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## Assembling the Pieces of Personhood in Anne Carson's *Nox*

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### **Abstract**

Life writing traditionally seeks to sort out confusion, trauma, identity, or to serve as memento; in Anne Carson's *Nox*, many of these parameters are met while others are broken. I examine the modes by which *Nox* violates expectations of the genre through her highly marked text, fragmented imagery, and Latin translation, such that the text could more properly be called epitaph rather than narrative. The text was crafted as a scrapbook to honor Carson's deceased, estranged brother, with whom her relationship was complicated due to his absence. Because *Nox* primarily focuses on the remnants of his life rather than the author's, it calls into question the ways in which memory and artifact embody the dislocated subject. Working with reader response theory as well as theories of authorship, I argue that Carson's *Nox* rejects the traditional form of "life narrative" and asks the reader to construct the text on their own due to its fragmented nature. The material form of the text, as an accordion book comprised of one long sheet rather than distinct ones folded into leaves, invites the reader to explore and mark the text further as they begin reading. In my essay I show that these idiosyncrasies do not merely disrupt the reader as they read, but rather that they inspire a deeper understanding of mourning and how we memorialize the deceased.

*Keywords:* Arts and Humanities, Life Writing, Anne Carson, Literature, Critical Theory, Rhetorical Theory

## INTRODUCTION

Anne Carson is an author not widely acknowledged for her prose; however, she is more frequently cited for her contributions as a poet with works including *Autobiography of Red*, and for her scholarly works such as the translation of *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. While *Nox* is certainly not her first published work, it may be one of her most fascinating as it is deconstructed and reconstructed as a work of life writing. While many forms of life writing utilize the author as the subject and incorporate first-person narration, this piece challenges that notion since Carson is not the true subject; Michael, her late brother, is the person we spend the most time focusing on. He is the focus on the front cover, and his name is written several times on the first fold of the piece. Carson utilizes imagery more than text throughout her piece, and by doing so, she leaves the reader with an expansive amount of space to do interpretive work. The text itself is printed on one long piece of paper and folded accordion-style to fit in a box, meaning that one side was left blank in the process. This, along with the white space on the printed side of the text, calls into question how we define “life writing” when using non-conventional methods to create a text—or a text that lacks text—centered around a life.

There has been minimal critical work done on examining *Nox* for something other than its impressive visual properties. However, a few notable scholars have made interpretive leaps in examining Carson’s piece. Tanis MacDonald, a scholar of Canadian literature, focuses on the criticisms *Nox* has faced because of its unique structure and relationship with materiality, as well as how the book defies the expectations of genre. MacDonald states in her chapter of *Material Cultures in Canada* that “*Nox* forces a kind of tactile revelation in the voyeuristic examination of its unfolding” (MacDonald 2015, 57). One would not expect that turning the “pages” of a text

would bring about these feelings, but the expectation we have for the text is what forces that enjoyment and/or distress upon a reader as they begin to disassemble the work. Sara Tanderup, author of *Nostalgia Experiments: Memory in Anne Carson's Nox and Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams' S.*, characterizes *Nox* as being in a struggle with trying to maintain the semblance of a conventional book while also attempting to “break the binding” of what books should look like by using new media to create her text (Tanderup 2016, 47). These arguments become more plausible after examining how this text functions for what it is rather than what it is not.

I would like to contribute to the conversation these scholars and others have started by focusing on how these visual elements, and lack thereof, contribute to *Nox*'s exceptionalism as a life writing text. I discuss the ways in which the genre is able to create a definition for how we are to understand the piece just as the piece and its lack of conformity to genre complicates what we understand as life writing. Along with this focus, I will also examine how the absence and presence—and by extension, the traces—of visual and textual elements disrupt the reader as they experience the text. This will encompass a discussion about the lack and presence of conventional literary markers traditional texts possess. I will also examine how the creation and layout of this text demand reader intervention, and whether or not Anne Carson can be considered the author for her brother's life. The following section will begin my discussion on visual cues in the text and their relationship with the genre of life writing.

### **VISUALS AND LACK THEREOF**

The synopsis on the back of the container states that *Nox* is a replica—or as close as possible—of a scrapbook Carson kept that contained much of the knowledge she had on her brother after their childhood together and his subsequent move to Europe. The publication she created from this scrapbook serves as “an epitaph for him in the form of a book,” meant to hold the memories and

(literal) pieces her brother has given her of his life in his absence (Carson 2010). There are postage stamps, recreated conversations, and fragmented letters scanned onto the pages, often serving as his “presence” in the text throughout this absent period. Even though calling this piece a “document” or “manuscript” by conventional terminology seems inappropriate, the replicated scrapbook still maintains many of the same conventions it did in its original state.

