

2015-02-03

Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson

McDowell, Drew

McDowell, D. (2015). Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/27947
<http://hdl.handle.net/11023/2072>

Downloaded from PRISM Repository, University of Calgary

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson

by

Drew McDowell

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 2015

© Drew McDowell 2015

Abstract

This study examines Anne Carson's use and abuse of the lyric form, elucidating how Carson reinvigorates the lyric poem with the power of the sublime, and theorizing the relationship between poetry and knowledge. Through three critical and historical inflections, "*Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson*" contextualizes Carson's *synthetic* approach to poetry alongside the work of her significant influences and her significant peers. In following two diverging themes in Carson's work, the erotic and the thanatological, this dissertation posits a new way to understand Carson's contribution to poetry in Canada. By illuminating the ways in which Carson proffers a significant challenge to both contemporary critical practices and contemporary poetic practices, "*Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson*" traces the development of an alternative lyrical tradition – a tradition that manifests the sublime as a "counter-song" to the neo-Romanticism that pervades lyricism in Canada.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The Introduction, "Troubling Propositions," links Carson's reception by readers, critics, and academics to her unique poetics, elaborating on the controversies surrounding both her publications and her prestigious, international awards. Chapter one, "*Synagôgê* and *Diairesis*: Anne Carson's Classical Precedents," establishes the way the Classics influence Carson's poetry and scholarship, including her theories of both desire and loss. Chapter two, "The Matter of History: Anne Carson's Modern Inflections," provides context for Carson's poetic experimentalism, locating her concerns about historical representation among those of Ezra Pound, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Phyllis Webb, and P. K. Page. Chapter three, "Postmodern Relatives: Anne Carson's Elusive Doubles," theorizes her subversive use of

the lyric in relation to Postmodernist epistemology, including an examination the work of her peers Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson. In conclusion, “*Symbolon: The Poetry of Anne Carson*” speculates that Carson’s approach to the lyric both affirms the consanguinity of philosophy and poetics, and constitutes an alternative to the dominant lyrical tradition in Canada.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation and pursuing this degree, I have incurred many debts. Although poor compensation, I proffer my gratitude and warmest appreciation. First, I must thank my supervisor, Christian Bök, for his patient encouragement, his unwavering support, and his keen attention. I am grateful for such generosity of both time and spirit. Additionally, I offer my thanks to my committee members, Jon Kertzer and Harry Vandervlist, for their graciousness and willingness to help at a moment's notice. Thanks, also, to my two external examiners, Noreen Humble and Tanis MacDonald.

Without assistance from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Department of English, completing this project would have been impossible. I am thankful for financial support in the form of scholarships, awards, and assistantships, including the Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship in 2009 and 2010, and the Graduate Faculty Council Scholarship in 2010.

For their reassuring kindness, good humour, and challenging conversation, I am indebted to Sungfu Tsai, Matt Kriz, and Mike Roberson, who have influenced me remarkably and never asked for anything but friendship in return.

My mother and father have provided me with love, sustenance, and encouragement in the pursuit of this endeavor. I humbly thank them for the opportunities they have granted me.

Finally, I owe a lifetime of gratitude to my wife, Andrea. Her patience, her love, and her understanding have made this project, and all other things, possible.

I dedicate this dissertation to Andrea, the love of my life.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures and Illustrations	vii
INTRODUCTION: TROUBLING PROPOSITIONS	1
CHAPTER ONE: <i>SYNAGÔGÊ</i> AND <i>DIARESIS</i> : ANNE CARSON'S CLASSICAL PRECEDENTS	42
Theorizing the Ineffable	47
Theorizing Eros	56
Claims of Longing	62
Theorizing Loss	76
Claims of Loss	84
CHAPTER TWO: THE MATTER OF HISTORY: ANNE CARSON'S MODERN INFLECTIONS	102
Modern Loss: Anne Carson and Ezra Pound	112
Modern Longing: Anne Carson and H. D.	127
Modernizing Canada	141
Modern Longing: Anne Carson and Phyllis Webb	143
Modern Loss: Anne Carson and P. K. Page	153
CHAPTER THREE: POSTMODERN RELATIVES: ANNE CARSON'S ELUSIVE DOUBLES	165
Outlining Postmodernism	172
Postmodern Longing: Anne Carson and Sina Queyras	176
Postmodern Loss: Anne Carson and Sina Queyras	193
Postmodern Longing: Anne Carson and Lisa Robertson	208
Postmodern Loss: Anne Carson and Lisa Robertson	218
CONCLUSION: <i>RED DOC</i> >	228
WORKS CITED	248

List of Figures and Illustrations

Fig. 1. Anne Carson, <i>NOX</i> (NY: New Directions, 2010)	96
Fig. 2. Anne Carson, <i>NOX</i> (NY: New Directions, 2010)	97
Fig. 3. Anne Carson, <i>NOX</i> (NY: New Directions, 2010)	98
Fig. 4. Anne Carson, <i>NOX</i> (NY: New Directions, 2010)	99

INTRODUCTION: TROUBLING PROPOSITIONS

When the critic David Solway remarks in his now infamous essay “The Trouble with Annie” that Anne Carson “is a phony, all sleight-of-hand, both as a scholar and a poet,” he rehearses a vituperative assault not only on her poetry, which he finds “obstreperously bad,” but also on the entire cultural industry of scholarly and popular criticism (Solway “Books”).¹ For Solway, criticism in Canada resembles a “professional scam” where reviewers celebrating Carson’s books contrive “a gigantic pyramid scheme no-one can blow the whistle on” (Solway “Books”). Indeed, the zeal with which many critics laud Carson’s poetry is matched only by the zeal with which Solway disparages it. Yet, Solway identifies what is certainly the most puzzling aspect of Carson’s critical reception: the enthusiasm that she receives from popular reviewers and the reluctance of academic specialists to comment on any but her most ubiquitous works. Carson’s popularity with juries is unmatched; her poetry has won the Lannan Literary Award (1996), the Pushcart Prize (1997), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1998), the MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship (2000), the Griffin Poetry Prize (2001), the T.S. Eliot Prize (2001), the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation (2010), and a second, Griffin Poetry Prize

¹ This essay originally appears in *Books in Canada*. In a later, revised version for *Director’s Cut*, Solway softens his hyperbole, rephrasing this statement to read, “*her work appears to be chiefly sleight-of-hand, both the scholarship and the poetry*” (44; emphasis added). Such a revision is most likely a response to the backlash from the readers and writers of *Books in Canada*. Nevertheless, the essay in *Director’s Cut* registers a number of significant revisions (primarily those which tend to confuse criticism of writing with criticism of a writer). See Solway “Books”; Solway “Cut” 39-58.

(2014).² Still, only a handful of academic critics engage her complex, erudite poetry with discerning rigour, and “[e]ven reviews are beginning to sound like extended blurbs” (Solway “Books”).

In attempting to staunch the “gush” that issues from reviews of her books, Solway’s “The Trouble with Annie” exemplifies what has become the other strange aspect of Carson’s ascent to celebrity: the acrimony that even seasoned literary critics employ when they review her work. In an article in *The Guardian*, the eminent critic Robert Potts accuses her of writing “doggerel,” stating that what distinguishes her poetry from prosaic, “confessional-style realism is an occasional (and occasionally clichéd) lyricism, some fashionable philosophising, and an almost artless grafting-on of academic materials” (Potts). Importantly, Potts seeds ground that Solway tills; their objections to Carson proceed along a similar line of reasoning. Yet, it is not the contradictory responses that indicate a critical lacuna in the interpretation of her work; instead, it is the magnitude to which that approval and disapproval continues to grow. On one hand, Carson’s exponents seem confounded by sheer admiration. Harold Bloom enthuses that she is a “[writer] of palpable genius” (11), and he includes her in a very short list of poets whom he admires. On the other hand, her detractors remain untroubled by the increasingly personal tenure of their attacks. The *National Post*’s coverage of the 2001 T. S. Eliot Prize is a poignant example, asking fatuously whether Carson is a “Poet or ‘Prize-reaping machine?’” (Heer B+).

² As of the writing of this dissertation, Anne Carson is the only poet to win the Griffin Poetry Prize twice. She won in 2001 for *Men in the Off Hours*, and again in 2014 for *Red Doc*.

The incongruity of popular esteem and academic indifference may in fact originate from certain, significant elements of Carson's poetry itself. As Daphne Merkin writes in *The New York Times*, Anne Carson's work is "unclassifiable, even by today's motley, genre-bending standards. [Is] she writing poetry? Prose? Prose poems? Fiction? Nonfiction?" (Merkin). Critics have focused disproportionately on either the "problem" of generic classification or on the "problem" of Carson's esotericism. Jeff Hamilton, in an early review essay, succinctly addresses this difficulty of genre and readerly expectation when he asks, "[h]ow do we talk about what hasn't been done before?" (105). Hamilton's comment about Carson's poetics identifies not only the insufficiency of our critical vocabulary, but also one significant obstacle that most critics have not easily surpassed. The difficulty of Carson's poetry stems from the way she manifestly engages literary criticism and continental philosophy *in medias res*. Most notably, her poetry reflects the *synthesis* of disparate temporal, discursive, generic, and aesthetic forms. As a notable Classicist, Anne Carson transfigures a lifetime of eclectic learning into complex, textual assemblages that challenge a reader through both the breadth of their allusion and the depth of their connection. One can open any of her books and find the productive *synthesis* of seemingly unrelated literary genres, where elegant, lyrical observation intermingles with the sharp, poignant assertions of scholarly, philosophical critique. Hence, Robert Potts decries Carson's "artless grafting-on of academic materials" (Potts), and David Solway maligns what (for him) seems like nothing more than "an IKEA-type poetry" (Solway "Books"); hence, Daphne Merkin in *The New York Times* dubs Carson "one of the great pasticheurs" (Merkin), and *The Kenyon Review's* David Baker calls "Canada's most progressive poet" someone who

wants to “cross-pollinate every epoch, genre, and personality she can conjure” (154).

What these contradictory responses illuminate, however, is not only the degree to which her work catalyzes critics and incites strong opinions, but also the degree to which her work grasps something essential – something persistently overlooked – about poetry and the literary arts in the contemporary moment.

One of the aims of this study is to explain the controversial place that Anne Carson occupies in the adjacent territories of contemporary poetry and contemporary poetry criticism. As the incompatible and often antagonistic responses to her work demonstrate, Anne Carson’s poetry straddles competing modes of critical evaluation and competing tendencies in poetic practice. Her critics constitute her work as either conventional or progressive, either authentic or derivative, either domestic or foreign, either Modernist or Postmodernist. Carson’s poetry frustrates the categorical imperatives of contemporary critical practice, exposing the inherent limitations of these categories as they are *nominally* employed. Carson’s work challenges contemporary criticism on a number of fronts: first, her work contests the hegemony of the lyric poem and its discourse of epiphany; second, her work displaces a normative conception of “beauty” as the most prescient, aesthetic criterion; and third, her work transcends the thematic parameters of nationhood as a critical discourse. The irresolute conflict over Carson’s work belies not merely an aberrant, idiosyncratic taste among critics; Carson’s work also calls into question the epistemic discourse of poetry itself. Importantly, to speak of “poetics” is always to consider the relationship between poetry and knowledge, and always to question the hermeneutical systems that transform literary works into things both comprehensible and meaningful. Carson troubles critics and readers at the level

where poetry makes a claim to a specialized, discursive knowledge – a knowledge that, for Carson, exceeds facile containment in the fashionable precepts of present-day criticism. Carson’s poetry disputes the epistemic claim at the basis of all critical discourse, upsetting the established categories of contemporary hermeneutics.

To illustrate the multiple ways in which Carson’s work confronts the epistemological *nomos* that critics apply in discussing her poetry (and what such *nomos* criticism implies about contemporary poetry more generally), I borrow language from the domain of continental philosophy. I examine her *synthetic*, convergent poetics in light of the terms that Immanuel Kant develops in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he proposes that conceptual knowledge arises from the confrontation between pure, *a priori* intuition³ and sensate, experiential phenomena. I describe how Carson’s poetry represents the *manifold* of pure experience, unhinging generic, historical, and aesthetic frames of reference. Where Anne Carson’s experiments in genre, form, and discourse appear hermeneutically incoherent to many critics, I explain how her poetry dramatizes a variety of intuitive perceptions and aesthetic modes, enacting a *synthesis* of apprehensions. Carson’s poetry not only portrays how lived moments (what Wordsworth calls “spots of time”⁴ and what the Language Poets call “transcendental moments”⁵)

³ According to Kant, “intuition” describes the activity of perception – the form that gives shape to, and provides for, the possibility of tangible, sensible experience. As he states in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Objects are therefore given to us by means of our sensibility. Sensibility alone supplies us with intuitions. These intuitions are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding there arise concepts.” See Kant “Reason” 59.

⁴ In the twelfth book of Wordsworth’s “The Prelude,” he writes “There are in our existence spots of time, / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue” (12.208-15). Wordsworth describes the *epiphanic* aspect of poetic experience. See Wordsworth “Prelude” 269-302.

transmute into poetic knowledge, but also how the acquisition of such knowledge causes metaphysical and ontological “shock” (even if this is, somehow, ameliorated through the act of producing a poem).

In what is perhaps a more fashionable nomenclature, Carson’s poetry dramatizes the influence of discourse on the production of experience, revealing that discourses constitute distinct, epistemological, if not ontological, paradigms – the distinct ways of knowing and being in the world. In Carson’s poetry, the mixing of genres and discourses reflects the multiple possibilities of “intuitive” form (to adapt a Kantian vocabulary), and in turn, such poetry reflects the multiple possibilities of sensible experience. To put it more clearly, Anne Carson’s poetry dramatizes the transaction between sensible experience and mental perception in “a fragment of unexhausted time” (Carson, “Economy” viii), where perception must anticipate, and yet also adapt to, heightened experience. In Carson’s poetry, the influence of discourse colours this transaction; her poetry illuminates how epistemological paradigms mediate pure, sensible experience, showing how “what we know” conditions “what is possible” to experience. Some critics have called this the influence of “simulacra.”⁶ Like an anatomical cross-section of time and consciousness, Carson’s poetry embodies this moment of mutual change: where intellect and object are simultaneous and yet separate; where intuition and apprehension

⁵The Language Poets, including such writers as Carla Harryman, Barrett Watten, Ron Silliman, Lyn Hejinian, and the Canadian, Steve McCaffery, write in opposition to heightened, lyrical experience. See Silliman “Aesthetic Tendency” 261-75.

⁶ In Roland Barthes’s essay “The Structuralist Activity,” Barthes defines the simulacrum as “intellect added to object” – an intermediation in the perception of reality where “[s]tructural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it.” The apprehension of experience, therefore, is displaced by the apprehension of simulacra; reality is supplemented by its own projection. See Barthes “Essays” 215.

are both “aligned and adverse”; where knowledge and experience are each “placed like a surface on which the other may come into focus” (Carson “Economy” viii).

In an interview with the eminent critic Stephen Burt in *Publisher’s Weekly*, Carson comments that lyrical poetry “attempts to enter so deeply into history at a particular moment that time stops” (Carson “Borders” 57). She also theorizes the lyric poem specifically in its positional relation between states, as it

aims to capture a moment of change from one time to another, from one situation to another, so it’s not that you describe any moment in the day and make it intense, you choose the moment in the day when everything changed because of some little thing or thought or mood. Homer can tell you the whole history of the fall of Troy, he has 24,000 words to do it, and there’s no necessary choice of frame, of the critical moment. (Carson “Borders” 57)

Carson’s “necessary choice of frame” suggests that, in facing the *manifold* of experience, poetry must order such impressions according to temporal and aesthetic frames, “[entering] so deeply into history” that the normative condition of time ceases to define the successive perception of things. Take the brief lyric “Lear Town” from the sequence entitled “Life of Towns” in *Plainwater*:

Clamor the bells falling bells.

Precede silence of bells.

As madness precedes.

Winter as childhood.

Precedes father.

Into the kill-hole. (96)

Time proceeds normatively as the reader encounters these poetic fragments – that is, from top to bottom, left to right. However, the forward motion of time hinges upon each terminal caesura, so that the reader moves progressively through the poem, but in connection with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, follows the plot along an inverse chronology, diegetically "backward" through the events of the play. As an example of temporal *deixis*, the word "precedes" signals the coincident flows of time; "precedes" plays with what comes before it and after it syntactically, inverting the logical succession of lines in moving from "effects" to "causes." Because of the adversarial relationship between the two momentums of "textual" time, the reader reaches an ambiguous ending ("kill-hole"), an image that simultaneously invokes death (the image of a gravesite) and life (the image of a womb, in following the poem's inverse chronology). The last line of the poem describes both Lear's beginning and his ending – the site of Goneril's, Reagan's, and Cordelia's birth. The great irony of this poem is that, for Lear, the birth of his children marks beginning *and* ending, a simultaneous expression of both *eros* and *thanatos* – the genesis of life and the terminus of death. The last line of Carson's poem signals the convergence (and divergence) of chronologic flows, and becomes the absent centre, the excluded middle, from which time moves both centrifugally and centripetally. In the deep aporia of this poem, Carson depicts Lear's madness as the endlessly recursive and endlessly dialectical ground "zero" of temporality; Lear is caught in an infinite feedback loop, where the foundation for all possible experience (the *a priori* condition of linear time) cannot resolve itself into a successive, forward momentum.

As an accomplished historian and scholar of Classic literature, Anne Carson brings “enviable resources” (Rasula 32) to bear on the composition of her poetry, and so her work reflects an overwhelming *synthesis* of so many complex means of plying knowledge from the *manifold* of raw, experiential data. This dissertation presents a study of Carson’s *synthetic* poetics through the lenses of Classicism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. This *synthetic* approach more accurately portrays her enormous contribution to Canadian poetry and international poetry by revealing the various, contradictory ways that her work engages both the aesthetic theories and the epistemological claims of Modernism and Postmodernism. For Carson, Modernist experimentalism and Postmodernist experimentalism dramatize an epistemological crisis that questions the veracity of absolute discourses such as history, truth, and representation – questions that unsettle the very foundation of the western, literary tradition. Furthermore, Carson locates the genesis of such crises in Classical sources, as essential problems rooted deeply in the history of western thinking about writing and representation. I argue that, for Carson, the Classics characterize many of the central concerns that theorists of Modernism and Postmodernism portray as distinctly *contemporary* problems. I contend that Carson’s vast learning provides her with a powerful way of recognizing not only how Modernism and Postmodernism represent the limits of western epistemology, but also how those limits have been previously anticipated by Classical authors.

In order to demonstrate how Carson’s poetry reveals the origins of contemporary thought in Classical sources, I theorize her work in relation to its use of Classical literature, and I examine how her work features the Classics as exemplary literary forms.

In Carson's poetry, the Classics are not only touchstones of western literary consciousness, but also enduring sites where the competition between literary values is continuously staged and restaged. Since ideas about literature, culture, and criticism evolve, every epoch reconfigures Classical texts according to their own necessary pretensions to truth, history, and knowledge. The Classics accumulate a special importance in Carson's poetry: as developmental precursors to the poetic *techné* of both Modernism and Postmodernism, the Classics are both exemplars of ideal, literary performance and prototypes for lyrical experimentation. Most importantly, I consider how Carson's poetry represents the sublime, working from the theories supplied by such disparate literary figures as Longinus in *On the Sublime*, Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*, Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, and Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. For Carson, the theory of the sublime provides a means to understand experiences that overwhelm the capacities of both knowledge and sensibility. The sublime both recognizes the epistemological limits of knowledge and transgresses those limits with unbounded magnitude. I offer readings of Carson's work in relation to Modernist and Postmodernist discourses – discourses that achieve the status of doctrine even as they rehash age-old literary anxieties and age-old conflicts between literary generations: either tradition *or* innovation; either Classicism *or* Romanticism; either teleology *or* teleonomy; either the learned sanctity of “form,” *or* the rhapsodic spontaneity of “content.”

In the following chapters, I demonstrate that Carson's *synthetic* poetics engages the discourses of Classicism, Modernism, and Postmodernism as epistemological paradigms. By organizing my discussion around two thematic strains that characterize

Carson's work, the *erotic* and the *thanatological*, I attempt to recreate some of the dialectical energy that shapes her poetics. Chapter One examines Carson's highly original use of Classical sources. First, I theorize her work according to the sublime, since the sublime constitutes an aesthetic response to epistemological rupture. Following, I develop an argument about Sapphic lyricism that builds upon Carson's theory of desire from *Eros the Bittersweet* – a theory which informs her translation, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Turning my attention to Carson's *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan*, I demonstrate how Carson's theory of loss illuminates her work in *NOX*, and how Classical texts provide epistemological models for the contemplation of personal loss. Because she is a noted translator of the Classics, Anne Carson is in a good position to see how our current paradigms of knowledge and our current theories of textuality predetermine our relationship with the Classics; conversely, Carson is also in a good position to recognize how rarely we observe the role of Classic literature in determining our relationship to knowledge and textuality.

Chapter Two investigates the relation between Carson's poetics of *synthesis* and the literary Modernism of Ezra Pound and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), two writers who articulate Modernist aesthetics in their respective texts *ABC of Reading* and *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Chapter Two also considers the work of Hugh Kenner and Charles Altieri, theorists who investigate the relationship between Modernist poetics and epistemology. I examine how Modernism's flirtation with Classical writers and Classical forms constitutes a reaction to the previous Romantic age, and I focus on the manner in which the Classics have been configured by writers such as Ezra Pound and "H. D.

Imagiste” to support Modernist, aesthetic ideology. Using Pound’s *ABC of Reading* along with some of his shorter essays on poetics, I explicate poems from both Carson’s *Plainwater* and Pound’s *Lustra*, noting how Pound’s early experiments in lyric poetry provide models for Carson’s contemplation of loss and mourning. Likewise, I demonstrate how H. D.’s *Notes on Thought and Vision* and *The Wise Sappho* anticipate Carson’s theory of desire, offering explications of both Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* and H. D.’s *Helen in Egypt*. Additionally, this chapter contrasts American Modernist poets and Canadian Modernist poets, illustrating how some Canadian responses to the epistemic crisis of Modernity differ from the more well-known American responses. I conclude this chapter with readings of Phyllis Webb’s *Naked Poems* and P.K. Page’s *The Metal and the Flower*, highlighting the works of Canadian poets who share with their American counterparts some similar concerns about *poesis* and knowledge.

Chapter Three, the final substantive chapter of my dissertation, places Carson’s poetics within a context of Postmodernism. I examine her poetics in relation to the work of such theorists as Jean-François Lyotard and Linda Hutcheon. Many critics deny that Postmodernism signals an intellectual paradigm-shift from the previous epoch of Modernism, and instead such critics describe Postmodernism as Fredric Jameson does in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* – as a hyperbolic parody of Modernist experimentalism, where “[m]odernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes” (17). However, in Carson’s poetry, experimental, Postmodernist aesthetics respond to the epistemological crisis first elaborated by the Modernists. Postmodernism, in Carson’s work, addresses the problems inherent in constituting knowledge according to such absolute concepts as truth, history, and representation. Chapter Three

investigates how Carson's *synthetic* poetics uses the lyric to examine the confrontation between intuition and experience. By engaging questions about truth, history, and representation, Carson also demonstrates how Postmodern thought draws its limits from Classical literature. The second part of this chapter offers readings of Carson's poetry against the work of Canadian writers Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson. I examine Queyras's *Lemon Hound* and Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*, theorizing the complementary treatment of *eros* in these two texts. I then suggest the similarities between Queyras's *Expressway* and Carson's *Men in the Off Hours*, especially their treatment of loss. This chapter ends by discussing the representation of *eros* in Robertson's *The Men: A Lyric Book* alongside Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*, and by theorizing similarities in the representation of *thanatos* in Robertson's *Magenta Soul Whip* and Carson's *Men in the Off Hours*.

Although Anne Carson's poetry is most striking for how its diverse parts cohere, this dissertation proceeds "cartographically,"⁷ by following each of the major streams of Carson's work in isolation – a method that tests the coherence of her poetics through such a principle of organization. This interpretive approach emphasizes heterogeneity by following several interimplicated concerns in her poetry, including her relationship to Classicism, her relationship to Modernism, and her relationship to Postmodernism. By looking at features of Carson's work in isolation, this dissertation separates her poetry

⁷ About the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari state: "The rhizome is . . . *a map and not a tracing* . . . What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real . . . The map is open and connected in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversal, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation . . . Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (emphasis in original). See Deleuze 13-14.

from the contradictory ways in which critics interpret her poetry. I also examine how such critical assumptions centralize a historical conception of poetic tradition. Carson's work questions the epistemic foundations of Modernism and Postmodernism, especially when many critics can only distinguish between these two discourses in terms of the intensity of their aesthetic *nomos*.

In many cases, Carson's critics merely rehearse age-old debates that have infected Canadian criticism since before Confederation: the xenophobic response to foreign literary influence and the anxious nail-biting over a home-grown literature that is "Canadian enough." The crisis of Canadian identity has deep roots in Canada's origins – when colonial values could still taint Canada's utopian newness, and when the politically volatile settlement of America still posed an existential threat. In Canada's first anthology of poetry, *Selections from Canadian Poets* (1864), Edward Hartley Dewart derides the poets of Canada for their specifically colonial cast of mind (XIV). Similarly, the critic E. K. Brown in *On Canadian Poetry* contrasts the thematic nationalism of poets such as G. D. Roberts with the Modernist experiments imported by younger poets just before, and just after, the First World War. The quasi-academic reviews published by A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott in *The McGill Fortnightly Review* (and later in both *Preview* and *Northern Review*), dramatize such conflicts among the champions of each aesthetic sensibility. In the introduction to *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, Eli Mandel observes that in the years leading up to the Second World War, critics take up two positions on poetry in Canada: the first perceives Canadian poetry as colonial, conventional, and derivative of stuffy British tradition; the second perceives Canadian poetry as vulgar, unpoetic, and derivative of crass American impudence (11-14). Mandel explains such a

deeply contradictory, deeply nationalistic conflict by noting that Canadian poetry criticism has always reflected this pattern of opposites in tension – a conflict of tradition and innovation, manifesting in the years between wars as a disagreement about poetic form and *vers libre*.⁸ In a statement made in the first issue of *New Frontier*, Leo Kennedy epitomizes this Modernist reaction to the literature of Canada's past: "It is as though a colony of shoddy late Tennysonian poets had been miraculously preserved here in all the drab bloom of their youth, cut from improving contact with the outer world, and reduced for purposes of criticism and comparison to the glib affabilities of their own numbers" (283).

Like the contradictory responses to Anne Carson's work, the conflict between advocates of *vers libre* and advocates of poetic formalism in early twentieth-century Canadian criticism constitute two contrasting positions about what poetry should do, what poetry should be, and what poetry counts as "Canadian." For the Modernists, the crisis in poetic values (and sociopolitical values, more generally), responds to a stagnant condition where, to quote Clement Greenberg, "creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters" (4). To many critics and poets of the time, Modernist experimentalism corresponds not only to a generational shift in practice but also to a shift in paradigm, signalling a change in perception about how poetic discourse represents knowledge, and proffering a challenge to the dubious assumptions of the past – assumptions which

⁸ In Arthur Stringer's introduction to *Open Water*, he notes the impulse in modern art to "achieve what may be called formal emancipation," and notes that in poetry specifically, rhyme and traditional form are anachronistic, shackling expression to an outdated tendency of thought. Also, John Murray Gibbon makes a similar argument in "Rhymes With and Without Reason." See Stringer 10; Gibbon 26-34.

naturalize a certain way of thinking about the world. The conflict surrounding Canadian poetry takes shape along lines that distinguish between the old and the young, the conventional and the progressive. When Eli Mandel characterizes the Modernist period in Canada as opposites in tension, he describes the parameters of critical position – parameters that, historically speaking, have defined the institutional relationships⁹ between critics and poets, and between grant juries and grant recipients.¹⁰ Such positions have even determined socially central and socially marginal practices. The xenophobia toward foreign literary influence persists because, as Frye notes in the conclusion to *Literary History of Canada*, Canadian identity aims for definition through literature (218). As the luminaries of each generation ascend to social and institutional prominence, they not only become rigid and parochial in their literary tastes; they also become rigid and parochial in their definition of Canada.

For better or for worse, “Canadianism” remains the criterion by which literary work accumulates status in the literary-cultural milieu of Canada, and “Canadianism” remains the critical *telos* by which Canadian critics ascertain literary value. Although the sense of what is “Canadian” may evolve over time,¹¹ a literary work that contests the

⁹ The publication of the *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences* in 1951 (the “Massey Commission”), recommended the formation of such cultural bodies as the *Canada Council for the Arts* (*Canada Council Act* passed parliament 28 March 1957), in order to provide institutional support for Canada’s artists.

¹⁰ See Frank Davey’s discussion about how literary “power” circulates according to the principles of institutional politics and cultural policy in *Canadian Literary Power*. Also, Lynette Hunter’s *Outsider Notes* examines the relationship between the ideology of the “Nation-state” and the influence of Canada’s socialized cultural systems and their influence on Canadian literature.

¹¹ Enoch Padolsky’s “Cultural Diversity and Canadian Literature: A Pluralistic Approach to Majority and Minority Writing in Canada” provides a good overview of the issue of Canadian “identity” in the late twentieth century. Additionally, Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies* incisively considers the discourse

hegemony of nationalist *topoi*, or fails to locate itself deeply enough in national concerns, often finds a hostile reception among critics of Canadian literature. Frank Davey's seminal essay "Surviving the Paraphrase" from 1976 directly responds to the "bad sociology" (431) of nationalist, thematic criticism – though perhaps Davey has more cause than most. As a member of the experimental *TISH* group of poets (including George Bowering, Fred Wah, and later, Daphne Marlatt) working in Vancouver from the early 1960s onward, Davey rejects the parochialism of Canadian criticism when the experiments of *TISH* fail to attract even moderate attention from the institutions of Canadian criticism – institutions employing many prominent Canadian Modernists. In "Literary Scenes in Canada," a short paper that appears on *canlit.ca*, Ian Rae notes that "experiments in open form writing by avant-garde American writers,"¹² inspire *TISH* poets to "[challenge] what they [perceive] as the Eurocentrism and bourgeois values of the Montreal moderns" (Rae "Scenes"). Over the span of twenty years, the "Montreal moderns" move from a position at the forefront of literary experimentalism to a position at the rear (from *avant* to *arrière*). For Davey and the rest of the *TISH* practitioners, the Modernists represent all that is institutionally coercive, all that is contrived, and all that is generic in the province of Canadian literature.

The generational conflict between the Modernists and the *TISH* poets also recognizes a pattern of opposites in tension, a situation that closely resembles the

of multiculturalism to the notion of Canadian identity and Canadian culture. See Padolsky 24-42; Kamboureli 131-74.

¹² Primarily the "Black Mountain Poets," including such influential American luminaries as Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, and Robert Duncan.

Modernists and the Formalists in the 1910s: the inherent suspicion of a literary culture that seems, as Archibald MacMechan¹³ notes, to import its poetic traditions from outside its own borders. A similar pattern of opposition greets the *Kootenay School of Writing* (KSW) when they “[explore] connections between Language Poetry, deconstruction, and various forms of political critique” (Rae “Scenes”). As inheritors of the *TISH* political sensibility, and espousing a similar concern for communitarian writing practice¹⁴ (a practice that poses significant problems to a grant system oriented towards an “Arnoldian” or “Romantic” conception of the artist), the KSW also provokes criticism for the internationalism of their poetics, including their ties to the (mostly) American Language Poets. The anxiety about international influence infects Canadian criticism even at the level of theory, where the particularities of Canadian responses constitute a presumably “essential” difference from American traditions and European traditions. A similar pattern of oppositions register when theorists such as Linda Hutcheon contrast the Postmodernism practiced in Canada with the Postmodernism practiced internationally. A similar pattern of oppositions emerges when critics ascertain the value of Anne Carson’s poetry based on her arms-length proximity to a thematic tradition in Canadian writing, or her arms-length proximity to a nationalist conception of Postmodernist practice.

¹³The opening pages of MacMechan’s *Head-waters of Canadian Literature*, expresses the opinion that American literary traditions formatively pattern the development of Canadian literary traditions – an opinion that Northrop Frye echoes in his conclusion to *Literary History of Canada*. See MacMechan 11-50.

¹⁴ Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden explore the communitarian dynamic of the KSW in the introduction to their edited anthology *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*, and they specifically describe the KSW in terms of their political social engagement, as inheritors of the *TISH* political sensibility and in their rejection of “Eurocentrism.” Ian Rae makes a similar claim about *TISH* in his short paper “Literary Scenes in Canada,” posted on *canlit.ca*. See Klobucar 1-47; Rae “Scenes.”

Like the critics of the Moderns, like the critics of the *TISH* poets, and like the critics of the *KSW*, Anne Carson's critics fulfill a legacy of pitting the old against the new – a legacy that characterizes the history of Canadian poetry. This is not merely a generational gap, as Peter Bürger argues about the international Avant-Garde in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. To the rearguard of traditionalists who have come to occupy positions of authority (and who may still constitute their place in the literary canon in terms of a radicalism that has long been toothless), new writing and new theories about poetry threaten the dominant critical mode.¹⁵ Not only does the Avant-Garde constitute a threat to the institutional authority of established poets, the Avant-Garde opposes the logical system by which institutions generate and legitimate their own authority. Such pressures by coherent “movements” provoke strong reactions. Such pressures by individual artists meet institutional indifference. At the beginning of her career, Anne Carson fails to attract the attention of both mainstream and academic publications despite publishing *Glass, Irony, and God* and *Plainwater* with premiere American publishers, and despite winning prestigious literary prizes, including the A. M. Klein Award in Canada, and the Lannan Literary Award in the United States. Notwithstanding positive endorsements in such high-brow publications as *The Raritan*, *Boston Review*, and *Chicago Review* – where Jed Rasula writes that the “simultaneous publication enlivened [*Plainwater* and *Glass, Irony, and God*] with the mark of Janus” (32) – Carson remains anonymous until her nomination for a National Book Critics Circle Award in the United

¹⁵ The work of the critic, as T.S. Eliot describes in his “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” involves interpreting the preceding tradition of literature as it contextualizes the appearance of new literature, but also, conversely, reconceptualising or rethinking that tradition in response to the emergence of new work. See Eliot 1092-98.

States. Since then, as almost every critic of her work observes, “Carson’s enviable reputation was imported home to Canada once already made elsewhere” (Fetherling C13).

The foundation of Anne Carson’s critical reputation in Canada comes almost entirely from the comments of international prize juries, and the fact of her receiving prestigious international awards. When U. S. reviews of her work begin appearing in such influential publications as *The New York Times*, Canadian publications like Toronto’s *Globe and Mail* “[scramble] . . . to respond” (Rae 230). Such belatedness causes a proliferation of enthusiastic reviews, prompting Diana Fitzgerald Bryden in *The National Post* to ask, “what is it about Carson that excites this kind of response? Is her voice so singular?” (Bryden 6). Although it is rare for a poet of *any* foreign nationality to receive such a surfeit of praise in the United States, Carson’s success continues to draw a mixed reaction in Canada. From early reviews that compare her work to “a flash of pale fire amid all the smoke and commotion sent up by a dozen less original authors” (Abley l.1), to the more recent backlash that leads someone like André Alexis to disparage “the homeliness of Carson’s language,” her “horrid banalities,” and to elect that “she is, at times, the drabest of poets” (D24), Carson’s reception, unlike that of her near contemporaries, is either all or nothing. Writing in *The Globe and Mail*, Kate Taylor ambivalently calls Carson’s work “frustratingly elliptical and hallucinogenically intense” (Taylor “Ancient”). Derek Webster of the *Times Colonist* writes that “[h]er books are fast becoming a touchstone for a new kind of writing” (D10). Ian Higgins, in a review of *Decreation*, compares Carson to a “multinational edifice” (Higgins). In conversation with Sandra Martin, P. K. Page attributes Carson’s strange reception to the fact that

“[s]he doesn’t write the way we expect a poet to write. That is frightening, perplexing or exciting, take your pick” (Martin). Anne Carson frustrates critical expectations, and this frustration is exacerbated by her lack of interest in the regular tropes and scenes of contemporary CanLit. In a positive review of *NOX*, Anthony Furey astutely notes, “[d]epending on the critical camp, [*NOX*] could be considered the most exciting literary errata of the year or a glorified coffee-table book” (F11). More than anything, the effusive praise of her early reviews and the suspicious tepidity of her later reviews constitute ambivalence as the defining mark of Carson’s critical reception.

The contradictory modes of assessing Carson’s work are not limited to Canada – though Canadian critics show less reserve in their disapproval. In Sandra Martin’s “Who’s afraid of Anne Carson?” British poet Robin Robertson explains Carson’s confusing, contradictory reception in the press: “[s]he is using the whole palate of human discourse, which is very unusual in poetry” (Martin “Afraid”). However, this is an aspect of Carson’s work that not every critic finds pleasurable. Adam Kirsch, writing in *The New Republic*, allows that Carson’s poetry arouses the feeling that “one’s mind is being exercised in a way that poetry usually does not demand,” yet he concludes that her poetry “ultimately does not repay one’s effort,” and even more damning, he states that Carson’s favourite tactic is “the aggressive assertion of nonsense so that it seems to conceal a deep and important meaning” (37). These two antipodean responses emerge from contradictory dispositions towards the western literary tradition and also reveal a contradictory belief about what poetry should and should not do, and the way that poetry should and should not do it. Whereas Robertson consents to Carson’s “‘conversational’ rhythms – inflection, irony and idiom – rather than the ‘formal machinery’ of metrics”

(Martin “Afraid”), Kirsch implies a definition of poetry that can only be called opposite. For Kirsch, who slights Carson for her Postmodern wordplay (an “idiosyncrasy which is individuality at its most superficial” [39]), the implicit standard of evaluation follows a lyrical, Romantic conception of poetry. If the radical divergence between critical assessments of Carson’s poetry is merely a generational conflict between the old and the young, the tepidity of her reviews should, in theory, become increasingly warm as critics become inured to her radical style. Yet even after nearly two decades in print, Anne Carson’s poetry still provokes the grandiosity of critical favour or disfavour – and her work remains the site where the debate between what poetry is, or is not, comes to the fore.

In *Jacket 11* Geraldine McKenzie writes that *Autobiography of Red* “declines into a dull narrative with few of the excitements poetry should offer” (McKenzie “Review”). Such a critical response presents not merely an evaluation of a work, but also an entire aesthetic cosmology. Likewise, when B. Renner argues in *elimae* that, “despite the immense failure of [*Autobiography of Red*]. . . Carson’s lines are no more or less worthy to be called verse than most of the so-called poetry published in the past two or three decades” (Renner “Review”), he insinuates that there is a proper “form” that poetry must take. In a similar vein, the hegemony of Romantic lyricism undergirds William Logan’s begrudging approval of Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* in *The New Criterion*, where he both lauds her work as “original,” and yet backhandedly states that she deserves readers who will put up with a “poetry oddly conceived” (Logan “Flesh”). In another review (for *Men in the Off Hours*), Logan again quizzically minces his praise: “[t]he oddity of Anne Carson’s poems conceals every virtue except their originality and exposes every flaw

except their contempt”; “Carson’s recklessness is appealing when many poets live on Social Security long before retirement”; “Carson is more architecture than art – you see the scaffolding for poems, yet you rarely see the poems” (Logan “Vanity”). Logan expresses implicit criteria for poetry that Carson’s work cannot fulfill. (What poetry outside of the pure genre of Romantic lyricism could?) Although many critics allow for Carson’s experiments in form as they (often) develop from the inherent qualities of her poetry and its subject matter, Carson’s *synthesis* of disparate genres tests the abilities of even prominent critics to extend beyond their *nomie* paradigms. Whereas some critics like Bruce Hainley from *The Nation* can remark that “Alfred Jarry pointed out that the word ‘monster’ is used to describe the blending of dissonant elements not easily understood . . . Carson’s work is heartbreakingly monster” (Hainley), Carson’s eclectic assemblages prove too much for other critics who maintain a conception of poetry narrowly determined by a formal relation to the lyric.

Carson’s work remains difficult for critics simply because her poems do not conform to the more normative conceptions of lyric poetry. Unlike the Modernists who, in championing *vers libre* and rejecting the procrustean traditionalism of formal metre, still offer poems that resemble traditional lyrics, Carson’s work is often indistinguishable from philosophy or literary criticism. Modernist, imagistic poetry still looks like poetry (line breaks, left justification, skinny margins), and can be easily distinguished from the expository, discursive, block-like edifice of prose. For Carson, whose poems enfold contrary discursive tendencies, the mixture of genres makes her poems seem like something *other*. In a review of *Decreation* from the U.K.’s *Guardian*, Fiona Sampson comments on the issue of Carson’s vast learning:

These pieces show rather than tell; what seems staged is, rather, suspended, eschewing argumentation and logical accumulation. Carson's ferocious technical control reduces the sprawl of thought to limpid idea. She is in fact writing essays under the discipline of poetics; an extraordinary project which both subverts the humdrum of lit crit and questions the role and limits of poetry itself. (Sampson "Symphony")

Sampson recognizes that the "cultural telescoping" of Carson's poetry challenges readers to reconcile discursive and lyrical impulses – impulses that "[question] the role and limits of poetry itself." However, the structural and generic indeterminacy of Carson's poems themselves may instigate such a disunity of critical opinion. In Carson's poems, the mixing of genres – something Aristotle specifically precludes in *Poetics* – tests the limits of lyrical sensibility (and the limits of lyrical "aurality"), questioning whether "the beautiful" is a tenable or even worthwhile poetic ambition. To her critics, Carson has a "tin ear" (Starnino), and she is bereft of any "natural poetic gifts" (Logan "Flesh"). But statements like these serve only to elevate a literary preference into a standard of judgement.

