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Abstract
This work seeks to explore the monster figure in its evolution from the Classical to the contemporary literary canons. Using Geryon, a three-headed and red-hued monster, as the central figure and Carson’s 1998 verse novel Autobiography of Red, it evaluates the underpinnings of the alienated “other” and attempts to shed light on its role in modern society.

Keywords
Monster, Carson, Greek

Disciplines
Classical Literature and Philology | English Language and Literature

Comments
Written as a senior thesis for English.
"Under the Seams Runs the Pain":
FOUR GREEK SOURCES and ANALOGUES
for Contemporary Monster
in Anne Carson's Autobiography of Red

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2013 Senior Honors Thesis
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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“Under the Seams Runs the Pain”: Four Greek Sources and Analogues for the Contemporary Monster in Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*

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Introductory Note:
The genesis of this senior project owes a good deal not only to the ever-diligent Departments of Classics and English at Gettysburg College, both of which liberally furnished the tools necessary for its completion and established a wonderful literary nexus ripe for examination, but also to an articulate graduate paper written by Raphael Ng of the University of Toronto, and entitled “The Autobiography of the Modern Monster: Anne Carson’s Geryon.” Ng’s evaluation of the culturally circumscribed spaces parceled out for monster and hero, as well as the transformations wrought by both as they act upon competing rubrics of social authority, was instrumental in prompting my own exploration of the thornier sources and analogues used by Carson. The paper provided below attempts to chart the comparative social frameworks employed by Carson and Stesichorus, and further contextualized by Hesiod, Pindar, and Pseudo-Apollodorus, in crafting their monsters. Emphasis will be placed not only on the etymological origins of the word “monster” in the Greek, Latin, and English lexicons but also the flesh and blood implications of such a designation as it flourishes within different social milieus and evolves according to ever-altering zeitgeists in both the classical and contemporary social and literary worlds.

Acknowledgments:
There are so many people who deserve gratitude for their unflappable aid on this project, and I cannot begin to thank each and every one. I must thank my thesis advisor, Professor Christopher Fee, for his superior guidance and unparalleled endurance in weathering more e-mails than any man should, Professor Robert Garnett, for providing a much needed earpiece off which to sound the woes of all the honors students, Professor Stefanie Sobelle, for helping me to get the proverbial ball rolling, my English advisor Professor Joanne Myers, for sparking my journey in the department, Professor Leonard Goldberg, for fortifying my confidence, Professor Brett Rogers, Professor Jonathan David, and Dr. Michele Lucchessi, for all of the Greek that I know, Dr. Ian Isherwood, for his commiseration and wit, Linda Miller, for always picking me up when I was down, Rebecca Barth, for her warmth and kindness when I needed them most, my roommates, John Nelson, Josh Poorman, Alex Skufca, and Dave DeBor, who saw me at my best and my very worst, my friends Amelia Grabowski, Phoebe Sumas, and Audra Foster, who never tired of my foul mood when writing, my brothers, Alex and Matt, who thought that this process could be no worse than sharing a womb together and were duly disproven, and my parents, Laurie and Jon, who have always supported me on a steady diet of love and inspiration. All mistakes are mine and mine alone.

Note on Translations:
All Greek translations presented within, unless otherwise noted, were rendered by the author. Nevertheless, I found it prudent, where I used my own translation, also to consult experts in the field, mainly M.L. West for Hesiod, Denys Page, W.S. Barrett, Paul Curtis, Malcolm Davies, and David Campbell for Stesichorus, Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff for Pindar, and James Frazer, R. Scott Smith, and Stephen M. Trzaskoma for Pseudo-Apollodorus, in order to frame, further contextualize, and corroborate my own interpretations.
“Although a Monster Geryon Could be Charming in Company”: 1 Introduction—Anne Carson, the Geryonic Monster, and the New Model of Monster Theory

On the first page of her 1998 verse novel Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse, 2 Canadian classicist and author Anne Carson writes that a “refugee population is hungry for language and aware that anything can happen. Words bounce. Words, if you let them, will do what they want to do and what they have to do.” 3 In much the same manner as Stesichorus, the 6th century Himeraean lyric poet to whom Carson refers, the contemporary discourse surrounding the monster is one that has been stymied by an insatiable appetite. A wide range of academics—authors, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists—have rushed to fill the void created by the monster and the monstrous with numberless theories germane to their respective disciplines, and the dialogues preoccupied with its characterization are diverse in both form and substance. Little, however, has been done to unburden monster theory of its most pressing questions. While tracts have been penned by notable scholars from Sherwood Anderson to Michel Foucault, John Milton to Sigmund Freud, and while monsters have been subject to varying levels of scrutiny under an equally variant number of lenses, the controlling notion that “our monsters have always resisted us” 4 has endured. Perhaps this is a product of the belief that any study of the monster figure is also an examination of the slippery social lexicon used to

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2 It is worth noting at this early juncture that a sequel to Carson’s novel, entitled Red Doc>, was published on March 5th, 2013. While it ultimately escapes the parameters of and deadline for this paper, a brief discussion for elucidative purposes is nonetheless warranted. In publishing Autobiography of Red, Carson maintained the integrity of the poet without wholly shirking the shell of the classicist. Her tale, at its core, is a classical revision much in the same vein as Eugene O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra, Jean Racine’s Phedre, C.S. Lewis’s Till We Have Faces, and Margaret Atwood’s The Penelopiad. However, and with the ominous acknowledgement that “to live past the end of your own myth is a perilous thing,” Red Doc> seeks to throw off the yoke of revision in favor of pure fiction. While classically influenced, it is undoubtedly the work of poetry, and would benefit in the future from such an evaluation.
3 Carson, 3.
confront the alienated and absolute other,\(^5\) and that the broad cultural implications present, while ripe for investigation, often elude the most specific study. More probably, however, this notion is inextricable from the suggestion that monsters are associated not merely with identity or the attempt to parcel out familiar units of character but also with issues of consanguinity and legitimacy. The figure of the monster—when properly distilled—is the problematic point of convergence where concerns about separation and ostracization meet those about recognized legitimacy and the composition of civilization,\(^6\) and must instead be viewed within those parameters.

In this vein, Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* provides a creative platform that gives voice to modern scholarship on the monstrous without contradicting that scholarship’s quixotic nature. She creates, in a similar manner as John Gardner’s *Grendel*, a temporalizing agent that makes use of modern cultural capital in order to familiarize the unfamiliar. Contrary to Gardner’s project, however, Carson maintains the thread of literary and social evolution inherent in any classical revision, and, in acknowledging Georges Canguilhem’s contention that “the existence of monsters throws doubt on life’s ability to teach us order,”\(^7\) arranges her verse and subject matter on two staggered literary planes. While her writing is evocative of that of her Hellenic predecessors, Stesichorus and other contemporaneous dactylic poets, her subject matter is laced with the catechism of twentieth and twenty-first century social concern.


\(^{6}\) The same has been argued about illegitimate children in Ancient Greece, nominally referred to as νόθοι (nothoi), among other epithets. The noun form of the term is derived from the verb νοθόω (nothoō) meaning “I make counterfeit.” There is something traditionally perceived as false or artificial in illegitimacy that casts a metaphorical shadow on parentage, and a similar sense of apprehension over absent legitimacy pervades the monster. It is the strictest transgression of established boundaries. Vid. Mary Ebbott, *Imagining Illegitimacy in Classical Greek Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003): 1, 2.

Constructed as a modern *Bildungsroman*, and crafted to convey the adolescent and early adulthood of the red-hued and winged Geryon, *Autobiography of Red* offers commentary on the perceptible distances inborn in “otherness” and extends the introspective framework begun in works like Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and later McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City*. Even the chief protagonist of Carson’s work, Geryon, is far from a historyless pariah or absurdist psychological composite, and has instead successfully flourished in the long, lacunae-riddled, and largely-footnoted literary canon of Western civilization. He skirts the lines of Hesiod, Stesichorus, Pindar, Pseudo-Apollodorus, Aeschylus, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Spenser, and lands among the partially delocalized Latin American borders of Carson’s novel as the archetypical monster figure commented on at length by authors and oft-forgotten by their readership, the anthropomorphic hybrid that prompts a species crisis, and the stylized symbol of conflicted legitimization.8

Geryon’s transmission, and, more broadly, the transmission of the Geryon myth, is as much a product of his collective authorial creation as it is the substantive representation of the primordial world that he embodies. Carson’s contribution to the collage is one of sensitivity, precocity, magical realism, and complicated affection.9 *Autobiography of Red* maintains a complex relationship with its sources, which are entangled within a socio-literary nexus that is not easily untwined. Nevertheless, with the novel’s emphasis on mytho-geographical mapping10 and the colorful hues of human heart-break, Carson’s novella-length verse project is responsible for reappropriating the image of the social monster and softening the conventional boundary that separates it from civilization.

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10 Carson truncates the scope of real and mythical locations. Consequentially, Hades is a four hour car ride from New Mexico. Vid. Carson, 77.
Such is engineered in many different ways: the hazy temporal manner in which past and present, myth and history blend seamlessly, the stark dimensionality of previously linear figures, and the heightened plasticity of the mythical narrative. While each will meet with discussion in its own turn, the purpose of this project is simply (or not simply) to evaluate the person of Geryon as he evolves from text to text in the classical literature underscoring *Autobiography of Red*, and to further shed light on the new model of monster theory established by its author. Carson utilizes classical revision in order to contribute to the relatively new discipline a sense of history, of cultural and literary legitimacy, and of prevalence in the crucible of post-modern criticism. Through a thorough investigation of four Greek sources and analogues for Geryon, one may glimpse the skeletal framework of the modern monster. It is only though such a process that the tradition in which it flourishes, framed with all of its implicative associations, finds room for further commentary and diversity. First, however, it will prove greatly beneficial to address a brief theoretical and etymological overview of the monster.

“I Ought to be Thy Adam; but Rather I am the Fallen Angel”: Theory, Etymology, and Ideology in Classing the Monster

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful… And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths... It was the truths that made the people grotesques.

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11 While this paper does more than hint at intertextuality, its chief concern is with those base composites employed by Carson in the construction of her Geryon. Beyond the Greek authors who will be addressed in the text exists a number of writers, all of whom have been used by Carson in order to sustain the poetic skeleton of her novel. They include, but are certainly not limited to, Sophocles, Sappho, Plato, Callimachus, Dante, Edmund Spenser, Daniel Defoe, Martin Heidegger, John Yeats, Walt Whitman, Paul Celan. For a closer study vid., Edith Hall, “The Autobiography of the Western Subject: Carson’s Geryon,” in *Living Classics*, ed. J.J. Harrison, pg. 218-237 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).


Joseph Conrad wrote in 1911 that “a belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.”

Despite his assertion in *Under Western Eyes*, authors for time immemorial have devoted an excess of pages to the creation, qualification, and further complication of non-human, bestial, or deranged monster figures. Literary traditions are populated with their byproducts—chimerical griffins, hybrid demons, anthropomorphic villains, and superhuman or subhuman behemoths—all of which have flourished as agonists in mythic fables or polarizing storybook fantasies with parabolic points of interest. It has been unraveling the etiologies that underscore the monster—its purpose in parable—which has proven a chief sticking point and primary confounding factor for contemporary evaluations. The miscreations that once existed as linear composites in Hesiod or Homer have met with those staggered and incremental humanizing forces which were so instrumental in expanding the monster of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and subsequently Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The notion of the monster as an elusive non-human entity, protean in form and Janus-like in character, however, has persisted.

The complications that arise from any attempt to classify the monster are twofold: a circumscribed definition is frustrated as restrictive and a universal threatened as overbroad. The monster’s wavering depictions have also provoked a wide range of critical interpretations. Although there exists most probably no singular or static definition that will remain unmolested by criticism or unchecked by the shifting incongruities of any one social milieu, countless theorists have attempted to pin down the lubricious body of the monster. Jeremy J. Cohen, for

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16 Asma, 282.
instance, argues that “we live in a time of monsters.” Accordingly, monsters have been progressively transmitted through vibrant cultural media, and subject to increasing levels of diversification and exposure. One of his seven hypotheses of the monstrous echoes both Heideggerian phenomenological thought on time and subjectivity, and a Foucauldian assessment of cultural behavior. He writes:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads [the juncture between knowledge of oneself as subject and as a pure body], as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the _monstrum_ is etymologically ‘that which reveals,’ ‘that which warns,’ a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on a page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhibits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment in which it is received, to be born again.

