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Anthropology as a Metaphor for Knowing in Anne Carson's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the trope of anthropology in the Canadian poet Anne Carson's work. This trope functions as an extended metaphor to describe the study of cultures, texts, and the "alien countries" of other human souls. Anne Carson rejects anthropological practices that aim at the "invasion" of the other, and associates such practices with the actions of seeing, projecting and even "devouring." Instead she favours anthropological approaches that foster mutual "encounters", such approaches being typically charged with the actions of listening, absorbing and breathing. This distinction becomes crucial when we consider its implications for reading and writing about Anne Carson's work. Can a reader encounter rather than invade a poem? What meaning can the reader find in such an encounter if, unlike the practice of anthropology, it is undertaken in written form and in isolation? Might we conclude that all responses to poetry emerge not from the fullness and immediacy of an encounter, but precisely from the impossibility of ever undergoing the experience of such an encounter?

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explore le trope de l'anthropologie dans l'oeuvre de la poétesse canadienne Anne Carson. Ce trope sert de métaphore étendue pour décrire l'étude des cultures, des textes et des «contrées étrangères» des âmes humaines. Anne Carson rejette toute pratique anthropologique qui vise à «envahir» l'autre, invasion qu'elle associe aux gestes de voir, de projeter et même de «dévorer». Elle prône plutôt des approches anthropologiques qui favorisent une «rencontre» mutuelle, caractérisée par l'action d'écouter, d'absorber et de respirer. Cette distinction a des conséquences importantes pour la lecture de son oeuvre. Le lecteur peut-il «rencontrer» un poème, plutôt que de l'envahir? Quelle signification le lecteur peut-il dériver d'une rencontre qui résulte d'une activité solitaire et écrite, à l'opposé même du dialogue anthropologique? Peut-on conclure que toute réponse à la poésie découle, non pas de la plénitude et de la nature immédiate de la rencontre, mais bien plutôt de l'impossibilité d'une telle rencontre?

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What is knowing? [This] question I leave to you. There is in it a life of love I can barely look at, except in dreams.

- Anne Carson, Plainwater 175

The Soul selects her own Society -
Then - shuts the Door -
To her divine Majority -
Present no more -

Unmoved - she notes the Chariots - pausing -
At her low Gate -
Unmoved - an Emperor be kneeling -
Upon her Mat -

I've known her - from an ample nation -
Choose One -
Then - close the Valves of her attention -
Like Stone -

- Emily Dickinson (1862), The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson 143

Anne Carson is a Canadian classicist and poet who has published Eros the Bittersweet (1986), Short Talks (1992), Glass, Irony and God (1995) and Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (1995), and who is introducing two new collections of poetry in 1998. Selections from these works have appeared in several anthologies, journals and magazines, including the Best American Essays of 1992, the 1996 Journey Prize Anthology and The New Yorker. To top off a long list of prizes and other titles honouring Anne Carson's achievement as a writer, the Lannan Foundation offered her a $50,000 literary award in the fall of 1996. Since then, she has been endowed with both the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships.

With such an impressive record one would think that a secondary literature would already have emerged around Anne Carson's work. Though her poetry has in effect inspired two verse responses, the critical silence around her work is resounding. Not a single article has been published so far; even her reviewers seem strangely awkward about discussing her work. Guy Davenport's foreword to Glass, Irony and God is a telling commentary in itself: he evades any direct reference to the poetry he is purportedly introducing by constantly directing the reader's attention to other more comfortable

authors and ideas, until he finally admits: "I know nothing of Anne Carson" (x).

Indeed, the silence around Anne Carson encompasses not only her work but also her persona. Her interviewers leave the reader with the distinct impression that they have succeeded only in intruding on her privacy. For example Mary di Michele, an accomplished poet in her own right, explicitly concedes her failure to establish an honest or even constructive dialogue during her interview with Anne Carson:

> When reader meets writer, expectations are high. Anne Carson is the kind of writer who deflects such interest. You can never, after all, meet the text which engages you [...] Knowing the search for the author was quixotic, I nevertheless felt the same letdown as the 'I' in Carson's own 'interview' with the classical poet Mimnermos, which ends: *I: I wanted to know you /M[imnermos]: I wanted far more*[1].

It is precisely the silence that enshrouds Anne Carson which first drew me to her poetry. When I realized how deliberately and how fiercely she had constructed this silence I was already hopelessly and paradoxically lost in the very quest that she would most forbid: in trying to understand its foundations.

How may we begin to speak of this silence, then, or justify filling the space of its unfurling and flowering with the sound of our words? It is difficult to interpose a voice in the space of Anne Carson's poetry, for her poems, like those of Emily Dickinson, present themselves as self-contained expressions of a personal truth or an emotional insight[2]. The

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[1] Mary di Michele, "The Matrix Interview: Mary di Michele Talks to Anne Carson" (Matrix 49 [1997]: 10).

[2] The seeming "self-containment" of a poem is a concept with a considerable critical legacy. The notion that a poem can display such closure is disputed, among others, by Jacques Derrida in Of Grammatology (1967. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) and in

sheer brutality of these insights, often conveyed through images of physical mutilation and pain, leave the speaker of her poems both vulnerable and exposed. It is striking in this context that Anne Carson should not make greater efforts to delineate between herself and the voice of her speaker[3]. For not only does Anne Carson openly scorn the idea of considering her speaker as an abstract and intentionally aesthetic entity ("A ___ with Anne Carson" 17), but the speaking voice of her poems consistently reflects her own biography as well as the viewpoints she expresses in her interviews and critical essays.

The seeming overlap between author and speaker contributes to the sense of imbalance and intrusion that characterize all the published interviews with Anne Carson. However, if Anne Carson shows only cool nonchalance at her exposure[4], the speaker of her poems certainly does not. In fact, the speaker manifests acute anxiety about the fact that the privacy of her poems might be disrespected and their self-contained space forcibly entered by an anonymous readership. This anxiety is betrayed in explicit addresses where she not only threatens and ridicules the reader, but also appeals to the reader's sense of compassion, all in an attempt to persuade the reader to stay away. In effect, the speaker raises so many obstacles to

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Writing and Difference (1967. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), as well as by Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford UP, 1966). We shall return to examine these issues at greater length.

[3] For a discussion of the distinctions between author and speaker, as well as author and "implied author", see Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961), Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?"(Dits et Écrits 1954-1988. Ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1994) and Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement" (MLN 94 [1974]: 919-30). Anne Carson can be called a confessional poet insofar as she refuses to draw a clear line between the two, and so disavow the harrowing experiences of her speaker. She also manifests "confessional courage" in using the first person pronoun to describe experiences that are in fact her own, instead of concealing herself behind a third person construction (see Laurence Lerner, "What is Confessional Poetry?" (Critical Quarterly 29.2 [1987]: 44-66).

[4] See particularly Anne Carson's interviews with John d'Agata ("A ___ with Anne Carson." Iowa Review 27 [1997]: 1-22) and with Dean Irvine ("A Dialogue

the reader's approach toward her poetry that the very activity of reading comes to be symbolically figured as an attack on a heavily barricaded fortress[5]. No matter what the reader's real intentions are, she is unable to extricate herself from the trespassive role imposed onto her by the speaker; if she nevertheless decides to go on, she involves herself unequivocally in the speaker's psychological warfare[6].

The speaker's appeal for the reader to stay away may seem compelling on an interpersonal level, but becomes problematic when we consider its implications for literary study. After all, one would think that when a writer submits a collection of poetry for publication, she *invites* readers to engage with her work. Anne Carson's speaker, however, goes to great lengths to show to her readers that this is not the case. Furthermore, how are we to reconcile the speaker's evaluation of our skill and sensitivity as readers with the fact that she herself shows no misgivings about interpreting other authors and literary works in her poetry, or even about taking on the persona of Emily Brontë[7]? Indeed, the reader is quickly made aware of an amazing discrepancy between how the speaker perceives her readers and how she perceives her own activity as a reader. Nor does Anne Carson herself show any misgivings about engaging in the critical study of other writers, not to speak of her undertaking to complete the extant fragments of other poets' works[8]. How are we to reconcile these

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without Socrates: An Interview with Anne Carson." Scrivener 21 [1997]: 80-7).

[5] Castles and fortresses function as a metaphor for a stance of isolation in both Anne Carson's and Emily Dickinson's poetry. The barricaded fortress is explicitly represented in Anne Carson's poem "Canicula di Anna", where the speaker describes "the rock on which the city [of Perugia] was built" and the "second, interior city" that was carved out inside the rock (Plainwater 49).

[6] We shall designate the enacted reader as female, although the speaker makes no gender distinction in her treatment of her readers.

[7] The speaker assumes the persona of Emily Brontë in "The Glass Essay" (Glass, Irony and God 1-38).

[8] See for example "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" (Plainwater 3-11), and "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" (Raritan 14 [1995]: 32-44).

discrepancies, or find the criteria by which Anne Carson distinguishes between different forms of readership? I believe that these questions are central to Anne Carson's work, and that they need to be examined before we can understand and begin to articulate a response to her poetry.

II. The trope of anthropology

> How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office one's friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but [myself] mixed with somebody - with whom?
>
> - Virginia Woolf, The Waves 83

I would like to suggest that the seeming paradoxes in the speaker's treatment of her readers are elucidated through her trope of anthropology, which functions as an extended metaphor to describe the study of cultures, texts, as well as the "alien countries" of other human souls ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 201). Although we will have to engage in considerable cross-referencing throughout Anne Carson's work in order to trace and reconstruct this metaphor, it is nevertheless a task worth undertaking, for the trope of anthropology is at the heart of the speaker's understanding of how one should approach others.

In order to understand the speaker's use of anthropology as a metaphor, we must first set it in the context of separate human consciousnesses taking shape through time. This evolution is governed by her characters' constant attempts to open themselves up to or close themselves off from others' fluctuating tides of tenderness, fear, hope and suspicion. Her characters seem to have a mutual and instinctive sense of each others' consciousnesses, as if these were entities that one could hear, see, and almost touch. In "Autobiography of Red", for example, one of the characters lies in the dark and "listens to the blank space where /[a rapist's] consciousness is, moving towards her" (48); a little later in the narrative, two other characters' consciousnesses come together and then "drift[…] back /to opposite walls" (69).

What is immediately conspicuous in Anne Carson's poetry is that different conscious entities are presented as if they were separated by enormous spatial distances[9]. This distance is only underscored by the speaker's particularly isolating use of the language of 'selfness' and 'otherness': her poems flow from the viewpoint of a conscious and centered 'self' (usually the speaker), who tries to situate herself toward an 'other' who is so separate and clearly delineated as to become objectified[10]. The speaker often describes the process through which the self comes to adjust herself to the other as "bringing into focus"; such metaphors figuring the speaker as a photographer into whose field of vision an other occasionally stumbles saturate the pages of her poetry[11]. Indeed, if the characters are not actually regarding each other through cameras, they watch each other intently or "eye each other from opposite shores of the light" ("Autobiography of Red" 43).

Between the self and other stands a gap both abysmal in its danger and unbridgeable in the space that it spans. Most of Anne Carson's poems are in fact set in bare and open spaces, whether they be deserts, moors or vast wastes of water. The openness of the landscapes does not imply that that they are easy to cross; on the contrary, the sun scorches, the water threatens to drown, and the wind whips so violently that it rips off shreds of human flesh ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 9). Nor is it only the elements that separate

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[9] In "Just for the Thrill", for example, human beings are likened to solitary stars separated by light years of distance - - the only difference between them is that humans are "inflammable" (Plainwater 237).

[10] The discourse on 'selfness' and 'otherness' originates with Hegel, and particularly with "Lordship and Bondage" (Hegel, G. W. F. Phenomenology of Spirit. 1807. Trans. A. V. Miller. New York: Oxford UP, 1977. 111-19). It is interesting that both Anne Carson and Hegel use these terms in the context of coming to 'know' or 'recognize' an other, though in Hegel this process is motivated by the self's desire to destroy the other.

[11] See particularly Autobiography of Red, where the protagonist Geryon increasingly relies on his camera to provide a link between himself and others. On the power dynamics established by the photographer's gaze, see

the self from the other, for the walking surfaces conceal razors and shards of ice that would sever the characters' feet[12]. Strikingly, the air itself, although silent and clear, is often compared to distorting, heavy and potentially dangerous glass[13].