Such preferences accumulate the power of fact and the profluence of ideology, leading diverse groups of writers to oppose the hegemony of the lyrical "I" and to question the value of the epiphanic, lyrical experience.¹⁶ In Carson's poetry, subjectivity is the site where experience and perception collude in the production of knowledge. Her

¹⁶ See Lyn Hejinian's *The Language Of Inquiry* for "The Rejection of Closure," or the multi-author manifesto "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry." See Hejinian "Inquiry" 40-58; See Silliman "Aesthetic Tendency" 261-75.

poetry examines the complex, interpenetrative negotiations in the formation of self and *other*. In the “frozen” time of the lyric, Carson’s poetic speaker encounters a powerful moment of definition and simultaneity: the perceptual transaction that both cleaves “subject” from “object” and yet also illuminates their enduring dependency. Carson’s critics experience a lyricism that is at times unlyrical, a harmony of dissonance, a poetics both Ancient and Modern – a poetry that resembles prose. As Paul de Man states of Rilke’s poetry: “the aesthetics of beauty and ugliness can no longer be distinguished from each other. Nor is it possible to think of these seductive surfaces as merely superficial” (23). Anne Carson’s poetry is similarly intense. The difficulty in evaluating her work is a difficulty in adapting oneself to non-normative modes of reading, and encountering a poetry that performs its dissolution of objective and subjective modes of being. For de Man this is the “figure of chiasmus that crosses the attributes of inside and outside and leads to the annihilation of the conscious subject” (37), an idea which leads him to interpret the trope of the violin in Rilke’s work as an allegory for the “figural potential of language” (38) – an allegory for pure relativity and the arbitrariness by which language conforms both to thought and to experience. However, Carson’s poetry does not illuminate how the discrete categories of interiority and exteriority “[stand] in the service of the language that has produced them” (de Man 37), but instead, her work illuminates how subjectivity moderates and conditions the possibility of the Real. Many of Carson’s critics can read no further than the arbitrary “line breaks, and the allusions, and the snap-fast turns of Pound” (D’Agata), and so her poetry, to critics of a certain disposition, reads as an imagism so chock-full of “allusions it would have given T.S. Eliot heartburn” (Logan “Flesh”).

One of the strangest critical responses to Carson's poetry, though originating in Canada, sends ripples into the international literary milieu: the pejorative criticism of the self-styled "Jubilate Circle" of Montreal, a group which includes such poet-critics as David Solway, Carmine Starnino, Eric Ormsby, and Robyn Sarah. Together, they occupy influential editorial positions in such important publications as *Books in Canada*, *Maisonneuve*, and *Signal Editions*. The "Jubilate Circle" wields an increasing amount of power in Canada's literary marketplace, even boasting ties to New York's *New Criterion* (Rae "Literary Scenes"). Although David Solway is the most brazen in his criticism of Carson, his colleague, Carmine Starnino, is similarly dismissive. However, in the sheer gusto of their disapproval, their project of undermining Carson's reputation takes on the odour of a scam. In one of Carson's earliest reviews (for *Glass, Irony, and God*) in Montreal's *Gazette*, Starnino praises her work, writing that he has "nothing but admiration" for her "breathtaking," "imaginative verve" ("Unfettered"). The review, by all measures, is a positive endorsement. Starnino gently cautions that the only drawback to Carson's work is an "overrefined quality to her imagination," stating that "one emerges from the poems with the debilitating sensation of having lingered in a too-rarefied atmosphere" ("Unfettered").

Yet, a mere eighteen months later, Starnino publishes "Iconoclast with a tin ear," a scathing admonishment of *Autobiography of Red*, where he cites a growing number of faults: her "[feeble narration]"; her "premeditated act of avant-gardism"; the "narcotic" effect of her lines (read: "sleep inducing"); and finally, he disparages a poetry that "has become more abrasively unlikeable with each new book" (Starnino "Iconoclast"). Such an attack is hard to reconcile, and more strangely, Starnino's review suggests that he has

found her work distasteful *all along*. This confusing evaluation of Carson's work is difficult to explain, but a comment by Jed Rasula about *Plainwater* and *Glass, Irony and God* may offer a solution to such a contradiction: "their simultaneous publication enlivened them with the mark of Janus" (32). Janus, of course, refers to the Roman god of beginnings and endings; two-headed, Janus faces both forward into the future, and backward into the past. Perhaps Starnino's review says less about Carson's "tin ear" and "abrasively unlikeable" poetry, and discloses more than he intends about his own predilection for the poets and poetry of the past. According to Ian Rae, the "[Jubilate Circle] connect their work directly to the values of the Montreal moderns," preferring formal lyricism to all other experimental poetries ("Literary Scenes"). Both Starnino and Solway attack Carson for the perception that her work is poststructuralist (by which they no doubt mean "gimmicky" or "fashionable"), though the "Jubilates" display a greater concern for what Carson's work is not rather than a concern for what it is.

When David Solway publishes "The Trouble with Annie" in *Books in Canada*, he provokes a furor of response. Fraser Sutherland replies by quoting the banalities of Solway's own verse and publishing it in the "Letters to the Editor" section of *Books in Canada*. Ian Rae writes an essay about the controversy in *Canadian Literature*. More recently, Tina Northrup discusses Solway's essay in *Studies in Canadian Literature*. The nature of Solway's attack seems even more bizarre in relation to his "performances" as Andreas Karavis – an imaginary persona that Solway invents in order to draw media attention to the publication of his pseudonymous books *Saracen Island* and *The Andreas Karavis Companion*. Solway's hoax, replete with disguised public appearances and a bogus back-story, makes his criticisms of Carson seem disingenuous, to say the least. In

“Anne Carson and the Solway Hoaxes,” Ian Rae examines Solway’s essay as a publicity stunt for the re-launch of *Books in Canada* (under the editorship of none other than David Solway). As Rae observes, *Books in Canada* directs all letters of response to consult an unabridged version of the essay appearing in Solway’s (then) forthcoming book, *Director’s Cut*. Rae’s meticulous analysis even finds Solway subtly recommending his own book of poetry (*Modern Marriage*) in a condemning statement about Carson’s *The Beauty of the Husband*. Aside from the pecuniary interest that Starnino and Solway invest in their rejection of Carson’s poetry, the “Jubilates” rehash the same anxieties about Canadian literary culture that have plagued the Montreal moderns, the *TISH* poets, and Carson’s contemporaries in the *KSW*. As Solway himself admits, “Carson, then, is a watershed figure: which side of her one falls on tells one and others who one is, as part of the literary community, or simply, as an educated and presumably sentient reader” (“Trouble”). It is especially telling that even Solway conceives of her work as simultaneously progressive and yet also conservative (if not explicitly derivative); he finds her guilty of a decidedly contemporary “obsession with fragments and simulacra,” and also of regurgitating what “has been done before, done better, and done authentically” (“Trouble”). Even her most strenuous detractors cannot determine how Carson’s work fits into the literary milieu. Such confusion gestures toward this persistently misunderstood feature of Carson’s poetics.

Until the publication of a special issue of *Canadian Literature*, the strange controversy surrounding Carson’s reception neglects to attract serious academic attention. In a way, the special issue of *Canadian Literature* undoes much of this damage. Despite its belatedness (appearing only after Carson wins the *Griffin Poetry Prize*), the Carson

issue of *Canadian Literature* produces a number of tangible effects: first, it lays a national claim on Carson and her work; second, it marshals a scholarly response to Carson's growing notoriety; and third, it provides some critical and national context for Carson's poetry. Since its publication, only a handful of essays have appeared in such journals as *English Studies in Canada*, *Open Letter*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and *Postmodern Culture*. A nationally definitive statement by design (and a response to the silence of Canadian academics), the issue of *Canadian Literature* is somewhat erratic in its focus – despite notable essays by excellent researchers such as Ian Rae, Andre Furlani, and Tanis MacDonald. Overwhelmingly, the articles are either review essays or essays that describe elements of Carson's cultural reception – Ian Rae's "Anne Carson and the Solway Hoaxes," and Andre Furlani's "Reading Paul Celan with Anne Carson: 'What Kind of Witness Would that Be?'" are notable examples of the latter. Only two of the essays in the Carson issue deal with significant aspects of Carson's poetics, and only one essay (by Tanis MacDonald) advances an argument about her poetics.

One of the earliest reviewers to consider Carson's poetics is Jeff Hamilton, whose article "This Cold Hectic Dawn and I" appears shortly after the publication of *Plainwater* and *Glass, Irony, and God*. Whereas most of Carson's early reviewers focus on issues relating to genre, Jeff Hamilton examines *Plainwater* and *Glass, Irony, and God* in light of Carson's theory of *eros* from her scholarly work, *Eros the Bittersweet*. Hamilton takes on both Carson's experiments in genre and the discursive register that her poetry utilizes in its paradoxically "prosaic" lyricism. Hamilton theorizes Carson's poetics in terms of her eclectic literary influences, constituting her work as a mongrel poetics drawing a lineage from both Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein. As Hamilton notes, the tension

between metrical line and discursive sentence energizes her work in *Plainwater*. The two modes of reading operate contrapuntally, both intensifying and yet frustrating the culmination of each distinctly oppositional desire – *eros* flirting along the horizons of both closure and deferral. For Hamilton, the “erotic triangle” that Carson advances in *Eros the Bittersweet* remains the defining figure for Carson herself: “Carson wants not to tell a story, but to show the slippage between categories like poetry, verse, and prose; the self, the other, and the act of love by which that relation gets represented” (120). First proposed by René Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, this triangular paradigm (a paradigm which Carson cleverly adapts), becomes, for many scholars, the crucial metaphor in the description of Carson’s poetics.¹⁷ Similarly, Adam Phillips examines Carson’s formal experiments as an erotic, triangular figure, through which the poet mediates both the production and the sabotage of generic categories. As Adam Phillips writes, “[i]n Carson, all the rituals of form are first and foremost an expression of their own limitations,” where forms become distinct only by “what leaks out of them” (Phillips). Like Hamilton, Phillips perceives Carson’s poetics through the triangular model of *eros* – a model that culminates in the admixture of categorical “leakage.” The metageneric experimentalism that characterizes Carson’s

¹⁷ Although Girard extrapolates this triangular paradigm from *Don Quixote*, he describes the figuration of desire in much the same way as Carson does (although Girard is almost never mentioned in *Eros the Bittersweet*). For Girard, “[t]he triangle is no *Gestalt*. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere; the triangle has no reality whatever; it is a systematic metaphor, systematically pursued” (2). Girard warns against the problems inherent in substituting the spatial, explicatory model for the real configuration of desire – the circuit of energy – which emerges in the relation between people. Carson cleverly adapts this model in her discussion of Classic poetry, and Sappho in particular, but does so by advancing an argument at the level of concept, while Girard explores the relation between characters in *Quixote* as a dramatic structure – a literal “love triangle.” See Girard 1-52.

work, for Hamilton and Phillips, is little more than the negative capability of a poet examining the limits of genre.

Chris Jennings and Kevin McNeilly advocate a similar interpretation in their respective works, “The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson” and “Home Economics.” For Jennings, the triangular figure of *eros* becomes the preeminent means of understanding Carson’s examination of form and genre. Jennings writes that “Carson gives her writing a triangular structure by binding the terms juxtaposed not only to each other but to a liminal position between them” – a perspective that emphasizes “connection from contiguity” (923), and he understands Carson’s role as a translator to be the paradigmatic structure for Carson’s poetics. McNeilly, on the other hand, discusses Carson’s work in terms of a gift economy, a symbolic exchange. McNeilly comments that Carson’s poems “[resist] appropriation by representational structures” and aim for “connection, unmediated contact” (McNeilly 10). Despite their obvious differences, Jennings and McNeilly both describe Carson’s poetry as mediation between discursive categories, between ancient and modern epochs, and between languages (Ancient Greek and Contemporary English). Jennings calls this Carson’s “liminal position” (923), and McNeilly describes Carson’s poems as an “elaborate cross-talk” (11). In attempting to make Carson’s poetry correspond to contemporary critical discourses, these essays must, by necessity, adapt descriptive metaphors – metaphors that tend to displace her work and become the subjects of critical discussion themselves. And so, even the recurrent, triangular figure of *eros* merely replaces discussions about Carson’s literary work with discussions about Carson’s scholarly work, making only a tepid claim about Carson’s overarching poetic sensibility.

The most important scholar of Anne Carson is Ian Rae, whose articles on Carson appear in *Canadian Literature*, *Open Letter*, and *English Studies in Canada*. In what is perhaps the most stringent and protracted study of Carson's work, Rae's "Anne Carson: Unframing Myth" in his book *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada*, manages a wide-angle focus on even the disparate, discontinuous elements of Carson's poetics. Rae not only examines how Carson's experimental approach to genre disturbs normative strategies of reading novels and poems (the subtitle of *Autobiography of Red* is remarkably, "a novel in verse"), he also theorizes Carson's use of the Classics. Rae locates her work within a tradition of experiment (he specifically likens her work to Steisichoros's innovative mediation between epic forms and lyric forms). Rae argues that Carson's manipulation of genres in "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" from *Plainwater* (utilizing the organizational structure of an interview, translated fragments, and *testimonia*¹⁸) becomes the prototype for the much more expansive formal apparatus of *Autobiography of Red*. Rae contends that Anne Carson's work displays versatility in adapting to various genres of discourse. This poses a problem for many critics because they are unable to develop an interpretive paradigm that accounts for such versatility. Within a critical tradition that values the mimetic presentation of "real life" above all else (even in the lyric poem, which can accommodate an "impressionistic" account of experience), Carson's poems emphasize the infinitude of possibility and the protean mutability of so-called "reality."

¹⁸ In an interview with Mary di Michele (the "Matrix" interview), Anne Carson describes *testimonia* as "anecdotal stories about the poet or about the poem, that are passed down and aren't really regarded as credible history" (8). See Carson "Matrix" 7-12.

In *Defensive Measures: The Poetry of Niedecker, Bishop, Glück, and Carson*, Lee Upton argues that Carson's poems work by "reversing, inverting, or challenging in overt or covert ways a dominant perceptual mode" (17). Upton makes a significant argument about how all poetry reacts against inherited aesthetic forms and inherited perceptual conventions, similar to Charles Bernstein's double-edged dictum in *A Poetics* where he states that "*Poetry is aversion [a version] of conformity in the pursuit of new forms*" (1, emphasis in original). Carson's experiments in genre and discourse occupy a special position in Upton's argument; Carson's work epitomizes poetry's "defensive" procedures, and so Upton discusses her work in light of classic defences by Sydney and Shelley. Upton relates Carson's transgressive experiments in genre to a "movement toward knowledge" (Upton 16, emphasis in original). In describing how the metageneric quality of Carson's work challenges the inheritance of aesthetic tradition, Upton presents "genre" as a method in relating to different, cultural paradigms. Moreover, Upton's argument implies that "genre" is historically contingent – dependent on both intellectual fashion and cultural limitations. Carson responds to the question of genre in relation to her own work in an interview with Mary di Michele:

MDM: *Plainwater* is described or "packaged" as an anthology of essays and poetry, yet I found it in the critical anthologies section of a large bookstore. Some works need sections entirely on their own. Is this a problem for you? For reviewers? For publishers? For bookstore clerks?

AC: Not a problem but a question. What do "shelves" accomplish, in stores or in the mind? (Carson "Matrix" 7)

Although it seems that Carson's riposte to Mary di Michele rejects the systemic organization (and implicit instruction) inherent in generic categories, she may in fact be drawing attention to the function of "shelves" as constructions of aesthetic discourse, since a "shelf" (like a genre) defers to the "dominant perceptual mode" (Upton 17). In "Beauty Prefers an Edge," an interview with Mary Gannon from *Poets & Writers*, Carson also describes her troubled relationship with genre and form as "chaos," where her practice doesn't quite fit with existing terminology (Carson "Edge" 31). While Upton connects Carson's challenging experiments in genre to epistemological concerns, Upton does not interrogate how or why Carson's "defensive measures" resist inherited poetic traditions, or what her experimental approach (in mixing Classical and Modern forms) suggests about either the past or the present. For Upton, Carson's work fulfills the social function that famous defences by Sydney and Shelley propose to be the *desideratum* of poetry. In *Defensive Measures*, Upton does not rationalize the necessity for such defenses in the first place.

For E. L. McCallum and Monique Tschofen, Carson's collage-like poems examine the relationship between poetry and visual art. In their respective articles, McCallum and Tschofen both theorize Carson's use of the photograph in *Autobiography of Red*. In describing how Carson's "textual photographs" impact the structure of the text, Tschofen and McCallum occupy diverging positions, though. In "'First I Must Tell About Seeing': (De)Monstrations of Visuality and the Dynamics of Metaphor in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*," Tschofen interprets Carson's "textual photographs" as an "argument about the ethical, cognitive, and perceptual possibilities unleashed by language" (36). In "Toward a Photograph of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne

Carson's *Autobiography of Red*," McCallum argues that Carson's photographs portray "a concern with the way representation works and with the limits of photographic representation" (par. 17). For Tschofen, "seeing" or "visuality" becomes a coercive, self-confirming discourse. She argues that Carson reveals "a subordinate history of deictic practices within philosophy and art from antiquity to the present day" (32). Tschofen also suggests that Carson's use of a "photographic" structure draws attention to the interrelations between narrative discourse and visual discourse, elucidating the relationship between thought and representation, implying that mimetic limitations are also cognitive limitations. This is somewhat distinct from the way that E. L. McCallum theorizes Carson's use of the photograph. Carson, according to McCallum, reorients the *telos* of the photograph away from thanatography (*pace* Barthes, Susan Sontag, and others),¹⁹ and towards time itself, so that the photo becomes "the tain of time, bouncing the past into the future like the silver backing on a mirror that bounces our image back to our eyes" (McCallum par. 6). In *Autobiography of Red*, the *synthesis* of discursive genres, the confusion between olfactory senses, and the displacements of verbal elements, all signal a complex notion about the relationship between knowledge and discourse, so that different discourses may constitute distinct epistemologies, and distinct approaches to representing knowledge.

Although many recent, scholarly critics of Carson's work provide valuable insight about her poetics by examining how her poems manifest a resistance to normative genre

¹⁹ In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes expressly relates the photography to thanatography, writing that "[w]ith the photograph we enter into *flat Death*" (92), describing both the history of photographic usage (as *memento mori*), and the philosophical experience of encountering a moment of passed (dead) time. See Barthes "Camera" 89-94.

and traditional form, most critics avoid commenting on the interrelation of such disparate elements. Critics offer many provisional ways of reading Carson's work that, nonetheless, ignore the consistency of her project, failing to address how her poems sustain an argument about poetic representation in Western literature. Despite some valuable contributions, critics still partake in several problems that have plagued discussions about Carson since the earliest reviews of her work. The most significant of these problems is also the most tenacious: scholars of Carson's poetry do not consider how the themes of desire and loss recur throughout her entire corpus of work. As a result, for most critics, the "difficulty" of her poems prompts an unreasonably narrow parameter of critical engagement. Although only a few of Carson's publications have been available to her early critics (and this study, admittedly, has the benefit of considering a wide range of Carson's poetry and translations), their analyses set the narrow terms by which even recent scholars interpret her work. Despite the structural importance of the epitaph to Carson's poetry and the epigraphic character of Carson's poems in *Men in the Off Hours*, *Decreation*, and *NOX*, critics have mostly ignored the themes of loss, death, and memory in Carson's work. Similarly, most critics tend to focus on the most commercially successful of Carson's books (*Autobiography of Red*; *The Beauty of the Husband*), and the most normatively devised examples of her experiments in genre and form. When critics theorize Carson's generic hybrids, they only consider examples that least imperil the normative conception of lyric poetry. Without a discussion linking the disparate, complex facets of Carson's overall project, the criticism of her poetry remains as fragmentary and discontinuous as the texts that they presume to interpret.

To describe Carson's poetics as *manifold* is to emphasize the discontinuous, the fragmentary, in her work. To describe Carson's poetics as *synthetic* is to emphasize the *cathartic*, the ameliorative, in her work. Carson's project transcends the discussions of genre and esotericism that forms the body of response to her poetry, and instead Carson's project engages questions surrounding poetic representation and poetic knowledge – questions that are central to theories of writing and representation in the western literary tradition. Behind the concern for Carson's genre-play, her controversial reception, and the way that she marks convergences between disparate, literary figures, Carson poses questions about the nature of consciousness, representation, and epistemology. For Carson, the lyric poem dramatizes the aporia where subject and object exist in a state of both contiguity and dissolution. Carson's *synthetic* poems represent the meeting point of perception and experience, where her experiments in mixing genres and discourses recognizes multiple ways of articulating experience, and thus multiple ways of representing knowledge. Carson's poems do not conform to the normative conception of the lyric, nor do they conform to traditional conceptions of beauty, and this remains the reason why critics have been so contradictory in their estimation of her talent.

These difficult poems draw attention to the way that poetry engenders complex perceptual processes *in medias res* – processes that in Carson's work find simultaneous expression in the union of genres, discourses, and distinct media of representation. Carson's poems call into question the illusion of a consistent, stable reality, drawing attention to the fragmentary texture of lived experience. Carson uses and abuses the generic conventions of the lyric poem (the dominant perceptual mode), experimenting instead with alternative approaches to representing experience. She examines how

discourse both narrowly constitutes and is constituted by knowledge. More than anything, Canadian critics of Carson's work focus on how her poetry defies the conventions of Romantic lyricism, and how her poetry rejects the institutional credo of "Canadianism" that describes the cultural valences of grant juries and literary critics who reward literature for confirming the national *mythos*.

Moreover, Carson's writing problematizes what it means to be a "Canadian" writer, since the various, critical accounts of her work in Canada tend to evaluate her according to a rigid criteria that celebrates reiterations of national *topoi*. In a sense, Carson's work then becomes the arena for the polemical staging of literary ideology, where critical positions also serve as *de facto* positions on contemporary aesthetics. Critics deride Carson for her progressive experimentalism (her "avant-gardism," as one critic explains), and for her conservative traditionalism (her reliance on Classical sources). The confluence of national and international criticism on Carson's poetry makes the schism in Canada all the more apparent – her literary celebrity makes the case of her dual receptions unique in Canadian Literature. For example, in the same issue of the *London Times Literary Supplement*, the critic Oliver Reynolds laments the failure of *Autobiography of Red* while his colleague, Karl Miller, chooses it as his book of the year (Rae "Carson to Cohen" 231). It is, in part, the internationalism of Carson's poetics that provokes Canadian critics to reject her poetry as stringently as they have in the popular press. Additionally, Carson's poetry *synthesizes* two traditions commonly considered distinct: European Postmodernism and Canadian Postmodernism. Although Linda Hutcheon and Robert Kroetsch distinguish between Canadian Postmodernism and the Postmodernism practiced elsewhere, both Hutcheon and Kroetsch remain mostly silent

about poetry, concerning themselves instead with the emancipatory potential of archaeological models for narrative (Kroetsch 24), or the self-reflexivity of “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon 8). Essentially, Hutcheon and Kroetsch reconfigure the international Postmodernism of Foucault and Lyotard in light of the nationalistic, thematic criticism practiced in Canada, and so both Kroetsch and Hutcheon define Canadian Postmodernism as skepticism about the historical narratives of Canadian identity. For Carson, the Postmodern substitution of trace fragments and archaeological historicism for coherent, historical narrative influences her poetry at a structural level. Carson’s poetry not only shares in the epistemic concerns of Postmodernism, but also performs such concerns, structurally. The status of knowledge remains central to Carson’s work and more than merely a passing thematic concern with regional specificity.

Since defining “Canadianism” remains a central aim of Canadian literary criticism, Carson’s internationalism troubles critics. The influence of international poets on Carson’s work, including Carson’s response to the aesthetic challenges of Modernism and Postmodernism, implies a rejection of the diluted way that Kroetsch and Hutcheon theorize Modernism and Postmodernism in Canada. Carson’s work, therefore, is productively *post-nation*, refusing to identify with “Canadianism” as a social or critical value. Even her author’s blurb at the back of her texts (“Anne Carson lives in Canada”) recognizes Carson’s rejection of regional themes and regional identities as they aggregate into a national *mythos* and an overwhelmingly self-preoccupied, inward, literary gaze. Additionally, her erudite poetry presumes the ubiquity of knowledge systems and the ready access to information. Her poetry critiques the institutional systems that make her

work possible; she relies on the benefit engendered by institutions like universities, libraries, and archives to organize discursive knowledge into discrete categories of thought. When asked about genre and the marketing of her books, Carson retorts, “What do shelves accomplish?” (Carson 7). Although a seemingly benign response, Carson’s quip can be rhetorically deployed against any arbitrary, discursive parameter: criticism, ideology, history, and nation.

Carson’s poetry confronts the prevalent, aesthetic *techne* of Canadian criticism – her international awards and honours trouble not only the way that Canadian critics draw the contours of a national literature, but also the circulation of value in an institutionally mandated system of national identification. The controversy inspired by Carson’s work serves as a tangible example of the insularity of Canadian literature and the insufficiency of Canadian criticism in extending its reach beyond the crises of either regional identity or national identity. Her poetry provokes responses that diverge over questions of aesthetic tendency, and in Canada this problem of aesthetic criticism becomes confused with issues of nationalism. An American or British audience receives her books more enthusiastically than critics in Canada do, and Canadian critics respond overwhelmingly to her international celebrity rather than her works themselves. Carson’s poetry illustrates the particular problem of insularity in Canadian criticism, an insularity that leads critics of Canadian literature to focus inwardly, on historical problems of self-identity, rather than outwardly, on the relationship between Canadian and international literatures. More than anything, Carson’s poetry reveals a distinct problem in how Canadian criticism evaluates literature.

By describing Carson's poetry as *manifold* and *synthetic*, Carson's poetry escapes both the narrow purview of contemporary criticism in Canada, and also the hegemony of the Romantic lyric poem. Carson's work critiques knowledge by appropriating and reconfiguring the dominant perceptual mode of poetry, the lyric. In Canada, Carson's work uniquely engages literary concerns and epistemic concerns outside of the thematic parameters of "nationhood," and her work also rearticulates Canada's role in relation to international literature, redirecting criticism outward from its suffocating, inward focus. Her poetics sheds light on the relationship between knowledge, language, and experience, and her work makes a significant argument about poetic representation. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how Carson critiques the discourses of Modernism and Postmodernism, and how her work recognizes the radical, epistemic challenge that these discourses pose to the Western literary tradition. Additionally, I examine Carson's use of classical sources, and what her work accomplishes in drawing the past into a close relation with the present, enacting a contiguity of thought that transcends the limitations of genre and discourse.

CHAPTER ONE: *SYNAGÔGÊ* AND *DIARESIS*: ANNE CARSON'S CLASSICAL PRECEDENTS

For Anne Carson, a notable Greek historian and translator, Classical works possess a special significance in contemporary literary criticism. As the earliest examples of texts *recognizably* literature, the Classics commonly signify the origins of Western literary culture. Despite the sense of cultural difference that emerges from what seems the “barbarism” of antiquity, Classical texts nonetheless evoke both the philosophical origins of Western civilization and the fledgling *nomos* of contemporary aesthetics. The Classics suggest both a nostalgic origin and a primitive *other*. Such ambiguity provokes contradictory (or even competing) interpretive approaches. Michel Foucault notes the paradoxical way we relate to the Classics when he acknowledges “both the difference that keeps us at a remove from a way of thinking in which we recognize the origin of our own, and the proximity that remains in spite of that distance” (“Pleasure” 7). By identifying how these conflicting senses influence our conception of the past, Foucault implies certain, self-reflexive limitations to historicity: first, he advises against mistaking fantasies *about* the past for communion *with* the past; and second, he cautions against construing the past as unknowable in its difference. For Anne Carson, the simultaneous sense of familiarity and strangeness associated with Classical texts recognizes the contiguity between knowledge and imagination. Foucault implies that all claims to historical knowledge are provisional because historical narratives fuse fantasy and reality, creating a palimpsest of imaginal desire and historical fact. Still, Carson affirms that the Classics portray distinctly contemporary concerns that are not merely

aspects of etiological mythmaking. Carson contends that, in their ambiguity, Classical works contain the origins of contemporary thought; she finds the genesis of Modernist and Postmodernist aesthetics in the unstable correspondence between the “story” of the past and the “ruins” of the past – a correspondence that magnifies our contemporary concerns about textuality, historicity, and representation. In the words of Walter Benjamin, Carson observes that “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Benjamin 255). In Carson’s work, Classical texts perform in a number of special ways: first, as pure points of origin for contemporary thinking about the present; second, as exemplars of tentative, if not dubious, assertions about historicity; and third, as mutable ciphers of interpretation – the “scaffolding” for the imaginative reconstruction of a lost culture, lost values, and lost time itself.

This chapter argues that Carson’s use of the Classics enfold several interimplicated streams of theoretical and philosophical inquiry: she identifies such “contemporary,” epistemological concerns about representation, history, identity, and truth in Classical works, and she examines how Classical writers anticipate the interpretive challenges normally associated with Modernist and Postmodernist artists. Not only does Carson suggest that inquiry into the very structures of knowledge constitutes the rationale for the entire Western literary tradition; she also suggests that Classical writers recognize such epistemological challenges within the aesthetic category of the sublime. In her poetry, Carson dramatizes the ways in which representational discourses become epistemological paradigms (the manner by which knowledge comes to

“resemble”²⁰ experience and, in turn, the manner by which experience becomes accessible to the mind *as knowledge*). Carson often writes about sublime experiences that violate or perturb the established parameters of thought – experiences that, in their magnitude, defy comprehension. The sublime experience exceeds the limits of knowledge, and thus the sublime provokes a moment of intense self-reflection; the sublime evinces an image of the mind reeling in the midst of its own failure, and then revelling in a kind of *synthetic* adjustment. Carson uses the Classics to explicate how sublime aesthetics present a troubled relationship between knowledge and representation – a relationship in which the intensity of certain experiences command not only a re-evaluation of the content of knowledge (*what* is known about something) but also calls into question the entire form of knowledge (*how* something is known).

The sublime is both an explicit subject of Carson’s poetry and a theorized concern in her scholarship. Carson recognizes that, to paraphrase Lyotard, the sublime simultaneously comprises an epistemological failure and an ontological disruption, where the magnitude of experience prevents meaningful cognizance (Lyotard “Sublime” 101). In other words, the intensity of the sublime experience inhibits comprehension and, if only momentarily, problematizes the ontology of the subject. In accordance with the theories of her Classical and Romantic predecessors, Carson speculates that both the

²⁰ In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault describes how the “fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home” (xxii). Foucault attempts to elucidate the interior structures of consciousness: he examines *how* we perceive what we perceive; *how* the inner “rules” or “instructions” dictate the possible ways knowledge can “resemble” concrete experience; *how* knowledge represents itself to itself; and *why*. “Thus, in every culture,” he writes, “between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and its modes of being” (xxiii). See Foucault “Order” xxii-xxiii.

triumph of perception over sublime experience and the recuperation of subjectivity over metaphysical “shock” occur discursively, in personal contemplation and poetic representation. For Carson, the lyric poem produces an image of the mind in the dynamic expression of change. In her work, the Classics act as both a neutral site that hosts the competing values of cultural criticism, and as the originary expression of those same cultural values. In their dramatization of contemporary philosophical concerns, the Classics confront the epistemic authority of truth, history, and representation – confrontations that many critics consider hallmark characteristics of both Modernist and Postmodernist literature.²¹ Carson employs the Classics in her poetry and in her scholarship because many of the issues surrounding the relationship between discourse and knowledge remain central to the Western literary tradition. Furthermore, inasmuch as the Classics dramatize an epistemic challenge to the *techne* of representational discourses, such challenges constitute the *de facto* origin of Western literary consciousness.

As the perpetual objects of literary criticism and the perpetual subjects of literary theory, Classical texts conform to the philosophical demands of each era. The cultural history of the Classics is simultaneously the cultural history of literary criticism. Despite being the hermeneutical target of so many various traditions, assumptions, and theories, the Classics nonetheless remain the most resilient examples of literary change, reflecting the transformation of literary values over time. Even so, Carson recognizes that Classical

²¹ For a very clear, concise discussion of the relationship between historicity and truth in a postmodern context, see Hutcheon “Canadian” 87-101.

writers anticipate the contestations that Modernists and Postmodernists proffer to the truth-values of historiography, representation, identity, and even poetry. Such recognition not only informs the rationale for Carson's theoretical work in *Eros the Bittersweet*, but also influences her translations in *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Likewise, in *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan*, Carson demonstrates how contemporary philosophical problems and contemporary aesthetic concerns originate in Classical thought. And in *NOX*, Carson shows how Classical aesthetics provide a salient form for contemplating personal loss. In her dialectical treatment of the erotic and the thanatological (the two dominant themes in her critical and creative oeuvre), Carson acknowledges the tradition of portraying *eros* and *thanatos* indistinguishably in representational art.²² Carson characterizes *eros* as the tension between competing manners of experiencing desire; Carson characterizes *thanatos* as the tension between competing manners of understanding loss. By utilizing brief explications from Carson's *Decreation*, my discussion to follow first advances the theory of the sublime to understand crucial aspects of Carson's work: the disintegration of subjectivity in experiences of both longing and loss; the epistemological failure that accompanies such experiences; and the triumph of *synthetic* perception, the *catharsis* of poetic representation. This chapter then examines Carson's theory of *eros* in *Eros the Bittersweet* – a theory that celebrates Sappho's fr.31 as an exemplar of the relation between the sublime and the erotic. Furthermore, this discussion illuminates how

²² Arthur Bernard Cook, in *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, writes that "Eros with crossed legs and torch reversed became the commonest of all symbols for death" (1045). Greek sculpture depicts *eros* and *thanatos* as winged cherubs. See Cook 1045.

Carson's theory of *eros* exerts a formative, thematic influence on *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. The chapter proceeds to a consideration of *thanatos* and the epigraphic subjects of Carson's scholarship in *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan*, and then turns to her poetry in *NOX*. By focusing on the erotic and then the thanatological in sequence, this discussion not only attempts to recreate the dialectical vigour that characterizes Carson's work in these two diverging areas of inquiry, but also to reproduce a sense of the dynamic, contrapuntal rhythm that permeates her exploration of the sublime.

Theorizing the Ineffable

The sublime functions unusually in Carson's work; unusually, because Carson reinvigorates the sublime with its Classical sense of ontological "transport" and metaphysical "return." Her earliest influence is the 1st CE writer tentatively referred to as "Longinus" (or more currently, "Pseudo-Longinus"), whose treatise describes the sublime as an affective response to literary work. A paraphrasable definition of Longinus's sublime is hard to manage, though. In an essay that appears in *Decreation*, Carson calls the sublime a "documentary technique," and describes *On the Sublime* as an "aggregation of quotes" where "Longinus skates from Homer to Demosthenes to Moses to Sappho on blades of pure bravado" (45). Carson approaches Longinus's treatise with a sensibility that responds to later commentaries by Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-François Lyotard. The sublime, according to Longinus, is the mark of the greatest poets, and "consists in a consummate excellence and distinction of language," in order to "transport [the audience] out of themselves" (163). In the Classical ("Longinian")

formulation, the sublime evinces discursive power, something that “shatters everything like a bolt of lightning” (163). Outside of affect (179), Longinus is notoriously elusive when describing the constitution of the sublime, except to gesture vaguely towards such controversial literary concepts as *ekstasis*²³ (“to stand outside oneself,” as in rapture) and *catharsis*²⁴ (the “purgation” or “purifying” of emotion). However, Longinus implies a more certain definition of the sublime when he writes about Sappho’s fr.31 (the only extant source for this poem). In fr.31 Sappho describes the disintegration of the body in the experience of desire:

for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking

is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin

fire is racing under skin

and in eyes no sight and drumming

²³ In common use, “ekstasis” is roughly analogous to “ecstasy.” Consider how, in Plato’s *Ion*, the sense of disembodiment that Socrates and Ion attribute to the effect of reading great poetry corresponds to the notion of “transport” in the Longinian sublime: in *Ion* Socrates asks, “when you give a good recitation and specially thrill your audience . . . are you then in your senses, or are you carried out of yourself, and does your soul in an ecstasy suppose herself to be among the scenes you are describing?” Ion responds, “for I will tell you without reserve: when I relate a tale of woe, my eyes are filled with tears; and when it is of fear or awe, my hair stands on end with terror, and my heart leaps” (Plato, “Ion” 235). For further discussion of *ekstasis* in the Longinian sublime, see Guerlac 276.

²⁴ Aristotle’s *Poetics* discusses the power of art to transform its audience. He writes, “Tragedy, then, is mimesis of an action which is elevated . . . through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions.” In suggesting both purgation and purification, *catharsis* also contains the feeling of what might contemporarily be called “closure:” in the sense of resolution (as in the lyric poem); in the sense of relief and finality; and in the medical sense of being restored or cured. See Aristotle 47-9. Additionally, Stephen Halliwell’s critical introduction to *Poetics* provides a succinct outline of the controversy surrounding Aristotle’s use of the term *catharsis* in his discussion of tragedy. See Halliwell 19-20.

fills ears (Carson “If Not” 63)²⁵

Longinus observes that in fr.31 Sappho achieves the sublime by representing a paradox; he describes the tension between Sappho’s experience of bodily disintegration, and the recuperation of that body in the text of the poem (a substitutive relation between corpse and corpus). The poem affects the reader by enacting a tension between content and form: the speaker falls apart and the poem comes together. For Longinus, this is a tension between the “reality” of lived experience and the “artifice” of poetic form. The “supreme merit to [Sappho’s] art is,” Longinus writes, “the skill with which she takes up the most striking [symptoms of love] and *combines* them into a single whole” (201, emphasis added). Here, Longinus makes two important claims: first, he identifies the erotic as inherently sublime; second, he notes that Sappho’s representation of *eros* draws its power from the dialectical tension between the fragmentary, disorienting character of experience and its poetic recuperation as a consistent, unified whole. Sappho dramatizes the tension between the sublimity of erotic experience and the *synthesis* of poetic reflection.²⁶ For Longinus, Sappho’s fr.31 is an example of the poetic sublime *par*

²⁵ All references to Sappho’s poetry come from Carson’s *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. There are only superficial differences in the translation of fr.31 that Carson offers in *Eros the Bittersweet*, *Decreation*, and *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. However, there are significant differences between the version offered by Carson and those offered by other scholars. In a sense, Carson translates not only the content of Sappho’s poem, but also the spatial form of Sappho’s lyricism; Carson applies an imagistic or Modernist (or even “Poundian”) sensibility to the formal arrangement of fr.31. Compare Carson’s translation of fr.31 with Barnard 39; Barnstone 67; Davenport 84; Powell 11; Roche 63; and West 38.

²⁶ Suzanne Guerlac compellingly argues that for Longinus, the sublime “force” of Sappho’s fr.31 comes out of the traumatic encounter of the disincorporate body, an anxiety arising from the deferred expectation of physical unity (Sappho’s speaker is “shattered” by lust). The poem culminates in a representation of the sublime experience and also re-enacts an aspect of the sublime experience, achieving a textual *catharsis* when the strength of Sappho’s poetic enunciation recuperates the corporeal fragments into a linguistic whole. Guerlac posits the unity of the textual body as supplement for the unity of a corporeal body,

excellence. Longinus contends that the sublime is actually a feat of textual performance, a *mimetic* re-enacting, where the surface of poetic language is “tortured” “into conformity” (203) with the subject of its discourse. He characterizes the sublime in the terms of praxis, where the sublime creates an experience in language – performing linguistically what is comprehended only sensually. Through this special type of *mimetic* resemblance, the poetic sublime reproduces in the reader the annihilating effect of the experience itself. In *Decreation*, Carson describes this far-reaching effect of the sublime as “spillage,” where the “passionate moment echoes from soul to soul” (46). The pleasure in this experience, Carson asserts, comes out of being “inside creative power” at the moment of invention (46). Like Longinus, Carson theorizes the sublime in the terms of affect for the simple reason that both the lived experience of the sublime and the aesthetic expression of the sublime epitomize exceptional singularity.

