

## “Dazzling Hybrids” The Poetry of Anne Carson

The subtitle of Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* only hints at the variety of genres that the Montreal poet employs. In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson brings together seven distinct sections—a “proemium” (6) or preface on the Greek poet Stesichoros, translated fragments of Stesichoros’s *Geryoneis*, three appendices on the blinding of Stesichoros by Helen, a long romance-in-verse recasting Stesichoros’s *Geryoneis* as a contemporary gay love affair, and a mock-interview with the “choir-master”—each with its own style and story to tell. Carson finds fresh combinations for genres much as she presents myth and gender in a new guise. Although men appear to be the subject of both the romance and the academic apparatus that comes with it, Carson sets the stories of Stesichoros, Geryon, and Herakles within a framework of epigrams and citations from Gertrude Stein and Emily Dickinson that, far from being subordinate, assumes equal importance with the male-centred narrative when Stein supplants Stesichoros in the concluding interview. The shift in speakers and time-frames in the interview, as well as the allusions to the myth of Isis, emphasize Carson’s manipulation of mythic forms. Carson’s retelling of the *Geryoneis* (itself a lyrical revision of an epic myth) draws inspiration from Stesichoros’s portrait of Helen of Troy in the *Palinode* (a recantation of the poet’s earlier, Homeric portrait), as well as from the mythic scenes in which Isis reconstitutes the fragmented body of Osiris. Negotiating this complex arrangement of literary allusions, Carson uses shifts in gender and genre to foreground her extensive alterations to the myths that underlie and frame *Autobiography of Red*.

Because it employs fragmentation and “radical recontextualization” to “overturn the conventional distinction between a framing ‘master-text’ and

a cited text that exists in supplementary relation to it" (Jones 14), *Autobiography of Red* could be situated in the Canadian tradition of "documentary-collage" (Jones 14) that Manina Jones traces in works such as Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. Indeed, Marlatt has written a favourable review of *Autobiography of Red* (Marlatt 41) and the cover of Carson's novel-in-verse bears a strong endorsement from Ondaatje: "Anne Carson is, for me, the most exciting poet writing in English today." However, the primarily Greek derivation of Carson's fragments has prompted Guy Davenport to situate Carson's poetry within a revived classicism. Introducing Carson's *Glass, Irony and God* (1992), Davenport displays his professional interest in the McGill professor of ancient Greek by arguing that Carson "is among those returning poetry to good strong narrative (as we might expect of a classicist)" (x). Carson's romance certainly upholds Davenport's argument for "good strong narrative," but the scholarly framework of Carson's novel-in-verse also borrows from her non-narrative experiments in poetry "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" (*Plainwater* 1995), as well as her essays on lyric form in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986).

The reception of *Autobiography of Red* highlights the diversity of readings made possible by what Melanie Rehak calls Carson's "dazzling hybrids" (39), in a feature-length article on the poet in the *New York Times Magazine*. However, one should note the media dazzle that accompanies the discussion of Carson's hybrids when Rehak's article includes a full-page fashion shot of Carson in red (37). The success of *Autobiography of Red* has rocketed Carson from cult status in small literary magazines to international prominence, creating a mystique summed up by the opening question of an article in the *Boston Review*: "What if a Canadian professor of classics turned out to be a greater poet than any living American?" (Halliday). Assessing her most recent collection of poetry, *Men in the Off Hours* (2000), the *New York Times Book Review* calls Carson the "most instantly penetrating of contemporary poets" (Bedient 44), *Time Magazine*<sup>1</sup> declares that Carson "fulfills poetry's highest calling" (Bruck 98), and the *Globe and Mail* (scrambling to respond to the *New York Times Magazine* feature) proclaims that "Carson is where the action is in contemporary poetry" (Wilson D19). While Carson can mix and match with the best postmodernists, her ability to write essays, lyrics, narrative and non-narrative poetry with equal facility distinguishes her. This ability also creates contradictory appraisals of her talent. For example, in a review of *Autobiography of Red* for the *TLS* (3 Dec. 1999),

poet Oliver Reynolds praises Carson's attempt to blend intellect with emotion, but laments that the romance at the heart of her novel-in-verse could not "sustain the expectations created by its extraordinary first half" (24). In the same issue of the *TLS*, critic Karl Miller chooses *Autobiography of Red* as his book of the year on the strength of its "single magnificent and perplexing poem [the romance]" while suggesting that it "might have shed the gnomic appendices which both precede and round off the romance proper" (Miller 6). The reception of *Autobiography of Red* has been overwhelmingly positive (among reviewers such as Marlatt, Rasula, Miller, Moses, Siken, Macklin, and Beam), but some critics of the novel-in-verse find it either "top-heavy with its absurd apparatus" (Logan) or "so devoted to the emotional fluctuations of [the] protagonist" of the romance that the novel "ends up feeling like a lyric poem fantastically extended" (Halliday). However, a closer look at the manipulation of myth in *Autobiography of Red* reveals that the mock-academic apparatus surrounding the romance is neither absurd nor a simple extension of the lyric sequence.

The first section of *Autobiography of Red*, a proem entitled "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" introduces the reader to the ancient Greek lyricist. Stesichoros (also Stesichorus) was born in Himera, on the coast of Sicily, between 650 (*Red* 3) and 628 (Davidson 197) BCE. Of the "dozen or so titles and several collections of fragments" (*Red* 3) remaining from Stesichoros's works, Carson is particularly interested in a "long lyric poem in dactylo-epitrite meter and triadic structure" (5) called the *Geryoneis*. The eighty-four surviving papyrus fragments and half-dozen citations of the *Geryoneis* expand on the story of Geryon from the tenth labour of Herakles (also Heracles or Hercules). The fragments "tell of a strange winged red monster who lived on an island called Erytheia (which is an adjective<sup>2</sup> simply meaning 'The Red Place') quietly tending a herd of magical red cattle, until one day the hero Herakles came across the sea and killed him to get the cattle" (5). Instead of adopting the "conventional . . . point of view of Herakles and fram[ing] a thrilling account of the victory of culture over monstrosity," Stesichoros offers a "tantalizing cross section of scenes, both proud and pitiful, from Geryon's own experience" (6). Stesichoros gives Geryon an "unexpectedly noble" (Davies, "Stesichorus" 277) character and marks the transition from epic deed to lyric encounter as a shift from heroic conquest to subjective engagement. In the lyric sequence "Autobiography of Red: A Romance," Carson furthers this evolution by transforming the *Geryoneis* into a contemporary gay love affair between a leather-jacketed

Herakles and his little red admirer. However, as the organization of *Autobiography of Red* implies, it is necessary to understand Stesichoros's deviations from the epic form before engaging with Carson's romance. "[R]anked with Homer by some of the ancients" (Barnstone 109), Stesichoros achieved considerable fame by re-framing the epic narratives of Homer and Hesiod, as well as by reconsidering the targets of their abuse, such as Geryon and Helen of Troy.