Cohen’s theory is labyrinthine and multi-tiered. Although it runs the risk of seeming at points convoluted, its formalized incorporation of theory past and present adds a compelling prong to its compact presentation. The monster is more than a solipsistic entity, incapable of introspective force, and relegated to the impressionable template acted upon by its viewer. It appears, if Cohen’s notion is extrapolated, that the figure of the monster is a panopticonic relic, a medium itself capable of both imbibing and eliciting the entirety of the emotional spectrum. What is more, it is something (not someone) that is far from physicalized, a Platonic shade and a semiotic symbol that can be evoked if one closely investigates the temporal gaps in between crucial cultural moments. While the monster retains a body in Cohen’s conception, it is one that seems beyond its locus of control, an elemental force that with Grendelian certitude and prophetic insistence rallies against boundaries. It is worth noting, however, that the monster of Cohen’s

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definition, while significant in its sheer multiplicity and elucidative form, is almost everything that Carson attempts to clarify in her work.

Cohen is neither the first nor the last figure to posit a denotative solution to the monster or its derivative components. Sherwood Anderson, as established before, provides a literary platform not for the evaluation of the monster but instead of the grotesque. Grotesqueness, like monstrosity, maintains a long and illustrious lexical history of alteration. Initially a decorative painting or sculpture consisting of partitive representations of human and animal forms, it came subsequently to reflect distortion and unnatural combination, as well as ludicrous incongruity. It too was out of keeping with the appropriate scale of nature, and, therefore, required some alternative qualification. For Anderson the grotesque involved acquisition of human-wrought truths, which, in one of the truest adherences to its original 16th century employment, distorted portions of the physical person and perverted spiritual composition as well.

A notion with similar implications is posited by Mary Douglas in her anthropological presentation of pollution and taboo. According to Douglas the regulation of pollutants is of primary importance to the homeostasis of society, and as its broad moral backbone, acts as an important legislator of necessary social boundaries that exist both within and without the body. She writes:

I have tried to show that rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience… Pollution ideas work in the life of the society at two levels, one largely instrumental, one expressive. At the first level, the more obvious one, we find people trying to influence one another’s behavior. Beliefs reinforce social pressures: all the powers of the universe are called in to guarantee an old man’s dying wish, a mother’s dignity, the rights of the weak and innocent… Similarly the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressions. These danger-beliefs are as

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21 Anderson, 6.
much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. They are a strong language of mutual exhortation. At this level the laws of nature dragged in to sanction the moral code: this kind of disease is caused by adultery, that by incest; this meteorological disaster is the effect of political disloyalty, that the effect of impiety. The whole universe is harnessed to men’s attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbors or children. 23

Douglas’s argument, framed as it is by primordial occupation with sympathetic magic and protective ritual, suggests also a model for the totemic displacement of the monster. 24 In the absence of a stable process for the transference or attenuation of pollution, a tertiary figure often absorbs guilt produced by social, political, or religious transgressions. It is at this juncture, when good citizenship fails, that the monster incipiently shares space with sympathetic magic. Misfortunes without traceable antecedents require explanation, the delineation of a cause for an illness or ill-omen, which alleviates the sense of panic produced by intransitive catastrophe.

Such is the crux of the Pandora myth: a contrived figure enters a circumscribed space and, almost unwittingly, injures those inhabiting it. 25 Although it may be overly simplistic to claim that the monster is a universal derivative of Pandoran guilt, the attributes inborn in both—as testified to in literature—make such a cross-cultural parallel fecund. Like Pandora, the destabilizing force of the monster, which enters the crucial interstices between pollution and formalized taboo, also permits the possibility of hope. There is hope that the hero will restore peace or rectify an error, hope that Heorot will not face destruction, hope that mercy will temper the blow dealt to Victor’s family, all of which emanates from the concentrated monster figure. In Cohenian language, the monster, regardless of its commitment to evil, maintains an antiphrastic

24 For a broader overview of totemic beliefs and the ritual theory of myth, as well as a more thorough presentation of general theories of myth, vid. Eric Csapo, Theories of Mythology (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).
25 A comprehensive structural analysis of the Pandora myth was undertaken by anthropologist and French historian Jean-Pierre Vernant. Vid. Csapo, 254-261.
capability. It implies, in other words, the capacity for its opposite both in form and substance. A fitting example is drawn *inter alia* from *Beowulf*. Rather ludicrously, without Grendel’s invasion the necessity for hope would have been diminished or non-existent. The violation of the monster figure prompts a dual advantage: it fosters unity between external groups and also permits a possibility of hope that serves as the kernel of endurance. The monster is a duplicitous agent that provokes as it evokes, and serves ontological ends as it promotes phylogenetic. It is, moreover, best fleshed out as an intermediary between the socio-emotional spectrum of a constructed civilization and its native dwellers. 26

Pollution and grotesqueness are characteristics, along with terribleness, awfulness, and revulsion, which, although not strictly related to the monster, have been leveled against it on numerous occasions. They are both qualities that generate components of the monster, and also feature directly in theories concerning its formation. Foucault saw the monstrous as a result of the problematic relationship of individuals to groups, the psychological complication of freedom and cultural discourse which impaired creative action,27 and carved out space for the “human/animal hybrid [that] occupies a central place… in legal history.”28 It is, like many of its counterparts, an indirect theory of the monster that presupposes, and therefore comments upon, supplemental parts to satisfy the whole. In a similar manner, Freud’s presentation of the uncanny also contributes a compelling angle to the monstrous. According to the author, the uncanny is “undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror,”29 as first addressed by psychologist Ernst Jenscht. More to the point, the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is the

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28 Sharpe, 6.
opposite of what is familiar, and derives its frightening aspect from that quality.30 The same
theory applied to the monstrous—its unfamiliar association and inherent ambivalence as
transgressor—is also applied to the uncanny. In its emotional capacity to produce a double image
that has the ability to observe, criticize and censor the self, and to generate the illogical
superstitious dread associated with animistic and atavistic units in the collective unconscious,31
the monster—while not a proof positive embodiment—certainly produces disturbance. Like the
uncanny, it exists within the self, and, although often metastasized to the external realm, it
produces keen internal dissonance. The veritable frights that are a product of superstition are also
those which motivate the monster, and prompt in equal measure the maintenance of
psychological and municipal boundaries. Such is in none more poignantly carried than
Frankenstein’s monster, whose presence as a sentient creation is a direct manifestation of
Victor’s nondisjunction between unconscious and conscious spheres. His artificial progeny is a
direct challenge to self-censorship, and an uncanny and frenzied reflection of himself as maker.

All of the above notions serve in the aggregate as a crucial critical lens for evaluating
Carson’s project, and feature, partially or wholly, in Autobiography of Red. There elements are
subject to a certain level of synchronicity and, in conjunction with other philosophical and
psychological units, compose the sweeping skeleton of Carson’s hybrid world. Grotesqueness
and subjectivity of time and space both confront the machinations of the uncanny in crafting the
contemporary monster, and, by extension, the contemporary Geryon. For instance, that Carson’s
Geryon is chiefly a photographer—concerned not only with the fragility of boxing in time but
also the camera obscura representation of natural elements—demonstrates his adherence to
physical distortion as a form of uncanny creation. His ideological industry in juxtaposing paused

30 Ibid., 195. For a more comprehensive etymological evaluation of the uncanny, vid.: Freud, “The Uncanny,” pg.
195-199.
31 Ibid., 210-11, 216-217.
reality with its inchoative counterpart mirrors the theoretical process by which the monster is
drawn into existence by the author, an action which must contend not only with symbolic
generation but also the checkered etymological history of the monster. Like many words in the
English language, “monster” has run the rough road of linguistic growth, faced the sharp buffets
of neologicistic introduction, and weathered a host of competing interpretations in order to reach
its current denotation.

The term itself, in all of its incarnations, is a lexical nemesis. Impossible to reconcile for
the modern reader, and equally contentious to the modern writer, its divergent implications are
mirrored only by its widely disparate evolution. More broadly, contemporary notions have relied
upon the perceived nexus that exists between immorality and physical deformity, while classical
adhere to fragmented mythological associations. Both, however, are extricated from a tradition
of evaluation which places greater emphasis on the individual creature, the aberrational progeny
of primordial deities or the primary opponent of divine mandate, than it does on general
terminology used to affirm a catchall.

Monster has its root in the Latin cognate mōnstrum, denoting anything from a portent or
prodigy, to a wicked person or atrocity, and its corresponding verb moneō, monēre, meaning to
warn, advise, and, most poignantly, to remind. It was later adapted to the Anglo-Norman and
Middle English monstre, moustre in the mid-12th century, which reflected the traditional sense of
“prodigy” or “marvel,” and which, in the 13th century, prefigured a more modern emphasis on
disfigurement and misshapen form. Although in the mid-13th century the term acquired a brief
association with paganism, and later in the 18th century the quality of an antiphrasative suggesting

32 “monster, n., adv., and adj.” OED Online, Oxford University, accessed: September 15, 2012,
33 Idem.
an item of extraordinary attraction, its original Latinate and subsequent Middle English orthographic and linguistic configurations have endured well into the contemporary period.\textsuperscript{34}

The first employment of the term in its original form as “a mythical creature which is part animal and part human,”\textsuperscript{35} and later as “any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening,”\textsuperscript{36} was provided by Chaucer in 1375 in his \textit{Monk’s Tale}. Chaucer writes, “was neure wight sith that this world bigan, / That slow so manye monstres as dide he.”\textsuperscript{37} His allusion to Herakles, the Greek demigod and venerable divine hero often exalted for his encounter with anthropomorphic beasts during the Twelve Labors mandated by Eurysthios, certainly suggests the definition provided above, and finds fitting association with the subject matter of this paper. That the monstrous was comprised of decidedly chimerical qualities is a notion commonplace in \textit{The Canterbury Tales}, and frequently maintained in such earlier works as Dante’s \textit{Inferno} and Aesop’s \textit{Fables}.

In 1384 John Wycliffe’s Bible resurfaced the original Latin implication of “something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; a prodigy, a marvel,”\textsuperscript{38} a denotation which, although widely favored in the 1600s, fell out of fashion in the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century and was instead replaced by the more novel illustration of “a creature of huge size.”\textsuperscript{39} Ultimately, however, it is the 1715 and 1759 characterizations of the monster in Charles Molloy’s \textit{Perplex’d Couple} and Oliver Goldsmith’s \textit{An Enquiry into the Present State of Learning} respectively as “an

\textsuperscript{34} Idem.
\textsuperscript{35} Idem.
\textsuperscript{36} Idem.
\textsuperscript{39} Idem.
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ugly or deformed persona, animal, or thing,” which have flourished throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and serves as the illustrative backbone of Carson’s monster figure.

The Hellenic record for the term is just as frenzied. There exists no one finite word for “monster” in the Greek Ionic, Doric, Attic, or even Koiné dialects. Much like its Latin and Old English linguistic offspring, the notion of the monstrous was diffused throughout a whole body of parallel nouns, adjectives, and verbs which evolved as a product of innovations made in the syntax and diction of the Greek language on a whole. The closest denotative suggestions are derived from the words: θήριον (therion), θήρ (ther), and κνώδαλον (knōdalon). In some manner, all three signify “a wild animal,” with the latter two advancing first the notion of those that are fabulous, sacred, or monstrous in size (such as the sphinx, centaur, or satyr in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides respectively), and later the serpent. While these words suggest qualities of alienation evocative of more modern denotations, any study seeking to evaluate the evolution of the monster figure from the classical to the contemporary literary spheres will find a corresponding referent problematized by the different mechanisms of language utilized Greek and English.

Nevertheless, the denotations catalogued in the OED and Liddell and Scott’s Greek Lexicon call for some overlap, and allow the reader to flesh out several definitive claims concerning the word. Primarily, the monster is not expressly non-human, such would invalidate

40 Idem.
41 Idem.
42 Vid. S.C. Woodhouse’s instrumental English-Greek dictionary for cross-listed words and definitions. Access: http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/Woodhouse/
43 “θήριον, θήρ, κνώδαλον, n., adj.,” H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, eds., Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). The word πέλωρον (pelōron) also suggests a similar definition, although in a widely different manner, and will be discussed in the Hesiod section of this paper.
its emphasis on aberration or alteration, but instead extra-human. While it may be overbroad to argue that the monster is not purely a philosophical creation, established to contradict, comport with, and accentuate social and cultural fears, such seems amply conveyed in its etymological history. As several transcendent writers contend, from Sophocles in his Philoctetes to Alexander Pope’s “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,” deformity is difference, and magnitude and incongruity alienating agents. The etymological history of the monster details its evolution from a strictly animalistic Hellenic conception to one that has incorporated finer gradations of difference well beyond the physical sphere. Regardless, while the monster may be a semiotic code for cultural study, it maintains no distinct cipher crucial for comprehending its multiplicity and promoting its definitive classification.