Anne Carson's poems suggest that it takes immense courage and effort not to remain self-enclosed but to open oneself up to reaching across this space in an attempt to bridge the gap between self and other. What motivates such an extraordinary action is a sense of loneliness and isolation that culminates in a "crisis of human contact" (Eros the Bittersweet 21); or stated more positively, a need to know the world beyond one's self - "cet immense désir de connaître la vie" ("The Fall of Rome", Plainwater 104). This impulse is symbolized by the numerous characters in Anne Carson's poetry who are depicted inside cars, trains or planes, in the midst of physical displacement away from or toward those whom they mean to confront. As we shall see, however, these characters only end up hurling themselves into a confrontation with their own essential solitude, for "No one can be with you on the inside" ("Mistakes of God"). Indeed, it often seems as if the longing for the touch of another being points to a deeper division within the human self: at the moment when Anne Carson's

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Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Ways of Seeing (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982) and Susan Sontag, On Photography (London: Anchor, 1990).

[12] The speaker encounters such hazardous and potentially crippling surfaces especially while she is at home: her father leaves open razor blades on the stairs ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 1; "New Rule"), and the vast moor around her mother's house is "paralyzed with ice" ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 2).

[13] Glass is often used as a metaphor for the communicative distortion or failure that results from the distance between self and other. In "The Glass Essay", as in many of Anne Carson's poems, the metaphor derives from a scene in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. Just as Catherine Earnshaw's ghost cries vainly behind a glass window, so too the speaker and her mother are "lowered into an atmosphere of glass" where their remarks that "trail through the glass" ultimately fail to meet their end. Again in "Town of Uneven Love (But All Love is Uneven)", the narrator and her lover are separated by glass: "If he had loved me he would have seen me. /At an upstairs window brow beating against glass" ("The Life of Towns", Plainwater 108).

characters start approaching one another, the self suddenly splits into an inner self who remains at the point of origin and watches the outer self take tremulous steps forward.

In the introduction we presented Anne Carson's poetic world as a fortress well defended against the potential attack of the reader. Just as the reader hears the speaker tell of the vast and perilous abyss separating self from other, so too the reader encounters those devastating distances and dangerous obstacle courses in trying to approach her fortress. In other words, the reader, through her activity of trying to understand the speaker, comes to enact precisely the same exertions and perils involved in establishing human contact that the speaker presents as a subject in her poetry.

In Eros the Bittersweet, Anne Carson compares the reader and speaker to lover and beloved (78), and claims that the gap between the two is "the real subject of most love poems" (30). We shall return to examine the differences in the gap between reader and text, lover and beloved later on in this thesis. For now, suffice it to say that whether it be a question of human communication or textual understanding, the speaker insists on underscoring the effort, danger and pain involved in soldering the fissure between self and other -- in "press[ing] them together like the lips of a wound" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 194)[14].

Anthropology, or "the science of man" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 223), becomes an important trope in Anne Carson's poetry precisely because it is a discipline that has defined guidelines for how we can bridge the gap between self and

[14] The speaker often describes the gap between self and other in such explicitly physical and even grotesque terms: "The spaces between. /us got hard they are. /Empty spaces and yet they. /Are solid and black. /And grievous as gaps. /Between the teeth. /Of an old woman [...]" ("The Life of Towns", Plainwater 95).

other in order to "know one another" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 175). The speaker's understanding and use of the words "anthropology" and "knowledge" quickly become inextricably intertwined, if not interchangeable. It is an anthropologist who teaches the speaker about the discipline, and this teaching unfolds in the context of potential danger - "It was an anthropologist who first taught me about danger" ("Diving", Plainwater 117)[15]. It becomes clear that the speaker associates danger with the gesture of projecting oneself toward the darkness of an unknown other. This gesture is potentially hazardous, for if it fails to meet its end, the self is left suspended in a state of exposure and vulnerability[16]. To be sure, the derision and obstacles that she hurls at the reader in the reader's approach toward her fortress are already indicative of the real damage that one may incur in reaching out toward another.

"Are there two ways of knowing the world - a submissive and a devouring way?", wonders the speaker in "Kinds of Water" (Plainwater 135). In both her interviews and her poetry, Anne Carson contrasts anthropology as an "invasion" (Irvine 80) or "discovery" ("Diving", Plainwater 117) with anthropology as an "encounter" or "science of mutual surprise" (117). According to the speaker, anthropology as "invasion" consists in analyzing a culture as a dead specimen or mute object of study, while anthropology as "encounter" recognizes the other as a subject in its own right. Moreover, the invasion is associated with the actions of seeing, projecting and even "devouring" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 135), while the encounter is charged with qualities of listening, absorbing

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[15] The speaker's connection between knowledge and danger is by no means unique, for the process of coming to know has been archetypally linked to danger within other self-enclosed sites as well, such as the garden of Eden, Pandora's box and Plato's cave.

[16] The gesture is so vulnerable that the speaker sometimes wishes that its recipient were unconscious while she tenders it: "Unless you are asleep I cannot make my way /across the night /and through my isolation" (TV Men: The Sleeper, Glass, Irony and God 70).

and breathing. We shall explore these distinctions throughout Anne Carson's poetry, as they will become crucial to our argument.

For the remainder of this study, it will be important to keep the foundations of Anne Carson's trope of anthropology in mind. As we have seen, this metaphor functions to explain how the characters in her poetic world may unfurl from their self-enclosure and project themselves toward an other in order to establish communication between separate consciousnesses. We have also seen that there is, according to the speaker, a real danger and vulnerability involved in opening oneself to the knowledge of another being. The trope of anthropology further falls into a basic contrast between invasive and encountering approaches, which we will develop further, as it will become central for our understanding of the speaker's seemingly paradoxical treatment of her readers. Let us now turn to examine how the trope of anthropology plays itself out first in human communication and then in textual interpretation.

Anthropology along human and mural

> I am standing on a corner in Monterey, waiting for the bus to come in, and all the muscles of my will are holding my terror to face the moment I most desire [...] he for whom I have waited so long, who has stalked so unbearably through my nightly dreams, fumbles with the tickets and the bags, and shuffles up to the event which too much anticipation has fingered to shreds.
>
> - Elizabeth Smart, By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept 17

When we begin to examine how the speaker applies the trope of anthropology to human relationships, we are immediately struck by the fact the metaphor is initially undertaken because of a painful failure in human communication, namely the speaker's failure to establish contact with her father. In fact, many of Anne Carson's poems deal with her sense of devastation and helplessness in confronting her father's progressive dementia, "Thirst", "Very Narrow" and "Father's Old Blue Cardigan" being the most powerful among them[17]. The speaker realizes only too late that she never reached out to communicate with him while there was still time - "Father, tell me what you were thinking all those years when we sat at the kitchen table together munching cold bacon and listening to each other's silence? I can still hear the sound of the kitchen clock ticking on the wall above the table" ("Thirst", Plainwater 120). The widening gap between father and daughter is symbolized by halting conversations on long distance telephone lines onto which "snow falls"; these conversations are abruptly terminated by the father's recurring excuse of not wanting to "run up [her] bill", leaving the speaker clutching the receiver: "Who are you? /I said into the dial tone" ("Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 24-5). Typically, the emotional isolation that befalls her father upon his illness is symbolized by a train that no longer moves toward or away from anyone else: "He sat there in the dark like a stopped train. In a night longer than a

[17] These works are included in the appendix.

tunnel. In an ark suddenly open to all winds" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 209).

It is important to explore what resources the speaker draws on in coming to terms with her alienation from her father, for this will help us to develop our understanding of the connotations that cluster densely around the speaker's use of anthropology as a metaphor. As we have already seen, the speaker considers anthropology as a discipline that will help her to analyze the process of coming to 'know' others, so that the communicational failure that took place in her relationship with her father will not be repeated in her other relationships. She grasps onto anthropology in order to theorize and categorize this failure, and to tame and civilize her turbulent feelings about this event: "Anthropology [...] is an activity of the forebrain. If we strain thought clear of impulse slowly, slowly the day scream will subside to ordered lust" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 197).

The speaker's understanding of anthropology evolves through her conversations and travel experiences with several other people. Her most striking insights are woven into the series of poems collected under the heading "The Anthropology of Water" (Plainwater 117-260). This work includes three introductions which the speaker offers as parables or guiding amulets for the often highly symbolical inner voyages that follow. Let us turn to these introductions ("Diving", "Thirst" and "Very Narrow") in order to uncover the foundations and develop the connotations associated with the speaker's trope of anthropology.

The Introductions to "The Anthropology of Water"

First the speaker meets an anthropologist who teaches her the difference between 'invasions' and 'encounters' in anthropological practice ("Diving", Plainwater 117-8). It is

immediately evident that the speaker is interested in this distinction primarily in order to find a name for her hurtful communicational pattern with her father, which in effect is permeated with sharp and invasive imagery. For example, since no real communication exists between father and daughter, the two metaphorically project inanimate objects toward each other instead: "I had learned to take soundings - like someone testing the depth of a well. You throw a stone down and listen" ("Thirst", Plainwater 122). Moreover, the speaker's father's mind becomes "a sacred area where no one [...can] enter or ask the way" (121), and his sentences "come clawing into [..her] like a lost tribe" (120); this hooked and barbed image is then set into anguished juxtaposition with her nightmare of undergoing "abdominal surgery with a coat hanger" (121). This viscerally invasive imagery conveys how profoundly disturbed the speaker is by her father's sudden psychological nakedness ("Very Narrow", Plainwater 191), which she experiences with the emotional impact of incest.

Indeed, the way in which the speaker seizes upon anthropological terminology to describe her estrangement from her father's increasing otherness is both eerie and highly idiosyncratic, and contributes directly to her association between anthropology and danger. The speaker emerges from her experiences with her father with a strongly dichotomized and largely unconscious understanding of invasions and encounters, and will henceforth seek to steer clear from invasions at all cost. Instead, she will try to discover whether it is possible to approach another as an encounter, which now becomes synonymous with truly 'knowing' another.

The speaker's understanding of anthropology develops further when the anthropologist tells her of a culture where true and false virgins are identified by an "ordeal of water": "For an intact woman can develop the skill of diving into deep water

but a woman who has known love will drown" ("Diving", Plainwater 117). Anthropology is now juxtaposed with erotic knowledge, and although this juxtaposition initially seems rather elastic, it becomes ever more intricate as it is developed throughout Anne Carson's work. The anthropologist's story also associates knowledge with water and loss; indeed, already earlier in this introduction the speaker claims to have let "Father, brother, lover, true friends, hungry ghosts and God" slip out of her hands like water - and "water is something you cannot hold" (117). Water is further linked not only to loss but also to rupture, severance and potential danger: for, as the myth illustrates, "kinds of water drown us" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 132).

The anthropologist, then, not only teaches the speaker the difference between encounters and invasions, but also introduces the association to danger, eroticism, water and loss. These elements are set in kaleidoscopic relation to anthropology, and will emerge whenever the speaker approaches another for the purposes of human contact. In response to the anthropologist's story, the speaker finds herself telling him the legend of the daughters of Danaos:

> Danaos was a hero of ancient Greek myth who had fifty daughters. They loved their father so much it was as if they were parts of his body. When Danaos stirred in his sleep they would awaken, each in her narrow bed, staring into the dark. Then came time to marry. Danaos found fifty bridegrooms. He set the day. He carried out the wedding ceremony. And at midnight on the wedding night, fifty bedroom doors clicked shut. Then a terrible encounter took place. Each of forty-nine of the daughters of Danaos drew a sword from alongside her thigh and stabbed her bridegroom to death. This archetypal crime of women was rewarded by the gods with a paradigmatic punishment. Danaos's forty nine killing daughters were sent to hell and condemned to spend eternity gathering water in a sieve. But yes, there was one daughter who did not draw her sword. What happened to her remains to be discovered (118).

