

“Shifting Ground” Breaking (from) Baudrillard’s “Code” in *Autobiography of Red*

We can say that no writer who began in a rather lonely struggle against the power of language could or can avoid being coopted by it, either in the posthumous form of an inscription within official culture, or in the present form of a mode which imposes its image and forces him to conform to expectation. No way out for this author than to shift ground—or to persist—or both at once.

—Roland Barthes, *Leçon*

I don’t think writing is an effort of control. It’s an effort of collaboration with whatever insights are available there.

—Anne Carson (to Kevin McNeilly)

In an essay on the ancient Greek poet Stesichoros that frames her *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* (1998), Anne Carson writes that “[t]here were many different ways to tell a story like this” (5). Her “this” refers to the tenth labour of Herakles, his killing the monster Geryon, which Stesichoros’ *Geryoneis* and Carson’s *Autobiography of Red (Red)* “tell” from Geryon’s perspective in “different ways”—his in lyric fragments, hers as a verse novel with the rather odd generic tag, “autobiography.” Ian Rae’s work on *Red* amasses Carson’s fragments into the concept of the “hybrid form” (*Poet’s Novel* 232). Rae argues that she destabilizes the neat ordering implied by a single label.¹ For him, the “mysterious designation [of] ‘autobiography’” best highlights her play with “fixed modes of representation and perception” (*Poet’s Novel* 228, 234). Rae may be right to identify Carson’s general interest in creating productive discomfort in her reader, but the autobiographical apparatus remains the most radical and beguiling aspect of her text. There are still “many different stories” to uncover with the following question: Why is *Red*—part academic essay, part classicist translation, part third-person account of Geryon’s life—called an “autobiography” at all?

Three recent answers to the question of why *Red* is classified as an autobiography indicate a developing trend in scholarship on the text. Critics invoke the insights of a major philosopher to distill Carson's project. Jacqueline Plante reads Carson's transgression of "categorical boundaries" in terms of Gilles Deleuze's notion of "becoming" (175); Stuart Murray aligns Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories about "perception and human subjectivity in the lifeworld" with her "autobiography of the autobiographical writing self" (102); most recently, Edith Hall calls "Heidegger's identification of time as the chief *locus* by which human subjectivity orients itself, [one] of the most important intellectual and artistic compass points that can help us read the poetic map of Carson's poem" (218). These are engaging readings that pull some fascinating threads out of *Red*, but all three decontextualize the generic classification, wrenching it away from its function for Geryon, not to mention his experience, within the text. Moreover, with the exception of Hall, they rely on extra-textual philosophical paradigms. My paper provides an interdisciplinary reading of the "autobiographical mystery" via the work of a thinker who has been curiously cast aside in these emerging critical examinations, Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" (1970) is quoted directly in *Red*'s opening chapter, "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" Baudrillard's essay argues that all representative acts obey an unseen "structural code" which "govern[s] both objects and subjects . . . subordinating them to itself" (92). Carson elides this disempowering consequence of a universal "*passion for the code*" (Baudrillard 92)—in her paraphrasing of Baudrillard—creating a subtext that challenges the supposedly liberating effect of the "difference" that Stesichoros makes. I argue that this subtext informs the complex negotiation of interiority, exteriority, and writing in Geryon's narrative. *Red* dramatizes its ambivalence about Stesichoros' "undo[ing] the latches" through its portrayal of Geryon's relationship with writing, which is explored in conjunction with allusions to the encroaching effects of the existential state of *Mitwelt*² and psychoanalytic mappings of desire (5). Since writing reproduces "conform[ity]" to the semiological system, Geryon's turn to the photographic essay as a medium, "shift[s] the ground," freely enabling his autobiographical impulse (Barthes 467). *Red* frames photographs as coded spaces between subjective interiority and objective exteriority. The valorization of photography in such a writerly text amounts to a tension, which Baudrillard's rubric of the "fetish" helps address, insofar as *Red* simultaneously recognizes and disavows the loss of our power over

language. The dialectic movement of fetishization, with its constant naming and negation, responds to the "structural code" of *Red's* narrative in a way that posits the written as a necessary supplement to images, and vice versa.³