The monster of this paper, however, is not an indistinct or amorphous phantom. Regardless of the linguistic complexities that underscore any attempt to parse his existence—he is not once saddled with labels traditional expressive of the Hellenic monster figure—Geryon has endured a long and illustrious literary life, has survived classical and postmodern scrutiny, and will continue to buck the yoke of definition long after Carson’s Autobiography of Red. The question of merit that stands before the modern critic is not whether the figure of Geryon will continue his dissemination. That has been duly answered and addressed by preceding literary traditions. More appropriate are inquiries concerning how Geryon has evolved, through what manner and process he has done so, and what modern literature has done to complicate his figure. There is, furthermore, little use in challenging his qualification as a monster. He has been labeled one, if not by the Greeks, certainly by modern translators and commentators, since at
least the early 17th century. His thoroughly red complexion and winged body, as marks of physical deformity, have served to set him apart from his counterparts, and have proven the chief indictment whereupon he is branded.

Nevertheless, Geryon’s depiction in Carson’s verse novel underplays those attributes, and takes instead the agonizing process of introspection as its chief concern. It charts the odyssey of the monster from self-incrimination to self-actualization, from self-loathing to self-comprehension, and dangles the purported result over a palimpsestic precipice in which past and present comingle riotously. More directly, Geryon’s monstrous physical qualities are alluded to marginally in the text, while his psychological dilemmas in reconciling those characteristics serve as the crux of his narrative. In crafting her representation of Geryon, Carson employs a number of composites wrought by her predecessors, and melds their precursory images into a comprehensive whole. He is not the Geryon of Hesiod, Stesichorus, Pindar, Pseudo-Apollodorus, or Dante but instead one predominately modern and strikingly different. While framed with the physical faculties of the ancient authors, he is imbued with all the muddled thinking and affected indifference of a twentieth century teenager. The attributes accrued from the older incarnations, however, are pivotal components of his character, just as the texts in which they exist are essential sources and analogues for Autobiography of Red.

“There is No Person without a World”: The Sources and Analogues for Carson’s Geryon

The origins of the Geryon myth have been mined by a wide body of scholars concerned with comparative linguistics, Proto-Indo-European roots, and classical literature. Although there is a paucity of definitive information, circumstantial fragments abound, and these have been used

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44 Stuart Gillespie, “Hesiod Goes Augustan: An Early Translation of the Theogony,” Translation and Literature 17 (2008): 197. Gillespie notes that Hesiod, from whom we derive the earliest extant reference of Geryon, was formalized in English verse as early as 1618. However, Stephanus revealed the first few fragments of Stesichorus’ Geryoneis in 1566.

45 Carson, 82.
to piece together a murky history of the figure inside and outside of Greco-Roman culture. A landmark study was undertaken by Malcolm Davies, who sought to address the folk-tale origins of Stesichorus’ *Geryoneis*, and was instrumental in laying the groundwork for longer and more-developed works. He chose to place the orthodox Geryon tale, in which a Heraklean hero is assigned a task and must strike out against a nefarious villain in order to complete it, in the realm of Proppian analysis. 46 This allowed for greater distillation of the myth and, through application to the prefabricated template created by Propp, permitted a wider range of fruitful cross-cultural research.

After careful evaluation, Davies determines that the atomistic foundation of the account is cognate with the prototypical *Jenseitsfahrt*, or heavenly journey. 47 This notion is decidedly hero-based, and maintains connective parallels in Celtic, Norse, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon mythology. Two notable examples include Thor’s visit to the Giants’ citadel of Utgard and Odysseus’ journey to the underworld of Hades, and similar excursions are repeated to the same effect in competing pantheonic and cosmological traditions. 48 Although not directly affiliated with Carson’s Geryon, the stylized monster figure that plays an active role in the *Jenseitsfahrt* demonstrates both universality of theme and vast dissemination. Herakles still confronts Geryon in *Autobiography of Red*, still attempts to ascend heavenward proclivities, and still seeks to achieve a legislated, if not indistinct, purpose. The *Jenseitsfahrt* framework also indicates that the Geryonic folk-tale grew up before and well without the Greek world, which

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47 Ibid., 282.
48 Davis, 284.
imported many monsters from the East during the 7th and 8th centuries, and which found cause for germination in many ancient societies. Nevertheless, it is the largely Hellenic conceptualization—initiating with Hesiod—that most influences the Geryon of Carson’s novel.

Hesiod:

Like many of his mythical compatriots, Geryon’s earliest extant illustration is derived from Hesiod’s 7th century cosmogonic poem the *Theogony*, and its attendant scholia. Although the image of the three-bodied monster—one of many Geryonic physical traits expressed in the literary canon—long predates its attestation in the Hesiodic corpus, transmitted by way of commercial tributaries in the Egyptian Delta and flourishing widely in Vedic, Avestan, and Celtic mythology, Hesiod’s undertaking represents its first discernible literary reflection in the classical canon, as well as one of its many notable incarnations. Of Geryon’s origin, Hesiod writes:

Χὼ μὲν ἀποπτάμενος προλιπὼν χόνα, μητέρα μῆλων, ἵκετ᾽ ἐς ἀθανάτους· Ἰηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε στεροπήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους. Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐν δόμασι ναίει βροντήν τε ἐς ἀθανάτους.

He [Pegasus], on the one hand, having flown off, left the earth behind, the mother of flocks, and came to the Immortals, where now he dwells in the house of Zeus, carrying both thunder and flashes of lightening to the ever-wise father of the gods. But Chrysaor, on the other hand, having been joined to Callirrhoe, daughter of glorious Oceanus, begot three-headed Geryon. And this one mighty Herakles slew beside his swaying oxen in sea-girt Erythea, on the day when he drove

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49 Curtis, 13.
His lineage—as proffered by Hesiod—reflects a level of complexity consonant with the Greek mythopoetic template, and the intricate interplay between primordial deities and their mortal counterparts, although a hallmark of Hellenic cosmogony, has served to confound his broader significance in the larger pantheonic tradition. Nevertheless, and more substantively for the current study, a few literary certainties exist. Hesiod’s Geryon is the son of Chrysaor, himself born of Medusa, and Callirrhoe, the daughter of the primordial Oceanus. As a product of this union, Geryon’s immortality, and, by extension, his divine legitimacy, are wholly jeopardized. While Hesiod suggests that Chrysaor is indeed immortal, it is well-established that his grandmother, the Gorgon Medusa, was not. Geryon’s obfuscated *athanasia* proves a primary source of conflict in later texts within which he features prominently; one necessary for further fleshing out the full ideological scope of his character and function.

Additionally, Hesiod describes Geryon not as a monster but instead as τρικέφαλον (*trikephalon*), an adjectival modifier meaning “three-headed.” It is the singular physical attribute tendered by the poet, one which finds a greater echoic significance in subsequent texts, and which also underscores the nature of his expressly monstrous representation by more modern writers. Despite initial investigations, which suggested that the Greek language did not provide a

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51 Hesiod relays that the winged horses Pegasus and Chrysaor sprang forth from Medusa after Perseus had severed her head (ll.280-281). Pegasus, Hesiod continues, was called so because he was born near the springs of Oceanus, and Chrysaor because he wielded a golden blade (ll.282-283). Additionally, Orthus is the brother of three-headed Cerberus and Tiryns is a Mycenean settlement, the remains of which still exist at Argolis in the Peloponnese. All other allusions will be duly discussed in the above section.


53 Vid. Presumable previous chapter on etymology and Greek terms for the English “monster.”
word reflective of the modern monster, Hesiod does indeed include one that offers a contrary intimation. When alluding to Callirrhoe’s daughter, he writes:

She [Callirrhoe] bore another monster (πέλωρον) in a hollow cave, this one extraordinary, neither alike to mortal men nor to the immortal deities, goddess-born, stout-hearted Echidna, who is, on the one hand, half-nymph, lively-eyed and beautiful-cheeked, and half again portentous serpent, both terrible and large, speckle-hued, eating raw flesh beneath the sacred depths of the earth.

Echidna is a direct descriptive foil to her brother, whose sparsely defined attributes are thrown into sharper relief when juxtaposed with those of his sister, and serves as the primary progenitor of monstrous offspring in the *Theogony*. Such is evidenced in her classification as πέλωρον (pelōron), a substantive adjective that Hesiod frequently, and in the current instance, pairs with δεινόν (deinon), “terrible,” and μέγαν (megan), “large.” Πέλωρον means “monstrous in size, portentous, and prodigious” in the Homeric and Euripidean lexicons, and is evocative of the later Latin mōnstrum and its English equivalent.

The linguistic distinction between Geryon and his sister operates on a paradigmatic platform, made manifest by Hesiod, and both are utilized as fitting metonymic substitutes for the monstrous. While Geryon himself is not directly called a monster, Hesiod’s employment of the

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54 Vid. fn.42.
55 Accordingly, Echidna was joined in love to Typhon, the last son of Gaia to be fathered by Tartaros, and both produced a series of monstrous offspring testified to throughout the Hellenic literary corpus. Hesiod conveys that she brought forth Geryon’s hound, Orthus (ll. 310), Cerberus (ll.312), the Hydra of Lerna (ll.313), and the Chimaera (ll. 319). Like her brother, many of her own progeny were killed by Herakles as part of his Twelve Labors. Echidna also produced several children with her own son Orthus (ll. 327), and together they brought forth the Sphinx (ll.326), and the Nemean lion (ll.327), the latter of which was also slain by Herakles (ll. 328). Hyginus also claims that she was the mother of Scylla, although other classical authors claim otherwise. Like most of the monstrous figures fleshed out in Greek literature, Echidna and her offspring are often implicated in “flesh-eating” and other cannibalistic undertakings.
word ἄλλο, a neuter adjective meaning “another,”\textsuperscript{57} indicts him as such a figure. Although it is very likely that Hesiod wished to express a different, albeit nonetheless suggestive, definition for πέλωρον,\textsuperscript{58} the connotative effect would not be, and has not been, lost on more contemporary readers and translators of the Geryonic texts.

The excerpted fragments of the \textit{Theogony} detail a prominent lineage of primordial offspring, some that are beneficent and others debauched and reviled throughout the Greek world, in an attempt to convey the mythical contexts within which they were formed. In the current instance, Geryon serves as the signal for a discursive primer to Herakles, one of many autochthonic arbiters in the Hellenic world, and acts as a paramount touchstone by which Hesiod introduces unpredicated his Tenth Labor.\textsuperscript{59} That labor, labeled by Paul Curtis as his “most famous,”\textsuperscript{60} concerns the acquisition of property far beyond Herakles’ sphere of appropriate ownership. Mainly, he must journey to the proverbial end of the world, a small island called Erythea, where, under the mandate of Eurysthios, he must bring back the cattle of the monster Geryon.\textsuperscript{61} His methods for completing the task are largely left to his discretion, and, as in almost every instance of heroic encroachment, he may exploit divine assistance. Such provides a fitting platform for confrontation with Geryon’s functionaries, and results in their ultimate cataclysmic clash.

The greater part of Hesiod’s \textit{Theogony} does not concern either Geryon or his mottled pedigree, and the poet does very little to furnish elucidative material concerning the battle. He

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., “ἄλλο, adj.”
  \item \textsuperscript{58} It could also serve to signify simply one who was begot from the Gorgons, as both Geryon and Echidna were. This definition garnered clout during the Homeric era.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Henry John Walker, \textit{Theseus and Athens} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 85. In addition to Herakles, Theseus, the Athenian engineer of the \textit{synoikismos}, alternatively the \textit{synoecism}, in which surrounding villages were brought together into a cohesive Athenian polis, Poseidon, and Aegeus have been imbued with a similar autochthonic function in Greek society.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Curtis, 9.
\end{itemize}
does, however, make additional references to his character toward the latter end of the text.

Reprising the Geryonic thread in his poetic conclusion, Hesiod writes:

… νῦν χαίρετ’ …
κούρη δ’ Ὀκεανοῦ, Χρυσάορι καρπεροθύμῳ
μιθείς’ ἐν φιλότητι πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης,
Καλλιρόη τέκε παῖδα βροτῶν κάρτιστον ἀπάντων,
Γηρυονέα, τὸν κτεῖνε βίη Ἡρακλῆι
βοῦν ἔνεκ’ εἰλιπόδων ἀμφιρρύτῳ eἰν Ἐρυθείῃ.

