

Anne Carson and the Solway Hoaxes

Carson may be our newest pedestalized inamorata but the fact is—and I say this unabashedly—she is a phony, all sleight-of-hand, both as a scholar and a poet. (Solway, “Trouble” 25)

David Solway unequivocally rejects Anne Carson’s poetry in his article, “The Trouble with Annie: David Solway Unmakes Anne Carson,” published in the July 2001 edition of *Books in Canada* (*BiC*). The “identical platitudes” heaped upon Carson by the media compel Solway to wonder “if there is not some sort of professional scam going on” (25), which he suspects is “fostered by a sort of critic-and-peer collusion, a veritable conspiracy of literary dunces” (26). Of course, Solway is somewhat of an expert on scams, because in 1999 he duped the editors of *BiC* and published “The Pelagic Bard of Kalypto’s Isle,” an essay in which he describes the arduous translation of an “influential” but utterly imaginary Greek poet named Andreas Karavis. The essay was accompanied by an interview between Karavis and the fictitious poetry editor Anna Zoumi, as well as by sample translations of Karavis. To give the ensemble an air of authenticity, Solway included a blurry photograph of Karavis (actually a bearded Solway in a fisherman’s cap) that also graces the frontispiece of Solway’s *Saracen Island: The Poetry of Andreas Karavis* (2000) and *An Andreas Karavis Companion* (2001). In “The Trouble with Annie,” Solway makes the opposite claim: he argues that a real and genuinely influential Canadian poet is a phony. The arguments that Solway marshals in his attack on Carson are troubling, however, for reasons he does not acknowledge. Either Solway is perpetrating another literary hoax, or the arguments and terms of reference that he establishes in this article effectively unmakes his own poetic output.

The opening paragraph of “The Trouble with Annie” outlines Solway’s apocalyptic view of Canadian poetry and criticism. Making a point that he

reiterates in “Double Exile and Montreal English-Language Poetry,” Solway asserts that the Canadian literary community suffers from rampant nepotism:

I have long suspected that the genus of drab writing which the great majority of our acclaimed poets generate so effortlessly these days is the reflex not only of the ambition to write abundantly whatever the consequences but, generally speaking, of the desire to acquire status in an official community of impresarios, critical strategists and bravura players. [. . .] Anne Carson’s sudden cometary prominence provides us with a stunning textbook example of how the mediocrity industry works in our time, attuned not to merit but to celebrity. (24)

In a letter to the editor, Chris Jennings responds to these criticisms by citing Solway’s reputation for mischief and pondering whether Solway is being disingenuous “in both the logic and tenor of his attack” (39). Although Solway’s tone is bombastic, and nowhere suggests that he offers his criticisms in the spirit of lighthearted spoof, Jennings raises a valid question when he asks if the “newly minted associate editor of *BiC* [i.e., Solway] is doing his part to generate buzz for the relaunch [of *BiC*] by attracting the wrath of Carson’s readers” (39). To be fair, both Jennings and I have published essays on Carson, and we have our own investment in the debate (Rae; Jennings, “Erotic”). However, even members of a supposed “conspiracy of literary dunces” cannot fail to note the editorial stratagems at play in the relaunch issue, its cover bearing the heading “Anne Carson gets her due.” Although Solway condemns the media attention that Carson receives, he is in the business of generating it.

Pecuniary motivations aside, Solway does make a valid point in “The Trouble with Annie.” Having appealed to the Great Canadian Inferiority Complex in his opening remarks, Solway nourishes anxieties in Carson’s readership with a few compelling facts. He scrutinizes the discussion of Paul Celan’s “NO MORE SAND ART” in Carson’s *Economy of the Unlost* and argues that “the few interesting things Carson does have to say about Celan’s poem are cribbed almost verbatim” from John Felstiner’s *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (24). Solway correctly asserts that Carson draws heavily from Felstiner’s work. However, as Jennings observes, *Economy of the Unlost* is peppered with citations of Felstiner, and Carson does not (as Solway maintains) make much effort to conceal her debt to the Celan biographer (“Letter” 39). Moreover, Solway’s argument does little to diminish the originality of Carson’s larger project, which is to draw connections between two radically different authors, as the subtitle *Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan* indicates.

However, having established a foothold in fact, Solway strides boldly into the subjective realm of Carson's poetry with the aim of exposing her "charlatanism" ("Trouble" 24). As evidence of Carson's "lack of fibre" (24), Solway selects two short lyrics from *Men in the Off Hours*. He criticizes the first lyric, "That Strength," for "stringing together [. . .] disjointed locutionary tagmemes" which do not in themselves "deserve serious inspection" (24). The next poem, "Freud (1st draft)," he criticizes for its uninspired verses, which include "a couple of quoted passages from Freud's letters [. . .] chopped up into stanzas" (24-25). Jennings offers a qualified defence of both poems, but it is difficult to draw conclusions from such short selections of Carson's work. For example, the simile "He could fill structures of / threat with a light like the earliest olive oil" in *The Beauty of the Husband* has been cited by critics as an example of Carson's brilliance (Sutherland, "Tango" D3) and shortcomings as a poet (Solway, "Trouble" 26; Merkin 3). What is certain, however, is that Solway once again evades the larger question. He fails to examine the long poems in *Glass, Irony and God* and *Plainwater*, the two books that established Carson's reputation, and makes only passing references to *Autobiography of Red*, the book that elevated Carson from cult to star status in poetry circles. Instead, Solway cites snippets of Carson's later poetry out of context as examples of bad verse. This tactic is hardly a fair means of evaluation, as Solway was forced to acknowledge when Fraser Sutherland, one of the book reviewers whom Solway mocks, returned the favour by citing unspectacular lines from Solway's verse in a letter to the editor of *BiC* (9). Granted, "The Trouble with Annie" is an abridged version of an essay set to appear in Solway's book of criticism, *Director's Cut* (2003), but the choppiness of the essay is the least of its faults.

