

Carver, Raymond (1938-1988)

Encyclopedia Article

Carver, Raymond (1938-1988) by William Shakespeare

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Contents

Carver, Raymond (1938-1988) Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
Carver, Raymond (1938-1988).....	3

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Raymond Carver's success derived as much from the renewed interest in the short story brought about by the publication of *The Stories of John Cheever* in 1978 and the backlash against 1960s metafiction as it did from Carver's own genius. Although considered one of the most recognizable and imitated stylists of his time, Carver was in fact one of a growing number of minimalists whose "dirty realism" came to be associated with (and for some demonstrated the shortcomings of) university writing workshops. What chiefly distinguished Carver's stories from the similarly laconic, uninflected, disquietingly detached, and paratactic work of others was his focusing on the marginal lives of generally working-class characters trying, and often failing, to make do. Carver's semi-autobiographical fiction offered an alternative not only to earlier reports of the deaths of author and character alike but to the pursuit of affluence and the extolling of the entrepreneurial spirit during the Reagan years. The triumph achieved in a number of Carver's later stories was more spiritual than material and even then carefully qualified.