Hes. Th. 963, 979-983

… And now farewell… daughter of Oceanus, Callirrhoe, who, having been mixed in the love of rich Aphrodite with strong-hearted Chrysaor, birthed a son

Hesiod again invokes the stylized image of Herakles’ Tenth Labor, emphasizing Geryon’s passive position, the locative sea-girt Erythea, and the requisition of the oxen. Instead of employing Geryon’s initial adjectival epithet, however, he designates the monster as βροτῶν κάρτιστον ἀπάντων (brotōn kartiston apantōn), “strongest of all men,” and couches his differentiation in non-physical attribution. The critical implication of the epithet, however, is not merely semantic but also substantive: Geryon, unlike his familial counterparts, is above all else a mortal man. Such a designation, moreover, could account for the original application of πέλωρον as consonant with monstrous size and exceptional corporeal capability.

The only unqualified portion of his fragment concerns environment, and Hesiod gives little definitive description of Erythea. The only surviving information on the region is provided by Pseudo-Apollodorus, who will be discussed in a subsequent section. It is worth noting, however, that modern scholarship, relying upon literary and artistic materials, has generally promoted an association with “one of the islands at the mouth of the Guadalquivir,” mainly Cadiz and its direct geographic region. Its identification with the area surrounding the Iberian Peninsula finds corroboration in assertions derived from Pseudo-Apollodorus, who argues that

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62 Barrett, 5.
the island is situated beyond the “boundaries of Europe and Libya,” near the Pillars of Herakles. The primacy of its Spanish association is later exploited by writers such as Dante and Spenser, and serves as a crucial localizing function in Carson’s verse novel.

As a final note, Hesiod’s three surviving references to Geryon and his bloodline in the *Theogony* are crucial, when paired with sixth-century Chalkidian vases depicting the figure, in laying the foundation for further Geryonic allusions. The ideological import of the Hesiodic illustration does not alter drastically throughout the Hellenic world. It is the relatively solid representation concretized by the Greek literary corpus at large, moreover, that affords a greater platform for manipulation by Carson. Additionally, it is from Hesiod that Carson draws the raw bibliographic material necessary for her depiction and manipulates his familial scope overall.

**Stesichorus.**

After a century of relative absence, the image of Geryon was reprised anew by the 6th century lyric poet Stesichorus, whose seminal, albeit fragmented, illustration serves as direct forbearer to Carson’s Geryon. His significance in solidifying Geryonic attributes is testified to in both the classical and modern canons. Despite sundry biographic encomiums authored by Pausanias, Apollonius of Rhodes, Athenaeus, Dio Chrysostom, Isocrates, and Plato, is most poignantly evidenced in a Hesiodic scholia to line 287 of the *Theogony*. The author writes:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ἐστὶ δὲ ὁ Γηρυονεὺς ἐκ Καλλιρόης τῆς Ωκεανοῦ καὶ Χρυσάορος. Στησίχορος δὲ καὶ ἕξ χεῖρας ἔχειν φησὶ καὶ ἕξ πόδας καὶ ὑπόπτερον εἶναι.}
\end{quote}

Geryon is the son of Callirrhoe, the daughter of Oceanus, and Chrysaor. And Stesichorus says that he has six hands and six feet and is

\begin{quote}
\textit{τὸ τετρακόλοον ἔτος Τριών Ζευς ἔδραμεν ἐνθείον, τῶν δὲ Θεῶν ἀνεκδότως διδυμοῖς καὶ μεγαλοπρέπεις ἔστιν.}
\end{quote}


\[64\] Canto XVII of Dante’s *Inferno*, and Section ix, Canto X, Book V of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*.

\[65\] Ibid, 7.

\[66\] Scholia on the subject of Stesichorus, his birth, life, and work, are all rendered by the author. Fragments extricated from the *Geryoneis*, due to their lacunae, suspect, and exceedingly controversial nature, in conjunction with the author’s own compunction, are rendered by Paul Curtis of the University of Exeter and derived from his Brill edition of Stesichorus’ *Geryoneis*. 
The enduring representation of a multi-limbed Geryon does indeed find artistic referents in the period directly preceding the dissemination of Stesichorus’ epic, *Geryoneis*. While Chalkidian vase imagery contemporaneous with Hesiod depicts a three-headed image,67 decked out in the fashion described briefly in the *Theogony*, earlier bass relief is evocative of Stesichorus’ Geryon. As artists and sculptors, “equally conversant with a common oral tradition, were seldom reliant on… bards,”68 the production of parallel Geryonic images was commonplace. The period of artistic experimentation associated with the 7th century begot numerous depictions of centaurs, three-winged youths, hare-headed men, and other eclectic combinations, which in turn influenced the fluctuating portrayal of Stesichorus’ tragic figure.

Nevertheless, the implications of the scholia are apparent. Stesichorus, popularized in the Romano-Attic tradition heralded by Cicero, is commemorated as the poet who introduced aberrations and idiosyncrasies not only into the extant illustration of Geryon, but also into the representation of his volatile relationship with Herakles. His innovations are corroborated by the parallel evolution of the Geryonic artistic corpus, initiating with a 7th century plaque and pyxis from Phaleron and culminating in pictorial reliefs on subsequent 6th century shield bands dispersed throughout the Greek world.69 Despite the significant fragmentation of the *Geryoneis*, Stesichorus’ rich linguistic instrumentation—both his deviation from the standard Homeric template and inherent ability to agitate the adjectival “latches of being”70— has served to sustain his image of Geryon in both the classical and the contemporary literary traditions.

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68 Curtis, 11.
69 Ibid., 15.
70 Carson, 4.
Stesichorus is responsible, moreover, for inaugurating the fluid utilization of adjectives, Greek ἐπίθετα (epitheta), or “additional things,”\(^{71}\) which reinvigorated 6\(^{th}\) century poetic lyricism. Suddenly, and with the advent of his dactlyo-epitrite lyric poetry, “there was nothing to interfere with horses being hollow hooved… or a river being root silver… or a child bruiseless… or Herakles ordeal strong.”\(^{72}\) Stesichorus’ emphasis on adjectival neologisms—not so much the arbitrary creation of new words as the compound coalescence of old—contributed a vibrancy to the existing literary schematic that afforded malleability both to language and its ideological expression. More significantly, Stesichorus created the proverbial mold from which a new, linguistically fluid and philosophically substantive Geryon could be cast. His endeavor, more so than any predecessor, was instrumental in yielding the piecemeal Geryonic figure reflected by Carson, and in her revision she appears frequently to speak directly to him.

The genesis of the Stesichorian Geryon was very much a product of the poet’s origin and relative location in the Helleno-centric world, and as such can be sourced in the fragmented biographical material available to the modern scholastic audience. He is described by Carson as coming at that difficult interval “after Homer and before Gertrude Stine.”\(^{73}\) Although biographically fragmented, fundamental information concerning Stesichorus’ birth, upbringing, and ascendance to the mainstream poetic forefront can be pieced together through the consultation of disparate sources in the Greco-Roman world. The most comprehensive and complete of the classical references is derived from the 10\(^{th}\) century Byzantine Suda, a massive


\(^{72}\) Carson, 5.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 3.
historical encyclopedia of the ancient Mediterranean world comprised of scholia, critical
commentary, and canonical works compiled by many different authors.\(^{74}\)

Although of unknown authorship, the *Suda* is instrumental in foregrounding both obscure
and prominent classical authors, detailing pertinent biographical facts, and even outlining
controversial interpretations. The entry provided for Stesichorus, although surviving in brief,
provides equally fecund avenues for investigation. It reads:

\[\text{Στησίχορος: Εὐφόβου ἢ Εὐφήμου, ὃς δὲ ἄλλοι Εὐκλείδου ἢ Εὐέτου ἢ Ἡσίοδου. Ἐκ πόλεως Ἰμέρας τῆς Σικελίας καλεῖται γοῦν Ἰμεραῖος; οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ Ματαυρίας τῆς ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ Παλαντίου τῆς Ἀρκαδίας φυγόντα αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν φασίν εἰς Κατάνην κάκει τελευτήσαι καὶ ταφῆναι πρὸ τῆς πόλης, ἤτοι εἰς αὐτὸν Στησιχόρειος προσηγόρευται. Τοῖς δὲ χρόνοις ἣν ἥμερον Αλκμάνος τοῦ λυρικοῦ, ἐπὶ τῆς 37 Ὀλυμπιάδος γεγονός, ἐτελεύτησε δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς 56 Ὀλυμπιάδος. Ἐχον δὲ αὐτὸν γεωμετρίας ἐμπειρὸν Μαμερτῖνον καὶ ἥτοι Ἦλιανακτα νομοθέτην. Καὶ ἦστιν αὐτὸν τὰ ποιήματα Δωρίδι διακέτῳ ἐν Βιβλίοις 26. Φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν γράφαντα ψόγον Ἐλένης τυφλωθῆναι, πάλιν δὲ γράφαντα Ἐλένης ἐγκώμιον ἐξ ὀνείρου, τὴν παλινῳδίαν, ἀναβλέπει. Ἐκλήθη δὲ Στησιχόρος ὅτι πρῶτος κιθαρῳδίᾳ χορὸν ἐστηθην. Ἐπεὶ τοις πρῶτοις Τισίας ἐκαλεῖτο.} \(\text{Sud. Σ 1095}\)

Stesichorus: Son of Euphorbus or Euphemus, and according to others Euclides or Euetes or Hesiod. [He is] from the city Himera in Sicily, at any rate he is called the Himeraean; but others say that he is from Matauria in Italy. And others still say that, having taken flight himself from Pallantium in Arcadia, he came to Catana and that he died there and was buried before the gates, which have been called by name Stesichorian from him. And he was in time later than the lyric poet Alcman, having been born in the 37\textsuperscript{th} Olympiad.\(^{77}\) He died in the 56\textsuperscript{th} Olympiad.\(^{78}\) And he had a brother, Mamertinus, experienced in geometry, and another, Helianax, a lawgiver. He was a lyric poet. His poems, [written] in the Doric dialect, are in 26 books. And they say that, having written abuse of Helen, he was blinded, and that later he recovered his sight, having written an encomium of Helen, the Palinode, from a dream. And he was


\(^{75}\) Greek letters maintained substitutive numeric values, and were used as shorthand to express specific dates and quantitative constructions. In the above cited instance, nu is representative of 50 and digamma, an archaic alphabetical symbol which originally stood for the sound “w,” and was later reprised as the Byzantine Greek ligature στ (ς) known nominally as the *stigma*, represents the number 6. Similar utilizations are present throughout the passage, as in λξ’ Ὀλυμπιάδος, where λ is 3 and ξ is 7. Vid. “Greek Number Systems,” The MacTutor History of Mathematics Archive at the University of St. Andrews, accessed: September 17, 2012, [http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/HistTopics/Greek_numbers.html](http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/HistTopics/Greek_numbers.html).

\(^{76}\) κ is representative of the number 2.

\(^{77}\) David A. Campbell, Paul Curtis, and W.S. Barrett mark this time as 632/28 B.C.

\(^{78}\) Campbell, Curtis, Barrett mark this time as 556/2 B.C.
While far from definitive, the image of Stesichorus crafted by the *Suda* poses a particularly interesting—and equally untenable—set of questions *vis-à-vis* the *Geryoneis*. First and foremost, it is made manifestly apparent that Stesichorus, like his corresponding lyrical creation, maintained a muddled pedigree. Such is evidenced both in the numerous patriarchs posed by the text, as well as the disparate locations of his alleged birth. For instance, any attempt to link the 6th century lyric poet with his immediate predecessor, Hesiod, although corroborated by a claim recorded in the work of the 7th century grammarian Tzetzes, is perhaps most evocative of an ancient biographical desire to biologically link two poets for the purpose of authenticity and transmission.\(^7\)

The authenticity of Stesichorus’ father figure is contingent upon the authenticity of his birthplace. While credence is given to Matauria and Catana by Stephanus of Byzantium and Antipater of Thessalonia, Himera emerges as victor when one consults the classical criticism

\(^7\) Curtis, 5.
Additionally, the adversative ὡς δὲ ἄλλοι (hōs de alloi) in the opening line of the Suda, bisecting the list of names, suggests that its author favors Euphorbus and Euphemus as the most likely patriarch, and lists of public office confirm the widespread diffusion of those names throughout Greece. Although speculative, such thin logic adheres to the scrutiny necessitated of classical prosopography, especially in the face of meager primary sources, and is duly testified to in subsequent commentaries. It is, moreover, the only semi-definitive claim that can be conjured up to sustain Stesichorus’ family. Although the Suda alludes to two purportedly successful siblings, one a reputable geometer, and the other a lawgiver, only one substantial source exists—from the 5th century philosopher Proklos—validating the former. The relative obscurity of Stesichorus mirrors quite appropriately that of his Geryoneis, and, more significantly, Geryon himself.

