sitting next to a man. Earl observes the customer and notices him glancing at Doreen. Interested, he continues watching the other patron and "wait[s] for [him] to say something" (31). It is rather clear that Earl anticipates hearing a comment about his wife's appearance from the stranger. When the man remains quiet, Earl attempts to have a conversation with him about Doreen, similar to the one in the story's beginning. He asks the visitor about the woman in an objectifying and sexist manner: "Don't you think that's something special?" (32) and "Does it look good or not? Tell me" (32). Once again, in the story, the woman is degraded to the position of a sex object with the usage of pronouns such as "that" and "it," usually used for objects and animals. The stranger seems to be uninterested and perhaps even annoyed and uncomfortable. Even though the man appears to be indifferent, Earl goes on speaking in a similar misogynistic manner, as he comments: "look at that ass on her" (32). The comments' distastefulness is amplified by the fact that they are made by a husband about his wife. This type of behavior can be seen as a way for Earl to prove his manhood in front of other men – as Timothy Beneke explains, it is not infrequent for a man to use sexism in order to "prove [his] superiority" (47) and to mask insecurities and lack of assurance about his own masculinity (Beneke 43, 47).

Another example of traditional masculinity can be found in Carver's "One More Thing". It is a tale depicting a family fight between a male character, L.D. with his daughter, Rae. The fight is witnessed, and eventually interrupted, by the mother, Maxine. L.D. and Rae fight over the daughter's beliefs. The father is described as a drunkard, displaying aggressive behavior who, after Maxine's intervention, wants to leave the house—he packs his suitcase and announces his departure. Before stepping out, he seems to want to say his last words. However, he does not know what he should say and the story ends.

It is rather difficult to strictly categorize L.D., as he seems to have the characteristics of both marginalized and complicit masculinities. While not much information about him is given in the story, he most likely belongs to working class. The character is shown to abuse alcohol on regular basis, and the reader may infer that his addiction makes it unlikely for L.D. to have stable employment. Throughout the story it is suggested multiple times that the man is financially dependent on Maxine. The woman is employed (Carver 2009: 130) and pays the rent for the family's accommodation (132). These examples show L.D.'s underprivileged position and highlight his belonging to the marginalized manhood type.

However, L.D. also displays some features of complicit masculinity. The most noticeable one seems to be his desire to dominate the women in his family by such means as physical violence. L.D. partakes in aggressive behavior, such as throwing objects and breaking them, for instance: "he picked up the [pickle] jar and pitched it through the kitchen window" (131). L.D.'s behavior scares the women making them consider calling the authorities. L.D.'s desire for an authoritative position also seems to show through the way he talks to Rae and Maxine. In the story, the man calls his daughter names, degrades her, and refuses to stop his disrespectful behavior despite her request (131).

L.D.'s aggressive attitude towards his daughter and wife highlights his misogyny. The man appears to have a condescending attitude towards Rae's interests, such as astrology and the supernatural. The interest in zodiac signs is

quite often seen as “frivolous” (Kat 2017) and feminine (Waller 3), due to factors such as focus on introspection, media popularity of its female practitioners (Waller 3-4), as well as creating community open to women and, later, other marginalized groups (Beusman 2015), and, quite likely, its irrationality due to the lack of scientific proof. These associations are most likely the reason why L.D. criticizes Rae’s hobby so ferociously. It seems that in his eyes, his daughter’s interests discredit her as a worthy conversation partner: “I can’t take anybody seriously who sits around all day reading astrology magazines” (Carver 2009: 130). Even though the topic of the conversation does not relate in any way to Rae’s interests, her father still uses them to undermine her arguments and opinions and to emphasize the fact he supposedly values reason and logic as is expected of men. However, the father’s behavior described in the story appears to be detached from these masculine ideals, and therefore, emphasize L.D.’s hypocrisy. The male character is shown using abusive expressions, such as threats and insults: “You’re crazy, Rae,” “This is a nuthouse”, throwing objects, and reacting emotionally (131–132). His actions are often noticeably dramatic. For example, in the scene where L.D. announces he is going to leave the family, he keeps on repeating his statements, creating a dramatic effect. After packing his belongings, he repeats similar sentences again. L.D. seems to crave attention and wants to create an impressive exit. As these scenes show, his preference for logic appears to be only superficial.

