Carlos Lopez

Dr. Amy (Amanda) Fish

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**The expectation of character in “Citizen”**

In Claudia Rankine’s “Citizen,” we are presented to the struggle of African Americans in society through the use of many anecdotes and metaphors, and although many of these can be left to interpretation, there is arguably a few themes of disparity among society that are present throughout the whole book. An example of this would be the theme of the perceived societal expectations of African American citizens by the American population.

“ ‘I’ is supposed to hold what is not there until it is. Then *what is* comes apart the closer you are to it” (71). This is the quote that begins the page and it relates how the author feels a disconnect between who society says she is supposed to be and who she actually feels she is. However, she understands that this feeling might not apply to everyone, so she generalizes it to the public by using the second and third person with the words “you” and “it” rather than the first (71). She then acknowledges that the first person is nothing more than a “symbol for something”(71). It is just a simplification of what a person might be. However, she also acknowledges that “ ‘I’ has so much power; it’s insane”(71). Despite the pronoun being just a word, it has the power to change peoples’ identities for fear that they might be alienated from the rest of the world.

However, not only does the author acknowledge this divide in how society wants African Americans to behave but she also lets you feel how society indirectly tells you this in the form of a passerby who is “all gloved up, in a big coat, with fancy fur around the collar[…]saying, you should be scared, the first person can’t pull you together” (71). Of course, the passerby does not say this out loud but through her looks alone this can be easily implied. The author also acknowledges this through the quote “you are reading minds, but did you try?”(71) in addition to the first curse word in the whole book “Shit” (70) which reveals her frustration towards two things: that she might be becoming paranoid of people judging her and that she might be right and people ARE judging her.