Attempting to give tangible shape to the hazy image of Stesichorus is problematized by the absence of a substantial literary corpus. While he is the subject of anecdotes addressing his purported insult of Helen, subsequent blindness, and eventual palliative palinode, he mainly falls victim to the same fate as many 6th century lyric poets, subsisting off of fragmentary poetic remnants, and relegated, like all in Magna Graecia before the reign of Heiro, to a cloud of legend. Unlike others, however, Stesichorus is a poet “to whom the fates have been unkind.” His monolithic poetic collection, allegedly twenty-six books in total, has been whittled down to

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80 It is worth noting that the earliest references to Stesichorus’ life began two hundred years after his death. That being said, Pausanias 9.12.5-6 suggests that in Himera coins were stamped with Stesichorus’ image, Plato’s Phaedrus contains a reference to his Himeraean birth, Aristotle’s Rhetoric an anecdote about Stesichorus and the Himeraeans, as does Pollux’s Vocabulary, and Cicero’s Speech against Verres. Vid. Curtis, 1, 8 and David A. Campbell, ed., Greek Lyric: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): 37, 39, 41, 43, 45.
81 Curtis, 3.
82 Ibid., 5.
84 Barrett, 1.
papyri pieces detailing at most five, all compiled by E. Lobel in volumes of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. These are drawn primarily from the *Nostoi*, the *Boar-Hunters*, *Eriphyle*, the *Sack of Troy*, and *Geryoneis*, and comprise in the aggregate no more than 193 tattered lines. It is Stesichorus’ corpus, despite its syncopated form, however, that is of the greatest interest in any review of Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*.

Stesichorus “lived among refugees who spoke a mixed dialect of Chalcidian and Doric,” and may have been a member of a displaced Lokrian colony. It is important, and assured by almost all extant biographic fragments, that he did not inhabit the rich and well-attested Athenian and Peloponnesian spheres of Greece proper, but was instead confined to the nebulous regions composing Magna Graecia. Such is reflected in his works, which, beyond the *Geryoneis*, also include *Kerberos, Kyknos*, and *Skylla*. All bear the indelible mark of Herakles, and attempt to recount his adventures before, during, and after the Twelve Labors of Eurysthios. More significantly, they are examples of crucial autochthonic legitimization. Herakles, as an arbiter of Greek identity, a metonymic representation of its authority and citizenship, was sung by Stesichorus in order to legitimize not only his poetic practice but also the Himeraean connection to the mainland. Separated as it was by the yawning Ionian Sea, it featured not in the direct democratic machinations of its hegemonic overseer, and required alternative means of promoting association. Herakles is but one manner by which Stesichorus could draw attention to Himera, and other colonial enterprises like Matauria and Catana, while also bolstering his popularity and lyric talent. Although a number of impetuses most probably impelled him to craft his creative works, and it is valid that “most surviving choral poetry from the 7th and 6th century

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86 Ibid.
87 Carson, 3.
88 Barrett, 1. Residents of Locris were original from central Greece.
89 Curtis, 7.
was composed for specific functions with a particular context,"⁹⁰ there is much to be said about the brilliant abstraction inherent in the legitimizing process. One sees it in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, mainly, concussive forces teasing out conflicting notions of freewill, fate, and the sanctity of custom. There is both a poverty of progress engineered in imperialism, and an act of poignant transgression. Each is made manifest by Stesichorus’ ambivalent representation of Herakles and Geryon in the *Geryoneis*.

The *Geryoneis* exists as several fragments, some incomprehensible, and others quite well-preserved. Unlike the *Theogony*, which has been transmitted fairly unscathed, Stesichorus’ epic has met with an onslaught of critical pronouncement, and is complicated by the diverse interpretations of philology, orthography, paleography, and papyrology. The general format of the fragments accrued has been formalized by Denys Page, W.S. Barrett, and Paul Curtis, and, although there persists a healthy speculation concerning their configuration, this tripartite arrangement will be adopted in the current instance. Fleshing out the substance of the *Geryoneis* is also problematized by the unfortunate number of lacunae. Nevertheless, some certainties about Geryon and his philosophical inclinations are maintained.

Directly preceding Geryon’s engagement with Herakles, he is exhorted by his mother, Callirrhoe, who views such an imbroglio as guaranteeing certain death. Stesichorus writes:

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⁹⁰ Curtis, 37.
The entreaty of Geryon’s mother complicates the notion of the monstrous, and adds dimensionality to his previous isolation in the literary tradition. More so than past representations, Stesichorus’ maternal provision checks the moral certitude of Herakles’ own liminal transgression.

Further characteristics of Geryon can be divined from his response. After considering his mother’s proposition and personal appeal, he converses with his friend Menoetes about his checkered mortality. He notes:

\[\text{μ̣[} \text{ἐ̣γ̣ὼν [μελέ]α καὶ ἄλασ-}\
\text{τοτόκος κ[α] ἄλ[ας]τα παθόσα}\
\text{ἄλλα σε Γ]αρυόνα γονάζομαι[ι,}\
\text{α[ι] ποκ’ ἐμ[]ὸν τιν μαζ[όν] ἐπέσχεθον}\
\text{.........]φωμον γ[}\
\text{.........] [}\
\text{τόχα ματρ[ι] φιλα[ι] γανυ[θ][είς ἦς θυ-}\
\text{μός ἐν εὐφρ[ο]σύναις[}\
\text{ώς φαισα θυ[ό]δεα πέρ[λ]ον}\
\text{][..]κλυ[.][}\
\text{ῥευγ[.]}\
\text{γ[]ον ελ[}\

Stes. Gery. Fr. 6. 91

The entreaty of Geryon’s mother complicates the notion of the monstrous, and adds dimensionality to his previous isolation in the literary tradition. More so than past representations, Stesichorus’ maternal provision checks the moral certitude of Herakles’ own liminal transgression.

This is an entirely new depiction of Geryon, and, although it may have found corroboration in past sources, none survive that depict him quite as this one does. Far from the conventional monster figure, Geryon demonstrates a psychological complexity consonant with his counterparts in the Geryoneis, and is contextualized both by concern for his cattle and a poignant desire to diffuse shame. In order to do this he must confront the omnipresent machinations of fate, vaguely aware that he is not ἀθανάτοιο (athanatoio), or “deathless,” as his father, but nonetheless willing to perish in mortality or endure in immortality. Perhaps the most striking

93 Vid. Page, S. 11, and P.Oxy. 2617 frr. 13(a) + 14 +15.
aspect of Stesichorus’ fragment is not his compassionate representation of Geryon as much as it is his reappropriation of the role of transgressor and transgressed. In this instance, and by Geryon’s own indictment, Herakles is the figure ἱζῶν βόας (izdōn boas), “ravaging” or “ambushing the cattle.” This is not an instance of the prototypical monster violating boundaries but instead a crisis of liminality incited by the hero. The hero assumes the role of monster, and monster the role of victim, in a circular construct devised to suggest their consanguinity. What is more, Geryon is cloaked in the tragic lexicon, and serves as the primary figure of πάσχον (paskōn), or “suffering.” Even the verbal form in parenthesis, πάθην (pāthēn), cognate with pathos, is an aorist94 infinitive suggesting the longevity of injury in both the past and present spheres of time, and negates an evil portrayal of Geryon.95 While it is impossible to determine Stesichorus’ motive in rendering a manifold Geryon, one begot to bear critical burdens, the effect created is one of parallel sympathy. It relocalizes the narrative to focus not on the hero, as Homeric epic does, but on the monstrous victim.

The humanized Geryon does not acquiesce to his mother’s wishes. His subsequent conflict with Herakles, depicted on countless amphorae and kraters contemporaneous with Stesichorus and commented upon by Pseudo-Apollodorus, is one of the fullest fragments available, and succeeds Athena’s own imploration to Zeus for Geryon’s well-being and safety.96 Even the Olympiads—newly-formed deities who set about to circumvent primordial mechanisms—object to Herakles’ gratuitous encroachment. The description provided is vibrant, and captures wholesale the scintillating innovative and aesthetic language characteristic of Stesichorus. He writes:

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94 Proto-Indo-European tense used in Ancient Greek to dictate simple past.
96 Curtis, 82. Fr. 10, S.14, P.Oxy.2617 fr.3.
two… in his mind he [Herakles] distinguished…; [it seemed to him] much better… to fight with stealth… mighty [man]… on one side he devised for him… bitter destruction; [and Geryon held] his shield against [the son of Zeus], but now Herakles took hold of his sword, and struck the helmet from Geryon’s head, the helmet with its horse-hair plume [gave off a great clang and straightaway rolled] on the ground.]

... the end that is hateful death, having doom around his head, defiled with blood and… guts, the pain of the speckle-necked Hydra, the destroyer of men; secretly he, with guile, thrust it into his brow and with divine dispensation pierced his flesh and bones; and the arrow went straight into the crown of his head, and his armor, and his gory limbs were stained with blood; and Geryon titled his neck like a poppy when spoiling its gentle body suddenly drops its petals…

Stes. Gery. Fr.12

It is by far one of the most beautifully written passages in Greek lyric poetry, studded with both the descriptive fecundity of Euripides and Sophocles, and the substantive brilliance of the Homeric epics. Stesichorus’ portrayal of the iconic mythic clash, moreover, is decidedly sympathetic, and devotes a large degree of its poetic center not to validating Herakles’ action but instead legitimizing Geryon’s defense.

Column I\textsuperscript{98} is concerned primarily with tactics employed by Herakles in the engagement, and makes a brief allusion to his Olympian lineage. He is the son of Zeus, the divine regent, from whom Athena previously begged mercy on behalf of Geryon. Coinciding with the physical conflict is the one of legitimacy and familial hierarchy upon which the first is predicated. Zeus cannot indulge Athena’s request by simple mandate of paternal necessity, which authorizes his son’s actions and contravenes Geryon’s protection. Stesichorus’ emphasis on the mechanisms of battle is contextualized by the double depiction of conflict, first in the literal sense and second in the metaphoric and familial. This illustration of Heraklean violence \textit{in situ} mirrors the mythological construct of collision between Olympic forces and primordial deities, typified in the \textit{Titanomachy}.\textsuperscript{99} This is further accentuated by Stesichorus’ reliance on the Homeric lexicon, and inherent in his synecdochic association of helmet and body, in which \textit{καναχὴν δ’ἔχεν ἱππόκομος τρυφάλει’} (\textit{kanakēn d’exen hippokomos truphalei’}),\textsuperscript{100} “the helmet with the horse-hair plume is struck from Geryon’s head.” He is uncrowned and Herakles’ victory is imminent.

\textsuperscript{98} The order of arrangement for the \textit{Geryoneis} is hotly contested in the scholarly community. While the substance of the text is traditionally based upon the fragments housed in the Sackler Library of Archaeology, Art History, and Classics at Oxford University, its layout has been confounded by the half-formed state of the papyri. It was probably recorded in the extant fashion around the first century BC and was comprised of a series of thirty triadic lines divided into columns. Those are the columnar differences expressed above. Vid. Curtis, 69 and Barrett, 10.

\textsuperscript{99} The purportedly ten-year long series of battles fought in Thessaly between the Olympians, commanded by Zeus, and the Titans.

\textsuperscript{100} Col. I, line 16.
Column II serves as the foundational basis for Geryon’s philosophical and psychological conflict. It is lyrical evidence demonstrating the inborn “concealment drama... in [Stesichorus’] work... [his preoccupation with] some special interest in finding out what or how people act when they know that important information is being withheld.” Hitherto, Geryon expresses anxiety over his dubious immortality, a quality complicated by his muddled lineage. Certainly, pedigree dictates that his *athanasia* maintains a solid baseboard for speculation. His mother is the daughter of Oceanus, a divine personification of the sea in keeping with others in the pantheonic tradition, and his father the progeny of Poseidon and Medusa. There is, however, a Hesiodic snare in his maternal grandmother, who was widely considered the only mortal gorgon. Nevertheless, Geryon is adamant in his resolve to confront Herakles, as he affirms in his conversation with Menoetes, and sallies forth out of personal necessity. Column II features the definitive moment in which, κεφαλαί περὶ πότμον (kephalai peri potmon exōn), “having doom around his head,” Geryon’s mortality is unequivocally confirmed. There is no attempt to prompt a meditative afterthought, or insert a simultaneous confirmation. There is simply a stylistic construction of death and decomposition.