An important feature of the male character in Carver’s story is suggested by its title—“One More Thing.” The expression comes from the last line of dialogue in the story (134), which is one of its key utterances, and calls attention to L.D.’s characteristics: wanting to be right and not being open to ideas that differ from his own. An example of such an attitude can be noticed right at the beginning of the story, when he refuses to listen to his daughter (130). The father dismisses the girl’s opinions as he tells her: “keep your nose out of things you don’t know anything about” (130). Here, the man seems to use silencing, which, according

to Judith V. Jordan, is a known practice under patriarchy (Jordan 148) that is used by men in order to keep their dominant position (Luke 211). Its usage also suggests L.D.'s unwillingness to have his opinions challenged by others as he wants to always have the last word in the conversation whether in literal speech or physical action. When Maxine informs L.D. that she does not want him to live in their house anymore (Carver 2009: 131), the man, instead of trying to discuss this matter with his partner, resorts to physical violence: he throws a jar through a window, breaking the glass. This situation shows that when L.D. does not have any worthy arguments, he uses physical force in an attempt to win the fight and assert dominance. Another example of such behavior can be found at the end of the story. When L.D. is technically ready to leave the house, he chooses to stand in front of the women in a way that seems potentially intimidating. He wants to say something before his final exit; however, it is soon revealed by the narrator of the story that L.D. does not know what to say (134). This moment shows that the man always wishes to have the last word. The contents of his speech seem not to matter to L.D. as he is only interested in 'winning' an argument.

Another important aspect of L.D.'s character is his penchant for violence or violent and abusive behavior, which is pointed out numerous times in the story. The first aspect that is brought to the reader's attention is L.D.'s alcoholism, which is highlighted in the very first sentence of Carver's story: "Maxine [...] found L.D. drunk again" (130). The narrator describes in detail L.D.'s behaviour under the influence of alcohol: he starts verbal fights (131-132), uses abusive language (131-133), and calls his family members offensive names (131). The man does not control his anger when drunk, leading to violent actions such as throwing a glass jar (131). After witnessing it, Maxine tells Rae to leave the kitchen in case L.D. wants to hurt her. The situation suggests that the man either has physically hurt one of the women before or could potentially do so.

At the end of "One More Thing", L.D. once again behaves in a threatening manner towards the women as he suddenly moves closer to them. Although

Rae and Maxine both step away from the man, Maxine states that she is not scared of him. The man does not do anything more and tries only to say his last words. It is possible that Maxine's declaration both stopped him from continuing his violent actions and surprised him to the point where he does not know what to say and how to react. L.D.'s feeling of masculine entitlement as the head of the family is ultimately challenged by the female voice.

Questioning Masculinity in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral"

"Jerry and Molly and Sam" contains an example of masculine behavior differing from the social norm. The protagonist of the story is Al, a husband and a father. The man is driving around with the family's dog, Suzy, wondering whether to abandon the animal. Al is also thinking about his uncertain life situation, such as unclear job prospects and his love affair. After some time, Al finally lets the dog go. Upon returning home, he sees his family upset and decides to bring the dog back. The story ends ambiguously: Al finds the animal which then walks away from him. It is not clear whether he will come back with it or not.

The main character of "Jerry and Molly and Sam" can be seen as an example of marginalized masculinity. Based on the information Carver gives about Al, one can assume that he is a member of the working class. The company for which the man works is firing its employees, and therefore, his situation appears to be uncertain (Carver 1985: 115). The man seems worried about his financial situation, as his family has moved to a house with expensive rent (115).

The norms of masculinity, such as being assertive (O'Brien 34), decisive, and "willing to take risks" (59), are called into question in several ways in the story. It is important to analyze not only the character of Al and his reactions to certain events, but also the central conflict of the story which can be read metaphorically. On the surface, Carver's story is mainly about a man who wonders whether he should abandon his dog. However, on the metaphorical level, Al's doubts about letting the dog go can be seen as doubts about

abandoning his family. By means of this metaphor, the story explores themes of choosing between one's needs and desires and conforming to the expected social role. Being the head of a family is seen as a traditionally male position (Rosenthal & Marshall 183). Therefore, deciding whether to abandon such a duty can be a stressful process of questioning one's legitimacy as a man.

One of the masculine norms questioned in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" is the ability to make decisions without hesitation which is usually expected of men (O'Brien 59). The protagonist struggles with his decision regarding Suzy, the dog. At first, the man sees abandoning her as the "only [...] solution" (Carver 1985: 115). However, the man seems to start feeling unsure quite quickly, as right before heading out with the dog, he becomes easily irritable and feels the need to comfort himself by smoking cigarettes (118). When driving around, Al once again has doubts. This time he does not know where he should leave the dog and visits numerous places before making the final decision (118-119). After abandoning Suzy, Al is "jumpy and perspiring" (120) and it becomes clear that he doubts the rightness of his action. When Al comes back home, he sees his family members distressed, which causes even more doubt and regret. The character asks himself what he has done, and, while isolating himself in the bathroom, he realizes "how grave exactly was his mistake" (123).

