



## A New Path to the Waterfall

*Raymond Carver , Tess Gallagher (Introduction)*

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**A New Path to the Waterfall** Raymond Carver , Tess Gallagher (Introduction)

Raymond Carver, author of *Where I'm Calling From*, is widely considered one of the great short story writers of our time. *A New Path to the Waterfall* was Carver's last book, and shows a writer telling the truth as best as he knows how in the time left to him. The sixty-odd poems in this collection are linked by Carver with selections from other writers, most notably Chekhov, whose work was an inspiration and a guide, and by the cumulative force of the life and death questions he poses in them. As Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* guided countless readers discovering their true love and work, Carver's book will guide those in the process of celebrating a limited life and mourning the inescapable end of it. *A New Path to the Waterfall* is an essential book for those who admire Carver's work, and testament to the transcendent strength of the human spirit. In her introductory essay, Tess Gallagher, Carver's companion and fellow writer, lays out the circumstances of their last years together with matter-of-fact grace.

### A New Path to the Waterfall Details

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## From Reader Review A New Path to the Waterfall for online ebook

### g says

Want to read this because of the coda, "Late Fragments" that was mentioned on HMH LiT Tumblr (<http://hmhbooks.tumblr.com/post/72621...>)

And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.

---

### Janice says

this probably got an extra star because it was carver's last book, and you can feel his urgency, his intensity, his candle burning bright before the dawn. that said, after reading the introduction, which i read last, i see what they were trying to do with all the quotes from chekhov and others, but while reading it just felt like annoying filler.

also, the poems in here are uneven in terms of quality, but it is worth it for the ones at the top of the scale.

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### Priya Sharma says

I know nothing about poetry. I couldn't explain why a poem is "good" or "bad" to save my life. There were things in here that I loved though, which made me cry all the more when I went back and read the introduction and learnt of Carver's fate.

#### Late Fragment

And did you get what you what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.

---

### Steve says

I think Carver, if he had lived, could of been a good poet. There are some good poems in *A New Path to the Waterfall*, but there are also some bad ones, ones that could of been cut down (like in half), and just plain old

blocks of prose (and I'm flexible on that). This collection was ambitious in design, as it is broken up by recast passages from the writings (mainly) of Chekhov that are meant to portray the great Russian writer as a poet at heart. You'll get no argument from me. These passages are terrific, and are no doubt meant to establish kinship with the modern day American Chekhov -- Carver. The problem is that Carver's offerings are so uneven. But I think this is forgivable, since Carver was dying at the time. Tess Gallagher lays all of this out (Chekhov, Carver's sickness, the design of the collection, Carver's own interest in poetry), in an eloquent introduction that is as much a part of the book as Carver's writings, Chekhov's passages, etc. If Carver had lived, I have no doubt that he would have polished many of these poems a great deal more. As it stands now, it is a writer's last efforts against the fading light. We must be thankful for what we have.

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### **Guillermo Macbeth says**

Poesía incandescente. La intensidad de lo lírico rompe cualquier esquema. Parece que hay una estrategia y que está rota. En ese fracaso quizás anide el éxito del minimalismo. La estrategia de lo simple, lo directo, del aplanamiento del lenguaje sobre los pliegues de lo inmediato, produce en Carver un efecto paradójico. En vez de reducir, amplifica. Si sus cuentos son fulminantes para nosotros sus lectores víctimas, estas poesías, más implacables todavía, no conceden nada, ni la conciencia de ser lector víctima. Son versos de un Chéjov borracho, crudo, fracasado, resignado, conectado a la vida sólo por un invisible hilo luminoso hecho de palabras inquietantes. "Así eran las cosas. La verdad, es que no hay mucho más que / decir." (p. 86). "Apagamos / las luces y nos metimos en la cama y quedamos en silencio. / El silencio de una casa en la que nadie puede dormir." (p. 67). "Miro la cámara. / Mi sonrisa se hace de sal. Una sal / donde estoy de pie." (p. 34). ¿Es Carver como la Edith del Génesis?, ¿está Orfeo en su genealogía directa? Creo que estas fisuras tienen sentido.