In the 18th CE and 19th CE, when the “rediscovery” of Longinus’s treatise prompts an intellectual furor among the aesthetically-minded *proto*-Romantics and the Romantics *de jure*, most theorists suppress or ignore the discursive, textual quality of the sublime in order to focus on the sublime experience of nature. In *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison writes, “there is generally in nature something more grand and august than what we meet with in the curiosities of art,” for artworks “can have nothing in them of that vastness and immensity” (Addison “Pleasures”). Addison uses the necessary superlatives that come to typify all discourse on the sublime. However, not until Edmund Burke offers a systematic approach in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of*

significantly interpreting the indissolubility of experience and representation in the Longinian sublime. See Guerlac 282-83.

the Sublime and Beautiful, do the beautiful and the sublime become aesthetic concepts for describing the *mimetic* relationship of art to nature. Burke describes the beautiful and the sublime in equipoise, as paired opposites. The beautiful and the sublime, according to Burke, achieve definition only through the interplay of oppositions. In Carson's work, this dialectical counterpoint finds expression in her twinned exploration of the erotic (in *Eros the Bittersweet* and *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*), and of the thanatological (in *Economy of the Unlost* and *NOX*). Burke's theory of both the sublime and the beautiful influences Carson's work in a number of ways: first, he theorizes both the response to the beautiful and the sublime in accordance with the psychology of human drives (pleasure and pain); second, he distinguishes between positive pleasure (pleasure in affirmation; the beautiful), and negative pleasure (pleasure in negation; the sublime); third, he undertakes a dialectical program in order to show the beautiful in counterpoise to the sublime (and *vice-versa*); lastly, he contrasts the way that beauty both satisfies and affirms formal, aesthetic principles, while the sublime both transgresses and negates such principles.²⁷

Burke's theory acknowledges the reciprocal interpenetrations of the beautiful and the sublime. The "positive pleasure" of the beautiful, according to Burke, derives from the apprehension of perfect form in nature, whereas the "negative pleasure" of the

²⁷ By distinguishing between the sublime and the beautiful, Burke satisfies the central question of his inquiry. Burke most concisely articulates these categorical distinctions in the last section of Part III, "The Sublime and Beautiful Compared," where he offers a reductive *précis* of both the structure and content of his study. See Burke "Origin."

sublime derives from the negation of form in nature.²⁸ The beautiful object conforms to the categorical idea of “the beautiful” (satisfying the desire for symmetry, proportion, and order), but remains particular in its expression of such an idea. The sublime object negates such formal categories (violating the expectation of symmetry, proportion, and order), through the particularity of its expression. The beautiful object conforms to a pre-existing idea, whereas the sublime object demands that the basis of such an idea be re-evaluated. Even in the “eternal distinction” between the beautiful and the sublime, “we must expect to find the qualities of things the most remote imaginable from each other united in the same object” (Burke “Origin”). The “sense” of one, in other words, must inform the comprehension of the other. In Carson’s work, the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime, *eros* and *thanatos*, comprehends such dialectical transpositions. In theorizing the dichotomy of the beautiful and the sublime, Burke recognizes the contradictory impulses that challenge our ability to make sense of our experiences.

The inward orientation of the sublime feeling, in the terms of pure affect – the simultaneous sense of attraction *and* repulsion, pleasure *and* pain – makes the sublime a concept of particular importance in Kant’s third critique (another explicit, albeit esoteric, focal point of Carson’s work). Kant’s philosophy of the sublime in *Critique of Judgement* elaborates upon Burke’s early psychologism, and in the spirit of Burke’s dialectical procedure, Kant counterpoints the analytic of the sublime against the analytic

²⁸ Burke counterpoints apprehending a flower and apprehending a mountain as examples of the distinction between the diverging responses to the beautiful and the sublime. See Burke’s “Proportion Not the Cause of Beauty in Vegetables” in Part III of his treatise for his discussion of the beautiful in flowers, and see “Vastness” in Part II for his discussion of the sublime in mountains. See Burke “Origin.”

of the beautiful. Kant conceives of the sublime in an oppositional relation to the orderly, formal ideation of beauty, where the “boundlessness” of the sublime is apprehended in a “totality” that “is also present to thought” (“Judgement” 61, emphasis in original). In the particularity of Kant’s thought, the sublime is a process only “found in the mind,” something that lacks an objective, “sensible form” (62), so that we identify “not so much the object, as our own state of mind in the estimation of it” (70). The psychological interiority that differentiates Burke’s philosophy of the sublime from both Longinus and Addison finds more advanced expression in the work of Kant, who theorizes the sublime as a failure in perceptual capacity, a failure to provide the magnitude of experience with a sufficient ideational form. Carson dramatizes this failure by ironically subjecting Kant to a parodic version of his own philosophy in “Outwardly His Life Ran Smoothly”: “Rule Your Nature: Kant breathed only through his nose” (“Decreation” 69). In the imperative of Carson’s poetic line, the mandate to “Rule Your Nature” recognizes both the grammatical equivalent of a command, and the literal construction of a rule or tenet. At the same time, the imperative dictates the necessity of positing a form for nature (“Rule” as both law and measurement, a conceptual boundary applied to the boundless magnitude of “Nature”). The bathetic effect of juxtaposing the intensity of the imperative with the ludicrous image of Kant breathing “only through his nose” (69) parodies the dialectic between order and disorder – between calm, outer poise and obsessive, inner chaos – between cultivated form and raw experience.

In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant describes the sublime as an interior dialecticism between perceptual boundaries and the boundlessness of experience; the sublime represents a transgression of knowable limits. The “negative pleasure” of the sublime

arises not from the experience of epistemological failure, but instead comes from the “positive pleasure” of triumphant comprehension, and being able to “[comprehend] of the manifold in the unity” in the face of existential magnitude (Kant “Judgement” 73). In describing the tension between orderly concept and disorderly experience, Kant advocates a position remarkably similar to Burke’s. Carson, likewise, also acknowledges this dialectical rhythm – the counterpoint between boundary and boundlessness, the formal perfection of the beautiful and the formal disjunction of the sublime – perhaps most evidently in the ambiguous scene of *eros* in “Ode to the Sublime by Monica Vitti,” a dramatic monologue that appears in *Decreation*: “‘Everything,’ Kant says, exists only in our mind, attended by / a motion of pleasure and // pain that throws itself back and forth in me” (67). Carson notes the contradictory way that sublime *eros* contains the dual experience of pleasure *and* pain (reflecting an irony in the gulf-like caesura that spans the stanza break), and she characterizes this sexual experience in the terms of violence. She presents the Kantian sublime as the simultaneity of pain and pleasure, as the *ekstasis* of sublimity and the *catharsis* of beauty, and the tension between dissonance and harmony. However, Carson does not suggest that the sublime transforms into the beautiful; instead, Carson contends that the entire manner of distinguishing between the beautiful and the sublime transforms. In Kant, the sublime satisfaction is a culmination of feeling that “in our mind we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity” (75). The negative pleasure of terror and awe experienced in life becomes a positive pleasure of beauty and truth experienced in poetry.

It is precisely at this point that Jean François Lyotard reinvests a sense of the aesthetic in his theory of the sublime, a feature that Kant either ignores or suppresses

(aside from one small rejoinder to note that “the sublime of Art is always limited by the conditions of agreement with Nature” [Kant, *Judgement* 62]). For Lyotard, the sublime defines the condition of Modernity (“Postmodern” 79), and remains the precondition for the development of Avant-Garde aesthetics and Postmodernist aesthetics – aesthetics that he situates in the schism between the “presentable and the conceivable” (“Answering” 79), and theorizes in its aim to “[put] forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself” (“Answering” 81). Carson not only accommodates the “unrepresentable” within the aesthetics of her poetry, she exploits the tension between the “presentable,” what can be shown, and the “conceivable,” what can be thought, as a source of poetic power. In Carson’s exploration of both *eros* and *thanatos*, she describes how sublime experiences disrupt the coherence of thought necessary to make order from the chaotic perceptions that flood in through the senses. The sublime shatters the consistency of a worldview, and restructures the entire mode by which experiences become codified as knowledge, transforming both the manner in which we experience an object or event, and the meaning we associate with such objects or events. “The art-object,” according to Lyotard, “no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is . . . the actualization of a figure potentially there in language” (“Sublime” 101). The orientation of the Postmodernist or Avant-Garde art object mobilizes the sublime in order to unsettle the foundations of epistemology.

Theorizing Eros

Carson's first book, *Eros the Bittersweet*, examines this relationship between the "presentable and the conceivable" in the specific context of the erotic experience. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson theorizes *eros* in the terms of opposition or contradiction, as a dialectical process that immobilizes the self in the "vibration" of erotic paradox. *Eros the Bittersweet*, like many of Carson's more recent books, abides by a principle of design, where short, lyrical "thought-fragments" cohere through thematic resemblance rather than chronological, expository narrative. Like Longinus in *On the Sublime*, Carson anchors her theory to an analysis of Sappho's poetry. She specifically invokes fr.130 where Sappho characterizes *eros* as "sweetbitter" (pleasure *and* pain), an adjective compounded by contradiction. For Carson, "sweetbitter" connotes a dialectical counterpoint, the experience of the beautiful and the sublime in their reciprocal, mutual interpenetrations. This ambiguous formulation of *eros* comes from Greek where, according to Carson, "*eros* denotes 'want,' 'lack,' 'desire for that which is missing'" (10). Using Sappho's fr.31 as an exemplar of *eros* in poetry, Carson devises a three-part structure to explain the "radical constitution of desire" (16), providing for the assertion that "[a]ll human desire is poised on an axis of paradox, absence and presence its poles, love and hate its motive energies" (11). However, when Carson advances the figure of the triangle to explain the "circuit of possible relationship" between the "lover, beloved and that which comes between them" in fr.31 (16), she turns a dramatic structure into an allegory of desire:

He seems to me equal to gods that man

whoever he is who opposite you

sits and listens close

to your sweet speaking (“If Not” 63)

Sappho describes a *tableau vivant*, where the arrangement of actors (poetic speaker, girl, man) forms a spatial metaphor. To the contemporary reader, the erotic situation seems more like the stuff of melodrama: the generic love triangle. Yet the triangular configuration is not only a dramatic structure, it is also a cognitive one. Much of Carson’s theory seems, at least on the surface, to echo René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. In Girard’s text, desire forms a three-part structure (subject, mediator, and object), a figure extrapolated from *Don Quixote* for the purpose of explication; the triangle offers a concrete way to discuss a cognitive process. For Carson, Sappho’s dramatic situation becomes an allegory for the constitution of longing; when the speaker shifts into apostrophe, it provokes both a cognitive and physiological transformation: “Sappho’s subject is eros as it *appears* to her” (Carson “Eros” 16, emphasis in original). Carson writes,

Thin lines of force coordinate the three of them. Along one line travels the girl’s voice and laughter to a man who listens closely. A second tangent connects the girl to the poet. Between the eye of the poet and the listening man crackles a third current. (13)

Carson’s triangle is an explanatory figure – one that fits the representation of *eros* only awkwardly. Carson describes the speaker’s apprehension of the two lovers as dialectical: the speaker feels both the possibility of fulfillment and the actuality of deficiency – “[t]riangulation makes both present at once by a shift of distance” (17). Carson interprets *eros* to be a paradoxical experience where the “the difference between what is and what

could be is visible” (17). The triangular arrangement reveals itself both as a scene in which the actors “cheat out”²⁹ their stage positions, and as a cognitive structure for the contemplation of desire. For Sappho’s speaker, the triangle of actors provides the necessary dramatic condition for self-reflexivity, where the speaker observes her own “mind in the act of constructing desire for itself” (16). However, the speaker’s outward perspective quickly turns inward; the dramatic frame becomes a cognitive frame; dramatic action gives way to dramatic apostrophe. The speaker slips into solipsism, and the condition of the physical self reflects the agony of mental anguish.

Many critics apply this triangular figure to almost every feature of Carson’s poetry and scholarship. Literary scholars use the figure of the triangle to explain Carson’s various positions: as a translator between two languages; as a historian mediating ancient and modern cultures; and as an innovator mixing generic categories.³⁰ However, the triangular, tripartite structure of *eros* that Carson develops in her explication of fr.31 only insufficiently describes her own poetics. By focusing on the triangle that Carson extrapolates from Sappho, scholars defer analysis of her poetics to a metaphor of visuality – sightlines – a metaphor that reduces her work to a figure of

²⁹ In the language of professional performance, “cheating out” refers to stage blocking, where in a scene, actors physically orient towards the audience while seeming to engage in dialogue (in pantomime, this kind of blocking provides the opportunity for an actor to “break the fourth wall” and make an “aside” to the audience, usually a meta-commentary on an aspect of the plot or action occurring onstage).

³⁰ In “The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson,” Chris Jennings describes Carson’s work in the terms of a triangular structure, a figure that he applies to her translations, her use of the classics, and even her experiments in genre. Similarly, Harriet Zinnes in *Hollins Critic* also focuses on “triangulation” as an explicatory figure. In two different essays in *Canadian Literature*, Kevin McNeilly describes Carson’s use and abuse of generic forms as a “counterpoint” between lyricism and other genres (“Short Talks,” 6), and her use of classic and modern sources as “an elaborate cross-talk” (“Economics,” 11). In *Raritan*, Adam Phillips discusses her experiments with genre as “leaky.” See Jennings, 923; See McNeilly, “Short Talks” 6 and “Economics” 11; See Phillips, “Contracts”; See Zinnes, “Time.”

description. (What moment of observation – literally witnessing an act or conversation between people – is not also an act of triangulation?) In Sappho’s poetry, the triangle of lovers provides a dramatic context for the speaker’s apostrophic description of physical and emotional disintegration in the sublime experience of desire. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson uses the triangle to describe the “shift of distance” that the speaker in fr.31 undertakes in observing the two lovers (17), a shift in perspective that reveals the dialectical character of desire’s opposite motivations and opposite experiences: endless deferral and endless promise. For Carson, the triangular figuration of desire is not merely a “trivial mental manoeuvre” (16) because “perception leaps” and “something becomes visible . . . that would not be visible without the three-part structure” (17). Importantly, it is not the triangle which defines *eros*; instead, the triangle provides a concrete way to conceptualize the paradoxical experience of desire as both lack *and* fulfillment, both absence *and* presence. In the barrage of oppositional, physical sensations, the speaker witnesses the “erotic paradox” of desire, the simultaneity of pleasure and pain. The patterning of oppositional senses epitomizes a mind in the midst of paradox, for as Carson reminds us, “[e]pic convention represents inner states of feeling in dynamic and linear enactment, so that a divided mind may be read from a sequence of antithetical actions” (“Eros” 5). Carson interprets the “divided mind” of the speaker from the interplay of opposite, physical sensations, so that the “fire” that “[races] under skin” from within offsets the “cold sweat” that “holds” from without (“Fragments” 63). In the sublime magnitude of *eros*, all of the speaker’s receptive senses shut down, so that she declares “no: tongue breaks,” “in eyes no sight” and “drumming / fills ears” (63). The inversion of syntax recognizes a reversal in perception, a mental focus that turns inward

(a syntactical feature unique to Carson's translation of fr.31). *Eros* transports the speaker of the poem outside of herself – but not as one watches oneself from above in an out-of-body experience. In fr.31, the speaker achieves *ekstasis* as her body disintegrates, becoming a rough assemblage of defamiliarized parts. *Ekstasis* implies transformation; “[c]hange of self is loss of self, according to the traditional Greek attitude” (Carson, “Eros” 154). As the receptive, sensory instruments of the speaker's body dissociate from the unified, aggregation of the whole, the speaker's tongue, eyes, ears, and skin all take on the character of objects. The speaker observes the parts of her own body and experiences them as foreign, disincorporate elements. Sublime *eros* blunts and blinds the speaker's senses so that she can no longer maintain reciprocal, continual contact with the phenomenal world. For the speaker in the midst of sublime, proprioceptive “disruption,” subjectivity radically cleaves itself from objective, exterior reality.

For Carson, desire both recognizes and transgresses the limits of subjectivity in the pursuit of repletion. This yearning is precisely that which reveals boundaries, and in *eros* “the lover is provoked to notice . . . self and its limits” (33). When the poetic speaker of fr.31 faces the obliterating moment of *eros*, she suffers the ontological disruption that Lyotard attributes to the sublime.³¹ Fr. 31 parallels the experience of sublime *ekstasis* in the breakdown of bodily “limits” where metaphysical disintegration accompanies corporeal fragmentation. Sappho's poem mimetically performs the very

³¹In an essay in *Re-reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, Yopie Prins notes that Carson's translation of fr.31 reveals that “these oddly impersonal constructions present ‘Sappho’ as object rather than subject of bodily sensation, and the grammatical split between subject and object persists . . . doubling back on itself: ‘I seem to me’” (emphasis in original). Furthermore, Prins writes, “[t]he performance of subjectivity, then, is less the central assertion of fragment 31 than its central problem.” See Prins “Re-Reading” 41.

thing that it describes; the speaker not only narrates the sublime moment of *eros*, the lyrical form of the telling also attempts to reproduce an aspect of the experience in language. Carson makes fr.31 an erotic paradigm for the manner in which the poem both describes *ekstasis* and reflects *ekstasis* compositionally. The solipsistic interiority of fr.31 recognizes that, in the words of Kant, the sublime generates from “not so much the object, as our own state of mind in the estimation of it” (Kant “Judgement” 70). The speaker can no longer perceive the world as she did before – such an estrangement defies understanding. When the speaker breaks contact with sensible, exterior reality in Sappho’s fr.31, she disappears into pure lack and the impossible, timeless present. “Desire,” Carson writes, serves “to demolish time in the instant when it happens, and to gather all other moments into itself in unimportance” (117). Sappho’s speaker turns inward, closing off her senses, and the insurgent experience of desire necessitates “a gathering of moments” – “a gathering” which is also, paradoxically, the dissolution of orderly, historical time (time as it is experienced in relation to a concept). As Kant theorizes, “time is no longer objective if we abstract from the sensibility of our intuition, that is to say, from that mode of representation which is peculiar to us” (Kant “Reason” 70). The temporal experience of desire, in other words, is “peculiar” to subjectivity. In Sappho’s fr.31, this disintegration isn’t healed until Sappho recuperates the body of the speaker in the textual space of the poem (Guerlac 282-83). Or, as Carson elusively writes in an endnote to fr.31 in *If Not, Winter*, “Sappho’s body falls apart, Longinus’ body comes together: drastic contract of the sublime” (364).

Claims of Longing

For all her manifestations in contemporary literary criticism and throughout the history of literary studies, Sappho looms largely in what Paige duBois calls in *Sappho is Burning*, “a move toward a new kind of thinking, toward the cultural production of subjectivity and individualism and reason, *logos*” (106, emphasis in original). The development of subjectivity in Sappho is part of what makes her work so important and so influential to Carson’s poetics.³² Sappho’s representation of the body, on one hand, comprises nothing more than an “alliance of functions, a loose set of organic capacities” (73), an idea that duBois links back to Homer.³³ On the other hand, Sappho’s representation of the body indicates “the beginning of the historical evolution of selfhood, of individuality” and the “new sense of the poet as an ‘I’” (73). The significance of Sappho’s portrayal of subjectivity in her poems is such that it not only influences the enduring conventions of lyric poetry (as a genre determined almost entirely by its concern for the self), but also influences how the lyric mediates public and private modes. When considering Sappho’s conflicted presence in both public and private worlds, Jack Winkler concludes that “Sappho’s consciousness is necessarily a double consciousness [;] her participation in the public literary tradition always contains an inevitable alienation” (95). When considering the contrapuntal relationship between

³² Yopie Prins confirms this assertion in “Sappho’s Afterlife in Translation,” noting that “Sappho seems to give birth to the lyric ‘I’: the conception of a singular self that also speaks as a generalized lyric subject.” See Prins “Afterlife” 38-39.

³³ Jack Winkler provides a very clear, concise discussion about Sappho’s use of Homeric passages. However, it is Paige duBois’s rethinking of Bruno Snell’s criticism that leads her to establish the relationship between Homeric ways of conceptualizing the body, and Sappho’s innovation of poetic subjectivity. See Winkler 93; duBois 72-73.

inner experience and outer experience in fr.31 – a counterpoint that culminates in the poetic speaker’s solipsistic retreat – Winkler characterizes the double modality of Sappho’s poem perfectly.

In fact, Carson’s poetry and her translations focus on Sappho’s work specifically because of the palpable, physical tension between public and private forms of rendering experience. Sappho’s speaker suffers the sublime annihilation of *eros* and retreats within, “for Sappho . . . shows us the objects of outer sense emptying themselves; and there on the brightly lit stage at the centre of her perception appears – her own Being” (Carson, *Decreation* 160-61). Carson exemplifies Sappho’s portrayal of the immanent self – a self conflicted by public, masculinist ways of articulating experience in objective, totalizing terms. Sappho’s speaker contemplates her own subjectivity as an abstract object; she views herself from the mute, blind, and deaf territory deep within. By “stand[ing and] observing her [self] as if she were grass or dead” (*Decreation* 161), Sappho’s speaker seems both to “contain” and objectify her public identity in order to contemplate its essence – a cogitation that resembles the Husserlian process of phenomenological reduction.³⁴ This shift in perception suggests that, in the *ekstasis* of sublime transport, Sappho’s speaker apprehends dual facets of her identity, witnessing the contiguity between her public self and her private self in a moment of intense, intimate connection. The sublime experience of *eros* inspires, for Sappho, an experience of pure self-reflection

³⁴ Husserl conceives of phenomenological reduction as the act of divisively “parenthesizing” (what some have called “bracketing”) natural attitudes, assumptions, and habits of thought in order to contemplate the perceptual manifold in the given appearance of a phenomenal object. Additionally, in his discussion of the poetic epiphany, Martin Bidney provides this incisive explanation of Husserl’s “brackets”: “Husserlian *epoché* or ‘bracketing,’ [is] the phenomenological isolation of a given object of consciousness for the contemplation of its pure structure.” See Husserl 131-43; Bidney 9.

(subjectivity paradoxically witnessing its own genesis). The poetic self attached to the lyric, for Carson, offers a means of articulating experience that counteracts the alienating effect of public discourse.

Sappho reconstructs her fragmented body through poetic enunciation; her poem exposes the limitations of the desiring self, the shattering of those limitations in sublime ecstasy, and the recuperation of subjectivity through the medium of poetic discourse. This metaphysical process of disintegration and recuperation also, uncannily, describes the phenomenal transmission of Sappho's poems through the ages: in frayed bits and tattered pieces excavated from archaeological sites; in partial or erroneous reproductions by other, Classical writers; and in the discussions of various historical records and political narratives.³⁵ Page duBois concludes that the search for an original or authentic Sappho is futile because "there is no original text, no 'right,' perfect, whole object"; "we have only a broken bit of ceramic mediated by centuries" (28). Sappho continually suffers reconstitution, reconstruction, and reimagining, according to an ever-evolving, ever-changing, ever-present fantasy of the whole – a fantasy that nostalgically invents a "prelapsarian" version of the past.³⁶

³⁵ In "Red Meat: What Difference Did Steisichoros Make?" from *Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson ironically (and somewhat facetiously) characterizes Steisichoros's *Geryoneis*: "*Geryoneis* . . . reads as if Steisichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem and then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat. The fragment numbers tell you roughly how the pieces fell out of the box. You can of course keep shaking the box." The characterization is significant, because of the way Carson formally builds the material experience of reading and compiling Steisichoros's fragments into the entire text, *Autobiography of Red*. See Carson "Autobiography" 7.

³⁶ In the introduction to *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, Ellen Greene notes that contemporary scholarship on Sappho must address two distinct problems. Scholars face the "problem of how to piece together Sappho's surviving fragments," and scholars also face a "multitude of fictions about her – fictions that are themselves fascinating because they reflect the particular cultural attitudes and biases out of which these fictions emerged." See Greene 2-3.

In *Victorian Sappho*, Yopie Prins observes “how Sappho is continually transformed in the process of transmission” (13), so that each age offers its own version or imitation of Sappho. Prins argues that in Victorian England, “Sappho” is a trope for social, cultural, and political discourses. For Prins, “Sapphic imitations are a product of their own historical moment and no longer measured against – except perhaps to measure their distance from – the time of Sappho” (14). Even Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a famous literary critic and a frequent correspondent of Emily Dickinson’s, modernizes Sappho in light of a cultural sensibility that can only be called *Victorian*. According to Gloria Shaw Duclos, Higginson attempts to save Sappho from the “fate” of her sexuality by “refashion[ing] her into an exemplar of American womanhood” (405). Duclos contends that Higginson elevates Sappho from a caricature of feminine disreputability to a portrait of feminine respectability – a portrait, which, as Duclos observes, resembles Margaret Fuller, the famously conservative literary critic and Higginson’s personal friend (407). Peter Green makes a similar assertion about Sappho’s difficult transmission, relating that in the *Loeb Classical Library* text of *Lyra Graeca* (the scholastic “standard” edition), J. M. Edmonds “improves” Sappho’s poems by filling in the lacunae between fragments with his own words. However, “since these tended to say exactly what romantic aficionados of Sappho found most congenial, they were liable to be absorbed, often unconsciously, into the general picture” (Green 35). Sappho remains a mutable fixture of literary culture even into the twentieth century, when H. D. and others take her up as a literary progenitor, and even later, when critics begin to realize the significance of this reclamation.

For Susan Gubar, “Sappho’s status as a female precursor empowered a number of female modernists to collaborate in exuberant linguistic experiments” (“Sapphistries” 44). Gubar examines the extraordinary influence that Sappho wields over the feminist imagination, and Gubar traces out the various presentations of Sappho that have been designed both to support and to suppress a feminine literary heritage. Sappho, for Susan Gubar, stands for the absences in women’s literary history. She writes, “Sappho represents . . . all the lost women of genius in literary history, especially all the lesbian artists whose work has been destroyed, sanitized, or heterosexualized” (“Sapphistries” 46). Gubar’s version of Sappho accomplishes a number of revisionary feats: Gubar uses Sappho to authorize a meta-historical claim about women’s writing in Ancient Greece (and throughout history, more generally);³⁷ Gubar elevates the degraded condition of the fragments into a symbol for the erasure of women’s culture in both ancient and modern contexts; Gubar transforms the survival of Sappho’s fragments through the centuries into a narrative about feminine determination and female triumph. Sappho’s fragments are the material “proofs” of patriarchal effacement; Sappho’s fragments are the facts of irrepressible feminine tenacity. Sappho constitutes the *synthetic* unity of absence and presence; the fragments narrate two histories simultaneously, both of which confirm the inviolate authority of the other. In Gubar’s reclamation of Sappho (a reclamation that, significantly, originates from her scholarly interest in such writers as Emily Dickinson

³⁷ In “The ‘Women’s Tradition’ in Greek Poetry,” Laurel Bowman provides a thorough and thoughtful discussion about the ways in which contemporary feminist scholarship has both illuminated the study of women’s writing in Ancient Greece, and yet also configured the past in order to (often dubiously) authenticate the present. Bowman examines many of the more controversial claims about Sappho in light of historical, material evidence. See Bowman 1-27.

and H. D.), the physical condition of Sappho's fragments becomes a politicized metaphor – a metaphor through which history itself is (anachronistically) re-shaped.

Sappho is, in many respects, a perfect allegory for the confluence of perception and imagination – where narrative influences the experience of material objects, showing the formative relationship between ideas and things. In “Vilcashuamán: Telling Stories in Ruins” the scholar Jon Beasley-Murray considers the relationship of imagination to the fragmentary, dilapidated condition of ruins. Although Beasley-Murray theorizes the effect of architectural ruins, his analysis also describes the imaginative reconstruction of textual ruins:

. . . ruins are incessantly seen as pointing beyond themselves, to some absent totality. That totality has then to be narrated. Stories fill in the gaps left by the ruin's material remains . . . These narratives restore the ruins before our very eyes, allowing us to imagine them, once again, complete . . . Narrative accretes around them, purporting to complete them. It is as though we can never see the trees for the forest. (215)

Beasley-Murray implies that the encounter with the ruin (or equally, the textual fragment) reveals the *synthesis* of imagination and material reality, an order imposed upon a rough array of pieces – an idea that Carson echoes when she notes that in the experience of desire, “[t]he ideal is projected on a screen of the actual, in a kind of stereoscopy” (Carson “Eros” 17). In reversing the terms of an old adage (“trees for the forest”), Beasley-Murray insinuates a dialectical tension between the whole and its parts – a tension that also finds sublime expression in Sappho's fr.31. However, when Beasley-Murray asserts that “narratives restore the ruins before our very eyes” (215), he writes

about the effect that architectural ruins or textual fragments have on the imagination, inducing a fantasy about past unity and a fantasy about the events that must have transpired to deliver the fragments to the present moment, in their present state. The narratives that have contextualized Sappho's fragments within a unity and within a history, for example, may have no possible, verifiable relation to the past. The stories and *testimonia* which situate Sappho's fragments also narrate an idea about Sappho herself. The poetic fragments become synthetically unified with the imagined whole in the procedure of discursive construction. Yet, as Margaret Williamson, a scholar of Sappho, notes, "Sappho's poems cannot be completely insulated from her fictional career. The cultures that spun fantasies about her are also those that copied her texts, and as they did so they stamped their preconceptions on them, whether by selection or by alteration" (37). Likewise, Glenn W. Most contends that in the absence of information about Sappho, "obscene comic invention rushed to fill in the vacuum of accurate historical knowledge" (14). Sappho and her work show signs of wear in the transmission across centuries. Thus "referential" names like Sappho, Stesichoros, Alkman and many others stand, not in relation to the works that they have authored³⁸ (as with contemporary texts), but instead stand for the discursive system that conjoins their fragmentary remnants and presents a historically determined version of possible wholeness.³⁹ For

³⁸ For further discussion on how the author's name reverts to a function of paratextual discourse that surrounds the literary object, see Foucault's "What is an Author?" 1622-36.

³⁹ Yopie Prins centralizes a similar claim about Sappho in her study *Victorian Sappho*. For Prins, "Sappho" is protean, shape-shifting, an invention without limits: "[o]ut of scattered texts, an idea of the original woman poet and the body of her song could be hypothesized in retrospect: an imaginary totalization, imagined in the present and projected into the past." In *Victorian Sappho*, Prins focuses on many of the

each of Sappho's translators, "Sappho" signifies the orderly, logical system that they apply to the reconstruction of her work – a system devised from the hearsay, *testimonia*, and various stories that pass through the ages.

In an interview with John D'Agata in *The Iowa Review*, Carson states that much of the fragmentary experimentalism in her own work "comes out of dealing with classical texts which are, like Sappho, in bits of papyrus with that enchanting white space around them, in which we can imagine all of the experience of antiquity floating but which we can't quite reach" (14). The fragments resonate with unwritten meaning; the absences provoke a fantasy about the past. Carson advances a similar proposition in the introduction to *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, "On Marks and Lacks," where her feelings about the activity of reading and interpreting Sappho are perhaps more clear:

As acts of deterrence these stories carry their own kind of thrill – at the inside edge where her words go missing, a sort of antipoem that condenses everything you ever wanted her to write – but they cannot be called texts of Sappho's and so they are not included in this translation. (xiii)

Carson negates the "imaginative" reconstructions in favour of the "real" gaps in papyrus. Carson theorizes the literal absences that intervene between fragments of Sappho's text where even intervals of years (or centuries)⁴⁰ occur between the discoveries of fragments

ways the name "Sappho" signifies various cultural attitudes, historical narratives, and "the logic of lyric reading that has produced [these] idea[s] of Sappho." See Prins 3-22.

⁴⁰ The transmission of Sappho's work over the ages has been particularly fraught; the remnants of her poetry survive by serendipity alone. Fragments of Sappho's texts exist today mostly through citation in other Classical works by other authors (Longinus is an excellent example of this), and through archaeological recovery – over the course of centuries in some circumstances. Over the last one hundred and twenty years, the excavation sites at Oxyrhynchus both affirm the status of previously known

– fragments that may have originated from works already distorted by millennia of translation and appropriation (so that ironically, a discovery of one incomplete fragment might indeed be centuries “newer” than the more recent discovery of a second, complementary fragment). Carson inscribes time onto the page itself, where “the enchanting white space” (Carson, “D’ Agata Interview” 14) runs up against the imagination in the assembly of fragments. In *If Not, Winter*, Carson signifies the phenomenal, fragmentary status of Sappho’s verse by using square brackets to ironically mark out the contours of absence.⁴¹ As Carson explains, there “is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes smaller than a postage stamp,” for “brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure” (“If Not” xi). In this case, the bracket not only implies editorial interference, but Carson also alludes to Husserl’s concept of phenomenological reduction, a “parenthesizing” or “bracketing” of the objects of consciousness (isolating the way experiences or ideas form in the mind) in order to interrogate these objects for the very structure of their existence. The Husserlian “parenthesis” proposes, more than anything, a systematic approach to defamiliarizing the experience of concrete things, in order to reveal unperceived habits of thought and unacknowledged perceptions. When Carson inserts square brackets in her translations of

fragments and have also offered up all new, previously unknown fragments of work. As recently as in 2005, a new reconstruction of one of Sappho’s poems has appeared in London’s *The Times*, translated by M.L. West. For further discussion on the problematic of Sappho’s reception, see “Papyrus into Print” in Williamson, 34-59. For both commentary and a translation of the newest poem in Sappho’s canon, see West “New Sappho Poem” 8.

⁴¹ In “Fugitive Places: Anne Carson and the Unlost,” Dean Irvine interprets Carson’s use of brackets to be a “notation of the unlost,” a gesture towards absence, like a “[map] whose edges are bordered by *terra incognita*” (“Unlost” 279). For Irvine, the brackets in *If Not, Winter* suggest a “reclamation of the lost text through the ‘imaginal adventure’ of reading” (“Unlost” 279), a way of enfolding the hearsay and *testimonia* and false or embellished narratives about Sappho into the experience of reading Carson’s translation. See Irvine “Unlost” 272-89.

Sappho's poems, the reader must project an absence in what appears to be a consistent textual object. Carson's "space of imaginal adventure" evokes an arena for the "free play" of supplemental imagination. The reader imaginatively encounters the rifts, the lacunae, and the absences – the wear of history – by reading through the "bracket." In effect, the reader mentally destroys the phenomenal unity of the book. As an object that *synthetically* unifies imaginative possibility and Sappho's meagre, remaining fragments, *If Not, Winter* exploits the tension between the imposition of editorial "form" and the reality of textual fragmentation. Carson reveals "the book" to be an organizational unity, to be a mode of habitual thought that, despite its ubiquity, is still a relatively modern invention. Like Carson's mixing of generic forms, the book, in this instance, becomes the site for experiment; the codex form of *If Not, Winter* is itself both a physical transformation and a discursive translation from the ragged forms of the original papyrus fragments. In *If Not, Winter*, the reader must undo the discursive, narrative, and even the phenomenal inheritance of Sappho.

By stripping away the discursive paradigms that construct specific images of Sappho and specific interpretations of her poetry, Anne Carson reinvests Sappho's work with a material, phenomenal sense; she translates both Sappho's poems and their physical presence: ragged, papyrus scraps and spidery, faded scrawl. For many scholars, historicizing Sappho means historicizing a theoretical or interpretive paradigm. Sappho hosts whatever critical discourse offers the most intellectual traction in any given age. The many versions of Sappho's poems recognize the *manifold* of possibility in the handful of extant fragments – fragments that accumulate cultural currency in *synthesis*

with contemporary forms.⁴² As Peter Green notes in *The New Republic*, “Sappho . . . has a remarkable way of attracting idolaters, pseudo-moralists, spinmeisters (mostly with a sexual agenda), and a wide range of crackpot theorists, ranging from the benignly dotty to the angrily obsessive” (34). Green acknowledges that, throughout history, the variety of responses to Sappho’s poetry remake her work according to dominant cultural, social, and philosophical discourses. Carson’s translation challenges such narrative appropriations by asserting the pre-eminence of the material elements of Sappho’s fragments – by divorcing the Sapphic histories from the fragments of Sappho’s poems. The shadowy, indeterminate Sappho that appears throughout *If Not, Winter* gestures towards the aspects that have been lost as surely as the aspects that have been found. For Carson, Sappho not only reflects, but also anticipates the philosophy of cynicism and the distrust of “metanarratives”⁴³ characteristic of so much Modernist and Postmodernist literature.

In the three-part introduction to *If Not, Winter*, Carson obliquely asserts her intention to undo or negate the discourses that supplement, or even supplant, Sappho’s poetry. Carson remarks that “[c]ontroversies about [Sappho’s] personal ethics and way

⁴² Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig most emphatically (and perhaps ironically) dramatize the endless, imaginative possibility that Sappho’s fragmentary poetry offers to contemporary scholars in *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*, where Wittig and Zeig attribute an entire (blank) page to Sappho. Such an intellectual provocation finds discussion in the work of Jack Winkler, Susan Gubar, and Holt N. Parker (to name only a few). See Gubar “Sapphistries” 44; Parker 146; and Winkler “Double Consciousness” 162.

⁴³ The most concise theorist to describe this “blanket” sensibility in Modernism and Postmodernism is Ihab Hassan in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, when he states: “History . . . moves in measures both continuous and discontinuous. Thus the prevalence of postmodernism . . . does not suggest that ideas or institutions of the past cease to shape the present. Rather, traditions develop and even types suffer a seachange . . . assumptions have been reconceived not once but many times – else history would repeat itself, forever same. In this perspective, postmodernism may appear as a significant revision, if not an original *épistémè*, of twentieth-century Western societies.” See Hassan 259-60.

of life have taken up a lot of people's time throughout the history of Sapphic scholarship. It seems that she knew and loved women as deeply as she did music. Can we leave the matter there?" (x). Similarly, about her translation, Carson writes "I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through" (x). Carson cleaves Sappho's fragments from the imaginative frameworks that both distort and encumber them with dubious fictions in an effort to provide unmediated contact, and to engender the sublime experience of discovery. By stripping down Sappho's poetry to the bare reality of the fragment, Carson implicitly challenges the historical narratives that present Sappho in specifically contemporary, specifically political terms. Carson does not refuse the historical argument that conceives of Sappho as literary "foremother" for women's writing. Nor does Carson reject the way literary desire transforms Sappho in order to satiate an unfulfilled social need. Instead, Carson treats "Sappho" as a signifier – a signifier which shifts and floats through history – contingent upon both the particularity of time and the particularity of place to endow it with meaning. In her naked appearance, "Sappho" suggests the very structure of triangular desire; the papyri fragments offer both connection and its deferral. However, when Carson insulates her translation of Sappho's fragments with typographical brackets, she metaphorically buffers Sappho against the narrative, historicized, and politicized distortions, ironically highlighting such distortions through their absence. Carson's gesture not only demonstrates Sappho's tremendous influence on the development of the lyric (in conjunction with the philosophy of "selfhood" that permeates lyric poetry), she also recognizes how the idea of "Sappho," in the variety of Sapphic "appearances," both powerfully reflects and powerfully affects the constitution of literary values. Carson's stripped-down presentation of Sapphic

fragments in *If Not, Winter* affirms the importance of Sappho to lyricism more generally; Sappho is not merely an influence on the development of the lyric in Western poetry and poetics, Sappho is one of the prime architects of the lyric mode.

Such an approach to Sappho's poems suggests that Carson remedies a loss: she attempts to reenergize the Sapphic fragments with the aura of their material *presence*,⁴⁴ replicating the sublime experience of historical discovery. Carson also engenders a physical, substantive limitation on Sapphic history – a limitation that, paradoxically, frees Sappho from the narratives of social and cultural history. By isolating Sappho's poetic fragments from competing literary inheritances, Anne Carson cultivates a context of absence for the contemplation of such raw, poetic material. The fragments dialectically “appear” in relation to the absence of a whole. The absences “appear” in relation to the trace material, suggesting “wholeness” lost in the wear of centuries. In Carson's translation, the idea of “Sappho” disappears. *If Not, Winter* portrays the sublime sense of endless possibility and the explosive, annihilating encounter between the meta-discursive “idea” of history and the tiny “facts” of papyri – “facts” that threaten the very foundation of historical knowledge. The reality of the fragments displaces their own conceptual form. Although the stories of Sappho's legacy remain conjecture at best (and fabrication at worst), there are a few simple facts which can be known about Sappho: the facts of the remaining fragments, their meagre but potent content, and their enduring influence on the lyric mode. In *If Not, Winter*, what “shows through” most is the presence of frayed

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin describes the messianic aura that attends the presence of the art-object in relation to authenticity; he notes, “[t]he authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” (221). See Benjamin “Work of Art” 217-51.

papyrus, and the space of Sappho's absence (x). Carson examines the *manifold* of tattered papyri, ceramic shards, and partial citation in the reciprocal, dialectical *synthesis* of a posited form.