Al is also not "willing to take risks" (O'Brien 59), which opposes the norm of traditionally masculine behavior. This theme is particularly noticeable regarding the relationship dynamics with his family and his lover, Jill. Throughout the story, it can be noticed that Al seems unhappy with his current life. Carver describes the character thinking about his secret relationship with Jill: "he did not want it to go on, and he did not want to break it off" (Carver 1985: 116). Here, once again, Al's problems with making decisions are highlighted. The next sentence—"you don't throw everything overboard in a storm" (116)—seems to point at the character's tendency to avoid difficult dilemmas and fear of taking risk.

Another non-traditional masculine quality which can be observed in the main character is his emotionality. As it was demonstrated earlier, the expression of emotions that could make a man appear weaker such as sadness, doubt, and regret, is generally seen as emasculating and, therefore, negative. The contempt for emotional expression, as well as other traits associated with femininity, usually stems from a mixture of misogyny and homophobia (Connell 2005: 78). Throughout the story, the character displays various emotions such as those mentioned above. Al seems to be starkly different from the masculine ideal as one of its key features is “successful endurance of distress” (Beneke 44). He easily gets angry because of the dog, which urinates inside of the family’s house and destroys their possessions, such as underwear and wires (Carver 1985: 117). He seems to become nervous quickly and lets the dog become the source of his distress: “She’s crazy [...] [a]nd she’s driving me crazy” (117). Al also tends to have strong emotional reactions that follow his actions: for instance, after abandoning the dog, he starts sweating. The narrator of the story also mentions that the main character feels depressed to the point where others could notice it without trying: “it shows all over you, even in the way you light a cigarette” (120-121). Upon his return home and seeing the distress of his children caused by the dog going missing, which manifests in Al having a psychosomatic reaction. He experiences “a fluttery sensation in his stomach” (123), which most likely is nausea caused by a high level of stress that he is not able to control. Overall, the displays of emotions differentiate the protagonist of “Jerry and Molly and Sam” from the cold and distant idea of hegemonic masculinity.

In the Western society, marriage and children are often seen as highly important components of masculinity. Liberska *et al.* (223) highlight that popular in some cultures saying—“the true man should father a son, build a house and plant a tree”—implies the importance of family relationships and stability in the conception of manhood. This idea is also supported by the fact that in the majority of Western cultures men are expected to be the family’s main

providers (Kabeer 3) and protectors. This view is questioned by the main character of the story as he appears to be unhappy in his marriage and is accused by his wife of not loving their children. This reaction, while not uncommon among men, highlights the problems the protagonist has with his role as being a father. According to Adams and Coltrane (231), men often find it difficult to fit within a family due to emotional unavailability and difficulty with nurturing others, which are seen as important in families today. Those fathers' difficulties quite likely stem from following the rules of traditional fatherhood which is rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Katarzyna Suwada (40) highlights that such men "identify their main parental role as that of the economic provider" and do not actively participate in domestic life. As a result, emotional and physical closeness between fathers and their children tends to be very limited. Al's dilemma about abandoning the dog can be seen as a parallel of an inner conflict regarding his family. While it is never explicitly stated in the story, Al seems to be thinking about leaving his family, possibly in order to start a new life with his lover, Jill. However, despite these desires, there is also an aspiration to conform to the masculine ideal within Al. The character, while thinking about abandoning the dog, wonders about himself: "he felt he'd never get over it [...]. A man who would get rid of a little dog wasn't worth a damn. That kind of man would do anything, would stop at nothing" (Carver 1985: 124). In these lines, it is clear that Al builds a rather significant part of his self-worth on being a decent person, as the society wants him to be. However, he still questions the norms and his attempts to conform to them seem to make him unhappy.

The tensions between conforming to the rules of traditional manhood and challenging them is also present in "Cathedral". In this story, Carver uses first-person narration in order to show the events from the point of view of a husband. The protagonist recollects things his wife told him about her friend before his first visit to their home. The blind man, Robert, is the wife's former employer and the two have corresponded with each other using tapes. The wife

comes with Robert from the train station. The three have dinner and watch television together. Robert and the husband become more friendly with each other and watch a program about a cathedral. Robert suggests that he and the husband draw a cathedral together. While drawing the picture, the main character's hand is held by Robert.