The photos, textures, and paints that are found throughout the original scrapbook can be seen in this version. However, these images of the original work are a facsimile and not the actual pieces. The images of the images appear to be real when viewing the piece; they possess the same colors and produce shadows on the blank page as the real photograph would if it were laid on paper. With textures and other markings of these images still visible in the reproduction, it leads the reader to believe that there are items glued or stapled to the pages. To make the text appear as genuine as possible, Robert Currie, Carson’s partner, had the idea of “scanning it [*Nox*] and then Xeroxing the scans” while lifting the lid of the copy machine “so a little light gets in, so it has three-dimensionality” (Teicher 2010). This is what gives the work the shadows and textured appearance while being flawless to the touch. By doing so, the original artifacts from the scrapbook are able to maintain a sense of authenticity while being reproductions in *Nox*.

The elements of the images that have been captured and reproduced lend to the idea that “life” has taken place around these images and that they are the result of human interaction rather than clean, mechanical reproduction. Images are assigned meaning by what they represent, and to Carson, these images are representations of her brother during his absence. In order for him to feel as “present” to the reader as he is to Carson in the scrapbook, these flaws and visual cues needed to exist for proof of life to also exist. The text embodies Michael, and at the same time, it embodies what Anne has done with his absence. She has lived in and around these photos for

years prior to *Nox*'s publication, and during that time she has added elements to the pages and images that signal their deviation from a standard text. This is a prime example of how Carson has chosen to “mark” the text by using different media. Johanna Drucker, a scholar in graphic design and digital humanities, distinguishes a “marked” and “unmarked” text as having, respectively, different typefaces and/or utilization of graphic design to call attention to the text, or no remarkable visual cues that suggest the text has other components or stylistic variation—the difference between an “abnormal” page and a “normal” page in a book (1994, 96-97).

*Nox* has limited places where the text is not marked, such as the opening pages with the publishing company, copyright statement, and ISBN code. Carson likely chose to incorporate the marked pages of text throughout her work to make it a “genuine reproduction” of the original manuscript. Rather than creating a remix of how it would have looked if written on a word processor with digital images, this reproduced text functions as the original text in a more intimate way. So, while all of *Nox* is a marked text, some sections exhibit more markings than others. Even the lexical entries, which we see with translations of “Catullus 101,” are unmarked texts on marked pages. Placing an unmarked text onto an unmarked page causes that entry to be marked, as the lexical entry was scanned in and made to look like an image rather than a digitally constructed leaf. When looking at Section 2.1, for example, we can see it is a marked page because of the inclusion of not only the separate pieces of paper with text on them situated on the page, but also the impressions of the words “WHO WERE YOU” shaded over in pencil. These impressions continue for several pages, giving each subsequent fold markings.

The traces left behind by these markings can be seen as traces of Michael's presence in his sister's life. Carson tries to place the focus on her brother rather than herself by filling this text with artifacts that came from him; however, the contradictory action of putting these items—

which belong to her—in this text may re-center the focus onto her interpretations and impressions anyway. Carson herself states “I didn’t want this [*Nox*] to be about me” (Teicher), but her use of personal artifacts shifts attention from her brother’s life to her grief over it. She had honest authorial intentions while creating his memorial, and because of the nature of its construction, her own grief inevitably filters in and informs the process. Going back to the statement of “book as epitaph” she makes on the container, this would suggest that the book is meant to hold memories and honor the deceased. She does not lament throughout the text explicitly, even though these feelings are implied by the fact of this text existing. Instead, the items she does include are centered around “making sense” and “remembrance” of his life, passing, and relationship with her. Referring to the book as “epitaph” places connotations on how the text functions within this genre, and it also gives the reader an idea of what to expect.

An epitaph, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is the engraving on a tomb; or, in this case it is more accurately defined as “a brief composition characterizing a deceased person.” Carson’s composition is not necessarily “brief,” but it does characterize Michael based on the information she has at her disposal. She gives him the embodiment of an entire text rather than a few words etched onto a headstone. I believe Carson chooses to do this because his body is no longer with us—Michael’s widow dispersed the ashes into the sea (Carson 5.5)—meaning that he has no physical being left other than the one Carson creates. The text embodies what Michael is to her—a fragmented, faded collection of memories and conversations that no longer have a grounded backing in her mind. She writes his life through these artifacts and their constructed meanings through their material properties.

