

Finding the Female Voice in Form—A Feminist-Narratological Reading of “The Glass Essay”

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Abstract

Anne Carson’s “The Glass Essay” straddles the genres of essay and poetry, crossing the boundaries of traditional literary forms. It serves as a subversion of literary tradition and provides a paradigm for female writing. This essay first discusses the relationship between form and gender. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the narrative structure of “The Glass Essay” through a feminist narratological lens, examining the ways in which Carson’s narrative techniques foreground female experiences and voices. Lastly, I discuss how the transgression of form in Carson’s work serves as a valuable and innovative approach to feminist writing. This analysis aims to uncover how these narrative strategies contribute to creating a female narrative voice that challenges and redefines the norms of traditional storytelling.

Key Words: Feminist Narratology, Anne Carson, The Glass Essay, Feminist Writing

“Sometimes one must try to invent a form which expresses the limitations of form,
which takes as its point of departure the terror of formlessness.”
—Glenn Gould

Form matters. As Aristotle articulates in *Metaphysics*, “By form, I mean the essence of each thing and the primary substance” (7.1032b), and emphasizes that one cannot bypass form to get to the essence. This concept demands examination on a deeper level: form itself embodies ideology. Contrary to the idealistic belief that form is objective, neutral, and purely functional, independent of its context and social discourse, as formalist and structuralist narratologists

might presume, form is deeply intertwined with ideology. Narrative form is inherently ideological and participates in socio-historical discourse, thereby exerting a profound and active effect on the construction and reproduction of the text. “The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property, and domination” (Bennett and Royle 54). Sternberg points out that there are “many-to-many correspondences between linguistic form and representational function” (Sternberg 112). Narrative strategies involve the dialectical relationship between form and content (Alber 7), and these choices are “highly semanticized and engaged in the process of cultural construction” (Nünning 360). Hence, it is important to get a sense of the ideological underpinnings of narratives.

Narrative form is never neutral—it is imbued with ideology, and one crucial dimension of this ideology is gender. As Mary Eagleton notes in *Genre and Gender*, “The etymological connection between the words ‘genre’ and ‘gender’ provided further stimulus, if only symbolic” (437). This suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between literary form and gender dynamics. As Lanser points out, the traditional approach to narratology is largely constructed by texts written by men, adopting an androcentric view (677). It is worth examining within literary tradition how the narratives are related to gender and how certain narratives are prioritized or considered superior, while other narratives which embody women’s experiences are overlooked or marginalized.

Women’s alienation from language has led to their departure from dominant narrative forms. Lacan theorizes language as a socio-historical product shaping subjectivity through the symbolic order, which is already inscribed with male dominance¹. Furthermore, Spender examines nuanced ways gender operates within and against language, arguing that language is “man-made,” maintaining the patriarchal order and alienating women². Cameron points out in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* that, since language is not designed by or for women, female writers struggle with it, finding it alienating (129). Women often experience a sense of distance and an inability to fully express themselves—not due to a lack of skill but because they are in conflict with a tool representing systematic suppression. This difference in how men and women

¹See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, Routledge, 1977. Lacan discusses how the symbolic order, governed by language, structures subjectivity and reflects patriarchal authority.

²See Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, Pandora. Distributed in the U.S. by New York University Press, 1998 for an extended discussion of how language structurally reinforces male dominance.

relate to language leads to distinct narrative paradigms. Moreover, conventional storytelling predominantly conforms to the narrative method which is linear, following an external logical approach, while women may be more inclined to non-linear, jumpy narratives that do not follow external logic but rather psychological activities. Lanser calls this “plotlessness,” attesting that it is also a kind of “plot,” one with multiplicity and closeness to psychological reality (688). A typical example of this is stream of consciousness writing.

Form can have both reproductive and restrictive effect on content, as Lukacs observes, “form sets limits around a substance which otherwise would dissolve like air in the All”(28). Virginia Woolf highlighted how traditional literary forms fail to capture women’s experiences: early female writers lacked a tradition that fit their experiences, as the long-standing male literary tradition did not reflect their perspectives. For example, the male-dominated perspective in the Petrarchan sonnet during the Renaissance didn’t suit women’s views on love, making it an ill-fitting form for them (Farwell 13). This disparity between the forms available to women and their lived experiences led to a significant struggle for female writers.

