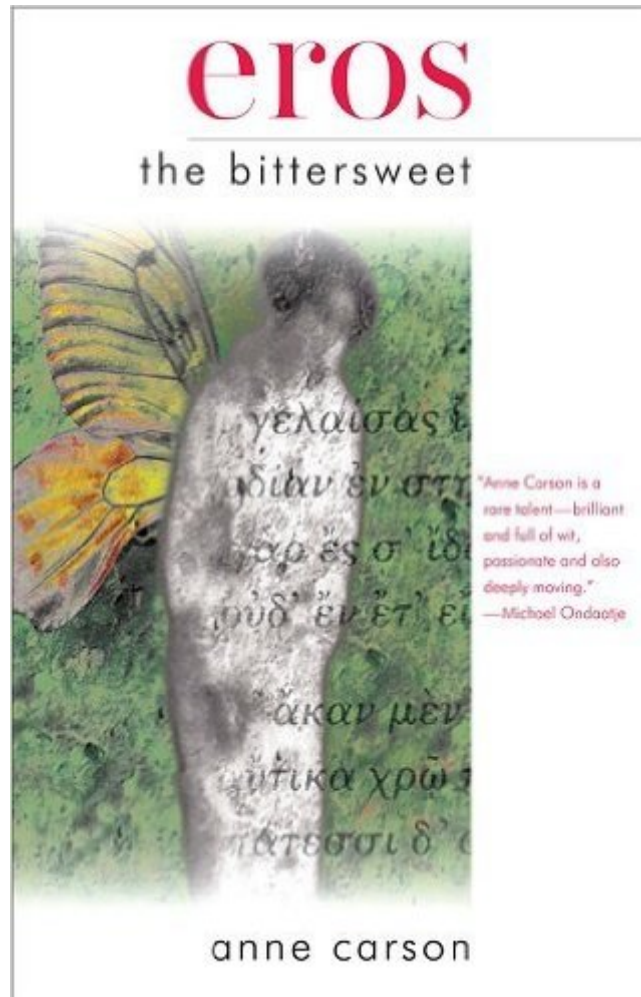


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Eros The Bittersweet (Canadian Literature)



Synopsis

A book about romantic love, *Eros the Bittersweet* is Anne Carson's exploration of the concept of "eros" in both classical philosophy and literature. Beginning with, "It was Sappho who first called eros 'bittersweet.' No one who has been in love disputes her," Carson examines her subject from numerous points of view, creating a lyrical meditation in the tradition of William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All* and William H. Gass's *On Being Blue*.

Book Information

Series: Canadian Literature

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (20 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Eros the Bittersweet, by Anne Carson, is a short and curious set of essays about the nature of desire. That sentence alone captures very little of the scope and character of the book: Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet* is a reflexive, paradoxical, expansive and narrow work. It is fine as filigree in its craftsmanship, and Anne Carson, as always writes in an easy, conversational, endlessly approachable style. It is, I can see, a great scholarly work, a great piece of thought, but it is unfortunately not a book I particularly enjoyed. Let me explain. Anne Carson starts the book with a fragment of a poem by Sappho: Eros once again limb-loosener whirls mesweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up. The rest of the book is devoted to exploring what this phrase Sappho has coined--sweetbitter*, or as we more commonly refer to it, bittersweet--really means. Where does it come from? What is this dyadic, split experience we have of desire? Her explorations of the bittersweet nature of Eros take her through the lyric poets of Ancient Greece, through the novelists

of Ancient Greece, through paintings, through ice, through insects, through modern novels. The breadth of sources Anne Carson marshals in her scholarly inquiry of Eros' bittersweetness is sweeping. The point of desire becomes first flexible, then reflexive--what we desire, she argues, is the act of desiring. Then, she employs this lens to literature, to the alphabet itself, to the act of reading and writing. She poses the reader of a work of fiction as a lover (one overcome with Eros), but poses the writer of a fiction as a nonlover. The ideas are rich, endlessly rich. Sometimes the work borders on wordplay, but even then Anne Carson is a clear-eyed enough thinker that you go along with it.

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