Elucidative description is also provided for Herakles. His actions are executed with ἐπίκλοπος (epiklopos), a term signifying not so much “guile” as perfunctory “thievishness.” In his utilization of the substantive, Stesichorus again acknowledges the violative function of the hero, one which is often catalyzed by δαίμονος αἴσαι (daimonos aisai), or “divine allotment.” This is the internal struggle inborn in the *Geryoneis*, the fatalistic undercurrent that trumps up

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102 πότμος (potmos) is often associated with fate and allotment. Geryon is not so much ringed by doom as he is by the inexplicable concourse of his lot in life. This interpretation is exceedingly interesting who one juxtaposes it with Geryon’s own conception of shame in life and glory in death. Col. II, line 3.
103 Vid. Liddell and Scott’s entry in their *Greek-English Lexicon*.
104 Col. II, line 8-9.
sympathy for Geryon and distaste for Herakles, and the complicating factor that transforms Geryon’s death from pathetic to tragic. He is sentenced to death by irrevocable divine mandate. Try as he might to slip the fetters of fate, or even to bolster his own divine merit, he is nonetheless suppressed and killed. What is more, Herakles contradicts the tripartite division of his own father, Zeus Xenios, who moderates the essential practice of xenia in the Greek world. Far from hospitable interaction, Herakles travels to Erythea for the sole purpose of murder and theft, and without sufficient provocation enough to withstand the scrutiny of corrupted xenia. He is the violator in this instance, and Geryon, who is in no way indicted either as a monster or as an aggressor, must pay for the blood-guilt of another.

That Stesichorus’ description of Geryon is overtly sympathetic is evidenced in the last illustrative simile of the passage. Herakles, having penetrated his armor and rendered his helmet useless, pierces his body in a manner cloaked in violent Homeric language, and cakes his extremities with blood. Geryon’s diminutive situation is situated well within the language of vulnerability, with the adjective ἁπαλὸν (hapalon) signifying the “softness of Geryon’s flesh… [as a] foil to the spike of Herakles’ missile,” and is subsequently confirmed by Herakles’ vicious coup de grâce. Making use of an arrow poisoned with the blood of the Lernaean Hydra, he strikes Geryon directly in the forehead, splitting it in twain. The image produced is both disturbing and eerie, and Geryon, in response to the caustic blow, ὡς ὅκα μ[ά]κ̣ω̣[ν / ἅτε καταισχύνοισ’ ἁπαλὸν / [δέμας ἀϊψ’ ἀπὸ φύλλα βαλοῖσα (hōs hoka makōn / hate kataiskunois’ hapalon / [demas aips’ apo phulla baloisa), “tilted his neck like a poppy when spoiling its gentle
The image of the poppy is a significant one, and suggests a more complicated passage than death. It straddles a liminal boundary that foregrounds competing notions of finality and temporary detachment. The Greek word μήκων (mēkōn), poppy, was also associated with νόδυνος (nōdunos) and παυσίλυπος (pausilupos), adjectives that mean “without pain” or “soothing pain,” and the substantive μανδραγόρας (mandragoras), derived from the plant and its purported anodyne qualities. Additionally, poppies, given their narcotic function, were often associated with Ὑπνος (Hypnos), the god of sleep, and Μορφεύς (Morpheus), the god of dreams who calls forms before the dreamer. Geryon’s analogical description presupposes not merely death, as the first line of column ii portends, but also detachment and freedom from pain.

The Geryon of the Geryoneis is an instrumental component of the Geryon of Autobiography of Red. In his creation, Stesichorus further exposes the conflicted relationship maintained between autochthonic desire, at its core one for prolonged acknowledgement and legitimacy in the Greek world, and the preservation of individuality. The linchpins that hold together the construct are Geryon and Herakles, and the inversion of immortality that witnesses Heraklean victory over a pseudo-mortal, works at defined angles to meet the distinction between Greece proper and its colonial enterprises on a political plane. Stesichorus is keenly aware—and his Geryoneis demonstrates such an awareness—of the difference between Athens and Sicily, Sparta and Himera, that prompts both inclusion and inherent alienation. The muddled mortality of Geryon is the muddled legitimacy of Himera, logically present but both realistically and geographically questionable. Stesichorus’ Geryon is an exercise in reconciliation, an

109 Lines 15-17.
110 Vid. Respective entries in Liddell and Scott.
acknowledgment of the concussive elements of imperialism, and a gentle articulation of those very fine but nonetheless discernible spheres of cultural interaction that are subject to sweeping changes. It is an attempt to both proximate and distance, to throw into sharper relief the nature of permeable and impermeable boundaries, and to carve out spaces for their examination. The monstrous in the Geryoneis is no longer rooted in the abberational physical qualities of Hesiod but instead the socially motivated administration of alienation moderated by mythology and dissimilarity. There is, without a doubt, a little bit of the Stesichorus in Carson’s Geryon, and his perceptible presence works to stem the tidal surge of overwhelming introspection and volatile self-exploration by which her novel progresses.

Pindar:

The Boeotian lyric poet Pindar, who lived from circa 518-440 BC, was an aristocrat known best for his Olympic odes and the vibrant triadic structure that he borrowed directly from Stesichorus, and arrayed with incisive explorations of tradition, law, and society. One of his most oft-quoted fragments concerns the inextricable connection between violent upheaval and νόμος (nomos), or custom, and involves directly Herakles’ theft from Geryon. Pindar writes:

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This triadic ode, nominally referred to as “The Nomos-Basileus Fragment,” is essential in characterizing Hellenic notions of theft, its practitioners, and those victims against whom the act is executed. Although Pindar substitutes Diomedes as the chief counter to Herakles in place of Geryon, the similarity of the occurrences yields a controlling tenet that has universal implications. More to the point, death, as Stesichorus’ Geryon poignantly alludes to in his conversation with Menoetes, is the appropriate course of action when one is defending property.

Although the item pilfered is subject to change, horses for Diomedes and cattle for Geryon, the

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end result is not only necessary but inevitable. In order to dissipate shame, and unburden one’s progeny, one must either succeed in battle or perish in the act.

Pindar’s fragment is essential to the study of *Autobiography of Red* in its introduction, presentation, and representation of *nomos*. Custom has hitherto been oblique, serving intangibly to charge the division between heroic right and monstrous impotence. Pindar alters the established framework to reflect not merely the agonistic influence of divinity or the social institutions administrated from Olympus but also the pervasive influence of legal custom as it existed in contemporary Greece. Marginal description, beyond the assertion of his ubiquitous patronymic, is furnished for Herakles, and all of the illustrative force in the fragment is placed behind his opponents. The pride that the Greeks took in their legal statutes, inextricable from *nomos* and trumpeted by the poet, “was a significant part of their sense of national and civic identity,” 114 and Pindar’s preoccupation with the affirmative elements of self-defense against a civil and social wrongdoing signals a break from the epic tradition of Hesiod and Stesichorus. No longer is destiny or fate the chief arbiter of action but constructed custom, working to regulate and contravene transgressions moral or otherwise.

Geryon and Diomedes are cast in overtly positive roles. Although the passage has been vexed by competing critical interpretations, the prevailing view “is that *nomos* here refers to the tradition that Heracles is a hero and that his deeds must be accepted as justified.”115 Pindar strikes out against that notion. Aware that theft, like murder, produced widespread miasmatic taint and pollution which could infect social structures and pervert religious practices, he glorifies opposition to Herakles’ situational heroism. Pindar seems to side with the victims, and

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115 Ibid., 21.
appears impressed by custom’s ability to legitimize crime.\textsuperscript{116} What is more, Pindaric \textit{nomos} serves to familiarize the alienated figures of Diomedes and Geryon. It is “but the process of human action stretched between vision and reality,”\textsuperscript{117} a broad spectrum for the application of justice, and the interstice between divine mandate and legal protection. Just like \textit{nomos}, Geryon occupies an intermediary position lodged somewhere between realistic legitimacy in the social strata, as a practitioner of \textit{κρέσσον (kresson)}, “the better things,”\textsuperscript{118} and necessary exclusion in the mythological. Akin to the comparative used in line 17 of Pindar’s fragment, Geryon and Diomedes act on a sliding scale of moral rectitude and justification, which, while higher than Herakles, is not as of yet superlative, and requires external validation.

Pindar’s “Nomos-Basileus Fragment” adds increasing diversity to the Geryon figure, and attributes a righteousness which, while not free of implication, divorces actions in Erythea from his monstrous relationship. Not once are physical qualities hearkened or divine mandate mustered to supplement tangible support. While there is an implicit understanding of the Tenth Labor that skirts the background of the passage, it is in no way manifest or relevant. Instead, Pindar is concerned only with an analysis of custom, violence, and the indistinct intersection of justification and the absolution of guilt. For Geryon, in particular, the ode is a humanizing force that challenges his previously polarized depiction in Hesiod, and further fleshes out that perceptible ambiguousness begun in Stesichorus.

\textbf{Pseudo-Apollodorus:}

The last classical source discussed in this paper, and the thread by which the others are stitched together, is extricated from Pseudo-Apollodorus’ \textit{Bibliotheca}, or Library. The Library

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{116} Idem. \\
\textsuperscript{118} Line 17.}
colorfully details, among many other mythological incidences, the Twelve Labors of Herakles.

Although previously attributed to Apollodorus of Athens, the notable scholar, historian, and grammarian who was pupil of Diogenes of Babylon, the *Library* contains quotations from authors who purportedly wrote well after his lifetime. Scholarship and academia have, therefore, styled the writer Pseudo-Apollodorus in order to represent appropriately the large historical record and expansive mythographic work penned by the author. Nevertheless, his section recounting Herakles’ Tenth Labor is one of the fullest and most fruitful for any study of Geryon.

He writes:

δέκατον ἐπετάγη ἄθλουν τὰς Γηρυόνου βόας εξ Ἐρυθείας κομίζειν. Ἐρυθεία δὲ ἦν Ὡκεανοῦ πλησίον κειμένη νῆσος, ὥσπερ Γάδειρα καλεῖται. τούτην κατόφικε Γηρυόνης Χρυσάορος καὶ Καλλιρρόης τῆς Ὡκεανοῦ, τριῶν ἄνδρῶν συμφυὲς σῶμα, συνηγμένον εἰς ἐν κατὰ τὴν γαστέρα, ἐσχισμένον δὲ εἰς τρεῖς ἀπὸ λαγόνων τε καὶ μηρῶν. εἶχε δὲ φοινικᾶς βόας, ὃν ἦν βουκόλος Εὐρυτίων, φύλαξ δὲ Ὄρθος ὁ κύων δικέφαλος ἐξ Ἐχιδνῆς καὶ Τυφώνος γεγεννημένος. πορευόμενος οὖν ἐπὶ τὰς Γηρυόνου βόας διὰ τῆς Εὐρώπης, ἄγρια πολλὰ ζῷα ἀνελὼν Λιβύης ἐπέβαινε, καὶ παραλθὼν Ταρτησσὸν ἐστήσε σημεῖα τῆς πορείας ἐπὶ τῶν ὅρων Εὐρώπης καὶ Λιβύης ἀντιστοίχους δύο στήλας. θερόμενος δὲ ὑπὸ Ἁηλίου κατὰ τὴν πορείαν, τὸ τόξον ἐπὶ τὸν θεὸν ἐνέτεινεν: ὁ δὲ τὴν ἄνδρείαν αὐτοῦ θαυμάσας χρύσεον ἔδωκε δέπας, ἐν ᾧ τὸν Ὡκεανὸν διεπέρασε. καὶ παραγενόμενος εἰς Ἐρυθείαν ἐν ὧν Ὀλβαντι ἀυλίζεται. αἰσθόμενος δὲ ὁ κύων ἑπ’ αὐτὸν ὤρμα: ὁ δὲ καὶ τοῦτον τὸ ὅπαλο παίει, καὶ τὸν βουκόλο Εὐρυτίωνα τὸ κυνὶ βοηθοῦντα ἀπέκτεινε. Μενοίτης δὲ ἐκεῖ τὰς Ἁιδοῦ βόας βόσκον Ποταμὸν Ἐρυθείας ἀπῆγγελε. ὁ δὲ καταλαβὼν Ἰρακλέα παρὰ ποιματόν Ἀνθεμόντα τὰς βόας ἀπάγοντα, συστήσαμεν μάχην τοξευθεὶς ἀπέδανεν. Ἰρακλῆς δὲ ἐνθέμενος τὰς βόας εἰς τὸ δέπας καὶ διαπλεύσας εἰς Ταρτησσὸν Ἡλίω

He [Herakles] was enjoined to carry away the oxen of Geryon from Erythea as a tenth labor. Erythea was an island lying near Oceanus, which now they call Gadira. Geryon, the son of Chrysaor and Callirrhoë, the daughter of Oceanus, inhabited this place, and had the body of three men born together, which were attached as one at the waist but split into three from the flanks and thighs. He had crimson oxen, of which Eurytion was herdsman and Orthus, the two-headed dog who had been born from Echidna and Typhon, was guardian. So, journeying through Europe to acquire Geryon’s cattle, and having killed many savage animals, he set foot into Libya, and, approaching Tartessus, he set up, as marks of his march, two posts ranged at opposite ends at the boundaries of Europe and Libya. But being warmed by Helios on his journey, he drew tight his bow at the god, who, marveling at the bravery of the man, gave to him a golden goblet, in which he could cross Oceanus. And having come into Erythea, he lodged on Mount Abas. But the dog, perceiving him, rushed toward him but he smote him with his club, and when the herdsman Eurytion came to the dog’s aid, he [Herakles] killed him. But Menoetes, tending to the oxen of Hades there, gave report of Geryon of the occurrences. And he, catching Herakles leading away

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Straightaway, it is apparent that this account, like Hesiod’s before it, is centered on Herakles. He is the chief agent of execution and the primary impetus for the narrative events therein recounted. Although no poetic niceties are conveyed, his systematic dispatch of Geryon and his functionaries engenders similar implications as those present in the other texts. Again, Herakles is given carte blanche, or, at the very least, divine access to a mystical goblet that allows for expedited transport, to trespass, thieve, and murder.