Lest Solway's polemic founder for lack of strong examples, he gradually abandons his scholarly arguments and resorts to bombast. Whereas Solway had the advantage of citing obscure authors, journals, and words in a foreign language to bolster his credibility in the Karavis affair, the author in this case is well known, and the journals largely contradict Solway's argument, so his grandiloquence must carry the day. After infantilizing Carson by calling her "Annie," the bulk of his article attempts to intimidate the reader with verbose statements in which Solway complains that "a hollow sententiousness echoes sepulchraly throughout" Carson's poetry (26). He concedes that Carson is a clever writer, but insists that "deficiencies [. . .] inevitably subtend in the pseudo-cerebrality of the intellectual mountebank" (26). Even Solway's admirers lament his use of "ostentatious terminology"

to overawe readers (Cude 138), but Solway maintains that he does “not regard [him]self as some sort of literary carnifex having a tantrum but only as someone whose irritation threshold has finally been reached” (“Trouble” 26). He is equally impatient with Carson’s reviewers and offers a broad survey of book reviews from prominent newspapers in order to lampoon them. However, he avoids the reviews and essays published in the *Denver Quarterly* (Hamilton), *Raritan* (Phillips), and *Canadian Literature* (Rasula; Rae) by stating that he does “not want to apologize for someone else’s publications or the public’s unexamined receptivity” (26). Such an unexamined reception on Solway’s part is alarming for an academic audience, and Solway expects readers to call his bluff, as he states in response to Sutherland’s letter: “No doubt I deserve my comeuppance but still I find it all great fun” (9). While Solway’s fun at first appears to be at Carson’s expense, close inspection of his essay reveals that he is a contrarian whose own arguments turn against him.

For example, Solway insinuates that Carson stole the tango theme in *The Beauty of the Husband* from “Timothy Findley’s *Pilgrim* (1999), in which a stricken Emma Jung, paralyzed by the intellectual beauty of her philandering husband, answers his leading question: ‘If you could dance with the devil, which rhythm which you choose?’ [. . .] ‘The Tango,’ she would have said” (“Trouble” 26). However, as Solway is presumably aware, the tango is also an important theme in *Autobiography of Red*, published the year before *Pilgrim*. Thus, if one wanted to speculate about two otherwise unrelated authors—and I do not—one would be forced to conclude that Findley stole the idea from Carson.

By Solway’s hypervigilant standards, one should also object to the unacknowledged borrowing in the passage from “The Trouble with Annie” where Solway proposes:

[t]he spectacle [of Carson’s poetry] is potentially an edifying one, as we observe a poet busy preparing her place in the Seventh Chasm of the Eighth Circle of the Inferno where those who ransack and conscript what does not belong to them are condemned to protean evanescence, exchanging identities with and *repeating* the forms and gestures of others. (25; his emphasis)

Readers of *Autobiography of Red* will recognize the irony in this statement, as the subject of Carson’s “autobiography,” the monster Geryon, presides over the Eighth Circle in Dante’s *Inferno* and is, for both authors, the personification of fraud and the pilgrim’s guide *through* the realm of dissemblers. Solway’s experience impersonating a modern-day Homer has

acquainted him with this territory, and the “alarmist rhetoric” (Jennings, “Letter” 39) and errors in “The Trouble with Annie” suggest that he is dissembling once again. However, before I consider this tantalizing proposition, I must inquire further into the matter of intertextual repetition, which is crucial to a study of both Carson and Solway.

The crux of Solway’s argument is that Carson ransacks the canon of Western poetry and is therefore a literary impostor. Although Solway carefully avoids using the word “plagiarism,” he invents a wealth of equivalent terms. He argues that Carson’s lines “are *conceptually* downloaded from Akhmatova” (“Trouble” 25; his emphasis), or that she writes through a process of “negative biomimicry” (26). The acrimonious inferences are not lost on the readers of *BiC*, one of whom congratulates Solway on exposing in Carson’s work “a complexity plagiarized from Stein, Celan, et al.” (Kirsch). It is worth noting here that Stein does not believe in the possibility of repetition (Stein 99), but I wish to stay with Solway’s line of reasoning, and, provisionally, to consider repetition as cause for damnation.

Although Solway condemns literary echoes in Carson’s poetry, he makes a self-incriminating recommendation to her readers towards the end of “The Trouble with Annie.” He suggests that Carson fans try “George Meredith’s *Modern Love*” as “an instance of how the subject of a disintegrating relationship may be handled poetically with genuine artistry, while at the same time breaking the limitation of an established form” (26). Readers familiar with *Modern Love* (1862) will recognize the allusion when they reach the end of Solway’s page and find him recommending his own book, “the award-winning *Modern Marriage*” (26). Upon inspection, *Modern Marriage* (1987) is indeed a lyric sequence about a disintegrating relationship, sporting epigrams from Meredith’s sequence. Although Solway does not employ Meredith’s innovative 16-line sonnet, he covers his canonical bases by writing Shakespearean sonnets. He also parodies Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s forty-third sonnet (“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”) in what he claims is a singular act of lovelorn desperation (*Modern* 44). Karavis, too, is fond of established poetic modes, and, in addition to a parody of Barrett Browning’s famous sonnet (*Companion* 121-22), he writes sonnets, a villanelle, and even a haiku. Evidently, Solway does not object to the repetition of forms and themes from canonical texts in his own work.