The most seemingly disconnected fragments in Anne Carson's work are often the most crucial; and so here, too, the legend of Danaos ultimately serves to reinforce the connection between knowledge, danger, eroticism, water and loss. For the speaker, like the fiftieth daughter, has "known love" in her own "narrow bed" ("Very Narrow", Plainwater 188-91), and has thus symbolically severed the connection with her father[18]. When juxtaposed with the anthropologist's myth, however, this knowledge of love would lead to drowning in deep water. This the speaker acknowledges when she warns the reader that "the water is deep" in the series of poems that is about to follow ("Diving", Plainwater 118)[19]. In effect, the speaker consciously identifies herself with the fiftieth daughter of Danaos, and sets out on her journey of self-discovery with a strongly ambivalent relationship to love and to knowledge. The untangling of love from knowledge will ultimately inform the speaker's quest for an encounter, and her frustration with this process will resurface throughout Anne Carson's work.

The word 'knowledge' takes on two further refractions when the speaker meets 'El Cid', a man who "knows how to ask questions" ("Thirst", Plainwater 122). El Cid's knowledge is especially critical to the speaker, who cannot forgive herself for having

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[18] In fact, the speaker's father is uncomfortable with any incipient signs of her womanhood, causing great anxiety in the speaker who only seeks to please him: "I perceived that I could trouble him less if I had no gender. Anger tired him so. I made my body as hard and flat as the armor of Athena [...] Unfortunately by then his mind was too far gone to care" ("Very Narrow", Plainwater 189).

[19] Like the metaphor of drowning, the image of the forty-nine sisters gathering water in a sieve is by no means a casual image in Anne Carson's poetry. This image becomes overwhelmingly powerful and complex when juxtaposed with other mentions of liquid running through sieves, such as water escaping through the speaker's hands. Elsewhere in Anne Carson's work, the indiscreet and indiscriminate way in which women supposedly spill out their voice in society is compared to "leaking water vessels" ("Gender of Sound", Glass, Irony and God 130); in "God's List of Liquids" sieves are figured as passageways of temporal pleasure: "*For I made their flesh as a sieve* /wrote God at the top of the page /and then listed in order: /Alcohol /Blood /Gratitude /Memory /Semen /Song /Tears /Time" (Glass, Irony and God 52).

failed to ask questions of her father[20], and who has consequently come to value the importance of genuine questioning in knowing another. When El Cid invites her on a pilgrimage from France to the Spanish town of Compostela, the speaker accepts his invitation, imbuing the journey with an expiatory "belief that a question can travel into an answer as water into thirst" (122). Knowledge is further associated with estrangement, for El Cid claims that one can only know one's life by leaving it (122); the speaker, however, is primarily interested in finding an outlet for her sense of grief and guilt over her lost relationship with father. Accordingly, the speaker intends to "channel [her] loneliness into penance" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 151) - - a sublimation that El Cid apparently manages exceptionally well. Most of all, the speaker hopes to achieve her first encounter with another consciousness, whether it be with God or with El Cid, who has a "passion for people who are pelted" (151), and whom the speaker would willingly embrace as her personal saviour.

"Kinds of Water"

Nowhere in Anne Carson's poetry do the unstable connotations associated with the trope of anthropology erupt as they do in "Kinds of Water", the travel journal that follows these introductions. Not only is the speaker repeatedly hurled against the limits of what can be known of another human being, but the very concept of knowing itself travels through so many different contexts as to become surcharged with meaning. Typically, the open landscape requires immense effort to traverse: "I have never felt life to be as slow and desperate as that day on the Meseta with the sky empty above us, hour after hour unmoving before us and a little wind whistling along the bone of my ear [...] Hours give no shade. Wind gives no shade. Sky does not move. Sky crushes all that

[20] See for example "The Glass Essay" (Glass, Irony and God 24), and "Despite Her Pain, Another Day."

moves" (164). The strenuousness of the journey functions as a metaphor for the danger and effort involved in crossing the distance to the soul of another human being. Day after day, the speaker is forced into confrontation with the unremitting otherness of her traveling companion, El Cid, who "is not the one who feels alien - ever, I think" (131). Instead, the speaker observes him "sailing through danger and smiling at wounds" (126), and "fail[ing] to understand why travel should be such a challenge to the muscles of the heart, for other people" (131).

El Cid's benign and condescending way of positioning himself toward otherness is repugnant to the speaker, whose hope had been to challenge and break down these kinds of boundaries in order to dissolve her guilt-ridden sense of self in an encounter (217). Instead of learning how to open herself up to the knowledge of another human being, the speaker now realizes that her gestures at communication will not necessarily be reciprocated; that there is even a sense of fear and vulnerability in tending and in returning such a gesture. This realization compounds in alienating the speaker from her traveling companion. She focuses her anger on small details of his body, which she construes as a barrier preventing her from access to his consciousness: "Ahead of me walks a man who knows the things I want to know about bread, about God, about lovers' conversations, yet mile after tapping mile goes by while I watch his heels rise and fall in front of me and plant my feet in rhythm to his pilgrim's staff as it strikes the road, white dust puffing up to cover each step, left, right, left" (143).

Moreover, the speaker comes to recognize that she cannot encounter God, for religion only acts as an illusion to absorb her solitude - "One way to put off loneliness is to interpose God" ("Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 31). She now admits

that she was not ultimately hoping to dissolve herself in religious ecstasy, but to abandon herself in the love of another human being:

> There is no question that I covet [the] conversation [of a lover]. There is no question that I am someone starving. There is no question I am making this journey to find out what that appetite is [...] I know you want me to say that hunger and silence can lead you to God, so I will say it, but I awoke. As the nail parts from the flesh, I awoke and I was alone ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 142-3).

The speaker quickly finds herself enclosed in her own mind again, and starts a solitary reevaluation of what it means to know another. As we have seen, the speaker has come to associate anthropology with erotic and questioning knowledge. The speaker initially assumes that erotic and questioning knowledge contribute positively to the larger quest of encountering another. This assumption is radically undermined when the speaker in a later relationship refers to intimacy as "the terrible sex price that women have to pay" ("Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 32), and when her partner betrays her - ironically, on the pretext of wanting to "know" other people ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 238). Moreover, she quickly becomes impatient with the questioning way of knowing another in which she and El Cid engage, and which becomes associated with the pilgrim motif of two animals taking turns to carry the other on top of their back ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 144-50). Questions and answers prove insufficient to pull the speaker out of her self-enclosure. But instead of assuming responsibility for her own sense of isolation, she transfers the burden of her anger and disappointment onto her interlocutor: "I know what he is going to say (as soon as he begins). And all at once I am enraged. My sharp pilgrim's knife flashes once. 'I know!' right across his open face. I know. I know what you say. I know who you are. I know all that you mean. Why does it enrage an animal to be given what it

already knows?" (164). The speaker does not wholly reject the importance of eroticism or questioning in knowing another, but realizes that they feel invasive if the partners are not willing to open themselves up to an encounter as well.

What does it mean to encounter another, then? Up until this point in the pilgrimage, the speaker has pursued comparative and rational investigation into what it means to establish contact with another human being. She has moreover remained at the centre of herself, sure master of the creative and intellectual process that this journey engenders. However, her journal entries increasingly move toward a more unconscious and watery language, full of voices calling to her in the middle of the night and feelings that carry out of her control. At around midpoint in the pilgrimage, when the speaker's hopes of establishing contact with El Cid desist, the question of anthropology becomes relegated to her subconscious. From there it emerges in feverish and delusional metaphors representing invasions and encounters. As we have seen, the speaker's suppressed past experiences with her father are at the root of her understanding of these two approaches to knowing another. Now it becomes clear that invasions and encounters do not represent a 'science' or a methodology for her, but rather highly charged and dichotomized archetypes. Invasion carries the full weight of her guilt over her lost relationship with her father, and describes a selfish and plundering way of approaching another. Encounter, on the other hand, represents her desire to find absolution; an idealized projection of everything opposite the invasion.

Invasion

When faced with her failures at knowing others, the speaker returns almost obsessively to the invasive images that informed the original communicational pattern with her father.

The invasion is represented by hard and projectile objects, such as rocks or pebbles, which are shown to be hitting her when she is at her most vulnerable, or grating against her nerves. Although pebbles appear as symbols of invasiveness during the pilgrimage as well, the invasion is perhaps most strikingly represented elsewhere in Anne Carson's work, where it is figured in terms of scientific and visual imagery, and specifically in terms of surgical instruments. These sharp and pointed objects come poking, ripping and tearing at the characters in her world, or even attempting to "dismember" them ("Mimnermos Interviews", Plainwater 23). The invasive approach to knowing another is also repeatedly represented through symbolical nightmares about botched operations or other surgical procedures.

The surgical invasion is depicted explicitly in Anne Carson's poem "On the Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman" ("Short Talks", Plainwater 42). In this poem, the speaker tells of the life and death of 'Black Jan', a character whose corpse is being dissected by an anatomist called Dr. Deyman. The insensitivity of the concluding lines of the poem suggest that the invasive approach to 'knowing' others may not be ethically viable: "the cold weather permitted Dr. Deyman to turn the true eye of medicine on Black Jan for three days [...] Cut and cut deep to find the source of the problem, Dr. Deyman is saying as he parts the brain to either side like hair" (42). The irony and incommensurability of these lines stem from the fact that while 'Black Jan' had been alive and imbued with consciousness at the outset of the poem, he is suddenly being dissected and scrutinized as if he had never been more than a mute object of study: and "Sadness comes groping out of [his dead body]" (42). The poem is permeated with clearly delineated visual details, sharp instruments, and the rational language of science - - all attributes characterizing the invasive approach to knowing another.

Encounter

Unlike the invasion, Anne Carson never gives an explicit example of an encounter, the encounter remaining an elusory communicational ideal throughout her work. Accordingly, the language surrounding the encounter is hesitant and visionary; it is also full with fluctuant and fluid metaphors of warmth and "withinness"[21]. Indeed, at times this language suggests a wish to return to a luminous prelapsarian state or even to the pulsating immediacy of a womb. For instance, the speaker implies that the true knowledge of another involves the dissolution of personal boundaries in a primordial birthing flood: "We think we live by keeping water caught in the trap of the heart" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 139), while in fact "[w]e live by waters breaking out of the heart" (138). This image intimates that openness to another may lead to a possibly dangerous yet transformative experience. The speaker also suggests that we should strive for a more tender and careful way of communicating by reaching out to each other "like tendrils" (146). The image of tendrils unfurling toward each other forms a striking contrast with the pebbles which the speaker and her father had metaphorically projected into their communicational void. The speaker symbolizes the encounter through the loss of self-consciousness and reason; the encounter not only decenters us but "draws us outside [our] own language and customs" ("Very Narrow", Plainwater 190) and "into a language not our own" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 176).

In fact, as the pilgrimage progresses, the speaker more and more defines anthropology not as the 'science of man', but as the love of man: "Love is, as you know, a harrowing event. I

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[21] "The radical for *within* in classical Chinese is an empty box. You can indicate withinness of any kind you like by setting another radical within the box. For example human love, while it is happening, will seem like something within withinness" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 239).

believed in taking an anthropological approach to that" (190). This semantic sliding signals a shift from rational language to the realm of the unconscious. The shift takes place because knowledge has become associated with water and danger, leading the speaker to experience the sensation of drowning when she confronts the possibility of an encounter - - as if indeed she had been cast into deep water to test whether she has 'known' love. In effect, the speaker's introspection has only led her back to the point from where her journey started, namely to the original ambivalence between love and knowledge; an ambivalence which she cannot escape as Danaos's fiftieth daughter.

The speaker offers one powerful example of the encounter, for despite her tenuous relationship to religion, she nevertheless sketches out a compelling analogy between the encounter and religious transcendence. During the pilgrimage, she and El Cid pass by a pit set in a rock wall, with iron bars closing off the entrance. The speaker learns that women who were called 'emparedadas' once placed themselves inside the pit and lived there, taking as sustenance only what was offered by the pilgrims passing by (162). Suddenly, the speaker turns to the reader and claims that the emparedadas are a metaphor for what 'knowledge' signifies to her (165). The notion of willingly immuring oneself for the sake of personal redemption quickly becomes the focal point of the whole narrative. Not surprisingly, the speaker immediately seeks to associate herself with the emparedadas, reminding the reader of her willingness to wall herself within her own self-enclosed fortress. Moreover, when she takes photographs of the dark mouth of the pit, something extraordinary happens, for none of the pictures print properly: "Look at this one, for instance - it could be a picture of a woman with something in her hands. [...] Can you make it out? The picture has been taken looking directly into the light, a fundamental error" (165). Where

does the light come from? Clearly, the emparedadas have transcended to a sphere of knowledge that shines out from the dark enclosure. And for the first time, the speaker is unable to capture and objectify an 'other' in her photographic lens: she stands outside the emparedadas' encounter with a higher consciousness. Indeed, the emparedadas' religious transcendence cannot be represented in concrete or descriptive terms, but must be conveyed through metaphors.