The relationship between the Sapphic fragments and their assembly into a "useable" completion marks the dialogical relationship between writer (or, really, *writing*) and reader. However, as so many scholars confirm, the textual corpus readily exchanges for the authorial corpse; Sappho speaks directly to us in the textual equivalent of short-wave static, and her transmission must be filtered by some means into discourse that is both comprehensible and adaptable. Yet, as Carson's translation clarifies, the condition of the Sapphic fragments stimulates in the reader a desire for completion – a desire for a stable, coherent whole. For the reader of *If Not, Winter*, Sappho's fragments dramatize the erotic experience. By reasserting absence as an integral feature of Sappho's poems, Carson's translation kindles the desire for completion. The experience of reading Sappho's fragments is an experience of dialecticism in the interchange between absence and presence. Carson's description of desire uncannily echoes Lyotard's description of Postmodernist aesthetics – aesthetics that, according to Lyotard, draw their radical potency from the sublime. Sappho's fragments excite the imagination in the suggestion of a past form and by implying a sense of the immensity of the whole. In the contemplation of these fragments, the mind experiences paradox; we simultaneously perceive the substantive limitation of *actuality*, and we transgress those limitations, imaginatively proceeding into the realm of *possibility*. For Carson, the excitement that the fragments generate intensifies the already-familiar dialogism inherent in the everyday activity of reading. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson observes that, in

reading a text, “what the reader wants from reading and what the lover wants from love are experiences of very similar design” (109). Perhaps more lucidly, Carson writes, “[a]s you perceive the edge of yourself at the moment of desire, as you perceive the edges of words from moment to moment in reading (or writing), you are stirred to reach beyond perceptible edges – toward something else, something not yet grasped” (109). Carson equates reading with *eros*: as endless deferral in the pursuit of knowledge and as endless deferral in the pursuit of repletion.

Theorizing Loss

The simultaneous experience of oppositions that characterizes Carson’s theory of *eros* remarkably parallels her theory of mourning. Although she may not articulate them in the same way, Carson’s *Eros the Bittersweet* and *Economy of the Unlost* conceive of the sublimity of desire and the sublimity of mourning similarly – in terms of a dialectic that enfolds the oppositions of absence and presence into the same cognitive space. The experience is, of course, paradoxical. Nonetheless, Carson’s theories cast light on dual aspects of yearning. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson conceptualizes *eros* as the desire for excess; she portrays *eros* as a longing for the libidinal “profit” that generates from the supplement to the self, the synergy between lover and beloved, the plenitude achieved in the *synthetic* union of opposites. In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson conceptualizes grief as the desire for completion; she portrays grief as a longing to remedy the “debt” that accumulates in suffering personal loss, the irreconcilable discord between bereaved and beloved, the deficiency experienced in the disunion of self and *other*. These two streams of inquiry, the erotic and the thanatological, constitute the most important aspects of

Carson's poetic oeuvre. Her work oscillates between these two discursive poles. She theorizes the erotic experience and the thanatological experience as distinct modalities (discriminating between the desire for *repletion* and the desire for *completion*),⁴⁵ yet also comprehends how the mind accounts both ontological "profit" and ontological "debt." In a sense, Carson's theory posits desire as the motive energy of both *eros* and grief. The following discussion illuminates how Carson develops her theory of loss in *Economy of the Unlost*, and discusses its tremendous influence on the composition of *NOX*.

Carson's theory of loss yokes the activity of mourning, the experience of grief, to the metaphoric conceit of profit and debt; she relates the cognitive structure of loss and the development of the epitaphic memorial to the emergence of a numismatic economy in Ancient Greece, a mercantilism that supplants the earlier, relational, gift economy characterized by *xenia*.⁴⁶ In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson relates how in Ancient Greece a monetary economy uncannily emerges at the same time as the technological refinement and aesthetic development of epigraphy – a development, she contends, of intense importance to the lyric mode in poetry. In the prologue to *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson writes that "economy is a trope of intellectual, aesthetic and moral value," and that money is a "mediator for our greed" (3). Money, in other words, intercedes in desire

⁴⁵ I distinguish between the two terms as follows: "repletion" in the sense of satiation by excess or "profit;" "completion" in the sense of a remedy for absence or longing.

⁴⁶ *Xenia*, according to Carson, most commonly translates as "hospitality" or "ritualized friendship." *Xenia* describes a reciprocal, continual relationship enacted between the giver of a gift and the receiver of a gift, an economic model that foregrounds communal responsibility in the transaction of goods (gifts). The gift has both "economic and spiritual content" (16), that "form a kind of connective tissue between giver and receiver" (18). *Xenia* illustrates the social bond, and social responsibility, of the highly decorous "trade" relationship between people in Ancient Greece. However, Carson also recognizes the duality inherent in *xenia*, which also "denotes 'stranger,' 'outsider,' 'alien'" (22). Carson writes, "[a]t one time it made sense to blend these meanings in a single word because the reality was unitary" (22). See "Economy" 11-19.

and its satiation accounting for the fluctuations between not only financial profit and debt, but acquisition and deficiency in all other contexts. As a trope that sublates into the very structure of thought, Carson argues that in Greece in the fifth century BCE, “economy” becomes a means of conceptualizing the relationships between all people and all things. In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson assembles biography, testimonia, and extant literature surrounding the ancient poet Simonides of Keos (a notable epigraphist, and the first poet to receive payment for commissioned poems). She counterpoints this investigation of Simonides with biography, criticism, and poetry from the Modernist poet Paul Celan (one of the first writers to document the Holocaust in poetry). Carson explains that, in harnessing these two poets together, they “keep each other from settling” (viii). Each poet forms a dialectical, cognitive horizon for the contemplation of the other. Carson rationalizes such a strange collation of temporalities, circumstances, and cultures as “withness,” where “each [poet] is placed like a surface on which the other may come into focus” (viii). In Simonides’s epigraphic inscriptions, Carson locates the teleonomic origin of poetic economy. The surface of a tombstone enacts an aesthetic balance between profit and expenditure; epitaphic inscription exploits words for their semantic values while conserving the limited supply of compositional space, both of which must be efficiently and austere accounted. In Paul Celan’s verse, Carson locates the limit-case of poetic economy. Celan demonstrates the inability of language to represent the Holocaust, and Celan demonstrates how in the aftermath, language fails to memorialize such an unaccountable absence; for Celan, there is no possibility of linguistic conservation or linguistic expenditure in the midst of a loss that cannot even be fathomed. In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson polarizes the poetic innovations of Simonides and

Celan as representative limits: one adapts epigraphic poetry to a new system of accounting value; one discovers a loss to which the commemorative “value” of poetry forever remains incommensurable. In this forced dialogism, Carson theorizes the relation between two, diverse, poetic modes, where the confluence of writing, memory, and even history conform to an economic structure – where the poetic inscription of an epitaph both conceptually and literally supplements, or becomes a totem, for the dead.

For Simonides, teetering in the liminal space between two economic modes, the incremental movement towards a monetary system that no longer observes the *xenia* of gift economics both disenfranchises the poet and problematizes the value of poetry. Carson explains that, when a numismatic system replaces the gift economy in Ancient Greece, poet and patron no longer occupy the same social class: like craftsmen, poets perform a certain labour; like craftsmen, poets are subject to the alienation of transacted labour. Carson writes, “Money has quantified the moral tension between [Simonides and his patron] and liquidated their mutual responsibility” (22). Her description notes that the exchange of money for goods both abstracts and commoditises the relationship between people – a relationship that, in a gift economy, normally ensures equality, reciprocity, and constant renewal. Although adapting poetry and the labour of poets to a mercantile system of measurement is not necessarily easy (Simonides’s literary reputation is one of miserliness), Simonides affixes the value of epitaphic inscription to the value of memory. The market price for Simonides’s epitaphs adheres to the value of commemoration; the limitation of writing space and the poetic economy of “meaning” conspire to drive up the cost of inscriptive, poetic labour. In forcing a dialogue between Simonides and Paul Celan, Anne Carson recognizes their inverse, but nonetheless overlapping, relation to

poetic economy. For Paul Celan, poised in the epistemological breach between two eras (before and after the Holocaust), the semantic “value” of poetry undergoes a crisis where “meanings ‘burn out’ of language,” an effect that Carson contends “gives a context of ‘ashes’ to everything that [Celan] says” (“Economy” 30). Despite the oppositional way Carson configures the relationship between these two poets, Carson notes a significant similarity: Celan’s estrangement⁴⁷ from his native German instils the same sense of thrift that influences Simonides’s epitaphs, for Celan “uses language *as if he were always translating*” (28, emphasis in original). Carson’s insight into Celan’s poetics relies on analogy from *Grundrisse*, where Marx equates economic transaction with semantic transaction in the activity of inter-linguistic translation.⁴⁸ Unlike Simonides, Paul Celan faces a human debt that cannot be remedied, or supplemented, or otherwise “filled” with linguistic, poetic capital; in writing about the Holocaust, Celan faces the memory for which no memorial can stand. If Carson theorizes Simonides’s epitaphic poems as the first instances of poetic economy (in the contemporary sense), then Carson theorizes Celan’s elegiac poems as examples of the great, enduring bankruptcy of poetic language.

⁴⁷ In the field of Holocaust Studies, the problem of memorial representation (and representation more generally) is well-considered by such scholars as James E. Young, Dominick LaCapra, and others. James E. Young notes in *At Memory’s Edge* that one of the main problems of re-inscribing the memory of the Holocaust into the landscape of Germany is the problem of official history. He asks, “How does a city like Berlin ‘house’ the memory of a people that is no longer at ‘home’ in Germany?” (8). Young’s answer echoes the same sense of estrangement with which Carson approaches the poetic language of Paul Celan: “I suggest here that a ‘Jewish museum’ . . . cannot be *heimlich* but must be regarded as *unheimlich* – or uncanny” (Young 8). See Young 1-11.

⁴⁸ To make her point about Celan’s unique attention to the German language and linguistic translation as economic transaction, Carson quotes from *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*: “Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign (*fremde*) language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy.” Carson quotes Marx to centralize the issue of exchange at the heart of translation (rather than as an aspect of language itself). See Carson “Economy” 28.

In the examples of both Simonides and Paul Celan, Carson elucidates how an economic model influences both the experience of loss, and the commemoration of loss. The epitaph is a mediator between public and private memory. Despite the visible, public presence of a tombstone, the epitaph is the first instance of poetry intended to be read privately rather than performed, and thus the epitaph occupies the crossroads of public, commemorative discourse and private, contemplative mourning. Carson focuses on the epitaph for the unique, and perhaps originary, spatial constraints that inform epitaphic composition, and Carson focuses on how the epitaph exemplifies intimacy in connecting poetry to “real life.” The epitaph is a concrete example of writing that not only aids memory, but also embodies memory, supplementing a physical absence with a physical presence according to the principle of economic exchange. The inscription on a tombstone or sepulchre either eulogizes or elegizes; it both gives voice to memory, and also substitutes for the dead. Carson writes, “[r]emembering brings the absent into the present, connects what is lost to what is here” (38), and about the writing of epitaphs, she notes “[a] poet is a sort of hinge. Through songs of praise he arranges a continuity between mortal and immortal life” (40). The epitaph marks absence with presence in a continual, cognitive transaction. Memory concretizes around the inscriptive text of a tombstone, a placeholder that both acknowledges loss and substitutes for loss; the monument stimulates desire for *what was*, and in that necessary absence, the monument defers satiation with the substitutive presence of *what is*. Carson’s theory of loss is not unlike her theory of *eros*. For Carson, incompleteness sustains *eros*, and incompleteness “[aims] at defining one certain edge or difference: an edge between two images that cannot merge in a single focus because they do not derive from the same level of reality –

one is actual, one is possible” (“Eros” 69). Not unlike the way *eros* thrives in the space between reality and imagination, the epitaph similarly marks the junction between the actuality of loss and the fantasy of completion. “To know both,” Carson writes, “keeping the differences visible, is the subterfuge called eros” (“Eros” 69). Holding these two perspectives in counterpoint, the epitaph similarly mediates between the present and the absent, between the living and the dead. As Carson asserts in *Economy of the Unlost*, “[t]he purpose of the monument is to insert a dead and vanished past into the living present” (73). Both the experience of remembering the dead and the experience of erotic desire, according to Carson, depend on the dialectical tension between oppositions. The structure of loss, as Carson argues throughout *Economy of the Unlost*, appears economic in nature.

Both the erotic and the thanatological in Carson’s work focalize on the dialectical relationship between the absent and the present. Although her theories are parallel in structure, Carson employs distinctly different metaphors in her expositions: she describes *eros* as triangulation; she explains memorialisation as transaction. For both theories, the configuration is tripartite. Despite the differences in explanation, the epitaph draws its potency from the sublime. For the lover, the erotic experience provokes a crisis in subjectivity, in the recognition of “[d]esire for an object *that he never knew he lacked . . .* desire for a necessary part of himself” (“Eros” 33, emphasis in original). For the mourner, the experience of loss provokes a crisis in subjectivity, in the recognition of “the act of attention that forms stone into memory” (“Economy” 95), and “connect[s] what is lost to what is here” (38). Carson’s description of *eros* seems remarkably like her description of the epitaph: “The difference between what is and what could be is visible”

(“Eros” 17). In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson similarly writes, “there is one thing a poem can do that a painting cannot . . . namely, render the invisible . . . [Simonides’s] medium is words positioned so as to lead you to the edge where words stop, pointing beyond themselves toward something no eye can see and no painter can paint” (51). Perhaps unknowingly, Carson’s theory of epitaphic memory echoes her earlier definition of *eros*, constituting the tombstone as a junction between the “visible and invisible worlds [that] lie side by side” (45). Carson discovers that the sublime moments of poetic contemplation, in the experience of personal loss and the experience of heightened *eros*, both evince an aesthetic sense that Postmodern theorists and Postmodern practitioners claim as the precondition for the development of Modernity and Postmodernity. In his essays, for example, Lyotard constitutes the sublime as the empowering force and the hallmark characteristic of Postmodern aesthetics. The Postmodern art-object, he asserts, aims to intercede in the “presentable and the conceivable” (“Postmodern” 79), and aims to elucidate the “unpresentable in presentation itself” (81). In Carson’s theories, both the erotic poem and the epitaphic poem describe similar culminating circumstances, where the poetic text balances or mediates between the absent and the present. Carson posits that it is the confrontation with the “void,” the sense of absence or loss, which compels the poet to write poetry – the “voids” between experience and knowledge that drive both Simonides of Keos and Paul Celan to interpret the fluid, dynamic relation between absence and presence.

Claims of Loss

In *NOX*, Carson's theory of memory bears not only poetic, but also personal, significance. By describing the loss of her brother Michael, Carson crafts an epitaph that utilizes her conjoined theories of memory and epigraphy. *NOX* is unique; Carson collates and intersperses a wealth of personal artefacts, personal photos, and personal letters (the keepsakes of a life) alongside fragments of Catullus's "Carmina 101,"⁴⁹ one of the most famous elegies in the Western literary tradition. *NOX* resembles an artist's book in its collage of visual, tactile, and textual objects, yet this is not merely a gestural appropriation, as *NOX* is a facsimile of an actual scrapbook. Perhaps the boldest way in which *NOX* differs from the other texts in Carson's oeuvre manifests at the level of conceptual unity: *NOX* is not quite a book. Made from a single, uncut sheet of paper (folded into nearly two-hundred pages, accordion-style), *NOX* seems a hybrid text, caught between scroll and codex. Where a scroll presents information in a format of sequential access (one must follow the left-to-right motions of both furling and unfurling), a codex presents information in a format of random access (one can surf through pages, information, at whim). In *NOX*, Carson exploits the tension between the constraints of the sequential format and the desire to "flip through," so that the reader handles the text much as ancient scholars would handle a scroll, and the reader must relate to the poetic material in a similarly constrained manner. In a recent issue of *PN Review*, Jason Guriel describes this difficult activity as "wrestl[ing] with *NOX*, the way you would [wrestle

⁴⁹ In section 7.1, Carson translates Catullus's 101 in full: "Many the peoples many the oceans I crossed - / I arrive at these poor, brother, burials / so I could give you the last gift owed to death / and talk (why?) with mute ash. / Now that Fortune tore you from me, you / oh poor (wrongly) brother (wrongly) taken from me, / now still anyway this - what a distant mood of parents / handed down as the sad gift for burials - / accept! soaked with tears of a brother / and into forever, brother, farewell and farewell" See *NOX*.

with] grief” (46). This challenge to the normative kinesis of reading defamiliarizes the nearly automated activity in which readers physically engage with texts, but yet also implies the spatial dimensions of a page (so that poetic fragments or visual artefacts still oppose each other across the crease). *NOX* provokes the kind of specular attention normally reserved for visual art. The dual activity of looking at and reading *NOX*, contemplating both the visual content and the textual content of the page, enfolds the discursive frame of “the book” into the very fabric of poetic composition. This enacts a tension between the poetic form of the text (*NOX* is a fragmentary assemblage), and the physical form of the publication (as one, long page, *NOX* inspires sustained reading and prolonged contemplation). Carson’s *NOX* relies on the conceit of linguistic translation; Carson opens the book with Catullus’s complete “Carmina 101” in Latin, and the text proceeds to translate each word of the poem into English according to its many shades of meaning and many senses, so that the left side of each page resembles a kind of dictionary. In section 7.1 of *NOX*, Carson writes, “over the years of working at [Catullus’s 101], I came to think of translating as a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for the light switch.” The metaphor of fumbling, of groping blindly without resolution, both recalls Carson’s characterization of *eros*, and seems to have influenced the form by which “Carmina 101” appears in *NOX*. The metaphor also describes a failure. “I wanted to fill my elegy with light of all kinds,” Carson writes at the beginning of *NOX*, employing the verb tense of retrospection. Along the right side of the page, Carson assembles her poetic, narrative, and visual materials. Each word from “Carmina 101” heads a section of yellowed ticket stubs, poetic reflections, and sepia-toned photographs that, by the end of the narrative, makes for a complete translation of

Catullus. *NOX* terminates by reprinting the translation in full but distorted beyond legibility, simulating the wear of history.

The unique structure of *NOX* recognizes a number of themes that persist throughout Carson's poetic oeuvre: the intersection between public and private (as Carson's personal ruminations penetrate the semantic "gaps" in Catullus's very public elegy); the erotic dimensions of reading and writing (reading that is also a writing, and *vice-versa*); the fragment as poetic opportunity and the dialectical tension between collection and dispersion, between *synagôgê* and *diairesis*.⁵⁰ Although a facsimile (the surface of the page appears as a smooth facade), the rough, scrapbook-quality of *NOX* includes torn edges, crumpled leaves, smudged typeface, sepia-stained photographs, and in short, all of the coarse textures of handmade assembly. The facsimile represents the normative features of a codex without being one, and thus, *NOX* orients towards the codex as a conceptual, organizational reference point. Although contiguous, the pages in *NOX* seem to be distinct units. Like the stones that bear Simonides's inscriptions, the blank page of the scrapbook provides the conceptual horizon for the supplemental layers of poetic and narrative text that are either glued or stapled into the book. The economic mandate of thrift that governs the material construction of tombstones also sublates into the aesthetic *nomos* of epitaphic composition – a mode of composition that manifests "a system of exchanges, syntactic, spatial and moral" ("Economy" 75), in its formal

⁵⁰ In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes the process of dialectic as collection and division, having Socrates define the activity as "bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars," and "dividing things again by classes, where the natural joints are" (265). Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan provide a short commentary on *Phaedrus* in *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium*, offering up the transliteration of "collection" and "division" as *synagôgê* and *diairesis*. See Plato "Phaedrus"; Corrigan 81.

properties. Ancient Greek epigraphy alternates lines of red and black text in a lattice that integrates two poems, *synthetically* producing a third from the admixture. The conceptual, spatial, and even material substitutions that formalize epigraphy find translation into ink and paper in the mixed-media assembly of *NOX*. The tradition of alternating poetic lines on the epitaph becomes a counterpoint of public and private remembrance: Catullus on one side; Carson on the other. The penetration of Catullus's "Carmina 101" by Carson's own narrative of loss also recognizes the dichotomy of inside and outside, public mourning and private grief, an idea that is reinforced by the "clamshell" or "doorway" of the textual enclosure. In fact, *NOX* even resembles a tombstone in its thick, hulking exterior that opens like a portal between temporalities, its text unfurling into the reader's lap. Additionally, *NOX* plays at reproducing other physical characteristics of the epitaph. Where the epitaphic inscription is actually scraped from the face of the tombstone, *NOX* utilizes a kind of *frottage*,⁵¹ revealing impressions either stamped or scored invisibly onto the page. And in the reproductions of the "backs" of the pages that wear such invisible impressions, *NOX* mirrors faux embossments. *NOX* also includes cut-outs, cross-out erasures, photographs of shadows, and monochromatic negatives in order to translate the "system of exchanges" that occur on the surface of the memorial stone. *NOX* preserves the characteristics of epitaphic economy in the aesthetics of creative translation.

⁵¹ *Frottage* describes the artistic reproduction of physical textures by placing a sheet of paper over an object and rubbing graphite or wax over the surface of the paper. This is a technique that derives from "brass rubbing," a personal commemoration used to reproduce the textured, engraved surface of famous tombstones, artistic plaques, or embossed brass images.

Carson's *NOX*, significantly, is not an elegy in the traditional sense.⁵² Although Carson expresses the desire to "fill [her] elegy with light of all kinds," *NOX* stands independently of the literary tradition that, through such disparate figures as Catullus, Milton, and Tennyson, represents the poetic work of mourning. Priscila Uppal, in *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English-Canadian Elegy*, notes that the elegy is not only a poetic form but also a ritualized form for mourning loss. She concludes that there is a "symbiotic relationship between the elegy as a literary form" and both public ceremonies of mourning and "psychological methods of working through grief" (7). The elegy, in other words, performs the work of mourning. Likewise, Tanis MacDonald writes in *The Daughter's Way: Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies* that "The elegiac dynamic in poetry has a corollary to that of tragedy in drama; just as tragedy provides catharsis through its invocation of pity and fear, the elegy provides a mourning ritual through its inquiry into the boundaries of consolation" (12). MacDonald notices a particular problem that the elegy suffers: in elevating the circumstances of death to panegyric (or even hyperbole) about the deceased, the elegy "stylize[s] illness, accident, and death" (12), trading real, complex experience for poetic sentiment and simplistic consolation. Carson's *NOX*, however, avoids such exchanges (and furthermore, avoids the gesture towards psychological or aesthetic closure). In writing about Carson's "The Anthropology of Water" specifically, MacDonald explores how Carson paradoxically

⁵² Both Priscila Uppal and David Kennedy note that there is a distinction between elegies and elegiac poems, where an elegy reflects the mourning work of bereavement, and a poem that is elegiac in tone is, despite its focus on personal loss, just a sad poem. See Uppal 22-23; See Kennedy 7-8.

“test[s] the tension between melancholia and consolation” (27), noting that, for the narrating persona of the poem, consolation is elusive, and perhaps even impossible.

NOX portrays a similar tension between the necessity for closure (or the readerly expectation that consolation will follow), and the impossibility of grief. Yet Carson’s *NOX* does not elegize the life of her brother. Carson’s brother is absent from 1978 until his death in 2000. His death, then, marks the absence of an already articulated absence in Carson’s life – a double negative. There is no room in *NOX* for hyperbole or panegyric because Michael’s life, at least to Carson, is a mystery; she has little more than a collection of fragmentary traces. Furthermore, as Michael’s body is cast into the sea, there is no monument that stands anywhere but in Carson’s own memory. Carson’s elegy, then, remains the translation of Catullus’s “Carmina 101” – a public form she energizes with private meaning. In narrating the difficult emotional, intellectual, and psychological challenges of translating such a text in light of personal loss (a loss layered, in fact with another loss), *NOX* exists independently of the poetic mourning ritual of elegy. *NOX* does not exemplify the process of finding consolation through poetry, but rather examines the processes by which a person searches for consolation in the writing (and translating) of poetry, and in the intellectual negotiations that come out of devising an epitaphic form.

Where Carson describes the epitaph as a genre “profoundly concerned with seeing what is not there, and not seeing what is” (73), she theorizes the mediation of past and present across the surface of a tombstone. In *NOX*, the absent and the present are palimpsests that continually define, modify, and reciprocally transact, in the same manner that “foreground” derives its meaning from its positional relation to “background.” Akin

to the many tombstones that Carson examines in developing her theory of the epitaph, *NOX* stands in place of her absent brother. In section 5.6 Carson provides a justification for her unusual memorialisation:

When my parents died I chose . . . to burn them. Then I buried the ashes under a stone cut with their names. For my brother I had no choice, I was a thousand miles away. His widow says he wanted to be cast in the sea, so she did this. There is no stone and as I say he had changed his name.

Across this brief passage of text, Carson overlays three strips of what appear to be transparent, cellulose negatives: equally spaced (mostly); equally framed by white background (mostly); they descend to the bottom of the page like the bars of a jail cell. The page balances absence (“no stone”; “he had changed his name”) with an ironic echo of presence – the “presence” of a prison made out of memory. This paradox finds even sharper definition in relation to the epitaphic form. Where Carson theorizes the sepulchre or tombstone to “guarantee a future exchange of oblivion for memory and purchase a moment of life . . . each time its inscription is read” (“Economy” 78), in *NOX* that sense of oblivion is far more intense. In the absence of both a physical monument and a physical corpse, the corpus of assembled fragments and artefacts in *NOX* must substitute death for life.

NOX must supplement what Carson calls the “void”; she offers a collection that must literally become the textual body in the place of the physical body’s absence. Just as Carson articulates the relationship between sublime experience and sublime poetry in Sappho’s fr.31, so also do the fragmentary “objects of memory” accumulate into a textual whole: a whole that is also conceptual; a whole that offers a measure of *catharsis* in the

synthetic union, where memory accrues into a coherent personal history. In *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Eviatar Zerubavel observes that “[c]ontinuous identities are thus products of the *mental* integration of otherwise disconnected points in time into a seemingly single historical whole” (40, emphasis in original). For Carson, the assembly of such an array of fragments recognizes the self-reflexive process of memorialisation, “allowing us to establish the distinctly mnemonic illusion of continuity” (Zerubavel 40). Carson echoes this sense of enacting historical “continuity” in section 1.3 of *NOX*: “Herodotos is an historian who trains you as you read. It is a process of asking, searching, collecting, doubting, striving, testing, blaming and above all standing amazed at the strange things humans do” (n.pag). Despite the weak pun of “amazed” (astonished, yet also lost), Carson construes history as Zerubavel does: in the dialectical activity of collection, but also in the “idea” that shapes the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of such a collection. Carson likewise considers the mnemonic “shape” of events when she relates Simonides’s system of memory.⁵³ Even in its formal properties, *NOX* gestures towards the “illusion of continuity” (*NOX* is a single, uncut sheet of paper), and “disconnected points in time” (*NOX* delineates the compositional units of pages). In the erotic tension between the conceptual whole and its

⁵³ Carson summarizes Cicero’s anecdote, noting that after commissioning a poem, Skopas invites Simonides to a dinner party. At the dinner party, Skopas promptly declares he will only pay Simonides half his fee for the poem. During the meal, Simonides receives a message he must attend to, and while outside Skopas’s house, the roof collapses and kills everyone inside. The community is unable to identify the bodies for burial until Simonides employs a mnemonic mental device that allows him to accurately visualize the exact location of each dinner guest. The community is thus able to identify the corpses. Carson writes that “Simonides creates a moment of order” and in “star[ing] at the smoking ruin of the dining hall, Simonides is contemplating a piece of the texture [of the *kosmos*] that now exists nowhere but in his own mind” (42). Cicero’s *testimonia* not only suggests the theory that Zerubavel develops, the story allegorically embodies the mnemonic system that *synthesizes* order from ruins, and makes scattered events into coherent history. See Carson “Economy” 38-42.

fragmentary parts, *NOX* holds two perspectives in equipoise, in the aporetic drama where form and formlessness exist simultaneously.

However, *NOX* reaches beyond itself and beyond the mediation of absence and presence (life for death) – something which occurs when the reader of an epitaph considers the subject of commemoration. In bridging the epistemological “gap” between the reality of the tombstone and the imaginary of memory, *NOX* portrays the reciprocity that occurs in the transaction between such exchanges. Like the Ancient Greek concept of *xenia*, the epitaph draws the reader of the tombstone and the subject of the memorial into contact; the epigraphic poem provides an ideational form for the *catharsis* of grief. This reciprocal contact between the living and the dead enacts a relationship where the conciliatory “gift” of the poetic epitaph for the reader (and conversely, the commemorative “gift” of the memorial for the dead) extends from the “interior of the giver, both in space and time, into the interior of the receiver” (“Economy” 18). In *NOX*, the reader shares in the experience of Carson’s “void,” but experiences it differently than Carson. The reader of *NOX* is unlikely to identify with the epitaph for Carson’s brother in the same manner as Carson does; the reader does not perceive Michael’s absence in the same way that Carson might – as a lack without remediation. Although *NOX* does trade on a reader’s empathy and the universal experience of loss, *NOX* more compellingly provokes a reader’s *desire for knowledge*. The sense of personal loss that impels commemorative activity, for the reader becomes an absence of knowledge that compels resolution. The reader must invent a form, a logic of connection to explain the principle of assembly in *NOX*. Furthermore, it is this imaginal form that, for the reader, substitutes for the absent Michael. Like the various incarnations of Sappho that emerge throughout

history, “Michael” signifies nothing but the specific logic of connection that governs the reader’s “will to know,” making sense from the nearly incomprehensible *manifold* of fragments. As Carson writes in the first few pages of text (section 1.0), “No matter how I try to evoke the starry lad he was it remains a plain, odd history. So I began to think about history.” The first historian, Carson reminds us only a few pages later in section 1.3, “trains you as you read” (n.pag.). In the struggle to make sense of her brother’s death, *NOX* represents Carson’s own process of historical collection. By demanding that the reader develop a strategy with which to make sense of the text, Carson devises a situation that largely parallels her own. *NOX* partakes in that special quality of *mimesis* for which “Longinus” epitomizes the sublime in Sappho’s fr.31: *NOX* recreates the sublime experience of mourning the dead. For Carson this is “mimesis in its most radical mechanism . . . the bone structure of poetic deception” (“Economy” 52). By enfolding the reader into the process of “re-creation” and of sharing in the great “void” of loss, *NOX* represents the sublime realization of death – a realization for which even the complex, conciliatory aesthetics of the epitaph seems ironic in its insufficiency. As a substitute for Carson’s absent brother, *NOX* is woefully inadequate.

The realization of death – the “void” that defies commensuration – haunts the design of *NOX*. Reaching the end of the text, the reader confronts the distorted reproduction of “Carmina 101” – the *synthesis* of public elegy and private mourning. The poem offers little consolation as a counterpoint to the magnitude of loss. However, Carson mediates such an immensity of feeling with the appearance of intimacy. The singular, handmade “feel” of *NOX* appeals to the reader’s sense of familial closeness, but in its strong individuation, the work also announces itself as *other* (and thus it remains at

a distant remove). *NOX* invites readers into the text, to illuminate its spaces with the “light” of empathetic re-creation, and to penetrate the gaps in the text with the idiosyncrasies of their own personal narratives. Like the historian Herodotos, Carson primes the reader with her own attention to translation. The reader pauses at the phenomenal threshold of *NOX*'s status as an object: simultaneously “full” of the reader's personal identification, and yet also “empty” of any personal attachment. The intimacy that *NOX* portrays is part of its artifice; *NOX* is a mass-produced facsimile. The inclusion of childhood photographs, hand-written letters, and saved postage stamps – artefacts that seem unique, but are nonetheless iconic – draws the reader into an experience of the “vicarious past”⁵⁴ and a nostalgic identification with photos that, lacking the identifying features of captions, signify only the nostalgia of past childhood. Such a positive response undergoes a transformation for the reader when the photos appear torn, dismembered, mutilated; the Arcadian nostalgia for the past becomes phenomenally corrupted by the historical process of reflection. Two moments, one past and one present, conjoin.⁵⁵ Present remembrance adulterates the ideational structure of the past.

⁵⁴ In Marianne Hirsch's seminal *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, she describes the immersive experience of looking at family photographs, where “[r]ecognizing an image as *familial* elicits, as I have argued, a specific kind of readerly or spectatorial look, an *affiliative look* through which we are sutured into the image and through which we adopt the image into our own familial narrative” (emphasis in original). The distinction between “the real” of the image and the medium of the photograph erases entirely, so that the photo seems to displace the temporal difference between “now” and “then” and instead exists contemporaneously with the act of looking. In Carson's *NOX*, photos appear independently of any locating or identifying captions. The children could be any children. The landscape could be any landscape. The photos in *NOX* immerse the reader in undifferentiated nostalgia for a past that could be anyone's, anywhere. See Hirsch 93.

⁵⁵Such an activity recalls Barthes's theory of the *punctum*, the detail of the photograph that transcends the photograph, reaching out to revitalize the personal relation between the viewer and the subject, a theory that he develops further in relation to time, as the *punctum* enfolds both the “meaning” given an object in the *now* as opposed to the “meaning” of the object in the *then* of the photographic event. See Barthes 42-45. However, as Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer elaborate in their discussion of a cultural artefact from

The personal contravenes the historical, and *vice-versa*. The reader distinguishes between the double modality of recollection and remembering.

In the drama of such a personal and historical encounter, *NOX* portrays the exchange between encomium and lament that occurs across the surface of a tombstone. What is most interesting about *NOX*, however, is the way in which the compulsion of the personal threatens to overshadow, and overwrite the “merely historical” in its entirety. In section 2.1 – a section alternating *frottage* (“WHO”), poetry, *frottage* (“WERE”), narrative, *frottage* (“YOU”) – Carson relates an anecdote about her ailing mother: on her death bed, Carson’s mother requests that Carson take her collection of personal letters, saying she only wants to keep one, “The one your brother wrote from France you know that winter the girl died” (n.pag.). Despite the letter bearing the bad news of Michael’s troubled life, Carson’s mother preserves the letter because it substitutes for the absent brother, as an epitaphic missive (the epistle, Carson tells us in *Eros the Bittersweet*, is the erotic subterfuge of narrative [“Eros” 91]). In the following pages, *NOX* reproduces colour fragments of the letter’s enclosure, colour fragments of the handwritten letter itself, and a brief narrative paraphrasing the letter’s contents. The section terminates, of course, with another reproduction of torn-up pieces of envelope. Section 2.2 is, perhaps, the most important section of the entire text. Although the section only presents factual evidence, the *reason* that her brother has left Canada, the text is reproduced several times over several pages. Where the previous section (2.1) uses the delineated boundaries of

the Terezín concentration camp, the “meaning” that the *punctum* takes on can be “cultural/historical rather than personal/familial.” See Hirsch and Spitzer 353-83.

the page and proceeds normatively (top to bottom, left to right), section 2.2 begins to unsettle such conventions, utilizing the continuous span of paper.

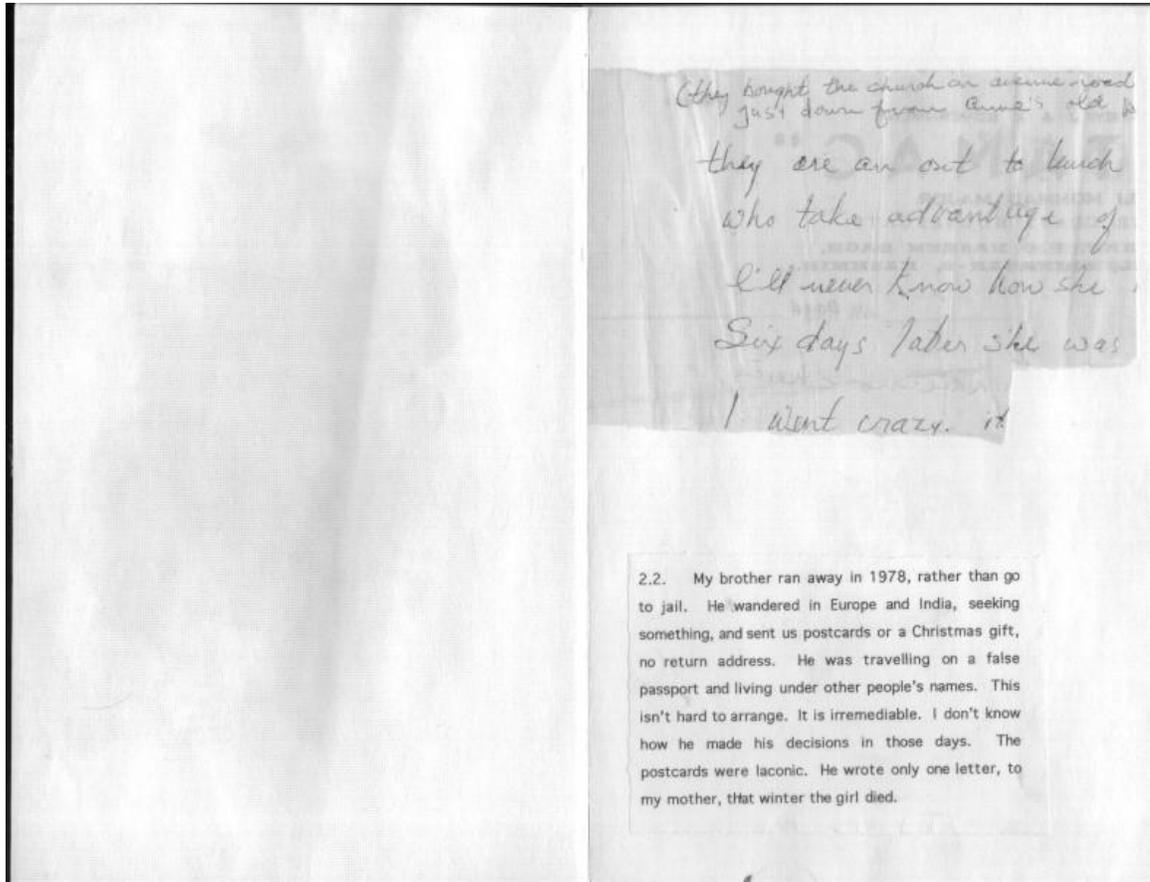


Fig. 1. Anne Carson, *NOX* (NY: New Directions, 2010).

Section 2.2 intersperses fragments of Michael's handwritten letter with the almost compulsive repetition of the facts of Michael's disappearance. First, Michael's letter unfolds once across the opposing blank page (in the manner of an insert glued into the spine).

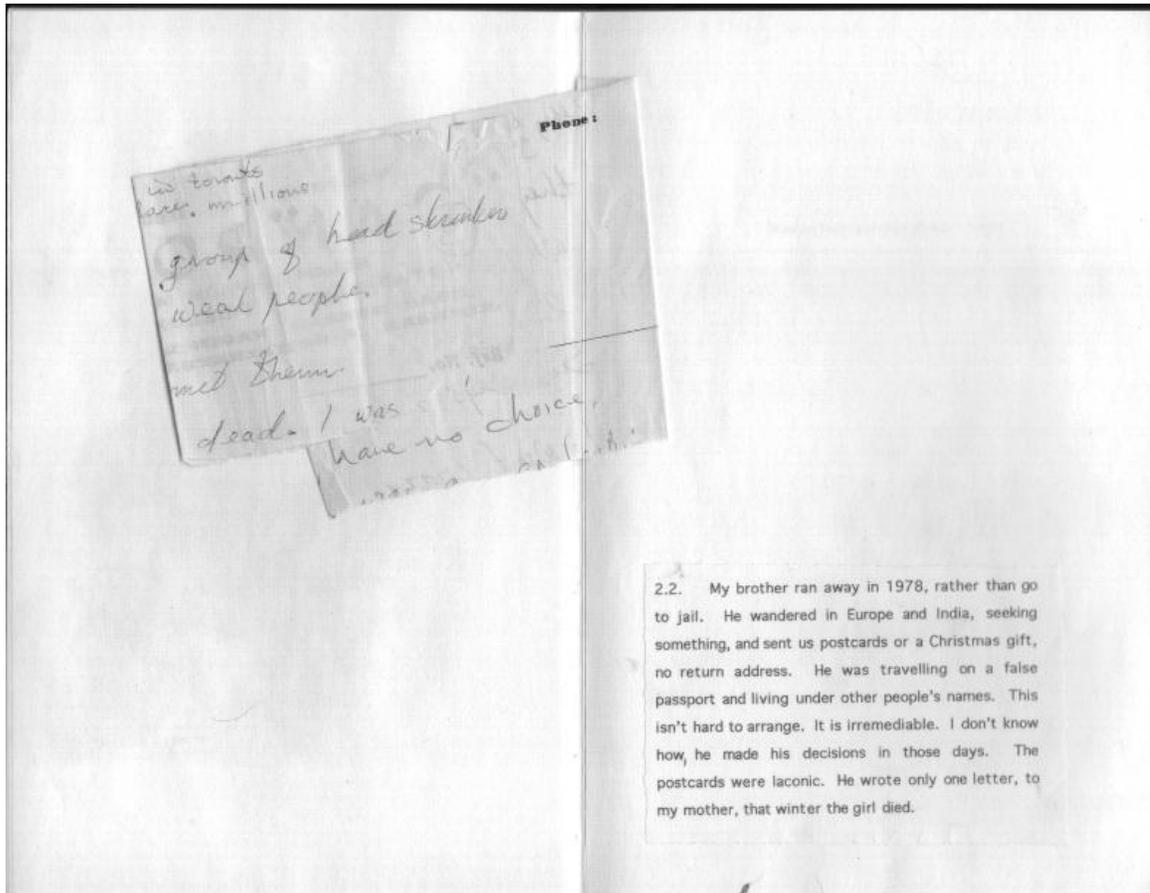


Fig. 2. Anne Carson, *NOX* (NY: New Directions, 2010).