According to many critics, Stesichoros is the true hero—the acknowledged legislator—of Carson's *Red*. Indeed, Carson appears to make her debt to and admiration for the Greek poet clear in the opening section of *Red*, "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" Carson highlights his impressive rhetorical résumé: he reputedly freed language from the "fixed diction" popularized by Homer (4). Thus Stesichoros was able to invert, challenge, or otherwise shift the perspective in classical narratives, notably Helen's culpability for the Trojan War and Herakles' slaying of Geryon. One strategy for addressing the complexity of *Red* has been to read Carson's enthusiasm straightforwardly, aligning her with Stesichoros. For instance, Monique Tschofen writes that "Carson repeats" Stesichoros' gesture of escaping "a restrictive cultural logic" (49); Rae connects Stesichoros' "manipulation of genres" to Carson's "generic play" (*Poet's Novel* 233); and Dean Irvine notes that "[f]or Carson, as for Stesichoros, adjectives are the refugees of language" (281). All of these readings are attentive to individual details from the opening essay, but by merging Stesichoros and Carson, they miss (con)-textual clues that illustrate that she approaches his legacy with more caution. The most superficial of these clues is the wording of the chapter as a question, rather than a statement. This phrasing does not imply that Carson presents Stesichoros as having made no difference. She goes on to write, after carefully detailing his contributions, that "[y]ou can answer for yourself the question 'What difference did Stesichoros make?'" in reference to the fragments of his *Geryoneis* (6). Notice, though, that the question of the nature of Stesichoros' "difference" remains open. As such, her quotation from Baudrillard invites a contrapuntal position to the one celebrating Stesichoros' contribution.

The paragraph in Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" from which Carson draws her quotation is worth citing in full because her selective quotation constitutes an act of erasure, which leaves significant traces of the source material in *Red*. Baudrillard re-evaluates Marx's commodity fetishism as semiological:

If fetishism exists it is thus not a fetishism of the signified, a fetishism of substances and values (called ideological), which the fetish object would incarnate for the alienated subject. Behind this reinterpretation (which is truly ideological) it is a *fetishism of the signifier*. That is to say that the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the

passion for the code, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation. This is the fundamental articulation of the ideological process: not in the projection of alienated consciousness into various superstructures, but in the generalization at all levels of a structural code. (92, emphasis in original)

In other words, “what difference *could* Stesichoros make?” Consider how Baudrillard stresses that the processes of production (material “substances”) and consumption (“the code”) are entangled. Both create a fundamentally “alienated subject.” In Marx’s critique of capitalist modes of production, it is workers detached from the output of their labour; in Baudrillard’s critique of representation, it is everyone distanced from the reality that the “signifier” supposedly discloses. So while Stesichoros alters the mechanics of production, importing adjectives “from somewhere else,” he accelerates the consumptive alienation that Homer had first made manifest (Carson 4). “[W]omen” are not “neat-ankled,” nor is “a child bruiseless” (4, 5). The output of the two poets has superficial differences, but on the deeper level of the “structural code,” the outcome is the same—whether the signs used are “stable” (Homer) or “more complex” (Stesichoros), that they are used at all communicates subjects and objects “governed” by representation (4, 5). Since the concept of how language acts in an infinite sign-system is diffuse, an example is useful. Stesichoros signifies on Homer’s representation of “blood [as] black,” describing “killings” as “cream black” (4, 5). While Stesichoros’ representation is more nuanced than Homer’s, the shared adjective “black” emphasizes that the poets obey an identical “*passion for the code*.” The possibly more radical step would be to describe “killings” using a blank space, without recourse to an adjective like “black.” Of course, Carson does not ask this of Stesichoros. For her, he is notable for extending language’s self-referential loop. Her reservations about this extension are embedded in her allusion to Baudrillard.

Carson compresses the above quotation from “Fetishism and Ideology” into the following: “Consumption is not a passion for substances but a passion for the code,” says Baudrillard” (4). Not only does she leave out the aspect of “fetishism,” she seemingly omits the regulatory property of the “passion for the code” he outlines immediately afterwards. Such a willful misquoting on Carson’s part should be separated from her mock adaptations of quotations gauging Stesichoros’ reputation, such as the one from “Suidas,” which gushes that Stesichoros “Makes those old stories new” (4). What she omits from Baudrillard, she locates in Stesichoros. Whereas the Homeric regime was productivist in that its “fixed diction” connects to “a passion