Let us retrace the speaker's trajectory in her search for an understanding of what it means to know an other, as this search unfolds in the series of poems collected under the title "The Anthropology of Water." The speaker starts out with the hope that the discipline of anthropology will redefine her approach to others, so that she will never again have to suffer the consequences of the kind of a communicational breakdown that took place with her father. She finds this breakdown reflected in the anthropological 'invasion', and instead seeks to understand what it might mean to 'encounter' another. To this end, she juxtaposes anthropology with other concepts associated with coming to know an other, such as questioning, traveling and engaging in sexual intimacy. However, the speaker finds that one cannot achieve genuine knowledge of another through any descriptive methodology, and that an encounter involves hard work and the willingness to open oneself to a possibly dangerous and transformative experience. Furthermore, true knowledge of another cannot be described in concrete terms, but must be conveyed through associations and metaphors. The emparedadas are a particularly apt metaphor for the effort and unrepresentability of attaining to such an encounter with another.

In between closure and openness

The speaker's experiences during the pilgrimage enclose her into solitude, but from that vantage point, she is able to

observe others' vulnerable gestures at communication with an almost visionary sensitivity. She fluctuates between gratitude and hostility toward the offerings of friendship that are tendered toward her. Occasionally, she also launches her own desperate quests after an encounter; for she cannot stand aloof for long without craving for the "crisis of human contact": "I lived blank for many years. And learned [..that] nothing replaces the sting of love, for good or ill" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 221). Indeed, when she remains isolated for too long, she imagines herself becoming a "[w]oman caught in a cage of thorns. /Big glistening brown thorns with black stains on them /Where she twists this way and that way /Unable to stand upright" ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 17). However, the language surrounding the desire to reach out for love is often equally violent and disturbing, suggesting a body hurling itself into its own destruction, or approximating the blind and rapacious force of a conflagration: "Humans in love are terrible. You see them come hungering at one another like prehistoric wolves; you see something struggling for life between them, like a root or a soul and it flares for a moment, then they smash it. The differences between them smash the bones out" ("Very Narrow", Plainwater 190)[22].

The speaker demonstrates admiration toward those who are able to fold themselves into safe self-enclosure without suffering from loneliness. These spirits experience others' gestures at making contact as an intrusion on their peace; indeed other humans' whole comportment appears sharp and hostile to them: "Their faces I thought were knives. /The way they pointed them at me" ("The Life of Towns", Plainwater 104). Yet the speaker

[22] Elsewhere, the desire for an encounter is described in similarly destructive and ravenous terms: "There is a kind of pressure in humans to take whatever is most beloved by them /and smash it ("Book of Isaiah", Glass, Irony and God 110); "To see the love between Law and me /turn into two animals gnawing and craving through one another /toward some other hunger was terrible" ("Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 17).

also implies that this peace approximates the peace of death, for others' attempts at communication are ironically described in the language of exhumation: "[o]ld mother fingers coming down through the dark. /To rip me out my little dry soul my" (108). Nevertheless, this self-protective and removed stance is the one which the speaker adopts toward the reader, Anne Carson adopts toward her interviewers, and Mimnermos adopts toward the speaker as interviewer in "The Mimnermos Interviews"[23].

The speaker's vacillation between self-enclosure and openness is illustrated with great lucidity in "The Fall of Rome: A Traveller's Guide" (Glass, Irony and God 73-105). This poem lays bare the speaker's vulnerability in taking the initiative to unfurl from her enclosure in order to reach out toward another human being. The poem typically begins with the speaker' physical reach of traveling to Rome to meet with Anna Xenia, her friend, lover, or possibly her double, only to find that making contact with another human being requires more than mere physical displacement, more in fact than what she is capable of:

> Why have you
> come here?
>
> You
>
> have broken in,
> why? (80)

Anna Xenia seems to be asking the speaker upon her arrival, the isolated "you" only aggravating the speaker's sense of alienation and vulnerability. The speaker relies on explicit invasive imagery ("you /have broken in") to convey Anna's closure to communication. And indeed, Anna is as separate and

[23] "Mimnermos Interviews" is included in the appendix as an example of a self-protective and self-enclosed stance toward an other's gesture at

"as beautiful as an island" ("Canicula di Anna", Plainwater 77). The speaker quickly realizes that Anna does not particularly want to entertain her during her trip, not to speak of availing herself for an encounter. The speaker takes refuge from her own embarrassment in her mode of definitions, which is her characteristic rhetorical mask when faced with an interpersonal failure. This mode contrasts with the more open and listening disposition which characterizes an encounter. Here are four successive attempts at the speaker's definition of the word 'stranger', which is how she comes to identify herself in Rome. The four definitions illustrate the speaker's entrance into Anna's world, the friends' awkwardness, their progressive estrangement, and finally the speaker's withdrawal into her original solitude:

> A stranger is someone who stands in the doorway,
> drenched in confusion,
>
> and permits the dog to escape.
>
> Anna Xenia chases the dog
> down five flights.
> She comes back
>
> to find me still in the doorway.
> It is a difficult moment. (87)

Anna's house typically functions as a metaphor for her separate, self-enclosed self or private sphere[24]. The speaker continues:

> A stranger is someone desperate for conversation.
>
> Then why is it I never have anything to say?
> We perch in our armour at the kitchen table. (87)

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communication.

[24] In another poem about Anna, "Canicula di Anna", Anna's closure to communication is represented through her recurring dream, staged inside a house: "Anna is hesitating somewhere./ Maybe she is dreaming her dream./ It always comes to her/ Just before morning./ She is in a room,/ and she is trying to close the door./ Arms and legs are forcing their way in./ Violent as lobsters" (Plainwater 55). The speaker's mother's house also becomes a symbol for the mother's self in "The Glass Essay."

The distance between one end of the table and the other now seems to grow enormous and unbridgeable as the two interlocutors find themselves increasingly estranged from one another:

> A stranger is someone
> who sits
>
> very still at the kitchen table,
>
> looks down at his knuckles,
> thinks some day we will laugh about this,
> doesn't believe it. (89)

The speaker takes her exit in a final definition of 'stranger', in which she assumes the role of a wolf. The wolf is a figure with whom she often identifies, wolves being a conventional symbol for the marginal element in society[25]:

> a stranger is someone
> who takes dread a little too seriously.
> Out
>
> on the street again at sunset,
> sores open,
> moving blindly.
>
> There is a loneliness that fills the plain.
> Total.
> Lunar. (93-4)

Yet there is also something mutilated about the speaker's wolf - - this "being /made of raw sounds /joined at the stumps /and moving /as one form /down there" ("Canicula di Anna", Plainwater 77). This mutilation and disfigurement is described in explicitly physical terms, as happens so often when the

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[25] "The wolf is an outlaw. He lives beyond the boundary of usefully cultivated and inhabited space marked off as the *polis*, in that blank no man's land called *to apeiron* ("the unbounded"). Women, in the ancient view, share this territory spiritually and metaphorically in virtue of a 'natural' female affinity for all that is raw, formless and in need of the civilizing hand of man" ("The Gender of Sound", Glass, Irony and God 124). In "The Truth about God", the speaker explicitly assumes the role of a wolf: "I saw my life as a wolf loping along the road [...]" (Glass, Irony and God 49).

'wounds' separating self from other refuse to be stitched up by the speaker.

By describing her trip to Rome, the speaker shows her readers how psychologically dangerous and painful it is to be suspended midair after trying unsuccessfully to open herself up to the knowledge of another. Unable to establish communication with Anna, the speaker withdraws back into her original self-enclosure and solitude, hoping that she will never have to enact these absurd and fated gestures again, still knowing that she will not survive without love for long.

ii. Anthropology and textual interpretation

> This poem leads you
> as formal as a footman
> through the doors of perception
> and into a hall
> where it introduces you to the poet
> who is displayed
> like a mantis in amber,
> like a beetle in resin
> like a fly suspended
> in a web of seed pearls,
> housed in the four-chambered
> heart of a ruby.
>
> - Mary di Michele, Tree of August 48

So far, we have established that Anne Carson's speaker adopts the trope of anthropology in order to theorize her approach to the human characters in her poetic world. I believe that anthropology also has profound implications on how the speaker approaches works of literature, though she herself never makes these implications explicit. Nevertheless, the way in which the speaker presents works of literature parallels point by point the way in which she presents human beings.

First of all, the speaker represents both human beings and literary works as if they were separated by vast distances. Among human beings the distance is spatial, involving strenuous journeys or halting conversations on long distance telephone lines; among works of literature, on the other hand, the distance is temporal. For although the speaker's poetry is densely intertextual, she only engages with authors and texts who belong to eras far past. Thus Sappho, Mimnermos and Emily Brontë appear on the pages of her poetry, while her literary contemporaries do not. And if the distance between human beings is symbolized by festering wounds that will not heal, so too there is rupture and pain involved in reaching across the centuries to engage with a literary work of art. For example, the speaker's imaginary interview with Mimnermos, a 6th century BC poet, begins with a wearying journey through pouring rain:

> M[imnermos]: It surprises me you came all this way
> I[nterviewer]: What a mud pond
> M: You don't like rain
> I: No let's get started [...] ("The Mimnermos Interviews", Plainwater 18).

In the speaker's final interview with Mimnermos, the distance that separates them is symbolized by static that partially erases the tape on which she had recorded the interview (24).

The parallels between human beings and literary works of art extend further. The speaker considers works of art as embodiments or records of human consciousness[26]. Furthermore, the speaker represents both works of art and human beings as self-enclosed spatial entities that may be approached and possibly even opened up by others[27]. Certainly, the visual imagery of Anne Carson's poetry suggests that her own poetic world winds thickly around a concealed centre enfolding the vulnerable speaker at its very heart. Yet it is the speaker's

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[26] The speaker's critical preference for conceiving works of art as embodiments of consciousness is revealed in her numerous references to phenomenological theory, and particularly to Heidegger. In "Canicula di Anna", for example, she describes a conference of phenomenologists; her description demonstrates a profound familiarity with Heidegger's work. These references are ever more striking when we consider that the speaker never makes reference to any other critical school. What is more, Anne Carson herself engages with the texts of other poets as records of their particular consciousness (see especially "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" and "Now What"). We shall return to examine Anne Carson's treatment of other writers in greater detail.

[27] As we have seen, the seeming closure of a work of art is a concept with a considerable critical legacy, contested among others by Jacques Derrida and Frank Kermode (see footnote 2). Murray Krieger argues that closure is not a property of the text, but rather a human habit or even a need ("An Apology for Poetics." In American Criticism in the Poststructuralist Age. Ed. Ira Konigsberg. Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1981). William Spanos demonstrates that an adoption of phenomenological theory (such as the speaker's) contributes directly to a focus on the spatial aspects of a literary work of art, at the expense of the work's disclosure over time ("Breaking the Circle: Hermeneutics as Dis-closure." Boundary 22 (1977): 421-57). Spanos also shows that a new critical approach leads to a similar focus on the work's spatial form. Certainly, the complex self-referentialities and internal ambiguities in Anne Carson's work do contribute to the sense that her work forms a private and self-enclosed universe, best understood when the reader "suspend[s] the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (Frank, Joseph. The Idea of Spatial Form. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991. p. 49).

relationship to the enacted reader[28] that definitively establishes her poetic world as a separate and self-enclosed entity toward which the reader must adopt an anthropological approach. The speaker not only portrays the enacted reader as just another human character inside her poetic world, but also imposes the role of an invader on the enacted reader, whether the actual reader wants to assume this role or not.