In addition to contradictions between Solway’s poetic theory and practice, there are inconsistencies in his critical stances. Solway never misses a chance to condemn Canadian poetry as homogeneous (“Standard”), and he

recommends that Canadian poets look outside the national borders in order “to smash the boundaries of our insularity, to take all place and all time as our province” (“Flight” 122). While Carson’s work would seem to exemplify this vision of a “hybrid and syncretic” poetry (123), in “The Trouble with Annie” Solway strikes the pose of a disgruntled purist:

In an age where continuity and seamlessness, artisanal craftsmanship and wholeness of original conception are at a discount, Carson writes an IKEA-type poetry, fitting together bits and pieces into a mental furniture that appears weirdly functional but is utterly devoid of charm, staying-power and livability. It is, in effect, a poetry of screws, hinges, dowels, thin linear splines and sharp corners, a line from Akhmatova here, a *souppçon* of Celan there, little bits of Beckett and Bataille, a dollop of Plato, a generous helping of Keats, all put together according to a blueprint from Sappho. (25)

This is a fine list of Carson’s influences, although Gertrude Stein is certainly more important than Bataille. Carson herself argues that the poet is a kind of hinge in the introduction to *Autobiography of Red*, where she demonstrates that Stesichoros’ use of adjectives created new connections between “substances in the world” (5) by unsettling the linguistic conventions of Greek epic. However, Solway’s IKEA reference misses the mark because Carson’s craft resides in the innovative joinery of her major works, with their bold juxtapositions of place and time, as well as their subtle transitions between seemingly incongruous narratives.

Solway’s attack on Carson’s borrowings and reworkings warrants a closer investigation of his own Karavis hoax. In his introductory essay on “The Pelagic Bard of Kalypso’s Isle,” Solway describes his fictional efforts to translate Andreas Karavis, as well as providing details of the poet’s life. Born in Crete in 1932, Karavis fled to a nearby island during the Nazi occupation, learned ancient Greek in high school, and took to the sea upon graduation to ply his grandfather’s trade as a fisherman. Karavis honed his poetic skills at sea and gave away copies of his first book, *White Poems*, “as a bonus with the evening catch sold in the island marketplaces” (21). The poet’s fame was bolstered by a sex scandal involving “the celebrated writer, Lili Zographou” (21), and his second volume, *The Dream Masters*, “rapidly established itself as one of the important moments in the history of modern Greek literature, a subject of many reviews and critical essays in the leading intellectual journals” (21). Apparently gulled by the tourist-brochure romance of this portrait, the editor of *BiC* advertised Solway’s essay with the cover heading: “Andreas Karavis, Greece’s Modern Homer” (20). Inside the magazine, the heading “Great Poets of Our Time” hangs over the portrait of Karavis. The

cover heading thus testifies to the desire of the editor to discover the next big thing, while the portrait testifies to Solway's fantasy of being the next big thing.

The subsequent issue of *BiC* features three letters to the editor that complicate Solway's hoax. The first letter is from Barbara Joannides (a pseudonym?) who praises "the felicity of [Solway's] translations" (3). The second letter is from Yiorgos Chouliaris, a press attaché at the Greek Embassy in Ottawa, who commends "David Solway's extremely imaginative efforts on behalf of 'Andreas Karavis, Greece's Modern Homer'" (3). Chouliaris later confessed to Ben Downing, the author of an article on the hoax in *Lingua Franca*, that he played along with Solway's game in order to "honor a Canadian writer who went to such roundabout lengths to validate his life-long involvement with Greece" (Downing 2). The third letter to the editor comes from Fred A. Reed, a classicist who congratulates Solway for his work on a "poet of near-mythical dimensions" (3). This letter also contains a hint of conspiracy, because Reed's appraisal of *Saracen Island* graces the back cover of Solway's book. However, Downing reports that the letter was unsolicited, and it jeopardized Solway's hoax.

Reed's letter "take[s] issue with some of the biographical data Solway presents," in particular the claim of Karavis to Cretan ancestry, which Reed says "may be charitably described as apocryphal" (3). Citing "[n]o lesser an authority than C.D. Candias, Professor of Cultural Studies at the Arcadian Academy," Reed observes that "scrutiny of court records in the Aegean prefectural archives" has proven that Karavis made his living by "smuggling cigarettes (then a state monopoly)" (3), which gives credence to Epimenides' paradoxical assertion that all Cretans are liars. Candia, of course, is the Venetian name for the capital of Crete, and Reed plays along with Solway's joke, as one Canadian to another. However, having noted Karavis' "taste for dissimulation, personality shifts, and blurred identity markers," Reed concludes his long letter by revealing one of Solway's secrets:

Unconfirmed rumour, concludes Candias, suggests that Karavis may actually have appropriated some of the earlier poetry of David Solway, disguising it sufficiently to conceal its origins. Were this to be the case, the affinity between the established poet and his translator would appear in a starkly different light. (3)

This passage invited closer scrutiny of the authorship of the Karavis poems. Rumours immediately began to fly concerning the non-existence of Karavis, but Solway categorically denied them until he was interviewed by Downing. In fact, Solway upped the ante in his game by posing as Karavis for the launch of *Saracen Island* at a Montreal restaurant in October, 2000 (Downing 1).