The essay form, specifically, bears heavy connotations and ideology of a patriarchal societal structure, embodied in the masculine writing tradition from, from Plato’s dialogues, the texts of the mystics, Montaigne’s Essays to Kierkegaard’s imaginary diaries and short stories. Throughout the history of Western culture, while genres like novels and poetry have seen outstanding women writers, essays have remained a field dominated by male writers who have held the right to speak. The traditional essay form emphasizes structured conformity, authority of the argument, enforced objectivity, clarity of language, and the dominance of logic and rationality. These qualities are highly exclusive, positioning this form as the standard while excluding other styles of writing or narratives. Due to its proclivity for a scientific method, the essay as a form also rejects the personal, domestic, subjective, and emotional aspects. Carson’s “The Glass Essay” challenges this by reshaping the essay form to include personal and emotional depth, sensitivity, and a distinctly female voice, thereby reclaiming the genre for women.

In this paper, I use Carson’s “The Glass Essay” as a foundation to examine its transgression of form from the perspective of feminist narratology. The narrative of “The Glass Essay” focuses on the lives of speaker, her mother and Emily Brontë. Thematically, it explores inner activities

and perspectives on love, loss, desire, imprisonment and liberty through the stories of three women as well as offering criticism on socio-political feminist issues. It also demonstrates a range of distinctively unconventional narrative modes, which should be examined under the broader scope of feminist literature. By incorporating both the private and public narrative voice, employing telling as a narrative technique, and adopting stream-of-consciousness writing, the text reveals a complex array of storytelling methods. My primary concern for this paper revolves around the question: How does “The Glass Essay” subvert the traditional narrative structure and achieve a feminist narrative through the transgression of conventional forms?

To answer this question, we need to understand what genre means for Carson. Known for her cross-genre writing, Carson is a poet-and-classicist-and-philosopher-in-one. She is famous for her loose boundaries of genres, daringly mixing the past and the present, juxtaposing the real and the imaginary, and rewriting and reinterpreting ancient texts and mythologies (Ruprecht Jr. 137). As Kuiper observes, Carson’s writing “mixes poetry with essay, literary criticism, and other forms of prose, and her style is at once quirky, inventive, and erudite” (2). In an interview, she explained the significance of form to her: “when I’m writing, usually I mull around first with the form, and if I don’t get it in a few days then I don’t try to write the thing because I can’t begin without a form” (Carson, “Talk” 22). In “The Glass Essay,” Carson composes a nine-part structure, featuring poetic elements such as the structure of tercets akin to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, short sentences and stanzas, rich imagery, rhythm, sound effects, and poetic devices like refrain, making it aesthetically closer to poetry. D’Agata attempts to situate her essays between the autobiographical explorations of Montaigne and the public concerns of Cicero. Carson doesn’t subscribe to the idea that the essay is a process of “self-exploration.” She believes it is “lazy” for an artist to indulge in the personal, as the work ends up being self-circling (20).

In “The Glass Essay,” Carson actively tries to break away from traditional essay structures and achieves a formal freedom by employing polyphony, fragmentation, non-linear narrative, and the blending of personal and public voices. This attempt to transgress and revolutionize the essay form can be seen as an effort to carve out a space for female writing. While female writing is a broad and diverse term that cannot be confined to a single paradigm, there are two main perspectives on this. One is what Virginia Woolf called “androgynous writing,” which,

