

**University of Alberta, Canada**

**Christine Wiesenthal**

**The ‘impossible truth’ of writing off the subject: Anne Carson’s decreation poetics and ‘The glass essay’**

Abstract:

Advocating a poetics of ‘decreation’ committed to ‘getting Me out of the way’, the experimental poet and classicist Anne Carson has typically invented strangely hybrid, trans-generic forms that resist and subvert conceptions of self, subject, or even an agential ‘center’. Yet auto / biographical questions are foundational to her work, even as it seeks to depart from conventional life writing forms. Taking up the troublesome problem of ‘Me’ in Carson’s work, this article attends specifically to the emergence of Carson’s decreation poetics in ‘The Glass Essay’ (1995). It examines the process of (self) decreation as a relational, anti-subjectivist proposition and as a textual phenomenon that ultimately poses intractable paradoxes for readers, including the paradox of a ‘dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work, and the teller disappears into the telling’ (Carson 2005: 173).

Biographical note:

Christine Wiesenthal is a Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, where she teaches in the areas of Creative Writing and contemporary Canadian literature. Her books include works of literary criticism, poetry, biography, and an edited collected of poetry.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Anne Carson – autobiographical poetics – subjectivity – decreation

My personal poetry is a failure.

I do not want to be a person.

I want to be unbearable.

(Anne Carson 'Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions' (in *Decreation* 2005))

It may not be entirely coincidental that autobiography has emerged as one of the most popular cultural practices in our precarious times, insofar as it also poses an *inherently* troubled mode. Indeed, as Caren Kaplan reminds us, 'autobiograph[y] ... differs ... from that of other Western genres in that its 'troubles' seem to define it' (1992: 115). Kaplan has in mind longstanding debates around authenticity affecting perceptions of autobiography's literary value, but we could also trace life writing's troubles to the writing subject in the first place, 'that creature enclosed in self and defined by self' (Carson 2005: 179): the apparently autonomous, 'rational and representative 'I'' (Gilmore 2001: 2). As a stream of writers, philosophers and feminists from the genre's Enlightenment roots to our own post-humanist era remind us, we are our own biggest problem, especially where it comes to getting our 'I's' out of the way.<sup>1</sup>

As my epigraph suggests, Canadian experimental poet, translator and classicist Anne Carson ranks among those seeking to decenter the autobiographical subject – to resist what she deems the 'failure' of the personal mode, the limitations of even the conceptual category of personhood, to become instead something '*un*-bearable'. To this end, the long and prolific arc of Carson's career across a number of wildly unconventional hybrid works 'has always been an exercise in reinvigorating the clichés of autobiography' (O'Rourke 2010), in effect 'moving away from recognizably autobiographical forms even [while] engag[ing] autobiography's central questions' (Gilmore 2001: 7). Like a guttering candle, 'the Me is a kind of interesting flicker' throughout Carson's texts (Wachtel 2011: 46). Typically, her productions merge poetry, literary criticism, translation, fictional autobiography or other prose forms in a 'genre-averse approach to writing' that often confounds critics (Rae 2011: 162). From early works such as the long poem, 'The Glass Essay', to more recent formal experiments, such as the multi-media elegy, *Nox* (2010) or the loose folios of *Float* (2016), however, Carson autopsies shards of her lived experience in discontinuous, fragmentary, and recurrent ways that resonate today with topical questions, including, for example, the 'under-explored' field of 'serial autobiography' (Chansky 2017: 151).

As Meghan O'Rourke notes, Carson's 'autobiographical writing is always offset by some other story', 'refracted' especially through 'her vast knowledge of classical literature' and literary history more generally, as a scholar and translator of immense reach (2010). In 'The Glass Essay', in particular, autobiographical details of the speaker's life are set against details from the life and work of Emily Bronte (and Bronte's posthumous reconstructions by various biographical hands), generating a complex play of transparency and reflection, sameness and difference, that is visually captured by the text's governing metaphors of glass and ice. Refracting also the speaker's relationship with her elderly mother in the narrative present, the poem unfolds as an intercalated layering wherein 'distinctions' between multiple identities, as well as

distinctions between truth and fiction, dream and reality, conjecture and fact, eventually ‘seem to flatten and coalesce’ (Carson 1995: 24).<sup>2</sup>