Given Solway's taste for dissimulation, his publication history in *BiC*, and his startlingly negative assessment of one of Canada's most lauded poets, it seems pertinent to ask whether Solway's attack on Carson is also a hoax. Ostensibly, the purpose of "The Trouble with Annie" is to transform Carson's fame into infamy. Solway speculates that Carson's popularity is the product of "a sophisticated literary prank" (26), and he argues that "Anne Carson could just as well be Anne Knish who, along with Emanuel Morgan, figured as one of the two main principals in the celebrated Spectra hoax perpetrated by Witter Bynner and Arthur Davison Ficke in the early part of the century" (26). The fact that the Spectra hoax took place in the twentieth century, not the twenty-first, is perhaps the sort of error that caused Jennings to wonder whether Solway might be performing a prank himself. Although Carmine Starnino maintains that one should "read and reread" Solway for his "coherent thinking, [. . .] skeptical attitude, analytic rigor, and rhetorical gifts" ("Introduction" 14), his skepticism and rhetoric mar the coherence and rigour of his thinking in "The Trouble with Annie." Fissures of fact and logic break apart the monolith of Solway's indignation, as he continues his analogy to the Spectrists:

Of course, what Bynner and Ficke had in mind was (in the words of William Jay Smith in his book on the subject) to clear the air of "the stuffiness that tends to gather about literature when it loses its sense of humor and earnest but lumbering personalities take over." But what happens when the apparent parody is not deliberate, when what properly seems like a spoof is intended seriously, when, as Smith complains, "the element of common sense, which should shape all judgment, is . . . in eclipse"? (26)

This question is worthy of careful consideration, but one should also ask what it is eclipsing. The "stuffiness" citation in Smith's book precedes the revelation that the Spectra poems were motivated by the reluctant admiration of Bynner and Ficke for the poetic experiments of Wallace Stevens (67). In the original draft of the Spectra manifesto, Knish acknowledges Stevens's influence: "Among recent poets, apart from a small clan soon to be heard from, we have noted only one who can be regarded in any sure sense as a Spectrist. This one is Wallace Stevens. In his work appears a subtle but doubtless unconscious application of our method" (Smith 67). Smith notes that Stevens was "engaged in carrying Cubism over seriously into poetry, just as the Spectrists had done jokingly" (68), and thus the Spectra burlesques represented an opportunity for Bynner and Ficke to engage with a poetics that they did not feel confident attempting seriously, or under their own names.

Given this knowledge, it is less surprising that Solway disparages Carson's collage technique in his discussion of "Freud (1st Draft)," yet describes "the lover as an exemplary figure (or collage)" in the preface to his own *The Lover's Progress* (12). Such reversals of opinion occurred in the Spectra hoax as well. By assuming aliases, Bynner and Ficke overcame their inhibitions and unbridled their desire to experiment, as Ficke states: "it was only Bynner's opportune departure, this 3rd day of March, that prevented us from becoming seriously interested in further and genuine experiments, and thus perishing at the hands of the monster which we had created" (Smith 19). Ultimately, the Spectrists were forced to admit that their prank had backfired. When the hoax was exposed in 1918, a commentator in *Reedy's Mirror* observed that the "disclosure would be a good joke on the public [. . .] were it not for the fact that the burlesque poetry is more successful than the authors' serious work. To make matters worse, Emanuel Morgan [Bynner] continues to write after being exposed as somebody else—talk about a Frankenstein monster!" (42). If Carson is participating in a literary hoax, as Solway suggests, then she has won long-lasting fame for the unintended quality of her poems, having won a Lannan Award (1996), Pushcart Prize (1997), Guggenheim Fellowship (1998), MacArthur Fellowship (2000), Griffin Prize (2001), and T. S. Eliot Prize (2002).

Of course, I do not believe that Carson is a fraud, but Solway's accusations interest me because they resonate with the complaints of the earlier hoaxers. In a passage that draws from the same lexicon of insults that Solway employs, Ficke explains that the motivation of the Spectrists was not entirely humorous:

When we invented the Spectric School, both of us were genuinely indignant at the charlatanism of some of the new 'schools' of poetry [such as Imagism]; and it was with the most deadly intentions that we made our attempt to render their 'schools' patently ridiculous. We had great fun doing it—but back of the fun was an intensity of malice which Bynner does not explain. We who devoted our whole lives to poetry were angry and indignant on seeing apes and mountebanks prancing in the Temple. (qtd. in Smith 46)

Similarly outraged, Solway tells Downing that he resents having had to resort to the Karavis hoax to draw attention to his poetry (4). Calling Carson a mountebank seems to be an extension of this attention-getting strategy, and Solway's theatrics have doubtless won him new readers. However, these readers should ask themselves whether the monster Geryon, the Frankenstein creature Carson pieced together from a number of literary fragments in *Autobiography of Red*, has begun to consume Solway.