The images of Geryon presented in Pseudo-Apollodorus’ account are those of a stylized monster presented in Hesiod. No longer is he three-head but instead ἔχων ἀνδρῶν συμφυὲς σῶμα (exōn andrōn sumphues sóma), “retaining the body of three conjoined men.” While this is no direct attestation to power or might, Geryon is expected, by virtue of his qualities, to maintain such in equal measure to his appearance. On that score, there is very little description offered of the main actors in the incident. Instead, much detail is devoted not only to the rote recounting of the myth but also factual geographic explication. Herakles’ journey is localized, and incorporates travel from the Peloponnese, on through Europe and Africa, the creation of the Pillars of Herakles, and eventual arrival in Erythea. Each episode in Herakles’ campaign, moreover, is framed by a geographic point of interest. Erythea is associated with Phoenician Gadira, or

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120 Text extricated from the Apollodorus Loeb, ed. by James Frazer in 1921. For more information see the Perseus Project at Tufts University.
modern day Cadiz, he allegedly encamps before Mount Abas, and ultimately battles with Geryon
on the banks of the Anthemus. It is the final piece in rendering an early composite of the Geryon
in *Autobiography of Red*, and serves both to give tangible shape to the novel’s geographic
heritage, and also to establish an epicenter of action for its narrative.

Additionally, Pseudo-Apollodorus also charts the wayward web of divinity that studs the
myth. Herakles, the son of Zeus, must traverse Geryon’s grandfather in order to pilfer his cattle,
and, in challenging Helios, is instead given help by him to circumvent the only familial entity
Geryon has at hand. To complicate matters, the only figure who escapes the brawl with his life is
Meneotes, himself pasturing the flock of Hades when Herakles approaches. All of the characters
present live well within the shadow of death, and the physicalized referent provided by the
author is but another marked reminder of Geryon’s inevitable destruction.

While the last Hellenic figure provided for as commentator, Pseudo-Apollodorus is far
from the last literary figure to comment upon the Geryon matter prior to Anne Carson. Geryon
features briefly in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Dante provides a disturbing chimerical interpretation of
Geryon as both an escort in the poet’s descent through Hell and the image of fraud, and Edmund
Spenser utilizes his superficial visage and embellished malice as an allegorical representation of
Spanish power. The competing depictions are numerous, and while they elude easy
reconciliation, have provided a calcified image of Geryon. Although Carson finds cause to
include motifs and piecemeal illustrations employed by all three poets, the Ancient Greek
precursors form the most solid and manifest influence. The classical Geryon maintains inborn in
his character all of the idiosyncratic apprehension that the contemporary bears, and although

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121 See the creature in *Aeneid* Book VII, Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto XVII and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*, Book V, Canto X.
locality and time have altered to confront modern machinations of alienation and ostracization, he endures the fitful schizophrenia of past and present with organicity and intelligence.

“Now See the Sharp-Tailed Beast that Mounts the Brink”:\textsuperscript{122} Anne Carson and Her Geryon Figure

While Anne Carson’s \textit{Autobiography of Red} is self-styled as a novel in verse in the vein of her Greek predecessors, it bears the ekphrastic stamp of post-modern poetry with ease. Frenetic images of past and present wend their way through intercalary chapters that are wedded to embellished interviews with Stesichorus, inverted appendices, and the short, clipped, but nevertheless aesthetically saturated and stylistically blunt language of Charles Simic or John Ashbery. Carson’s novel is bookended by two systematic investigations into Stesichorus as a mythopoetic figure. The first fleshes out his presence in the classical cannon and provides an ornamental and fictional recapitulation of the \textit{Geryoneis} fragments, all of which is followed by three appendices detailing the blindness of Stesichorus and the attendant palinode of Helen. The second is an apostrophic interview between the poets, foregrounded by an appositional attachment to the title on the first page, \textit{Autobiography of Red: A Romance}. Romantic inversion belies the tragic elements inborn in the Geryon myth, and structures the novel around a tripartite association with the Hellenistic romance, of which Chariton’s \textit{Callirhoe} is an example,\textsuperscript{123} romance of the medieval, renaissance, and early nineteenth-century periods, and romance of the modern era. The central nexus is dominated by a wayward \textit{Bildungsroman} that takes as it subject Geryon’s adolescence and early adulthood, presented in the manner of photographic episodes that reflect quite keenly the fragmentary nature of the papyri. His life, although arrayed in a linear manner, is saturated with non-consecutive events that have concussive import throughout.


\textsuperscript{123} The association with Geryon’s mother is apparent.
the novel. What is more, Geryon is an exercise in introspection, and, borrowing the fatalistic framework of Stesichorus, contends with issues of temporal displacement and personal dissension.

Much of the biographic information utilized by Hesiod, Stesichorus, and Pseudo-Apollodorus, is adapted to fit the parameters of Carson’s project. He has a father whose absence is just as noticeable as Chrysaor’s in the original myth, a mother who exhibits the same tender, albeit neglectful, care for her son, and a sibling who harbors varying levels of personal savagery. In place of a sister, however, Carson creates a brother to compliment the meager and unassuming young Geryon, one who, while far from begetting a host of monsters as Echidna does in the Hesiodic tradition, indoctrinates his younger brother in an economy of sexual incest predicated upon masturbation. It is this violative assault, this personal and deeply physical transgression, and voyage “into the rotten ruby of the night… [that] became a contest of freedom / and bad logic,”124 that first sparks Geryon’s interest in autobiography. The day following his brother’s formative carnal intimidation, he “began his autobiography… [in which he] set down all inside things / particularly his own heroism / and early death much to the despair of the community… [and] coolly omitted / all outside things.”125 A few pages later, in chapter VI, the reader is exposed to the first scant entries of his creative work, which, in true metaphysical fashion, mirror almost exactly those represented in its mythic predecessor. Geryon writes:

**Total Facts Known About Geryon.**
Geryon was a monster everything about him was red. Geryon lived on an island in the Atlantic called the Red Place. Geryon’s mother was a river that runs to the sea the Red Joy River Geryon’s father was gold. Some say Geryon had six hands six feet some wings. Geryon was red so were his strange red cattle. Herakles came one day killed Geryon got the cattle…

125 Ibid., 29.
Questions Why did Herakles kill Geryon?
1. Just violent.
2. Had to it was one of His Labors
3. Got the idea that Geryon was Death otherwise he could live forever.

Finally
Geryon had a little red dog Herakles killed that too.\textsuperscript{126}

There is an eerie palimpsestic quality underscoring the passage, the uncanny crank of ancient cogs sliding laboriously into place, and a deeply disturbing echoic significance in Geryon’s preliminary description. Provided above are all of the events and attendant queries that comprise the course of his life on a different literary plan. Incidents such as these, although not directly present in Carson’s novel, maintain a kinetic potential that threatens at poignant moments to break from its mythological seams and taint the whole of her work.

Geryon is established immediately as a pensive child, curious, and very much aware of his physical differences and emotional scope. He is red, as in Hesiod, and he does have wings that make frequent appearances and serve as “his affliction but also, ultimately, his means of discovering his true self,”\textsuperscript{127} and which he keeps bound and hidden throughout the course of the novel. His subjugation is inherent and self-alienation constructed along stringent guidelines. At one point he remarks that his favorite weapon, to his brother’s incredulity, is a cage,\textsuperscript{128} a stylized image of captivation that dovetails with physical descriptors yielded by the classical sources. In Hesiod and Pseudo-Apollodorus it is Geryon’s location, his habitation of the distant Erythea, that necessitate distance and divorce, while in Carson it is the circumscribed spaces of identification that foster such qualities.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{127} Hall, 223.
\textsuperscript{128} Carson, \textit{Autobiography of Red}, 33.
Despite the traumatic course of his childhood, “somehow Geryon made it to adolescence.”\footnote{Ibid., 39.} It is at this juncture, and forgoing the prophetic implications of his first journal entry, that “he met Herakles and the kingdoms of his life all shifted down a few notices… [because] They were two superior eels / at the bottom of the tank and they recognized each other like italics.”\footnote{Idem.} Herakles is older by two years, arrogant, raucous, and a bit self-concerned, but, nevertheless, Geryon kindles a love for him that does not make him “gentle or kind”\footnote{Carson, \textit{Autobiography of Red}, 42.} but instead introspective and caustic. Shortly after their first sexual experience, at ages fourteen and sixteen respectively, Geryon visits Herakles hometown of Hades. The reappropriation of the classical underworld, in much the same fashion as fate in Stesichorus and Meneoites’ occupation as cowherd of the flock of Hades in Pseudo-Apollodorus, serves as a reminder of the ill-omened relationship and establishes continuity between past and present textual narratives.

Geryon familiarizes himself with Hades, and interacts closely with Herakles’ grandmother,\footnote{If the classical lineage is maintained, although the connection appears to be either tenuous or non-existent, this could be a modern representation of Rhea, Zeus’ mother, or Anaxo, Alcemene’s mother, both of whom were grandmothers to Herakles.} herself an accomplished photographer who captured the eruption of the island’s volcano. It is a period of transition and physical growth, in which he experiences “a pain not felt since childhood.”\footnote{Carson, \textit{Autobiography of Red}, 53.} His wings, perpetual reminders of difference and external markers of internal dissonance, begin to struggle “like the little mindless red animals they were,”\footnote{Idem.} and he is driven by personal necessity to lash them together with a wooden plank. It is a form of restraint, one that mirrors the intrinsic regulation of expression with which he must cope until the novel’s conclusion.

\footnotesize{\bibliography{references}}
Hades is transformed into a realm of autonomy, a splendid utopian and ravine-riddled landscape that acts as a respite for Geryon. It is the absence of its presence, at his mother’s behest, that prompts painful evaluation. Although the wayward tête-à-tête between Geryon and Herakles continues after his departure, it is unequivocally strained and ultimately severed. The image presented, however, is far from polarized. Herakles is a diligent grandson to his ailing grandmother, Geryon a sensitive young man stung by love and heartache but nevertheless caught up in its ravenous desire. Contradictions exist but only as a form of perverse unity, acting in cosmic collusion to bring about a gaiety that transfigures dread.\textsuperscript{135} Fate, even in the classical sphere, mandates the separation of the two characters, and its inevitability eventually comes to fruition.

Herakles does not kill Geryon in the traditional sense. Both are very much alive, and presumably continue on in such a manner after \textit{Autobiography of Red} concludes. Nevertheless, the sexual violence implicit in their relationship—foregrounded by the inherent alienation produced by homosexuality in a modern, albeit mythically mapped, society—soft-peddles his insecurities and complicates his already complicated sense of self. He enters “a numb time, caught between the tongue and the taste,”\textsuperscript{136} and straddles the indistinct anodynic boundary between wakefulness and sleep, evocative of the poppy imagery employed by Stesichorus, which is closest in form to stasis. During this time, his autobiography having acquired the quality of a photo journal, he travels to Buenos Aires and experiences an artificial flight which throws into sharper relief the suppressed capability of his organic faculties. A poignant entry from \textit{Fodor’s Guide to South America}, suggesting that “the gaucho acquired an exaggerated notion / of master over / his own destiny from the simple act of riding on horseback / way across the

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 72.
plain,”ⁱ³⁷ mirrors appropriately his own philosophical displacement. His method of deriving agency from flight is checked by his inability to reconcile destabilizing and distinct physical differences.