Carson is herself the first to acknowledge that attempts to trouble, upend, or (as I will call it) write off the subject are not in themselves a unique aim. As she writes in ‘The Glass Essay’: ‘My questions were not original. / Nor did I answer them’ (1995: 17). She is echoing the musician John Cage, in fact, when she speaks of her aspiration ‘to get every Me out of the way’, and thereby examine her subject matter ‘without getting [her] own fingerprints all over it’ (Wachtel 2011: 46, 39). But while Carson in this respect has wide company within both autobiography’s ‘richly experimental’ past (Gilmore 2001: 10) and the contemporary *avant garde*, her particular method or ‘program for getting the self out of the way’ is original. *Decreation* is the term Carson borrows from the philosopher Simone Weil to encapsulate her inventively resistant autobiographical practice. As she notes of her source in *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*:

Simone Weil was also a person who wanted to get herself out of the way so as to arrive at God. ‘The self’ she says, in one of her notebooks, ‘is only a shadow projected by sin and error which block’s God’s light and which I take for a Being’. She had a program for getting self out of the way which she called ‘decreation’. This word is a neologism to which she did not give an exact definition nor a consistent spelling. ‘To undo the creature in us’, is one of the ways she describes its aim (2005: 167).

Drawing also on precursors such as Sappho and the medieval heretic Marguerite Porete, Carson’s decreation poetics envisions a form of ‘*ek-stasis* (literally standing outside oneself)’ (2005: 161) influenced as much by feminist mysticism as by Carson’s own thoroughly postmodern epistemologies. Importantly, ‘to decreate [is] not to destroy’ (178): it is rather, to ‘*create* a sort of dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work and the teller disappears into the telling’ (173). For Carson, then, decreation is specifically a textual or representational process, ‘an impossible motion possible only in writing’ (179). Decreation in this sense is thus not equivalent to a kind of ‘annihilation of the self’ ‘in the Romantic tradition of the sublime’, as it has sometimes been described (Pollock 2008).<sup>3</sup> Rather, as Dan Disney has argued, it is a fundamentally ironic form of self-eclipse that ‘exalts in [its] own alterity while *subverting* conventional discourses of the sublime’ (2012: 25-6).

Although Carson’s own take on decreation poetics is most fully developed in her book of that title, it is, as I hope to show, already emergent in earlier texts such as ‘The Glass Essay’. In works such as ‘The Glass Essay’, a lyric essay ‘about love and its necessities’ (1995: 11), Carson’s ironic subversion of the sublime self extends to encompass discourses of Romanticism and ‘spiritual melodrama’ (1995: 37) more generally. Above all, ‘The Glass Essay’ clearly reflects (pardon the pun) Carson’s recognition that any self-displacement sought by way of decreative *ek-stasis* will involve ‘some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction’, a ‘*dream* of distance’, as she puts it, that always marks the goal of self-transcendence as literally ‘*un-bearable*’ – an unsupportable or unsustainable fantasy (2005: 171, emphasis added). In ‘The Glass Essay’, no less than in *Decreation*, Carson’s project to write off the subject ultimately poses an intractable paradox. At the same time, however, it also encodes a theory of

subjectivity inventive in its emphasis on relationality – and, finally, in its own ironic, ungodly way, an anti-subjectivist ethos that is uniquely daring too.

\*

‘To be a writer’, as Carson writes in *Decreation*

is to construct a big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice and any claim to be intent on annihilating this self while still continuing to write and give voice to writing must involve the writer in some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction ... To tell is a function of self’. Obviously, for a writer who aspires to ‘get every Me out of the way ... [t]his situation is a big problem’ (2005: 171-2).

