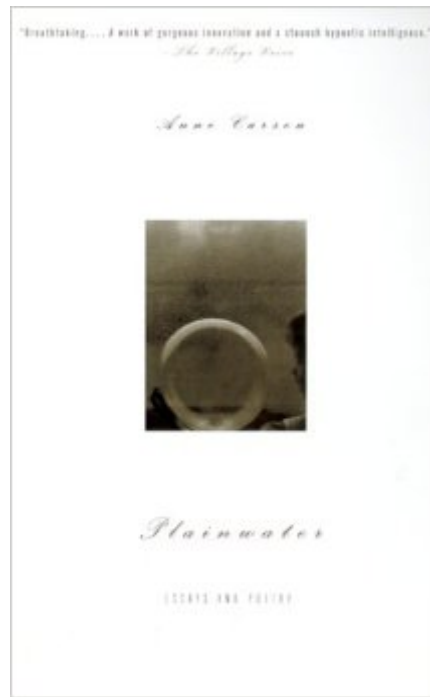


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Plainwater: Essays And Poetry



Synopsis

The poetry and prose collected in *Plainwater* are a testament to the extraordinary imagination of Anne Carson, a writer described by Michael Ondaatje as "the most exciting poet writing in English today." Succinct and astonishingly beautiful, these pieces stretch the boundaries of language and literary form, while juxtaposing classical and modern traditions. Carson envisions a present-day interview with a seventh-century BC poet, and offers miniature lectures on topics as varied as orchids and Ovid. She imagines the muse of a fifteenth-century painter attending a phenomenology conference in Italy. She constructs verbal photographs of a series of mysterious towns, and takes us on a pilgrimage in pursuit of the elusive and intimate anthropology of water. Blending the rhythm and vivid metaphor of poetry with the discursive nature of the essay, the writings in *Plainwater* dazzle us with their invention and enlighten us with their erudition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Highly lyrical, *Plainwater* works more inside Carson's language than outside in the realm of ideas. In fact, the language itself seems to be the idea. Rather, Carson invokes ideas instead explicating. At the very least, Carson's lyricism veils larger ideas about loss and love and art from the reader through impressionistic ["Short Talks,"](#) poems, lyric postcards, and associative leaps that leave the reader jolted and moved, if confused. Take the section ["On the Mona Lisa"](#): "Every day he poured his question into her, as you pour water from one vessel into another, and it poured back. Don't tell me he was painting his mother, lust, et cetera. There is a moment when the water is

not in one vessel nor in the other -- what a thirst it was, and he supposed that when the canvas became completely empty he would stop. But women are strong. She knew vessels, she knew water, she knew mortal thirst" (37). This "Short Talk" reads more like a prose poem than the lecture the chapter title implies, forcing the reader to firstly think more about the language and the images than the ideas. But then the ideas emerge from the language. Beginning with the topic of the Mona Lisa, Carson jumps into the realms of water and questions, imagistically painting a relationship between the woman (Mona Lisa) and her creator/author/painter (Da Vinci). She abstracts a relationship through talk of water and vessels and thirst. But Carson claims that "there is a moment when the water is not in one vessel nor in the other," pausing within a moment of time to jump out of the reciprocal relationship that she creates between the painting and the painter (and the woman?). The art of the painting, the question of the art, hovers above both Da Vinci and his painted woman.

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