according to Farwell, aims to fuse male and female minds to achieve an objectivity similar to that of T.S. Eliot's notion of impersonality and unification of sensibility (448). However, this approach is criticized by scholars and feminist writers like Adrienne Rich for still positioning the male as the subject and the woman as the other. In contrast, Helene Cixous, in her concept of "*Écriture Féminine*" (female writing), advocates for a different kind of women's writing. This approach emphasizes the unrestrictiveness of form, non-linear narratives, and themes of female sexuality as a more radical subversion of patriarchal literary traditions and as a distinctive model of female writing. She advocates for a feminine style that actively disrupts rigid patriarchal structures, emphasizing a libidinal, volcanic, and self-creating form of writing. This unique writing style is deeply connected to the woman's body and her experiences, breaking free from traditional norms and expectations of linear argumentation and genre constraints. Susan Suleiman, in her introduction to Cixous's "*Coming to Writing*" and *Other Essays*, highlights this boundary-breaking style, questioning whether Cixous's work is poetry, critical commentary, autobiography, ethical reflection, or feminist theory, and ultimately concluding that it transcends genre limitations. In doing so, Suleiman underscores the revolutionary nature of Cixous's approach to writing. Similarly, Carson has echoed this idea of female writing by blending literary genres and creating a hybrid form that aligns with feminist efforts to redefine and reclaim literary spaces historically dominated by male voices.

In *Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire*, Carson argues that male anxiety and the imperative of control have historically constrained and stigmatized female sexuality, pitting women's innate fluidity against men's rigid self-regulation. She argues that the male fear of overstepping boundaries, combined with a need for control and self-containment, inevitably results in the submission and domestication of women, thereby stigmatizing and suppressing their free expression of sexuality. Women, according to Carson, feel no physical compulsion to control their desire, since their innate wetness and fluidity provide them with an almost limitless capacity for sensuality and sexual expression (137). This natural state stands in stark contrast to the male experience. Additionally, women are often considered to lack "soundness of mind" or "sobriety and self-control" which men employ to rationally master and regulate their desires from within (142). Carson elucidates that the male desire for control and profound fear of boundary-crossing reinforce their need to possess a restrictive form, resulting in an inherent hostility towards fluidity and sensuality. This is reflected in literature and other cultural artifacts

by the rigidity and conformity of form, the pervasive need for logical regulation, and the systematic inhibition of the free and authentic expressivity of female sexuality.

Carson has her own idiosyncratic way of defining an essay, which is at once very general and elusive. She claims an essay is “an attempt to reason and tell,” “to have something to say and to do so” (16). She believes an essay should have a public purpose, addressing an issue. She also sees it as a search for “facts,” stating that her form “originates from facts” (13). However, it is difficult to find facts in the traditional sense in “The Glass Essay.” But she explains that autobiography is part of the facts; every individual is a collection of facts (18). Thus, “The Glass Essay” construes a nexus of facts. Personal narratives, emotions, inner dialogues, texts from *Wuthering Heights*, biographical facts of Emily Brontë, conversations, visions, questions on freedom, faith, body and soul, reflections on female confinement and gender equality are all facts. These are what Carson wants to “reason and tell,” except she doesn’t reason and tell in the conventional way. An essay emphasizes structure, logic of argument, and objective and neutral language because its purpose is to present knowledge. Like any formal limit, this formal requirement permits an infinite number of individualized expressions.

Firstly, Carson constructs a subversive argument which entails thinking about argument not as a monolithic concept but as taking different forms: there can be fragmented arguments, arguments that contain repetitive or non-linear elements or arguments that incorporate opposite points of view (Smith 14). While traditional arguments that are sentences or statements, can be reduced to a simple question, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz have a minimal and flexible idea of an argument, suggesting it can be a short maxim or embodied in visual images as well as words. “An argument can be any text — written, spoken, aural, or visual — that expresses a point of view” (5). In this sense, arguments in “The Glass Essay” also include internal dialogue, conversations, and the visions Carson has presented, even the landscape. These arguments cannot be reduced to a single question, breaking the dominance of monolithic arguments in essay writing. In “The Glass Essay”, there is no single statement but a quest, a journey composed of a series of questions. She raises them but provides no definite answers. One of the central themes is the question of love:

But what love could be prior to it
What is prior?

What is love?

My questions were not original.