It is precisely such an ‘act of subterfuge’ that Carson attempts to negotiate in ‘The Glass Essay’, the most acclaimed work from her 1995 collection, *Glass, Irony, and God*, by introducing, and then immediately beclouding, such ‘a big, loud, shiny centre of self’. The love-troubled autobiographical ‘I’ who addresses us in the poem’s opening sequence (entitled ‘I’) remains unnamed throughout as she recounts the aftermath of a love affair with a man she names only as ‘Law’. This train wreck of lost love emerges in splinters, told while the autobiographical ‘I’ has returned to her mother’s home to lick her wounds; it is a narrative interspliced with both critical meditations on the speaker’s ‘favorite author’, Emily Bronte, and descriptive domestic scenes, in the narrative present, of the mother-daughter relationship – another essential form of ‘love and its necessities’ examined in this particular poetic looking glass. The poem’s rapidly fissuring foci is underlined for readers by the titles of its opening sequences, which proceed from ‘I’ to ‘She’ to ‘Three’, by which time, the ‘three silent women at the kitchen table’ include the speaker, her mother, and ‘Emily p. 216 propped open on the sugarbowl’ (1995: 2).

*Decreation* thus begins here with the swift establishment of a constantly shifting centre of focus, a triangular design Carson’s work consistently employs to explore circuits of desire (1986: 13, 16-18). This shift is accompanied by analogous swerves in the tone and narrative stance of the ‘I’ as she moves through her lived experiences. On the one hand, for example, ‘The Glass Essay’s’ ‘I’ enquires into the nature of ‘love’ and ‘anger’ with the calculating dispassion of an anthropologist. Consider the impersonality with which she autopsies the emotional aftermath of her ruined relationship with ‘Law’: It is generally anger dreams that occupy my nights now. / This is not uncommon after loss of love -- // blue and black and red blasting the crater open. / I am interested in anger. / I clamber along to find the source’ (1995: 27-28). Yet the writing subject also reveals a hyper-confessional capacity for abrupt self-exposure of the rawest kind, recording, for instance, her ‘furious’ and ‘merciless’ response to her once-‘heroic’ father’s helpless ‘floundering’ in dementia (24), or her mortification at her own body’s betrayal, its desire for the lover (‘Law’) who has just declared the death of his passion for her (‘thrusting my little burning red backside like a baboon / at a man who no longer cherished me’) (12). Ever alert to the ironies of thus yoking intimacy and publicity, ‘The Glass Essay’ reads in part as a critically self-aware version of Lauren Berlant’s ‘intimate public’ (2008), one in which affective sentimentality is anything but apolitical in the narrator’s pensive and parodic examination of gender roles and social ‘Law[s]’ of love and belonging.

The poem also deploys textual strategies that effect a depersonalization and destabilization of the autobiographical subject in the speaker's often detached treatment of self-as-other (Disney 2012), particularly in dream sequences of 13 different portraits of her 'soul' as embodied by anonymous 'Nudes' in various postures. Perhaps the most important attempt to conjure a decreative form of 'ek-stasis' ('standing outside oneself'), this series of imagistic interludes capture the narrator in effect picturing herself as an aestheticized erotic object (example: 'Nude #2: Woman caught in a cage'; 'Nude #4: Woman on a blasted landscape'). But such techniques are also evident elsewhere, as for example, when the narrator, 'fuck[ing]' Law even after he's declared their relationship over, experiences her orgasms as though out-of-body: 'until at last I was floating high up near the ceiling looking down / on the two souls clasped there on the bed' (1995: 12). Or, as the narrator's past begins 'running underneath' the present 'like an old video tape' replaying the good times, the self is again re-constructed in the third person, this time notably as interpellated by Law: 'his voice saying / You beauty': 'I can feel that beauty's / heart beating inside mine as she presses into his arms'. It is a nostalgic reverie promptly shut down by the subject of the present: 'No, I say aloud. I force my arms down ... / And the videotape jerks to a halt' (1995: 8).

Though her autobiographical subject thus evokes the 'ek-stasis' of decreation throughout, these textual strategies are subsidiary to Carson's larger structural design to write off one subject against another, and thus keep multiple selves 'moving and not settling': 'with and against, aligned and adverse' (1999: iii). With the autobiographical 'I' and the third-person 'She', Emily Bronte, 'each placed like a surface on which the other may come into focus' (1999: iii), 'The Glass Essay' works most profoundly to de-center the autobiographical 'I' by erasing any reliable sense of a singular subject or center of Being to begin with.