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### **Julene says**

I wept while reading the intro to this book. Tess Gallagher put together Raymond Carver's poems after his death and wrote about the experience. What an amazing memorial to him and to their relationship. He had cancer and knew he was dying and she stayed with him till the end. Carver was famous for his fiction but his poetry is not to be missed, my favorite is the famous line (I'm paraphrasing here) "everything after that was gravy." It has to do with the knowing he was dying and the time he had before his death. It's classic Carver. It's all gravy this life, what a great metaphor.

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### **Dan Siney says**

I'm incapable of explaining how much I love this book and this author.

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### **Geoff says**

I love Carver's stories as much as anyone, but man do these poems stink. I've given the collection two stars because there is a compelling, touching quality in these heartfelt confessions, but they're really not at all good.

## Arick says

while his poetry isn't as stellar as his prose, Carver is still a force to be reckoned with. The poems that ended this volume... powerful stuff... to actually read this man accepting his death is incredible. With that said, don't start here if you are just getting into Carver. Do some short stories, then migrate to his poetry. This book made me cry. Well done.

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## Robert Isenberg says

An impulse buy (of \$1.50 at the library), "Waterfall" is a priceless addition to my bookshelf. I've long love Carver's stories (starting with "Cathedral"), and I had no idea that he wrote poetry before his death in the late 1980's. More surprising still, "Waterfall" is his final collection, a kind of homage to his own life and thoughts. His wife, Tess Gallagher, seems to have assembled it posthumously, and every poem has the urgency of waning days. Some startling quotes from Chekhov are scattered throughout the book, and each snippet is better than any of his full-length plays. Haunting work, especially the last piece, which is etched on his tombstone.

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## Armand says

In one of the poems in Raymond Carver's "A New Path to the Waterfall ", called "His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed with Notes", Ray Carver describes provides a list of short, written fragments found in someone's bathrobe pockets. To whom the bathrobe belongs to is a bit unclear. Butn I suspect it's supposed to be Ray Carver himself. In the poem, the notes in his pockets cover everything from personal memories, to a recollection of a Belgian painter, to Star Trek, and in many ways, that's what "A New Path to the Waterfall" is: a hodgepodge blend of the personal, the historic, the artistic, and the fantastic , including poems by Carver (loosely grouped by themes), translated works by other poets, snippets of Chekhov, and an introduction by Carver's second (?) wife, the writer Tess Gallagher. Her moving introduction tells the story of his death.

And- sadly- I have to admit that it really didn't grab me . This is unfortunate because I'm a big fan of his short fiction, although not entirely unpredictable, since I don't have much of a taste for poetry. I tried most of the poems in the book and some seemed more like journal entries, some of the longer ones lost me (I may have been trying too hard to find a theme), and the ones that I really liked tended to be the ones that weren't written by Carver to begin with (My favorite poem in the book is a translation of a Czeslaw Milosz poem). Of course, I was moved by Tess Gallagher's introduction, and there were some beautiful images and occasional world-wise phrasing that only Carver could produce, but overall the book just didn't pull me in me in the way I had hoped.

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## Chandler Chandler says

Love Carver. Hands down he's my favorite author. I love his funny reflections on his former life of heavy drinking. He never quit smoking though which lead to his death. Since it's written by Carver when he knows

he's dying, it's also very powerful.  
It includes my favorite poem:  
No other word will do. For that's what it was.  
Gravy.  
Gravy, these past ten years.  
Alive, sober, working, loving, and  
being loved by a good woman. Eleven years  
ago he was told he had six months to live  
at the rate he was going. And he was going  
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways  
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?  
After that it was all gravy, every minute  
of it, up to and including when he was told about,  
well, some things that were breaking down and  
building up inside his head. "Don't weep for me,"  
he said to his friends. "I'm a lucky man.  
I've had ten years longer than I or anyone  
expected. Pure Gravy. And don't forget it

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### **Tyler Jones says**

It is a testament to Carver's commitment to poetry that this book even exists. He knew the end was getting near, and he continued to send us these reports; *this is how it feels, this is what it's like...*  
As honest and powerful as the prose he is more well known for.

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### **Northpapers says**

Sometimes, briefly, I wish I could separate concerns about craftsmanship from emotional impact. Shortly after those times, I usually think about how deeply intertwined the two are, and how that distinction is maybe a stupid one to make, because ideally, art makes interesting use of the overlap.

No author sits as neatly at the tense point between those two concerns than Raymond Carver the poet. And no collection of his work better embodies his no-frills depiction of deep emotional currents than this one, where he reckons with his own death in the months before he dies of cancer. And that context inevitably sparks dramatic feeling that can cloud the critical eye.