for the code," Stesichoros "release[s] being" into a consumptive economy that acknowledges language as an object (4, 5). As Baudrillard explains, however, it is impossible to separate production and consumption because both depend upon an associative order that is "factitious, differential, encoded, [and] systematized" to generate meaning (92). On a broader level, this tyranny of association operates through Carson's use of Homer to make sense of Stesichoros' importance. She invokes this associative order in an adapted quotation from Longinus, which states that Stesichoros is the "Most Homeric of the lyric poets" (4). On the surface, Longinus' words damn Stesichoros with hyperbolic praise, as they contradict the apparent distinction Carson's essay will go on to draw between the two ancient poets. However, a closer look reveals that Carson adopts and amends the Longinus quotation from an 1888 *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on Stesichoros. The entry cites Longinus labeling Stesichoros as "most like Homer" ("Steischorus" 543). Carson translates "Homer" into "Homeric," into an adjective affixed to Stesichoros. *Red's* Longinus thus recognizes the mutually constitutive grounds determining Stesichoros appreciation—Homer and adjectives. Similarly, Stesichoros requires Homer in order to perform his inversion of the Geryon and Herakles myth. Without Homer's source-text, Stesichoros would have less "surface" to "study" (5). Homer's meaning had been to illustrate "the victory of culture over monstrosity," but Stesichoros' inversion signals the unleashing of a monstrous sign system on culture (6).

The key word for Carson in Baudrillard's characterization of this monstrous, associative system is "differential." The value of a sign lies in its difference from all the other signs circulating in the system. Stesichoros' *Geryoneis* is thus only marginally distinct from Homer's account; after all the results are identical—Herakles kills Geryon and his "little dog" too (6). Moreover, it is not just that the ends overwhelm the means here, but that the very choice of a different narrative is an illusion. The "passion for the code" dictates reproducing what the system requires, namely, that the hero wins. Any "hows" are flattened out by the fact that "what we consume," as Craig Owens points out in *Beyond Recognition* (1992), "is the object not in its materiality, but in its difference—the object as sign. Thus, difference itself becomes an object of consumption" (119). As a result, control over representation supplants control of the means of production as the locus of power. So again, "What difference did Stesichoros make?" He did not, as critics often claim on Carson's behalf, seize the means of representation; instead, he *made* difference reveal its service to the dominant ideology of serial production.

Carson develops her challenging reading of Stesichoros' legacy in "Appendix C" of *Red*, "Clearing up the Question of Stesichoros' Blinding by Helen" (18). "Appendix A" welcomes skepticism regarding the stated purpose of "[c]learing up" the facts, as it elucidates how Helen "made an object lesson of the poet Stesichoros," blinding him because "he began his poem 'Helen' with a bit of blasphemy" (15). The "blasphemy" amounted to drawing on "an adjectival tradition of whoredom" connected to Helen (5). She only restores his sight once he composes a "palinode," reprinted as "Appendix B," which is defined as "saying the opposite of what you said before" (15). The immediate irony is that Helen's censorship of Stesichoros cracks the patriarchal coding of the "adjectival tradition." There are several additional points of interest in light of the resistant reading Carson invites through her allusion to Baudrillard. Firstly, this story contextualizes how Stesichoros' break from Homer represents, in Baudrillard's words, a "decoy and ideological metamorphos[is] of an unchanged order" insofar as he is subjugated by Helen's arbitrary exercise of power (98, n12). She singles him out purely for the purpose of "demonstrat[ing] her own power" (Carson 15). That the "by Helen" phrase is isolated on the last line in the titles of Appendices "A" and "C" reinforces her authority as a representative of the "unchanged [mythic] order." Carson hints that Helen is the author ("by Helen") testifying about the blinding incident, which explains why "Appendix C," as Rae observes, "clear[s] up nothing at all" (*Poet's Novel* 241). It is not in Helen's interest to demystify the operation of power. The rhetorical road of conditional "if" clauses leads nowhere truthful. Even the palinode, "by Stesichoros," is cryptically worded in double negatives, as in, "No it is not the true story" (Carson 17). The double negatives reflect, more than resist, the capriciousness of Helen's blinding. To see this mirroring as Carson's comment on the dominant-subordinate structure of the Helen-Stesichoros relationship, we need to be attentive to two interconnected extra-textual details. First, as Rae points out, "[t]he thrice-repeated 'No' in the left column of the palinode is unique to Carson's translation" (*Poet's Novel* 240). Carson transforms the negative into a double negative. Relatedly, in her *Economy of the Unlost* (1999), Carson writes that "the interesting thing about a negative . . . is that it posits a fuller picture of reality than does a positive statement" (102). Carson negates the negation by adding in the "no's" in order to accentuate the narrowness of the "picture" that Stesichoros is permitted to present.