As the narrator confides early on, 'Whenever I visit my mother / I feel I am turning into Emily Bronte' (859). Like Bronte, she spends much of her time –when not occupied with domestic tasks in the kitchen – alone, brooding while 'striding' across windy 'moors' that call up the 'blasted' Romantic landscape of *Wuthering Heights*, and the poem's glacial tropes. Bronte fascinates Carson's 'I' in part because in her writing, Bronte's 'raw little soul' so convincingly surpasses the 'sad, stunted' constraints of her 'uninteresting, unremarkable' existence – 'the days and years whose bareness appalls her biographers' (862).<sup>4</sup> The disconnect between the apparent poverty of Bronte's pinched and sheltered life, and the sweeping knowledge of passion and eroticism in her poetry and fiction is a mystery also heightened for Carson's 'I' by the torrid extremes of romance and realism in Bronte's character and writing: 'all she knew about love and its necessities' sometimes 'teeter[ing] on the brink of a potentially bathetic melodrama' (1995: 19), but other times revealing a downright sadomasochistic toughness, 'an angry education that shapes the way her characters / use one another' (1995: 10). 'She knows how to hang puppies, / that Emily', the narrator muses, citing also apocryphal tales of Bronte's legendary toughness as a child, cauterizing her own wounds, and encouraging her father to 'whip' the disobedient Branwell (1995: 4, 14). These are, of course, precisely the same qualities readers see mirrored in Carson's autobiographical 'I', whose own 'self-dramatising' moments can veer precariously close to corny romantic

cliché, even as she elsewhere reveals that same puppy-hanging capacity for unflinching ruthlessness.<sup>5</sup>

As already intimated, however, the reflective ‘atmosphere of glass’ (1995: 2) that Carson establishes between her ‘I’ and Bronte is subject to a freeze / thaw cycle over the course of the poem, one that alternately transforms the mirrored looking glass into an opaque surface of ice, or to ‘mud’, signaling barriers of non-correspondence between the 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘I’ and her 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary precursor (1995: 864). While Bronte, the speaker avers, ‘remained a girl all her life despite her body as a woman’, the speaker claims for herself a ‘jerky passage from girl to woman who I am now’ – a ‘more difficult sexual destiny’, in fact – before the poem’s end (1995: 13, 35). Similarly, Bronte’s ‘anger is a puzzle’ to the speaker, who herself disavows anger as the ‘vocation’ it evidently became for ‘some’ Victorian women (1995: 29-30). But the most important difference between the double poets of ‘The Glass Essay’ relates to religion and spirituality: Bronte, the narrator realizes, believed in ‘Thou’, a ‘vaster entity’, a ‘shelter’; ‘but for myself I do not believe this’; ‘I am uneasy with the compensatory model of female religious / experience’ (1995: 34-35, 32).

What results from this interplay of alignment and opposition between ‘I’ and ‘She’ is ultimately something like an ‘autobiographical smudge’, to borrow a suggestive phrase from playwright Sharon Pollock (2006: 299). The surface of Carson’s ‘Glass Essay’ bears the ‘fingerprints’ of an ‘I’ ‘all over it’ (Carson. qtd in Wachtel 2011: 39), but they are markers of an identity whose borders are by the end rendered indistinct, smeared across subjects, or submerged in the sticky whorls of another subject. And as the intricate structure of Carson’s text suggests from the outset, this smudge must also be seen to extend from ‘I’ and ‘She’ to encompass ‘Three’: the third woman who figures in ‘The Glass Essay’, the speaker’s mother. It is the speaker’s mother, frail but formidable at eighty years old, who provides an unexpected third angle to the mobile, overlapping subjectivities examined by Carson here, and who simultaneously anchors the text’s inquiry into *multiple* forms of ‘love and its necessities’.