Although Quintilian remarks that Stesichoros "sustained on the lyre the weight of epic song" (10.1.62; trans. A. Miller 77) and Carson has Longinus—in a slight manipulation of Longinus 13—call Stesichoros the "[m]ost Homeric of the lyric poets" (*Red* 4), Stesichoros's primary contribution to literary history lies in his alteration of epic for lyric purposes. Stesichoros was probably the first to combine elements of lyric monody (solo song), epic narrative and dance in order to recast the ancient myths as choral performance:

Although he may well have been preceded by Terpander (and others unknown) in the invention of musical settings for the traditional epics, his poems on epic themes appear to have been distinctive in their completely "lyrical" form, composed as they were in a triadic structure and adapted to *nomoi* for the lyre. (Maingon 1)

Malcolm Davies cautions that Stesichoros's compositions were not strictly choral ("Monody" 601), but his verse differs from the monody of Sappho, Alcaeus and Anacreon in its preference for "an artificial language with a strong Doric flavour" and its triadic structure—in which "a strophe is followed by an antistrophe in the same metrical pattern, the antistrophe by an epode in a related but different rhythm" (Campbell 2: 262). Thus, instead of relying solely on the conventions of either lyric or epic, Stesichoros—like Carson—creates his own hybrid form.

In "Stesichorus and the Epic Tradition," Maingon examines Stesichoros's treatment of Homeric form and diction and offers these conclusions:

Retaining the heroic theme, he amalgamated traditional and original material in narrative poems of about 1500 lines in length to be performed to the accompaniment of the lyre, either by solo voice or by chorus, or even both. Held within the bounds of this structure the poems were far more narrowly defined as far as content was concerned and less digressive than epic. The musical accompaniment in itself, the *nomos* which was traditionally divided into seven parts, imposed a finite structure on the theme. (Maingon 355)

Toying with these numerological conventions, Carson divides *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* into seven sections (in the manner of lyric performance)

and the lyric sequence "Autobiography of Red: A Romance" into 47 numbered sections (one short of the Homeric corpus). This kind of generic play becomes increasingly important towards the conclusion of *Autobiography of Red*, where the lyric/epic evolves into a "photographic essay" (*Red* 60) that gives way to an interview which appears to be part of a drama. In Western literature, this manipulation of genres begins, according to Carson's proem, with Stesichoros.

Carson explains Stesichoros's achievement in terms of adjectives, which she calls "the latches of being" (*Red* 4). "Homer's epithets," Carson writes in her proem, "are a fixed diction with which Homer fastens every substance in the world to its aptest attribute and holds them in place for epic consumption" (4). For example, in Homer "blood is *black*," "God's laughter is *unquenchable*" (4), and the name Helen of Troy is attached to "an adjectival tradition of whoredom already old by the time Homer used it" (5). As a young man, Stesichoros followed Homer in "mak[ing] the most of Helen's matrimonial misadventures" (Davidson 200) in his lost *Helen*. However, for "no reason that anyone can name, Stesichoros began to undo the latches" (*Red* 5) in mid-career. Suddenly there was "nothing to interfere with horses being *hollow hooved*" or a "river being *root silver*" (*Red* 5) and the fixed characterization of Helen as a whore was affected as a result. Whereas Homer has Helen qualify her speech in the *Iliad* with disclaimers such as "slut that I am" (Lattimore 3.180),<sup>3</sup> Stesichoros reconsiders the denigrating effects of these insults. By rejecting the presentation of Helen as a (self-described) "nasty bitch evil-intriguing" (Lattimore 6.344),<sup>4</sup> Stesichoros implicated the men who made her both the prize and scapegoat of the Trojan War.

Legend has it that Stesichoros's changed attitude towards Helen resulted from his blinding at her hands. Newly deified, Helen revenged herself on the epic tradition by blinding Stesichoros when he engaged in the standard Homeric slander of her name. To regain his sight, Stesichoros spontaneously composed a *palinode* or counter-song, and performed a kind of public retraction. In its use of inversion, the *Palinode* parallels other innovations by Stesichoros in style (strophe/antistrophe/epode) and diction. To cite one example of relevance to *Autobiography of Red*, Stesichoros assigns Helen her husband's distinctive hair colour, ξανθός or reddish-brown (*Oxyrhynchus* 43), in fragment 2619 14.5 (probably from the *Iliou Persis*). By Maingon's count, the epithet "ξανθός belongs primarily to Menelaus (16 times in the *Iliad* and 15 in the *Odyssey*) while it is used in the feminine of Demeter (twice), of Agamede (once) and Ariadne (once, in the *Theogony*)"

(86). Homer leaves Helen's exalted beauty unspecified, enabling her to stand in more easily as a synecdoche for all women of treacherous beauty. Undoing this particular latch, "Stesichorus probably intended the relationship between Menelaus and Helen to be accentuated (perhaps ironically) by th[e] transference of the epithet regularly expected with Menelaus to his misguided wife" (Maingon 87). This simple verbal transgression not only speeds Helen's conversion from archetype to individual, but also sets a precedent for Carson's manipulation of epithets and proper nouns in her final interview, where Gertrude Stein answers questions in place of the "choir-master," Stesichoros.

