Genre Developments in the 21st Century: Representation and the Network in Anne Carson's *Float*

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Multimodality and Genre

Three hundred years after the publication of what is often considered to be the first novel in English, it seems only appropriate to mark *Robinson Crusoe*'s tercentenary by looking into some recent developments of genre innovation in the English literary landscape. One such contemporary innovator of genre is Canadian author and classics scholar Anne Carson, who has been said to upend readers' assumptions about generic labels and even to defy categorisation (e.g. Bloom 456; Gilbert 299; James), or to borrow Joshua Wilkinson's words:

> Most writers fit neatly into a genre or two; a few writers seem to *exemplify* the genres they work in; a small number really bend or blend genres in order to create new kinds of texts and performances; and still fewer seem to obliterate genre itself, from the inside out. I would place Anne Carson's work in that latter, freakish category, for what it's worth. (1; original emphasis)

While it might be a bit of a stretch to claim that Carson is highly exceptional in her attitude towards genre busting in light of the recent flurry of genre-defying work straddling poetry, scholarship, and memoir,[1] Carson's work bewilders by combining generic hybridity with a penchant for experimentation with the possibilities of book form. Although we undeniably have covered quite some distance between Daniel Defoe's genre innovations and those of Anne Carson, the advent of digital media has laid bare an often-neglected dimension of

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[1] The works of North American author-scholars Anne Boyer, Maggie Nelson, and Mary Ruefle (see e.g. MacLaughlin), amongst others, spring to mind.

textual and generic scholarship, namely its material foundations (e.g. Hayles, "Translating Media"). In *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003), Gunther Kress points out that genre tends to be treated as a purely linguistic phenomenon and that notions of genre are permeated by assumptions specific to the linguistic modes of speech and writing (105). Surprising, therefore, is that despite Carson's reputation for rethinking the notion of genre, little attention so far has been paid to the *multimodal* strategies that Carson employs in her work.

While cogent criticism has now been devoted to Carson's poetics (e.g. Jennings), her formal aesthetics (e.g. Linden; McDowell; Thorp), and use of translation (e.g. Hjorth; Rose; Simon), these readings only tentatively address the material dimension of her work. While others have recognised this technical aspect of literature by examining Carson's practice of ekphrasis (e.g. Campbell; Tschofen, "Drawing Out") and her engagements with photography, cinema, and the visual (e.g. Mayer; McCallum; Tschofen, "First"), much of this research up to now has been primarily descriptive in nature. Despite the fact that critics (e.g. Brillenburg Wurth, "Re-Vision"; MacDonald; Plate, "How to" and "Moving Words"; Tanderup) have proposed materialist readings of Carson's *Nox* (2009) in which technical and conceptual features mutually affect one another (see e.g. Hayles, *Writing Machines*), few scholars have been able to pursue the nexus between materiality and genre. Therefore, my aim in what follows is to investigate in what ways Carson has contributed to genre developments in the 21st century from a multimodal perspective uniting word and vision. My case study for this enquiry is Carson's recent work titled *Float* (2016), a collection of unfixed chapbooks in which the materiality of reading plays a crucial role.

In invoking the concept of materiality in literature, I follow the lead of literary critic N. Katherine Hayles. Her theory of materialised text does not regard texts as immaterial verbal constructions but rather recognises the physical structure in which they are realised ("Translating Media" 275). In Hayles's conception of texts, textuality is regarded as

embodied, since the underlying reasoning is that different physical realisations of a text affect the readers' interaction with its material form, and hence also the range of interpretative possibilities (277). This awareness of the material dimension of literature is arguably most prominent in concrete poetry, a genre of poetry in which material differences in the shape, size, and arrangement of words tend to reinforce the content of the work.[2] The significance of Hayles's argument therefore lies in its potential to reawaken interest in an often-overlooked aspect of literature. Equally important to my discussion is Lars Ellestrom's related notion of the *technical medium*, which stands for the specific tangible device or apparatus (12). In other words: I will approach Carson's collection as a specific media realisation or form, rather than as an abstract media category (Ellestrom 12).[3] In the context of *Float*, I thus treat the notion of genre as a language-centred knowledge structure that is 'materialised' in a concrete medium.