Just as Helen teaches Stesichoros about the injustices associated with language acts, Geryon "learn[s] about justice from his brother quite early" (Carson 23). The lesson is no less blunt. Justice obeys the discretion of the

dominant party. Here, as the next line indicates, the arbiter is Geryon's "bigger and older" brother (23). Impatient with Geryon's "stupid[ity]," his brother suddenly abandons the responsibility of walking him to school (24). More unsettling is his sexual abuse of Geryon, an "Economy of sex," which is perpetrated on the basis of a hierarchy of desirable marbles (28). The notion that unequal power relations accompany sexual desire is demonstrated more extensively in Geryon's relationship with Herakles. One of the clearest demarcations of the brothers' dominant-subordinate subject-positions is when Geryon's brother asks him, "*What's your favorite weapon?*" (32). Geryon answers, "*Cage*" (33). His brother ridicules this response because he presumes a dominant position, more interested in offensive than defensive measures. Geryon unconsciously expresses the insight that the Stesichoros sections had intimated—if subjects are all in the cage of a structural code, perhaps recognizing this condition is the closest they can get to justice.

More consciously, Geryon imagines his interior as a site of resistance to forces like his brother. "Inside is mine, he thought" after he is first sexually abused (29). This "thought" encourages Geryon to begin writing his autobiography, in which he plans to "set down all inside things" (29). The utopian impulse to simultaneously "omit / all outside things" is in tension with the reification of Geryon's mother as a regulatory code governing expression in the early stages of his narrative (29). He relies on her, an "outside thing," to define meaning. When he comes across the word "each," which has no established material referent, his mother fills in the "space for its meaning" with the example of him and his brother "*each hav[ing] [their] own room*" (26). His belief that "Once she said the meaning / it would stay" is subsequently destabilized by the fact that Geryon has to move from his own room into his brother's (26). The fabric of "this strong word *each*" that "he clothed himself in" then tears (26). While this tearing does not undermine his positing of his mother's linguistic authority—he still thinks that the "wrong voice" of his babysitter reading to him could compromise the "words that belonged to his mother"—it prefigures his temporary shift to sculpture as the medium for his autobiography (32). His mother remains the ordering force. For example, Geryon gathers a series of found objects to create an image of himself—affixing "a cigarette" and the "crispy paper" of a ten-dollar bill "to the top of [a] tomato" (34, 35). That he uses items from his mother's purse illustrates how inseparable he views his life-story from hers at this early point in his life. At the same time, the money represents a distinct experience that Geryon tries to communicate to his mother. The

day after Geryon's brother first molests him, he gives Geryon "an American dollar bill" as a form of compensation and/or penance for the sexual abuse (29). Geryon's incorporation of money in his autobiographical sculpture constitutes a demand to have his trauma recognized, which his mother does not meet. The violence of her misrecognition is underscored by the fact that she tells him "*It's a beautiful sculpture*" (35). Even if Geryon's substituting of a ten-dollar bill for a one-dollar one is viewed as an act of sublimation, his mother's advice to "*next time . . . / use a one-dollar bill,*" signals his failure to have his interior struggle acknowledged (35).

Geryon quickly leaves behind the medium of sculpture, briefly returning to writing, only to find an equally alienating code articulated by his teacher. Having learned the lesson of the deep untranslatability of figurative representation from his experience with sculpture, Geryon "set[s] down the facts" about himself (37). These are soon subjected to revision, though, when his teacher voices her mild disapproval of the story's sad ending to his mother on "Parent-Teacher Day" in the form of a question: "*Does he ever write anything with a happy ending?*" (38). In an echo of Stesichoros' palinode, Geryon has no choice but to comply with outside directives, and so gives his story a "*New Ending / All over the world the beautiful red breezes went on blowing hand / in hand*" (38). The dual imperative for and artificiality of this change captures Geryon as the "subject . . . trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object" (Baudrillard 92).