Stein maintains a strong presence in the academic frame of Carson's novel-in-verse. Carson begins her proem with an epigram from Stein, "I like the feeling of words doing / as they want to do and as they have to do" (3)<sup>5</sup> and then immediately situates Stesichoros "after Homer and before Gertrude Stein, a difficult interval for a poet" (3). Between the epigram and interview, Carson develops the connection between Stein and Stesichoros as a shared talent for fragmentation. Just as Stesichoros's adjectives broke with the standard diction of Homeric epic, Stein's experiments in sentence structure changed the face of twentieth-century narrative by "repudiat[ing] the conventions of syntactical causality" (Kostelanetz xiv). In Stein's "cubist" (xxiii) treatment of the verbal surface, "nouns . . . are used in ways that obscure their traditional functions within the structure of a sentence," adverbs that "customarily come before a verb now follow it, and what might normally be the object of a sentence either becomes its subject or precedes it. Instead of saying 'someone is alive', Stein writes, 'Anyone can be a living one'" (xiv). For Stein as for Stesichoros, fragmentation serves as a means to destabilize fixed modes of representation and perception. Thus, when Carson returns rhetorically to the proem's titular question—"What difference did Stesichoros make?"(4)—she offers a comparison that directly links early Greek lyric to high modernist portraiture: "When Gertrude Stein had to sum up Picasso she said, 'This one was working'. So say of Stesichoros, 'This one was making adjectives'" (4). The theme of working—as in working with, belabouring, modifying—fragments serves as a bridge to the proem's conclusion, where Carson invites her readers to create their own work:

[T]he fragments of the *Geryoneis* itself read as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat. The fragment

numbers tell you roughly how the pieces fell out of the box. You can of course keep shaking the box. "Believe me for meat and for myself," as Gertrude Stein says. Here. Shake. (6-7)

The interjection of Stein's voice here completes her framing of the proem. Stein's quotation also makes her words essential to the semantics of *Autobiography of Red* because they provide a clue to the meaning of "Red Meat" in the first two chapter titles.

Stein's disturbing conflation of meat and self in a paragraph about the fragments of Stesichoros jars momentarily, but the interjected quotation points back to "The Gender of Sound," the final essay in Carson's *Glass, Irony, and God* (1992), where Carson contemplates sexual *double-entendres* in antiquity and asserts that "putting a door on the female mouth (mouth/vagina) has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day. Its chief tactic is an ideological association of female sound with monstrosity, disorder and death" (121). In the midst of discussing epithets attached to the voices/mouths of Helen, Aphrodite, and Echo, Carson asks her reader to consider this description of the sound of Gertrude Stein by the biographer M.D. Luhan:

Gertrude was hearty. She used to roar with laughter, out loud. She had a laugh like a beefsteak. She loved beef.

These sentences, with their artful confusion of factual and metaphorical levels. . . projec[t] Gertrude Stein across the boundary of woman and human and animal kind into monstrosity. The simile "she had a laugh like a beefsteak" which identifies Gertrude Stein with cattle is followed at once by the statement "she loved beef" indicating that Gertrude Stein ate cattle. (*Glass* 121)

When compounded with details of Stein's "large physical size and lesbianism," Carson argues, Luhan's allusion to cannibalism completes the "marginalization of [Stein's] personality" as a "way to deflect her writings from literary centrality. If she is fat, funny-looking and sexually deviant she must be a marginal talent, is the assumption" (121). *Autobiography of Red* redresses this slight by giving Stein's voice increasing prominence in the story of a monster who tends a herd of mythical red cattle and whose name means "roarer" or "speaker." Stein's epigrammatic voice in the upper margin of the first page resurfaces as reported speech in the body of the proem, as a stylistic echo in "Appendix C," and eventually as an active voice in the final interview.

In the novel's second section, "Red Meat: Fragments of Stesichoros," Carson offers her own experimental translation of the *Geryoneis*. Carson

does not simply render the Greek into English. Instead, she blends details from the *Geryoneis* and her upcoming adaptation of it to create a hybrid translation. Her translations exaggerate the “strangeness . . . of language” (*Economy* 28) by incorporating foreign elements into fixed narratives and refusing the smooth transition of Greek into English. To alert the reader that scenes where, say, Geryon’s mother takes him to his first day of school are not features of Stesichoros’s text, Carson inserts anachronistic details such as “the ticking red taxi of the incubus” (“III”) into the gaps of Stesichoros’s narrative. Painting fragments in the manner of the cubists, Carson combines glimpses of ancient and modern narratives in a style that foreshadows the perspectival shifts of the novel’s concluding interview. Translation, in this way, becomes an act of composing elements from different epochs and speech genres, rather than an exercise in maintaining a uniform identity for the text across languages and periods.

Even Carson’s direct translations are highly unconventional. For example, Carson translates only the latter half of fragment 15 (which she numbers 14), focusing on the moment of penetration in the conquest of Geryon by Herakles. The clipped diction in Carson’s translation contrasts sharply with the heroic tone in Andrew Miller’s version:

(Fr. S15)

[T]he arrow held its course straight  
through to the top of his head  
and stained with crimson blood  
his breastplate and his gory limbs.  
Then Geryon’s neck drooped  
to one side like a poppy  
which, disfiguring its tender beauty,  
suddenly sheds its petals. . . .  
(Miller 77)

XIV. Herakles’ Arrow

Arrow means kill It parted Geryon’s  
skull like a comb Made  
The boy neck lean At an odd slow angle  
sideways as when a  
Poppy shames itself in a whip of Nude  
breeze (*Red* 13)

Traditionally, the three-bodied grandson of Poseidon posed a formidable threat to Herakles. The Greek folk hero, as Carson notes ironically, “[g]ot the idea that Geryon was Death” (37). Although Herakles and Geryon are descended from immortals, both suspect they are mortal. Malcolm Davies therefore speculates that “the labours involving Cerberus and the Hesperides are recent in origin” and reads the tenth labour of Herakles as a “heroic journey to the land of the dead” (“Stesichoros” 278) in which the hero must attain “immortality and triumph over death” (279). Carson’s translation, on the other hand, makes Geryon a “boy” and sexualizes his



encounter with Herakles by limiting the imagery to penetration, nudity and shame. Carson's version of the *Geryoneis* remains a "matter" of life and death, but the contemporary poet explicitly eroticizes the border between mortality and immortality. As translator and author of the romance, Carson foregrounds a homoerotic subtext that would have been obvious to the Greek audience of Stesichoros, but under the generic title of autobiography, Carson's work as a whole suggests a heterosexual subtext.

Carson pioneered this kind of experimental translation in "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings," a long poem in *Plainwater* (1995) that is the stylistic prototype for *Autobiography of Red*. The translations in "Mimnermos" combine fragments from the Greek lyric poet Mimnermos (also Mimnermus, c. 630 BCE) with contemporary details such that poet and translator seem to be engaged in a kind of cerebral copulation, or brainsex. To this unorthodox translation, Carson adds an essay and three mock interviews with Mimnermos, as she explains to Mary di Michele in "The *Matrix* Interview":

When I was working on ["Mimnermos"], I started from a translation of a body of fragments, then added to the translation an essay, in some degree historical, explaining the background of the poet and how the fragments have come down to us. And in dealing with that historical material, I found a whole lot of what they call, in Classics, "testimonia," which means anecdotal stories about the poet or about the poem, that are passed down and aren't really regarded as credible history. But they shape our notion of who the poet was as a person. . . . So the interviews are about this interstitial matter that comes down to us in semi-historical sources. (12-13)

Elaborating on the model of "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings," *Autobiography of Red* plays on the double-meaning of "body of fragments" by inserting the "body" of Gertrude Stein into the fragments of Stesichoros, at first as an intertext and later as a character. On a formal level, these fragments of "Red Meat" begin to cohere when Carson also works the myth of Isis (conventionally represented with cattle horns) into the story of Geryon. While Carson's use of the Isis myth is not conventional, the Montrealer insists that "[c]onventions exist to be re-negotiated" (di Michele 12). Instead of modifying the story of Geryon to match the Egyptian myth, Carson appropriates formal elements of the myth and uses them to shape her narrative framework.