For *Float*, this medium is a boxed collection of twenty-two individually bound chapbooks that are held together by a plastic slipcase. The collection is not only unconventional in the sense that reading can therefore be free-fall, but also in the sense that Carson crosses several genres by including poems, translations, lists, ruminations, and essays, alongside what could be termed lyric plays and lyric lectures. According to John James, "the book, if we can call it a book, contests not only conventional understandings of genre and readership, but, through its collective disjunction, the classificatory *modes* by which we comprehend our realities" (emphasis added). Before embarking on a multimodal reading of genre in *Float*, it should be noted that, as also Ruth Page asserts, we are dealing with an

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[2] For a concise overview of concrete poetry, see Bray. For a discussion of the relationship between concrete poetry and more recent forms of digital kinetic poetry, see Rettberg (118-24).
[3] Ellestrom makes a tripartite distinction between "basic," "qualified," and "technical" media: the former two refer to abstract classifications, the latter to a concrete object that embodies basic and qualified media (12, 30). I will focus my discussion on the material dimension of media by treating *Float* as a technical medium, rather than highlight the perceptual or socio-conventional dimension. In Ellestrom's terms, a basic medium is primarily identified by its appearance (perceptual dimension), whereas a qualified medium relies heavily on its contextual use and aesthetic characteristics (socio-conventional dimension), as can be illustrated by the distinction between a visual text and visual literature respectively (24-27).

amorphous concept, since "what might count as a mode is an open-ended set, ranging across a number of systems including but not limited to language, image, color, typography, music, voice quality, dress, gesture, spatial resources, perfume, and cuisine" (6). In my discussion, therefore, I draw on Page's understanding of the term 'mode' as "a system of choices used to communicate meaning" (6). Within the context of *Float*, Carson's use of language, typography, and image—under which I include the arrangement of words—stands out specifically.

In her comprehensive study on the experimental genre of multimodal printed literature, Alison Gibbons identifies several formal features typical of multimodal novels, including "unusual textual layouts and page design, varied typography, […] concrete realisation of text to create images […], devices that draw attention to the text's materiality, including metafictive writing", as well as "footnotes and self-interrogative critical voices" and the "mixing of genres" (*Multimodality* 2). All these elements are present in *Float* to a greater or lesser extent. The collection not only includes unusual textual layouts, as demonstrated in list poems, but also plays with font sizes, boldface, italic type, line lengths, and line-spacing. In addition, *Float* features chessboard-like compositions of text in "Good Dog II" or visually mimics a descending motion in the "Drop't Sonnet," freely combines genres—including lectures in the form of sonnets or a play—and includes footnotes, self-interrogative voices pondering on the implications of being "trained to strive for exactness and to believe that rigorous knowledge of the world without any residue is possible for us," and several metafictional comments on the materiality of language, as the following excerpt from "Cassandra Float Can" demonstrates:

> Everywhere Cassandra ran the glue was coming up off the edge of the page and, when she pulled at it, *this* page was underneath, this page on which I am telling you that everywhere Cassandra ran she found she could float. (original emphasis)

Cassandra is a prophet in Greek mythology who plays a significant role in Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon*. In "Cassandra Float Can," Carson reflects on the logic of translation and the untranslatable, but more generally, she ponders the relationship between words and what is underneath the surface of them, which she compares to a "sensation of veils flying up" offside her vision. The collection's title, *Float*, therefore does not merely refer to the unrestricted, free-floating practice of reading that the collection inspires, but also hints at the notion of the floating signifier, which stands for an empty word without a corresponding mental concept (Lévi-Strauss 63), and the collection thus emphasises the material nature of language.

Incidentally, this material, visual dimension may be unsurprising for an author who is also a painter and who has a background in graphic design (Rae 28; Plate, "How to" 102). Gibbons elsewhere defines multimodal literature, which she restricts to the novel, as a type of literature that "experiment[s] with the possibility of book form, playing with the graphic dimensions of text, incorporating images, and testing the limits of the book as a physical and tactile object" ("Multimodal Literature" 420). While *Float* meets these criteria, it is clear that it falls beyond the scope of Gibbons's analysis of the multimodal novel, which "acknowledge[s] other creative multimodalities, such as forms of shaped texts like concrete poetry" (*Multimodality* 1) but nevertheless seems to exclude more poetic experiments from the genre of multimodal printed literary fiction. Although I am not contesting the fact that readers are free to read literary works in whatever order they see fit, the existence of individually bound, unnumbered chapbooks goes against the conventional novel's fixed form, while conceptually, the collection's heavy reliance on scholarship does not meld well with the novel's affirmation of the common life and its social orientation (see e.g. Eagleton). However, since Gibbons appears to define the genre of multimodal literature as anything but conventional by taking the performative construction of narrative meaning as a defining