Then the letter unfolds again, upon itself but longer. The letter exceeds the outside limit of the page, projecting into the black absence at the margins of the facsimile.

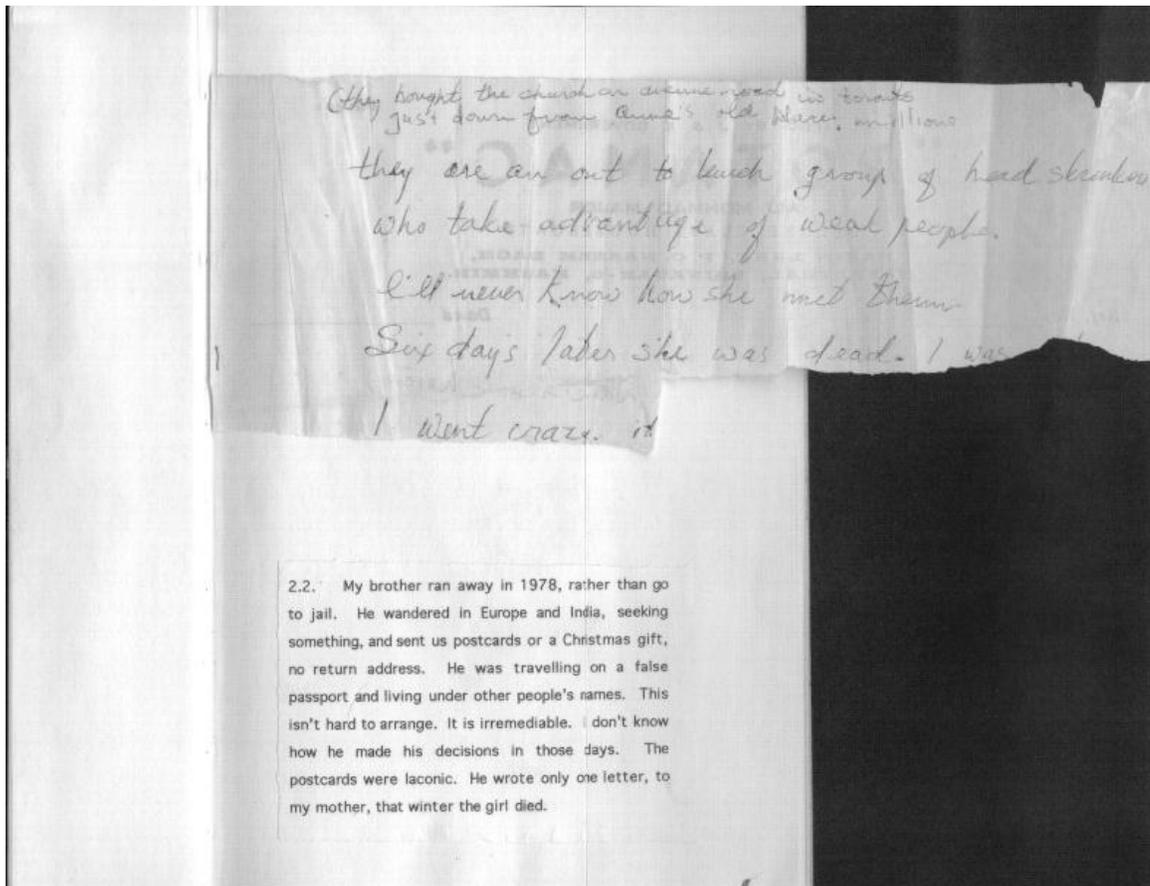


Fig. 3. Anne Carson, *NOX* (NY: New Directions, 2010).

Finally, the letter hinges over again, violating the opposite border (so that only a fragmentary half of the factual narrative appears). The two successive images mirror each other. The front and back of the letter form an isthmus across the negative space between two sheets of paper. Like a filmstrip, the unfolding of Michael's letter occurs frame by frame. The bridging effect, the inclusion of negative space, emphasizes the material properties of the letter (the contours of Michael's handwriting, the interplay between front and back), suggesting that Michael's story spills out of the conceptual frame of the book.

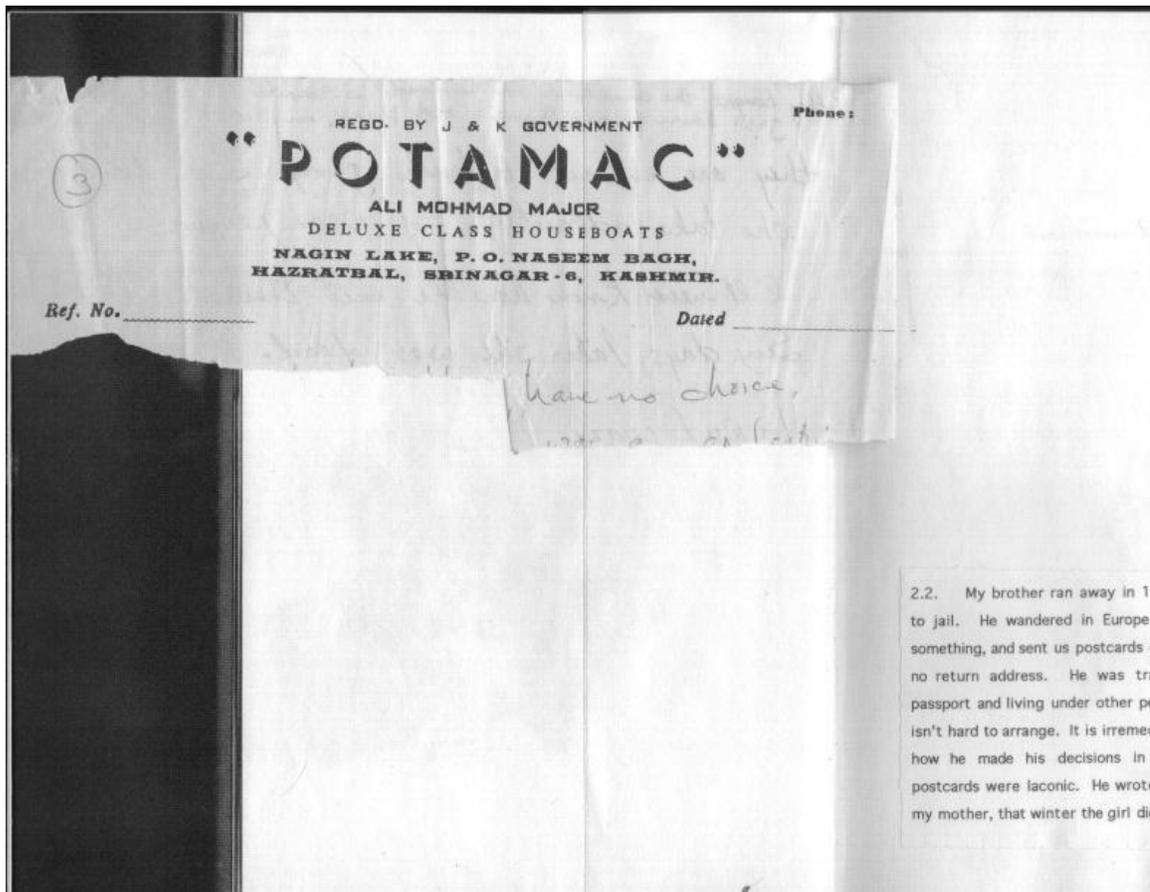


Fig. 4. Anne Carson, *NOX* (NY: New Directions, 2010)

The letter occupies more than just conceptual, compositional space; by violating the parameters of the text, Michael’s letter takes on the phenomenal presence of a real object in the real world, occupying a place in both space and time. The bridge that forms between the front and back of the fragmented letters marks the contiguity between two distinct moments, emphasizing the connection between a past and a present (dramatizing the epistemological breach of “before” and “after”). In these three sequential images, *NOX* recreates the unfolding of more than Michael’s letter; *NOX* mimetically reproduces the passage of time. This crucial narrative event underpins the entire aesthetic strategy of Carson’s book. After section 2.2, the representational artefacts begin to “break down”:

photos appear torn, destroyed; tiny fragments of Michael's letter intermingle with fuller transcriptions throughout; handwritten phrases overlay typewritten phrases. The two faces of *NOX*, the whole and the fragmentary, retain an irresolvable tension that prevents any kind of *catharsis*. There is little consolation in *NOX*, implying that the project of mourning, of memory, never really resolves.

The aesthetic sense that informs both *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* and *NOX: An Epitaph for My Brother* recognizes an experience of history that culminates in the sublime – an experience that wreaks havoc on a coherent metaphysics and stable epistemology, but an experience that transforms knowledge and its limitations in the *synthetic* reflection of discursive form. The power of both texts (and the substance of both theories, as they appear in *Eros the Bittersweet* and *Economy of the Unlost*) comes from the strangely dissonant experience of holding two perspectives in the mind at once, in the interstice between perception and imagination. Both *Eros the Bittersweet* and *Economy of the Unlost* theorize the lack for which writing itself becomes supplement. Both theoretical texts demarcate conceptual terrain that accounts for nearly the entire oeuvre of Carson's work. Such fragmentary assemblages like *If Not, Winter* and *NOX: An Epitaph for My Brother* confront the reader with the question of possibility and actuality; the reader must determine not only the content of their own knowledge about something, they must also *synthesize* a form, an entire worldview, to cross the gap between knowing about the world and being in the world. Where *If Not, Winter* presents an image of Sappho bereft of the particular ways in which "Sappho" has appeared throughout history in the costumes of political reading and social allegory, *NOX* presents an image of Carson's brother – an image that is always on the verge of disappearing. The

fragmentary aspects of Carson's work suggest a "historical" approach to textuality, a dialectics in the true sense of *synagôgê* and *diairesis*, collection and dispersion.

Carson's texts evoke the sublime sense of historical discovery, the connecting of points and fragments across the supreme *manifold* of time and place. Not unlike the continual discoveries at Oxyrhynchus (discoveries that continue to unearth missing fragments of Classical texts and further expand the breadth of the ancient world), Carson's *If Not, Winter* and *NOX* illuminate the particular ways that the present and the past transact with each other in an ever-increasing system of transferral, drawing each other into continual, reciprocal contact. For Carson, the logic of connection reveals aspects of our contemporary thought in the literature of the past, or perhaps more accurately, aspects of our contemporary thought in the *experience* of the past. Both *NOX* and *If Not, Winter*, find in antiquity the ideas that we most closely associate with now, with ourselves – ideas that constitute the far horizon of philosophical thought. However, many of these ideas are not only present in Classical works, but are, more than central, foundational in the emergence of poetic discourse. How are we to consider Sappho's poems without first considering the radical experience of subjectivity? How are we to understand the ancient epitaph without first conceding to the ancients at least a rudimentary phenomenology? For Carson the Classics connect "now" and "then"; the Classics exemplify the *punctum* of contemporary thought. Both *If Not, Winter*, and *NOX* recognize the root system of our current age in Classical sources, the beginnings of which we have not yet surpassed.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MATTER OF HISTORY: ANNE CARSON'S MODERN INFLECTIONS

The poetic fragment is, for Carson, both an aesthetic and philosophical entity: a formal strategy in her poetry, and a theoretical subject in her scholarship. In many ways, her use of the poetic fragment realizes a sensibility shaped by her Modernist forerunners. Carson's experimental approach to lyricism and her philosophical approach to historicity place her in the company of such American poets as Ezra Pound and H. D., as well as such Canadian poets as Phyllis Webb and P. K. Page – poets for whom the sanctity of tradition and the sovereignty of history collide with modern developments in social, economic, technological, and industrial life. Like her predecessors who face the intellectual turmoil and the metaphysical ambiguity of a suddenly Modern world, Carson develops aesthetic responses to similar intellectual “rifts” – “rifts” yet to be mended in our current cultural milieu. Carson projects this persistent problem of history against the “indeterminacy”⁵⁶ of the present, framing such philosophical concerns in her experimentation with poetic form. Her poetic response to such epistemological instability portrays a “genetic” affinity with the experimental poetries of the Modernists, who similarly confront the paradox of maintaining historical consciousness alongside the

⁵⁶ In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, Marjorie Perloff advances the idea of “indeterminacy” as a quasi-tradition in Modern poetry that begins with Rimbaud, finds expression in Pound, Stein, and Williams, and comes to full-fruit in the work of such contemporary poets as John Ashbery. For Perloff, “indeterminacy” identifies a poetics that maximizes textual, interpretive possibility by attenuating the cogent relation “of the word to its referents, of signifier to signified” (17), so that “symbolic evocations . . . are no longer grounded in a coherent discourse” (18). In this sense, “indeterminacy” generates a surfeit of linguistic and symbolic possibilities while augmenting the “writerly,” constructivist aspects of a poetic text. See Perloff “Poetics” 3-44.

nihilistic ideology of “the new” (“the new,” describing a specific, persistent imperative of the Modern age). In accordance with the lyrical *travails* emerging from Vorticism and Imagism, Carson’s poems similarly explore the sublime disjunction between material fact and narrative history. Carson’s *If Not, Winter*, for example, closely recalls Pound’s translation of a Sapphic fragment called “Papyrus:”

Spring . . .

Too Long . . .

Gongula . . . (Pound *Lustra* 57)

Like Carson’s use of parentheses, Pound’s ellipses indicate the lacunae in both text and page, emphasizing the physical, material fact of the fragment. The ellipses signify absence in an ironic, yet endless, polysemy; the nearly *intangible* appearance of the “piece” reifies the virtually *tangible* disappearance of the “whole.” The gaps in the papyrus represent the loss of the entire verbal system that determines the particular manifestation, if not the specific value, of the poem.⁵⁷ Essentially, the realism⁵⁸ of Pound’s translation negates the established, scholarly tradition that provides “ready-made” references to meanings, tropes, and forms with which to decode, or conversely, to encode, such slight, nearly incomprehensible scraps. To be clear, Pound’s “Papyrus” not

⁵⁷ Pound reacts against the “tradition” of Sapphic translation that tends to remake, reinvent, and reinterpret Sappho according to the intellectual, social, and political demands of the time. I use the word “loss” because of the way Pound’s “Papyrus” may appear to a reader already familiar with Sappho’s poetry and Sappho’s history in the form of widely available – and wildly inventive – translations by scholars such as J. M. Edmonds.

⁵⁸ Here, I intentionally echo Charles Altieri’s assertion that aesthetic Modernity aims toward the development of a “new realism” which refuses “ideals of sensitive description and symbolic representation to pursue . . . links between . . . science and a ‘presentational’ realism possible for poetry.” See Altieri “Poetry” 3.

only repudiates the inventive translations of Sappho, but also rejects the entire discursive, historical framework that imbues these Sapphic fragments with Romantic values and that recognizes them as *poetic*.

“Papyrus” reflects an unusual *synthesis* of form and content; the fragment conjoins the material artifact of the past and the revised consciousness of Pound’s present. “Papyrus” mimetically performs the exceptional, sublime event of discovery.⁵⁹ This poetic re-enactment eschews historicity in order to portray the sense of disjunction, in a discovery that sutures the narrative, historical past to the diasparactive,⁶⁰ timeless present. For Pound, the fragment becomes a “luminous detail,” a special mode of scholarship that he describes in “I GATHER THE LIMBS OF OSIRIS” as a “certain [fact]” that “give[s] one a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law” (“Selected” 22). The “luminous detail” then “govern[s] knowledge as the switchboard governs an electric circuit” and “remains the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics” (“Selected” 23). The “luminous detail” yokes together the differential construction of inner perception and outer experience; it opens up a passageway between intellect and thing. Pound harnesses the oppositional

⁵⁹ In addition to offering up new artifacts of classical culture and classical civilization, the discovery of papyri fragments presents “authentic” or “original” versions of previously known texts by such writers as Sappho, Alkman, or Pindar (among others), thereby actualizing the traditions of both hermeneutics (through historical scholars, and later, literary critics) and dissemination (by medieval scribes, and later, in “standardized” editions) in a differential relation between the historically extant and the newly discovered. The differences between the new fragments and the existing texts narrate a contrapuntal history of both textual criticism and literary desire. For perhaps the first time, scholars such as Pound could *see* the invention of history in the traditions and the institutions that formalize such literary objects as instruments of knowledge.

⁶⁰ In *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, the term “diasparactive” signifies the condition “of incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin” (5). The manifestation of “the perception of reality as diasparactive,” according to Thomas McFarland, is the “sense of longing” (7). See McFarland 3-56.

currents of two, distinct ways of historical thinking in this “luminous detail,” *synthesizing* the narrative past with the sublime sense of present disjunction. By translating this Sapphic fragment so controversially, Pound reinvests the Oxyrhynchus papyri with a sense of their material presence – an aspect of his work that scholars of Pound or Modernism rarely engage.⁶¹ Furthermore, the Oxyrhynchus papyri that provoke such a response from Pound, and so concretely embody the Modernist crisis about knowledge in historicity, are perhaps diluted, or even absorbed, into the overall texture of “upheaval” by which scholars regularly represent the Modern epoch⁶² (so that history is but one corresponding aspect of a widespread intellectual *geist*). Pound, however, dramatizes the sublime rupture that characterizes such a revisionary event. “Papyrus” reflects how the imperative of discovery compels an existing system of knowledge, an existing frame of reference, both to adapt and to assimilate such strange, elusive objects into a meaningful relation with the past.

Like “Papyrus,” Carson’s “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings” similarly utilizes the papyrus fragment as a constitutive, poetic model – a model that she

⁶¹ The most notable critic to address the influence of the Oxyrhynchus fragments on Ezra Pound is Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era*. He considers the influence of Greek form on Pound very carefully (if somewhat sporadically), suggesting that the extreme *realism* of “Papyrus” conversely reflects “how the past exists [in] phantasmagoric weskits, stray words, random things recorded” (5). Furthermore, he notes that Pound’s translation is a salvo against narrative distortions, and that “Papyrus” “still displaces in the memory Edmonds’ tushery,” whereby he adds, “which was part of what Pound meant” (55).

⁶² Michael Levensen, in *Modernism*, and again in his edited volume *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, describes how terms like “crisis,” despite being commonplace in discussions of literary modernism, nonetheless “still [glow] with justification.” Almost all theories of Modernism describe the rapidity of change (in social, scientific, and economic spheres) as the defining characteristic of the era. In *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, Charles Altieri observes that it is almost unnecessary to discuss the “cultural crisis” in this epoch because poems such as “Hugh Selwyn Mauberly” and “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock” stand as monuments to it. See Levensen “Companion” 4; Altieri “Abstraction” 3-4.

supplements with more overtly discursive (and overtly contemporary) forms, such as the scholarly essay and the celebrity interview. This layered, fragmentary structure (translation, essay, interview) is a form that Carson adapts throughout various poetic texts and, as Ian Rae notes in *From Cohen to Carson*, “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings” sets the formal precedent for the experimental composition of *Autobiography of Red*, Carson’s most famous book.⁶³ “Mimnermos” mixes the ancient with the modern, incorporating translated papyri with contemporary lyrics. Rae calls this intermingling “cerebral copulation,” and he describes the compound of public, historical fragment and interior, lyrical rumination as *collage*. However, the entire series of poems accretes into a *montage* of thoughts and images (a shift in emphasis which also accounts for the sequential, linear organization of poetic assemblages, in the manner of a photo essay or film). The fragments are like a mirror; we confront our own imagination in perceiving a relation between objects. As Kenner muses about the experience of reading through “Papyrus:” the “imagination augments, metabolizes, feeding on . . . such scraps” (Kenner 5). The juxtaposition of Carson’s lyrical moments against Mimnermos’s fragments does, as Rae avers, “map the passage of time” (“Cohen” 227); but it is a passage that, for coherence, depends upon the external, temporal inference of a reader “making sense” out of the successive arrangement of fragments. Where the injections of lyric establish a connection between the poetic speaker and Mimnermos, between the ancient past and the quotidian present, they also fill the gaps in papyrus with thematic, emotional content – a

⁶³ Ian Rae’s compelling *From Cohen to Carson* describes the formative relationship between “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings” and *Autobiography of Red*, noting that Carson’s early “Mimnermos” is “the stylistic prototype” for the more elaborate use “of the essay, interview, and translation that frame *Autobiography of Red*.” See Rae “Cohen” 225.

content that participates in a double fiction: the lyrical “I” is both the poetic speaker and the imaginary persona of “Modernized” Mimnermos. Where Pound repudiates the lyrical invention of Sappho by his literary forebears, Carson employs such a *synthetic* procedure as an aesthetic strategy:

fr.5

A Sudden Unspeakable Sweat Floweth Down My Skin

He gazes, perhaps he blames.

Sweat. It's just sweat. But I do like to look at them.
Youth is a dream where I go every night
and wake with just this little jumping bunch of arteries
in my hand.
Hard, darling, to be sent behind their borders.
Carrying a stone in each eye.

(Plainwater 6)

The typographic characteristics of this fragmentary text distinguish the “reality” of the translation from both the exegesis and the *synthetic* “imagining” (which comprises the bulk of the poem). In *Black Riders*, Jerome McGann observes that in much Modernist poetry “[t]he semantic content of the message is carried by the graphic features” (83), a typological orientation that Carson similarly adapts to her own work. The interplay between font sizes suggests the way that the various pieces of this text “fit” into perception; the translation (substituting for the fragment itself) looms over the caption, casting a perceptual shadow across the page like a physical monument. Each subsequent fragment in “Mimnermos” adapts this form. Carson then supplements the “brainsex paintings” with a scholarly essay and three mock interviews. In the appended essay,

“Mimnermos and the Motions of Hedonism,” she writes, “What streams out of Mimnermos’s suns are the laws that attach us to all luminous things. Of which the first is time” (*Plainwater* 12). Notwithstanding the resemblance between Carson’s language and Pound’s description of the “luminous detail,” Carson elucidates the structural, formal elements of her poem by utilizing a metaphor of sunlight and luminosity, constituting time as the condition for all reflection, in the way “all luminous things” (like the moon), retain the “genetic” character of their source (like the sun), and in the way laws, as concepts, produce their effects in those who are subjects. Carson provides an analogy for the constitutive relationship between the “whole” and its “part” – between the platonic ideal and its worldly manifestation. This thematic, textual interplay between Mimnermos and Carson not only occurs in the scholarly essay, which advances an interpretive argument about Mimnermos’s fragments, extant *testimonia*, and academic research. The thematic coherence between Carson’s poems and Mimnermos’s fragments also finds expression in Carson’s parody of the celebrity interview, where a split perception engenders a fictional “I” who interrogates a fictional “Mimnermos” about the gaps in his history and in his texts

This chapter argues that, in Carson’s work, the fragment draws all of these disparate discourses and epistemological modes into a close relation, as a special “node” in the cross-currents of past and present, part and whole, perception and imagination. In Modernist poetry, experimental forms proliferate as natural responses to the changing social, philosophical, and economic worlds, where traditional poetic forms no longer address the constitution of Modern experience. The desperate urgency of these responses suggests the magnitude of this epistemological upheaval and, at the same time, also

recognizes the inherently ontological and metaphysical implications of such a dramatic restructuring of Modern intellectual life. For poets such as Ezra Pound, H. D., Phyllis Webb, and P. K. Page, the development of new aesthetic forms realizes a desire to express the inexpressible; their prototypical experimentation aims at both describing and interpreting such estranging, unfathomable experience. For Carson, these Modernists supply ways of responding to the changing condition of knowledge (a crisis in the way ideas correlate to things, and thus a crisis in the way people relate to themselves and the world around them). Pound's "Papyrus," for example, manifests a critical skepticism about both the literary past and the historical past – a skepticism that finds equivalent expression in Carson's *If Not, Winter*. A poem like "Papyrus" intervenes in the constitution of historical knowledge by provoking the reader to reconsider the veracity of historical discourse and to reconsider the ability of such discourses to represent knowledge or to communicate truth. This relation between facticity and historicity emerges in Carson's work at both formal and thematic levels. The experimental work of Ezra Pound and H. D. (not to mention Phyllis Webb and P. K. Page) provide models for examining the bonds not only between epistemology and *poesis*, but also between perception and imagination. This complex link between poetry and knowledge, according to Charles Altieri, is especially significant to the Modernists. He postulates that, "all the major modernists understood the relation between describing a world and realizing it through emphasis on the powers of the medium in which it is rendered" (13), because "[p]oetry could articulate relational structures and, more important, relational activities pronouncedly too subtle for the classifying mind" (21). In describing Modernity as an age that has witnessed the expansion of scientific knowledge beyond all

formerly anticipated boundaries, Altieri's conception of poetry as a supplementary, mimetic epistemology advances a way of conceptualizing the relationship between literary experiment and representational knowledge. Experimental Modernism provides Carson with a powerful means of thinking about the sublime affect of radical, rapid change in the very constitution of human perception.

The discussion to follow examines the Modernist influence on Anne Carson's work, specifically the influence of international writers Ezra Pound and H. D., and the influence of Canadian writers Phyllis Webb and P. K. Page. Although the rise of global capitalism and the "shrinking" of the world define the preeminent condition, and perhaps greatest effect, of Modernity for many scholars,⁶⁴ the Canadian response to such significant, intellectual change suggests a worldview that is already "internationalized."⁶⁵ Carson occupies a unique position in relation to these two conjoined responses to Modernism, because the affinities between Canadian Modernists and American Modernists so rarely attract discussion (except as controversial, and somewhat unexamined, claims about Canada's belatedness in developing a Modern literature⁶⁶).

⁶⁴ Such critics as Raymond Williams in *The Politics of Modernity* examine Modernity as a symptom of such diverse causes as mass immigration, economic concentration in large metropolises, and the changing landscape of global power. See Williams 44.

⁶⁵ This argument about Canadian writing references (although notably diverges from) the work of Robert Kroetsch, whose claim that Canada was never Modern, only Postmodern, appears in his introduction to the inaugural issue of *Boundary 2*, an important scholarly journal devoted solely to Postmodern literature. See Kroetsch 1-2. Di Brandt, in the introduction to *Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women's Poetry*, echoes Barbara Godard in claiming that "Kroetsch's provocative remark . . . had effectively stopped critical investigation into Canadian literary modernism." See Brandt 9.

⁶⁶ In *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon argues that the view of Canada as a "cultural backwater" is typical in presenting Canada as "always copying what the Americans do, twenty years too late" (2). She explains this difference in cultural timing as a result of the divergent, unique historical situations of both the U. S. and Canada, so the sense that Canada "has never really been in synch with the US in terms of cultural history" suggests not belatedness, but difference. See Hutcheon 2-3.

In many ways, the Canadian Modernists adapt the critical attitude of the international Modernists to the neo-Victorianism of Canadian literature – an aesthetic development that continues to shape the milieu of Canadian poetry and Canadian criticism even to the present day. As such, the pastoral context of Canadian literature in the early part of the twentieth century may conceal the great affinities between international Modernism and Canadian Modernism. First, this chapter examines Pound's *ABC of Reading* and some of his shorter essays, such as "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," "Vortex," and "I GATHER THE LIMBS OF OSIRIS," illuminating how Carson's sublime, poetic experiments reflect Poundian insights into the relationship between history, memory, and discovery. The following discussion takes selections from Carson's *Plainwater* along with selections from Pound's *Lustra* as constitutive examples of Carson's and Pound's interimplicated theories of the historical sublime. This chapter then examines how H. D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision* and *The Wise Sappho* anticipate Carson's theory of Eros, discussing how these theories motivate H. D. and Carson to experiment in lyrical form and render dialectical aspects of the erotic experience in their poetry. The similarity of their approach to lyricism becomes most evident in a parallel discussion of *Helen in Egypt* and *Autobiography of Red*, two texts that bring the past and the present into close proximity through their special use of the poetic fragment. This chapter then relates Carson's work to the Canadian stream of Modernism in Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* and P. K. Page's *The Metal and the Flower*. This chapter presents the discussion of each Modernist in counterpoint, thereby illuminating the interrelation of form and content in Carson's poetry.

Modern Loss: Anne Carson and Ezra Pound

The most prevalent aspect of Carson's work remains the way that it describes epistemological rupture and *synthetic* adjustment, both of which characterize the apprehension of sublime experience. This kind of poetry, as Altieri explains about the Modernists, recognizes that "perception is a dramatic event charged by its relation to other events," so that "[knowledge] . . . may be a secondary development created by . . . conjunction" (14). In Altieri's view, knowledge emerges from the violence of sublime experience – the experience that unveils perception in a sudden moment of self-actualization, where the magnitude of the new confronts the limited epistemology educed from the past. The supplemental, relational perception that poetry offers, in Carson's work, destabilizes certain monolithic structures of knowledge in their discursive, often fictionalized, appearance. For someone like Ezra Pound, the poetic image "[mediates] between the real world of experience and the conscious world of appearances" (Beasley 15). *ABC of Reading* remains the most accessible of Pound's statements on the function of poetry, and in many ways, *ABC of Reading* seems a diluted version of the more polemical discussions in "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," "Vortex," and "I GATHER THE LIMBS OF OSIRIS." *ABC of Reading* is important, however, because Pound both advances his theory about the productive and receptive aspects of poetic consciousness, and because he clearly describes the central, quasi-scientific tenets of poetic perception. Pound advocates a "careful examination of the matter," describing direct, sensory experience in the juncture of intellectual, perceptual apprehension, so that poetry enacts a "continual COMPARISON of one 'slide' or specimen with another" (17). Although *ABC of Reading* appears in 1934, twenty years after the major statements of both "Imagism"

and “Vorticism,” it is difficult not to read *ABC of Reading* as a more moderate, less brazen, version of these earlier poetics. Improvising from the scholarly work of Ernest Fenollosa, Pound offers an “Ideogrammic Method,” a mode of analysis that *synthetically* conjoins objects of study for rigorous, contemplative analysis. Pound describes the ideogram as a “picture of a thing . . . in a given position or relation” (21), and “as a means of transmission and registration of thought” (19). The significance that Pound attaches to the ideogram stems from his notion that the pared-down transparency of the image immersively produces the effect of the poem in the mind of the reader (what Pound calls *phanopoeia* [“ABC” 42]). The most compelling and perhaps most famous example is Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough. (*Lustra* 53)

In this version from *Lustra*,⁶⁷ Pound juxtaposes two distinct images and two distinct moments, like counterweights balanced across the fulcrum of the semicolon. The first line observes gloomy, subterranean Paris (and the scores of people lined up on the platform of the Metro). The second line describes the metaphoric “impression” provoked by such an observation. The poem records the two diverging perceptions – real and metaphoric – as correlating observations. Both lines portray the movement between

⁶⁷ The typographic qualities of this poem change subtly from publication to publication, but the effect is significant. In the April 1913 issue of Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*, Pound inserts wide spaces between each distinct, visual impression, following “apparition,” “faces,” “Petals,” and “black.” Pound also replaces the semi-colon at the terminus of the first line with a colon, suggesting a subordinate, temporal relation between the successive perceptions of “real” experience, and the progressive motion of the mind drawing a correlating, abstract impression. See the end citation for “In a Station of the Metro.” For more information on the typographical evolution of Pound’s poem, see Brinkman, 33-6.

particular manifestations to generalized concepts, as specific “faces” accrete into a collective sense of “crowd,” and as specific “petals” accrete into a collective sense of “bough.” The poem reflects a series of counterpointed tensions: underground and aboveground, the urban environment and the natural environment, the human world and the vegetable world, the spectral and the substantial. The significant quality of the poem is not the content, but is instead the equivalent relationship among the two *contents*: the real and the imaginary. The reader mediates the two distinct impressions, which produces a sublime, diasparactive experience in the conjunction of a new, urban reality alongside the old, pastoral tradition.⁶⁸ The *phanopoeia* of the image, in other words, does not merely describe or narrate the situation of epiphanic, epistemological disjunction; instead, *phanopoeia* sublimely recreates the immense experience in the mind of the reader. For Hugh Kenner, this is the aim of imagism and the aim of Pound: to imitate the way in which sublime experience transmutes into knowledge, for “[t]he imagist’s fulcrum . . . is the process of cognition itself” (“Poetry” 73). Likewise, Charles Altieri describes imagism as “snapshot portraits” (“Art” 4), importantly noting how the “[audience participates] in an intricately unfolding sense of metaphoric expansiveness” (“Art” 5). The “metaphoric expansiveness” that Altieri so insightfully recognizes in Pound is the affect of the sublime as it illuminates, in the words of Kant, “not so much the object, as our own state of mind in the estimation of it” (Kant, “Judgement” 70). The incongruity between lived experience and imaginative production in Pound’s poem transposes a

⁶⁸ This sentiment was not only shared by Pound. In “Romanticism and Classicism,” T.E. Hulme writes, “There are then two things to distinguish, first the particular faculty of mind to see things as they really are, and apart from the conventional ways in which you have been trained to see them. This is itself rare enough in all consciousness. Second, the concentrated state of mind, the grip over oneself which is necessary in the expression of what one sees.” See Hulme 133.

sublime affect from poem to reader; it “spill[s] over the frame” of the page, in what Carson calls “a passionate moment” that “echoes from soul to soul” (“Decreation” 46).

The most striking quality of Pound’s poem, however, is its radical condensation; the spare, anti-discursiveness of the poem makes it easy for readers to approach “In a Station of the Metro” in the same manner that they might approach a painting – a quality which is also apparent in the best examples of Carson’s poetry. At times, Carson’s work conforms to Flint’s poetic dicta from his article “Imagisme” in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, repudiating linguistic excess in the service of poetic economy, revering the Classics and Classical writers, and advocating direct treatment of “‘the thing,’ whether subjective or objective” (199). However, where Pound’s imagism describes a poetic praxis that focuses stringently on technique, Carson’s imagism takes on the critical, philosophical attitude of Vorticism. Carson engages the kinds of questions about history, temporality, and Modernity in her work that Pound and Lewis first present in the short-lived *Blast*. When Wyndham Lewis advocates for the “Reality of the Present” (Lewis, “Long Live”), and declares that Vorticism has “forgotten [the past’s] existence” (Lewis, “Our Vortex”), he offers a philosophical position that engages with the rapidity of change and perhaps even with the epistemological “violence” associated with modernization. Pound articulates a similar provocation in his “Vortex”: “The DESIGN of the future in the grip of the human vortex. All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pregnant in the vortex, NOW” (“Vortex,” emphasis in original). Pound’s use of a sentence fragment is significant: the fragment prevents hypotactic integration (and resists narrative “time”), so that the sentence, in repudiating history, mimics such a resistance syntactically. Similarly, in constituting the past as a gestational

pregnancy, Pound suggests that the past “develops” (but ironically, is never “born”) alongside the timeless, eternal present. For Carson, this challenge to the teleological, temporally-invested sense of history finds multiple expressions in her own poetry: in her use of Classical sources, in her use of the fragment (both structurally and thematically), and in her lyrical experimentation. Vorticism expounds the timelessness of perception in the apprehension of reality such that, in following the enigmatic Lewis, the “sentimental” conception of both the future and the past is little more than imaginative projection (“Our Vortex”).

Carson’s poems portray a similar sense of the timelessness of the present in their refutation of the “sentimental” experience of the past. Like many of the poems in *Plainwater*, the sharp, almost obsessive focalization on the image dramatises a philosophical idea regarding discursive historicity and the discovery of papyri fragments. In “Mimnermos: the Brainsex Paintings,” Carson’s loose translations demonstrate a fidelity to the poetic image, both “subjective and objective” (Flint 199) – a fidelity that charges even such tiny scraps with the same appositive power of a poem like “In a Station of the Metro.” Carson’s version of Mimnermos’s fr.22, “Half Moon,” presents the dynamic juxtaposition of two distinct images, a juxtaposition that recognizes interplay between the receptive apprehension of reality and the productive capacity of imagination. The caption reads, “[h]e awakens early” (10), and the fragmentary lyric follows: “Half moon through the pines at dawn / sharp as a girl’s ribcage” (10). The poem correlates a real observation against its figurative impression using the simile (“as”) in much the same manner as Pound utilizes the semicolon. Like “In a Station of the Metro,” the rapid shift from the literal to the figurative in fr.22 foregrounds the disjunction between perception

and imagination. James Longenbach notes that in Pound the “leap from one figurative or semantic plane to another” provides a “feeling of unpredictable release” (“Disjunction” 32), describing a *cathartic* discharge of the anxiety surrounding the experience of holding two perspectives in equipoise. However, the disjunction in Carson’s poem is not entirely a shift from one discrete, semantic plane to another, for the real experience of seeing the moon through trees evinces the imagistic, mental impression of a girl’s ribcage. The impression (of a pale, marbled, slender figure) emerges from the poem’s dramatic visuality. Pound’s “Liu Ch’e” portrays a similar transformation, where a memory of the past suffuses an image of a vacant courtyard. In “Liu Ch’e” the images are sparse, bare; they depict a timeless moment of stasis where even the skittering of dry leaves across cobblestone, a commonplace trope for both vacant isolation and time’s passage, lay still. Significantly, the poem relays a scene of absence, where negative assertions imply the spectral presence of the past: “[t]he rustling of the silk is discontinued”; “there is no sound of footfall” (*Lustra* 51). These statements portray a paradox: negations that simultaneously create and then banish such images from the dramatic scene. “Negation requires this collusion of the present and the absent on the screen of the imagination” (“Economy” 102), Carson writes, describing the way that negation must first produce the image that it refutes. The elegiac mood suggests that while the speaker imbues the current, vacant state of the courtyard with a nostalgic memory of the past, the focal consciousness of the poem is frozen between times, apprehending both actuality (the reality of loss) and possibility (the spectre of fulfillment) simultaneously, caught on the threshold like “a wet leaf that clings” (51). The leaf’s wetness stands in opposition to the sense of dryness that emerges from the poem’s aural images (silk “rustling” while leaves

“scurry”), as if the nostalgic projection of the past onto the present is, significantly, an apprehension of memory. Both translations are elegies (one poem describes the scene of departure; the other describes the scene of the departed). Both poems exploit the tension between absence and presence as a constitutive, preeminent feature.

As memorials about loss, “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings” and “Liu Ch’e” (not to mention many of Pound’s *Lustra* poems) draw their power from the apposition of radically condensed images. By juxtaposing the input of experience against the output of imagination, these poems generate a perceptual cross-current that spills out of the poem and into the consciousness of the reader, who must likewise engage the diasparactive poem and *cathartically synthesize* the two divergent presentations. The pared-down minimalism that Pound advocates in “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” (“use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something” [201]) or in *ABC of Reading* (“keep the language efficient . . . keep it accurate, keep it clear” [32]) finds direct, applicable expression in his translations and his poems, but it is perhaps the simple act of arrangement, the paratactical juxtaposition of “one ‘slide’ or specimen with another” (“ABC” 17), that expresses “vivid consciousness in some primary form” (“Vortex” 153). The primary form that Pound utilizes in an elegy like “Liu Ch’e” is the epitaph. For Carson, whose *Economy of the Unlost* explores the influence of the epitaph in the work of two diverse, poetic “specimens,” the epitaph is a genre of writing “concerned with seeing what is not there, and not seeing what is,” and a genre that inserts a “vanished past into a living present” (“Economy” 73). Like an epitaphic monument, the rhythmic, reciprocal motions of absence and presence in “Liu Ch’e” and fr.22, “Half Moon,” draws the reader into a middle space where the poem provokes a dialectical

transaction between the reality of the present and the memory of the past. For Carson and Pound, the poem takes on the character of a physical monument, casting its shadow across the threshold between two worlds.

The series of poems entitled “Life of Towns” from *Plainwater* is Carson’s best example of poems so situated in the cross-currents between productive imagination and received experience. Carson opens the series with an oft-quoted introductory essay that posits “the town” to be a *synthetic*, organizing principle applied to the *manifold* of experience. The town evinces an “illusion that things hang together somehow, my pear, your winter” (93), “where you will stand and see pear and winter side by side as walls stand by silence” (94). It is impossible not to read the Poundian echoes in Carson’s strange, lyrical introduction. Where Pound advocates a “continual COMPARISON” (“ABC” 17), in his “ideogrammic method” in order to discover “[s]omething that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases” (“ABC” 22), Carson asserts that “[a] scholar is someone who takes a position,” a vantage point, “[f]rom which position, certain lines become visible” (*Plainwater* 93). Carson’s “lines” describe the structures of knowledge, the very process by which physical, sensory experience transmutes into pure concept. In the apprehension of an object or an event (or a town), sameness and difference display both receptive and productive capacities. “[T]he mysterious thing,” Carson writes, “is how these lines do paint themselves. Before there were any edges or angles or virtue – who was there to ask the questions?” (93). A “town,” then, describes the relationship between language and the world (lexical and semantic “territories” become geographical and political territories). In “Fugitive Places: Anne Carson and the Unlost,” Dean Irvine notes that in the “Life of Towns” section of *Plainwater*, Carson’s “poet-scholar takes a

position, but never reveals a location. These towns she studies are everywhere and nowhere at once” (276). The indeterminacy of location leads Irvine to interpret these towns as “textual spaces” rather than “actual civic spaces” (276), and to interpret Carson’s use of the fragment as a device to foreground the “materiality of the language” (276). By creating such an effect, Carson suggests that constellations of words and meanings, in the Saussurian sense, produce both the shape of experience and the varieties of possible experience. Carson’s “town” is a descriptive metaphor for the *synthetic* concept through which experiential phenomena, the *manifold*, becomes comprehensible. A “town” is a metaphor for epistemology. Carson’s series of poems uses the discovery of the papyri at Oxyrhynchus (“Town of the Sharp-Snouted Fish”)⁶⁹ as a conceit through which to apprehend contemporary experience. Carson reverses the positional relation between the present and the past, so that it is not the historical idea of the past that resonates in the new discovery of papyrus scraps, but aspects of contemporary life that resonate in the “found” forms of contemporary waste (waste which is not merely “literary” but must be “read” as such). The reader confronts defamiliarized aspects of contemporary civilization from the vantage point of the future. The “town” represents the discursive idea that conjoins the imaginary, modernized fragments in a logical appearance: a *gestalt* that energizes the constituent “parts.” The poem “Memory Town” is most explicit in its meditation on contemporary waste:

⁶⁹ Both an academic conference and an exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford have commemorated the one-hundred year anniversary of the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri. Currently, a digital version of this multimedia exhibition, *Oxyrhynchus a City and its Texts*, is available online with a searchable database of all available papyri fragments. P.J. Parsons provides the translation for “Oxyrhynchus” (“Town of the Sharp-Snouted Fish”) in his contribution to the exhibit, “Waste Paper City.” See end for citation.