The reader next glimpses Geryon as an aspiring philosopher in Argentina, indoctrinated by bombastic philosophical pretention, and scribbling quotes from Heidegger on postcards in an esoteric café. These are ironic, overbroad, and wildly funny, all manifesting a similar tenor such as when Geryon notes that “there are many Germans / in Buenos Aires they are / all psychoanalysts the / weather is lovely wish you / were here.”ⁱ³⁸ At this juncture, his wings have grown unmanageable. In order to check their transparency he dons a large overcoat—a device of peculiar accentuation—which only serves, as a mark of poignant repression, to distance him further from others.ⁱ³⁹ His wings are powerful moderators of personality, and fettered they check his character progression.ⁱ⁴⁰ During his stint in Argentina, Geryon is also largely ensconced in Heideggerian and Aristotelian thought, and attends a conference and subsequent dinner which yields the controlling theory of time and interaction threaded throughout Autobiography of Red. Such is conveyed in a brilliant anecdote by a Jewish psychologist named Lazer. He recounts to Geryon:

Well for example this morning
I was sitting at my desk at home looking out on the acacia trees that grow beside
the balcony beautiful trees very tall
and my daughter was there she likes to stand beside me and draw pictures while
I write in my journal. It
was very bright this morning unexpectedly clear like a summer day and I looked up and I looked up
and saw a shadow of a bird go flashing
across the leaves of the acacia as if on a screen projected and it seemed to me that I
was standing on a hill. I have labored up

ⁱ³⁷ Ibid., 81.
ⁱ³⁸ Ibid., 83.
ⁱ⁴⁰ Idem.
to the top of this hill, here I am it has taken about half my life to get here and on
the other side the hill slopes down.
behind me somewhere if I turned around I could see my daughter beginning to climb
hand over hand like a little gold
animal in the morning sun. That is who we are. Creatures moving on a hill.
At different distances, said Geryon.
At distances always changing. We cannot help one another or even cry out—
what would I say to her,
‘Don’t climb so fast!’

The subjective and phenomenological units indirectly addressed by Lazer are those that influence
the process of autobiography, a literal self-writing, and confound the notion of solipsistic
preoccupation. More directly, they verbalize a basis of connectivity in the novel. Lazer’s
depiction of time and location promotes a sharp awareness of its current, which extends in both
directions, and serves as the broad basis for inclusivity upon which human commonality
flourishes. Another, more significant, implication results from Lazer’s tale: it suggests the inborn
alienation inherent in human existence, the monstrous incongruities maintained through the sheer
construct of strained interaction, and serves as a temporal turning point for Geryon.

Shortly thereafter, and following his realization that “there are no words for a world
without self, seen with impersonal clarity,” Geryon reencounters Herakles and his friend
Ancash, both of whom have undertaken to record the sounds produced by volcanoes. United by
this painful and inflammatory collision, the product of parallel temporal and geographic
landsapes, the three travel to Peru. Although Herakles’ continues to violate the boundaries
legislated by personal space, inflicting again fresh sexual and psychological wounds upon
Geryon, it is Ancash who subsequently becomes the primary instigator of self-reflection in the
novel. He is the first figure, precluding Geryon’s mother, brother, and, presumably, Herakles, to

141 Carson, 95.
142 Stuart J. Murray, “The Autobiographical Self: Phenomenology and the Limits of Narrative Self Possession in
see his wings fully unfurled. He runs “his fingers slowly / down the red struts that articulated each wing base,”144 and proceeds to tell Geryon about the Yazcol Yazcamac, those Peruvian figures who saw inside of the volcano and return red-hued and winged, with “all their weaknesses burned away.”145 It is a striking moment of continuity and commiseration, which, prior to Herakles’ interruption, places Geryon in a position of superiority and enlightenment. This is echoed shortly thereafter when Ancash, his mother, Herakles, and Geryon decide to visit the volcano in person, and in doing so transgress collectively against the sacrosanct boundary in the hope of spectacular observation. It is, as classicist Edith Hall notes, a moment in which “sadness and envy at the lost potentialities of rich, precise language seem to glitter beneath Geryon’s own interest.”146 The journey heavenward—as if in death—is the linguistic center in which the Jenseitsfahrt, the Greek, and the contemporary myths meet, and which serves as the catalyst for Geryon’s actualization.

The novel culminates not so much with the visage of the volcano as it does with a physical altercation between Ancash and Geryon. In a keen moment of observation, the former gleans Geryon’s interest in Herakles, and, harboring his own burgeoning desire, strikes him. The scuffle is quickly resolved and the lingering substantive question disclosed: “Do you love him?”147 Geryon tentatively responds, “In my dreams I do.”148 The nature of such a distinction is paramount—this poisoned arrow is dipped not in the blood of the Lernaean Hydra but instead in the visceral serum of thwarted affection—and the swift chime of time vis-à-vis reality comes to a shattering crescendo. There is but one action left to execute, and Geryon indulges in its exercise: although he “had not flown for years… [he might as well] be a / black spot raking its way toward

144 Ibid., 128.
145 Ibid., 129.
146 Hall, 222.
147 Carson, 143.
148 Idem.
the crater of Icchantikas on icy possibles… [and with] the bitter red drumming of wing muscle on air.”149 He unbinds his wings and sets off toward the hollow, cloaked in overt Dantean imagery,150 and unencumbered by the crippling anathema of self-doubt and ostracization. When all three later view the volcano, with time wending “towards them / where they stand side by side with arms touching, immortality on their faces, night at their back,”151 it is a moving moment of release and a mythological deviation that bucks the yoke of previous textual history in favor of the human chorus of self-acknowledgment and comprehension.

The Geryon of *Autobiography of Red* is an eclectic combination of his past incarnations, and makes use of their lexicon of identification and classification without abiding by similar principles of polarization. He is, in the strictest sense, a δεύτεροποτμοι (*deuteropotmoi*), a second-fated one, who faces death and is subsequently revived.152 Carson gives him new life, a complex modern history that straddles precariously classical allusion and poetic fiction, and equally contributes a new prong to the monster figure. It is one of intense suppression and colorful guilt concerning both physical abnormalities and emotional complexity, wedded to problematic constructs of memory and reflection. While its configuration is nothing ostensibly progressive, the logical inquiry that follows is worth addressing: how is Carson’s Geryon different from the others? He makes use of the similar mythology patterns, and is subject to unparalleled levels of sympathetic indulgence and compassion. More so than that, however, he is a figure who is evidently accepted into society.

Carson’s Geryon is not relegated to a desolate mere like Grendel or forced to the outer extremities like Frankenstein’s monster but instead is admitted to the world carved out for his

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150 Vid. Canto XVII.
inhabitation. The boundaries erected are self-created, and he, more so than any of his predecessors, is keenly aware of his differences. His refusal to acknowledge them—his red hue and winged torso as physicalized representations of social guilt and the implicit chasm created by superficially unconventional forms of love and affection—is the primary catalyst that indicts him as monstrous. The modern monster, moreover, is one plagued by internal dissonance, and shirks the classical trope of transgressor and transgressed in favor of an overlapping platform of joint implication. It is a medium for comprehension, and, in its cultural relativity, the essential and unflappable arbiter of introspection. Geryon, more specifically, is the full force of human insecurity contextualized against the monolithic barrier of custom and the brilliance of intimacy which contravenes its tenets.

Scholastic reception of *Autobiography of Red* also trumpets Geryon’s introspective qualities, and edifies Carson’s instrumental hand in shaping the modern monster figure. In particular, Monique Tschofen has gone to great length in demonstrating the process by which Carson “excavates and resurrects Geryon.”¹⁵³ The Geryon of Carson’s work, as “a composite pieced together from fragments which originate elsewhere,” is concerned with dissembling and disassembling.¹⁵⁴ In his frenetic attempt to dismantle—for the purpose of comprehension—the world about him, Geryon forgets to address the piecemeal material from which he himself is constructed. The chief existential crisis present in *Autobiography of Red*, and the quandary inborn in all monster figures, is not purely one of irreconcilable differences with the surrounding environment as much as it is one rooted in an inherent inability to determine one’s place in it. Geryon is able to execute his final act of self-release the moment he finds tangible proof to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 34; 35.
suggest that, contrary to etymological assertions in the past, he is not out of keeping with the
nature elements from which he is ultimately derived.

“To Deny the Existence of Red / Is to Deny the Existence of Mystery”: Conclusion—
Geryon as the Evolutionary Monster

The individual who does deny the existence of red, Carson continues, is “the soul...[who]
will one day go mad.” Self-knowledge is remedy to monstrosity, and serves as the broad
bulwark that safeguards intimacy and individuality. It is also, paradoxically, the circular current
that brings again the monster, and all of its sundry implications, to the forefront of the literary
and social imaginations. The monster is most probably a host of different things: vexatious,
contention, problematized, necessary, and ubiquitous, and, to renew Cohen’s claim, “we live in a
time of monsters.” They exist in every discernible region of the mind, compose the heritable
units of memory, and are the essential touchstones by which one defines oneself against the
greater mass of social individuation.

The Ancient Greeks were forward-thinking in their etymological connotations of the
monstrous, forgoing any definitive restriction, and promoting a protean base that allowed for
multiple lenses of evaluation. Latin and English, although each with their mechanisms of
connotative flexibility, were more rigid in classing the monster as a figure out of keeping with
nature, and prompted its ongoing association with physical abnormality and malicious
psychological and sociopathic behavior. Such denotations were duly reflected in literary corpora
from the 14th century onward, and have become stylized representations of the foreign figure or
alienated other. There have, however, flourished noteworthy examples that have sought, whether
inadvertently or deliberately, to confound orthodox notions of the monstrous. Not all Greek texts

156 Idem.
157 Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 3.
have gone on at length to reinforce “the political and cultural hegemony of propertied males,”¹⁵⁸ and many have instead sought to provide progressive narratives on disenfranchisement and alienation.

In this vein, Geryon is a progenitor of the social monster. He has evolved from the slight primordial figure in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, and, before that point as the multifaceted folk-tale figure found in disparate cultural spheres, to the full-bodied and powerfully implicative character of Stesichorus, Pindar, Pseudo-Apollodorus, Dante, and Carson. While there is no definitive reason for his continued existence, and despite the infractions of memory that neglect his presence in the ongoing dialogue, he has maintained a robust position in Western literature. Perhaps this is merely because inborn in Geryon are all the qualities necessary for a fruitful social narrative. He is a physical aberration, even in a Greek world where comparative and superlative adjectives were used to suggest degrees of difference, a cultural pariah, and an alienated figure who does not deign to inveigh against boundaries other than his own. It is the hero who serves as the figure of transgression, and the hero who ultimately inaugurates battle and theft. These qualities make Geryon an interesting case study for the internalized creation of the monster, one predicated not only upon the framework of custom but also the very visceral elements of introspection and self-characterization.

These two faculties animate Carson’s Geryon, and *Autobiography of Red* on a larger scale, with the significance necessary to sustain a literary drive. Geryon is wrest from the page, and finds fount for larger expression in a manner the generates very few questions. One could, however, embark upon the thread: what does Carson say about the monster, and what is the new model of monster theory? These will never find absolute answers, and one can only conjecture as

¹⁵⁸ Weinstone, 174.
to their subsequent success. Nevertheless, Carson’s monster operates on a staunchly paradigmatic platform that bridges ontological apprehension. He is one of social self-construction and intense personal anxiety, very much akin to his readership, and seeks to parse out identity as a product of external comparison.

The monster, more broadly, is not only a flesh and blood articulation of difference, but also an idiosyncratic function of memory that generates unfamiliar figures in the hope of prompting their opposite self-association. It is, more significantly, a component of being, ineradicable from the framework of any social institution, which produces the uncanny and promotes the reflective. Geryon, as notable figure amongst its lot, has endured from the classical to the contemporary sphere for just those reasons. Universality, no matter how marginal, has sustained his transmission and bolstered his image. The fact that he is protean, that all monsters are Janus-like in their ability to look both backward and forward, is a supplemental notion that makes his presence all the richer and more fruitful. Bound by the marked archetypical lexicon of social control, which has migrated from the classical to the contemporary sphere, the monster waits with full assurance of its continuation. While it may not flourish in the largest compendiums or the most broadcasted spectacle, the monster can withstand the harsh and atmospheric environments of any landscape. From the smallest margin to the broadest literary schematic, it retains adaptive capabilities of mimicry and plasticity which ensure that—in the harsh Darwinian process of literary and mythic natural selection—it will forever remain primed for survival.
Bibliography


--------------. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen, pg. 3-25.