characteristic ("Multimodal Literature" 421), I propose to build on Gibbons's insights by moving beyond her restriction of the multimodal genre to the novel. The questions that need to be addressed, then, if *Float* cannot be regarded as a novel, is how it can be most accurately defined and how particular word-image relations in the collection can inform this generic conception.

Analogical Networks

Building on Kiene Brillenburg Wurth's ("Posthuman Selves") identification of a network aesthetic in contemporary paper-based literature, I argue that *Float* can be conceptualised as a networked collection of display texts in which the notion of genre hovers between print and digital textualities. According to Brillenburg Wurth, current avant-garde literature is often characterised by an ambiguous dynamic between nostalgia and futurism ("Posthuman Selves" 97), which she terms a network aesthetic typical of the digital age. These works are verbal-visual conjunctions that are fundamentally networked due to the excessive intertextual and generic perspectives they offer (83, 92). However, their prosthetic textuality here exceeds the intertextual, since the space between the texts—the network itself—becomes the norm (83). In other words, such texts can be compared to display screens in the sense that "they function as portals to assembled fragments of existing texts" (13). These multimodal texts can therefore be defined as quasi-generative *assemblages* and are hence authorial and procedural at once (83, 89), which is crucial to my investigation of genre in *Float*. Put differently: how does the interaction between the visual and the verbal modes evoke a network aesthetic that, although conceived of by an author, is fundamentally decentred and open-ended? Pursuing this open-ended line of thought, the network aesthetic is closely related to Lyn Hejinian's notion of the "open text" that encourages productive participation on the reader's part by "resist[ing] the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix

material and turn it into a product" (43). What the network shares with Hejinian's "open text" is an emphasis on process, a rejection of writerly authority, and a repudiation of hermeneutic closure (42-44).

Carson's *Float* can be counted among those display texts that participate in a network aesthetic by virtue of, on the one hand, its multimodal nature, and on the other hand, its generic crossing and reworking of existing voices and texts, to the extent that the work approaches a generative textuality, in the sense that it appears to have been produced by a text-machine that relies on a computational form of writing (see Rettberg 37-38), as demonstrated in the many references to Wallace Shawn, H. G. Wells, Emily Dickinson, Homer, John Donne, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Gustav Janouch, Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, Aeschylus, Frank O'Hara, Émile Nelligan, Hegel, Marcel Proust, Euripides, and Emily Brontë—to name but some. These extended riffs on a plethora of authors, with whose works and ideas she often only cursorily engages, pervade the collection with an extreme sense of referentiality that reconfigures textuality as intrinsically networked. In other words, Carson's practice of what Jennifer Thorp has dubbed "name-dropping" (15) becomes the framework on which to hang a story. In this light, I propose to read the network in Carson's collection as an open-ended web of fleeting, formerly unthought-of connections that can be approached from different intertextual and generic angles. In "Uncle Falling," Carson provides the following description of such a network:

> I like to write lectures. My favorite part is connecting the ideas. The best connections are the ones that draw attention to their own frailty so that at first you think: *what a poor lecture this is—the ideas go all over the place* and then later you think: *but still, what a terrifically perilous activity it is, this activity of linking together all the threads of human sin that go into making what we call sense, what we call reasoning, an argument, a conversation. How light, how loose, how unprepared and unpreparable is the web of connections between any thought and any thought.* (original emphases)

Such an understanding of a network aesthetic ties in with Carson's notion of the edge, as elaborated in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), her study of the concept of 'eros' or desire combining literary history, translation, and philosophy. This idea of an edge as a liminal boundary serves as a trope throughout *Float*, but especially in "Cassandra Float Can." In an often-quoted passage from *Eros*, Carson argues that all human reasoning is analogical:

> [...] we think by *projecting sameness upon difference*, by drawing things together in a relation or idea *while at the same time maintaining the distinctions between them*. [...] In any act of thinking, the mind must reach across this space between known and unknown, linking one to the other but also keeping visible their difference. It is an erotic space. To reach across it is tricky; a kind of stereoscopy seems to be required. (171; emphases added)

In other words, the network in Carson's collection can be conceptualised as a web of—often intertextual—connections between *apparently* different notions and entities. In "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," for instance, Carson explores the concept of naming through the works and lives of Homer, Joan of Arc, Francis Bacon, and Friedrich Hölderlin, whereas her study of profit in the collection is centred on Homer's classical epic *Odyssey*, Alberto Moravia's (1954) novel based on the *Odyssey* (*Il Disprezzo*), and Jean-Luc Godard's (1963) film version of that novel (*Le Mépris*). Carson illuminates the striking similarities between these seemingly unrelated or possibly even incongruous authors and makes these correspondences take on meaning as different perspectives on a common theme. In some cases, an intratextual connection is established when the same intertextual figure reappears on multiple occasions in the collection. Homer, for example, does not only feature in "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent" and "Contempts: A Study of Profit and Nonprofit in Homer, Moravia and Godard," but also in the chapbook titled "Candor." Consequently, Carson weaves a web of connections between the concepts of the untranslatable, profit, and the female voice through the figure of Homer.

Material Multiplicity

What is crucial to this discussion, however, is that the material organisation of *Float* contributes to its participation in a network aesthetic that defies the sense of an ending. More precisely, Carson's skilful use of multilinearity, haptic interaction, and combinatory poetics foregrounds the idea that a single fragment in the collection can give rise to multiple possibilities in narrative progression: there are either different ways of reading the same excerpt, the readers need to interact physically with the text for the narrative to unfold, or the readers are presented with similar text fragments that seem to be generated according to an algorithm. In "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," for one, Carson appears to make use of a computational form of writing that is typical of combinatory poetics and based on the application of algorithmic procedures to a database (see Rettberg 37-38). This procedural form has a closed structure by relying on predetermined constraints, such as a set of restrictions or an elaborate form, that generate and thus precede the actual content of the poem (Conte 40). However predetermined, this kind of closed form is open-ended in the sense that it contains the possibility of never-ending variations.

In a series of such generative language experiments that meditate on the notion of the untranslatable and are part of "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," Carson offers six playful translations of the same fragment of Ancient Greek, each time using words from a different literary work, including "Woman's Constancy" (1633) by John Donne, *Endgame* (1957) by Samuel Beckett, and *Conversations with Kafka* (1951) by Gustav Janouch. Crucially, Carson explicitly mentions that she uses "the wrong words," thus confirming that form here triumphs over content. In "L.A.," Carson relies on the alphabet as a generative principle: lines of lyric verse in boldface are interspersed with prose lines that each begin with the next letter of the alphabet, while "Eras of Yves Klein" is composed of lines starting with 'The Era of.' As a final case in point, the "Triple Sonnet of the Plush Pony Part III" reuses different composing principles throughout its unfolding:

A body in the dawn.
A body in the cold.
A body its breath.
Its breath a plume.
A dance a plume.
A dance not thou.
A thou, a thee.
Thou, breath.

As this short excerpt illustrates, the poem makes use of four syntactic structures and relies on the words 'breath,' 'plume,' 'dance,' and 'thou' as connectors between the different variations on these syntactic patterns, thus engendering a poem that almost mechanically generates its progression from within.

In this way, Carson teases out connections with the notion of the literary work as a text-machine that relies on code. In "Possessive Used as Drink (Me)," she explicitly mentions this notion of coding and her refusal to surrender the key to this code to her readers:

> The Pronoun Stacktrain can be assembled at home and comes with directions. The directions are in code. I'd give you the key to the code but then I wouldn't have any refuge at all, would I? I might panic like Marcel Duchamp's first wife who got up in the middle of the night and glued all the chessmen to the chessboard.