Anyway, I'm not a critic. I like to like what I read. And here were the dying words of one of my favorite writers.

I felt, sometimes, that he could have approached his subjects with a little more restraint or that he could have developed others. Some of the punches landed a little bluntly. But that's part of the process of staring down your own death.

Tess Gallagher's introduction is beautiful, stirring, and integral to the book. There are several very good poems here. My favorites were, "Two Worlds," "The Moon, The Train," "The Letter," and "What the Doctor Said." Finally, I found the impact of "Late Fragment" irresistible. I cried.

## David Schaafsma says

### The Human Heart, That Old Port

Raymond Carver was one of the best short story writers of all time. He came from a chaotic working class family, with a violent alcoholic father. He himself pretty much destroyed his life through alcohol abuse, and many of his stories emerged out of that life and his experiences with AA. He was married at 19, had three kids by the time he was 23, and early on admits he made “full-time drinking as a serious pursuit.” He was dead by fifty, but ten years before he died he gave up booze, and met the poet Tess Gallagher. This poem is in the collection *A New Path to the Waterfall*, his last book, a collection of poems:

Gravy

No other word will do. For that’s what it was.

Gravy.

Gravy, these past ten years.

Alive, sober, working, loving, and  
being loved by a good woman. Eleven years  
ago he was told he had six months to live  
at the rate he was going. And he was going  
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways  
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?

After that it was all gravy, every minute  
of it, up to and including when he was told about,  
well, some things that were breaking down and  
building up inside his head. “Don’t weep for me,”  
he said to his friends. “I’m a lucky man.  
I’ve had ten years longer than I or anyone  
expected. Pure Gravy. And don’t forget it.”

I was never a big fan of Carver's poetry, but I was rereading some of his short story collections recently and at a used book sale found a copy of this beautiful boxed hardcover edition of his poems, just 200 copies of the edition produced posthumously and signed by his wife Tess Gallagher. (Mine’s #95; I knew you just had to know). It’s a gorgeous artifact, in other words. I soon after read a lovely review by Ilse of another collection of his poetry, so immediately began reading this. Synchronicity! Sometimes there is a time when a book is just telling you to read it. It gave me the opportunity to re-evaluate his poetry and see him again, at the end, still writing, facing death.

In short, I think this is Carver’s best collection of poetry. Gallagher, in her fine introduction, argues for Carver as poet, though early on he admits he just wrote poem-like things when he wasn’t doing the thing he really wanted to do, fiction. These are often story poems, but there’s a lyricism here and there in these poems that I didn’t find in his early poetry. His basic writing aesthetic is a kind of brutally honest realism, no sentimental affectations or flowery prose. Tough. And he keeps to that here, largely, but he’s somewhat softened by the love of his life in his last years, I think. Here he speaks of resources he turns to for his poems:

“It was all or nothing. Lightening, water,  
Fish, cigarettes, cards, machinery,  
The human heart, that old port

Even the woman's lips against  
The receiver, even that.  
The curl of her lip."

This follows in part from the advice of his mentor, Chekov:

"Be sure not to discuss your hero's state of mind. Make it clear from his actions."

That old saw: Show, don't tell.

Well, I don't love all the poetry, but I like in these late poems the better blending—for my tastes—of the lyrical with the commonplace, of the straightforward, no-nonsense language with the sudden insight. The poems sometimes echo the force of his best stories. There's heart in them.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this particular book is the conversation it has with other writers throughout, though especially Chekhov, placing excerpts from these writers' works between some of the poems. Maybe when many of us read, we read with our lives, we weigh our experiences against what we read, we heal ourselves sometimes through reading, as Carver certainly does in this book. In this collection, Carver teaches us how to face the darkness, with love and grace. In the process he visits some of his past experiences (his father, his ex-wife, his son, his drunken nights) and his present struggles with cancer, revived every day by the writing, and by Tess, as he would seem to suggest in this selection from Chekhov:

". . . and with a burning pain in my heart I realized how unnecessary, how petty, and how deceptive all that had hindered us from loving was. I understood that when you love you must either, in your reasonings about that love, start from what is highest, from what is more important than happiness or unhappiness, sin or virtue in their accepted meaning, or you must not reason at all."

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