Geryon's initial turn to photography as a way to represent his autobiography and break from this coding coincides with, and is circumscribed by, his falling in love with Herakles. Geryon's first encounter with him recalls the Stesichoros-Helen storyline insofar as seeing Herakles "step off / the bus from New Mexico" is described as "one of those moments / that is the opposite of blindness" (39). The irony of this statement is dramatic, given what the narrative has already communicated about their relationship; namely, that Herakles will subjugate Geryon. "*I'm a master of monsters,*" Herakles later brags (129). Geryon's desire for Herakles is thus predicated on his blindness to Herakles' dominant position, as fixed by the coding of myth. His desire reinscribes the code. The broader irony is that, at least in the Homeric system, Herakles' function as "master" would be on the surface; "unlatched," Herakles can be loved, allowing for a more insidious subduing through seduction. Carson shows Herakles' continuing alignment with the dominant position when he and Geryon graffiti buildings in the town. Herakles rubs out the "CAPITALISM SUCKS" tag in the same sequence as he

says to Geryon, "*All your designs are about captivity, it depresses me*" (55). In the same way that Geryon's brother could not see how a cage could be a weapon, and his mother could not translate Geryon's trauma, Herakles cannot understand Geryon's creative expression of his subordinate position. Nor can he access the intensity of Geryon's feelings for him. When Herakles ends their relationship, he tells Geryon, "*Freedom is what I want for you . . . / I want you to be free*" (74). What Herakles misses is that their relationship, however indirectly, *had* freed Geryon via the representational autonomy Geryon discovered in photography.

The inseparability of their relationship from photography, as well as the latter's momentary releasing of Geryon from the shackles of the linguistic code, is encapsulated in an exchange between Geryon and his mother that exceeds the clichéd brooding teenager-invasive mother dynamic. His mother asks him, "*So who is this new kid you spend all your time with now?*" (40). As a form of reply, Geryon photographs her. He does not verbalize an answer because "[h]e had recently relinquished speech" (40). For the first time, Geryon is able pursue his autobiography in direct opposition to the external expectations to which speech necessarily conforms. He keeps his affair his own affair, while realizing his goal of meaningful self-expression. When his mother presses on in the next sequence, "*So Geryon what do you like about this guy this Herakles can you tell me?*" his inner space is flooded with a "Thousand things he could not tell" (43). The freedom-from that photography engenders is perhaps most powerfully illustrated by the fact that the narrative also resists immediately identifying any of the content of the "[t]housand things."

What the narrative does clearly identify is the nature of photography's appeal to Geryon, first in the context of his fascination with a photograph entitled "Red Patience" (51). The photograph depicts a volcanic eruption from "1923" (46). Geryon asks Herakles' grandmother, the photographer of "Red Patience," a hypothetical question about the photograph, and is encouraged by her claim that he is "*confusing subject and object*" (52). For Geryon, who grapples with how to productively synthesize his interior and exterior worlds, such "confusion" is welcome, especially since the grandmother publicly supports and acknowledges it. Photographs are also not nearly as constrained by intentionality as speech or text. "Raising a camera to one's face," the narrative later declares, "has effects / no one can calculate in advance" (135). The inherent unpredictability of any photographic moment is dramatized in Geryon's "If He Sleep He Shall

Do Well” shot of “a fly floating in a pail of water” (71). Like Schrödinger’s cat, the fly is both alive and dead in the “fifteen-minute exposure” (71). Photographs are receptacles of such spontaneous instances of liminality. Their capacity to capture the movement of being and time render them as the best, closest, answer to the “question that had long exercised Geryon,” “What is time made of?” (93; see also 80). There is no correct answer, but the “truest” approach for Geryon is outlined below the question—it is the photographic medium. “Much truer / is the time that strays into photographs and stops” (93). This paradox of photography, its conjoined wandering and resting object-subject, is nicely articulated by Monique Tschofen. Photography “introduces motion into stasis,” she writes, “and yet compresses the movement of time into an instant” (44). She does not go on to say *why* this paradox makes photography attractive to Geryon, but it is significant. Unrestrained motion is what enslaves Geryon in the sense that Herakles also moves across continents and narratives. With reference to his colonizing role and source-text position, Herakles is still the conquering hero in his modern relationship with Geryon. If, obeying the paradox of the photograph, he can be “compressed into an instant,” his identity will remain constant, but he will be more attentive to the immediate realities of his co-presence with Geryon than his epic, encoded mission. The photographic effect offers Geryon the hope of cracking, rather than reinforcing, the hegemonic cultural code in consummating his desire for Herakles.