This metafictional reference to a possible loss of authorial control testifies to the ambiguous oscillation between authorship and computation that is symptomatic of this network aesthetic (see also Brillenburg Wurth, "Posthuman Selves"). Carson offers a more abstract reflection on the sense and nonsense of coding in the seemingly nonsensical "Sonnet of 'We Tried Doing It Without the Cue Sheet but Couldn't Remember What Color Referred to What Movement and What Had Been Done and What Was Left to Do'" where she writes that "she continues these leaps / scramble the code scramble uphill scramble eggs / and without premeditation but in full arc if possible have a good time." Such leaps of thought, which are reminiscent of Carson's notion of 'undoing the latches of being' that she introduced in *Autobiography of Red* (1998), are crucial to the functioning of the network, as they make up

the jumbled yet coded connections between the disjointed parts of this web of floating signifiers. Here again, the notion of analogy as a pattern of both similarity and difference plays a crucial role.

In general, Carson explores "the idea of 'network' itself" in *Float*, as James observes, by defying the concept of order. Not only are the pages unnumbered, the table of contents also resists chronological sequencing by being arranged alphabetically. Even the collection's first chapbook that acts as the cover seems to be ordered incorrectly, since the colophon is located at the verso of the title-leaf, as one would expect, yet that title-leaf appears at the end of the chapbook. Carson accordingly asks in "Maintenance" if "order [is] an issue of maintenance as in in what order as in the order given in the diagram the order they came out of the box etc." In the next numbered line, the speaker wonders: "Who does all this thinking are there rules for it ~~this boundary~~ between the work and its maintenance who draws it." Crucially, the word 'boundary' is crossed out, and the sense of elimination associated with this typographical principle is reinforced when the speaker asserts in the next point that he or she "do[esn't] like boundary." On a macro level, the readers of *Float* therefore need to engage with floating chapbooks that physically oppose boundaries and instead embody a network of relations.

At the level of the page, the collection also opens up discussions about the materiality of language itself by relying on haptic interaction that requires a disjunctive encounter with the materiality of the page for the narrative to progress (see also Laccetti 178). In "By Chance the Cycladic People," for example, the readers are encouraged to put the numbered statements that make up the narrative in the correct order, which is especially relevant since Carson is said to have made use of a random number generator to order the lines (see Biele). Similarly, the "Deictic Quiz Sonnet" is made up of (mis)quotations from works by Homer, Emily Dickinson, William Shakespeare, Gertrude Stein, and John Keats, as well as from an

interview with the American dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Each excerpt is accompanied by an answer, but since these answers are cryptic and seemingly taken out of context, the readers are coaxed into looking for an appropriate question—in the literal sense of the word—that would complete the narrative. Another more oblique example of haptic interaction in the collection can be found in the "Countstack Not Counting Restacks," which acts as a repository of words used in the different texts that make up the chapbook titled "Stacks," each with a corresponding number that presumably denotes the number of times that word is used in the chapbook. However, since some phrases, including "female wantonness" or "non-LIFO" (Last In First Out), stand out more than other more common words, such as afternoon or animals, and the number that is assigned to these striking words and phrases can sometimes appear extraordinarily high, readers are invited to start counting themselves in order to gauge the reliability, and consequently the actual meaning, of this list.

Equally, Carson can be seen to engage with the strategy of multilinearity, which refers to the practice of offering different possibilities in narrative progression, including alternative narrative structures, shifts in point of view, and complications of character development and chronology (Rettberg 59, 68). By way of illustration, the "Merce Sonnet" is composed of nine blocks of text that can be read both horizontally and vertically. In a metafictional comment, Carson reflects on the fact that there are indeed "two opposite places to start" in this dance of words. While most lines favour a horizontal reading, and this assumption is reinforced through the positioning of the opening and closing quotation marks, Carson's deft use of coupled rhyme in the poem constantly opens up the possibility of a different, vertical reading path:

> Two opposite places to start
> Take a name. Play a part.
> got, a lot,
> empty but hot.
> nouns.

pronouns.
from each location,
a quotation:

As another case in point, Carson is able to evoke an unfulfilled story in "108 (*flotage*)" by having her readers fill in what happens between the numbers that represent file cards, and thus participate in the reconstruction of the plot by concocting the text for the missing numbers themselves.[4] Thus, these missing numbers, which seem to provide a literal illustration of Wolfgang Iser's concept of gaps in readers' interpretation, allow her to play with points of view and chronology. Let us consider the following example in which Carson's use of focalisation becomes increasingly more blurred after the seventh line:

> 1. A number she liked some prayer thing 108.
> 3. Loosening back against the bars of it.
> 5. Are you tempted?
> 6. I've always been tempted.
> 7. That was the name I gave her in the story (what story).
> 10. Woke up too early crick in my neck went to get some American money.
> 11. Picked up this hitchhiker sort of blonde got a ghostyhat [*sic*] on.