The speaker and the enacted reader

We began this study by examining the speaker's efforts to represent her poetic world as a heavily barricaded fortress from which the enacted reader is systematically excluded. Let us now sketch out the trajectory of the enacted reader in her approach toward and rejection from this fortress. Upon entering the grounds of Anne Carson's poetic world, the reader immediately perceives that the fortress functions as a symbol of the speaker's self, and even of her body: for the speaker unflinchingly proclaims that the material of her poetry is sown of her own flesh and blood. Indeed, her fortress seems to be made of a "Deck of cards" - - "Each card is made of flesh./ The living cards are days of a woman's life" ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 35).

By suggesting that her poetry is sown of her own flesh, the speaker seemingly heightens her vulnerability and exposure. Paradoxically, however, this exposure is made to serve an integral function in her psychological warfare against the enacted reader: the opaqueness of the cards ensures that the enacted reader will not see her, while their fragile nudity appeals to reader's sense of decency, discouraging the reader from approaching the speaker any further. Indeed, entering the speaker's space would constitute a rapacious act of intrusion

[28] For a treatment of the distinction between the actual reader and the reader enacted or implied by a text, see Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (1976. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) and

on the speaker's privacy: for she goes so far as to portray her poetry as a living and breathing womb[29]:

> [...] White room whose walls,
> having neither planes nor curves nor angles,
> are composed of a continuous satiny white membrane
>
> like the flesh of some interior organ of the moon.
> It is a living surface, almost wet.
> Lucency breathes in and out.
>
> Rainbows shudder across it.
> And around the walls of the room a voice goes whispering,
> *Be very careful. Be very careful.* (35)

Now something curious happens: for despite the speaker's designation of her poetry as a fragile and intimate space, she decides that the enacted reader will pay no heed whatsoever to her injunctions. Accordingly, she imagines that the reader will continue trespassing on her privacy and invading her space. Strikingly, the speaker figures the readerly invasion in terms of the reader devouring her body: "[the readers'] little snouts wake and bite in" ("Afterword", Plainwater 88). This metaphor functions as the literary parallel of the surgical invasion which the speaker sees reflected in her relationships to the human characters in her poetic world.

The speaker reacts to the readerly invasion by becoming hostile and by explicitly denouncing the reader's activity of reading as criminal investigation ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 239) or even as stalking ("Afterword", Plainwater

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"Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response" (In Aspects of Narrative. Ed. J. Hillis Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 1971).

[29] The speaker's anxious willingness to identify her womb as the seat of her creative self certainly resonates with some controversial theories of female creativity. For accounts of "hysteria", etymologically "a malfunctioning of the womb", and its relationship to creativity, see Sigmund Freud, "Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1901. The Freud Reader. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1995. pp. 172-239) and "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1907. The Freud Reader. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1995. pp. 436-43), as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th-Century Literary Imagination. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Ch. 2-3).

88)[30]. The speaker also vehemently reiterates that the reader's evaluation of her work is irrelevant and even insulting to its integrity. Yet the enacted reader is a paradoxical creation, for such a reader can only exist through the act of reading[31]. Indeed, not just through any act of reading, but a careful one - - detectives and stalkers must pay close attention.

Even though the speaker represents the enacted reader as a human character in her world, the enacted reader seems entirely void of basic human attributes such as a sense of respect and compassion. What is more, the reader is not even given a voice with which to accept or object to the role assigned to her by the speaker. By depriving the enacted reader of these qualities, the speaker effectively projects a constructed identity onto the reader. As Charles Taylor suggests:

> Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of existence[32].

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[30] The speaker repeatedly enacts the reader as a stalker who takes voyeuristic pleasure in her exposure. This visual enactment may actually contribute to the speaker's presentation of her poetic world as a separate and self-enclosed space: according to Bachelard and Blanchot, for instance, spatial form in literature is created (and not merely invaded) by the process of the reader's gaze. See Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (1958. Trans. M. Jolas. Boston: Beacon P, 1969) and Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature (1955. Trans. A. Smock. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989).

[31] Following J. L. Austin, we could say that the speaker's interdictions and commands "perform" the reader ("Performative Utterances", In Philosophical Papers. 1961. Ed J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock. London: Oxford UP, 1976. pp. 232-52).

[32] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" (In Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994. p. 25.).

And so, following Taylor, we can say that the enacted reader is not the only figure established as a persecutor, for the speaker persecutes the enacted reader as well.

The ambivalent constructions behind the speaker-enacted reader relationship are laid bare in the "Afterword" to "Canicula di Anna" (Plainwater 88-90)[33]. In this afterword, the speaker turns to accuse the enacted reader of having selfishly grasped at the story of "Anna" in the hopes that it would not yet end: "Perhaps it is something about me you would like to know - not that you have any specific questions, but still, that would be better than nothing" (88). The speaker then makes a show of exposing herself by declaring: "You do not know how this vague wish of yours fills me with fear. I have been aware of it from the very beginning" (88). When the enacted reader nevertheless continues to approach her, the speaker resorts to a hostile tone where she threatens to lock the intrusive reader inside the fortress of her poetry for good - "It is almost as if you hear a key turn in the lock. Which side of the door are you on? You do not know. Which side am I on?" (89). This threat suggests that the speaker and the enacted reader are equally dependent on their common text[34]. Indeed, in a final dramatic gesture, the speaker taunts the enacted reader by reversing the stalking roles altogether:

> And yet, having held you in my company so long, I find I do have something to give you. Not the mysterious, intimate and consoling data you would have wished, but something to go on with, and in all likelihood the best I can do. It is simply the fact, as you go down the

[33] A copy of this afterword is included in the appendix.

[34] This moment where the speaker acknowledges her mutual dependency with the enacted reader is reminiscent of the final passages in Hegel's "Lordship and Bondage", where both lord and bondsman recognize that neither has succeeded in effacing the other. The speaker's dependency on the enacted reader is revealed by the fact that she fears being ignored by others just as much as she fears being invaded by them. In "Entgegenwärtigung Town", for example, the speaker hides in a house, only imagining that she is being pursued: "I heard you coming after me. /Like a lion over the flagpoles and. /I felt the buildings. /Sway once all along the street and I. /Crouched low on my heels. /In the middle of the room. /Staring hard. /Then the stitches came open. /You went past" (Plainwater 100).

> stairs and walk in dark streets, as you see forms, as you marry or speak sharply or wait for a train, as you begin imagination, as you look at every mark, simply the fact of my eyes in your back (90).

The speaker mocks the enacted reader by other means as well. She suggests that a "perfect listener" could in fact earn her confidence, followed immediately by the disclaimer that such a listener exists only in her dreams ("Mimnermos Interviews", Plainwater 20)[35]. What is more, she only rarely makes direct propositions that are not obfuscated by irony or inversion, or do not hinge on words that have become so surcharged with internal meaning as to be almost untranslatable[36]. For example, the speaker displays an uneasy awareness of herself as a writer, and in a typical gesture of irony she suggests that she (like Kafka) is a "mendacious creature" ("Diving", Plainwater 117). These kinds of inversions and ironical strategies make it impossible to know exactly where the speaker stands, where her voice is coming from.

What is more, the speaker manifests an ambivalent relationship to language, and slips casually back and forth between an authentic lyrical voice and a factual, reporting or defining language full of seemingly desultory lists and descriptions of painting techniques. She deems language inadequate for the purposes of genuine communication, even though the enacted

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[35] The "perfect listener" is the ideal reader, a figure who, according to Didier Coste, takes on an equal importance for the actual reader and the reader enacted by the text ("Trois conceptions du lecteur et leur contribution à une théorie du texte littéraire." Poétique 43 [1980]: 354-71). The speaker sets up the ideal reader as an elusory ideal of which the enacted reader must always fall short. Incidentally, these discouraging taunts are not limited to Anne Carson's speaker alone. In her interview with John d'Agata, Anne Carson uses an analogous strategy when she opens the interview by suggesting that there is no need to interview her, for she has already given the "perfect interview" a few years before: "The interview to end all interviews - almost four hours we talked! More of a conversation, really. I don't think anything could top it. Do you want to start?" (1). Interestingly enough, this perfect interview has never been published, as far as my research shows.

reader clearly has no choice but to depend on words in attempting to understand her. According to the speaker, however, there is "fear inside language" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 141), "something shattered inside language" ("Just for the Thrill", Plainwater 204), "yes there is violence in it" (217); the truth keeps slipping away in language (202), "language shelters [...] anger" (233) and only "reopens wounds" (232). The speaker illustrates the failure of language by practicing deliberate acts of erasure in the text: the photographs that she points to are missing, the tape player through which she speaks breaks or fills with static, and the pages which she describes disappear under "daubs of ink" (234).

Indeed, the speaker goes to great lengths to assert herself as the mistress of her fortress. When she suspects that her power position is threatened, she escapes through a trap door, raises a mirror toward the enacted reader, or sends the enacted reader up staircases that lead nowhere. The reader comes to resemble Kafka's "K": the more assiduously she strives to reach the Castle, the further she is relegated from it. For example, one of the speaker's favourite distancing strategies consists in flinging the enacted reader's attention to some superficial detail just at the point when she is most involved in the speaker's narrative. This process of deflection can most clearly be observed in "The Glass Essay", where the speaker sinks into an ever deeper unconscious imagery and brutal self-examination[37]. When this process becomes too intense, she directs the reader's attention to a surface detail, such as a clock ticking on the kitchen wall. Yet another obstructive tactic introduces translucent or semi-

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[36] 'Water', 'glass', 'knowledge', 'love', 'edge', 'spin' and 'gone' are just some examples of words that become so saturated with internal connotations as to lend themselves beautifully to a deconstructive reading.

[37] The speaker's self-examination appears particularly raw and brutal because she confesses to "experiences that deprive her of dignity in her suffering - precisely what one is normally most ashamed to own up to" (Lerner 54).

opaque substances (such as liquids, glass, crystals or ice) into the narrative whenever the speaker judges that the relationship between writer and reader has become too immediate or "transparent"[38].

We can conclude, then, that the speaker makes concerted efforts to introduce ambiguity, irony and invasiveness into her relationship with the enacted reader. In effect, she portrays the enacted reader just as she does the numerous interviewers, psychoanalysts and surgeons who make grotesquely intrusive appearances in her poetry, and who approach her with scalpels and other sharp clinical instruments. Through the imagined act of reading, the enacted reader comes to negotiate precisely the same challenges that the speaker confronts in trying to establish contact with the human characters in her poetic world. Just as "El Cid" and "Anna" close themselves off from communicating with the speaker, so too the speaker closes herself off from the enacted reader. It is surely not a coincidence that the speaker should be most hostile toward the enacted reader in precisely those poems where she herself experiences rejection or hostility to her own acts of communication[39]. And just as the speaker transfers the burden

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[38] On literary transparency, see Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle (Évreux: Gallimard, 1971). The speaker will sometimes apologize for the obstructions caused by the semi-opaque substances in the narrative, and claim that they function to hide her own loneliness from herself - usually, with little success: "A great icicle formed on the railing of my balcony/ so I drew up close to the window and tried peering through the icicle,/ hoping to trick myself into some interior vision,/ But all I saw/ was the man and woman in the room across the street/ making their bed and laughing" ("The Glass Essay", Glass, Irony and God 37).

[39] See especially "Canicula di Anna" and "Anthropology of Water". Roman Ingarden has written extensively on the function of the enacted reader, especially as this construction relates to the overall meaning of the literary work of art (The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art. 1937. Trans. Ruth Ann Crowly and Kenneth R. Olson. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973). Ingarden suggests that texts are "places of indeterminacy" (notice again the spatial metaphor) full of gaps and vacancies that must be occupied by the reader in order to achieve the text's full communicatory or aesthetic effect. The reader must therefore actively assume or "concretize" the role designated by the text itself. Applying Ingarden's theory to Anne Carson's poetry, we could say that by rejecting the enacted reader, the actual reader comes more fully to understand the speaker's humiliation and solitude in being rejected by the human characters in her world.

of her own solitude onto "El Cid", lashing out at him in anger and disappointment, so too she transfers her shattered hopes onto the enacted reader. First she makes the reader reenact her painstaking exertions at establishing human contact, then she forces the reader to assume that these exertions fail because of the reader's own ineptitude, and finally she hurls the reader outside the walls of her fortress altogether.

