



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**A NEW-HISTORICIST READING OF RAYMOND CARVER'S REPRESENTATION
OF THE WORKING CLASS AND MASCULINITY**

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By

SAMAN SHARIATI-RAD

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment
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Chair: Assoc. Prof. Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, Ph.D.

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

At first glance, Raymond Carver's short stories appear to be preoccupied with personal themes and inside-family relations rather than larger sociocultural issues; however, a closer examination reveals them to be interconnected with the broader narratives of American identity in the second half of the twentieth century. This study seeks to shed light on the mutually constitutive relationship between Carver's fiction on the one hand and the social, cultural, and political movements of his time on the other. Its whole process is premised on the New-Historicist idea that a work of literature not only is molded by the historical discourses of its era, but also is able to fashion its surrounding society. Based on this central principle, any interpretation of a literary text would be incomplete if the critic does not consider the text's association with the group of discourses which have helped shape it and to which the text, in its own turn, has been a forming response. Adopting such a New-Historicist perspective, my dissertation close reads twelve short stories by Raymond Carver along with their surrounding historical "co-texts." In one phase called "historicizing literature," I analyze the moments of progress and regress of 1970s and 1980s America to arrive at a heightened understanding of Carver's fiction. Then, in a second phase named "textualizing history," I examine Carver's work to better comprehend the society and culture within which it was produced and received.

To evaluate the relationship between Carver's short stories and their historical positioning, my dissertation selects the two issues of "class" and "gender" as its main lenses of survey. However, since these two components of social identity cover vast areas, I pare them down to the subjects of the "working class" and "masculinity" to be able to respond to more focused questions. It must be noted that in Carver's fiction these two topics are related, as the author's depictions of the working class mostly revolve around the lives of some male characters.

As my first objective in this thesis, I identify those working class and masculinity discourses of the American 1970s and 1980s which actively participated in shaping Carver's short stories. This investigation finally reveals the ways in which Carver's literary production was co-opted to serve the construction of social and political power in the United States. Then as a second objective, I determine the dissident discourses of the working class and masculinity injected by Carver's 1970s and 1980s short stories into the sociocultural arenas of the era. By analyzing how actively Carver's fiction participated in making cultural meanings and values, this section of my study unlocks the secret power of the literary text. It also shows how Carver helped to correct and improve the too often static and ideologically motivated portrayals of America's working-class masculinity. Lastly, following my third objective, I delineate Carver's typical image of the "working-class man" of 1970s and 1980s America. This last part of my research is the proof of the author's ability in making the narratives of working-class men in the United States more sympathetic, relatable, realistic, and humane.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**ANALISIS "NEW HISTORICISM" TERHADAP REPRESENTASI KELAS
PEKERJA DAN MASKULINITI DALAM CERPEN TERPILIH OLEH
RAYMOND CARVER**

Oleh

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Sekali imbas, cerpen karya Raymond Carver kelihatan berlegar dengan tema peribadi dan hubungan di dalam keluarga dan kurang menyentuh isu-isu sosiobudaya yang lebih luas, namun begitu penelitian terperinci telah mendedahkan bahawa cerpen beliau adalah saling berkaitan dengan naratif identiti Amerika pada separuh abad kedua puluh. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan pandangan terhadap hubungan saling konstitutif di antara fiksyen Carver dan pergerakan sosial, budaya dan politik pada zamannya. Keseluruhan proses kajian ini adalah berdasarkan kepada idea historis baharu bahawa karya sastera bukan sahaja dibentuk oleh wacana era sejarahnya, tetapi juga mampu mewarnai masyarakat sekitarnya. Berdasarkan prinsip ini, sebarang tafsiran terhadap teks sastera tidak akan lengkap jika pengkritik tidak menerima kesatuan teks dengan kumpulan wacana yang telah membantu pembentukannya dan mana-mana teks yang membentuk tidakbalas terhadapnya. Berdasarkan perspektif New Historicism ini, saya telah menganalisis dengan teliti sebanyak dua belas cerpen oleh Carver selari dengan persekitaran sejarah "ko-teks" dalam satu fasa yang dikenali sebagai "historicizing literature." Saya juga menganalisis zaman maju dan mundurnya Amerika sekitar tahun 1970-an dan 1980-an untuk menghasilkan pemahaman yang tinggi terhadap fiksyen Carver. Kemudian, dalam fasa kedua yang dinamakan "textualizing history," saya mengkaji karya-karya Carver untuk lebih memahami masyarakat dan budaya Amerika semasa ia dihasilkan.

Untuk menilai hubungan antara cerpen Carver dan kedudukan sejarah mereka, dalam disertasi ini saya memilih isu-isu kelas dan jender sebagai fokus utama kajian. Walau bagaimanapun, kerana kedua-dua komponen identiti sosial ini meliputi kawasan yang luas, saya khususkan kepada "kelas pekerja" dan "maskuliniti" untuk

menjawab persoalan-persoalan tertentu. Kedua-dua topik ini berkaitan dalam fiksyen Carver yang memberikan gambaran beliau terhadap kelas pekerja yang kebanyakannya berkisar kepada kehidupan kaum lelaki.

Objektif pertama tesis saya adalah untuk mengenalpasti wacana kelas pekerja dan maskuliniti pada tahun 1970an dan 1980an Amerika yang sangat aktif dalam membentuk cerpen-cerpen Carver. Kajian ini akhirnya mendedahkan pelbagai cara hasil karya sastra memberikan sumbangan terhadap pembinaan kuasa sosial dan politik di Amerika. Seterusnya objektif kedua, saya meneliti wacana penentangan kelas pekerja dan maskuliniti yang terdapat dalam cerpen Carver ini menambah kepada pembentukan ideologi sosiobudaya mereka pada era tersebut. Dengan menganalisis cara fiksyen Carver mengambil bahagian dalam membentuk budaya yang bermakna secara langsung dan secara aktif, kajian ini juga dapat merungkai rahsia kuasa teks sastra. Akhir sekali, saya cuba menggambarkan imej tipikal Carver terhadap "lelaki kelas pekerja" Amerika pada tahun 1970-an dan 1980-an.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 27 August 2014 to conduct the final examination of Saman Shariatirad on his thesis entitled "A New-Historicist Reading of Raymond Carver's Representation of the Working Class and Masculinity" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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