It is difficult to categorize the main character and infer to which masculinity model he belongs. It is likely that, similarly to the majority of Carver's characters, he represents either the complicit or marginalized group. Nevertheless, the information given about the protagonist is not specific. He is said not to enjoy his work and being stuck in it, as apparently there is not much possibility to change it (Carver 1985: 440). The man seems rather distant and reserved. According to his wife, he does not have any friends (436). He does not seem interested in Robert's visit either and appears to feel rather uncomfortable when the blind man finally comes to his house (436-438). Throughout the story, the husband experiences a change within himself in regard to the guest.

Robert can be seen as an example of marginalized masculinity given his blindness (434). Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson (174) state that being a man and being disabled are often seen as "[being] in conflict with each other" This common perception comes from the view of disability as a source of dependency on others and the ensuing lack of power (174). As Robert is shown through the eyes of the main male character, to whom he is a stranger, few details are given about him beyond what the wife tells her husband (Carver 1985: 436-437). Overall, Robert seems more open and friendly than the main character.

In "Cathedral" the main character appears to experience a psychological transformation. What prompts the change in the man's attitude is Robert's visit. At first, the protagonist did not seem to be interested in the visit of his wife's friend and is uncomfortable with Robert's blindness, having never met a disabled person before (434). While pitying Robert due to his disability and his

status of a widower, the husband does not seem interested in his wife's stories about the man. Instead, the protagonist quickly gets lost in his thoughts about the strangeness of the situation (437).

The protagonist feels surprised that Robert does not meet his expectations of how a blind person should appear (437). During their first exchange he does not really know "what [...] to say" (438); he seems to feel awkward and is not sure on what topic he should start a conversation. He appears to fixate on the fact that this is his first encounter with a blind person. The husband carefully looks at Robert's appearance and the blind visitor's eyes in particular seem to capture his attention. The man finds them "creepy" (438) as they look and move in an unusual way. Having his expectations about other people's looks and behavior challenged seems to make the character uncomfortable and possibly even anxious. The husband tries to alleviate the tension by proposing alcoholic drinks (439).

The fragments of the story where the three have dinner and a conversation provide the foundation for the change that later occurs when the two men are left alone. When the husband, the wife, and Robert are together, the husband seems to be more of a passive observer rather than an engaged participant (440). He continues observing Robert and is repeatedly surprised by his character. Then, the three move to another room, where the wife and Robert lead the conversation. The husband seems slightly irritated that most of the attention is directed at Robert, and, in his mind, he sarcastically calls the disabled man "a regular blind jack-of-all-trades" (440). The husband seems either to be uninterested in the blind man's questions or not to know how to respond to them (440-441).

The atmosphere between the two men seems to change with the wife leaving the room for a while. Initially, the husband hopes that the woman will come back quickly. However, as she is gone for longer than expected, he suggests to Robert that they smoke cannabis together (441). This moment seems to mark the beginning of a noticeable change in the husband. The

character instructs Robert how to smoke marijuana (441-442). Smoking in general can be seen as an activity of male bonding and it appears to be the case in Carver's story as well. The two men seem to finally be able to relax, most likely both because of the bonding ritual and from the effects of cannabis (441-442).

The aforementioned act of smoking together makes it possible for the two to slowly become more comfortable with each other. The men watch the television and stay silent for some time. It is likely that even though they seem to have grown to be more friendly, they still do not know what they should talk about as they have just met for the first time (443). During a broadcast of a program about cathedrals, the main character asks Robert whether he knows what this type of building looks like. The blind man admits that while he has a basic idea of cathedrals, he is not sure how exactly they look like and asks the other man to describe them. The main character fails to deliver an evocative description. Robert assures him that he does not mind (444-445). Then, Robert proposes that he and the man draw a cathedral together. The scene of drawing the cathedral by the two male characters is a key moment in the story. The two men start drawing together and Robert "closes his hand over [the main character's] hand" (446). This scene can be seen as the protagonist's moment of finding a connection with another human being. Robert suggests the other man "never thought anything like this could happen" to him (446), as if alluding to the lack of connections in the main character's life. Robert proposed that they should add some people to the drawing, saying: "What's a cathedral without people?" (447). One can interpret this utterance as a metaphor; the cathedral appears to be the main character's existence. Robert might be showing him the absurdity of not letting people into his life using the comparison to an empty cathedral as well as an illustration of his own alienation due to the disability. The two keep drawing the cathedral, when the wife wakes up and is surprised at the sight she sees. It is possible that the woman is not used to seeing her husband bond with other people and, especially, touching them (447).