Nor did I answer them. (17)

There is also the question of imprisonment and liberty: “I wonder what kind of Liberty this is” (18). Carson avoids focusing narrowly on a single theme, which is reductive to complex nature of the reality of life itself. Instead, she recognizes and acknowledges the interplay of various factors and themes interwoven as life itself. Carson engages with a range of crucial issues of human life and addresses these themes both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, each theme acts as a thread connecting the fates of the three women: The speaker, her mother and Emily Brontë. These themes string together the lives of the female figures, packing their existence in the same time and space. On the theme of the nature of a romantic relationship, and The autodiegetic speaker experiences the aftermath of her breakup, comparing her disturbing dynamics with her ex-lover to Brontë’s “hanging puppies,” much like Heathcliff’s reaction after hearing Catherine’s dismissive remark in the kitchen about him in *Wuthering Heights*: “It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff” (224), choring the elements of violence and cruelty in a relationship. On the theme of loss, the speaker shares the struggle with her mother as her mother grapples with the loss of her husband due to dementia. This thematic association and juxtaposition of their lives demonstrates multiplicity and interconnectedness, conveying a collective experience. Vertically, the narrative line of each character strings together a stream of themes, mirroring the complexity and multi-faceted nature of individual life. Beginning with personal experiences of breakup and loneliness, this initial exploration of heartache sets the stage for a broader discussion on the nature of love. Through these themes, the narrative delves into the intricate relationships of desire and pain. As the narrative progresses, the exploration of Brontë’s experiences leads her to ponder a significant and timeless topic: freedom. She asks “What was this cage, invisible to us, which she felt herself to be confined in?” (7) This question serves as a gateway to a deeper examination of the constraints that society imposed on women. Furthermore, in examining Emily Brontë’s spiritual bond, the speaker reflects her relationship with faith and questions whether she can achieve her freedom through faith. From a personal narrative Carson then extends to a philosophical inquiry into the nature of faith, the relationship between body and soul, and how these elements contribute to a sense of liberation.

All these themes are interconnected and contingent upon an individual's life. Rather than focusing on a single aspect and ignoring the rest, which would be simplistic and unrealistic, Carson offers a more nuanced and layered approach that captures the true essence of lived experience, reflecting the complexity of an individual's life. In reality, all these elements—love, loss, desire, freedom, and belief—occur simultaneously and influence each other. By presenting these themes in an interconnected manner, she challenges traditional narrative structures that often prioritize linearity and singular focus, allowing the reader to engage with the material in a more contemplative and personal way.

Secondly, the function of essay, in the Aristotelian tradition, as a form or rhetoric, is to persuade, to reason, and to engage with the rhetorical strategies as *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. In another tradition, which includes Plato, there is a tendency toward anti-rhetoric, with a concern for the pursuit of truth. In Carson's "The Glass Essay," a tension is evident as she wrestles with both rhetoric and anti-rhetoric, both in the attempt to pursue the truth. On the one hand, she engages with the objective and the scientific, presenting Emily Brontë's biographical facts, critics' comments, and other forms of factual evidence and rational analysis to arrive at a convincing standpoint from the external, for example:

Whacher

Emily's habitual spelling of this word,
has caused confusion.

For example

in the first line of the poem printed *Tell me, whether, is it winter?*
in the Shakespeare Head edition.

But whacher is what she wrote. (4)

On the other hand, Carson blends the essay form with a Montaigne-like deeply personal, exploratory style, presenting various voices and perspectives, such as autobiographical narration, conversations and dialogues and Brontë's personal writings. Carson mixes factual and subjective evidence, blending real life with literary and imaginary elements. In these personal narratives, she does not hesitate to exhibit emotion, conflict, and confusion. There is a

tendency toward anti-rhetoric, as she presents these elements and juxtaposes them in a parallel structure, using paratactic constructions. For instance:

Whacher is what she was.

She whached God and humans and moor wind and open night.

She whached eyes, stars, inside, outside, actual weather.

She whached the bars of time, which broke.