The speaker with other speakers

If the speaker shows such visceral mistrust toward the enacted reader, then one might assume that she would also indicate how to approach works of literature appropriately. Indeed, the speaker engages with numerous texts in her poetry, and particularly with Greek lyrical poetry, the Old Testament, and the journals and poems of Emily Brontë. Paradoxically, however, the speaker approaches the speakers of other literary works just as invasively as she imagines her own reader approaching her.

Unlike the enacted reader, the speakers of other works of literature do not appear as embodied characters with motives of their own. Rather, they appear as empty and unresisting literary bodies that Anne Carson's speaker can invade and exit at her will. For instance, the speaker usually does not indicate from where her numerous sources derive; instead, she simply weaves references and citations from other works into her own narrative voice. Moreover, in "Jaget" and in "Short Talks" the speaker presents her own short parodies of other writers and their works. Each parody bears as a title the parodied author's or work's name, suggesting that the parody can capture their very identity. Gertrude Stein is distilled into a single line: "How curious. I had no idea! Today has ended" ("On Gertrude Stein at 9:30", Plainwater 31). One can only wonder how the speaker herself would react to such overtly invasive and reductive treatment.

Yet it is in "The Glass Essay" where the speaker most explicitly invades the work of another writer. In this long narrative poem, the speaker takes over and assumes the persona of Emily Brontë, until the two become virtually indistinguishable. The poem typically opens with a long-distance journey. This time, the speaker travels all day in a train to visit her mother:

> [My mother] lives on a moor in the north.
> She lives alone.
> Spring opens like a blade there.
> I travel all day on trains and bring a lot of books -
>
> Some for my mother, some for me
> including *The Collected Works of Emily Brontë.*
> This is my favourite author.
>
> Also my main fear, which I mean to confront. (1)

It is unclear whether the speaker is traveling toward a confrontation with her mother, with Emily Brontë, or with herself - these "three silent women at the kitchen table" (2). Whatever the case may be, something potentially dangerous awaits her at the journey's end: for "spring opens like a blade there" (1)[40]. The speaker's fear of this danger initiates her transformation into Emily Brontë:

> Whenever I visit my mother
> I feel I am turning into Emily Brontë,
>
> my lonely life around me like a moor,
> my ungainly body stumping over the mud flats with a look of
> transformation
> that dies when I come in the kitchen door.
> What meat is it, Emily, we need? (1-2)

Even after spending the whole day in a train, the speaker must traverse vast physical landscapes so as to reach her mother's house, a symbol of the mother's self. There are already hints

[40] In fact, open blades are usually associated with the speaker's father.

of the marginalized and mutilated wolf in this description: the speaker senses that she will not be able to live up to the acts of communication that her mother will require of her. The indented and isolated word "transformation" indicates that the speaker has taken on the persona of Emily Brontë, as illustrated by the fact that her mother bluntly addresses her as "Emily" when she walks in through the kitchen door. The persona of Emily Brontë allows the speaker to escape her mother's expectations, as well as her own depression and loneliness after having been abandoned by her lover, "Law" - - "When Law left I felt so bad I thought I would die. /This is not uncommon" (8). From this point onward, the speaker cites freely from Emily Brontë's poems and private journals, compares their respective experiences, and invades and exits Emily Brontë's persona at her will.

We can conclude, then, that just as the speaker experiences rejection in her interactions with other human beings, so too she performs and perpetrates rejection in the textual world that she creates for herself. This textual world is a fortress inside which the speaker can finally assume the position of power. Accordingly, she not only rejects but also persecutes the enacted reader, whom she portrays as a flesh and blood intruder in her world. Such a portrayal allows her to continue to believe that her paper world reflects her relationships in the human world outside. What is more, the speaker hardly shows the kind of respect toward other speakers that she demands of her own enacted reader. Instead, she practices invasion on other speakers without questioning her actions and without any apparent concern for other speakers' self-protective strategies.

iii. Toward another way of knowing

> [The work] demands of the reader that he enter a zone where he can scarcely breathe and where the ground slips out from under his feet.

- Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature 195-6

It appears that we have reached the following conclusion: even though Anne Carson's speaker struggles to 'encounter' the human characters in her world, she performs and perpetrates 'invasion' both on her enacted reader and on the speakers of other works of literature. Clearly, then, the speaker makes a distinction between her relationships in the real world and in the textual world that she creates for herself. What is more, she makes a distinction between the skill and sensitivity of her readers and her own activity as a reader - - one that, considering her reading practices, seems entirely unjustified. How may we begin to understand these discrepancies, or situate ourselves as readers of Anne Carson's poetry?

So far, we have examined the speaker's associations and past experiences with invasion, and concluded that they lead her to reject invasion in her relationships with the human characters in her world. I would like to suggest that the speaker also offers a theoretical critique of invasion, despite the fact that she continues to practice this approach toward her reader and toward other literary works. Provocatively, Heidegger also adopts the figure of anthropology to demonstrate the visual and instrumental objectification of human beings that is so characteristic of the speaker's description of the 'anthropological invasion'. Heidegger speaks of anthropology not only as 'the science of man', but as "that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation to man" (The Question Concerning Technology 133). Moreover, anthropology is "that interpretation of man that already knows fundamentally what man is and hence can never ask who he *may be*. For with this question it would have to confess itself shaken and overcome" (153).

Anthropology, then, represents a study of others that has already been concluded. Heidegger's anthropologist, like the speaker's numerous interviewers, psychoanalysts and surgeons, starts from a pre-established model of the human being, and is at most searching for slight variations from the norm. In so doing, the anthropologist establishes clear boundaries between who is studying and who is being studied - - boundaries that serve to reify and objectify the other. Anne Carson's speaker believes that this approach is synonymous with 'invasion', and demonstrates that it is not a viable way to 'know' another. Accordingly, the invasive characters in her poetry are ultimately portrayed as impotent, ineffectual: in the "Mimnermos Interviews", the interviewer asks outrageously pedantic and irrelevant questions; in "The Glass Essay", the psychoanalyst shows only imperceptiveness through her suggestions; and in "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman", the anatomist's work lacks sensitivity to the larger human drama unfolding underneath his hands. Indeed, these characters' feeble acts and voices become drowned in the larger "roaring" of the universe ("The Life of Towns", Plainwater 108).

In "Chaldaic Oracles 1" the speaker explicitly critiques the invasive way of approaching another, whether this "other" be a human being or a work of art. The poem begins:

> There is something you should know.
> And the right way to know it
> is by a cherrying of your mind.

The poem has distinctly Heideggerian overtones. According to Heidegger, "to undergo an experience with something means that this something, which we reach along the way in order to attain it, itself pertains to us, meets and makes its appeal to us, in that it transforms us into itself" (On the Way to Language 93-4). This is the philosopher who also writes that "thinking cuts furrows", and that we must "*listen* to that

which language has already granted to us" (70-2). It is therefore we who must "cherry" our minds, and not the object of our knowledge. Why can we not thrust ourselves upon that which we wish to know? The speaker suggests:

> Because if you press your mind toward it
> and try to know
> that thing
>
> as you know a thing
> you will not know it.

If we thrust ourselves upon the other, we will not be able to know the other. According to Heidegger, modern technology "sets-upon" and "challenges": all of being is made to stand enframed in a useful order before humanity (The Question of Technology 320-2). All of being is therefore transformed into objects for production, and Heidegger adds: "Objectification [...] blocks us off against the Open. The more venturesome daring does not produce a defense" (Poetry, Language, Thought 120). But what is the being to which the most venturesome among us can be open? Heidegger answers: "An 'is' arises where the word breaks up" (On the Way to Language 108). So too the speaker, in the concluding lines of "Chaldaic Oracles 1", suggests:

> That thing you should know.
> Because it is out there (orchid) outside your *and*, it is.

Appropriately, Heidegger insists that poetry and thinking "share the same neighbourhood", and because they share the same neighbourhood, they may encounter one another (On the Way to Language 80-2). This is precisely what Anne Carson the classicist means by the concluding image in her essay "How Not to Read a Poem", namely that poetry shares the essential nature of wisdom in "mixing and unmixing itself" from others' interpretations (128). Heidegger stages such encounters in his later philosophical essays, just as Anne Carson encounters

philosophical questions in her poetry. As neighbours, the philosopher and the poet may encounter, indeed surprise, one another. What is essential is that both remain in the open and do not produce a defense against the other, for to defend oneself against one's neighbour would be to turn one's neighbour into an object. And once a neighbour has been objectified, no encounter is possible. As we have seen, the speaker of Anne Carson's poetry refuses to be objectified as if she were a tribe or a specimen waiting for categorization, and instead strives to make herself open to possibly dangerous and transformative experiences. Surely Heidegger would have enjoyed dwelling in such a poet's neighbourhood.

In discussing Heidegger, we have not only mixed poetry and philosophy, but philology as well. We have introduced the academic work of Anne Carson the classicist - - work that is, in effect, included in each one of her collections of poetry. Although one traditionally makes a clear distinction between speaker and author, the texts gathered together under the name "Anne Carson" encourage us not to. As a classicist, Anne Carson makes much of Prometheus, the "trickster" god who mixed up seemingly all important distinctions ("How Not to Read a Poem" 128). And it is not just as a classicist and poet that distinctions are blurred: Anne Carson the interviewee contributes to the confusion by granting interviews that sound much like the interviews that she stages in her poetry. It is my contention that such playful blending actually performs the possibility of another way of knowing.

Anne Carson's work as a classicist not only includes critical frameworks that complement the speaker's behaviour, but also offers solutions to some of the 'anthropological' questions raised by her poetry. Eros the Bittersweet, Anne Carson's essay on the role of *eros* in Greek lyric poetry, indicates why a speaker might want to create distance between herself and

her readers. In this work, Anne Carson sketches out an analogy between the activities of writing and seduction[41]. She shows that 'eros', or the desire to consummate 'the crisis of human contact' with another, thrives only when it is "deferred, defied, obstructed, hungry, [and] organized around a radiant absence" (18). Both the writer and the lover must engage in various distancing and "triangulating" ruses which defer union with the reader or the beloved (109). Only through such deliberately constructed boundaries may the writer/reader and lover/beloved keep "reaching" for each other and maintain a mutual space of erotic charge. The two can never touch, for otherwise the desire to reach out toward the other will cease. The writer/reader and lover/beloved must therefore maintain an "instinctive and mutual sensitivity to the boundary between them" (21); "the boundary of flesh and self between you and me" (30).

Certainly, Anne Carson's speaker goes to great lengths to introduce distance between herself and her enacted reader, while simultaneously ensuring that the reader will remain intrigued by her ambivalent indications. In effect, this distance ultimately contributes to further ensnaring the reader in a paradoxical desire to 'know' the speaker. In an interview with Dean Irvine, Anne Carson herself acknowledges a need to provoke an emotional reaction in the reader: "the discomfiting of the reader has some deep purpose I'm not quite aware of. It comes and goes in my writing; it comes and goes as an emotion" ("An Interview with Anne Carson" 82).

In Eros the Bittersweet Anne Carson not only offers an explanation for the distance that the speaker imposes between herself and the reader, but also gestures toward a new way of knowing another. Sokrates is the central character of this

[41] In drawing a parallel between eroticism and textuality, Eros the Bittersweet draws extensively on Roland Barthes's Fragments d'un discours

work, and his dialogical and receptive stance toward his interlocutors comes to represent the possibility of approaching another as an 'encounter' rather than an 'invasion'. Sokrates's wisdom emerges from his realization that a prolonged encounter is neither possible nor desirable: only distance ensures that we still want to reach out toward the knowledge of another. At best, we can hope to "mix and unmix" ourselves from others in a dialectical process of training our soul in moral health. Accordingly, Sokrates loves the very *process* of reaching out in order to know another, and famously acknowledges that he "no longer thinks he knows that which he does not know" (171). Sokrates's approach suggests that we should not hurl ourselves toward other bodies of knowledge with the hope of fusing ourselves with them, but rather approach others as learning experiences for making ourselves into stronger and wiser selves.

Anne Carson's speaker hardly achieves the sokratic ideal in her relationships with the human characters in her world, which are characterized by her unrelenting desire to lose herself in the touch of another being. Nor does the speaker achieve this ideal in her relationships with the enacted reader or the speakers of other works of art, where she deprives the other from the possibility of a dialogue. However, Anne Carson the classicist does experiment with the sokratic approach in her critical work on Catullus, Mimnermos, Sappho and Stesichoros[42]. In these critical essays, she strives to create clearings in which other poets' voices may be heard without her authorial interference. In particular, she produces striking interpretive results when she engages with their poetry by composing verse responses or innovative translations of her own.