Carson concludes this list poem with an unnumbered note between parentheses, in which she wittily remarks that

> There are many ways to tell a story. A guy told me what happened to him at the border. I put some points on file cards. Every time I tried to fill in what happens between the file cards I lost the story. I didn't really know him. It was like a winter sky, high, thin, restless, unfulfilled. That's when I started to think about the word *flotage*. (original emphasis)

This sense of unfulfillment that accompanies Carson's rendering of the story ties in with the unfinished nature of the network by virtue of its infinite connectedness (cf. Brillenburg Wurth, "Posthuman Selves" 92).

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[4] By italicising 'flotage,' Carson draws attention to the fluidity of the term: while it stands for the act of floating in English and evokes notions of floating signifiers, the French variant *flottage*, which she may also imply here, refers to wood transport by waterways (*flottage du bois*) or the manufacturing process of float glass (*verre flotté*).

Narratives of Exhaustion

My reading of Carson's collection has therefore revealed that a nuanced understanding of genre in *Float* necessitates an analysis of the interrelation between form and content. In other words, *Float* can only be conceptualised as a networked collection of display texts, as theorised by Brillenburg Wurth, due to the interplay between materiality and meaning in the collection. After all, the material strategies that Carson uses, which include multilinearity, haptic interaction, and combinatory poetics, generate various options in narrative progression and thus tacitly oppose the idea of an ending, which is typical of the paper-based network. While these strategies are certainly not new but rather hail from avant-garde traditions (see Rettberg), metafictional comments in the collection seem to imply that their specific implementation is informed by a reflection on the possibilities of analogue media in the digital age (see also Brillenburg Wurth, "Posthuman Selves" 85-86). Indeed, in "Good Dog I," Carson appears to shed light on the composition process of *Float* when she reveals that writing a poem comes down to trying to capture a network of answers:

> […] Tell you a story about the best poem I
> ever wrote the one I lost That page was terrific it slid out
>
> of a dream about the littorals above Europe and me looking
> down as if As if on oh oceans I had all the answers I was an
> answer! I was high as day arising and truth shot out of me like
> a lark Years ago These are tears I do not use I lost the
>
> page again and again found it again and again every time I
> moved finally captured it in a plastic sleeve […]

Carson's collection is an example of such an analogue medium that tries to gather and represent (personal) answers and data in an act of narrative exhaustion.

In a startling instance of narrative metalepsis, Carson suddenly directly addresses the reader as part of an extended reflection on varieties of enclosure: "Have I told you that your

face bewilders me? And that one day rummaging in your cabinet I opened your secret drawer by accident? Whether or not I found a secret there of course I can't say" ("Sonnet of the English-Made Cabinet with Drawers (In Prose)"). Carson has earlier criticised this inclination to "want other people to have a centre, a history, an account that makes sense" in *Nox* (2009), a replication of a notebook in memory of her deceased brother in the shape of an accordion-folded book-in-a-box. She thus effectively posits that, in trying to map the whole being of humans, this perilous endeavour to link together "all the threads of human sin" can never arrive at accurate representation since human beings do not have a centre—or rather, guard their secret drawer very closely—and therefore cannot be enclosed. In Hejinian's words, the network challenges "our inclination to isolate, identify, and limit the burden of meaning given to an event (the sentence or line)" (44), or, so I have argued, to ourselves and other people.

As a result, Carson's embodiment of the print network can be counted among those literary works that tap into the digital age by illustrating the complex dynamic between tradition and innovation in literature through a network aesthetic that is authorial and decentred at once. While *Float* has been created by an author who is not afraid to speak out and to reflect openly on whether "having a brother who comes and goes from his mind all the time might make a person especially aware of holes and splits and disruptions" ("Cassandra Float Can"), the collection is nevertheless decentralised due to the metafictional awareness of the limits of representation with which it is imbued. By positioning Carson's engagement with genre in *Float* at the hinge of 'past' and 'present' movements, this essay has demonstrated that the theorisation of recent developments in genre innovation requires a historical approach to the materiality of reading.

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