As a work of life writing, this text offers a unique perspective when understanding it as “book as epitaph” rather than “memoir” or “personal essay.” Typically, the author is writing

about their own self or their life as it has been thus far—such as in autobiography—usually for the purpose of teasing out the meaning behind certain life events or the life generally. However, there are also subgenres within life writing that reference writing about a life that doesn't necessarily belong to the author. Life narrators may choose to focus on any life as the subject, not just their own (Smith and Watson 2001, 3). They may also engage more closely with personal artifacts and memories than one would when writing a biography, which can be seen as a step removed from the “self” of the “self-life writing” (6). This is precisely the move that Carson makes when she situates her book as an epitaph in reference to or remembrance of Michael.

By situating the book as an epitaph, she invites the reader to understand it as such rather than a written work about Michael's life in a conventional biographical sense. She did not want the reader to see this as a story or narrative of his life, but rather an elongated representation of his existence through the use of images in the form of a book. His existence to her was punctuated by random letters and phone calls, in a very sporadic manner, which are portrayed in the text in the same way. The photos and conversations, while placed in the book in a purposeful order, are also haphazardly displayed on the pages. Wrinkles and tears, paint marks, and ink blotches are present on nearly every page—when they are not, it is likely because the image or text there was done digitally rather than through the copy method the rest of the text uses. In comparison to a traditional text, this book is anything but conventional.

### **BREAK WITH TRADITIONAL TEXTS**

As we have already found, *Nox* is not bound like a conventional text, which means that many of the attributes that a regular text possesses are not present. If we return to the notion of an accordion-style book, we see that this is one of the main ways in which Carson's text breaks with



the idea of functionality as a “normal” book. Instead of being able to take the book, cover and all, and open it between bound faces to begin reading, *Nox* demands that the reader unpack it—literally. One must open the box, remove the text and place it on a flat surface, and finally open the first “page,” which demands particular attentiveness to the text’s construction. This inherently draws attention to the fact that this text requires additional care, giving the reader the expectation that examining this piece will be different from picking up a standard text.

Carson uses the unique printing style of the accordion book to her advantage, as her publication eliminates the need for chapters and page numbers. The book is exclusively filled with images and text blocks, following a somewhat methodical arrangement. Each “page” is depicted similarly to how it appears in the original version, but merely by the fact of replication it has differences. The copy cannot capture everything in the original, giving Carson some creative control to change how we are to see and read this alternate version. For example, Section 2.2, which starts with the phrase, “My brother ran away in 1978, rather than go to jail,” is repeated nearly four consecutive times. Because each printing follows the other, the difference one would notice—and cause for the repetition—is the placement of the folded note at the top of the page. The note, which appears to be something Michael wrote to his sister while he was living abroad, is first depicted with several incomplete phrases including “who take advantage of” and “[s]ix days later she was.” As the pages continue to unfold, the note is flipped over to three other perspectives, presumably so the reader can see each side. The reader must rely on Carson’s printing for this, not only giving Carson control over what is visible, but also ensuring that the reader will never see the note as intimately as she does. By doing so, some of the secrets of her brother’s life remain shrouded in this scrap of paper.

In this section as well, there are two folds where we see Section 2.2 and the note folded out, but the note transgresses the page and invades the negative space of the copy machine. This defies the traditional book because the confines of the page are literally surpassed by the text, and we can see the edges of the following pages in the negative space where the note overhangs the page. The elements on the pages are situated there as part of the text, but that does not necessarily mean they are whole images or that the pages are filled to more than completion. The visuals on the page are pictures of the true pages, so their placement here directly depends on how Carson chose to have them printed. Normally, an editor wouldn't have to consider this because the book would have margins where the text and other images would be typeset to; however, Carson's text has none of this. The margins *are* the page edges, as one can see by the photocopied "spine" that appears in many of the creases. Some folds also include what appear to be "ripped out pages," such as Section 3.1 and 5.5. One can clearly see the shadow and jagged edge at the crease of the fold where a "page" should be, but instead this is another photocopied image that mimics aspects of a traditional print text.