Numerous elements of the Isis myth resonate with the *Geryoneis*—the characters, the fetishization of red, the goddess' journey and triumph over death—but one story does not transpose onto the other. With her husband/brother Osiris, Isis ruled Egypt in its earliest epoch, introducing magical

incantation, justice, and weaving in the company of the “watchdog of the gods,” Anubis, with his “dog’s head and spotted dog’s coat” (Goodrich 30). Osiris taught writing, astronomy, poetry and “traveled throughout the world with his kinsman Heracles, spreading the science of agriculture” (Goodrich 30). Periodically, the siblings’ peaceful kingdom suffered droughts brought on their evil brother Seth, father of “Orthus the hound of Geryones” (Hesiod 101). Seth “haunted the delta region, his red hair flaming” (Goodrich 33), and consequently Egyptians “abhorred the color red, considering it a manifestation of all the forces of treachery, murder, and jealousy” (Goodrich 33). According to Plutarch, the inhabitants of Coptos hurled asses off cliffs because the animals had red coats and Egyptians generally “sacrifice[d] red cattle” (165). Turning Egypt into a “Red Place,” Seth trapped Osiris in a coffin and sent him floating down the Nile. Isis recovered her husband’s coffin in Syria and revived him through a kind of necrophilic magic, only to have Seth chop him into fourteen fragments and cast them into the Nile. Isis retrieved the fragments of Osiris, but “did not find . . . his male member. . . . In its place Isis fashioned a likeness of it and consecrated the phallus, in honour of which the Egyptians even today hold festival” (Plutarch 145). Revived, Osiris ascended to the sky and left his wife to rule in his absence, her power confirmed by the symbolic phallus entrusted to her priestesses.

This theme of a reconstituted “body of fragments” provides the most important link to the structure of *Autobiography of Red*. The ordeal of Isis pertains to “Red Meat: Fragments of Stesichoros” because Carson’s chapter title makes an explicit connection between authorial corpse and literary corpus. These terms are similarly interchangeable in Plutarch’s *De Osiride et Iside* where the historian writes that Typhon (Seth) “scatters and destroys the sacred Word which the goddess [Isis] collects and puts together and delivers to those undergoing initiation . . . of which the end is the knowledge of the First and the Lord” (121). In this context, Carson’s “brainsex” is a kind of necrophilia. “Words after all are dead,” Carson tells di Michele, “[t]hey impersonate life vividly but remain dead” (14-15). Lacking the presence of Stesichoros’s original text, Carson must work—Isis-like—with likeness (that is, citations, testimonia) and absence (textual gaps). “No passage longer than thirty lines is quoted from [Stesichoros],” Carson explains, “and papyrus scraps (still being found: the most recent fragments were recovered from cartonnage in Egypt in 1977) withhold as much as they tell” (6). The fragments of the *Geryoneis*—like the fragments of the story of the

house of Oedipus by Stesichoros recovered from a mummy case in 1974 are pieces of the Stesichorean/Osirian body that Carson must summon all her poetic and academic craft to revive. However, Carson does not, like Isis, use the power of inscription entrusted to her to uphold patriarchal codes.

Carson's translations are not simply a re-membering of the Greek poets in English. In choosing to work with fragments of Mimnermos and Stesichoros, Carson deliberately chooses texts that have been dis-membered—as the missing book in Carson's "epic" underscores. While Carson's scholarly work resuscitates these nearly forgotten poems, the fictional elements of her writing actively resist any attempt to restore the authority of "the First and the Lord." Thus, ironically, Stesichoros's "master-text" undergoes the same overhaul to which the lyricist subjected his epic predecessors and the Mimnermos interviews run aground over the Greek's insistently phallic language. In the first interview, Mimnermos corrects the interviewer's use of the word "mystical": "M: Mystical I don't think we had a word mystical we had gods we had words for gods 'hidden in the scrutum [sic] of Zeus' we used to say for instance, proverbially" (*Plainwater* 20). Similarly, the second interview terminates when Mimnermos (named for his grandfather) objects to the interviewer's question on disguises:

- M: Well eventually someone has to call a boat a boat you can't dismember everything
- I: Dismember
- M: Sorry I meant remember
- I: Freud was named for his grandfather too (22-23)

In *Autobiography of Red*, Stesichoros and Helen engage in a similar linguistic power struggle, but one which suggests a paradigm for Carson's translations. The red-headed Helen of the *Palinode* offers Carson a second role-model for reconstituting the male corpse/corpus with a difference.

Carson's "Appendix A: Testimonia on the Question of Stesichoros' Blinding by Helen" lets citations such as Isokrates's *Helen* 64 demonstrate how Helen goes from being the object of language to an active agent (in)forming it:

Looking to demonstrate her own power Helen made an object lesson of the poet Stesichoros. For the fact is he began his poem "Helen" with a bit of blasphemy. Then when he stood up he found he'd been robbed of his eyes. Straightaway realizing why, he composed the so-called "Palinode" and Helen restored him to his own nature. (*Red* 15)

Carson offers no commentary here, but it is clear that in her appendices and "Red Meat" fragments Carson is also making "an object lesson of the poet

Stesichoros.” Carson restores the “vision” of Stesichoros by reconstituting his literary corpus and presenting it to the eye of the modern reader. But just as Helen’s magic altered Stesichoros’s impression of her, Carson’s translation of the *Geryoneis* creates a new portrait of the ancient Greek lyricist.

“Appendix B” consists solely of a translated fragment from Stesichoros’s famous retraction. The thrice-repeated “No,” unique to Carson’s translation, “measures out the area of the given and the possible” (*Economy* 118) along a margin of negatives:

No it is not the true story.

No you never went on the benched ships.