This hope is dashed when Herakles leaves Geryon. In response, Geryon goes into exile in Argentina. More importantly, he partially abandons photography as a medium for his autobiography and returns to writing. The return is marked by his first activity in Argentina, “s[i]t[ting] at a corner table of Café Mitwelt writing bits of Heidegger / on the postcards he’d bought” (82). The two postcards he writes in this section open with a line from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927), and the postcard in the next section opens with one from Heidegger’s “What Is Metaphysics?” (1929).⁴ Each Heidegger quotation explores a formal component of the existential state of *Mitwelt*—intersubjectivity, temporality, and moods. Edith Hall provides a succinct definition of *Mitwelt*: “It means the world that is jointly perceptible to the humans in it—all that the consciousness of each of us shares with the consciousness of others” (231). The “sharing” does not connote the union of subject-world (*Eigenwelt*) and object-world (*Umwelt*), as *Mitwelt* discloses Being’s fundamental foreignness in-the-world. The form of the postcard, a tourist artifact, communicates Geryon’s outsider status. The content of

the cards superficially overcompensates for this status with universalizing rhetoric. Each is a variation on the first one, which reads, "[T]here are many Germans in / Buenos Aires they are all / soccer players the weather / is lovely wish you were here / GERYON" (82). The subsequent substitutions of "psychoanalysts" and "cigarette girls" for "soccer players" are failed attempts to make sense of the new space he finds himself in (83, 85). Conversely, his foredoomed effort to capture the gestalt of Argentina with reference to the country's constituent parts successfully performs the task for which writing is uniquely suited—it reveals him to be an "alienated subject" (Baudrillard 92).

As the reference to "psychoanalysts" in the third postcard indicates, psychoanalysis has a prominent place in the narrative of Geryon's experiences in Buenos Aires. Critical attention tends to focus instead on Geryon's interaction with existentialism in this section, which is understandable given the allusions to Heidegger, and Geryon's befriending of two Skeptic philosophers. Nevertheless, the allusions to psychoanalysis are also notable in that the psychoanalytic conception of unconscious desire serves a purpose similar to that of Heidegger's *Mitwelt*—it magnifies the gap between Geryon's interior and exterior realities with the lens of writing. Two nights before he runs into Herakles, Geryon meets a tango singer who is also, she tells him, a "psychoanalyst" (103). Singing "*pays the rent*," allowing her to pursue her preferred vocation (104). Geryon says that "*psychoanalysis*" is as much "*a fossil*" as "[*t*]ango" (104). His dismissal of psychoanalysis is in the same spirit as Herakles' grandmother's mention of "*Freud*" earlier on (58). She criticizes Freud for his response when learning that her dog drowned in Buenos Aires: he "*made a joke it was not a funny joke / having to do with incomplete transference*" (58). Even less "funny" is that his response is not a "joke," but a diagnosis based in the critical vocabulary of Freudian psychoanalysis. If there is still a punch line, it relates to the totalizing gesture to myth ("incomplete transference") as an interpretive key. Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" establishes similar grounds for doubting the veracity and disinterestedness of the claims of psychoanalysis, arguing that "[t]he myth of the unconscious becomes the ideological solution to the problems of the unconscious" (100). Despite the self-fulfilling nature of the "myths" of psychoanalysis, Baudrillard does not underestimate their currency, as he links the rise of psychoanalysis to "the transfer of social control to the domain of the irreducible" (100). Geryon's skepticism about psychoanalysis does not protect him from this "transfer."