The repetition of the same text, as well as breaking the boundaries of the page, violates the expectation of narrative structure. This sets up an entirely different reading experience, and it also is a way in which Carson defies how we have come to understand the genre of life writing in terms of arrangement and chronology. We understand lives as being linear, with references to the past at intermittent times that are usually punctuated with a marker of the time difference; Carson does away with this idea. She instead allows the reader to journey through the text as the pages unfold, eventually allowing the reader to "see life" laid out before them. There are no promises or indications in the text as to whether or not the events are happening in a time-specific order or if they have been juxtaposed in the text for certain rhetorical effects—the reader must make

some of these determinations on their own. One may be able to examine the images in this book in any order and still understand the premise of Carson's text without reading any of her written work or translations. Traditional texts must be read cover-to-cover to reach the same level of insight that one could get by unfolding *Nox* and laying the entire manuscript out flat to examine its contents, and these contents may offer a better portrayal of the life she is trying to capture in her manuscript than if she had stuck to written word. To Carson, this is all she has of her brother; she has fragments of stories and memories of him while he was living abroad, so this is the best representation of that relationship she can forge while keeping the book in a book-ish construction.

Another way she defies the expectation of what it means to be a "book" is the way the text is bound: not at all. This has been noted previously, but here I would like to make special mention of how the text being unbound affects the way the reader interprets the work. The notion of a bound text implies an order, or a completeness, to a whole product. This "completeness" comes from the expectation that within a bound piece of writing, all of the pages are present and the necessary information for the text to be comprehended is available. Traditional print books are not pieced together randomly or out of order; while some books may be parts of a longer series (implying that they are part of a larger whole), each installment meets the outlined expectations of completeness. For *Nox*, the fact of its binding and printing are enough to categorize it as seeming incomplete. It is one long page, stored within a separate vessel, and it contains images/lexical entries that appear to have been taped, stapled, or glued to the base page. If a bound text were to be laid out page by page, one would assume that the spine of the book had been broken and information was either missing or damaged. However, Carson's text is

made to be this way, implying that there is more one could add to this collection to reach a stage of “completion.”

*Nox* is meant to be laid out and read as one continuous piece rather than in chunks or sections. The entire “front side” of the paper is printed on, whereas the reverse is blank. As we know, this is not the case for traditional bound texts; there is a relationship between right and left side of page, wherein recto/verso are meant to be read in sequence. In *Nox*, one could choose to read all “verso” text in the manuscript and then all “recto” text. This would, in a normal book, make no sense because the information would not be coherent. This is a direct opposition to the traditional idea of how we read a text, meaning that the reader must be attentive to the piece and how it functions. As such, I would like to examine some of the ways that this text complicates how author and reader operate as meaning-creating/-assigning entities.

#### **AUTHOR AND READER RELATIONSHIP**

When Carson constructed her scrapbook, she did not intend for it to be published—she showed only a handful of people before concluding that it was possible to publish while having “a fiction of privacy maintained” (Teicher). However, the mere fact of her text’s publication implies that there is a more direct relationship with those who are reading the manuscript than if it were never made public. By allowing the public to access the manuscript, that semblance of privacy can no longer be preserved. She invites the reader to begin interpreting the life that she has laid out before them, which is something many life narrators do. Wolfgang Iser, a popular literary theorist and critic, argues that after publishing a text, it is free of the author’s control, whether or not they want it to be. Leitch et al. describe Iser’s work as such:

[L]iterary texts provide the foundation for their interpretation, but they also imply the action of the reader. Reading is not passive but a process of discovery; a reader questions,

negates, and revises the expectations that the text establishes, filling in what Iser calls “blanks” or “gaps” in the text and continually modifying his or her interpretation. (2018, 1451)

A text, in short, interacts with the reader just as much as the reader interacts with the text. There is an ongoing symbiotic relationship between text and reader wherein the “coming together” of reader and manuscript allows for more complex and thorough understanding of the text. When multiple people are reading one text, it allows for a myriad of responses and interpretations that one reader would likely never be able to hypothesize on their own. As such, a text that is open to the public’s interpretation is also no longer “controlled by” the author, making that “privacy” invalid. The author cannot tell the readers how to interpret something, which is the notion Carson grapples with. The idea of questioning, negating, and revising a text is also something a reader can do more directly with *Nox* than they can with most other texts, and this is because of the inclusion of a second language and its fragmented translations.