‘The Glass Essay’s’ concerns with troubled love relations beyond the heterosexual entanglements of ‘I’ and ‘Law’, Heathcliff and Cathy, are made clear by those sections which focus on the speaker’s familial ties in the narrative present, as she deals with the complicated tensions and resentments, mutual debts and obligations, essential charades and ‘coded’ routines associated with her father’s decline into dementia, and, more fundamentally, with the mother whose house she has returned to. In effect, the poem’s representation of the relationship between the autobiographical ‘I’ and her mother mirrors the wobbly alignment and opposition that readers see at work in the I / Emily construct, except that this set of smudged subjectivities is fraught with a sharper ambivalence – as the speaker’s comparison of her mother to Emily’s pet hawk, ‘Hero’ may suggest (1995: 23). Mother and daughter figure most often as prickly antagonists in an ironic domestic drama, at once recognizably painful and wryly humorous. The narrator describes of ‘one of our oldest arguments / from what I call The Rules of Life series’, for instance, a dispute that can be triggered over such banalities as preferring the drapes open (daughter) or closed (mother). No matter what the trigger, ‘the Rules of Life’ argument always ‘reach[es] a delta / and may advance along one of three channels’: the ‘What You Need Is A Good Night’s Sleep channel / the Stubborn As

Your Father channel / and [the] random channel' (1995: 20-1). Yet though they inhabit alien worlds and hold clashing generational values, there is also an undeniable regard between *this* 'I' and *this* 'She', this mother who at crucial moments displaces Emily as the narrator's 'glass' reflection, and who does exemplify for her daughter the value of love 'for better or worse' ('This is the worse', the mother tersely observes, of caring for her stricken husband [1995: 24]). Undeniable also is the women's intimacy: 'I can tell by the way my mother chews her toast / whether she had a good night', Carson's 'I' tells us (1995: 21). At times, the mother / daughter bond seems as close as any between twins, or indeed, lovers: 'She and I often think two halves of one thought' (1995: 26). (Elsewhere in poems about her mother, Carson does in fact describe her as, 'my mother, / love / of my life [2005: 5].)

Tracing the recurrent flares of such familial relationships through multiple texts in Carson's *oeuvre* would begin to reveal the serial autobiography of an unbounded poetic 'self in process'.<sup>6</sup> Within 'The Glass Essay' itself, however, the boundaries and 'distinctions' of the presumably autonomous 'I' are once again subverted in relation to the speaker's mother, just as they are in relation to the ghost of Bronte. In this regard, while Carson's decreation poetics shares with critical post-humanism a definite emphasis on relationality at the expense of the 'windowless monad' of individual subject (1999: iii), it might most accurately be described as trans-human (not post-human) in its poetic vision.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, however, the subversive extent of Carson's decreation project in 'The Glass Essay' arrives in its concluding section. Entitled 'Thou', the text's ending is carefully staged to provide one last glimpse of what the narrator refers to as her own 'spiritual melodrama' (1995: 37). Whereas Bronte, the narrator recognizes, 'put off loneliness' by interposing God, a 'Thou' 'full of strange power' (1995: 31), God is not a solution for the secular 'I' of *Glass, Irony and God*: 'With Thou or without Thou I find no shelter / I am my own Nude' (1995: 35). This paves the way for the speaker's last *ek-static* 'vision' (1995: 37) of the 13<sup>th</sup> 'Nude', which arrives not in the form of an anonymous 'woman', this time, but rather in 'the form of a human body',

Trying to stand against winds so terrible that the flesh was blowing off  
the bones.  
And there was no pain.  
The wind  
was cleansing the bones.  
They stood forth silver and necessary.  
It was not my body, not a woman's body, it was the body of us all.  
It walked out of the light (1995: 38).

With this image of a skeletal rig of no body in particular but every body in general, the trans-human 'body of us all', Carson's poem appears to arrive at a moment where there is 'no corner ... left for saying 'I'' (2005: 170) – a vision of utter depersonalization, the subject stripped to a 'naked reality' that is beyond sex, seduction, pain. It is as though the speaker dissolves here, into her own 'dream of distance', no I / she / he, but an indeterminate 'it' that 'walk[s] out of the light', into a darkness where 'the self' is

indeed finally ‘displaced from the centre of the work [as] the teller disappears into the telling’.

