EN 205 WI – Short-essay assignment #1:

Carver’s “Commonplace But Precise Language” and “Cathedral”

Purpose of assignment: To demonstrate understanding of an author’s style.

Taken from a longer piece of writing by Carver, “Commonplace” makes clear his thoughts on the “minimalist” tag given to him by his contemporary literary scholars. Furthermore, he places his style of writing firmly within the tradition of long-established Realist authors such as Isaac Babel and Henry James. In particular, he states, “It’s possible, in a poem or short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring—with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader’s spine…” (109).

Review all of Carver’s thoughts from this essay and then, using “Cathedral” as your source material (and you are welcome, but not required, to read and include other Carver stories), discuss how his fiction shows him practicing what he advocates. Your essay must include an introduction, at least one body paragraph and a conclusion, be at least three hundred words long and include direct quotations both from the story and from Carver’s essay, cited using MLA format. This essay must be submitted to etutoring, and then taken to the Writing Center for review once the e-tutor’s comment are received.

Some things to consider:

How does Carver’s stylistic choice reveal itself in the setting? The point of view? In fact, use any and all of the Elements of Fiction as a means of analyzing and evaluating Carver and his fiction.

Due date: one week from today