As the ending scenes of the story show, allowing quasi-intimacy between men can be a beginning of personal change. While drawing, Robert tells the main character to close his eyes and puts his hand over the protagonist's hand. The main character thinks to himself that "It was like nothing else in [his] life up to now" (447), suggesting that this is the first time that he has made a real connection with another man. Then Robert asks him to open his eyes and look at the drawing. However, the main character keeps his eyes closed and says: "It's really something" (447). He is most likely referring to the experience he has just had and the connection he made with another person. This theory is highly probable as male-male touch is often discouraged and treated as a taboo in Western societies. While bromance—usually described as male friendship characterized by close emotional and non-sexual intimacy—is often seen as positive, at the same time many displays on male closeness such as touching (Greene goodmenproject.com) or living together, are seen as inherently gay regardless of actual sexual orientation of the men involved (Solomon et al. 284). Moreover, bromances themselves are quite often interpreted as having sexual undertones, especially in fiction, with the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson in many iterations of the story being one of the most prominent examples (Caro Lancho 2013). As male closeness is often seen as a taboo, it is not surprising, that the experience of the main character in Carver's story is unfamiliar and, likely, unexpectedly pleasant. In addition, the fact that the action takes place in a safe, judgment-free environment of the protagonist's home, it makes it possible for him to authentically experience platonic intimacy without homophobic stereotyping. Josef Benson suggests that the fact that Robert is a blind man makes him appear non-threatening to the main character, and therefore, he "does not feel the need to prove his masculinity" anymore (90). This aspect emphasizes the possibility that the protagonist is in a safe place and can open himself up to male friendship. The scene however, can also be seen in a homoerotic context. Such reading of Cathedral has been discussed by Libe García Zarranz in her article "Passionate Fictions: Raymond Carver and

Feminist Theory". The author points to the existence of phallic objects, such as the pen and fingers, which can be used to "revea[l] a latent homoerotic desire between the two men" (28-29). García Zarranz also points to the sexually charged language used by Carver, such as: "his fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper" (Carver 447, García Zarranz 29). In conclusion, both interpretations of the scene can be seen as convincing.

Conclusion

Raymond Carver's stories, while written in the 1970s and 1980s, touch upon many problems still faced by men today. Despite the society's increasing tolerance towards different strategies of embodying manhood, such as legislative measure supporting non-heterosexual men and more diverse media representations of the male gender, many men especially those belonging to various economic, sexual, and racial unprivileged groups still struggle with the norms of traditional masculinity. Carver's fiction offers an insight into these universal dilemmas and highlights areas which need to be addressed in order for manhood to change.

The representations of masculinities in the short stories by Raymond Carver can be divided into two main groups: images of traditional masculinities and depictions which question the traditional norms. This grouping, however, is meant largely to address the main issues of the texts, as it can be noticed that the basic two types of representation often permeate each other. The stories that have been discussed, which represent the first group, are "They're Not Your Husband" and "One More Thing." In these two stories one can notice that the male figures display various characteristics and behavior associated with masculinity. "They're Not Your Husband" presents a husband who is controlling his wife, as he seems to be more interested in what other men think than in the woman's feelings. "One More Thing" depicts a situation which highlights L.D.'s misogyny and disdain for feminine interests, as well as his aggression. Some of the traditionally masculine qualities Carver highlights in these stories are

dominance over women and girls, emotional distance, and preference for logical and rational thinking. The two stories present the darker sides of traditional manhood and its effects on men and their relatives in a critical way. In his stories, as in other works of dirty realism, Carver uses very sparse descriptions, both of surroundings and, more importantly, of feelings. The author's restrained writing seems to correspond to the stereotypical, and therefore fitting social expectations, image of the male gender.

The stories that seem to question the Western norms of masculinity in more explicit ways are "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral." In the former, the main character is faced with a dilemma whether he should abandon his family and express emotions, which is traditionally seen as non-masculine. "Cathedral" depicts a character who undergoes a psychological transformation while learning to emotionally open up to others and allowing himself to be touched by another man. Carver seems to recognize the harmful aspects of traditional masculinity he presents in the stories. "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral" depict men who are more emotional, perhaps truer to themselves than to an unattainable masculine ideal. While Carver does not appear to suggest how exactly masculine norms should change, he seems to notice the importance of emotional expression and honesty to one's own feelings for men. The view of masculinity in "Cathedral" seems quite positive, as it emphasizes the possibility of a positive shift in a man's attitude. It offers a spark of hope and optimism in Carver's usually bleak literary output.

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the analysis of manhood in the stories by Raymond Carver. The first section introduces necessary theoretical background, namely R.W. Connell's theory of four masculinities. Whereas the second and third sections are dedicated to the analysis of Carver's selected fiction on the basis of R.W. Connell's theory. The analysis is split into two parts – the first concerns images of traditional masculinity, while the second presents stories in which the norms of manhood are questioned. The article shows that despite being written in the 1970s and 1980s, the depiction of men's problems remains relevant.