In each one of you I paint.

I find.

A buried site of radioactive material.

You think 8 miles down is enough?

15 miles?

140 miles? (101)

The poem describes the “excavation” of subjectivity that occurs in portraiture⁷⁰ through the metaphoric discovery of a deep geological repository, where “radioactive material” might stand as an equivalent for “memory” (the half-life of radioactivity parallels the declining efficacy of memory). The poem relates the movement of elusive, aesthetic subjects (“each one of you”) as they transition through a series of corresponding, discursive frames: from subject of portrait, to portrait itself, to poetic metaphor, to poetic fragment. Such movement between the cognitive and aesthetic frames hinges on the perceptive crisis of the poetic speaker, who obsessively attempts to “contain” the “radioactive material” in a variety of epistemological forms – a material that leeches out of these various, discursive enclosures nonetheless. The speaker of the poem asks, “You think 8 miles down is enough? / 15 miles? / 140 miles?” simultaneously probing the “safe” depth to bury a memory or secret, and the aesthetic distance between a real subject

⁷⁰ Charles Altieri describes the “energies” of non-representational painting in his seminal work *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. In his discussion of Duchamp’s *Game of Chess* and *Portrait of Chess Players*, he writes, “It is a world not of scenes but of elemental relations, physical in large part because of the way the elements cohere in structures whose only locus is the realm of ideas. Indeed, the more the physical appears as elements so tightly interconnected by specific painterly rhythms, the more we have a physical world dependent on purely conceptual or aesthetic relations.” The painter then makes visible that which is usually invisible or suppressed in the “real” world of appearances. See Altieri “Abstraction” 18.

and its discursive representation. In the mimetic activity of painting, Carson draws a parallel between inside and outside the text, where the “radioactive material” spills out from the real subject into the aesthetic representation, and thus spills out from the confines of the poem to “activate” or “infect” the reader. “Memory Town” dramatizes the cognitive model of the sublime that Carson proposes in *Decreation*. The poem also parodies the hermeneutical activity of scholars, as if close reading (a type of excavation) brings these concealments out from the deep interior and into the light of observation. Like “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings,” “Life of Towns” centralizes the fragment in both theme and structure. The titles of the poems even play on the translation of “Oxyrhynchus” (“Town of the Sharp-Snouted Fish,” a name that identifies a sacred totem), proffering a hint about the central themes of each poem. The titles include “Town of Bathsheba’s Crossing,” “Town of the Dragon Vein,” “Town of the Man in the Mind at Night,” “Town of the Sound of a Twig Breaking,” and “Town of the Little Mouthful.” The poems reveal the *synthetic* union of fragmentary form and imaginary content, connecting an image of the past with the sense of present discovery: the focalizing consciousness contorts temporality in order to reconstitute an image of the present using the fragments of contemporary waste. Carson taps into one of the great ironies of history: we can only access the past through the things that we have chosen to forget or the things that we have chosen to conceal – the things that we have buried beneath the earth. As such, these fragmentary poems stand like future epitaphs over (what might still be) the remnants of our culture.

Carson’s “Life of Towns” takes the papyri fragment as a point of departure; almost every poem in “Life of Towns” centralizes excavation, discovery, as the

preeminent thematic concern.⁷¹ Similarly, Pound aims to “[uncover] a past that lives in the present” (Longenbach “Modernist Poetics” 51), but the stakes of his investigation into the structure of history are much higher. For Pound, the condition of being “Modern” depends upon a certain relationship to the past⁷² – a relationship that many critics describe as antihistorical, but James Longenbach asserts the opposite: in Pound “the present is nothing more than the sum of the entire past – a palimpsest, a complex tissue of historical remnants” (“Modernist Poetics” 11). The present is the *gestalt*, an idea projected upon the physical, material elements of history (the narratives, the citations, the scraps). The Modern, the now, is what remains ineffable, unfathomable, and nebulous. Pound’s “luminous detail” from “I GATHER THE LIMBS OF OSIRIS” attempts to overcome the ineffability of the present through the expansion of historical consciousness, primarily in the apprehension of the special detail that catalyzes a sense of the whole. In much the same way as the fragment wavers between the significations of absence and presence in Carson’s work, Pound’s concept of the “luminous detail” calls forth an imaginal sense of the past in the apprehension of the present. In the poem “Ortus” from *Lustra*, for example, Pound exclaims, “How have I not laboured / . . . / to

⁷¹ Dean Irvine compellingly argues that “Life of Towns” uses the papyri fragment as an aesthetic device, where the fragments “at once point toward the lost text” yet also “signify that which has been salvaged” (277). However, he also describes the poems in “Life of Towns” as “ersatz fragments,” a collection which is a “simulation” (278). See Irvine 277-78.

⁷² Stephen Kern writes that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the “thinkers developed a keen sense of the historical past as a source of identity in an increasingly secular world.” In “Modernity – An Incomplete Project,” an essay from *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Jürgen Habermas notes that “the term ‘modern’ again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.” Similarly, in paraphrasing Nietzsche, Paul de Man writes, “Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal.” See Kern 36-7; Habermas 3; de Man, 391.

give these elements a name and a centre!” (13), articulating a desire to conjoin raw experience to an essential, meaningful idea. Pound illustrates the process of definition, “of discerning that things hitherto deemed identical or similar are dissimilar” (Pound “Limbs” 25), a process that echoes the activity that Carson attributes to scholars in “Life of Towns.” The most striking feature of “Ortus” is the lack of an identifiable subject (the title, “Ortus,” translates from Latin roughly without context, meaning “a beginning,” or “an origin” [Lewis]). In “Ortus” even the instability of pronoun use (both “you” and “she”) suggests *manifold* formlessness. Like Carson does in “Life of Towns,” Pound turns the poetic focus onto the epistemology of producing difference and similarity in the comprehension of experience. In *Lustra*, the notion of “making history” and locating the present in relation to a historical sense becomes a poetic “through-line” that touches almost all of the poems.

Carson’s “Life of Towns” utilizes this mode of “historical scholarship” that Pound advocates, but does so uniquely: “Life of Towns” presents the elements of our present culture that might form the material inheritance that we bequeath to the future. The reader encounters the defamiliarized, dislocated present in these fragmentary poems – a sublime experience of looking beyond one’s own death to the paltry sum of our contemporary culture. In these fragments, Carson provokes a strange alliance between Classicism and Futurism; these imaginal projections offer little more than the fulfillment of an admittedly nihilistic desire (what in *Blast* Wyndham Lewis calls a “sentimental” image of the past and the future). As Pound writes in his poem “Coda,” “O My songs, / Why do you look so eagerly and so curiously into / people’s faces, / Will you find your lost dead among them?” (*Lustra* 44). The poem could be a metacommentary on the

composition of “In a Station of the Metro,” or even a lost stanza. However, “Coda” imparts a speaker that simultaneously personifies the focalizing consciousness of the poem, and objectifies their own poetic perception. The poem situates thanatological desire – that is, desire for the lost – as a compulsion somehow distanced from the speaker’s own responsibility. The “lost dead” become the lost lyrics of the past, fragmentary manifestations that defer resolution through endless, interpretive possibilities. “Coda” is a passage that leads to a terminus, an end that never ends in the pursuit of “the dead.” The poem itself becomes a measure of the poem’s own agency. “Life of Towns” accomplishes a similar animation by projecting what cultural remnants might be accessible to the future, and by imagining what significance these artifacts will bequeath to future generations. The reader of Carson’s poems cultivates an idea of his own contemporaneity from the fragments sown into the earth. Carson’s “Town of the Dragon Vein,” for example, dramatizes how aesthetic form constitutes the structure of thought – how our perception of a mountain, or a mountain range, depends upon the traditional forms of aesthetic representation. In Chinese landscape painting, the “dragon-vein” is a compositional technique for representing mountains pictorially. An innovation by Wang Hui in the late seventeenth-century, the “dragon-vein” describes “a network of ‘rising-and-falling’ rhythmic movements” where “[m]ountain folds are transformed into intertwined, twisting, undulating streamers and grey sprays of dots” (Fong 289). The “dragon-vein” is the bone structure of the pictorial representation of mountains; it is the essence of the depiction; it is the “effective aggregate of all the small eddies of movement implicit in every part of the painting. In it the whole becomes greater than the mere sum of the parts” (Rorex 17). Moreover, the “dragon-vein” is the aesthetic figure that

contains the sublime experience of viewing the Himalayan Mountains, in a form that is both comprehensible and familiar. The “dragon-vein” is the line that “become[s] visible” (*Plainwater* 93) in the epistemological production of the idea of mountains. However, the poem portrays a kind of intellectual regression, where the pictorial concept dissolves and leaves only the *manifold*, sublime experience. Carson begins the poem by depicting a sound “Being withdrawn after all where? / From mountains but. / They have to give it back.” (*Plainwater* 98). She describes the rhythmic push and pull as the *synthetic* concept dissolves into the *manifold* of pure experience. The pictorial image of the “dragon-vein” resembles the cartographic representation of tributaries, so when Carson writes “Your nightly dreams. / Are taps open reversely. / In. / To. / Time.” (98), the poem accomplishes a very specific feat: the poem describes the flow of perception in reverse, as the specificity of an idea recedes into its generalized sense.

For both Pound and Carson, the *synthesis* of idea and thing, of imaginary wholes and extant fragments, of sublime experience and discursive forms, becomes the rationale for so many poetic experiments. In Pound’s *Lustra* and Carson’s *Plainwater*, this dialectic proceeds according to a typographical logic, where the poetic fragments, like moments cut from the lineation of time, become a spatial metaphor for the impossibility of knowing the past. Projecting an idea upon these fragments becomes an act of desire – a desire for wholeness, for logic, for knowledge. The fragment becomes an erotic paradigm, activating the rhythmic motion of absence and presence, wavering at the threshold between completion and irresolution. The fragment defines an “edge between two images that cannot merge in a single focus because they do not derive from the same level of reality – one is actual, one is possible” (Carson “Eros” 69). For Pound a poem

such as “Papyrus” asserts the actuality of its fragmentary phenomenology in the face of such imaginary completions. For Carson, the fragment dramatizes the operations of consciousness, the desire to know, at the root of all epistemological reflection. On the very first page of Thomas McFarland’s *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, he asserts that “[t]he phenomenology of the fragment is the phenomenology of human awareness” (3). Just as epitaphs supplement for the dead, Carson’s poems “[connect] what is lost to what is here” (Carson “Economy” 38).

Modern Longing: Anne Carson and H. D.

Notes on Thought and Vision is a hybrid, unclassifiable work of fragments in which H. D. speculates about the structure of artistic consciousness. H. D. describes the relationship between thought and perception as one of mutual, productive reciprocity. Like Carson’s theory of *eros*, H. D.’s theory “of thought and vision” is Sapphic in origin.⁷³ Carson explicates the erotic sublime using the dramatic situation and the corporeal disintegration that Sappho describes in fr.31. Similarly, H. D. incorporates the Sapphic epiphany from fr.31, the objectification of the desiring self, into the very structure of her theory. H. D. notes that, for an artist, the mind accumulates a “physical

⁷³ Diana Collecott convincingly interprets H. D.’s *Notes on Thought and Vision* as a meditation upon the role of desire in the development of artistic sensibility, and the specifically feminine determinations of aesthetic desire. Collecott describes this “altered state of consciousness” as “[shifting] between . . . centres” (Collecott 191) – two centres that H. D. identifies as the womb and the brain (H. D. “Notes” 20). H. D. visualizes this state of consciousness like a “foetus in the body” (20). Similarly, in “Rose Cut in Rock,” a seminal essay on the dynamic relation between Sappho’s poetry and H. D.’s poetics, Eileen Gregory notes that for H. D. the attraction to Sappho’s world is the “threshold quality,” and that Sappho “represent[s] a deep interiority infusing an outward shape or motion” (133). Collecott’s *H. D. and Sapphic Modernism* provides a meticulous account of Sappho’s “signature” on the work of H. D. Gregory’s essay, “Rose Cut in Rock,” is collected in *Signets*, edited by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis. See Collecott 191; Gregory 133.

character” and substitutes for a “real body,” like “a window into the world of pure over-mind” (“Notes” 18). Despite the Freudian or even Platonic structure of H. D.’s diagram of artistic consciousness, the figure that H. D. develops seems to inform Carson’s configuration of *eros*. In this arrangement, the mind of the artist reflects a “Sapphic,” tripartite consciousness. The event of artistic discovery reveals the enmeshed circuitry of selfhood and desire in a transformative shift where aesthetic perception turns back upon itself and bears witness to the act of its own generative constitution. H. D.’s description of artistic perception resembles the dramatic, epiphanic structure of a lyric poem. Critics now regard *Notes on Thought and Vision* as H. D.’s definitive statement of poetics.⁷⁴ For H. D., the revelatory experience of the poet enlightens only the process of their own, objectified thought; the ecstatic experience offers neither social truths nor the virtues of a heightened, Romantic sensitivity. The flash of sublime insight associated with the lyrical epiphany casts light on nothing but the inner constitution of the artist’s own aesthetic desire. H. D. asserts that in discussing artistic perception, the “universal symbol is the triangle” (46). For H. D., the “over-mind” is not merely receptive, it is also productive; the “feelings extend out and about us,” similar to the elastic probations of a “jellyfish” (19), so that thought and vision mix upon the canvas of an active, *synthetic* perception.

For H. D. and Carson, Sappho’s erotic, lyrical formulations describe the vast, structural operations of poetic perception and epistemological reflection. While the

⁷⁴ In *H. D.*, one of the first monographs on H. D.’s work, Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes H. D.’s theoretical exposition in *Notes on Thought and Vision* as focusing in on a “central motif of her *oeuvre*: the spiritual meaning of erotic passion.” Angela Fritz Di Pace, in repudiating the marginal status of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, cites this same passage from DuPlessis’s to bolster the claim that the power of H. D.’s poetry results from representing the ecstatic *synthesis* of mind and body. See DuPlessis 40; Fritz Di Pace 4-7.

influences on Carson's poetic work include the Classical writers and the Classical forms that comprise the main objects of her scholarly attention, Carson's indebtedness to the outlier Classicism of a Modernist like H. D. is perhaps the more salient aspect of her scholarly and her lyrical practices. The most compelling example of this "lyrical scholarship" is *The Wise Sappho* by H. D., a ruminative work on the Sapphic inheritance that parallels Carson's genre-bending *Eros the Bittersweet*. H. D. comments on the difficult process where "only . . . the most wary and subtle intellect can hope even in moments of ardent imagination, to fill in these broken couplets" (62). Noting that "Sappho has become for us a name, an abstraction as well as a pseudonym" (67) for which "legend upon legend . . . adds curious documents to each precious fragment" (69), H. D. characterizes such scholarly historicism as "searching to find a precious inch of palimpsest among the funereal glories of the sand-strewn Pharaohs" (69). H. D. describes a *sentiment des ruines* where the scraps of papyrus and the bits of pottery necessitate an imaginary *gestalt*, and for which such imaginary, *synthetic* narratives become reified as history. Carson also acknowledges these features of Sapphic transmission, although Carson tempers this acknowledgement by admitting that these stories "cannot be called texts of Sappho's" ("If Not" xiii). H. D. and Carson both revere Sappho for the fragmentary, elusive promise contained in Sapphic papyri and Sapphic *ostraka* – the mangled bits that blur the distinction between the real and the imaginary.

The poetic fragment, for both H. D. and Carson, becomes the poetic form *par excellence* for representing the sublime experience of antiquity. Both H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt* and Carson's *Autobiography of Red* draw their elaborate aesthetics from the fragmentary work of Stesichoros (a poet blinded for libel by newly-deified Helen, and

then restored for his revisionary “palinode” – what Carson translates as “countersong” [“Autobiography” 15]). In these two texts, the poetic fragment becomes the organizing principle by which the disjunctive juxtapositions of past and present *synthetically* conjoin. Both *Helen in Egypt* and *Autobiography of Red* begin as imaginative excursions from the remaining fragments of Stesichoros. For H. D., the inclusion of the prose sections in *Helen in Egypt* supplements each lyric section using an “authorial voice” to engage the reader in a critical dialogue about the various, patriarchal representations of Helen. The prose sections not only destabilize this particular narrative (by emphasizing the lyrical artifice and its departure from the tradition), but also act as a “Modernizing” feature in a text that is already controversial for rejecting the patriarchal, Epic construction of Helen. H. D. compels the reader to re-examine the interimplicated aspects of history and mythology, and their modes of discursive transmission. According to H. D., “Helen of Troy was . . . substituted for the real Helen, by jealous deities” (1), is “both phantom and reality” (3), and remains “a human symbol” in which “*She herself is the writing*” (22, emphasis in original). Elizabeth A. Hirsh explains this reflexive (and perhaps anachronistic) treatment of Helen as an elaborate mirror, where the characters in *Helen in Egypt* “repeat ‘inside’ the text the process of mythmaking that constitutes its ‘outside’ or context” (440). As Hirsh explains, H. D. parodies the cultural “writing and rewriting of a tale,” an activity that, throughout the ages, “acquires the force of (psychological and cultural) fact” (440). The narrating personae perform the same feats of interpretation, the same acts of imagination, as the writers who have narrated Helen’s history. Helen, then, is a cipher: an amalgam of literary desire and historical fragment. Like the commentary about Sappho in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H. D. constructs

what Eileen Gregory calls “an allusive field” that enfolds the works of not only Homer and Euripides, “but almost all the other plays treating the matter of Troy” (Gregory 147). H. D. posits a counter-history and a counter-tradition to challenge the enduring, misogynistic representation of Helen as a symbol of feminine duplicity. Ultimately, the prose interventions that provoke in the reader a tendency to contemplate the contingent processes of history also, according to Robert O’Brien Hokanson, “underscore the fallible artifice involved in imposing literary form on experience” (333). In order to foreground a similar notion about the relationship between history and facticity, *Autobiography of Red* begins with a discursive essay that pre-emptively calls into question the ways that readers imagine the relationship between the modernized Geryon and the Classical Stesichoros. Carson’s “Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?” describes the importance of Stesichoros to poets like H. D. (he released the “latches of being” [4], freeing the adjective from the particularity of tradition), and Carson narrates the process of ordering the fragments into a comprehensible form. Carson writes, “fragments of *Geryoneis* read as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box . . . The fragment numbers tell you roughly how the pieces fell out . . . You can of course keep shaking the box” (6-7). For Carson, who immediately follows the essay with a selection of her own translations of *Geryoneis*, “the Real” both contravenes and complements the long lyrical narrative. The discursive essay in *Autobiography of Red* functions in a similar way to H. D.’s prose eruptions in *Helen in Egypt*; the *synthetic*, imaginal relation between fragment and *gestalt*, between the material past and narrative historicity, move to the foreground, and become the defining characteristic in both poetic texts.

Although their subjects remain distinct, both Carson and H. D. re-imagine Classical texts according to a Modernist aesthetic sensibility influenced by the assumption that historical discourse is an inherently unstable epistemology. Unlike Homer, who situates Helen in Troy and makes her the catalyst of the Trojan War, Stesichoros resuscitates Helen's fallen reputation, repudiates Epic tradition, and also regenerates his own sight through the writing of his encomium. Such "facts" of antiquity (the restored vision of Stesichoros; the enduring blindness of Homer) are not lost on H. D., a poet who theorizes vision as both a constitutive and also receptive sense at the centre of perceptive consciousness. In the first book of the Palinode in *Helen in Egypt*, H. D. explains that "[t]he Greeks and the Trojans alike fought for an illusion" (1.1). The illusion, of course, is not only the possibility of possessing Helen, but the illusion of Helen herself: the Helen who exists only as a cipher of desire; the Helen who has never set foot in Troy and instead dwells on the shores of Egypt. Stesichoros's Geryon, like Helen, is also a maligned character; during the pursuit of the tenth labour, Herakles kills Geryon and then steals his red cattle. In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson relates that new fragments of Stesichoros surface in Egypt periodically, even as recently as in 1977 (from *cartonnage*, the material of funerary masks – the significance of which is not lost on Carson). The uncanny implication is that fragments of Stesichoros's corpus, and thus fragments of Helen's textual corpse, continually emerge from the sands of Egypt – a resting place that offers up a newer "illusion," a newer *synthetic* body, from the sublime conjunction of narrative past and material present. Whereas the question of feminine representation comprises the central problematic of *Helen in Egypt*, *Autobiography of Red* engages the question of Stesichoros's blinding (and the controversy of Helen's

multiple personae) in a much more radical manner. In a series of twenty-one either/or statements, Carson parodies the formal logic of proposition to investigate the “truth” of the *testimonia* about Stesichoros’s “palinode,” set against the tradition of castigating Helen for her sexual promiscuity. Beginning with “Either Stesichoros was a blind man or he was not” (18), Carson proposes an orderly, logical evaluation of historical “truth,” but moves incrementally from an abstract contemplation of Stesichoros towards an embodied, imaginary drama. By the tenth proposition, discursive time (the “timing” of logic itself; or the hypotaxis of the entire propositional series), “reverse[s] and by continuing to reason in this way [we] are likely to arrive back at the beginning of the question” (19). The linear, temporal principle of propositional logic transmutes into a spatial principle, however, so that suddenly, “If we meet Stesichoros on our way back either we will keep quiet or we will look him in the eye and ask him what he thinks of Helen” (19). The *Suda* translates the headword for palinode (“Palinodia”) as “a journey in reverse” (see end for citation), so that the propositional series indulges an irony by portraying a rigid literalism of translation. Whereas *Helen in Egypt* fictionalizes the processes of historical dissemination, Carson parodies a discursive mode by which the truth-value of a given statement “tests” the rigors of logic. The short section acts as a passageway between the veritable and the imaginary; the section precedes the fictionalized Geryon narrative (the reconstitution of the Stesichoros fragments against the backdrop of contemporaneity). Like H. D., Carson subverts the assumptions of veracity, truth-value, in the representation of historical knowledge.

Stesichoros acts as a hinge between actuality and possibility in both *Helen in Egypt* and *Autobiography of Red*. H. D. utilizes Stesichoros to construct a counter-

representation of Helen while Anne Carson utilizes the fragmentary *Geryoneis* as a cognitive structure and the basis for her own *synthetic* fiction. Stesichoros is not only a hinge between the fragmentary remainder and the projective *gestalt*, or between the history of Helen's duplicity and the restoration of her integrity. Stesichoros is the hinge figure between the epic and the lyric, and he is one of the preeminent innovators of the lyric genre.⁷⁵ Some critics have even credited Stesichoros with elevating the lyric to the same status as the epic in Ancient Greece. Stesichoros brings the epic and the lyric into a close relation, positing the radical, interior reflection of the lyric poem against the public, etiological function of the epic poem. For H. D. and Carson, the epic-lyric innovation that Stesichoros provides becomes the precondition for the representation of perceptive consciousness – for the very possibility of epistemological reflection in the dissolution of the boundaries between interior subjectivity and discursive objectivity in poetic thought. Carson represents this possibility in the closing (fictional) interview with Stesichoros in *Autobiography of Red*:

S: I saw everything everyone saw

I: Well yes

S: No I mean everything everyone saw everyone saw because I saw it

I: Did they

S: I was (very simply) in charge of seeing for the world after all seeing is
just a substance

⁷⁵ Ian Rae meticulously argues in favor of Stesichoros's innovations in genre (as a mediator between epic and lyric) as a formal precedent for Carson's metageneric experiments, noting that "[i]n Western literature [the] manipulation of genres begins . . . with Stesichoros." See Rae 233.

I: How do you know that

S: I saw it

I: Where

S: Wherever I looked it poured out my eyes I was responsible for everyone's visibility it was a great pleasure it increased daily (148)

Carson's Stesichoros, responsible for inventing the very manner of "seeing" (an aspect associated with his innovative use of the adjective), recognizes that sight is both constitutive and receptive. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H. D. depicts perceptive consciousness on the cusp between production and reception, a position that Carson similarly espouses in *Eros the Bittersweet*. Stesichoros's revisionary writing of Helen, for H. D. and Carson, accrues the status of parable; once Stesichoros frees adjectives from their historically-conditioned usage and (empathically) perceives Helen outside of her traditional, Homeric representation, then his sight is suddenly "restored." Stesichoros embraces the lyric potential, the "understory," in the elevation of minor or marginalized figures in Greek mythology to the stature of epic subjects. By rewriting Helen and Geryon, Stesichoros performs revisionary feats that feel Modern in their challenge to established traditions of representation.

One of the primary ways that both Carson and H. D. subvert this logic of representation occurs as an effect of mixing genres, and using the lyric to undermine the totalizing, historical imperative of the epic. Stesichoros configures the lyric and the epic in a contrapuntal relation; H. D. utilizes the lyric to counteract the hegemony of the epic; Carson educes an imaginative fiction that is no less historical (and no more imaginative) than the work of any of her predecessors. For Carson and H. D., the collusion between

epic and lyric produces a collision between contradictory modes of perception, revealing a discord between received knowledge and personal experience. In *Helen in Egypt*, the different manners of knowing or experiencing Helen culminate during the three-part dialogue that occurs between the metadiegetic prose introductions, the embodied lyric poems, and the reader's own received history about Helen of Troy. The prose sections mediate between the lyrical fiction ("inside" the text) and the traditional representation of Helen of Troy ("outside" the text); not only a satire of cultural transmission (as one critic proposes), *Helen in Egypt* also brings the public and the private into a close, oppositional relation. The reader tests inherited knowledge against lyrical experience, and thus undergoes dissonant, sublime disjuncture. The *catharsis* of public and private, for the reader, is revisionary. Although the intermediary function of the prose captions in *Helen in Egypt* "seem to interrupt the flow of the verse" and also "obviate the narrative progression of the lyric" (Barbour "Captions"), Susan Barbour aligns these prose interventions with the Euripidean chorus: a stylistic, dramatic innovation that she traces back to the development of writing (and thus to the production of individual subjectivity). According to Eileen Gregory, "[t]he speech of the choral 'I' in Greek tragedy presents a paradox: it is at once one and many, a single identity with a single complex of emotion and thought, and at the same time a multiple entity, projecting a kind of experience by consensus," so that "Euripides . . . must in his dramatic songs be experienced lyrically both as 'I' and 'we'" (145). The Euripidean chorus straddles the performative function of both the personal utterance and the social construction. In H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, the prose captions similarly mediate between the private, interiority of the lyric and the public, exteriority of the epic, a fulcrum between lived experience and discursive

knowledge. Critics discuss Sappho's lyricism in similar ways, even going so far as to posit fr.31 as an exemplar of the collision between public and private perception.⁷⁶

Carson, however, stages this drama more formally: the discursive essay she includes at the beginning of her *Autobiography of Red* (along with the multiple appendices, and the author's interview at the end) counterpoints the lyrical "middle," and more forcefully opposes the two, disjunctive, knowledge-structures. *Autobiography of Red* examines the way that history bequeaths a false image of the past (and similarly erodes the relationship between knowledge and experience), but instead Carson draws attention to the constitution of such historical images – the idea of the whole that *synthetically* merges with the scraps of papyri. The inclusion of the translated fragments of Stesichoros in *Autobiography of Red* alongside the lyrical narrative foregrounds the imaginal constitution of such relationships, revealing the correlation between outer reality and inner perception.

The scholarly material at the beginning of *Autobiography of Red* affects the modernized narrative of Geryon in a number of different ways, but most importantly, it enacts a contiguous relationship between the factual and the fictional. Ian Rae claims that the inclusion of both essay and lyric serves the "(un)framing of mythic forms" (223), and performs a "chiasmus on the power relations within these myths" (224); the mixture of prose and poetry does have that effect in Carson, but this effect is perhaps more

⁷⁶ Scholars such as Yopie Prins place Sappho at the crux between the understanding of the "I" as a singular, speaking subject and the understanding of the "I" as a generalized, lyric subject. Paige duBois corresponds the development of Sapphic lyrics with the production of *logos* and subjectivity. These insights about Sappho echo the arguments that Gregory and Barbour make about Euripides almost precisely (and are the reasons they provide for describing the significant influence of Eurpides on H. D.'s work). See Prins 38-9; duBois 106.

apparent in the work of H. D. By including such “truthful” elements of scholarly and historical discourse, Carson supplements her imaginative fiction with a concrete aspect of reality that supplies a point of origin and allows a “differential” reading (a measure of how far the narrative departs from the rudiments of the past). Conversely, H. D.’s *Helen in Egypt* offers a counter myth, a possibility of difference that, latent in the fragments, remains unacknowledged or even unimagined. H. D. not only continues to “[shake] the box” (Carson “Autobiography” 7), her prose captions have a metaleptic function, and so offer a self-reflexive, critical commentary on the composition of the lyrical narrative, and an interpretive commentary about the character of Helen. Carson’s parodic use of the scholarly genres at both the beginning and the end of *Autobiography of Red* accomplish a similar feat, but unlike Helen, Geryon is a modern creation; there is virtually no literary inheritance to overcome, aside from Geryon’s marginal status in the labours of Herakles. Carson indulges a different desire when she imaginatively reconstitutes the monster Geryon in our contemporary world; as a character for whom physical difference might correlate to a difference in sexual orientation, Geryon signifies only desire in its tense, unresolved emergence.

The absence of any meaningful narrative about Geryon makes him an icon of possibility; Geryon becomes a signifier for desire in *Autobiography of Red*, similar to the way that Helen becomes a signifier for the misogynistic desires of writers in Ancient Greece. Much as Helen depends on the discursive system by which Classical and contemporary authors conjoin extant fragments (and thus produce an image of her), Geryon is a *synthetic* union of part and possibility. Carson translates seventeen fragments that describe Geryon; the paucity of either exposition or description in the translation

suggests that, for Carson, the Stesichorean fragments serve a thematic, rather than structural, role in the development of *Autobiography of Red*. Carson's scraps provide little more than basic, narrative facts:

XV. TOTAL THINGS KNOWN
ABOUT GERYON

He loved lightning He lived on an island His mother was a
Nymph of a river that ran to the sea His father was a gold
Cutting tool Old Scholia say that Stesichoros says that
Geryon had six hands and six feet and wings He was red and
His strange red cattle excited envy Herakles came and
Killed him for his cattle

The dog too (14)

Although Carson's translations are "unorthodox" (a feature that intensifies in such recent work as *Grief Lessons*, *An Oresteia*, and *Antigonick*), Carson presents these fragments as the sum of all existing knowledge about Geryon – knowledge that itself was once the product of an imaginative desire to reposition marginal characters (and marginal genres) in relation to heroic personalities in the Epic tradition. For Carson, the fragment portrays the erotic, dialectical possibility of fulfillment; the fragments provoke an imaginative conception of the whole. Even in the above example of Stesichoros, Carson embeds *testimonia* regarding Stesichoros's portrayal of Geryon writing that "Old Scholia say that Stesichoros says . . ." (14). Carson makes the fragments not only a signifier of their physical reality, but also a signifier of their *performative* reality (the reality that they occupy for other writers and readers). The facts then are not enough; the experience of the Stesichorean fragments dictates the appearance of the fiction about Geryon; the

fragments bear not only their own material bodies and faded, spidery scrawl, but their status as history. The troubled relationship between knowledge and experience also occurs in the development of the story: in trying to imagine the physical layout of his school, Geryon peers into “his mind to where / the map should be” but finds only a “deep glowing blank” (24), recognizing an inability to recall the physical, spatial structure of knowledge, the institutional representation of an epistemic tradition that condemns him to learning about himself and the world through the vicissitudes of pure experience. In his autobiography (a metafictional gesture), Geryon “[sets] down all inside things” but “coolly [omits] all outside things” (29). For Geryon, interior reflection and exterior apprehension are one and the same; Geryon is the screen upon which the actual and the ideal project themselves “in a kind of stereoscopy” (Carson “Eros” 17). Like H. D.’s *Helen in Egypt*, Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* also draws a relation between inside and outside the text, where Geryon, the focalized consciousness of the narrative, displays a similar process of discovery that characterizes the sublime encounter with the Stesichorean fragments. Geryon’s autobiography describes the evolving formulation of his desire (a desire for knowledge that later transforms into sexual desire). Finally, Geryon yearns for completion – a completion symbolized by Herakles, where Geryon becomes “provoked to notice . . . self and its limits” (“Eros” 33). Geryon realizes that “[up] against another human being one’s own procedures take on definition” (“Autobiography” 42). However, Carson’s translations at the beginning of the text reveals that the true form of Geryon’s desire is the absence of form; Geryon’s longing for Herakles suggests a union of opposites, both *eros* and *thanatos*, in the longing for death – a death that, unexpectedly, occurs outside the temporal boundaries of Carson’s text. For

H. D., Helen is also the representation of desire, but as the adaptable, mouldable form that reflects male desire back upon itself. In both *Autobiography of Red* and *Helen in Egypt*, the attraction of both the poetic fragment and the figures of Helen and Geryon, is an attraction to the imaginative possibility of difference.

Modernizing Canada

The originality of such poetry in the Modernist epoch, the experimental impetus that H. D. and Pound represent so forcefully, is not limited to the poetry of those who have fled from America to Europe. The epistemological shifts that characterize international Modernity find similar expression in the poetry of Canada. Canada claims an equal share of poets responding to the perceptual crises that have shaped all disciplines of knowledge and all manners of receiving such transformational “spoils.” Outside of the genre of cultural history, however, critics rarely engage Canadian Modernism, and rarely discuss its relation to the aesthetic developments of the international Modernists. Brian Trehearne is one notable exception. His two books *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists: Aspects of a Poetic Influence* and *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition* stand in contrast to the critical consensus that tends to overlook the development of aesthetic Modernism in Canada. In *The Montreal Forties*, Trehearne locates “full-fledged” Canadian Modernism in the early work of the Montreal poets F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith. Trehearne describes an etiological beginning that, as Gnarowski and Dudek argue, assumes belatedness in Canadian writing and places

Canadian poetry a full generation behind other literatures in English.⁷⁷ Although Dudek and Gnarowski contend that Canadian writers of the early twentieth century do exhibit the epistemological and aesthetic changes that typify the response to Modernity (they cite Stringer's *Open Water* as a kind of salvo into the Modern), Brian Trehearne remarks that, to this second generation of Modernist writers, "the achievements of their national predecessors must have looked thin indeed" and so "the forties are, without question, the decade of modernist consolidation in Canadian literature" ("Montreal" 48). It is not for a lack of poets that Literary Modernism in Canada stalls prior to the 1940s, but rather for a lack of mature institutions of criticism.⁷⁸ By the 1940s "imagism" may no longer be a coherent "school" or "movement." (Pound offers its eulogy in 1917.) However, "imagism" remains a prevailing force in English-language poetry and poetry criticism even to the present day. All histories of contemporary Canadian poetry draw their origins from the poets that experiment in the 1920s and that come to maturity by the 1940s – poets for whom the Modernist's experimental approach to the lyric offers an exit strategy from what Ken Norris calls the "excesses of Victorianism."

⁷⁷ The first chapter of *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* argues against the "belatedness" that, for so many critics, characterizes Canadian literature. Instead, Dudek and Gnarowski constitute the historical problem of Canadian Modernism to be, rather, a problem of historiography, and they recognize that the sense of belatedness has more to do with the critical writing of Canadian literary history than it does with the attitudes, the practices, or the poetry of the age. See Dudek and Gnarowski, 3.

⁷⁸ In Desmond Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada*, he suggests that the proliferation of scholarly work in the years between the wars is the true measure of the flourishing of Canadian literature. Significantly, then, the first scholarly journals appear just after the First World War (*The Dalhousie Review* begins publication in 1921; *The McGill Fortnightly Review* begins publication in 1925; *The University of Toronto Quarterly* begins publication in 1931). Ken Norris, in "The Beginnings of Canadian Modernism" argues that because there is no "centre" to Modernist activity prior to 1925, "it would be the rise of the little magazine that would serve as the breeding ground for the true initiation of Modernism in Canada and the subsequent schools and innovations." See Pacey 119-23; Norris "Beginnings."

Modern Longing: Anne Carson and Phyllis Webb

Although Phyllis Webb does not begin publishing until the mid 1950s (in *Trio* with Eli Mandel and Gael Turnbull), her work comes to prominence in the thick of poetic Modernism in Canada.⁷⁹ Unlike many of her immediate predecessors (such as her mentor, F. R. Scott, or even her contemporary, P. K. Page), Webb's poetic experiments do not bear the same "definitional" pressure from their oppositional, aesthetic relationship to the dominant poetic traditions in Canada. Webb escapes the need to defend not only her own experiments, but also Modernist experimentation more generally from the newly engendered institutions of Canadian criticism. Webb is one of the first poets who can sidestep the controversy surrounding poetic tradition and national identity – a discussion that plagues Canadian poetry from the 1920s onward. Webb's Modernism is less fraught by the critical anxieties portrayed in the pages of *Preview* and *First Contact*.⁸⁰ Like the poetry of Pound and H. D., Webb's poetry suffuses the aesthetic with the philosophical, so that *Naked Poems* presents a pared-down, fragmentary imagism that draws attention to both the constitution of desire and to the constitution of subjectivity, claiming the poem as a special site for such experimentation. In *Naked Poems* the poetic fragment dramatises the dialectical rhythm of desire, criss-crossing the gulf between the actuality of the fragment and the possibility of the whole.

⁷⁹In *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry/Anarchy/Abstraction*, Stephen Collis considers that Phyllis Webb engages in an elaborate dialogue with many of her Modernist precursors, such as T. S. Eliot and H. D. See Collis 57-8.

⁸⁰Trehearne provides an insightful overview of this critical rivalry between *Preview* and *First Contact* in the introductory chapter to his *The Montreal Forties*, and a useful discussion about this literary-historical period in Canada, overall. See Trehearne 1-40.

In *Naked Poems*, each poetic fragment is both formally autonomous and yet conceptually integrated with the entire suite of poems. Several suites of poems comprise the book (“Suite I,” “Suite II,” “Nonlinear,” “Suite of Lies,” “Some final questions”). Each section engenders a distinct set of typographical characteristics reminiscent of Pound’s imagistic, spatial experiments with negative space (although Pauline Butling describes this aspect of Webb’s work as an Olson-esque shift to “‘field’ composition” [22]). Most of all, the poems display a strong resemblance to the fragments of Sappho. While the first poem in “Suite I” echoes the bald, declamatory style of Sappho (“Your mouth blesses me / all over. // There is room.” [n.pag]), the second poem more accurately mimics the form of a Sapphic fragment:

AND
here
and here and
here
and over and
over your mouth

(Webb “Naked”)

Webb inserts extra spaces mid-line for the slightest caesurae, whose hesitations break around single words and then pause, portraying a ragged “breathlessness” in the staccato, verb-less pile of adverbs (“here”), conjunctions (“and”), and prepositions (“over”), all of which only find resolution in the possessive, “your mouth.” The intelligible utterance (“your mouth”) provides a moment of semantic clarity, a locating gesture, where a sensible, phenomenal object emerges from the “cloud” of absent reference. Spatially, the poem resembles a Sapphic fragment; the insertions of extra space seem like the tears and absences in Sappho’s poems (the kind of absences that provoke a reconsideration of the

relationships between the remaining terms). Even in such a sparse poem, Webb dramatises a relation between textuality and referentiality: the deictic adverb “here” points to a physical location (either its typographical co-ordinates on the page or some other spatial, geographical location); the conjunction “and” describes the relationship between syntactical terms; and the preposition “over” describes the spatial relationship between objects (even those belonging to people, like mouths). The challenge in reading this poem, however, remains the positing of a form with which to understand it, both singly, and in context with the other poems in the series. As discrete moments that are simultaneously interior and exterior (and dramatise such transactions, most notably in the “breath” of each line), these poems waver between assembly, in the sense of forming a coherent but extremely impressionistic narrative, and dispersion, as if reflecting sublime, epistemological dissolution. In the fifth fragment from “Some final questions,” the poetic speaker splits into two distinct personae, one of whom engenders a metacommentary, boldly asserting “I don’t get it,” and then asking “Are you talking about / process and individuation. Or absolutes / whole numbers that sort of thing?” The other personae elusively answers, “Yeah” (“Naked”), assenting to either one or even both propositions. In this mini-interview, the poetic speakers align “process and individuation” – the necessary conditions for identity – with “absolutes / whole numbers,” recognizing how a number is both a singular unit and yet an endlessly divisible summation of constituent “pieces.”