No you never came to the towers of Troy. (*Red* 17)

Such fragments withhold as much as they tell, as Carson observed earlier. Although Carson does not state it explicitly, Stesichoros’s revised story of Helen amounts to “a revolutionary version of the legend of Helen. . . . Such an innovation called into question the entire mythical basis for the legend of the Trojan War” (Maingon 300). Contradicting Homer, Stesichoros argues in his *Palinode* that the *eidolon* (image, phantom) of Helen goes to Troy with Paris, while the real Helen waits out the war in Egypt, where Euripides finds her in his *Helen*. Carson, too, follows Stesichoros’s version of the Helen story in her uncollected poem about the daughter of Tyndareus. Carson’s “Helen” begins with the statement, “Nights of a marriage are like an Egypt in a woods,” and proceeds to imagine Troy vanishing, “murmuring, stain / is a puzzle you do not want / the answer to” (*Boston Review*). Although there is some debate in the matter, A.M. Dale argues—in a view corroborated by Maingon (307)—that there can be “no serious doubt that, as all antiquity believed, the *eidolon*-story was the bold invention of Stesichoros, a volte-face in mid-career, possibly the outcome of a visit to Sparta” (Dale xxiii) where Helen was worshipped as a goddess. Stesichoros’s Helen story never supplanted Homer’s version, but it created a rival interpretation well-known throughout antiquity. Thus, in *The Republic*, Plato can remark without embellishment that “as Stesichoros says the wraith of Helen was fought for at Troy through ignorance of the truth” (9.586e). Using absence to define presence, the *eidolon* story stresses the fact that the Trojan war was fought, not over a woman, but over the way a woman was imagined.

In *Helen: Myth, Legend and the Culture of Misogyny*, Robert Meagher explains the crucial and codified role Helen played in the mythological foundations of Greece:

Helen—goddess, wife, consort, whore—[figured as] the epitome of woman to the Greek eye. In ancient Greek poetry and art, Helen was indeed always more than a woman who brought on a war. The Trojan War, whatever its actual insignificance may have been, stood as the paradigm for all war and Helen, its reputed cause, was the avatar of the feminine, the provocatrice of all mischief and pain, the original *femme fatale*. This synecdoche by which Helen was seen as all women and by which all women were seen as “Helens” was a simple liberty taken by the ancient tradition and operative, in one guise or another, ever since. (Meagher 10)

Stesichoros’s challenge to the received “truth” about Helen—the paragon of that “deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble” (Hesiod 123)—called her vilification into question. However, Carson is not content with a simple reversal of value judgements. Having apprenticed in “No,” Carson attempts to go beyond the rigid opposition of truth and falsehood in “Appendix C: Clearing Up The Question of Stesichoros’ Blinding by Helen.”

In fact, the twenty-one syllogisms in “Appendix C” clear up nothing at all. On the contrary, the mock-syllogisms “induce a narcosis of logic” (Rasula 188) by manipulating the binary movement of statement and counter-statement. Pressuring the gaps created by language, Carson begins with the simple syllogism, “1. Either Stesichoros was a blind man or he was not” (18), and proceeds to more vertiginous and Steinian statements:

10. If we are now in reverse and by continuing to reason in this way are likely to arrive back at the beginning of the question of the blinding of Stesichoros either we will go along without incident or we will meet Stesichoros on our way back. (19)

Circling and supplementing, Carson draws out the phantom of doubt in deduction’s linear movement towards truth. Welcoming this spirit of doubleness, Carson then launches her reader into “Autobiography of Red: A Romance,” the principal narrative in *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*.

The romance within the *roman* suggests a duplicity befitting the novel’s second version of the Geryon myth. Likewise, the multiple potential meanings of “autobiography”—of red, of Geryon, of a concealed “I”—make a fitting introduction to the story of a monster whose “triplicity makes him a natural symbol of deceit” and whose spirit “presides over the second of the three lowest regions of Dante’s Hell, the circles of those who sinned by fraud” (Robertson 210). Carson’s “duplication” of Geryon makes little attempt to be true to the classical version. Gone are two of Geryon’s three conjoined torsos, his blue hair and his yellow skin, familiar to classicists from his sculpture (c. 560 BC) at the Athenian Acropolis (Boardman 77;

“Geryon”). The red cattle and the “little red dog” of the fragments also disappear. Instead, Carson makes red a symbol of sexual drought in the romance and colours her anti-hero in the ochre of desire. By reducing details and narrowing the narrative focus to a lyric subjectivity that frequently approximates the first person, Carson makes Geryon the representative of passion *in extremis* in “Autobiography of Red” and concentrates the reader’s empathy on her little red misfit.

Although Carson sometimes claims not to “fee[1] easy talking about blood or desire” (*Plainwater* 189), Eros is in fact the subject of her first collection of essays and the principal theme of her poetry. “The vocation of anger is not mine,” Carson writes in “The Glass Essay”:

I know my source.  
It is stunning, it is a moment like no other,  
when one’s lover comes in and says I do not love you anymore. (*Glass* 30-31)

By translating the power struggle between Herakles and Geryon in the *Geryoneis* into a story of sexual conquest and unrequited love, Carson once again addresses “that custom, the human custom / of wrong love” (*Red* 75). Geryon’s love is not wrong because he is gay. On the contrary, Carson offers sensitive renderings of same-sex desire in several of her long poems, most strikingly in “Irony is Not Enough: Essay on My Life as Catherine Deneuve” (about a professor of ancient Greek who falls in love with one of her female students). Geryon’s sexuality serves instead to complete his alienation. His desire pushes him away from his (otherwise) supportive mother and makes him dependent on Herakles at the very moment that Herakles terminates their love affair. It is from this perspective of powerful desire and disempowering attachment that Carson prefers to explore “How people get power over one another,/ this mystery” (*Red* 79). Dominant-subordinate relations—particularly their inversion—fascinate Carson, whether the relations be between men, between women, between men and women, or between a master-text and its adaptation.

Carson’s genre-mixing is appropriate in this context because, as she explains in *Eros the Bittersweet*, the “terms ‘novel’ and ‘romance’ do not reflect an ancient name for the genre. Chariton refers to his work as *erōtika pathēmata*, or ‘erotic sufferings’: these are love stories in which it is generically required that love be painful” (78). Most of Geryon’s “erotic suffering” takes place in Erytheia, a combination of Stesichoros’s mythic “Red Place” and contemporary Montreal. <sup>6</sup> “Somehow Geryon make[s] it to adolescence” (39) in

this setting, surviving his brother's sexual abuse and the humiliation that a public school would hold for a winged red child. Then, in "one of those moments that is the opposite of blindness," "Herakles step[s] off / the bus from New Mexico" (39) and Geryon falls in love. The term "wrong love" acquires a double-meaning in this scene because of the echo in Carson's metaphor of blind Stesichoros "restored to his nature." In Geryon's visionary moment of sexual awakening, he sees that gay love is right for him, yet he is blind to his choice of lover. It takes Geryon the entire course of the narrative to admit that his unrequited desire, his "wrong love" for Herakles, is "[d]egrading" (144).