She whached the poor core of the world,

wide open. (4)

Another anti-narrative strategy Carson employs is the incorporation of a series of visions, which transcend the verisimilitude of life, revealing a tendency in her essay to function less as a means of persuasion and more as a way of engaging with truth in an anti-rhetorical mode. She presents 13 visions, or “Nudes,” which are abstract, surreal and incoherent assembly of images with the recurrent images of thorns, cage, implying the imprisonment, pain and suffering and representing the crystallization of female experiences. These visions follow a subtle, unspeakable organizational rule on a subconscious level. The beginning and end are almost identical, forming a roughly cyclical structure, unlike traditional evidence that leads to a linear conclusion. This cyclical structure suggests the ongoing and repetitive nature of human experience and understanding. Starting from Nude #1, the disintegration of body and mind, she progresses through a spiral staircase to the last vision Nude #13, which is identical to the first vision “it was a human body trying to stand against winds so terrible that the flesh was blowing off the bones” except that : “And there was no pain” (38). These visions possess a quality similar to the Delphic oracle, which can be seen as an attempt to reach truth outside of rhetorical conventions. Visions are often connected to psychic power, the ability to communicate with the spiritual world, a trait associated with witches or clairvoyants. They engage the faculty of intuition, requiring one to tune into their emotional powers and instincts, rather than rationalization. The meanings are hidden and resist authoritative interpretation and finality, encouraging readers to explore their own interpretations and connections. By weaving visions in and out of narrative, Carson disrupts coherence and the facade of reality constructed by the text, moving between the conscious and the unconscious in her search for a broader notion of truth. She exercises a different way of reasoning, separate from the logocentric

tradition that relies on the power of logic and establishes it as the predominant method of establishing truth. Carson grants the fragments of life, imagination, and human emotion legitimacy to speak, acknowledging their authenticity and their power as narratives.

Thirdly, “The Glass Essay” adopts a non-linear narrative mode in its treatment with time. Time does not progress linearly; instead, it constructs an interplay of experiences on multiple levels, occurring simultaneously in the past and present. The narration takes place in media res, triggered by a significant event: a man named Law leaving. This departure sets into motion two distinct and intertwined line of events. The first line of events follows the speaker as she travels to her mother, adhering to the natural, chronological progression of time. The second line of events delves into the past, recounting her intricate relationship with this man, Law, through the fragmented and often non-linear thread of her memory. These dual narratives, moving in opposite directions, effectively break the traditional linear mode of storytelling. This non-linear approach is pointed out by Donovan as a departure from the conventional masculine narrative: “static, and in a mode of waiting. It is not progressive, or oriented toward events happening sequentially or climactically, as in the traditional masculine story plot” (218-19). By juxtaposing these two timelines, the narrative creates a richer and more layered exploration of the speaker's emotional and psychological landscape, challenging the reader to engage with the story in a more nuanced and reflective manner.

In addition, the fragmented narrative techniques such as interior monologue, free indirect thought, and psycho-narration in “The Glass Essay” disrupt linear storytelling to mirror the associative nature of the human mind. The fragmentation and discontinuity allow deviation from the “central” narrative. This disrupts linear plot and challenges the conventional narrative, mirroring the actual workings of the human mind, and can be seen as an example of stream-of-consciousness writing:

Rain tomorrow.

That volcano in the Philippines at it again. What’s her name

Anderson died no not Shirley

the opera singer. Negress.

Cancer.

Not eating your garnish, you don't like pimento? (3).

The events described in the narrative are intricately linked by mental associations that lack an internal logic. The lines of dialogue are deliberately ambiguous, as they could either originate from the speech of the interlocutor or be a part of the narrator's internal musings. This intentional ambiguity is achieved by purposefully omitting quotation marks, blurring the line between mental images and actual conversation. Upon closer examination of the content, one might speculate that this could be the monologue of the narrator's mother. These lines, which seem to digress from the main issues and themes, are retained by the author. The narrative places a greater emphasis on the flux of consciousness rather than external events. This stream-of-consciousness technique, as noted by Lanser, exemplifies what she describes as the "plotlessness" of female writing. According to Lanser, this style of storytelling lacks a linear, progressive narrative structure and is therefore considered plotless. However, in her revision of what constitutes a plot, Lanser radically proposes that this "plotlessness" is, in fact, a unique kind of narrative (689). This perspective invites readers to reconsider traditional notions of storytelling and to appreciate the narrative's focus on the internal experiences and thoughts of the character, allowing for a more fluid and fragmented narrative structure, which better captures the complexity of female consciousness.