Naked Poems performs this dialectical rhythm that constitutes the central motion of desire. As the poems exhibit Webb’s sensitivity to spatial arrangement, the typographical characteristics of each suite begin to work oppositionally. In “Suite I,” for

example, the poems fill the bottom third of each page, whereas in “Suite II,” the poems hang across the top third of each page. The entire book relies on a series of counterbalances and counterpoints: from the non-narrative, impressionistic fragments in “Suite I” (the suite of pure experience); to the narrative lyrics in “Suite II” (the suite of formal reflection); to the *synthesis* of both experience and form in “Non Linear” (made apparent by the mixed typography and the blending of both narrative and abstract fragments). Like Pound’s appositive “In a Station of the Metro,” *Naked Poems* relies on the rapid juxtaposition between images, the swift turning of the pages, so that the poems take on the parataxis of collage, or in total sequence, the montage effect of gliding through a *manifold* of discrete, particular moments – moments that constellate but do not quite produce a sensible form. Stephen Collis asserts that “it is the *relationship between* the poems and their elements – relationality (part and whole, poem and poem) itself – that is left naked and unavoidable” (115-16, emphasis in original). Collis’s suggestion centralizes the *gestalt* relationship between phenomenal fragment and imaginary whole in his appraisal of *Naked Poems*. The emergence of subjectivity, the educing of “absolutes / whole numbers” (Webb “Naked”), becomes the *synthesis* of form and experience in the midst of sublime, erotic dissolution.

Lisa Potvin calls *Naked Poems* “sapphic haiku [sic]” (“Voice”), and Pauline Butling comments on Webb’s “haiku-like lines” (22); these descriptions are apt, even if they remain unexamined. Webb’s imagism is so minimalist, so anti-discursive, and so anti-narrative, that it seems to repudiate the lyrical tradition. However, Sappho is the more salient influence on Webb’s *Naked Poems*. Webb’s short, sparse lines parody the material, formal properties of Sapphic papyri, even using negative space to subtly gesture

towards the physical absences in Sappho's poetry. Like the Sapphic papyri, Webb's poems are disjunctive, arrayed over multiple pages; the fragments strain the codex-form of the book as a cognitive, organizational unity. *Naked Poems* anticipates Carson's translations in *If Not, Winter*, a text that purposively resists the imaginal *synthesis*, the productive desire, that characterizes most collections of Sappho. Where Carson's translation sheds the narrative costume of Sapphic history, Webb's fragments about feminine desire similarly resist codification according to a prescriptive epistemological form, and resist normative, lyrical closure. Butling and Potvin constitute such resistance as the "[development] of a woman-to-woman language, including the language of a lesbian erotic" (Butling 22), where "the speaker demands that the male preserve, which enshrines the intellect, open up a space, make room for otherness" (Potvin "Voice"). Although Butling and Potvin centralize the concern for epistemological form as a concern about emergent lesbian desire and emergent feminism, they both describe the sublime, erotic encounter in Webb as a schism between experience and knowledge. Sappho's fr.31 describes the sublime, ontological annihilation of erotic experience ("no: tongue breaks and thin / fire is racing under skin / and in eyes no sight and drumming / fills ears" [Carson "If, Not" 63]). For Webb, this discorporation signals both the *ekstasis* of sublime dislocation and the ecstasy of spiritual awakening. A fragment from "Non Linear" expresses this ecstatic "loss" when the speaker conjoins erotic and spiritual transcendence, writing that "Hieratic sounds emerge / from the Priestess of / Motion," and two lovers "disappear in the musk of her coming." The line is ambiguous because the disappearance reflects both the loss of selfhood in erotic union, and the *catharsis* of momentary fulfillment.

Another poem from “Non Linear” not only portrays the counterpoint between lyrical interiority and exterior description, two contradictory positions Butling and Potvin describe as feminist (subjective) and masculinist (objective); the poem also portrays the rhythmic, dialectical movement between these two epistemological modes. The poem breaks down, unable to reconcile itself, in the ground zero of the erotic sublime:

the yellow chrysanthemums

(I hide my head when I sleep)

a stillness
in jade

(your hand reaches out)

the chrysanthemums

are

(Job’s moaning, is it, the dark?)

a whirlwind!

Eros! *Agápe Agápe*

(Webb, emphasis in original)

The poem dramatises the colliding motion of two subjectivities: one, the objective, imagistic rendering of a vase of chrysanthemums (a still-life bouquet that is also a “whirlwind” of petals); and the other, an idiosyncratic rendering of the Judaeo-Christian myth of Job, who silences himself with his hand after protesting divine affliction, and who God answers in “a whirlwind.” The poem condenses into two distinct types of love, the erotic and the divine, that meet in a sublime collision for which the only answer is the silent, “relational” parataxis that conjoins this poem to the next in the series. On one side

of the poem the metaphoric “whirlwind” suffuses the literal description of a vase of flowers (a feminine ideal of both Keatsian and Classical beauty, and a persistent trope of feminine sexuality).⁸¹ On the other side of the poem, the “whirlwind” is the divine response to Job’s existential terror – an allusion that draws a relation between the speaker and Job, as two victims of metaphysical and ontological trauma. The speaker mediates between a public, objective mode and a private, subjective mode of rendering experience.

Despite their formal affinity to imagism and the work of Sappho, Webb’s poems differ from those of Pound, H. D., and Carson. Most notably, Webb eschews the poetic guises that these poets assume in order to deflect attention from the autobiographical presentation of experience. Instead, Phyllis Webb presents the chaotic *manifold* of experience almost nakedly. The earnest representation of desire, the *Naked Poems*, lays thought bare in such spare, minimalist lines of poetry. At the beginning of “Suite I,” Webb writes, “I am enclosed / by a thought // and some walls.” The simplicity of these lines belies the intensity of thought that underpins such a plain declaration. In one utterance, these lines describe an epistemological limitation that is also a physical limitation: the speaker simultaneously apprehends both mental interiority and physical exteriority – the borders of selfhood, the prison of a hotel room. The space and its limitations represent the dialectics of freedom and confinement, revealing a chiasmic, paradoxical inversion where the “confines” of the room permits the freedom to indulge desire, and the “freedom” outside the room necessitates the suppression of desire.

⁸¹ In “Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity,” from *Men in the Off Hours*, Carson relates the way Aristotle conceives of woman as formless vessels – vessels that adapt to whatever content they carry. The patriarchal logic that conflates women symbolically with vases or urns persists even into the present day. See Carson “Men” 132-33.

Because the foremost poetic and philosophical concern for Webb is subjectivity, the confluence of perception and imagination produces an individuated consciousness, and constitutes the “thought” that encloses the “I” of the subject. Even the assumption that Webb orders the sections (“Suite I,” “Suite II”) of *Naked Poems* according to Roman numerals might be incorrect because the numeric system is inconsistent. Instead, the headings could be read as assertions of self (“I”), dramatizing a movement towards *synthetic* resolution, where discrete, linear subject positions (“Suite I” and Suite “II”) become fluid, or “Nonlinear.” For Carson, the accumulation of aesthetic framing devices, such as the celebrity interview and the scholarly essay, alleviates the intensity of lyrical experience (and perhaps, the intensity of autobiography). In Carson’s lyrics, the autobiographical aspect of the poem, whether formulated as an “I-You” monody or the self-talk that T. S. Eliot and W. R. Johnson call “meditative verse,”⁸² subsumes into the veiled, perceptive intentions of a poetic persona. Even in “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings,” or “Life of Towns,” Carson reaches through the formal, aesthetic products of history to grasp the experience of the present. Webb’s *Naked Poems*, however, dramatises sublime, existential disincorporation in the midst of erotic passion. In its refusal to resolve, to achieve closure, in the traditional ways and according to traditional forms, *Naked Poems* lays the crisis of selfhood bare.

The problem of subjectivity in Webb’s *Naked Poems* is a problem deeply ingrained in the aesthetic fabric of the lyric genre. For Sappho and H. D., as for Carson

⁸² In “Swans in Crystal: The Problem of Modern Lyric and its Pronouns” in *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry*, W.R. Johnson improvises from Eliot’s theory of the lyric in “Three Voices of Poetry,” and offers a concise, illuminating discussion on the way the lyric addresses and constructs its audience. See Johnson 1-23.

and Webb, the lyric poem expresses the disjuncture between two epistemological modes, the subjective and the objective. The deep, inner focus of the lyric produces a sense of the confluence between inner monologue and outer reality, where a lyrical epiphany momentarily makes the inner machinery of cognition visible. In the erotic sublime, Webb's *Naked Poems* exposes an irresolvable breach between the subjective and the objective. This is the problem that Sappho describes – and very nearly solves – in fr.31 when she writes “greener than grass / I am and dead – or almost / I seem to me” (Carson “If Not” 63). Carson interprets these lines as a triumphant exclamation of Sappho's subjectivity (“I am”), where suddenly from the *manifold* of discorporate, erotic sensation, “at the centre of [Sappho's] perception appears – her own Being,” which is also an episode of *ekstasis*, “a spiritual event” (“Decreation” 161). The *ekstasis* of change, the self-reflexive experience of having one's perception turned back onto its own procedure, marks the ascension of a new subjectivity, where even in “standing outside oneself” a new image of the subject emerges from the rudiments of the old. The epiphanic closure in Sappho's fr.31 is only half articulated (“But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty . . .” [“If Not” 63]), so although the “space” of the new epistemology is clearly delineated, its meaning is lost to the ages. In Webb, this *catharsis*, in the triumph of epistemological form over the sublimity of experience, never occurs. In the last two poems in “Some further questions,” the final section in *Naked Poems*, the speaker interrogates her own subjectivity as a kind of phenomenal, objectified process:

Why?

Listen. If I have known beauty

let's say I came to it
asking

(Webb, emphasis in original))

The opposing page offers only one printed word hanging in the negative space of so much white space: “*Oh?*” (Webb, emphasis in original). The final utterance in *Naked Poems* is neither articulate nor meaningful in the traditional sense, although it seems to ask a (perhaps rhetorical) question of the speaker that goes unanswered and unresolved.

Like Carson’s translations of Sappho, Webb must also rely on the reader to posit a form against the poetic fragments and thereby reconstruct an idea of the text. Of course, Webb’s *Naked Poems* imitates such diasparaction – an approximation of the Sapphic “condition” that Carson attempts in her “Life of Towns.” For both Webb and Carson, the fragments of Sapphic papyri portray an aspect of the metaphysical and epistemological violence that results from such sublime, erotic experience. This physical discorporation of the fragment reflects the thematic content of the poem (the discombobulating experience that Sappho describes), so that the activity of “putting things back together,” for the reader, mimetically performs the content of the poem. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson theorizes the movement between reader and writer as a “symbolic intercourse” (108), where “What is erotic about reading (or writing) is the play of imagination called forth in the space between [the reader] and [her] object of knowledge” (109). Carson and Webb both exploit the erotic possibility of the poetic fragment, and in doing so, they call attention to the way that the text uncannily performs a correspondence between material form (papyri scraps) and thematic context (erotic discorporation). H. D.’s parody of the cultural transmission of Helen creates a similar effect. Pauline Butling notes that *Naked*

Poems portrays a triadic structure where the activity of the reader parallels both the narrative subjects of the poem, as well as the activity of the writer:

The lover's mouth moves over the body; the reader's eye moves over the page. The writer moves around in language, moves language around, to make room(s) for the women lovers. "There is room" on the page for such movements. (Butling 23)

As desiring subjects, the reader, the writer, and the women in the poem form a tripartite connection, where the imaginary point of contact across the surface of the page draws all three into a reciprocal transaction. In H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, the prose sections that offer a running commentary about Helen's literary inheritance and cultural reception accomplish a similar task. However, in *Naked Poems*, where a form must accommodate the magnitude of erotic experience and conjoin the fragments to a meaningful representation, the *synthetic* power of *catharsis* belongs primarily to the reader who, in mediating the text, creates the conditions for epiphanic resolution.

Modern Loss: Anne Carson and P. K. Page

Unlike the poetry of both Carson and Webb, P. K. Page's work does not manifest the sublime experience of ontological and metaphysical disruption as a structural value. Where Carson and Webb revere the poetic fragment for the way it hovers between formal, epistemological completion, and ruinous, epistemological dissolution, Page contains such disjunctive experience in the production of lyrical epiphanies. Both Carson and Webb act to prevent lyrical closure and to produce a sense of endless, infinite possibility in the dialectic between the whole and the part. Page, however, portrays a

synthesis of lived experience and discursive form in the unified representation of idea and thing. In Page's very early poem "The Crow," for example, the image of the crow perching over the foggy seascape is simultaneously the kind of natural image one might expect to see in poems about Canada, and yet the image is also the haunting spectre of a "churchwarden," "a stiff / turn-the-eye-inward old man / in a cutaway, in the mist" ("Hidden" 1.16). The poem follows the kinesis of the rolling waves as they lap the shore, "riding the air / sweeping the high air low" (1.16), until the "white foam" almost reaches the feet of the dark figure. Here, Page plays with the tropes of Romanticism, clouding the vision with a sense of the half-perceived, depicting the Byronic old man in a moment of contemplation, attended only by the dramatic force of the tide crashing against the shore. Yet the terminus of the poem betrays such a heightened intensity of perception. The baldness of the final lines ("in the mist / stands / the crow" [1.16]) creates an almost bathetic effect, where the garden-variety crow supplants the Romantic image of the "turn-the-eye-inward old man," and reasserts the "reality" of the scene in much the same way as Pound's "Papyrus" reasserts the reality of the Sapphic papyrus. Page's crow is simultaneously real and yet imbued with a sense of the Romantic; the crow is the lynchpin that connects pastoral Romanticism and the quotidian present, connecting "high to low" (1.16), two distinct planes of semantic reality. The poetic observer enjoins land, sea, and air, in an elemental unity. Page's epiphany is significant for repudiating the Romantic sublime (the dominant aesthetic discourse in Canada), shrugging off the formal inheritance of British Romanticism, and questioning the sentimental epistemology that produces a pictorial apprehension of nature. The poetic surprise, in this instance, is negative. Like Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," Page's "The Crow" conjoins the

“blank screen” of experience and the “sentimental tones” of imaginative production. She maintains an imagist’s sensibility, mediating between the real and the imaginary in a work that ironically repudiates the standard tropes of Canadian Romantic lyric poetry.⁸³

Like the imagists, Page values lyrical thrift in the construction of her poems, but only so far as it serves the sudden shifts from one insight into another. For Brian Trehearne, this “sharp juxtaposition” and the “accumulation of bravura images” (“Surrealism” 48), is a hallmark characteristic of Page’s style – a style that owes much to Pound’s and H. D.’s theory of the image⁸⁴ (and perhaps, their respective literary performances of such theories). In Page’s “Reflection in a Train Window” from *The Metal and the Flower*, the generative confluence between aesthetic imagination and exterior reality occurs across the mirror-reflection of the inner window on a passenger train. The dramatic situation, the *tableau vivant*, is an arrangement of spare, palimpsestic images. In a train window, a woman sees the reflection of herself, the reflection of the cabin and the train car, the reality of the passing landscape, and the emergence of her own interior response made manifest in the reflection of the glass. Seeing both forward, through the glass, and backward, into the reflection, she apprehends herself like an object, and the image balances between the Lacanian reflection of the space surrounding her and the real landscape passing in the distance. The glass is like an abstract painter’s

⁸³ Here, I elaborate on Brian Trehearne’s comment in *The Montreal Forties*, where he notes that Page approaches the “romantic revival” with a sensibility that is “painstaking and sceptical” (12). See Trehearne’s “Introduction” 3-40.

⁸⁴ More recently, Brian Trehearne argues in favour of a surrealist influence on Page’s work – an influence without formal acknowledgement, but an influence that seems inescapable given Page’s alternate career as an abstract painter. Trehearne additionally notes that the similarities between imagism and surrealism make surrealism a difficult influence to qualify with any surety. See Trehearne’s “P. K. Page and Surrealism,” an essay that appears in a special P. K. Page edition of *Journal of Canadian Studies*.

canvas; the surface flattens the contrapuntal realities one upon the other: inside merges with outside, containment within the train car merges with the boundlessness of the landscape outside, the transitory condition of travel merges with the permanent settlements of towns, and the motion of the train merges with the stillness of the scenery. “[L]ike a saint with visions,” the speaker’s reflection superimposes over houses decorated for Christmas (“Metal” 41). The speaker “merges with a background of mosaic,” loses “substance” and the materials of the landscape “pass through her” (“Metal” 41). Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” and “Liu Ch’e” provoke similar effects in the intelligent arrangement of simple, plain lines of poetry. The magnitude of effect, in Page’s poetry, emerges from the relation between images.

By the end of “Reflection in a Train Window,” the speaker does not experience the *catharsis* of reintegration; the speaker endures the metaphysical violence that disincorporates the image of selfhood into constituent refractions that pile-up on the surface of the glass. The disruption renders the speaker’s sense of self “ectoplasmic” (41) as subjectivity becomes paradoxically both objectified as a mental product, and as immaterial as a ghostly (and perhaps even divine) image. Subjectivity hovers in the middle space between actuality and possibility. The poem describes the event of sublime rupture where the speaker of the poem perceives a nexus that conjoins so many distinct realities; the confluence of images blurs their distinct edges but yet maintains their autonomy (like a palimpsest). Page’s poem depicts the *ekstasis* of the sublime, the unmaking of subjectivity, what for Sappho is a literal “breakdown,” but in Page’s poem, however, the poetic speaker becomes illuminated, punctuated by aspects of the external world (the Christmas ornaments that, overlaid upon the woman’s reflection, suggest

“stigmata / marking her like a martyr” [41]). The dissolution between conceptual barriers (between subject and object) in the reflection of the glass represents a collision between modes of apprehension, and even implies an ephemeral, conditional unity for so many diverging realities. Barbara Godard notes that in Page’s later poetry (from the 1970s on), “embedded frames proliferate vertiginously, [and] these multiple perspectives have enabled [Page] to register the shifting quality of being simultaneously in many worlds” (Godard 67). Godard expresses a sense that the poetic speaker is an assemblage of fragments, an insight that is also true of Page’s earlier work. As a genre uniquely calibrated towards the examination and assertion of personal identity, the lyric poem seems the perfect artifact for the transmission of such personal, interior ruminations. However, Page presents both the event and the response to the event in the speaker’s “soundless grieving” and “trembling bosom [that] falls, rises and falls” (“Metal” 41), but does not present resolution in a poetic epiphany. For Page, the poem *is* the sublime, epiphanic realization, and only rarely does she offer the consolation of a “finished” form in the platitude of a resolving last line.

In “Reflection in a Train Window,” the series of oppositions that produces consciousness in the spectral, ephemeral image of the poetic speaker appear on the mediating screen of the window’s glass. For many of Page’s critics, this “effort to mediate between the private world and the external one” is the “central tension” in Page’s work (Namjoshi 21).⁸⁵ The window pane, both reflective and transparent, becomes a

⁸⁵ Namjoshi opens her essay “Double Landscapes” with this argument, and it is likewise reiterated in one form or another by Brian Trehearne in “P. K. Page and Surrealism,” Dean Irvine in “The Two Giovannis: P. K. Page’s Two Modernisms,” Laura Killian in “Poetry and the Modern Woman: P. K. Page and the

metaphor for the confluence of epistemological systems as the speaker apprehends subjectivity and objectivity in a parallax relation (a startling, self-reflexive gesture that lays the mechanics of aesthetic perception bare). Unlike Sappho's fr.31, where the speaker retreats within the echo-chamber of her own consciousness and thus resists the totalizing effect of objective, masculinist discourse, Page's speaker contemplates the estranged images of selfhood they appear, overlaid, one over the other, both distinct and yet paradoxically indistinguishable. Page centralizes the discrepancy between inner life and outer life. In "The Permanent Tourists," images of public monument aesthetically balance against the images of private remembrance. "[T]ourists with their empty eyes" scour the public objects of remembrance, "[locking] themselves into snapshots on the steps / of monolithic bronze" ("Metal" 28), making private photographs of themselves to commemorate the moment. In the critical distance between public and private memorialisation (the sculpture versus the Polaroid, for example), Page recognizes the distinct epistemologies of public memorials and private memory.

The epitaphic monument stands as a public mode of remembrance, recognizing an objective discourse of history (the epitaph contains the public acknowledgement of a life, a type of memory that is primarily discursive and not "felt" or "experienced" except through other texts). The snapshot, however, is a private remembrance, but stands almost in opposition to the public mode.⁸⁶ In *Economy of the Unlost*, when Carson recognizes

Gender of Impersonality," Jane Swann in "Mapping the Mind's 'I': Vision, Perception, and Complicity in the Early Poems of P. K. Page," and no doubt many others. See end for citations.

⁸⁶ Barthes makes a similar distinction when he offers the terms *punctum* and *studium* to denote the different ways in which people relate to photographs. The *punctum* is the "luminous detail" in the photograph that engenders sympathy from the spectator; the *punctum* enfolds the observer into a sympathetic embodiment

that “the purpose of the epitaph is to insert a dead and vanished past into the living present” (“Economy” 73), she no doubt refers to the way that the public monument brings the past and present into a close relation. The private snapshot, a subjective discourse of “seeing,” reverses this relationship. The speaker describes the tourists as they “lock” themselves into snapshots, ironically reconstituting the public monument within a private, aesthetic epistemology that aims not to bring the past into the present, but instead, to bring the present moment alongside the past. Later, the tourists relive the experience of material history in the timeless and eternal present of the photograph. Like the epitaphic monument, the snapshot supplements the past with a present (and conversely, supplements the present with a past). The photograph “connects what is lost to what is here” (Carson “Economy” 38), draws a passageway between idea and thing, and enacts a parallax, contiguous relation between public and private epistemologies (a “subtle mourning” [Page “Metal” 28]). Carson utilizes the poetic fragment to accomplish a similar feat: the “Life of Towns” section of *Plainwater* uses the material form of history to draw an epistemological frame around the waste artifacts of the present. For Page, the grotesque snapshots of the tourists will later “conjure in the memory / all they are now incapable of feeling” (28), balancing the two oppositional strains of knowledge. For Carson, the fragments conceive of contemporary life as if they are the artifacts of the past – like the tourists posing beside monuments and projecting their own “pastness” deeply into the future.

with, not the photograph’s content, but the eye of the camera. This is the power of a family photo. The *studium*, on the other hand, describes the generalized cultural interest that a photograph may attract (or a delight in the historical scene), as is the case with photojournalism. See Barthes “Camera” 25.

In Carson's poetry, the tensions between public and private history find a structural expression in her metageneric experiments with the discursive essay and the lyric poem. Like H. D.'s prose and lyric counterpoints, Carson moves beyond the limitations of genre. In Page, public memorial and personal remembrance overlap in the photograph; in "The Permanent Tourists," the photograph acts as a material representation of personal history and the monument acts as the material representation of historical discourse. The poem layers two ways of relating to the past. "The Permanent Tourists" unifies ancient memorials with holiday snapshots, enfolding contradictory ways of experiencing history and temporality. For both Carson and Page, the disparity between objective and subjective understandings of temporality (especially in the representation of history) results from the epistemological upheaval of the sublime. In Page's "Photos of a Salt Mine" the sublime sense of loss haunts the description of a series of photos. The speaker introduces each photo of the salt mines "like a child's dream of caves and winter" ("Metal" 12), where the mines take on the characteristics of adventure stories (as "miniature matterhorns" and "aladdin's cave" [12-13]). The apprehension of each individual photo, however, becomes complicated by an apprehension of the whole, where the last photos in the series depict "Dante's vision of the nether hell" in the elemental opposition of "bright cold fires of salt" (13). When the speaker encounters the sublime fact of the mine disaster – no doubt a photojournalist's published account – the brief narrative transforms from a child's fantasy into a traumatic event. The disaster haunts the edges of the photographs ("the filter" [13]), visible only once the photographic point of view achieves "an acute high angle" (13) and objectively takes in the scene. Similarly, in Carson's "Ordinary Time" (an essay from *Men in the Off Hours*) the

instability of early historiographic discourse (the fact Thucydides “names seven different ways of telling time” [“Men” 3]) meets totalizing, discursive representation in the annihilating *synthesis* of an event:

How people tell time is an intimate and local fact about them. Thucydides sets us on a high vantage point above such facts, so that we look down as if at a map of the Greek states and see lives churning forward there – each in its own time zone, its own system of measures, its own local names. Soon this manifold will fuse into one time and system, under the name of war. But first we see it as hard separate facts. (3-4)

Carson characterizes the application of a universal system for ordering time upon the local, fragmented (and multiform) modes of temporality. The total aggregation of temporalities under the banner of objectivity, for Carson, represents a schism in the contiguous relationship between subjective experience and the mode by which experience is rendered into objective knowledge. Like the revealing aerial photo in Page’s poem, it is the force of Thucydides’s “high vantage point above” (3), that provides for the apprehension of the *manifold* of temporalities, where the violent sublimity of war becomes the discursive origin of universal “history.” Carson counterpoints this objective rendering of time with a discussion of subjectivity in Virginia Woolf, who suffers the narrow focus of “what one saw from where one sat” (4-5), in the limitation of subjective experience. Of course, Carson illustrates a great irony in conjoining the destructive effects of war and the unity of historical consciousness in Thucydides, invoking a tension between whole and fragment. Like the contrast between the panoramic view of third-person narrative and the limited perspective of first-person narrative, Carson

paradoxically portrays the two epistemological modes represented by Thucydides and Woolf as “circles” that “fit one upon the other . . . [moving] and [slipping], turning around a center which becomes gradually emptier, gradually darker, until it is as black as a mark on the wall” (7). For Carson, the two representative “poles” of Thucydides and Virginia Woolf enact a circuit of contiguity between subjective and objective representation. For Page, the photographs in “Photos of a Salt Mine” accomplish a similar unification of objective and subjective vantage points, where sublime events (of war and of disaster) draw the two distinct ways of rendering experience into a close relation.

In “The Multiple Self in the Poetry of P. K. Page,” Douglas Freake calls this Page’s “interest in the problematics of the self” (n.pag), an interest that is primarily lyrical and personal. In “Questions and Images” from *The Filled Pen*, a recent collection of Page’s non-fiction, Page asks, “Which is the mask and which the self? How distinguish, let alone separate, two such seemingly interpenetrating matters?” (39). In Page’s work, the lyric poem is that genre that brings the absent and present into a close, proximal relation. The lyric balances the two distinct modes of articulating knowledge and experience, holding them in equipoise, at the crux of their cognitive transactions. In Carson, this transaction between inner life and outer experience is a drama that plays out in the structure of presentation, where discursive and lyric forms both complement and complicate each other in poetic representation. Carson and Page centralize monuments, photographs, and artifacts of the past in their lyric poems, using the objects of memory to open up a passageway between the hard and fast delineations of past and present, imagination and reality. For Page and Carson, these lyrical and discursive monuments

bridge “the unbridgeable gap that exists between words or arrangements of words and the objects to which they refer” (Bentley), denying the material limitations of both language and the lyric that D. M. R. Bentley describes in his commentary on “The Permanent Tourists.” He asserts that poetry and photography “are both incapable of incarnating on paper either the objective reality of things . . . or the subjective reality of human consciousness.” For both Page and Carson, however, the lyric poem becomes the discourse for the mediation of subjective and objective worlds; “The Permanent Tourists,” in fact, weaves such impossibilities into the very fabric of its lyric.

All five of these writers Pound, H. D., Webb, Page, and Carson follow in the theoretical and formal footsteps of Sappho. They present a poetry that hinges on the abstract formulations of desire. Carson taps into a persistent, and perhaps originary, epistemological reservoir in elaborating her conjoined theories of *eros* and grief. This poetic sensibility springs directly from Sappho, one of the prime architects of the lyric form, whose poetry depicts the magnitude of the erotic sublime, and the disjunctive, problematic modes of articulating such experiences. These Modernists feel the inheritance of Sappho and her poetry in three ways: as an exemplar of lyric subjectivity; as an exemplar of the erotic sublime; and as a material, historical text (a material fragmentariness that seems to perform the very thing that it describes). Yet the revisionary poetic feats that the Modernists offer to their changing world nonetheless recreate the formal, philosophical, and experimental imperatives undertaken by their Classical forebears; it is the discovery of Sapphic, Stesichorean, or even Mimnermian fragments that draw the epistemological assurances of selfhood, reality, history, and even poetry into a point of crisis. The Classics portray distinctly contemporary exigencies that

destabilize the philosophical ground of the present. Carson's poetry centralizes these crises in the thematic orientations of her poems, and as structural elements in her formal experiments. In their poetry, these Modernists re-see the past in order to make sense of their present. For the Modernists, the experience of the Classics is not merely literary; the experience is also philosophical and phenomenal. The crisis surrounding historicity becomes one that threatens the intellectual fabric of the age by destabilizing such unshakeable bases of knowledge and identity: truth, reality, history. Modernist experimentation proceeds from a sublime realization about the instability – the impossibility – of such knowledge. Poetry then offers a supplemental epistemology that is inherently reflexive about its own tenuous status, and draws attention to its imaginal, aesthetic pretensions. Carson applies a Modernist's sensibility to the intellectual challenges and philosophical provocations of our current age because we have yet to surpass them; the fragmentary, elusive character of the Classics reflects the fragmentary, elusive condition of knowledge – a condition which forms the basis of all epistemological reflection.

CHAPTER THREE: POSTMODERN RELATIVES: ANNE CARSON'S ELUSIVE

DOUBLES

In “First Chaldaic Oracle” from *Men in the Off Hours*, Anne Carson portrays thought encountering raw, unformed experience. She apostrophizes, calling this, metaphorically, a “cherrying of your mind” (10). She writes,

The way to know it

is not by staring hard.

But keep chiselled

keep Praguing the eye

of your soul and reach –

mind empty

towards that thing you should know (10-11)

Notwithstanding the resemblance to Carson’s figuration of desire in *Eros the Bittersweet* – something she likens specifically to the appetite for knowledge and the experience of limits⁸⁷ – Carson describes cognition in “First Chaldaic Oracle” as a “reaching and grasping.” Thought extends past knowable limits, “right to the edge” of “that thing you should know” (10). But, “The way to know it / is not by staring hard” (11), or

⁸⁷ Carson writes, “As you perceive the edge of yourself at the moment of desire, as you perceive the edge of words from moment to moment in reading (or writing), you are stirred to reach beyond perceptible edges – toward something else, something not yet grasped.” Carson theorizes the relationship between reader and writer as both erotic and pedagogical. She states, “[w]hat is erotic about reading (or writing) is the play of imagination called forth in the space between you and your object of knowledge.” See Carson “Eros” 109.

“press[ing] your mind towards it” (10). Carson instead describes coming to knowledge as an act of decreation, “a cherrying of your mind” (10). Her strange description evokes multiple interpretations: a virginal state ironically “coloured” by its verbalization (the *synthesis* of purity and profanity), raw iron fired in a smith’s forge (the *synthesis* of form and content), the ember of a lit cigarette (the *synthesis* of craving and satiation), and even the spinning wheels of a slot machine (the *synthesis* of loss and plenitude). Significantly, each of these impressions focalizes around a moment of paradox, where a certain type of relationship – the relationship between oppositions – concretizes in sensual, corporeal experience. The poem portrays knowledge emerging from the *synthetic* confrontation of opposites, a condition that simultaneously establishes and destroys conceptual boundaries. By arranging unlikely verbs, Carson supplies unusual metaphors for such extensions of thought: “kings,” “flamepit,” “Praguing” (10-11). Although the poem avoids denoting any specific, normative action, the interplay between terms opens up vast territories of reference that, in their adjacency, create a scrimmage of conflicting tensions. The inactive gerund “cherrying” confronts the direct verb “kings,” evoking the game of Checkers, while the line expands into “kings your mind” (10), describing the ascension of a conceptual order. The poem presents the benignity of a board game alongside the malignancy of martial violence, so that imagery of play mixes *synthetically* with imagery of battle, and thought “comes out of red // with kills on both sides” (10). An image of simple domesticity merges with an image of brutal conflict, provoking an uncanny colloquy. The accretion of verbs opens up two divergent – but nonetheless interdependent – metaphoric trajectories. Carson draws attention to the gulf between these two modes of representation, and offers the poem as a mode of *synthesis*. “[T]he

right way to know something,” enfolds both concrete experience and cognitive abstraction. Carson’s epiphany, if it can be considered one, describes the metaphoric “breach” between representation and reality, and she offers the poem as something more than the conjunction of perceptive states: “Because it is out there (orchid) outside your *and*, it is” (11, emphasis in the original). Carson rejects the dialectics of juxtaposition; instead, these oppositions *synthesize* into a statement of pure being: “it is” (11).

Poetic experiments like “First Chaldaic Oracle” dramatize the changing relationship between knowledge and its formalization in poetic discourse. Carson’s poetry not only examines the violent apprehension of sublime experience; her poems also describe the manner through which these experiences become *poetic*. This impulse finds similar expression in her experimental *synthesis* of discourses, where the mixture of scholarly translations, lyric poetry, and prose essays not only enliven her poems with strange, surprising juxtapositions, a playful anachronism, and a diverse lexical range, but also recognize the paradoxical condition of knowledge. The *synthetic* constitution of her poems dramatizes epistemological instability, revealing a subject in the apprehension of her own cognitive and perceptual processes. “First Chaldaic Oracle,” for example, suggests a correspondence between mystical divination and sensory perception; prophecy and knowledge are both productive and receptive, finding their motivating energies in desire. Carson references the Chaldeans for good reason (though the reference may seem arcane). As a fragmentary text, the Oracles are extant *in absentia*; like many Classical works, we can only confirm their existence by examining the surviving scraps of papyri, incomplete citations, and the hearsay of *testimonia*. These Oracles secure purchase on the phenomenal world only through an act of faith – an act that not only extracts an idea

of completion from the fragmentary vestiges, but one that also substitutes such an “ideal” completion in the absence of a “real” complete whole. In a poem that ostensibly describes the correspondence between reality and representation, a reference to the Chaldeans may seem odd. However, the Chaldean Oracles signify the *synthetic* constitution of past and present. As a metaphysical text of the Neoplatonists, the Oracles survive only in fragments, through adaptation and quotation.⁸⁸ The Chaldean Oracles dramatize the transmission of knowledge across time, so that what remains of such objects, in both the moment of study and for the enduring future, is not a material presence. Instead, the only remains are the discursive, narrative, or even the poetic adaptations through which the Oracles become phenomenally available to the present; the Oracles emerge as a symbol for the instability of historical knowledge.

At its simplest, “First Chaldaic Oracle” exposes the operation of two discursive systems by conjoining two manners of describing experience. In such a violent *synthesis*, the poem’s rhythmic, irruptive quality records the dissonance of intellectual change. The poem bridges the gulf that stretches between “real” experience and “abstract” form (and by extension, bridges the gulf between divergent modalities of thought). In doing so, her lyric poems record the sublime, estranging experience of *autopoiesis*. For the speaker, the processes of cognition – thought itself – becomes visible. The poetic epiphany is not only dramatic (in the sense of sublime “shock”), but also self-reflexive; the poetic speaker observes the inner operations of cognition and perception – like lucid dreaming.

⁸⁸ The Introduction to Ruth Majercik’s *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary* provides a good overview of the transmission history of these papyri fragments, and their value throughout the ages. See Majercik 1-5.

For Carson, this self-reflexivity remains the *telos* of the lyric; sublime epiphany exposes the *synthesis* of so many powerful, perceptive states, and so many discrete, but interimplicated, manners of constituting experience. In many ways, Carson's lyricism suggests that poetic values have changed very little since Sappho. Even the Romantic conception of the lyric poem – a conception that continues to wield critical influence – implies that poets must refine the turbulence of lived experience into meaningful, aesthetic objects.⁸⁹ This chapter argues that Carson's return to a Classical formulation of the lyric poem self-consciously reinvests the lyric with the deterritorializing potency of the sublime. Her work stands in stark opposition to most of her peers, and in stark opposition to the Romantic "spirit" that infuses many Modernist and contemporary lyric poets. For Carson, the Postmodernist "doubleness" (the articulation that contains its counter-articulation; the *aporia* of poststructuralist thought) is the essential condition that the lyric aims to recreate in the mind of the reader. The lyric portrays an *aporia* – a moment of epistemological uncertainty or even epistemological opposition – and reveals

⁸⁹ In *The Prelude* Wordsworth writes, "There are in our existence spots of time, / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue, whence – depressed / . . . our minds / Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (12.208-15). For Wordsworth, these "spots of time" become poems only whence "recollected in tranquillity" ("Preface" 365). Although seeming to recall the description of the sublime offered by figures as diverse as Longinus, Burke, Kant, or even Lyotard, Wordsworth's description of the lyrical epiphany is crucially different. For Wordsworth, the *cathartic* element of lyricism repairs the exhaustion from "trivial occupations" and "ordinary intercourse" (12.213-14). Wordsworth suggests a lyricism of the beautiful – not the sublime – even when he recognizes the productive capacity of imagination in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," arguing that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind." The restorative power of lyric poetry relies on the renewal (and reaffirmation) of the possibility of beauty and truth in lived experience – experience that otherwise dulls and suffers the enervation of affect. For Wordsworth, the revelation that inspires a poetic response is a confirmation of aesthetic ideals already engendered in poetry and art (so that one might indeed live a life "poetically"). See Wordsworth, "Preface" 357-67; "Prelude" 269-302.

the complex, *synthetic* procedure by which multiple, distinct ways of conceiving experience manifest in poetic contemplation and are finally resolved or “healed” in the *catharsis* of poetic assertion.

This chapter examines Carson’s work in the context of Postmodernist thought and current Postmodernist practice. Much more than a term to describe the intellectual or philosophical dominant of our contemporary social milieu, Postmodernism describes an aesthetic orientation that provokes a continuing controversy about contemporary or recently-contemporary literature. Whether indicating a definitive break with the artistic practices of Modernism⁹⁰ or evolving directly from High-Modernist experiment,⁹¹ Postmodern aesthetics not only challenge the epistemological “ground” of art and literature, but also the very “ground” of epistemology. For Carson, such challenges constitute the *essentia* of lyric poetry. As such, the sublime, lyrical moment reveals the complex interrelations of epistemology, metaphysics, and ontology. The poem, in other words, becomes an epistemological *mise-en-abyme*. Like the work of her peers Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson, Anne Carson’s Postmodernism locates the genesis of this

⁹⁰ Along with Ihab Hassan and Jean-François Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon is notable for theorizing Postmodernism solely in the terms of disjunction. She characterizes Postmodernist literature as reactionary, tearing down Modernist values and “[critically] confronting the past with the present” (39). See Hutcheon “Poetics” 37-56; Hassan 259-71; Lyotard xxiii-v.

⁹¹ In *21st Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics*, Marjorie Perloff repudiates the “tired dichotomy” of Modernism and Postmodernism that has, for so long, come to define the discussions of contemporary literature (1). Similarly, in his introduction to *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster describes Postmodernism’s “uneven developments” which do not reflect “clean breaks and new days,” instead offering up a definition of Postmodernism to be “best conceived as a conflict of old and new modes” (xi). Notably, this is a position that Foster advocates for most of his career. In *The Return of the Real*, Foster asserts that “modernism and postmodernism are constituted in an analogous way . . . thus there is no timely transition between the modern and the postmodern” (207). Brian McHale makes a similar point in “1966 Nervous Breakdown; Or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?” See Perloff “Modernism” 1-6; Foster “Intro” ix-xvi; “Return” 205-226; McHale “1966” 391-413.

lyrical tradition in the work of Sappho. For Carson, Queyras, and Robertson, a Sapphic inheritance counterpoises the Romantic tradition that dominates contemporary lyricism in Canada, providing a position from which a critique of such a tradition becomes possible. In refocusing the lyric around sublime experiences, Carson, Queyras, and Robertson, each dramatize the *autopoietic* function of poetry – a function which simulates the lyrical experience in the mind of the reader. Following a brief overview of Postmodernism, this chapter presents a comparative discussion of *eros* in Queyras's *Lemon Hound* and Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband* in order to show the ways that both Carson and Queyras formulate responses to the erotic sublime. Both Carson and Queyras build upon a Modernist, experimental tradition, but they also remain skeptical about the Romantic sensibilities of such a tradition (a critical position that becomes a source of poetic power for each writer). The discussion then contrasts the thanatological aspects in Queyras's *Expressway* with Carson's *Men in the Off Hours*, examining each work in light of Carson's theory of loss from *Economy of the Unlost*. Finally, this chapter contrasts the erotic elements of Lisa Robertson's *The Men* with Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*, and ends by discussing the thanatological aspects of Robertson's *Magenta Soul Whip* and Carson's *Men in the Off Hours*. This chapter maintains a parallel structure, illuminating the complex ways in which Carson and her peers both reinvigorate the lyric with the power of the sublime, while questioning the relationship between knowledge and *poesis*.