There is a hint of national allegory here as Herakles makes a quick conquest of Geryon and, tiring of him, moves on to more exotic challenges in South America. Carson's portrait of Herakles matches his traditional profile as "the heroic individual, performing incredible feats, single-handed, in remote corners of the earth" (Maingon 292). In Stesichoros's *Geryoneis*, Herakles represents the unitary subject battling hybrid monsters at the edges of Greek empire. With a club and arrows dipped in the gall of the many-headed hydra (slain in the second labour), Herakles kills the two-headed guard dog Orthos and then destroys (the fragments suggest) each of Geryon's three heads individually. Similarly, in "Autobiography of Red," Herakles "slays" the man-dragon of the north and then assumes control over his Quechua-Peruvian lover Ancash—"a man as beautiful as a live feather" (112) whose name suggests both economic and cultural currency (Ancash's name occurs in a Quechua folk song that Herakles sings against Ancash's wishes). As if to confirm Herakles's covetousness, the "master of monsters" (129) enlists Geryon and Ancash to help him steal a statue of Tezca the tiger god when Geryon runs into the couple in Buenos Aires years later.

However, one should not push the national allegory too far. Carson has also taught at Berkeley and all but one of her books—*Short Talks* (Brick 1992), recollected in *Plainwater*—have been published in the United States. A recipient of the prestigious Lannan and Pushcart prizes, Carson has not yet been honoured with a Governor-General's award in her own country. Her border-crossing reputation is such that one American poetry editor calls Carson, without qualification, "our new Emerson" (Beam). While this is a high compliment in some circles, little in Carson's work suggests an interest in nation building, either Canadian or American. As the contemporary North American setting for her Geryon story indicates, Carson uses myth to span the borders of time and space, not to entrench national boundaries.

Furthermore, Carson's topography remains resolutely mythic. "Herakles' hometown of Hades" lies "at the other end of the island [Erytheia] about four hours by car, a town / of moderate size and little importance / except for one thing" (46), it has a volcano. On an early visit to this volcano, Herakles breaks up with Geryon and the molten, volatile volcano immediately becomes a metaphor for Geryon's emotional life. Years later, when Geryon runs into Herakles and Ancash in South America, they are recording the sound of volcanoes for a documentary on Emily Dickinson. The couple take Geryon with them to record the volcano Icchantikas in Peru, where Geryon finally frees himself from Herakles. Along the way, however, Ancash discovers Geryon's wings and tells him the Quechua myth of the Yazcol Yazcamac, eyewitnesses who descend into the volcano and "return as red people with wings, / all their weaknesses burned away— / and their mortality" (129). This mythic frame transforms Geryon's status as an outsider to that of a liminal figure—"One Who Went and Saw and Came Back" (128)—whose role is to transgress boundaries that others cannot cross.

The association of Geryon with volcanoes, "Lava Man" (59) and the Yazcol Yazcamac is not coincidental. In *Hercules' Labours* Jan Schoo argues that Geryon personifies the volcano El Tiede on the Canary Island of Tenerife. Schoo cites as evidence the meaning of Geryon's name ("roarer"), the winged images of the volcano Talos on Crete, and the fact that Geryon's dog Orthos is the "brother of Kerberos, the hellhound, one of the most outstanding representatives of the underworld" (Schoo 86). Maingon furthers the equation of Geryon with volcanoes by pointing out that in fragment 4 of the *Geryoneis*, Stesichoros uses the epithet κορυφή in its "less common sense of 'head'. . . [R]etaining the epithet most frequently associated with the word in its sense 'mountain'[,] he has deliberately suggested both potential meanings, magnifying the dimensions of the monster" (Maingon 60). This monster occupies a critical position between nature and culture, disorder and order, inhuman and human.

However, if one tries to determine the gender of this volcano/monster, an important fissure emerges in the narrative. The first reference to a volcano in the romance occurs in the opening stanza of its epigram, a heavily allegorical poem about speech and immortality by Emily Dickinson, #1748. The first stanza of #1748 offers a surprising variation on Dickinson's "often reiterated analogy of the self as a dormant volcano" (Dobson 107):

The reticent volcano keeps  
His never slumbering plan—



Confided are his projects pink  
To no precarious man. (*Red 22*)

While the masculine adjectives in this stanza may refer to the “Jehovah” of the second stanza, I choose to apply them to the volcano because Dickinson usually (see, for example, #1651, #1686)—though not always (see #1601)—capitalizes adjectives and pronouns referring to God. In either case, as an epigram, “his projects pink” alludes to Geryon’s “autobiography” which begins as “a sculpture” (*Red 35*) when the reticent monster is five years old. Ultimately, Geryon’s autobiography “take[s] the form / of a photographic essay” (60) and helps Geryon to get over the precarious Herakles. However, the fact that Geryon’s “photographic essay” is a thinly veiled metaphor for Carson’s lyric sequence (which culminates in a series of eight “photographs”) undermines Geryon’s masculinity. The final two stanzas in Dickinson’s poem compound this ambiguity. Like the antistrophe and epode in Stesichoros’s verse, Dickinson’s second stanza introduces a female counterpart to the male volcano, while the third stanza changes the mood with an abstract aphorism that reconciles male and female figures as “people” with a shared secret:

If nature will not tell the tale  
Jehovah told to her  
Can human nature not survive  
Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips  
Let every babbler be  
The only secret people keep  
Is Immortality. (*Red 22*)

The prize of immortality for which Geryon and Herakles struggle is, in Dickinson’s hymn, a secret divulged by neither the reticent volcano nor the woman with “buckled lips.” While this secret is not directly verbalized, Dickinson none the less conveys it as a property of “lyric time” (Cameron 4)—that sudden eruption of past and future into the poem’s present tense that Carson calls “*Volcano Time*” (*Red 144*). Both Dickinson and Carson prefer these lyric flashes of eternity to the plodding flow of continuous narrative: “Much truer / is the time that strays into photographs and stops” (*Red 93*). One of these moments occurs in photograph “#1748,” the synchronic and synaesthetic climax of Geryon’s erotic suffering, where Geryon takes Ancash’s tape recorder to the summit of Icchantikas to record an instant that blurs the borders between acoustic and visual, female and male, nature and culture.