To demonstrate this, one must examine the verso pages of *Nox* where Carson gives a Latin definition and context for the words of “Catullus 101.” The full poem, provided at the beginning of the text, is a Latin piece that she engages with as she dissects a lexical entry for each word and contextualizes them through Michael’s life. These Latin words have a variety of interpretations, which she indicates by having definitions and contextual sentences. This suggests that she sees the poem, and Michael by extension, as multi-faceted. Carson uses the context of “Catullus 101” to her advantage in the text as it focuses on a brother’s death and his subsequent burial, so she is able to reframe the poem to mirror what she wants to say about her own brother.

Through her translation of “Catullus 101” and subsequent publication of this work, Carson performs the first layer of reader response as a translator. She must make interpretations

about the text for the translation, and by doing so, she interpellates the poem through her own experience as a sister losing a brother. After publication, readers add another layer of response to what she has already done. “Guiding devices,” according to Iser, are what influence how the reader is supposed to navigate the text so that the reader and the text can “communicate” effectively across their boundaries. These “guiding devices,” Iser asserts, are the gaps and blanks left behind in the text that the reader is supposed to fill—there would be no need for textual interpretation if everything were explicitly laid out, so these gaps are essential for the reader to respond to a text (2018, 1454-55). *Nox*'s construction, both physically and as a life writing text, influence the reader's navigation of the text and therefore impact how the interpretations made may be based on how they chose to read the text; this is especially apparent when considering how white space is used. The abundance of choices on the reader's part (as to how they “read” the text) means that the “guiding devices” are not necessarily meant to be linear for all readers—they are simply a way for a reader to determine how the text functions for them.

The white space also serves an important purpose in Carson's text. The reader will become familiar with the concept of white/negative space very quickly after opening Carson's manuscript—few, if any, pages are devoid of significant white space, which one could argue is either incidental or purposeful. From what is understood about Carson and her work, the reader can assume that she did this for rhetorical effect. The incorporation of white space signifies the “blanks” that the reader is supposed to fill with their own interpretations. The literal blanks of the white space, as well as the literary gaps in time and plot, both function as the medium for textual interpretation. Considering that Carson had an absent relationship with her brother, these blanks may be symbols for the gaps in time that Michael was not part of her life. She fills these “blanks” with miscellaneous memorabilia from the times they *did* communicate or see one another, which

serve as footholds for readers to continue interpreting Michael and his relationship with Anne and others. From the number of artifacts we see incorporated into the text, the reader may conclude that Carson's relationship with her brother was not as "whole" as is implied by having a manuscript filled with memories of his life. There are quite a few minimalist pages in *Nox*, implying that these blank spaces are crafted to showcase emptiness, and in a more literal sense, the emptiness of their relationship and his passing away. Because Michael is no longer alive, he does not take up "positive space" the same way that a physical body would. The absence of his person is the presence of emptiness asserted by the white/negative space. Those blanks, in turn, provide space for him to exist while the effects of him are constructed on the pages. His effects in the world are, to his sister, the conversations, photographs, and letters he has sent her over his lifetime. But his actual presence, the one that Carson so desperately wants to encapsulate, is void. From here, the blanks embody the distinction of being him while also being a reminder that it is not him. However, we could also see this as a conundrum of who constructs the text versus who authors it.

"Anne Carson" is the name printed on the box of the text, and she is the person who is given credit for the publication and creation of *Nox*. It may be easy to dismiss the idea of having to consider "author" for this text because it seems like the question has already been answered. However, a critical reader of *Nox* may want to examine how the construction of the text and the authoring of the text are different components that may not lead to the same answer, especially when determining whose life this text is about. Carson writes *Nox* in first-person, referring to herself in the passages she constructs, reflecting on her relationship with her brother and the other stories/myths she is reminded of as she crafts the work. She offers translations of texts that are important to her and that offer insight on how she is grieving the death of her brother. She

recreates conversations, provides images, and marks the text with paints and pencil marks to showcase the emotions she was feeling throughout the process of creating *Nox*. But do any of these attributes make the book solely hers?