‘Or, so she *tells* us’ (2005: 179, emphasis added). To the extent that Carson might remind us here that telling remains a function of self, the subject cannot so easily be written off. We are presented at this point with the ‘subterfuge or contradiction’ of a speaker still ‘confined’ in the ‘cage’ of self (1995: 7), a paradox underlined by the tensions of tone and mood that mark this indeterminate ending. Framed as a species of ‘spiritual melodrama’, it is indeed difficult to know precisely how seriously we are to take the weight of this concluding eschatological ‘vision’. In effect calculated to hover ambiguously on the very edge of irony (or ‘teete[r] / on the brink of a potentially bathetic melodrama’, to reprise the speaker’s assessment of Bronte), Carson’s text, like Marguerite Porete’s ‘heretical’ *Mirror for Simple Souls*, seems to ‘se[t] up a little ripple of disbelief’ ‘inside her own telling’ – ‘a sort of distortion in the glass—as if to remind us that this dream of distance is after all just a dream’ (2005: 176). In this regard, like ‘the three women’ she writes about in *Decreation* – Sappho, Porete and Weil – Carson, we might say, ‘ha[s] the nerve to enter a zone of absolute spiritual daring’ of her own here, not only asking us to entertain the ‘impossible’ paradox of ‘decreation’ (2005: 179), but leaving the mood of that ‘un-bearable’ proposition – ek-static, ironic, or otherwise – uncomfortably ambiguous in the end.

As an inquiry after ‘love and its necessities’, then, ‘The Glass Essay’ may be seen to come as an anticipatory enactment of Carson’s subsequent declaration in *Decreation* that it is ‘Love [that] dares the self to leave itself behind’ (2005: 162). That wager or ‘dare’ not only flies provocatively in the face of a contemporary culture devoted to the promotion of the ‘Me’ as never before<sup>8</sup>; it also presents Carson’s readers with a problem that plays out across her *oeuvre* as an *extended* inquiry into fantasies of self-divestiture, an on-going preoccupation with both the limitations of the autobiographical ‘I’, and the insuperable difficulties of its ‘eclipse’. It should come as little surprise, then, that in *Float*, her most recent collection of work, we find Carson still working to write off that ‘big, loud, shiny centre of self’ which predicates authorial voice, still looking for the ‘Recipe’ ‘one might use ... to burn / the pronoun’ of a legible identity – ‘He hers himself she / his herself me mine / myself’ – ‘off / one’s / lips’, for good (2016). ‘But to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition’. The ‘telling’ of that truth ‘remains a bit of a wonder’. And why not, Carson asks us: ‘Why should the truth not be impossible? Why should the impossible not be true?’ (2005: 179, 178).

## Endnotes

1. Compared with, for example, Huff, who frames the parameters of post-humanist life narrative as a mode that would not only decenter the human in its focus on multiple beings and their ‘surround’, but also concomitantly de-privilege the technology of writing as mode of expression – thus expanding traditional conceptions of ‘life *writing*’ (2017: 279).
2. Rae also notes ‘the effect of a blurred identity between Bronte and [Carson’s] speaker’ in his reading of ‘The Glass Essay’, but he characterizes it as more of a ‘transformation’ via patterns of language and word association (2011: 174). His focus on translation and bilingual word play in the text is especially valuable for providing a broader cultural and political frame for Carson’s position as an Anglo writer in a Francophone context (during her years at McGill University). While Rae argues that Carson’s lyric essay ‘shatters’ the Enlightenment ideal of



the essay as an ‘analytic prose medium striving for objectivity’ (166), Paula Melton emphasizes that the term ‘essay’ in ‘The Glass Essay’ ‘designates not autobiography but effort’ (in the original French sense of the term as an ‘attempt’) (1997: 179).