Photograph “#1748” stands out because, in addition to sharing the numbered title of Dickinson’s epigram, it “is a photograph he [Geryon] never took, no one here took it” (*Red* 145). Following this ambiguous preamble, in which Carson once again casts doubt on the identity of the autobiographical subject, the “eyewitness” descends into eye/I of the volcano:

He peers down  
at the earth heart of Ichantikas dumping all its photons out her ancient eye and he  
smiles for  
the camera: “The Only Secret People Keep” (*Red* 145)

The picture taken of the eyewitness by “her ancient eye” in this scene is a kind of mirror image—a self-portrait that borrows its title from the final lines of Dickinson’s poem. Dickinson’s interjected fragment, like the Stein quotation earlier, enters the narrative abruptly, yet comes close enough to the end of the romance to frame it. The once-reticent male volcano thus concludes the romance using a feminine adjective and speaking in Dickinson’s voice. Carson completes this transition from phallic to labial imagery in the concluding lyric where the three men stare at “the hole of fire” in the side of the volcano and Carson explicitly distinguishes between the men and the fire to which they are “neighbors” (146).

Such “lateral fissures”—“called fire lips by vulcanologists” (105)—permeate Carson’s romance. The most striking example occurs in the poem “She,” where Geryon finds himself in the bedroom of Herakles’s mother and asks, “Who am I?” (57). Surveying the mother’s pearls and slips, Geryon is shocked to see himself “in the mirror cruel as a slash of lipstick. . . / He had been here before, dangling / inside the word *she* like a trinket at a belt” (57). While this simile seems to disparage a sense of femininity as passive and ornamental, the pronoun “she” carries extra weight coming from a poet who tells di Michele: “I cannot stand reading reviews of my work (I skim) or in general sentences in which I appear as ‘she’” (di Michele 17). Di Michele pursues the question of why Carson presents herself as “a person of no particular gender” (*Plainwater* 123) in her writing:

MDM: In “The Anthropology of Water” you write: “I am not a person who feels easy talking about blood or desire. I rarely use the word woman myself . . . The truth is, I lived out my adolescence mainly in default of my father’s favour. But I perceived I could trouble him less if I had no gender . . . I made my body hard and flat as the armor of Athena. No secrets under my skin, no telltale drops on the threshold.” What is the relationship of your writing to this word “woman”? To being a woman?

AC: A relationship of dis-ease as I suggested in the passage you quote.

MDM: Are “feminisms” of interest to you?

AC: Not currently. Particular females are of interest to me. (14)

Although Carson names Stein and Dickinson among the writers of interest to her, she clearly does not present herself as a proponent of an *écriture féminine*.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, however, that Carson’s relationship to patriarchy in “The Anthropology of Water” is also one of “dis-ease.” This long poem begins with Carson struggling to understand the “word salad” (*Plainwater* 120) of her ailing father, who suffers from dementia, and concludes with Carson writing from the perspective of her estranged brother. As in *Autobiography of Red*, Carson treats gender here as a phenomenon to be explored through fictional guises. If Carson presents herself as a person “of no particular gender” in her writing, it is because she refuses to restrict herself to the perspective of a woman. Similarly, if Carson’s novel-in-verse is of no particular genre, it is because Carson wants to explore what Manina Jones calls *That Art of Difference*: collage.

The fundamental question in *Autobiography of Red* is thus not whether Geryon is “he” or “she,” but rather how this “monster” can negotiate the conflicts entailed by loving and existing in a world more complex than its social, linguistic, and literary conventions would suggest. “Gay, red and winged,” Geryon “wants to know how to survive in a world where difference equals pain” (Marlatt 42). Herakles’s photographer grandmother suggests one solution to this dilemma by redefining Geryon’s question during a conversation on women and art: “Question is / how they use it—given / the limits of form” (67). Nowhere is Carson’s questioning of gender as a question of genre more explicit.

The final section of *Autobiography of Red* tests the limits of gender and genre. Titled simply “Interview”—with “(Stesichoros)” set below the title and divided from it by a double line—it unfolds as a dialogue about literature:

I: One critic speaks of a sort of “concealment drama” going on in your work some special interest in finding out what or how people act when they know that important information is being withheld this might have to do with an aesthetic of blindness or even a will to blindness if that is not a tautology

S: I will tell about blindness

I: Yes do

S: First I must tell about seeing (*Red* 147)

Carson sets up the reader to expect Stesichoros to describe his blinding by Helen. However, the conversation makes a sudden chronological leap:

S: Up to 1907 I was seriously interested in seeing I studied and practiced it I enjoyed it

I: 1907

S: I will tell about 1907 . . . Paintings completely covered the walls right up to the ceiling at the time the atelier was lit by gas fixtures and it glowed like a dogma but this is not what I saw (*Red* 147)

This shift in time-frame alerts the reader that returning to Carson's "scholarly apparatus" entails entering "a wickedly parodistic parallel universe to the novel inside it" (Macklin). The proem and interview surrounding Carson's romance prove not to be merely a passive frame, but rather active agents in determining the course of the larger story. As Jacques Derrida argues in "Parergon," an essay on framing in *The Truth in Painting*, those elements marked as extrinsic to the *ergon*, or principal artwork, in fact perform an intrinsic function in mediating the borders of that artwork (71). Carson employs this mediating power to shift the focus of the story and resituate Stein, Helen, and Dickinson—women marked as extrinsic to the history of Stesichoros, Geryon and Herakles—in more intrinsic positions. This manipulation of frames is a question of self-definition for "ex-centric" (Hutcheon 4) writers because, as Derrida notes, "*Parergon* also means the exceptional, the strange, the extraordinary" (58), revealing how easy it is for exceptional writers such as Stein and Dickinson to be dismissed as merely strange.

With the temporal frame destabilized, the reader's eye turns towards the left margin of the interview transcript for several reasons. First of all, the references to a gas-lit atelier, paintings and 1907 make it clear that the "S" in the column stands for Stein, not Stesichoros. Second, *Autobiography of Red* has been, thus far, an autobiography without an "I." Suddenly the reader is confronted with an interviewing "I" speaking in the first person. Remembering that Stesichoros often "spok[e] in his own *persona* in the introduction and conclusion of his poems" without "intru[ding] within the framework of the narrative itself" (Maingon 358), one is to presume that the interviewing "I" is Carson's academic persona returning from the proem. Thus the women's voices framing the male narrative have moved from the extrinsic positions of epigram and proem to occupy more intrinsic positions in a story they actively create as direct speakers.