The shadow of Geryon looms over Solway's most duplicitous passage in "The Trouble with Annie." Purporting to deplore the current vogue for simulacra, Solway declares that "the act of critical liberation involved in *our* recognizing this species of negative biomimicry will require prodigies of unsparring self-analysis" (26; his emphasis). Initiating this self-analysis, Solway denies Carson's selfhood and claims that "it is we who have summoned Anne Carson into being" (26). Making Carson the projection of desire—like the phantom of Helen that Stesichoros said went to Troy—Solway embarks on an unusual rhetorical journey. He abandons his commitment to truthful expression and extends his conceit:

Carson writes on litmus paper which tells us who and what we are. And who and what we are is not difficult to determine. *We* are Anne Carson: patchwork creatures without genuine moral and intellectual substance, preference machines lusting for unmerited approval, media constructs even in the privacy of our beings. We have become dabblers in poetry and classical scholarship without having to know much about either. (26; his emphasis)

Who is this *we*, and why does Solway call attention to it by using italics? At first, Solway seems to be speaking on behalf of Carson's entire readership, but on closer inspection, Solway's "we" functions as a vehicle of confession. When paired with the italicized *our* in the sentence about self-analysis, the "we" articulates a heteronymic plural, speaking for Solway and his fictional selves. It speaks for the lover, who is "a dilettante, a professional amateur, a cultural sightseer" (*Progress* 13). It also speaks for Karavis, who marries Anna Zoumi in *An Andreas Karavis Companion* and recites a poem at their wedding (76-77) that is a textbook demonstration of the concept of "negative attention" which Carson develops in *Economy of the Unlost* (100-19). Although Solway mocks this concept in "The Trouble with Annie," his explication of the Karavis poem weds his critical ideas to those of Carson in perpetuum (*Companion* 77). In this light, Solway's term "negative biomimicry" takes on a very different meaning.

The evidence for a confession mounts as Solway indulges his new zeal for simulacra in "The Trouble with Annie":

Anne Carson is our reflection in a distorting mirror which is at the same time wholly accurate and orthogonal. We have appropriated her as she has appropriated others. One might even say that Anne Carson is the higher Oprah. The projection of our unearned selves, she is watched, admired, and subsidized by us until reverse osmosis sets in and we are inevitably absorbed by our own emanation. Eventually we all appear on her program. (26)

How might Solway appear on Carson's program? Certainly he would make a fine walk-on character in Carson's "TV Men" series, playing the grumpy neighbour in a literary sitcom. But if one checks the production credits, Solway has much deeper ties to Carson's program.

Explaining the process of composition behind *Saracen Island*, Solway tells Downing that he invented Karavis because he had arrived "at a juncture that may be described as both impasse and crossroads":

The tone, stance, and poetic attitudes that had marked my work for a decade were, I felt, exhausted and in need of replacement. Such a "new" language cannot be summoned by fiat; it must flow from a new set of postulates and a new quality of experience. . . . So I invented Karavis to serve as alter ego and heteronym[.] (4)

This statement is not entirely true. One of the poems in *Saracen Island*, "Credo," was published under Solway's name in the *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1998. Another, "The Dream Masters," is recycled from Solway's 1993 collection, *Bedrock*. This collection combines Solway's verse with free adaptations of "the work of several poets [Solway] has known and admired—Nikos Gatsos, Henrik Nordtbrand [sic], and Andreas Karavis" (back cover). For example, Solway's long poem "Amorgos" is a response to Gatsos' long poem of the same name. In addition, Karavis' signature poem, "The Dream Masters," finds "its source in the first two lines of the fifth stanza of Section III of Nikos Gatsos' majestic *Amorgos*" (*Saracen* 119). Although Solway claims to be translating in *Bedrock*, one should be wary of his various signatures. He changes the position of the "t" in the surname of the celebrated Danish poet Henrik Nordbrandt (who writes extensively about Greece and the Mediterranean) to create a heteronym in *Bedrock* (11, 24, 77). This heteronym reappears in *The Lover's Progress*, where the lover translates a poem by Karavis that is supposed to be based on a Nordtbrand poem (33). Not only does this amalgam of voices collapse the difference between the heteronyms (and therefore diminish their reason for being), but Solway's Scandinavian moniker feeds parasitically on the Danish poet's hard-won reputation.

Solway also appropriates Carson's fame by mirroring her program in his own publications. In 1998, Carson published *Autobiography of Red*, which consists of an odd assortment of generic pieces: an introductory essay on the Greek poet Stesichoros, translated fragments from a long lyric poem by Stesichoros, a palinode by Stesichoros, two appendices detailing the legends surrounding the composition of his poetry, a long poem by Carson, and a

mock interview that blurs a number of authorial identities. A year later Solway published his essay on Karavis in *BiC*, accompanied by the interview between Karavis and Anna Zoumi. Solway followed up this publication in 2000 with *Saracen Island*, the collected works of a poet who, much like Carson, rocketed from obscurity to national prominence in the space of a decade. *Saracen Island* consists of a reprint of “The Pelagic Bard of Kalypso’s Isle,” translations of Karavis’ lyrics, the long poem “Saracen Island,” and twenty-five pages of “Commentary” detailing the modern-day legends surrounding the composition of Karavis’ poetry. On the first page of this commentary, Solway explains that the poem published in the *Atlantic Monthly* “was mistakenly attributed to me, the tag ‘translated by’ having been left out of the attribution” (109). The word “credo” derives from the Latin word for trust, but Solway’s explanation does not inspire much. Nor can his avowed commitment to seamless design account for his 2001 publication, *An Andreas Karavis Companion*, which is a patchwork of letters, translations, and diary entries utterly devoid of continuity. Most audacious of all, when Solway published “The Trouble with Annie” in July of 2001, he complained that Carson’s poetry is nothing more than “a function of shrewd outsourcing” (25). Is he being serious?