3. Although I agree with Disney that Pollock’s characterization of Carson’s decreation as ‘squarely in the tradition of the Romantic sublime’ is problematic, Pollock’s overall assessment of Carson as a simultaneously *avant garde* and ‘thoroughly traditional writer’ – both experimental in a way that ‘feels modern’ and at the same time steeped in literary traditions encompassing Romanticism and modernism (2011) – is itself very accurate.
4. The text offers a running critique of the life writing and critical discourses that surround Bronte, which I do not have space to elaborate on in detail here. Charlotte Bronte is both celebrated as a helpful master publicist for her preface to *Wuthering Heights* (1995: 9-10), and critiqued as a somewhat prudish and interventionist editor, in her ‘small adjustments to the text of Emily’s verse’, some of which emendations are duly recorded by the narrator for our notice (1995: 19-21). Carson’s poem also cites unnamed ‘biographers’ and literary critics in ways that lay bare their ‘banal’ and often irrelevant conjectures (‘She could have been a great navigator if she’d been male, / suggests a third [biographer]. Meanwhile / Emily continued to brush into the carpet’) (1995: 5).
5. ‘I am not a melodramatic person’, the narrator protests at one point, for instance, but nevertheless: ‘I felt my heart snap into two pieces’ (1995: 9, 11), she says when Law dumps her. Or, ‘When Law left I felt so bad I thought I would die’ she says, before adding: ‘This is not uncommon’ (1995: 8).
6. The intricacies of the autobiographical ‘I’s’ familial relations in general ‘flicker’ (in Wachtel’s words) for fragmentary inspection through such works as *Plainwater*, *Decreation*, *Nox*, for example, mapping as Chansky suggests, ‘the movement of the subject through multiple texts’ (2016: 151), and thus effecting a ‘self in process’ or ‘representational figure capable of signifying beyond any single text’ (Gilmore 2001: 98).
7. Insofar as ‘to tell [remains] a function of self’, in fact, Carson would probably argue that decreation implicates certain forms of naïve posthumanism in its ‘acts’ of intractable ‘subterfuge or contradiction’ as well. That is to say, she would likely argue that versions of popular posthumanism which seek to ‘radically’ de-center the human by representing the nonhuman (for example, animalography, which ventriloquizes the voice of the voiceless animal) remain limited by the same paradox which entraps the mystic, saint, or decreative writer in the impossibility of ever entirely ‘writing off’ the subject, save by an illusory ‘dream of distance’.
8. As Grace and Wasserman put it, we inhabit ‘a culture of me or I at a time when access to [autobiographical] cultural production [across various media platforms] is easy’ (2006: 14).

### Works cited (and consulted)

- Berlant, Lauren 2008 *The Female Complaint: On the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture* Durham: Duke UP
- Carson, Anne 1986 *Eros the bittersweet: An essay* Princeton: Princeton UP
- Carson, Anne 1995 ‘The glass essay’, in *Glass, irony, and God*, intro. Paul Davenport, New York: New Directions
- Carson, Anne 1999 *Economy of the unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan* Princeton: Princeton UP
- Carson, Anne 2005 *Decreation: Poetry, essays, opera* Toronto: Vintage Canada
- Carson, Anne 2010 *Nox* New York: New Directions
- Carson, Anne 2016 *Float* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart / Penguin Random House Canada
- Chansky, Ricia 2017 ‘Our futures: the future in motion’ *a / b: Autobiography Studies* 32 (2), 149-52

- Disney, Dan 2012 'Sublime disembodiment?: self-as-other in Anne Carson's *Decreation*' *Orbis Litterarum* 67 (1), 25-38
- Gilmore, Leigh 2001 *The limits of auto/biography: Trauma and testimony* New York: Cornell UP
- Grace, Sherrill and J Wasserman (eds) 2006 *Theatre and autobiography: Writing and performing lives in theory and practice* Vancouver: Talon
- Hipchen Emily and Anne Chansky (eds) 2017 'The futures of auto/biography' *a/b: Autobiography Studies* 32 (2), 139-57
- Huff, Cynthia 2017 'After auto, after bio: posthumanism and life writing' *a/b: Autobiography Studies* 32 (2), 279-82
- Melton, Paula 1997 'Essays at Anne Carson's Glass, Irony, God' *The Iowa Review* 27 (1), 179-82
- Pollock, James 2008 'Anne Carson and the sublime' [review of *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*] *Contemporary Poetry Review*, at <http://www.cprw.com/Pollock/carson.htm> (accessed 27 November 2015)
- Pollock, Sharon 2006 'Playwright: parasite or symbiont' In Sherrill Grace and Jerry Wasserman (eds) *Theatre and autoBiography: Writing and performing lives in theory and practice*, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 295-300
- O'Rourke, Meaghan 2010 'The unfolding' *The New Yorker* 12 July, at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/07/12/the-unfolding> (accessed 30 November 2016)
- Ray, Ian 2011 'Verglas: narrative technique in Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay'' *English Studies in Canada* 37 (3-4), 163-86
- Wachtel, Eleanor 2011 'An interview with Anne Carson' *Brick Magazine: A Literary Journal* 87 (Summer), 29-4