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amoureux (Paris: Seuil, 1977) and Le plaisir du texte (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

[42] See "Carmina: Transaltions of Catullus" (American Poetry Review 21 [1992]:15-6), "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" (Plainwater 1-26), "Now

Autobiography of Red is Anne Carson's monument to the poet Stesichoros: she begins with an essay on Stesichoros; then offers completely irreverent translations of his extant fragments; then weaves his characters, words and motifs into a long verse narrative of her own, and finally stages an imaginary interview with the poet. These multiple approaches are not only dialogical, but create silences and clearings in which Stesichoros's own voice is heard. Anne Carson's work on Mimnermos similarly begins with an essay, then introduces translations, and finally stages three imaginary interviews with the poet. Here too there is a lightness and playfulness in her approach, for she is constantly tugging Mimnermos's words into a language not his own - - and, as we have seen, the encounter "draws us out of our own language" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 190) and "into a language not our own" (178). For example, Mimnermos's words sound to her "like a fall of rocks down a dry ravine", or "like a secret trout on the slip down the fathoms" ("The Brainsex Paintings", Plainwater 17).

Anne Carson not only offers us a theoretical critique of invasion but also shows us what a literary encounter might look like. Like human encounters, literary encounters require courage, openness and the willingness to do hard work. Anne Carson discovers this challenge in classical poetry, which offers her both distance and resistance as a reader. So too we can interpret the speaker's distancing strategies as necessary for sustaining the reader's interest in knowing her. Like human encounters, literary encounters remain elusive; they vanish at the moment when we think we have grasped them. At best we can hope to create a clearing for such encounters to take place. Indeed, Anne Carson's interpretation of Sokrates

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What?" (Grand Street 9 [1990]:43-5) and "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" (Raritan 14 [1995]: 32-44).

suggests that what is important is not whether we achieve an actual encounter, but what we learn along the way. Perhaps we might conclude, then, that all responses to poetry emerge not from the fullness and immediacy of an encounter, but rather from the impossibility of ever undergoing the experience of such an encounter.

III. Conclusion

> The stranger and the enemy
> I have seen him in the mirror
>
> C.P. Cavafy, Collected Poems of C.P. Cavafy 35

So far we have examined the distances between the characters in Anne Carson's poetry, as well as the distance that the speaker imposes between herself and the enacted reader. In fact, we have interpreted these distances as a kind of outsiderdom: just as the speaker stands outside the metaphorical 'houses' of Anna and her mother, so too the enacted reader stands outside the speaker's fortress. The characters in Anne Carson's world want more than anything to enter into each others' dwellings, for the world outside is cold and treacherous: "Outside the house a black January wind came flattening down from the top of the sky /and hit the windows hard" ("Autobiography of Red" 35). We have interpreted anthropology as a map, perhaps even a key, for passing from the world outside to the warmth inside the love of another human being.

Yet perhaps the most striking distance in Anne Carson's poetry is the innermost distance, namely the characters' distance to their own selves. For her characters are strangers to themselves: they stand outside the houses of their own lives. Accordingly, they dispend much of their time and energy in attempting to understand their own thoughts, actions and feelings. It requires effort and courage to bridge this innermost gap: for "the soul is a place /stretched like a surface of millstone grit between body and mind" ("Glass Essay" 12). Thus Anne Carson's characters become veritable anthropologists of their own lives.

The inner gap in the characters' selves contributes to an ambivalence in their project of reaching out to know another

human being. Often when her characters move toward another being, the self suddenly splits into an inner observing self who remains behind while the outer physical self takes all the steps forward. This is the case particularly in the speaker's accounts of her relationship with 'Anna', where the speaker remains disassociated throughout, never allowing herself to enter fully into the moment. Despite their elaborate theories, then, Anne Carson's characters are ultimately unwilling to admit to themselves that in the end "there is no person without a world" ("Autobiography of Red" 82), and that only another person can dismantle "the walls of [one's] life /leaving behind just ghosts /rustling like an old map" (42).

Rather than face this knowledge, Anne Carson's characters are compelled to keep themselves in constant motion. If they are not actually boarding planes destined toward faraway countries, they are flitting, fidgeting, incapable of sitting still. When they finally find themselves alone in some forlorn hotel room, they listen restlessly to sounds of life from the world outside, or fight off surges of impossible desire. When Geryon in "Autobiography of Red" finds himself alone in a hotel room in Buenos Aires, he can no longer understand how he could have chosen this for himself: "he leaned his hot forehead against the filthy windowpane and wept [...] and moments later he was charging along the hollow gutters of Avenida Bolivar" (98). Only at such moments of extremity will Anne Carson's characters admit to themselves that only another person can hold them still.

Thus it is the inner gap in Anne Carson's characters that motivates their impulse to reach out toward others. There is some dishonesty in this: and indeed, it is perhaps a less indomitable task to come to know another than it is to know oneself. Yet it is unclear whether her characters are being more dishonest to those whom they seek to 'know' or to their

own selves. The speaker, in "The Glass Essay", clearly believes that she is making sincere attempts to understand the gap within herself, and even surrounds herself with all the conventional symbols of self-examination (such as regarding her own estranged face in the mirror). Yet her self-examination will go no further than to analyze the gap between what was and what could have been between her and her lover, 'Law'. Her self-examination never moves beyond the past tense, for it is far too treacherous to think of what could still *be*.

This tone of passive resignation extends to almost all of Anne Carson's poetry. Indeed, most of her poems describe the friendships and relationships that she claims have slipped out of her hands "like water" ("Diving", Plainwater 117). It is easy to infer why she might choose to write such thoughts and recollections down rather than communicate them in a direct interchange: poetry provides her with a mechanism to continue disavowing her responsibility for the loss of so much love. Moreover, there is a clear awareness in her work that the act of writing is only a cowardly substitute for the frightening and potentially damaging act of making human connection - for "encounters can drown us" ("Kinds of Water", Plainwater 132). The act of writing is also a small token of atonement for the pain that she has inflicted and that has been inflicted on her. The reader is left wondering about the meaning of this form of atonement which is undertaken in isolation, especially when it is not offered to the people in question (mother, father) but circulated for the perusal of anonymous readers. The reader is left wondering whether it can ever be too late to take action in the real world.

Such gaps are finally also reflected in the speaker's relationship to her own activity as a writer. Though she unflinchingly proclaims this work as her own, she also vacillates toward romantic theories of creativity that would

ease her responsibility as author. And clearly it would be easier to believe that this struggling and hurting creation could have been borne in spite of herself: "as if she had merely opened her mouth /to breathe lightning" ("Glass Essay" 24).

APPENDIX

1. Anne Carson, "Afterword" to "Canicula di Anna", Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1995): 88-90.

2. Anne Carson, "Diving: Introduction to the Anthropology of Water", Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1995): 117-8.

3. Anne Carson, "Thirst: Introduction to Kinds of Water", Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1995): 119-23.

4. Anne Carson, "Very Narrow: Introduction to Just for the Thrill", Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1995): 188-91.

5. Anne Carson, "Father's Old Blue Cardigan", New Yorker 73.34 (10 Nov. 1997): 93.

6. Anne Carson, "The Mimnermos Interviews (3)", Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1995): 24-6.

Anne Carson,
'Afterword' to 'Canicula di Anna', Plainwater 88-90

Afterword

After a story is told there are some moments of silence. Then words begin again. Because you would always like to know a little more. Not exactly more story. Not necessarily, on the other hand, an exegesis. Just something to go on with. After all, stories end but you have to proceed with the rest of the day. You have to shift your weight, raise your eyes, notice the sound of traffic again, maybe go out for cigarettes. A coldness begins to spread through you at the thought; a wish forms. Perhaps it is something about me you would like to know—not that you have any specific questions, but still, that would be better than nothing. I could pour you a glass of wine and go on talking about the sun still upon the mountains outside the window or my theory of adjectives or some shameful thing I have done in the past, and none of us would have to leave just yet.

You do not know how this vague wish of yours fills me with fear. I have been aware of it from the beginning, I must be frank about this, I have worn it around my throat like a fox collar since the moment I said *"Vediamo."* Just then I felt your body tense for a story, and for something else. You tracked and peered and stalked it through page after page. Now here we are. Little snouts wake and bite in.

But could you tell me, what is so terrible about stepping off the end of a story? Let us look more closely at this moment that gathers at the place called the end. Up until this time, you have been fairly successful at holding back your tears, and

suddenly you feel brokenhearted. It is not that you loved Anna, or look upon me as a friend, or hate your own life particularly. But there is a moment of uncovering, and of covering, which happens very fast and you seem to be losing track of something. It is almost as if you hear a key turn in the lock. Which side of the door are you on? You do not know. Which side am I on? It is up to me to tell you—at least, that is what other brave, wise and upright men have done in a similar position. For example, Sokrates:

> The man who had administered the poison laid his hands on him and after a while examined his feet and legs, then pinched his foot hard and asked if he felt it. Sokrates said "No." And after that, his thighs; and passing upward in this way he showed us that he was growing cold and rigid. And again he touched him and said that when it reached his heart he would be gone. The coldness by now was almost to the middle of his body and he uncovered himself—for he had covered his head—and said (what was his last utterance) "Krito, we owe a cock to Asklepios: pay it back and don't forget." "That," said Krito, "will be done, but now see if you have anything else you want to say." Sokrates made no further answer. Some time went by; he stirred. The man uncovered him and his eyes were fixed. When Krito saw this, he closed his mouth and eyes.
>
> (Plato, *Phaedo* 118)

Anne Carson,

Diving:
Introduction to the Anthropology of Water

Plainwater 117-8

I am a mendacious creature.

Kafka

Water is something you cannot hold. Like men. I have tried. Father, brother, lover, true friends, hungry ghosts and God, one by one all took themselves out of my hands. Maybe this is the way it should be—what anthropologists call "normal danger" in the encounter with alien cultures. It was an anthropologist who first taught me about danger. He emphasized the importance of using *encounter* rather than (say) *discovery* when talking about such things. "Think of it as the difference," he said, "between believing what you want to believe and believing what can be proved." I thought about that. "I don't want to believe anything," I said. (But I was lying.) "And I have nothing to prove." (Lying again.) "I just like to travel into the world and stop, noticing what is under the sky." (This, in fact, is true.) Cruelly at this point, he mentioned a culture he had studied where true and false virgins are identified by ordeal of water. For an intact virgin can develop the skill of diving into deep water but a woman who has known love will drown. "I am not interested in true and false," I said (one last lie) and we fell silent.

Anthropology is a science of mutual surprise. I wanted to ask him several questions, like whether he could tell me the

difference between heaven and hell, but I did not. Instead I found myself telling him about the daughters of Danaos. Danaos was a hero of ancient Greek myth who had fifty daughters. They loved their father so much it was as if they were parts of his body. When Danaos stirred in his sleep they would awaken, each in her narrow bed, staring into the dark. Then came time to marry. Danaos found fifty bridegrooms. He set the day. He carried out the wedding ceremony. And at midnight on the wedding night, fifty bedroom doors clicked shut. Then a terrible encounter took place. Each of forty-nine of the daughters of Danaos drew a sword from alongside her thigh and stabbed her bridegroom to death.

This archetypal crime of women was rewarded by the gods with a paradigmatic punishment. Danaos's forty-nine killing daughters were sent to hell and condemned to spend eternity gathering water in a sieve.

But yes, there was one daughter who did not draw her sword. What happened to her remains to be discovered. Clothe yourself, the water is deep.

Anne Carson,

Thirst:
Introduction to Kinds of Water

Plainwater 119-23

All things are water.

(a sentence spoken by the ancient philosopher Thales one night when he had fallen down a well)

I think it was Kafka who had the idea of swimming across Europe and planned to do so with his friend Max, river by river. Unfortunately his health wasn't up to it. So instead he started to write a parable about a man who had never learned to swim. One cool autumn evening the man returns to his hometown to find himself being acclaimed for an Olympic backstroke victory. In the middle of the main street a podium had been set up. Warily he begins to mount the steps. The last rays of sunset are striking directly into his eyes, blinding him. The parable breaks off as the town officials step forward holding up garlands, which touch the swimmer's head.