Apparently, he is. In an editorial response to Jennings’ letter, Solway rejects the idea that “The Trouble with Annie” is “just another of those hoaxes [he is] apparently so good at perpetrating” (“Letter” 40). He mocks the “disingenuousness” of Jennings’ conjecture and, in his accustomed manner, attempts to vaporize his opposition: “Chris Jennings, as any astute reader will instantly discern, does not exist. [. . .] I wonder whose heteronym he could possibly be?” (40). Jennings does exist, and he publishes under his own name (including reviews in subsequent issues of *BiC*), but the vehemence with which Solway, as associate editor, defends his article on Carson against criticisms by Jennings and Sutherland compels me to conclude that “The Trouble with Annie” is not a hoax.

Unfortunately for Solway, his argument would have been more clever if it had been disingenuous. Undermining his own dichotomy, Solway cites Milton in order to schematize the relation between himself and Carson as a contrast between truth and lies:

Although Milton surely demanded too much of poets when he affirmed in the *Apology for Smectymnuus* that “he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things,” the asymptotic approach to this ideal remains crucial. (“Trouble” 24)

This appeal to Milton is surprising, considering that Solway contrasts the “genuine” voice of Andreas Karavis to “the inflated rhetoric of what [Solway] like[s] to call—taking a cross-cultural liberty—the Milton Hilton school of poets” (“Bard” 21). The observation might seem like a humorous inversion of the sort that Solway appears to commit when he invents heteronyms in order to denounce “the centripetal indulgences of the postmodernist” (*Companion* 151). However, the humour disappears when one discovers Karavis pontificating on the primacy of the self in the same manner that Solway does in his book on education, *Lying about the Wolf* (1997).

Indeed, there is too little alter in Karavis’ ego. After studying “The Trouble with Annie,” I find it difficult to read Karavis’ denunciation of feminist readings of Sappho (*Companion* 100-101) as anything but a response to Carson’s *Eros the Bittersweet*. I also have difficulty hearing irony in passages where Solway claims that Karavis represents “the *authentic* traditional force which most of his fellow poets, according to his deeply-held [*sic*] conviction, have betrayed—not by neglecting tradition so much as by fabricating what he has called a ‘pretend tradition’” (*Saracen* 109; his emphasis). The fake/genuine binary simply collapses in these writings. Although Solway attempts to distance himself from “the old scops,” whom he calls a “tribe of fibbers” in a poem from his *Modern Marriage* sequence (60), in another poem from the same sequence he portrays himself “at 30,000 feet, / pursuing high, inventive Dedalus / to build workable lies” (46). Thus, critics who enter the Carson-Solway debacle enter a house of mirrors in which each argument reflects its opposite in a near-infinite regress: Carson endorses “the notion found early in ancient thought that all poets are liars” (*Beauty* 33), while Solway accuses Carson of building workable lies.

Perhaps overburdened by the mounting contradictions in his argument, Solway abandons any pretense to formal argumentation in the final paragraphs of “The Trouble with Annie.” Discussing *The Beauty of the Husband*, he resorts to sarcasm:

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is its penultimate page where under the rubric, a note about the author, we learn that “Anne Carson lives in Canada.” That’s it! No more information is needed for so illustrious a personage. The implication is that Canada is fortunate for being put on the map by virtue of its association with Anne Carson. (26)

This quibble over Carson’s biographical note would be inconsequential, were it not for the fact that the blurb plays a crucial role in an interview that Solway conducted with Michael Harris in the October 2001 issue of *BiC*.

Towards the end of the interview, Solway suggests the possibility of a “poetic renaissance” in Montreal comparable to the era of Layton and Klein (“Brilliant” 21). Harris cautions his interviewer that the “next ‘renaissance’ won’t necessarily come from a particular area or literary press or ‘School,’” but will “be spearheaded by individual poets making their way to the international stage” (21). Solway then asks Harris to assess the current state of Canadian poetry and Harris replies: “*Anne Carson lives in Canada*” (21). It is somewhat difficult to judge the correct interpretation of this reply without hearing it spoken, because Harris cracks jokes throughout the interview, and because Solway immediately changes the subject. If Carson is one of the “renaissance” poets excelling on the international stage, then Harris’ statement undermines the war on Carson that Solway continues to wage in the editorial pages of this issue. However, if Harris is being ironic, as the italics and his close association with Solway would indicate, then Carson’s writing has become emblematic of the deplorable state of Canadian poetry in the minds of a particular circle of Montrealers.

