

The Politics of Gazes in Raymond Carver's Works:
His Escapism and Establishment of Self-reliance

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As many critics have pointed out Carver's characters' obsession with gazing, the gaze of the characters is an important matter in reading Carver's works. They, however, do not shed light on how the characters' obsession is affected by their mental state. Accordingly, in this thesis, by relating the characters' act of gazing and their mental state, I discuss the changes in Carver's characters' attitude toward the gaze in his oeuvre.

The first chapter discusses the characters' escapism expressed in their voyeuristic gaze in his earlier works written before June 2, 1977, the date on which he stopped drinking. This chapter focuses on his short stories entitled "The Idea," "What Do You Do in San Francisco?" and "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" In the earlier stories, locating themselves in the seer's position, the characters justify themselves as normative by criticizing the others without being criticized by others in a similar way to gazing at TV or movies. Through this voyeuristic gaze, Carver highlights their weakness in escaping from their lives of failure, as if it reflects his lack of self-reliance in those days.

In the second chapter, taking up "The Calm," "Viewfinder" and "Cathedral" from the later works written after 1977, I argue that the one-sided relationship between the seen and the seer collapses. In his later works, with the assistance of others, the characters free themselves from the seen and the seer relationship which clearly divides the self and the others. Under the deconstruction of the relationship of the seen and the seer, as if brightened by the change in Carver's post-recovery life, the characters acquire a life-affirming attitude. It is, however, notable that the characters are not exposed to the direct gaze of others. Their life-affirming attitudes do not derive from the direct gaze at them. He still escaped from the others' gaze defining him due to his lack of a firm self-reliance.

The third chapter focuses on the stories written from 1986 to 1988, the year of his death. Considering mainly "Menudo" in which Carver describes the

character's aggressive affirmation of the view of himself as a failure, the chapter clarifies the way in which the characters acquire self-reliance by dispelling their negative attitude toward the gaze. The narrator in "Menudo" shows the acceptance of his deviational self by affirming the other's criticizing gaze to his eccentric behavior.

In "Menudo," by accepting the other's gaze as defining him, the narrator embraces his failed life as a deviator from social norms. In this attitude, he clarifies his firm self-reliance which enables him to engage in society without the influence of outward values. Whereas the self-reliance of transcendentalism, which suggests an optimistic expectation of human nature, Carver's characters' self-reliance depicted in the last works is realized by the tolerance which enables them to approve of their limitations. In their life-affirming attitude, by which they engage in their hopeless reality, Carver testifies his establishment of a firm self-reliance which he attained in his last years.