While the passages were placed in the book by Anne, we see parts of the text that are “authored” (by definition in the Oxford English Dictionary) by Michael. An example of an entry that came from him is Section 2.2, which is referenced earlier in the chapter when talking about entries that overhang the limits of the page. The letter was written by Michael and sent to Anne, and she chose to place it in the text with specific requirements in mind for how to capture the full letter while still maintaining its tactile nature. Michael wrote these words, yet these entries are put into the scrapbook by Anne. Because Michael has written or created pieces that have now been published in *Nox*, we can claim him as “author” as well. While Michael may fit this role, it can be extended only so far because he is simply the one who wrote the words that appear in the text. He has no say in how his words are used as that control is left to Anne, who constructed the text from parts. They each have a lack of control in this case because of their partial relationship to the objects they work with. Therefore, it may be accurate to call him an “unintended author” in this instance. Michael did not intend for his words to be made public, and he likely did not intend to be the subject of this manuscript. This places the publication’s control in Anne’s hands; from there, once published, control is lost by all parties except the reader.

Even though we can argue Anne is not the true “author” of the complete manuscript, as we see not all parts are written by her (and the same is true for Michael), we can still categorize her as the constructor and translator. She creates the context in which his words have been placed, meaning that she is able to control, at least in some sense, the way that his words will be interpreted by audiences who come into contact with the text after her. She understands the



meaning she wants to convey, and when the book only belonged to her, it was easy to maintain this semblance of what the words signify. Now that the book has been published, readers are responsible for assigning meaning to what is said. She is, as the constructor of the work, still in the role which she fits best—the role of the translator. She is not the author of Michael’s life story because she did not write the story—she translated it based off the context she understood and made it something she could process as a grieving sibling. Carson understands the parts of Michael’s life that he chose to share with her, meaning that her idea of him is solely based off her interactions with him as they were growing up and those sporadic communications after he moved to Europe. She, in essence, is the reader of Michael’s life, and then passes this torch along to the readers that come into contact with *Nox* after she has done her own interpretation of the “text” that is her brother’s enigmatic life. Her reading of his life influences how we are to understand it now that it has been published. If we were to take the parts, as Anne did, and construct them ourselves, each reader would have a different idea of how to arrange the pieces. Carson has essentially done this main construction, leaving future readers to deconstruct what she has built.

Because the only person who has the full context for Michael’s life story is Michael, one could make the argument that writing on his life, especially after his passing, is not writing about his “life” but rather the life that is understood by those close to him. Michael is not all he is on these pages—he is far more complex than we are led to believe just by what is in *Nox*. Iser writes “We have experience of one another insofar as we know one another’s conduct; but we have no experience of how others experience us” (1453). This understanding we have of each other as individuals is meant to influence the way we see each other, but not to form the entire person opposite ourselves. We will never know another like we know ourselves, and as such, writing

about the life of a person that has passed away whom we did not know much about is not the same as writing about the life we ourselves have lived. This is who Michael is for Anne, but this is not who Michael was for himself—she is not the author of his life, she is the translator for it, wherein she translates to fit her own definition of who she believes Michael is.

Michel Foucault, a highly influential theorist and philosopher, would argue that Anne functions as the author in some sense, but she is not a true “author.” An argument one could make based on his essay “What is an Author?” is that “[t]he author thus functions both to organize the vast reservoir of materials that the past bequeaths us and to anchor a certain way of interpreting those materials” (Leitch et al. 1389). In this sense, she can again be interpreted more as a translator or constructor than an author because of the level of her involvement in creating the text. While there are parts she does author, as mentioned before, these can also be called into question and examined for how the first-person pronoun “I” is used. Foucault believes that this “I” is not directly related to the writer, but rather to the “I” being written about in the text—whether or not those are the same “I” is irrelevant because, according to this logic, they cannot be (Foucault 2018, 1403). This is reminiscent of how Smith and Watson distinguish between narrated- and narrating-I in life writing texts, in that narrating-I is the writer speaking now, with the knowledge they have now, and the narrated-I is the past self, narrating the events as they happened at that time (Smith and Watson 59-61). This aligns with how Foucault believes the writer undergoes change in the text, eventually having a “second self” that doesn’t necessarily match the self that started writing said text (1403).

If we are to consider this, we may conclude that Michael is not an author because, in sections where he narrates and uses the I-pronoun, he does not undergo the process of reflecting on his statements or feelings at the time when he was speaking as the narrated-I. After his

passing, he was no longer able to consent to being the author because the words no longer belong to his body—they belong to the idea of who he was, which Anne constructs through the use of artifacts from his life. She, in some ways, is an author, but is still best described as a translator for the perception of Michael’s life.