For several years now, Solway has boasted that the poetry of established Canadian authors such as Purdy, Bowering, and Ondaatje pales in comparison to a small “segment of the anglophone community in Montreal, where the finest poets in Canada happen to live” (“Standard” 20; see also “Double” 25). Although the popularity of Carson’s books would seem to strengthen this contention, Solway has in mind such writers as Harris, Starnino, and Ormsby (“Interview” 154; see also “Double” 25). These poets also happen to be influential editors. Eric Ormsby (to whom Solway dedicated *An Andreas Karavis Companion*) is a contributing editor at *BiC*, where Solway and Starnino are the associate editors. Ormsby has also published an essay on Solway that abets the Karavis and Nordtbrand hoaxes (“Dark” 90), and edited Starnino’s book of poetry, *Credo* (2000), which thanks Solway in the acknowledgements, and which is dedicated to Harris. Michael Harris, in turn, is the former editor of Signal Editions for Véhicule Press (with whom Solway published five books) and Starnino has succeeded him as editor for the imprint. Carmine Starnino is also poetry editor for *Canadian Notes & Queries*, where Solway is a contributing editor. By his own admission, Starnino charts his poetic “voyage by [Solway’s] Parnassian star” (“Introduction” 15), and he has paid homage to his mentor by editing *David Solway* (2001), a slender volume of essays. He has also adopted Solway’s disdainful attitude towards the canon of Canadian poetry, which he maintains, with a few exceptions, “is a simulacrum,” an “out-and-out fraud” that

requires “a rigorous critical appraisal” or else “poets will only find it easier to lie” (“Busted” 3). Consequently, Starnino has published numerous essays and reviews in which he denounces the usual suspects (including Carson) as “charlatans” (“Busted” 6) and substitutes in their place a list of poets which includes “Eric Ormsby, David Solway, Michael Harris” and a few other Signal poets (“Stroll” 33; see also “Canadian” 31). In fact, if one examines the contributions of Solway and Starnino to *BiC* and *Canadian Notes & Queries*, their articles are almost exclusively devoted to denunciations of the “agenda-dominated camarilla[s] of movers and shakers” that they claim are stifling independent expression in this country (Solway, “Double” 26), yet at the same time they reiterate that “poets like Ormsby, Solway and Harris may be Canadian poetry’s only hope” (Starnino, “Busted” 10; see also Starnino, “Vowel” 30; Solway, “Modern” 21). Likewise, when charged for a month with the weekly “How Poems Work” feature in the *Globe and Mail*, Starnino devoted his first three articles to Ormsby, Harris, and Karavis. The great irony of this aggrandizing campaign, and perhaps the reason for the Signal poets’ resentment of Carson, is that she has fulfilled the fantasy that they have constructed for themselves in their editorial roles, yet failed to realize as poets.

In the interview with Solway, Harris complains about nepotism in Canadian publishing and concludes that “Canadian poetry needs to be exposed to the rigours of the international marketplace. [. . .] We should be vying with Faber, Cape, Farrar Strauss, Norton—the best poetry presses in the English-speaking world” (“Brilliant” 21). He does not remark that Carson publishes with Cape in Britain and uses a New York publisher (Knopf) in North America. Starnino, for his part, laments that Canada has yet “to serve up a single career able to guarantee worldwide attention for our verse. The question isn’t where is out [*sic*] Yeats? But where is our Derek Walcott? Our Seamus Heaney?” (“Stroll” 32). Only a few months after Starnino published this complaint in *BiC*, an international jury awarded the 2002 T.S. Eliot Prize to Carson’s *The Beauty of the Husband* instead of Heaney’s *Electric Light*. This decision would seem to silence Harris’ sarcasm, as well as to contradict Starnino’s assessment of Carson as “unaccomplished” (“Busted” 9), but the news of the award should not rightly disturb Solway, because he regards “*The Waste Land* as one of the great literary hoaxes of our time” (*Companion* 128). It remains for Solway to prove that a conspiracy of Eliotic hoaxers has infiltrated prize committees in the United States, Canada, and England in order to promote Carson, but it is rather apparent that the Signal poets have colluded to use her media presence as a

platform for promoting their own dizzyingly incestuous productions.

The influence that Solway and Starnino have had also sheds light on the way in which literary reputations are made and unmade in Canada. Carson was largely ignored by the major newspapers in this country until *The New York Times Magazine* ran a feature article on her on March 26th, 2000 (Rehak). Rushing to catch up with the Americans, the *Globe and Mail* published an article the following week, in which poetry editor Carl Wilson declared that “Carson is where the action is in contemporary poetry” (D19). The *Globe* book section promoted Carson over the course of the following year—until she won her first major award in Canada, the inaugural Griffin Prize, and already she had become too iconic for Canadian standards. On June 16th, 2001, Lynn Crosbie published an article entitled “Something New Please O Universe” in the *Globe*, in which she praises “the genuinely gifted Anne Carson,” but condemns the “rarefied” quality of the writing by the Griffin nominees (who included Don McKay and Robert Bringham). Less than a month later, Solway attacked Carson specifically in his *BiC* screed, thereby picking up from the conclusion of Starnino’s 1999 essay, “Canadian Poetry As a Busted Flush,” in which Starnino situates Carson alongside (the eminently talented) Dionne Brand and Erin Mouré in a list of authors who do not deserve to be called poets (9). Perhaps due to this Carson backlash in the literary press, the news that *The Beauty of the Husband* had won the Eliot Prize barely warranted a notice in the national papers, although Carson was the first Canadian and first woman to win the prestigious award. Eventually, the *National Post* responded to an article by Richard Potts in the *Guardian* (UK) in which the poetry editor laments that *The Beauty of the Husband* does not live up to the legacy of *The Waste Land* and the “canonised, totemic name” of Eliot (1). Potts worries that the selection of Carson will fail to distinguish the Eliot Prize from the more populist Forward Prize, for which Carson was also nominated, and he argues that *The Beauty of the Husband*, with its strong narrative dimension, “fails as poetry, simply because it shows either crashing inability or an unbecoming contempt for the medium” (2). Predictably, the *National Post* followed the example of the British press and published an indictment of Carson on January 31st, 2002, entitled “Poet or ‘Prize-Reaping Machine?’” (Heer B5). The *Post* article begins with a discussion of Potts, but takes its title from an interview with Solway:

