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ON CARVER: WILL YOU PLEASE READ THE SILENCES, PLEASE?

The following abstract is from a research report with the above title submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report by Victoria Elizabeth Buchanan Thomas.

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ABSTRACT

Literary criticism on the short fiction of Raymond Carver investigates frequently the narrative omissions whereby Carver renders the plight of middle and lower class America. Neither exclusively formal nor exclusively thematic critiques of Carver's short stories explicate adequately the purposes and effects of these narrative omissions. This study, which is framed by Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theories of 'negation and 'negativity', and Michael Fried's notion of aesthetic 'absorption', provides a formal and thematic reading of eight of Carver's stories. This study argues that the reader's investments in these omissions generate various indices of sympathetic identification. In tandem with such an inquiry, this study also examines the apparent antagonism between the realist and postmodernist strains discernible across Carver's narratives. This antagonism is caused by Carver's omissions, which simultaneously create the illusion of mimetic transparency and negate this transparency. The omissions that operate across Carver's stories make the reader conscious not only of how he or she interprets the author's words, but also how he or she interprets the world. Carver's neo-realism, this study proposes, therefore has a far greater potential for social realism than traditional modes of realist representation.