An example of (t)his victimization in the context of the written word occurs after Geryon has reunited with Herakles. On a flight to Lima with

Herakles and his boyfriend Ancash, Geryon reads a novel he purchased in the Buenos Aires airport. Maybe it was a Freudian slip, but “[h]e had not realized until he found himself stranded in it high above the Andes / halfway to Lima that the novel he’d bought / . . . was pornographic” (118). He is estranged from his own desire, “furious with himself” for “be[ing] stirred by dull sentences like, / *Gladys slid a hand under her nightgown and began to caress her own thighs*” (118). One consequence of this “stirring” is that it arouses Herakles’ attention, and he fellates Geryon while Ancash sleeps on. Irrational desire has placed Geryon again at the whim of Herakles, whose insensitivity and will to dominance have not abated over the years. It is “*Just like the old days*” they later agree, full of melancholy undertones (141). The narrative does not deny Geryon his “pleasure” during the encounter on the plane (119); therefore, the event is not simply an expression of Herakles’ dominance. Nevertheless, the description of Geryon’s moment of “pleasure” has two formal properties that support a more pessimistic reading. Full rhetorical emphasis gets placed on the phrase “Geryon gave himself up” by the caesura preceding it and the line break that follows (119). The enjambed “to pleasure” is subordinated because “Geryon gave himself up” suffices as an independent clause—submission does not always lead to pleasure, as Geryon knows all too well. What is most important about the encounter is that Geryon participates in the “Gladys” narrative—“He felt Herakles’ hand move on his thigh”—against the stated wishes of his interior monologue (118). The narrative is careful to highlight through the title of the section (“Gladys”) as well as the unattributed and emphatic last line, “Gladys!,” that Geryon’s interior reality has again been violated, this time by a psychoanalytically inflected re-vivifying of the Herakles storyline.

Text-based representation, whether in the form of a postcard, an autobiography, or an erotic novel, determines subjects by writing over their interior space in the code of the exterior world. It is only with the return to the “photographic essay” that Geryon generates an autobiography that most effectively balances the volatile link between interior and exterior worlds (60). Six of the last eight sections of *Red* are labelled as photographs. These photographs attest to the power of witnessing that is developed in the text’s final instalments—a power strengthened through its association with local legend. Herakles, Geryon, and Ancash travel to Ancash’s native Peru to record the sound of a volcano. Herakles and Ancash are including these recordings in their “*documentary / on Emily Dickinson*” (108). The recording process takes on added significance, and an added medium, when Ancash

sees Geryon's wings and identifies him as a "Yazcol Yazcamac" (128). "*These people*," Ancash explains to Geryon, "*saw the inside of the volcano*" (128, 129). According to the Jucu myth, as a reward for this witnessing, "*the Yazcamac return as red people with wings, / all their weaknesses burned away— / and their mortality*" (129). Ancash here provides Geryon with an empowering mythic identity and autobiographical purpose apart from his subordinate role in the classical Herakles story. Geryon eagerly assumes this new role, and begins photographing the journey into the mountains of Huaraz.

On the journey, the political unconscious of *Red* is mapped onto the landscape of Huaraz when Ancash informs Geryon that "*Nobody goes north of Lima / these days*" out of "*Fear*" (134). This "fear" is connected to Ancash's earlier locating of Huaraz as a hotbed of anti-governmental unrest when he tells the story of "*Guerrillas*" killing "*all the cats in Huaraz in one weekend*" in response to a television broadcast showing Peru's president "*with a cat / on his lap*" (123). Ancash's choice of the word "*Guerrillas*" communicates his sympathy with the anti-government forces which the president labels as "*terrorists*" (123). The distinction in labeling is not an innocent one. It shows that language simultaneously reinforces and reflects the binaries of political dialogue, imposing bifurcated visions of the proper functioning of reality. By contrast, Geryon's photographs of Huaraz portray a landscape unmediated by the limited range of signs associated with the Real of language and politics. Geryon's newly realized citizenship in Huaraz's indigenous population, a "Yazcol Yazcamac," thus takes on its full meaning—he expresses the autobiography of a subject not trapped in the discursive contest of linguistic and political symbolization. The key "[q]uestion" regarding photographs, as Herakles' grandmother says, "*is / how they use [silence]—given / the limits of the form*" (67). Geryon's photographic essay "silences" the noisy coding of assent and consent, commenting critically on the constricting complicity of linguistic and political horizons of the Self.