“Carson is essentially not a poet, she is a prize-reaping machine,” complains David Solway, a writer [now] based in Hudson, Que. “She is at the head of what we might call a gigantic pyramid scheme. Her reputation has been built up in

such a way that all the people who have invested in it can no longer blow the whistle because the whole thing will come tumbling down on their heads. Anne Carson is our poetic Enron." (B5)

Scenting a whiff of scandal, the *Globe* rehashed the *Post* article two days later, using the same portrait of Carson and the same lead-off discussion of Potts and Solway. The title of the *Globe* article asks, "Who's Afraid of Anne Carson?" (Martin R3), and a number of individuals, including Starnino, voice their fears. Although this article offers a broader selection of opinions than its precursor, in the midst of the backlash it was of little importance that Michael Redhill and Dennis Lee defended Carson's writing. It no longer seemed to matter to journalists that contributors to the *Guardian* had nominated *The Beauty of the Husband* as Book of the Year in 2001 (Kureishi); *Men in the Off Hours* as Book of the Year in 2000 (Eagleton); and *Autobiography of Red* as "one of the finest volumes of English-language poetry of the [1990s]" (Kinsella 3). The potential collapse of Carson's reputation, like the actual collapse of Enron, was the news. And Solway, by a clever inversion, had positioned himself at the head of a new media pyramid.

But is the foundation of this pyramid solid? By all appearances, Solway is constructing his literary reputation in direct competition with that of Carson. As an intellectual, a grecophile, and a lyric poet from the Montreal area, Solway is vying with Carson for roughly the same readership and hoping to win the judgment of history, as he states in "The Trouble with Annie": "I console myself by remembering that the quickless Reverend Bowles was, if not the most influential, arguably the most celebrated poet of Wordsworth's day and certainly one of the most ubiquitous" (26). This jealous tone inspired one reader of *BiC* to taunt in a letter to the editor: "guess whose nose is out the joint at seeing kudos (in his opinion rightfully his) going to [Carson]" (Eldredge 2). Similarly, Jennings suggests that Carson should respond to Solway's diatribe by writing "*Autobiography of Green* starring Karavis" ("Letter" 39). The fact that a *Globe and Mail* poll on February 7, 2001, nominated Atwood, Ondaatje, McKay, Carson, and Cohen as candidates for the inaugural Poet Laureate position (Anderssen 1) certainly does not bode well for Solway, but he remains undeterred. He dismisses both the position and the nominees ("Wilted" 38), and continues to do his best to turn Carson into "a watershed figure: which side of her one falls on tells one and others who one is, as part of the literary community" ("Trouble" 26). On one side, Solway situates Carson and the "'gullible' readership responsible for her election" (26; his emphasis); on the other side,

Solway situates his early poetry and that of his heteronyms. He also elects himself to perform the heroic task of unmaking Carson's reputation:

It is time the arrogant deceit implicit in such work were radically debelled no matter who professes to be appalled by the contumacy of my approach. Therefore there are times when one must speak explicitly, even if it is considered tactless and niggardly and abusive. And sometimes one must have the courage not only of one's convictions but of convicting others for their lack of such or for the impunity with which they continue to produce and extol such derelict material. (26)

While Solway's polemical tone has a hypnotic effect, his rant makes better fiction than criticism. There is more evidence of arrogance and deceit in "The Trouble with Annie" than in Carson's work. Although Carson has shied away from the debate and refuses to comment in the press (Martin R3), her enigma does indeed function for Solway as "a distorting mirror which is at the same time wholly accurate and orthogonal." Solway projects his criticisms onto the other that they might reflect back on himself. The polemicist does not lie in "The Trouble with Annie," then, so much as confuse the reader with his tone. What he expresses ironically in the *Spectra* passages proves more accurate than what he asserts sincerely in the bulk of his essay.

I would have liked to have concluded that "The Trouble with Annie" is a bizarre new installment in the Carson media narrative—an oblique acknowledgement of a literary debt combined with a mischievous attempt to dispel the effusive praise that even Carson has banished from the covers of her most recent books ("p'interview" 57). This reading would have overlooked Solway's pedantic side and stressed the pranksterish one that has been in full force lately, as his American interviewer observes with amusement:

Solway clearly relishes the practical-joke side of *l'affaire Karavis*, in no small part because it allows him covertly to tweak his countrymen. "Canadians are not a very exciting people," [Solway] says. "Like rubes at a carnival, they need to be poked, challenged, gulled, bedazzled, so that the collective jaw drops in something other than an insufficiently stifled yawn." (Downing 4)

However, in light of Solway's response to Sutherland and Jennings (who also cites this passage), and realizing that I am potentially another person whom Solway will declare does not exist, I am forced to conclude that "The Trouble with Annie" is a work so overburdened with contradiction and hypocrisy that its arguments are ultimately self-defeating. If one applies Solway's criticisms to his poetic practice, one discovers that he mocks only himself.

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