Fourthly, the narrative voice in *The Glass Essay* takes on a dual role, exhibiting both a personal, autobiographical tone and a parallel, public, reflective voice. Traditionally, the distinction between these two types of narration is determined by the narratee to whom the text is addressing. According to Spender, writing publicly becomes synonymous with writing for and to men, which is characterized by authority, collectivity, commonality, and objective rationality and logic. In contrast, the private voice, often associated with the female voice is intimate, personal, and often implies individuality, domesticity, and subjective feelings. For instance, letters are considered private forms of writing and thus did not challenge male discursive hegemony. As a result, women's voices have historically been excluded from the public literary sphere.

In "The Glass Essay," the narration begins with the autodiegetic narrator taking us witness a very personal scene. Then, the narration is intertwined with real-life conversations with her mother in the private setting of a kitchen and is punctuated by intense emotional outbursts at times: "I

fell on my knees on the rug and sobbed too. / She knows how to hang puppies, / that Emily” (4). The narrative voice is intensely raw and personal, adopting a confessional tone that displays vulnerability, uncertainty, demonstrating hypertensive self-awareness and anxiety. The confessional voice, often undervalued and dismissed by critics as hysterical or excessively emotional, and therefore lacking in artistry and decorum, defies the authority typically required in essay. However, in this case, the intimacy and privateness are a carefully designed and hard-achieved one. Carson has expressed her difficulty in striving at a personal writing in “Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions”: “My personal poetry is a failure” (Carson, *Decreation* 160). The speaker continues to confess in “The Glass Essay,” “It pains me to record this, / I am not a melodramatic person” (9). In other words, Carson as the writer regards confession as an art form, an exquisite poetic design that can be finely tuned to express the soul’s voice. The rawness and personal nature of the voice are intentional, crafted meticulously to draw the reader into a deeply personal and emotional experience. This approach is not uncontrolled excessive overflow of emotion, rather, it is a deliberate and thoughtful choice that aims to represent a specific emotional truth. Through the use of vulnerability and self-reflection, the confessional voice becomes a powerful tool of narrative. By doing so, the speaker achieves a resonance that transcends mere storytelling, inviting readers to connect on a profound emotional level, thus elevating the confessional voice to a form of art that is both deeply personal and universally relatable.

It can also be inferred that Carson treats the personal as a means of approaching truth, blending of autobiographical fragments with philosophical inquiry. By incorporating Emily Brontë’s personal writings, diaries, and poems, Carson allows herself and the readers to delve into Brontë’s inner life. While some critics dismiss Brontë’s existence as one of failure and despair: “sad stunted life, says one. / Uninteresting, unremarkable, wracked by disappointment / and despair, says another” (5). Carson challenges this portrayal using Brontë’s own poem, arguing that it is not true: “A messenger of Hope, comes every night to me / And offers, for short life, eternal Liberty” (18). Here, Brontë’s contemplative solitude becomes a site of imaginative freedom and spiritual intensity. Carson reclaims this “life of watching” not as passive withdrawal but as an empowered state of interiority that yields its own form of truth. In doing so, she disrupts dominant narratives that equate value with visibility, action, and public recognition. Reflecting on Brontë’s life as a writer, Carson also affirms the act of writing as a means of asserting subjectivity. For female writers, the personal becomes political: by telling

their stories, they resist silencing, reject passivity, and reclaim authorship of their identities. Through self-narration, they transform victimhood into agency, forging literary spaces where private experience is not only valid but vital. Carson's work thus redefines what counts as truth, voice, and narrative authority.

As the narrator engages with more public, political issues, she's actively transforming her voice to a more public one. The shift from the personal to the public voice demonstrates how the narrator's inner conflicts are intricately connected to and shaped by broader structures of gender, power, and societal expectation. In the conversation in the kitchen, the speaker and her mother quarrel:

Those women! says my mother with an exasperated rasp.
Mother has chosen random channel.
Women?

