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**The thesis and first body paragraph of the midterm paper**

In “Citizen,” the pronoun “I” becomes a placeholder for what society wants Claudia Rankine to be since her true self crumbles in the face of expectation due to her identity not being able to fit in the first person.

“ ‘I’ is supposed to hold what is not there until it is. Then *what is* comes apart the closer you are to it” (71). Rankine writes this quote to relate how she feels a disconnect between who society says she is supposed to be and who she actually feels she is. As a result, she avoids the use of the first person for two main reasons. By using the second and third person with the words “you” and “it” rather than the first (71), she generalizes this feeling of alienation to her audience since she understands that this feeling might not apply to everyone while simultaneously refusing to represent herself through the first person and hence limiting herself to what society expects her to be. 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, and Rankine shows us that she constantly feels this societal pressure weighing her down through the use 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). Clearly, the passerby does not say this out loud but through the stare she throws at Rankine, she can easily infer this. The author more directly 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 further reveals her frustration at the thought of people constantly reminding her that she does not fit within “I.”