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Raymond Carver Source Integration Essay

Art is a collective work. Much of literature is built upon what the writer has been previously exposed to. Artists and writers could attribute this to the mimetic theory of art; where art is simply a “mirror” of life itself. Through the intricate means of literature one can unfold their life and lay it all out on the table; disclosing any information they never felt inclined to share. Raymond Carver, perhaps one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, emulates this perfectly. He writes fictional tales that recurrently reference topics such as: family, marriage, finances, alcoholism, and self-actualization. Raymond Carver himself grew up in a family where his father worked on a saw mill and his mother did odd jobs to meet ends; reflecting his own financial struggles. He also was divorced and remarried; building his credibility on writing about broken families and finding what the true meaning of love is in relation to marriage. As for alcoholism, he struggled a great deal himself with this addiction; eventually ending up hospitalized. And for self-image we find Carver must have had some trouble with this concept as it appears very often in his work. Raymond Carver, similar to Ernest Hemingway shared quite the few commonalities that established his career and success. He touched upon sensitive subjects and was not afraid to express his insight on delicate matters. His writing inspired many other artists in the future to not only imitate his work, but even today in the 21st century to recapture his messages and bring them to life; or the big screen.

“What We Talk about When We Talk about Love,” one of Raymond Carver’s famous short stories, incorporates the common themes Carver is known to write about; love, marital problems, family troubles, financial stability, alcoholism, and self-actualization. This short story inspired the academy award winning film of 2014, *Birdman*. Even with thirty-three years between these two works, this film does not fall short in delivering the entirety of Carver’s work. *Birdman* portrays a washed up actor struggling to make it big again on Broadway. He internally struggles with an alter ego personality that stars as the antagonist in this film. Reagan’s split personality helps capture Raymond Carver’s underlying theme of what it means to find one’s own self-worth. Reagan, the main character also plays a character in his Broadway production of “What We Talk about When We Talk about Love.” His main character plays the crazy ex-husband that killed himself out of what is described as “love.” While playing through Carver’s short story on stage, the trend of alcoholism is constant. The characters on stage not only drink heavily while discussing marriage and love; but the characters within the film drink simultaneously as well. Reagan, finds himself heavily drinking through his problems and the majority of the scenes are designated in the location of a bar. Every time alcohol is portrayed in the film it is accompanied with violence and aggression. This mirrors the misuse of alcohol that Carver experienced in his own life and in which he incorporated into the majority of his works. Family turmoil is also targeted as a large problem in this film. Within the characters’ lives away from Broadway, Reagan has a daughter from his first marriage and is currently seeing a new woman. Throughout the play in the film the actors are discussing love. Ironically Reagan cannot come to a conclusion on this meaning himself. He still has feelings for his ex-wife and cannot seem to reconnect entirely with the new women he is seeing. He has trouble as well connecting with his daughter and as the film progresses we do not see much progress in the re-establishment

of their relationship until the very open-ended close to the film. The film also manages to include Carver's inclusion of monetary difficulties when Reagan discloses constantly that he is short on money to finance his play and is willing to refinance his house to pay for it, without any regard to his daughter's future. *Birdman* develops a highly unique take on Raymond Carver's work and manages to include all the elements of Carver's writing through the use of intertextuality.

Another popular work by Raymond Carver, "Why Don't You Dance?" inspired many other artists to branch off this story and capture the essence of Carver's work through the production of other films. The award winning short film, "Everything Goes," emulates this story piece by piece. The short film explains the Carver's tale of a man whose significant other walks out on him and the man puts all of his possessions up for sale on his front lawn, arranged in the same layout mirroring the interior of his home. Carver's story continues with a young couple coming with intentions to buy a few things, and then concludes with the couple consumed by alcohol and a strong intimate connection is formed between the old man and young girl through the dance they share. The story reflects all of Carver's favorite subjects of the misuse of alcohol, the ever-so complicated distinction between love and lust, and of course marital problems, accompanied with monetary values as well (the yard sale). The short film also includes all of the inner text allusions in Carver's work; the idea of self-actualization as the man puts his entire life on display for his neighborhood. The man has no shame in putting his life on display and interacting with the young girl signifying his trouble accepting his own self. Carver's short story also inspired the similar plot line of the film, *Everything Goes*, a recent movie starring Will Ferrell. This recent film, as well as the dated short film, assures that Carver's ideas have not gone out of style and still prove to be prevalent in today's time.

As noted before, much of Raymond Carver's success can be attributed to Ernest Hemingway. Without a doubt, the two writers share a similar writing technique. Carver modeled Hemingway's technique by: having open-ended endings to his stories, choosing to omit key details within his work, using a great deal of dialogue between characters, a questionable use of ambiguous pronouns. Carver also wrote much about domestic scenarios and he touched upon sensitive topics, much like abortion within Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants." Although Carver's success should be accredited to Hemingway, this cannot be seen in a negative light. Art, again, is a collective work. It is influenced by previous exposure and inspired by others. Hemingway paved the way just as much as Carver paved the way for many other artists and writers to come.

Mimetic theory of art: the theory that states artists use art as a medium to "mirror" reality. This is exactly what Raymond Carver has done through his works. He has managed to take on every day domestic problems and bring to the surface the turmoil in which families and our own individual selves face. He describes alcoholism as an addiction that fuels the fire and resistance to finding our actual self-worth, and most importantly he tackles the big question of love. Raymond Carver's works were relevant in his time and continue to be now. He inspired present artists to collectively elaborate off of his work and produce new works capitalizing on the commonalities Carver's writing relied heavily on.