Carson achieves this subversive manoeuvre within the limits of literary form. According to myth, each of Herakles's 12 *althoi* or *erga*, labours or works, included minor deeds called *parerga* or *side-works* (Schoo 7). Thus, the *ergon* of stealing the red cattle included the *parerga* of killing Geryon and Orthos. Stesichoros transforms the myth of Herakles into the *Geryoneis* by moving the parergonal figure of Geryon from the myth's periphery to its

centre stage. Carson duplicates this parergonal movement by having Stein supplant Stesichoros in the mock-interview. Just as Carson's opening section on Stesichoros begins with an epigram from Stein, the final section on Stein begins with the proper noun "(Stesichoros)" suspended in parentheses. The choir master unmastered figures as the starting point in a word play between Stein and Carson where the contemporary poet accentuates the epithetic origins of the Greek proper noun. Once famous for his adjectives, Stesichoros looks on from the wings as the women's concealment drama takes centre stage. The reputed inventor of the choral hymn (a form of performance involving multiple singers and dance and a precursor of drama) finds himself listening silently to a duet of female voices, neither of which appears to command control. This *hymn* become *her* casts an ironic pall over the title of the romance's final lyric, "XLVII. The Flashes in Which a Man Possesses Himself." Clearly, women's voices have taken possession of the narrative at this point.

Carson, like Stein, parodies autobiography's pretense to objective self-expression by using the genre as a means of fictional disembodiment. In Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, for example, Stein tells the story of her life through the fictional voice of her lover, Alice Toklas. Only on the final page of Toklas's autobiography does Stein concede her authorial ruse. Stein's originality—as Shirley Neuman argues in *Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration*—lies in her "repudiation for literary purposes of the continuity of the self":

Once [Stein] reconceptualizes narrative as that written as though by someone else, as analogous to translation, she begins to free herself to write about the "self" without concern for its duration and consequent identity. (Neuman 17)

Carson, likewise, dons several literary disguises—Athena, Stesichoros, Geryon, Stein—in search of "another human essence than self" (*Glass* 137). Each of the distinct voices in her identity collage offers a kind of testimony that, while it cannot be "regarded as credible history," none the less shapes "our notion of who the poet [i]s as a person."

And Carson's concealment drama has a final act. Reading the interview's marginal inscription vertically, one finds that the Steinian "ISISISISISISISISISIS" transforms—through the difference generated by repetition—from an assertion of being "*Is is*" to an ontological question "*Is is?*" And who could the subject hiding behind these verbs be but Isis, "she of the thousand titles" (Goodrich 27)? As a clue to this encryption, the Montrealer disguises her

voice in vintage Montmartre and shifts “Isis” from the left margin to the main narrative:

I: Description can we talk about description

S: What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it *is is* a description (*Red* 148, my emphasis)<sup>8</sup>

Isis is not directly named here, she is de-scribed, her name fragmentarily crypted in a passage that stresses the difference between surface appearance and a dynamic understanding of form. Such concealment pays homage to the goddess, as Plutarch explains: “At Saes the seated statue of Athena, whom they consider to be Isis also, bore the following inscription: ‘I am all that has been and is and will be; and no mortal has ever lifted my mantle’” (131). The secret Isis keeps, having struggled hard to win it for Osiris and herself, is immortality.

Thus, Carson does not use the *Geryoneis* or the myth of Isis as a fixed template, but rather sets in motion a series of literary allusions that intertwines ancient and modern, masculine and feminine, Greek and Quechua, Egyptian and Canadian. These surprising juxtapositions are the hallmark of Carson’s style, whether in long poems such as “The Glass Essay,” where she “weaves and conflates one theme with another . . . tell[ing] two strong stories with Tolstoyan skill” (Davenport ix), or in academic works such as *Economy of the Unlost* (*Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan*), where Carson explains her technique in a “Note on Method”:

To keep attention strong means to keep it from settling. Partly for this reason I have chosen to talk about two men at once. They keep each other from settling. Moving and not settling, they are side by side in a conversation and yet no conversation takes place. . . . With and against, aligned and adverse, each is like a surface on which the other may come into focus. (*Economy* viii)

In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson manipulates and conflates her source material, “exploding genres and making literature from shrapnel” (Greenman). Drawing female and male literary figures into closer focus through a series of alternating frames, Carson combines the Osirian art of writing with the Isian art of weaving to create “good strong narrative” through constant fragmentation and displacement of material. These shifting frames of reference are far from settled, as the reappearance of the “little red dog” (149) in the final lines of the interview underscores. *Autobiography of Red* thus demonstrates that the frameworks of myth, genre, and gender are volatile and constantly subject to revision.

NOTES

- 1 This review of *Men in the Off Hours* appears only in the Canadian edition of *Time*, however.
- 2 In translation, at least, "The Red Place" is a noun. However, the confusion of nouns and adjectives plays a key role in Carson's treatment of the epithetic proper noun "Stesichoros."
- 3 Also translated as "whore that I am" (Fagles 3.128) or "shameless bitch / that I am" (Lombardo 3.190-191). It should be noted that the translators make no attempt to lessen the pungency of these remarks. On the contrary, Lattimore's use of "slut" in a 1951 translation suggests a certain inventiveness and relish in the task.
- 4 Also translated as "bitch that I am, vicious, scheming" (Fagles 6.408) or "scheming, cold-blooded bitch" (Lombardo 6.362).
- 5 I have not been able to locate the text from which this quotation derives. It would not surprise me if the epigram is, in fact, Carson imitating Stein (as in "Appendix C") or Carson paraphrasing Stein (as in the interview).
- 6 Carson's Erytheia is a North American island where older brothers play hockey (34), where baby-sitters read from "the loon book" (32), where an American dollar bill is a novelty (29), and where schoolchildren examine "beluga whales newly captured / from the upper rapids of the Churchill River" (90).
- 7 Carson's reluctance to be identified as a feminist appears to stem from her general refusal of categories. Asked whether her multi-genre approach to writing poses a problem for bookstore clerks, Carson replies: "Not a problem but a question: What do 'shelves' accomplish, in stores or in the mind" (di Michele 10).
- 8 This statement is a paraphrase of Stein's meditations on style in "An Acquaintance with Description." Carson's syntax echoes a construction that Stein uses repeatedly in the piece: "What is the difference between a hedge and a tree. A hedge and a tree what is the difference between a hedge and a tree" (Stein 508).

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