I like the people in Kafka's parables. They do not know how to ask the simplest question. Whereas to you and me it may look (as my father used to say) as obvious as a door in water.

Before leaving for Spain I went to visit my father. He lives in a hospital because he has lost the use of some of the parts of his body and of his mind. Most of the day he sits in a chair, hands gripping the arms. With his chest he makes little lunges against the straps, forward and back. His huge red eyes move

all the time, pouring onto things. I sit in a chair drawn up beside him, making little lunges with my chest, forward and back. From his lips comes a stream of syllables. He was all his life a silent man. But dementia has released some spring inside him, he babbles constantly in a language neurologists call "word salad." I watch his face. I say, "Yes, Father" in the gaps. How true, as if it were a conversation. I hate hearing myself say, "Yes, Father." It is hard not to. Forward and back. All of a sudden he stops moving and turns toward me. I feel my body stiffen. He is staring hard. I draw back a little in the chair. Then abruptly he turns away again with a sound like a growl. When he speaks the words are not for me. "Death is a fifty-fifty thing, maybe forty-forty," he says in a flat voice.

I watch the sentence come clawing into me like a lost tribe. That's the way it is with dementia. There are a number of simple questions I could ask. Like, Father what do you mean? Or, Father what about the other twenty percent? Or, Father tell me what you were thinking all those years when we sat at the kitchen table together munching cold bacon and listening to each other's silence? I can still hear the sound of the kitchen clock ticking on the wall above the table. "Yes," I say.

When my father began to lose his mind, my mother and I simply pretended otherwise. You can get used to eating breakfast with a man in a fedora. You can get used to anything, my mother was in the habit of saying. I began to wake earlier and earlier in the morning. I would come back in from my morning walk about dawn, to find him standing in his pajamas and his hat, whispering, "Supper ready yet?" to the dark kitchen, his face clear as a child's. This was before confusion gave way to

rages. Dementia can be gleeful at first. One evening I was making salad when he came through the kitchen. "The letters of your lettuce are very large," he said quietly and kept going. A deep chuckle floated back. Other days I saw him sitting with his head sunk in his hands. I left the room. Late at night I could hear him in the room next to mine, walking up and down, saying something over and over. He was cursing himself. The sound came through the wall. A sound not human. That night I dreamed I was given abdominal surgery with a coat hanger. I bought earplugs for sleeping.

But I was learning the most important thing there is to learn about dementia, that it is continuous with sanity. There is no door that slams shut suddenly. Father had always been a private man. Now his mind was a sacred area where no one could enter or ask the way. Father had always been a bit irascible. Now his moods were a minefield where we stepped carefully, holding out one hand horizontally before us. Father had always disliked disorder. Now he spent all day bent over scraps of paper, writing notes to himself which he hid in books or his clothing and at once forgot. We did not try to keep track of them, this angered him the more. "I can feel summer sinking into the earth," my mother said one evening. We were sitting in the back garden. He had asked what time it was and gone in to write that down. She told him six o'clock, although it was only five, hoping he would spend about an hour writing 6 on pieces of paper and then realize six o'clock is suppertime and come to the table without trouble. To live with a mad person requires many small acts of genius—reverse of the moment when Helen Keller shouts "Water!"—when you

glance into the mad world and suddenly see how it works. My mother got good at this. I did not. I became interested in penance.

Let us be gentle when we question our fathers.

It wasn't until he went mad that I began to see I had always angered him. I never knew why. I did not ask. Instead I had learned to take soundings—like someone testing the depth of a well. You throw a stone down and listen. You wait for the gaps and say, "Yes."

I was a locked person. I had hit the wall. Something had to break. I wrote a poem called "I Am an Unlocated Window of Myself" (which my father found on the kitchen table and covered with the words GARBAGE DAY FRIDAY written in pencil forty or fifty times). I prayed and fasted. I read the mystics. I studied the martyrs. I began to think I was someone thirsting for God. And then I met a man who told me about the pilgrimage to Compostela.

He was a pious man who knew how to ask questions. "How can you see your life unless you leave it?" he said to me. Penance began to look more interesting. Since ancient times pilgrimages have been conducted from place to place, in the belief that a question can travel into an answer as water into thirst. The most venerable pilgrimage in Christendom is called the Road to Compostela—some 380 kilometers of hills and stars and desert from St. Jean Pied de Port on the French side of the Pyrenees to the city of Compostela on the western coast of the Spanish province of Galicia. Pilgrims have walked this road since the ninth century. They say the holy apostle James lies buried in Compostela and that he admires being

visited. In fact, it is traditional for pilgrims to take a petition to Compostela; you can ask St. James to change your life. I was a young, strong, stingy person of no particular gender—all traits advantageous to the pilgrim. So I set off, into the late spring wind blasting with its green states.

To look for the simplest question, the most obvious facts, the doors that no one may close, is what I meant by anthropology. I was a strong soul. Look I will change everything, all the meanings! I thought. I packed my rucksack with socks, canteen, pencils, three empty notebooks. I took no maps, I cannot read maps—why press a seal on running water? After all, the only rule of travel is, Don't come back the way you went. Come a new way.

Anne Carson,

Very Narrow:
Introduction to Just for the Thrill

Plainwater 111

Water is best.

Pindar

Memory is of the past.

Aristotle

No that's not her.

my father

Surely the world is full of simple truths that can be obtained by asking clear questions and noting the answers. "Who is that woman?" I overheard my father ask my mother one night when I was coming down the stairs to the kitchen. It took me a moment to realize he was asking about me—not because I did not know by then that he was losing his mind, which was obvious in other ways, but because he used the word *woman*.

I was not "woman" to him. I stopped halfway down the stairs. It reminded me of a night when I was twelve or thirteen. Coming down the same stairs, I heard him in the kitchen talking to my mother. "Oh, she won't be like them," he was saying with a sort of glow in his voice. It was the last time I heard that glow. Because soon afterward I did, to my dismay, begin to be like them—as the Chinese proverb says, "There was blood in the water trough early one morning."

I am not a person who feels easy talking about blood or desire. I rarely used the word *woman* myself. But such things are the natural facts of what we are, I suppose we have to follow out these signs in the endless struggle against forgetting. The truth is, I lived out my adolescence mainly in default of my father's favor. But I perceived that I could trouble him less if I had no gender. Anger tired him so. I made my body as hard and flat as the armor of Athena. No secrets under my skin, no telltale drops on the threshold. And eventually I found —a discovery due, in fact, to the austerities of pilgrimage— that I could suppress the natural facts of "woman" altogether. I did so. Unfortunately by then his mind was too far gone to care.

I lived alone for a long time.

What happened to me after that takes the form of a love story, not so different from other love stories, except better documented. Love is, as you know, a harrowing event. I believed in taking an anthropological approach to that.

Even now it is hard to admit how love knocked me over. I had lived a life protected from all surprise, now suddenly I was a wheel running downhill, a light thrown against a wall, paper blown flat in the ditch. I was outside my own language and customs. Why, the first time he came to my house he walked straight into the back room and came out and said, "You have a very narrow bed." Just like that! I had to laugh. I hardly knew him. I wanted to say, Where I come from, people don't talk about beds, except children's or sickbeds. But I didn't. Humans in love are terrible. You see them come hungering at one another like prehistoric wolves, you see

something struggling for life in between them like a root or a soul and it flares for a moment, then they smash it. The difference between them smashes the bones out. So delicate the bones. "Yes, it is very narrow," I said. And just at that moment, I felt something running down the inside of my leg. I had not bled for thirteen years.

Love is a story that tells itself—fortunately. I don't like romance and have no talent for lyrical outpourings—yet I found myself during the days of my love affair filling many notebooks with data. There was something I had to explain to myself. I traveled into it like a foreign country, noted its behaviors, transcribed its idioms, prowled like an anthropologist for the rare and unwary use of a kinship term. But kinship itself jumped like a frog leg, then lay silent. I found the kinship between a man and a woman can be a steep, whole, excellent thing and full of languages. Yet it may have no speech. Does that make sense?

One night—it was the first winter my father began to have trouble with his mind—I was sitting at the kitchen table wrapping Christmas presents. I saw him coming down the stairs very slowly, holding his hands in front of him. In his hands were language and speech, decoupled, and when he started to talk, they dropped and ran all over the floor like a bag of bell clappers. "What happened to you to I who to? There was a deer. That's not what I. How many were? No. How? What did you do with the things you dripped no not dripped how? You had an account and one flew off. That's not. No? I. No. How? How?" He sat down all of a sudden on the bottom step and turned his eyes on me, clearly having no idea in the world

who I was, or how he came to be there with me, or what should happen next. I never saw a human being so naked. His face the face of a fledgling bird, in what fringe of infant evening leaves, in what untouched terror lapped.

Sometimes you come to an edge that just breaks off.

The man who named my narrow bed was a quiet person, but he had good questions. "I suppose you do love me, in your way," I said to him one night close to dawn when we lay on the narrow bed. "And how else should I love you—in your way?" he asked. I am still thinking about that.

Man is this and woman is that, men do this and women do different things, woman wants one thing and man wants something else and nobody down the centuries appears to understand how this should work. "Every day he'd come in from the fields and throw his old filthy hat on my clean tablecloth that we're going to eat off—sweatband down!" says my mother, still furious, and he's been gone how long? years now.

New Yorker 73.34 (10 Nov. 1997): 93.

FATHER'S OLD BLUE CARDIGAN

Now it hangs on the back of the kitchen chair
where I always sit as it did
on the back of the kitchen chair where he always sat.

I put it on whenever I come in,
as he did, stamping
the snow from his boots.

I put it on and sit in the dark.
He would not have done this.
Coldness comes paring down from the moonbone in the sky.

His laws were a secret.
But I remember the moment at which I knew
he was going mad inside his laws.

He was standing at the turn of the driveway when I arrived.
He had on the blue cardigan with the buttons done up all
the way to the top.
Not only because it was a hot July afternoon

but the look on his face—
as a small child who has been dressed by some aunt early
in the morning
for a long trip

on cold trains and windy platforms
will sit very straight at the edge of his seat
while the shadows like long fingers

over the haystacks that sweep past
keep shocking him
because he is riding backwards.

—ANNE CARSON

Anne Carson,
'The Mimnermos Interviews', Plainwater 29.6

The Interviews (3)

I: [tape noise] . . . . . something of your intellectual background *Where does he come from?* etc. perfectly reasonable

M: What are you digging for

I: Nanno

M: ———

I: Who is this person this chasm this lost event

M: ———

I: Considerable ambiguity surrounds Athenaios's assertion that in old age you became enamored of a flute girl by this name

M: ———

I: Kallimachos talks about Nanno or "the big woman" as if it were an epic poem on the founding of Kolophon no one understands this reference

M: ———

I: Strabo says you gave her name to a collection of love elegies

M: ———

I: Foucault speaks of the Unthought as a limit within which all actual knowledge is produced I'm groping here can we regard Nanno as some sort of epistemological strategy are we to look for a logic of Nanno

M: ———

I: Do you dream of her

M: No I dream of headlights soaking through the fog on a cold spring night

I: Now it is you who is angry

M: I'm not angry I am a liar only now I begin to understand what my dishonesty is what abhorrence is the closer I get there is no hope for a person of my sort I can't give you facts I can't distill my history into this or that home truth and go plunging ahead composing miniature versions of the cosmos to fill the slots in your question and answer period it's not that I don't pity you it's not that I don't understand your human face is smiling at me for some reason it's not that I don't know there is an act of interpretation demanded now by which we could all move to the limits of the logic inherent in this activity and peer over the edge but everytime I start in everytime I everytime you see I would have to tell the whole story all

over again or else lie so I lie I just lie who are they who are the storytellers who can put an end to stories

I: You look so cold come closer to the fire

M: She used to get up first in the morning to light the fire it surprised me the young are seldom kind

I: Yet she was not a subject for you poetically I mean

M: I wrote her epitaph

I: I don't believe I know this piece

M: It was never published the family disapproved

I: I don't suppose you could

M: No

I: But

M: No

I: I wanted to know you

M: I wanted far more

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