In *On Photography* (1977), Susan Sontag marks "the limits of the [image] form," which *Red's* treatment of photography ultimately recognizes. Sontag writes that "images consume reality. Cameras are the antidote and the disease, a means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete" (179). Unaccompanied by captioning or *Red's* narrative, Geryon's photographic essay would efface the material significance of political struggle, rendering its "reality" "obsolete." However, the penultimate poem in *Red*, "Photographs: #1748," restores a significant supplementary task to the written word. Geryon fulfills his responsibilities as a witness and completes his autobiography by

photographing the interior of the volcano. The title of the poem, “#1748,” and its last line, “The Only Secret People Keep,” invoke Dickinson in order to balance the reality of the photographic object, with the unreality of its subject matter, “Immortality” (145). As it is framed as “a photograph he never took,” Carson suggests that photographic meaning cannot be fully accessed on its own, without the balance of text(s) (145). Remove language and individuals would “disappear” from the world, as Geryon feels himself doing when he “sp[ea]k[s] little” on the journey into Huaraz (135). Furthermore, without photography, “objects and subjects” risk being “delivered up to abstract manipulation” by a “structural code” that controls and consumes textual representation (Baudrillard 92). Taken together, text and photography challenge any act of settling on a single, stable meaning. Mediation occurs between representations, rather than being restricted to the coordinates of text or image and reality. Reexamined through a photograph, Dickinson’s poem translates into the world it had scornfully populated with moralizing “babblers” (22); after the photograph (of the) poem, Geryon’s autobiography is completed with the image of him, Herakles, and Ancash wearing “immortality on their faces” (146). Writing and photography cooperate to confer and preserve immortality. In so doing, they convey how Carson fetishizes the loss of our power over the written word—naming its loss through the Baudrillardian resonances in the “once-upon-a-time” of Stesichoros’ narrative, and disavowing this loss with her brilliant mobilization of words “to do,” as Gertrude Stein declares in Carson’s epigraph to the Stesichoros section, “as they have to do” (3).

Carson checks any inclination for a naive optimism about the capacity of writing to transcend the boundaries of reality in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1998), published in the same year as *Red*. She asserts that “[a] written text separates words from one another, separates words from the environment, separates words from the reader (or writer) and separates the reader (or writer) from his environment. Separation is painful” (50). Geryon’s creative turn to photography as a medium for his autobiography suggests that capturing images can lessen the “pain” of this separation anxiety by re-orienting subject-object relations, making them more cooperative than antagonistic. The question of why *Red* is termed an “autobiography” lingers, despite the “shift” in attention from image production to the problematic of consumption that the allusion to Baudrillard effects. An undeniable playfulness shapes the autobiographical designation, as it comes from the same writer who opens her *Economy of the Unlost* with the declaration that

"[t]here is too much self in my writing" (vii). The label "autobiography" summons such excess, which is in tension with a narrative that confirms the hard work of representing any, let alone "too much," self. Above all, Carson's reference to Baudrillard anticipate Geryon's discovery of a more satisfying medium for self-expression, the photographic essay, in a world where words always seem to belong somewhere, or to someone, else.

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NOTES

- 1 Rae discusses this multiplicity as part of an argument for "how Carson revises canonical narratives in order to allow the women's voices at the margins of her story to attain a place of prominence" (6). He expands on a point he makes in "Dazzling Hybrids: The Poetry of Anne Carson" (2000), where, noting the build-up of allusions to Gertrude Stein and Emily Dickinson in *Red*, he writes that "Stesichoros looks on from the wings as the women's concealment drama takes centre stage . . . [and] finds himself listening silently to a duet of female voices, neither of which appears to command control" (37). By contrast, I argue that Stesichoros remains central and present on a theoretical level throughout the text.
- 2 *Mitwelt*, as first defined by Heidegger in his 1919-20 lectures at the University of Freiburg, refers to the "with-world, the people about one" (qtd. in Inwood 246).
- 3 Two recent articles on *Red* also take photography as their focus: Sophie Mayer's "Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson" (2008), and E.L. McCallum's "Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*" (2007). My reading takes a different tack insofar as it interrogates the broader political function(s) served in putting classical scholarship, autobiographical text, and photographic image in dialogue.
- 4 The first line of the first postcard is "*Sie sind das was betreiben*," which according to John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's *Being and Time* translation reads, "they are what they do" (Carson 82; Heidegger 163). The second postcard begins, "*Zum verlorenen Hören*" or "lost time" (Carson 83; Heidegger 316, emphasis in original). The third opens with a phrase from "What Is Metaphysics?," "*Die Angst offenbart das Nichts*," which D.F. Krell translates as "[t]he nothing reveals itself in anxiety" (Carson 85; Heidegger 104). Thank you to Anthony Enns for his assistance in translating these quotations and helping me to locate them in Heidegger.

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