Complaining about rape all the time
I see she is tapping one furious finger on yesterday's newspaper
lying beside the grape jam.

The front page has a small feature
about a rally for International Women's Day—
have you had a look at the Sears Summer Catalogue?

Nope.
Why, it's a disgrace! Those bathing suits—
cut way up to here! (she points) No wonder!

You're saying women deserve to get raped
because Sears bathing suit ads
have high-cut legs? Ma, are you serious?

Well someone has to be responsible.
Why should women be responsible for male desire? My voice is high. (22)

The conversation between the speaker and her mom serves as a gateway to a much more complex socio-political discussion. The emotionally charged content and affect display the speaker's attitude clearly. The mother shames the women in the magazine for wearing bathing suits with high-cut legs, regarding them as a "disgrace" and condemns them for "complaining about raping all the time." This not only highlights the tendency of some people to blame the victim and fail to recognize the injustice but also reflects a deeper issue addressed in *The Second Sex*. Women often lack solidarity because "they live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women" (Beauvoir 28). The speaker's apparent emotional tone and blunt rhetorical question make her stance unmistakably clear; she is asserting, more explicitly than ever, that "women should not be responsible for male desire." Furthermore, Carson's reflections on Brontë's experiences bring to light the challenges faced by women writers and the societal constraints imposed upon them. Through these contemplations, Carson weaves a narrative that connects the personal with the political, emphasizing the enduring impact of women's voices in literature and their role in challenging and reshaping societal norms.

Carson continues a classical tradition of poets reflecting on justice through dialogue with literary predecessors. The relationship with a literary predecessor and poet-as-commentator role is not a novice invention in literature. It can be traced back to classical works. Most famously, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante encounters the former sailor Ulysses and seeks his advice. However, Dante also laments Ulysses' failure and endeavors to learn lessons from his mistakes in his pursuit of liberty. The parallel between Emily Brontë and Ulysses is constructed through the poets adopting the role of commentator in a quest for liberty, justice, and love. Dante demonstrates his keen political awareness and does not hesitate to take a public voice. This can be observed in the seminar-like tones he uses during his encounter in Limbo with the poets of antiquity, where he converses about art, the secrets of the craft, and more. Similarly, the keen concerns in "The Glass Essay" are articulated through the lines, "I want justice." and "She wanted liberty. Well didn't she have it?" (6). Justice and liberty, in this context, are not merely personal desire but also political focus.

As the poem progresses, the speaker's identity dissolves into a collective voice as the narrative shifts from searching to revelation. The personal "I" becomes more stripped down and bare, shedding layers of individual identity and complexity. It undergoes a significant transformation, shifting to a more collective "she," while the "I" retreats to being a mere observer, almost losing its unique voice and presence. The "I" becomes the "watcher" that Emily Brontë once was, continuing to peer and glance with an unwavering focus. However, in this act of watching, the speaker does not find what she is searching for, despite her intense scrutiny and observation. Eventually, she ceases watching, giving up the active search, and the vision comes to her in a moment of unexpected clarity. This time, she realizes that the "nude" does not belong to any individual, transcending personal ownership and identity. It becomes a universal symbol, detached from any single person, representing a more profound collective experience: "It was not my body, not a woman's body, it was the body of us all. It walked out of the light" (38). The essay concludes on this note of some kind of religious epiphany or divine revelation. By this point, it has departed far from the personal narrative at the beginning and embodies a voice resembling a Delphic oracle, hinting towards a vision and prophecy for a collective. The transformation from a personal quest to a universal revelation underscores the profound depth and complexity of the narrative, making it not just a personal journey but a shared human experience.

By transcending the boundaries of restrictive literary forms, the hybridity and inclusivity of Carson's work resonate with the essence of female sexuality, allowing for greater expressiveness. The fusion of poetic, intimate, and emotional language with philosophical inquiry into significant issues not only provides a vivid understanding of female experiences, particularly on a psychological level, but also integrates women into the broader discussion of universal human conditions.

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