## CONCLUSION

Carson has had a complicated, and largely nonexistent, relationship with her brother, but his death stirred something within her, namely grief, that prompted her to create a scrapbook to remember him by. This not only functions as a tool to help her manage this grief, but it is also a log of the artifacts that he sent to her over years of being away from home. Rather than secluding his memorabilia, she attempted to make her grief a physical product, resulting in the epitaph she published as *Nox*. This text, which she chooses not to restrict to a specific genre, can be seen as a life writing text based on some of the characteristics it possesses, including its visual, textual, and authorial elements. At the same time, these elements contradict each other at every turn. This chapter aimed to examine these parts and the ways in which they do and do not align with certain characteristics that may be considered such.

We learned that the visual elements she incorporates are truly author-less, and they are more about being a representation of Michael rather than trying to be a reminder for his now-passed life. She copied these photos, notes, and images into *Nox* while trying to keep them appearing as real as possible, which is one way she tries to keep this “truth” of who Michael was living on. The photos are lived in and around rather than immaculate, making them a constant reminder of the life that is no longer there. The visual elements, in the context of life writing, are typically used as reference or “springboards” for the writing to follow; instead, Carson uses “Catullus 101” as her springboard and the photos as main entries rather than text. She does not

write her grief directly, but translates it through the poem and illustrates the ways Michael was and was not a present figure in her life with the photos. Her usage of the term “epitaph” is purposeful, and is likely the closest word (along with elegy) that can describe the text Carson made for her brother.

By using this word, and constructing her book to emulate it, Carson raises questions about whether or not what she made is actually a “book,” and if it’s not a “book,” how it complicates it being an object of interpretation. One can still interpret the text on the pages, but the format also lends to serious inquiry on the reader’s part. How they choose to read the text, and what this does, affects much of how the text is to be received. The elongated structure, and repetition of parts, show it as a “life laid out before one’s eyes” rather than a traditional written work with a linear structure. Lives are not meant to be linear, and they often are not, so this text’s construction physically demonstrates this rather than stating it explicitly. This is rather unique, even for a text that does not necessarily have a genre. Pages or folds have little relationship because of the lack of recto/verso utilization, meaning that the reader is left to determine how all of these elements are supposed to fit together.

Readers are, in short, the main mode of interpretation for any text post-publication. Once a text has been interacted with by the reader, a layer of response to said text has been added and will thus be interpreted differently by each person as they experience the text, whether it be for the first or hundredth time. The same goes for the person constructing the text, as Carson had to create the first “response” to the reading through her incorporation of “Catullus 101.” This, plus her translations, set up the approach the reader may take when reading her Latin-to-English translations. She creates this influence, and by doing so, she “guides” the readers to interpret certain things about the text, just as she does when placing photos or other text on pages and

leaving white space on the folds. This shows a lack of Michael, but it does not exclude him from the text as a whole, as there are passages that he writes and Anne situates. While Anne Carson is the credited author, Michael is an unintended author through the inclusion of his writings and their conversations. She could not have constructed the text the same way without these elements, just as she could not have written a complete story of Michael's life. He is the only one who has a complete narrative of his life, and he is no longer alive to share it. It would be disingenuous to assume that Anne's work is complete, as it can never be. Michael took parts of his life to the grave, leaving no space in the text to reflect on the parts of his life he narrates (such as his notes). Carson must do this dual narration for what was and now what is, meaning she is the translator of the life, but not the author of it.

As a whole, *Nox* takes genre and manipulates it to best fit her needs for an epitaph rather than a biography or other "conventional" piece of writing. The text is one-of-a-kind, meaning that assigning it to a single genre would be a disservice to the amalgamation of writings incorporated within *Nox*. Instead, this text showcases what it means to be a person—the physical complexities, the blank space, the fuzzy images, and the internal translations all compose the individualistic nature of being a person rather than a category. This is especially relevant when considering how this book is meant to represent Michael, flaws and all. There are parts that may make more sense to some readers than others, and things that serve to remember who he was in context with things that his "life translator," Anne, finds to represent him more than a single image or memory. While this book is not traditional "life writing," it still encapsulates what it means to write and live a life, and how those things are never perfect. The goal of much of life writing is to sort out the moving target of what a life is; specifically, the way in which the writer

engages with the past “to reflect on identity in the present” (Smith and Watson 3). Anne, as the sister/translator/semi-author, reflects on who Michael was to her—a brother with no body.

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