Outlining Postmodernism

Despite an inconsistency of usage (marking both critical esteem and critical execration), in its broadest sense the term “Postmodernism” portrays an aesthetic affinity with the formal experiments of Modernism, a philosophical affinity with the shifting values of Modernity, and an historical affinity with the Modern period. In discussions about contemporary and recently-contemporary literature, critics still debate the relative limitations of either temporal or aesthetic definitions. Nonetheless, not even the most suspicious theorists of Postmodernism and the harshest critics of Postmodernity (critics like Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton)⁹² deny the changing relationships between literary works and the material world – relationships that constitute the conceptual *topoi* of Postmodernist theory and Postmodernist practice. Jean-François Lyotard offers the most concise and perhaps the most frustratingly reductive definition of Postmodernism as the “incredulity towards metanarratives” (“Condition” xxiv). The

⁹² In “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” Jürgen Habermas argues that “[t]his most recent modernism simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present; and we are, in a way, still the contemporaries of that kind of aesthetic modernity which first appeared in the midst of the 19th Century,” so that “[t]he relation between ‘modern’ and ‘classical’ has definitely lost a fixed historical reference” (4). For Habermas, the features of contemporary art and literature that seem to confirm Postmodernism (an aesthetic practice) and Postmodernity (an historical epoch) as a palpable, discernible break *from* the past are those features that most determinedly aligns our present moment *with* the past. Similarly, in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson argues that the academic institutionalization of high modernism provokes a “mutation in the sphere of culture” (4), where academics both embrace and normalize the excesses of Modernist experiment (its obscene ugliness according to a conservative, Victorian sensibility). The resulting aesthetic “liberty” permits the aesthetic extremes of Postmodernism, while “artistic production . . . integrate[s] with commodity production generally” (4), so that Postmodernist art and Postmodernist literature satisfy the almost pathological demand for novelty in the late-capitalist marketplace. Although offering an important insight about the relationship between late capitalism and literary production, Jameson theorizes Postmodernism as little more than the hyper-intensification of High-Modernism – High-Modernism confronting the vicissitudes of late-capitalist society. In the classic and oft-quoted “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism” from *New Left Review*, Terry Eagleton writes that Postmodernism “is among other things a sick joke” that parodies the revolutionary art of the twentieth-century avant-garde and, in its parody, nullifies art’s revolutionary force (here Eagleton channels Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde*). This is a position the Eagleton still maintains. See Habermas 3-15; Jameson 3-4; Eagleton 60.

reason for such an unstable relationship between the literary text and the real world, according to Lyotard, is the changing condition of knowledge in our contemporary period – the delegitimation of the Enlightenment metanarratives of “progress” (as *de facto* metaphysical systems, of which the discourse of history is perhaps the most significant), and the emergence of scientific discourse as the dominant epistemological mode (Lyotard “Condition” 25). Knowledge changes, in other words, its *techne* both in the pursuit of truth and in the logic of representation; the changing association between word and world in Postmodern criticism and Postmodernist literature implies a foundational transformation in the relationship between our lived experiences and the way we represent those experiences. For contemporary writers, the metaphoric “gap” between representation and reality widens; for contemporary critics, an increasing skepticism about mimetic representation in art and literature refocuses criticism around the production of “aesthetic surfaces.”⁹³ In response, poets undertake elaborate programs to make those surfaces apparent: they foreground the devices of representation; they draw attention to formal design; they emphasize the position of the reader in the production of literary meaning; they embrace contradiction and paradox as aesthetic values; and they challenge aesthetic continuities with the past – something which suggests total,

⁹³ One need only turn to Charles Bernstein’s oft-quoted “Artifice of Absorption,” where he notes that “‘artifice’ is the contradiction of ‘realism’” (9) and, in his paraphrase of Veronica Forrest-Thompson, writes that “artifice in a poem is primarily marked / by the quality of the poem’s language that makes it / both continuous and discontinuous with the world of experience” (10). Similarly, in *Radical Artifice*, Marjorie Perloff notes “we are now witnessing a return to *artifice*, but a ‘radical artifice’ . . . characterized by its opposition . . . to ‘the language really spoken by men’” (27). Perloff quotes Wordsworth’s “Preface” from the *Lyrical Ballads* to emphasize the contemporary shift away from the Romantic values of the past. See Bernstein 9-89; Perloff 1-28.

conceptual finality.⁹⁴ Concepts like reality and truth, seemingly unmoveable cornerstones of both ontology and metaphysics (and thus deeply ensconced in the lyric poem), no longer provide aesthetic or moral foundation. For writers, theorists, and philosophers, the conditionality of knowledge – that all knowledge is fluid, protean, and contingent – weakens the credibility of Western metaphysics. By recognizing that historical narrative is a human construct, Postmodernist writers submit the basic premises of Western, humanist culture to question, and ultimately, to radical revision.

Despite seeming like a continuation of Modernist experimentation or an extension of Modernist concerns, Postmodernism turns against the Modernist episteme and therefore, rationalizes aesthetic experiments differently. Postmodernist artworks do not aim to describe a new experience of reality (a “new expressionism,” in the words of Charles Altieri [5]). Instead, Postmodernist artworks portray the impossibility of knowing a “reality” in itself, and they recognize that “reality” is a contingent, circumstantial improvisation. In literature, this intellectual shift takes a number of significant appearances: first, in an awareness that knowledge formalizes and then circulates differently from the way that knowledge has done so in past centuries; second, in the challenge that Postmodernist experimentation offers to Enlightenment humanism;⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Here I suggest that much of the experimentalism that defines Postmodernism produces work that exhausts the aesthetic possibility of the experiment. Poets as diverse as the “OuLiPo” collective (including Italo Calvino, Georges Perec, and Raymond Queneau), the poets associated with $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ (such as Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, and Steve McCaffrey), the writers known as “Conceptual Poets” (namely Christian Bök, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Rob Fitterman), and even the recent “Flarf” group (primarily Anne Boyer, Benjamin Friedlander, and Gary Sullivan), publish work that constitute the limit-cases of their own diverse aesthetic practices – and thus their works become aesthetic “endgames.”

⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas offers a concise definition of these values, writing that, “the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic . . . The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this

and third, in the contingency of responses to the tenuous or even illusory values prevalent in the Modern epoch. In Lyotard's terms, "the exteriorization of knowledge" (the transformation from knowledge-as-learned-process to knowledge-as-material-commodity) alters both the way that people *know* things about the world, and the way people relate such knowledge to each other (Lyotard "Condition" 4). Linda Hutcheon, a prolific theorist, considers Postmodernism to be a watershed between the values of the past and the values of the present. She argues that "Modernists . . . have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values, even in the face of their realization of the inevitable absence of such universals" ("Poetics" 6). That such discursive, universal value-systems (like history) claim authority over all domains of human thought provokes a skeptical response from Postmodernist writers – a skepticism which becomes a defining, aesthetic virtue. Hutcheon calls this, variously, Postmodernism's "self-reflexivity" or "double voicing" – the mode by which Postmodernist literature emphasizes its contradictory elements (the necessity of literary conventions, traditions, and codes, and the simultaneous skepticism about these conventions, traditions, and codes). For poets, such a revolution in thought complicates the most enduring qualities of poetry, such as subjectivity, beauty, and epiphany,⁹⁶ or makes them no longer sustainable as literary values. At its most extreme,

accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life . . . that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also the understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings." See Habermas 9.

⁹⁶These are the qualities that critics regularly cite in their theories of the lyric poem. In *Lyric*, David Lindley's functional definition of lyric poetry takes subjectivity, immediacy, and brevity to be hallmark characteristics. Scott Brewster defines lyric poems using similar terms. W. R. Johnson picks up from T. S. Eliot's distinction between the poems of the past and the "meditative verse" of the twentieth century, and

this radical shift suggests that, in as much as lyric poetry stands metonymically for *all* poetry,⁹⁷ poetry itself is untenable in Postmodernism. Such losses offer both aesthetic and existential challenges to poets, not only compelling poets to experiment with form (sometimes radically, as an act of recuperation), but also to re-conceptualize the entire tradition of lyric poetry.

Postmodern Longing: Anne Carson and Sina Queyras

For Anne Carson and Sina Queyras, the epistemological “renovation” that frees lyric poetry from the constraints of a Romantic tradition (a tradition with deep roots in Canada’s literature), nonetheless submits lyric poetry to an interpretive paradigm already determined by that same Romantic tradition. Contemporary criticism tends to contain experimental works within a discourse of opposition,⁹⁸ where critical judgements do little more than describe a poem or a poetics by its proximity to the dominant tradition. Critics and scholars regularly “ghettoize” poetry that fails to reproduce expected poetic forms or

develops a tripartite system of classification that breaks poems into “I-You” poems, “meditative” poems, and “narrative” poems, all of which reflect the lyrical impetus to write “our feelings about, our judgements on, the world we see, and our relationship to that world” (13). See Brewster 3; Lindley 2-3; and Johnson 1-23.

⁹⁷ In “Postmodernism and the impasse of lyric” from *Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*, Marjorie Perloff assesses the tendency in contemporary poetry criticism to conflate “poetry” with “lyric,” and use the terms interchangeably. Perloff writes, “Poetry, then, means lyric, and by lyric . . . a short verse utterance (or sequence of such utterances) in which a single speaker expresses, in figurative language, his subjective vision of ‘the truths of moments, situations, relationships,’ a vision culminating in a ‘unique insight’ or epiphany that unites poet and reader” (174, emphasis in original). See Perloff 172-200.

⁹⁸ In *Unleashed*, a collection of Queyras’s poetry criticism from her *Lemon Hound* blog published by bookthug, Queyras asks the reader to “imagine sports coverage that was only one sport? Imagine commentators who only knew the rules of hockey, or baseball? . . . it seems to me that this is what we face as poets.” See Queyras “Unleashed” 159.

expected poetic content. They dismiss poetic works as “Avant-Garde” (and thus constitute such works as “merely oppositional” or “merely controversial”) if they either fail to replicate the concerns, or fail to keep up the appearances, of Romantic lyricism.⁹⁹ This is a dissimulation that has significant consequences because it defers critical reception to a precedent long established in Canadian Literature,¹⁰⁰ a precedent that prevents scholars and critics from evaluating the unique merits of diverse lyrical practices. Both Carson and Queyras fall victim to this type of misrepresentation, where critical polarization leads even their champions (both academic and otherwise) to laud Queyras’s and Carson’s works on the basis of a “resistance” to traditional forms (or national themes). Even in their praise, critics extol the virtues of position over the virtues

⁹⁹ Carson’s critics have overwhelmingly rejected her work based on its relation to Avant-Garde practice (an assertion that seems both misdirected, and frankly, incorrect). In Montréal’s *The Gazette*, Carmine Starnino disparages Carson specifically for her “premeditated act of avant-gardism,” a fault he finds so tendentious it becomes the basis for his excoriation of *Autobiography of Red*. Sina Queyras has recently experienced a similar rejection by Zachariah Wells on his ironically-titled blog, *Career Limiting Moves*. On 7 Feb. 2009, Wells posts a poem called “Citric Bitch’s Thinking is Shit,” an obvious, misogynistic allusion to Queyras’s book *Lemon Hound*, and her own lit blog of the same name. By directing this short, poetic parody of Christian Bök’s *Eunoia* at Queyras, Wells implies that her work is derivative (or at least, negatively influenced), and he derides Avant-Garde writing more generally. Although it may be tempting to dismiss a lit blog as irrelevant in relation to official verse culture in Canada, Wells’s blog post is incendiary enough that several writers and critics have spoken out against it, including Jon Paul Fiorentino in *The Huffington Post*. See Starnino “Iconoclast”; Wells “Citric”; Fiorentino “Sexism and Silence.”

¹⁰⁰ This is a conflict with deep roots in the history of Canadian writing, playing out in conflicts about Modernism by poets associated with *First Statement* and *Preview*, between the “Montreal Moderns” and the “TISH” group, between the “Jubilate Poets” and everyone else. The pattern of reception which greets new work or new writing in Canada (especially by those writer-critics with institutional affiliations), I argue, stems directly from this type of critical dissimulation – a “move” either directed at, or stemming from, institutional boundaries. It is a conflict that often runs along gendered lines: Wells’s “Citric Bitch” and Solway’s “Trouble with Annie” are just the most recent examples of this conflict, but poets such as P. K. Page have also experienced a similar reception. Brian Trehearne meticulously accounts the conflict between John Sutherland and P. K. Page, and the treatment she receives in the pages of *First Statement* in his text *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition*. See Trehearne “Montreal” 50.

of poetics.¹⁰¹ Such receptions however, indicate a similarity between these two writers – a similarity that manifests in their approach to the lyric. Like Carson, Queyras’s lyrics follow two divergent foci, the erotic and the thanatological, zeroing in on sublime experience and the influence that such experiences wield in the formalization of knowledge. The discussion to follow compares Carson’s and Queyras’s use of the literary past in their lyrical practices – practices which, even in looking backward, dynamically engage the concerns of the present.

Both Carson’s and Queyras’s poems derive from a Modernist’s inheritance, but one that, in the spirit of the age, applies itself to the social and philosophical problems of Postmodernism. However, where Carson’s poems employ a diverse array of discursive and literary forms, thereby drawing attention to the aesthetic surface of her poetry and displacing the formula of Romantic lyricism, Queyras employs an almost “Steinian” approach to poetry in order to disrupt the normative lyric. In *Lemon Hound*, Queyras favours the sentence as a unit of composition. By substituting the prose sentence for the lyrical line, Queyras draws attention to grammatical and linguistic surfaces. Such an exchange focuses the reader on the poem’s syntax, on its rhythms, on its diction, and on the lush, sonorous quality of its language. The poem – the sensorial experience of

¹⁰¹ Significantly, criticism of this sort over-determines the social and political functions of poetry – which is not to suggest that poetry shouldn’t be political, or that it isn’t already implicated in social processes. Scholars like Peter Bürger theorize the Avant-Garde (including such rebels as Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and Tristan Tzara) in terms that are pointedly political and social. Theodor Adorno extends an (adversarial) social purpose to all lyric poetry. Even Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, bombastically purports that a “political” interpretation of texts is the horizon of all literary interpretation. Such absolutism, however, is dangerous; by constituting all literary texts as merely political statements, there is a real danger of confusing aesthetic choices for ethical ones. This kind of substitution loads the idiosyncrasy of critical taste with the power of a moral imperative – an imperative that is legitimated by critical consensus. Power rests, in other words, among the institutional majority. See Bürger 35-54; Adorno 37-54; Jameson “Unconscious” 17-102.

reading the poem, rather – supplements or even supplants the semantic content. Perhaps Queyras inherits the Avant-Gardist sensibility for which Carson is most often accused; at times *Lemon Hound* seems transparent in its use of both Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf – “a collision” Queyras calls it, “between Woolf and Stein and [her]self” (Queyras “Truck”). The suite of poems “A river by the moment” from *Lemon Hound* is the best example of both the conjunction of Modernists in the design of Queyras’s prose sentences, and also the conjunction of past and present in the use of Modernist forms:

She feels river. She feels thumb. She is brisk and thumbing. She is numb and loving. She is feeling loving. She is feeling loving about feeling. She loves feeling about loving. She loves feeling about feeling. She loves feeling about feeling loving. Her loving feels. Her loving loves rivers. She is feeling loving about rivers. (12)

The poem echoes Stein diffusely; Queyras’s invocation occurs as a type of attention to grammar and lexis, rather than an overt allusion to any specific works. Although this brief selection is perhaps too short to recreate the effect of resonance, or to reproduce the rhythmic “motion” of the sentences that occurs throughout the entire poem, the snippet is enough to provide *gist*. A similar poetic attention to grammar and lexis informs Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, for example: “In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling” (21). Like Stein, Queyras employs a strategy of rhythmic repetition, something which Suzanne Zelazo suggests, “extend[s] Stein’s linguistic ‘jouissance’” (199). This “jouissance” (in the Kristevian sense), is an extension that aims outside of the page to the heart and mind of the reader. “A river by a moment” produces

an effect that transcends literary description; reading the poem recreates the special, erotic moment of sublime dissolution. The effect of Queyras's sentences – the prevalence of the sound in “thumb” and “numb” – is oral in the sense that the repetition of syntactically parallel sentences stresses internal rhyme (and is thus “heard”), but is also oral in that the repetition of “thumb” and “numb” produces a murmuring, “affirmative moan in consent” that, according to Suzanne Zelazo, “vocaliz[es] the acoustics of sexual climax” (Zelazo 200). Erotic experience spills outward from the page; the rhythm of the sentences, as they lengthen and shorten, parallels the rhythm of bodies approaching orgasm. The rhythm, in fact, portrays a significant “lyrical” feature: the rhythmic “motion” substitutes for narrative exposition – a feature that, in Romantic lyric poems, both contextualizes and legitimates the powerful *catharsis* in a lyrical epiphany. In Queyras's *Lemon Hound*, however, the transcendental moment obliterates in the formless, *manifold* experience of sexual climax.

Queyras's poems become figures of desire, provoking a tension between the extra-linguistic “meaning” of poetic form and the non-referential “obscurity” of semantic content. The poem portrays the triumph of sense over cognition, where lyrical consciousness dissolves beneath the sublime aporia of *eros* – the extravagant simultaneity where a body both produces and receives orgasm. Ironically, this interplay between form and content inverts the normative relationship between form and content in Romantic lyric poems, where (as it is now practiced) line breaks occur almost arbitrarily throughout

an ultimately “prosaic” rendering of a climactic scene.¹⁰² In contrast, the prose form of “A river by the moment” produces an excess of feeling, over and above the obscure referentiality of the content of the poem. Semantically, the poem says very little; the experience of reading the poem, however, resonates with meaning carried, not by the poem’s language, but by the rhythm and the sound. Reading becomes an activity that, according to Carson, maintains a “symbolic intercourse” (“Eros” 109). The poems in *Lemon Hound* use the influence of the past as a lens through which to examine moments of sublime rupture – the erotic – in contemporary life. In “*The Waves*, an unmaking,” the final suite in *Lemon Hound*, Queyras “writes through” the characters from Virginia Woolf’s experimental novel *The Waves*. Each of Woolf’s seven characters (including Susan, Rhonda, Jinny, Bernard, Louis, Neville, and the absent Percival), provides a poetic persona through which the lyrical grist of personal experience and personal identity transforms, estranging the “normal” features of the lyric even as the poem portrays a *synthesis* between Woolf’s characters and the poetic speaker. *The Waves* presents six of the seven characters as first-person narrators, all of whom “do not manifest individualized conversational habits” (Flint x-xi). According to the scholar Kate Flint, the “utterances are soliloquies, self-presentations and self-justifications, rather than acts of communication with one another” (x-xi). Each chapter of Woolf’s novel presents the continuous flow of an individual consciousness reacting to wave upon wave of

¹⁰² This is a common complaint about contemporary lyric poetry, made by such luminous scholars as Marjorie Perloff and Charles Bernstein. Bernstein’s “Artifice of Absorption,” a critical text, weaves such a condemnation about lyric poetry (that line breaks constitute poetry) into the structure of his essay. Damian Judge Rollison has called this poetry’s “graphic profile,” “an overall design which . . . makes certain mute but powerful discursive and rhetorical statements about itself, statements which are ‘read’ in conjunction with a text’s linguistic signifiers . . . support[ing] or contradict[ing], reading practice and interpretation.” See Bernstein 9-89; Perloff “Brink”; Rollison 292.

sensory information, suggesting that consciousness is “fluid,” but also “cyclical and repetitive, rather than linear” (Flint xi). The interstitial sections of Woolf’s novel that mainly consist of descriptions of waves and sunlight offer a metaphoric commentary on the design of the text (where the media of water both reflects and distorts the illumination of sunlight and the colour of the sky). In *Lemon Hound*, the poems project the quotidian details of life in Toronto as they are filtered through each consciousness of Woolf’s seven characters, describing trips to the Eaton Centre, Yorkville, and King Street, and mentioning recent books by Michael Ondaatje, Christopher Dewdney, and Christian Bök. Queyras even inscribes Percival into her suite of poems. Although just an absence in Woolf’s novel (the other characters allude to him), Percival appears in *Lemon Hound* as a blank page bereft of any “refractive” narration. This is a gesture that closely recalls Monique Wittig’s and Sande Zeig’s blank entry for Sappho in their *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*. “*The Waves*, an unmaking” uncannily resembles Carson’s “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings” in projecting across temporalities and through multiple personae in order to examine the textures of contemporary experience. Queyras unites a Modernist form (and Modernist creations) with autobiographical details, so that the conjunction between the two contents produces a unique form for the rendering of experience. Such telegraphing (through the personae created by Woolf) draws attention to the constitution of poetic subjectivity – where subjectivity becomes unfamiliar and strange in the animation of a fictional consciousness. The *synthesis* or “collision” of Queyras, Stein, and Woolf is an attempt to render selfhood visible – to effect an *autopoietic* experience and reveal the machinery of cognition.

Queyras enjoins the present with the past, using notable phrases from *The Waves* to title her poems, in much the same way that Carson utilizes translated fragments. For both Carson and Queyras, lyric poetry's "necessary choice of frame" (Carson "Borders" 57) comes from other texts, and finding a *gestalt* with which to conjoin the divergent aspects of personal identity. In *The Beauty of the Husband*, Carson fortifies these fragments and citations with a disjointed narrative about a dissolving marriage. She counterpoints both fragments and narrative with a metapoetic commentary about the actual writing of the book. Like the formal elements of the poem, the dramatic structure also portrays a triangle – a love triangle uniting a husband, a wife, and a mistress (or conversely, uniting a husband, a wife, and a man named Ray). In *Lemon Hound* the structure is also triadic, but feels more intimate: the reader is positioned alongside the poetic speaker, as the recipient of the text's stimulations, where the text itself is a kind of interloper in the contiguity between speaker and reader. Although the subtitle ("a fictional essay in 29 tangos") of *The Beauty of the Husband* gestures towards the *synthetic* assemblage of the book, Carson's *bricolage* sensibility is subdued; the twenty-nine poems reflect the dominant of lyricism. The poems draw a triangular relation between Keats's epigraphs, the content of the poems, and the "tags" that comment on the book's composition. More than anything, Carson maximizes the tension between divergent formal and thematic elements – between the lyric and the prose sentence, and between the erotic and the thanatological. Following a quote from Keats's *Otho the Great: A Tragedy in Five Acts* ("Will you return, Prince, to our banqueting?" [1.2.152]), Carson's third tango *synthesizes* mourning and *eros* in remembering the lost relationship:

III. AND FINALLY A GOOD DEDICATION IS INDIRECT (OVERHEARD,
ETC.) AS IF VERDI'S "LA DONNA È MOBILE" HAD BEEN A POEM
SCRATCHED ON GLASS

.....
How do people get power over one another he said wonderingly as we came out
onto the street. Bruises too filled him with curiosity.
I could not meet this need,

I hear she did. The reason I mention washing is that it puzzled me why
none of this seemed unclean in his study of it.
None of it was orgasmic for him,

his thrust – analytic you could say, as if discovering a new crystal.
Is innocence just one of the disguises of beauty?
He could fill structures of

threat with a light like the earliest olive oil. I began to understand *nature*
as something seamed and deep into which one plunged, going dark.

(15, emphasis in original)

The Beauty of the Husband portrays the ironic bitterness that attends the cleaving of
desire – a desire that is manifest in the dissonance between oppositional drives. When
Carson writes, “None of it was orgasmic for him // his thrust – analytic” (15), she
simultaneously describes an unfulfilling sexual encounter and the sterility of abstract
discourse, where “orgasmic” is both literal and idiomatic (as a hyperbolic expression of
excitement), and “thrust” connotes a motion that is both rhetorical and sexual. The poem
synthesizes two discursive frames in the narration of experience. The haunting, sinister
aspect of the poem’s narrative relies on this pattern of opposition; the spectre of violence
(“bruises,” “threat”) overlays the images and scenes normally associated with the
Romantic lyric. The annihilating effect of the erotic sublime does not always manifest as
a positive pleasure (and *catharsis* is not always a restorative “balm” despite its *synthetic*
resolution of disparate, oppositional states). Although the erotic tension resolves, it does

not dissipate, spilling outward from poem to reader. Carson translates Sappho's fr.130 as "sweetbitter" ("Eros" 3), implying a rhythmic "argument" that portrays the contradictory, oppositional motivations of the erotic sublime. The speaker of the poem recognizes the complex of *eros* as an expression of power (where *eros* requires, more than the productive capacity of a dialectical imagination, the relinquishing of erotic agency).

Although *The Beauty of the Husband* recreates the forms most associated with Romantic lyricism, Carson's text dramatizes the *pastiche* or *bricolage* of a Modernist's sensibility; in bringing together aspects of Keats's work, her own autobiography, and a statement on the book's composition, Carson's text portrays a critique of "the beautiful" as an aesthetic category (and also a critique of Romantic ideology as it fetishizes "the beautiful"). The penultimate line of the poem, "To stay human is to break a limitation" (16), alludes to the sublime as an aesthetic imperative – an aesthetic aim – where "beauty" cannot contain the magnitude of experience, much as the "structures of threat" cannot contain the ironic luminescence of "a light like the earliest olive oil" (15). The speaker then understands "nature" (15, emphasis in original) as "seamed and deep into which one plunged, going dark" (15), a description that, while metaphorically gendered and sexualized, suggests a classic binary ("nature" and "culture") through an archaeological conceit. Carson *synthesizes* disparate, fragmentary memories with multiple ways of constituting such memories, so that poetic form displaces the *manifold* of experience but unsuccessfully – the Romantic epigraphs become ironic in their reading. The poem enacts a tension between its assemblage and the fragmentary parts, an effect which seems to repudiate Keats's most famous maxim from "Ode on a Grecian Urn" ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty" [1194]).

For Queyras and Carson, *eros* activates in the feeling of oppositions. Both *Lemon Hound* and *The Beauty of the Husband* motivate oppositions in the service of mimetic passage, so that the poems spill out from the page, infecting the reader “in a passionate moment that echoes from soul to soul” (“Decreation” 46). The experience of desire is the experience of disincorporation, in the tensions between wholes and parts, and in the tensions between opposites held in equipoise. In *Lemon Hound*, the cleft between form and content (a dissonance that also rejects the Coleridgean notion of “organic form”), compels a reader to posit a *gestalt*, a sense of the coherent whole, in order to accommodate the compelling phonic and vocalic effects alongside the obscure, almost reference-less content. In *The Beauty of the Husband*, coming to terms with the *manifold* aspects of the poem – the citations from Keats, the metacommentary, and the poetic narrative – all require the reader to hypothesize a historical connection among the disparate parts. Each fragment, in a sense, stands in an ironic relation to the other fragments, so that Keats’s lines clash against the brutal narrative of marital dissolution and the bitter directness of the appended metacommentary. Carson draws the reader through various temporalities and various moods, from the sublime moment of romantic breakdown, to the moment of conceptual finality (the book), to the youthful optimism of the Romantics in the pursuit of beauty. The figure of the triangle, the basic structure of desire for Carson, forms the ground of her *synthetic* experiment. However, *Lemon Hound* performatively enfolds the reader in an erotic relationship with the text (where the desire to understand the productively obscure content is rewarded when the non-semantic features “reveal” the poem in an epiphanic climax). Although describing opposite

experiences of erotic disincorporation, both Queyras and Carson echo Sappho in their description of the erotic sublime.

Such presentations of *eros* in Queyras and Carson ultimately lead to different ends. Queyras presents the sublime as the erotic encounter between reader and poem, where the extra-semantic experience of reading the text remains at odds with the semantic content of the text – a representational gap that relies on the sensual, material experience of language as it is spoken and heard in order to transcend the boundaries of the page. Although this shift towards the poem’s linguistic surface suggests an affinity with the Language Poets who likewise refocus their work around the surfaces of grammar and language,¹⁰³ Queyras’s poems instead utilize language to produce a sensual effect in the reader – to recreate the experience of heightened sensuality in the reading experience itself. The spillover from text to reader is an effect that allows the reader to “share a bit of electric extra life with the artist’s invention” (“Decreation” 46). For Queyras, the sublime moment is one that, by its very description, denies the possibility of linguistic or poetic definition. The poem and the reader engage in a system of exchanges, a system of refractions, where reader and text “share” in the climax of non-signifying *jouissance*. The mirror-effects continue throughout *Lemon Hound*. Even in the sections that most closely recall Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, the reader achieves ecstatic transport through the *synthetic* personae that mix Woolf’s characters with a distinct poetic speaker. In Carson and Queyras, the presentation of the sublime feels double-edged: not only do they

¹⁰³ In *The New Sentence*, Ron Silliman explains the preference for parataxis over hypotaxis as a preference for semantic multiplicity. Similarly, in “Language Writing: from Productive to Libidinal Economy,” Steve McCaffrey (in paraphrasing Barthes) suggests that the pattern-seeking behaviour of the reader (the desire to structure disorder, or “make” meaning) energizes such paratactic sentences with the reader’s own desire, so that the reader actively participates in the generation of the text. See Silliman 63-93; McCaffrey 143-58.

represent sensual disincorporation, they also present these experiences as moments of epistemological confrontation. In the third poem from “*The Waves: an unmaking*,” the poetic speaker theorizes desire in much the same manner as Carson does – as a reaching, probative curiosity. Queyras writes, “The tentacles of my desire spread exponentially. I take over. I remake. I circle the globe with my eye” (95). The speaker relates how the *manifold* of sensory data becomes codified as knowledge, where “Nothing is ever whole. One must parcel. One must divide further” (95).

Similarly, the poems in *The Beauty of the Husband* not only describe the sublime experience of erotic displacement, but also comment directly on the way such experiences are formalized as knowledge. In Tango VIII, Carson writes that, “If it is true we are witnessing that agony of sexual reasoning in our age / then this man was one of ‘those original machines’ / that pulls libidinal devices into a new transparence” (37). When considering an old love letter, the poetic speaker cites Baudrillard’s *Forget Foucault*, a text written in response to Foucault’s thesis about the relation between sexuality and power. The speaker of the poem muses that her former husband was one of “‘those original machines’” (37) of Baudrillard’s – the desiring machine that propagates itself over and over (desire that produces and formalizes desire, endlessly). The overt reference to Baudrillard is no doubt esoteric, but it also gestures to the sublime, *manifold* aspect of *eros*, where the dialectical constitution of desire both produces and dissolves its own ideational form. For Carson, the husband paradoxically “pulls libidinal devices into a new transparence” (37), so that the machinery of desire is, ironically, both more and less visible. In Tango XI Carson makes reference to the *Phaedrus*, summarizing Socrates’s description of “dialectic” in her injunction to “MAKE YOUR CUTS IN

ACCORDANCE WITH THE / LIVING JOINTS OF THE FORM SAID SOCRATES
TO / PHAEDRUS WHEN THEY WERE DISSECTING A SPEECH / ABOUT LOVE”

(49). In the *Phaedrus* and in Carson’s poem, knowledge emerges from the conjunction of oppositions, by collecting or separating (*synagôgê* and *diairesis*) sensible objects according to a logic of resemblance. The production of sameness and difference becomes a discursive or even linguistic function. However in Tango XI, the dialectical “separation” that provides a perceptual structure also describes the sublime effect of *eros*, disincorporating the lover like “a zen butcher” who “makes one correct cut and the whole ox / falls apart / like a puzzle” (“Beauty” 49). The poem suggests that desire and knowledge are uniquely connected (and that erotic desire is akin to the will to knowledge). The power of *eros* is such that the experience of sudden desire severs metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological certainties. Desire provokes a crisis at the very heart of representation.

In both Carson’s *The Beauty of the Husband* and Queyras’s *Lemon Hound*, these epistemological ruptures act to, in the words of Linda Hutcheon, “de-doxify” the normative social network of meanings. Hutcheon describes the separation of *doxa* from the *episteme* as a specific aim of Postmodernism (in the rejection of dubious Modernist certainties). The effect is two-fold. First, the poems describe moments of erotic dissolution, where desire provokes an epistemological crisis – a crisis that demands a lyric epiphany as a *cathartic* response. Second, in recreating the circumstance of poetic reflection, the reader follows the poet’s thought as it moves to contain the sublime in a formal concept. For example, the first poem from Queyras’s suite “*The Waves, an unmaking*” *synthesizes* three distinct ways of articulating experience (even the experience

of reading) to unsettle the habits of thought and the habits of representation that constitute the epistemological texture of contemporary experience. The poem questions the normative cultural representations that predetermine the “shape” of contemporary experience, questioning how knowledge interpellates, and ostensibly produces, the experience that it purports to describe:

. . . I have no face. I cannot pinpoint
how to enter. My mind is a basin. There is no cool
water. All is shallow. Lights burn in the back of my
head. There is much to be done about me. I am not
what you want. I am not what you dreamed of. I was
never who I thought. Never what you needed. Where
you try and project there is a blank and the blank is
endless. (91)

The poem dramatizes the stripping away of poetic personae, complicating the layering effect that Queyras develops throughout *Lemon Hound*. Autobiography strains through the “filters” of distinct consciousness (the poetic speaker, Woolf’s character, Woolf herself, the inherited [public] ways in which knowledge reifies in discourse). The poem whittles away these personae until there is nothing but “a blank and the blank is endless” (91). The “unmaking” of epistemological forms renders the “blank” a sign of raw experience where the speaker “cannot pinpoint how to enter” the subject (and thus make sense out of sensory experience). Tellingly, the poem relates the feeling of opposition (mind and body; I and You; want and need; water and “burn[ing]”), which hearkens back to the elemental oppositions of Sappho’s fr.31 and the speaker’s bodily disintegration.

The speaker of Queyras's poem suffers the severing of metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological contiguity. Similarly, Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband* originates from the de-doxified moment where the positive pleasure usually associated with sexual desire twins with the "bitterness" of erotic dissolution. In *Tango IV*, the poetic speaker muses about a letter sent from her former husband, noting that he has knowingly embedded "cosmological motifs, fire and water, placed right before talk of love / to ground it in associations of primordial *eros* and strife" (20). The elemental *synthesis* of fire and water reflects the pattern of erotic opposition – of holding two perspectives simultaneously ("*eros* and strife") – where opposition represents a "primordial" or original state. The experience, for the poetic speaker, remains indeterminate and paradoxical. By theorizing the de-doxifying motivations of Postmodernist literature, Hutcheon shows how contemporary literature generates new forms – new ways of articulating experience, and new ways of apprehending (and representing) the phenomenal world. For Carson and Queyras, the sublime represents a rupture with the past, but one that necessitates a new form, a new manner of constituting experience. The effect of such de-doxifying ruptures is that both Carson's and Queyras's poems, while describing the originary paradox of sexual desire, also draws attention to the way knowledge circulates and maintains phenomenal purchase on "the Real" or "the True."

In Sappho's fr.31, the annihilating effect of *eros* produces a number of strange dissolutions. For Sappho, *eros* engenders a split between mind and body, where in the midst of sublime "shock," the body of the poetic speaker becomes like an object, and the mind of the speaker turns inward – a kind of *autopoietic* "witness" to proprioceptive breakdown. The body loses its coherent structure, and remains little more than a loose

set of allied functions and allied parts. As if witnessing a stranger, the poetic speaker experiences cognitive dissonance. Her limbs seem disconnected and strange; her thoughts seem to originate from somewhere else. In Queyras's *Lemon Hound*, such an inward turn realizes nothing comprehensible – nothing but a “blank” page (91), representing the character of Percival from Woolf's *The Waves*. Woolf's Percival is a paradoxical “absence” in Queyras's text (even in *The Waves* Percival is little more than an allusion). The reader encounters this lacuna in *Lemon Hound* in much the same way as the reader might encounter the lacunae in Sapphic papyri. The citation that Queyras includes from *The Waves* is especially significant because Percival negates the act of seeing: “I detect a certain effort, an extravagance in / his phrase, as if he said ‘Look!’ but Percival / says ‘No.’” (94). The blank page suggests that the very constitution of subjectivity is a *pastiche* assembly of normative cultural assumptions and normative cultural representations and, like a mirror, hosts the reader's own literary projections. In the next poem in the suite, Queyras writes “I, I, I sign my name everywhere,” and “I sign my name and the world unfurls,” and finally, “I, I, I sign my name everywhere, and everywhere is mine” (94). The repetition of “I” gestures to the motley, fragmentary constitution of subjectivity (and the layering perhaps, of *subjectivities*). The assertion of personal identity, in this poem, is simultaneously metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological. The subject calls the object into being, but it is an object mediated by the persistence of cultural representations. Pure subjectivity, according to Queyras, is “blank.” Carson's speaker, on the other hand, draws the reader through the fragments of sublime rupture, a quality which influences both the content and design of the poems in *The Beauty of the Husband*. The tangos persistently allude to the disintegration of

wholes. Whether an esoteric reference to Zen butchery, to the breakage of Duchamp's "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors," to the dialecticism of Socrates, to the passage of shadows to mark time, or even to the unused portions of a wedding cake, *The Beauty of the Husband* describes processes of disintegration. Because *The Beauty of the Husband* is primarily a work of memory, the deep subjectivity of retreat occurs as a thematic motif. In Tango XXVI, the speaker echoes Kant in discussing the ability to render the constitution of subjectivity visible. The speaker asserts, "by dividing pure movement into minutes, hours, years, we raise / the pseudo-problem of an underlying 'self' whose successive states / these are supposed to be" (123). The line reads self-reflexively, as a statement about the design of the text, where each of the Tangos function like perfect snapshots of a subjectivity in the midst of multiple, sublime ruptures. The poems accrete, one on top of the other, like "PROPAGANDA," as Carson writes in Tango V, "ONE ONE ONE ONE / ONEING ON YOUR FOREHEAD LIKE DROPLETS OF LUMI- / NOUS SIN" (23). In Tango V, the repetition of "ONE" occurs five times. For Carson, the rationale for *The Beauty of the Husband* is the amalgamation of selves, conflicted by the experience of a dissolving marriage. The book begins, in other words, where the self ends.

Postmodern Loss: Anne Carson and Sina Queyras

Unlike *Lemon Hound*, Queyras's *Expressway* portrays loss in the confrontation between the Romantic pastoral and the Modernist machine. Where *Lemon Hound* uses "the river" as a through-line and rhythmic inspiration, *Expressway* focalizes around the concept of the road and the traffic that moves along it, analogues for nature and culture.

Expressway reconsiders the pastoral themes that dominate *Lemon Hound*, shifting to a more expansive consideration of our contemporary moment (through the irony of a progressive Modernism). The book represents an elaborate critique of the Romantic lyric, especially as it is practiced in Canada. Queyras employs a widened discursive palette in the development of the poems in *Expressway*, using such models as the celebrity interview, the syllogism, the prose essay, and the Google-generated text. The varying poetic forms of *Expressway* suggest a difficulty in representing loss – the loss of faith in “progress” (in the confrontation between Romanticism and Modernism), and the loss of family. The book begins in mourning; the poetic speaker carries her father’s ashes, “A bag she carries in a bigger bag” (8), to scatter throughout the Canadian landscape. The pastoralism of *Lemon Hound* is now, in *Expressway*, the space by the road where “frolicking hounds squat to pee,” and even “*the idea of / River*” has passed, marking “so many years since any live flesh / Could be immersed” (6, emphasis in original). The poetic speaker laments the absence of a form for grief. Carson’s *Men in the Off Hours* similarly laments the absence of form in the poetic speaker’s mourning for a deceased father (“Father’s Old Blue Cardigan”) and a deceased mother (“Appendix to Ordinary Time”), a theme that haunts the entire book. Unlike Queyras’s *Lemon Hound* and Carson’s *The Beauty of the Husband*, *Expressway* and *Men in the Off Hours* centralize the elegy and the epitaph – the thanatological – in the thematic content of these poems.

Expressway begins in the genre of Romantic lyricism (even the title, “expressway,” is a trope of irony alluding to the Romantic conception of the sensitive poet). The poems take on many of the imperatives of the Romantic lyric: they

appropriate the “look” of Romantic lyricism (tight tercets, the addendums of couplets often signalling epiphany); they portray “spots of time” contemplation; they describe a natural setting; they narrate a personal crisis; and they suggest a sensitive perception to ordinary, domestic experience. However, these poems are “double-voiced” (Hutcheon “Politics” 109), meaning that they are turned against themselves: they are critical about the logic of Romantic representation, and instead foreground the elisions, the epistemological distortions, and the metaphysical orientations that determine the genre. The poems problematize many of the enduring tropes of Romantic lyricism, such as a stable conception of subjectivity, a “Polyanna” pastoralism, and a celebration of the beautiful. In the first poem, “Solitary,” the poetic speaker asks “What sympathy of sounds? What cricketing / of concrete, what struck rubber, what society / And shifting birdsong sweetens spring’s tumult?” (6). The “feel of the language,” as Ralph Koler observes in *Influency Salon*, is Romantic, as is the pastoral subject. It is, in other words, the poem’s focus on the indistinguishable difference between the squelch of tires and the sound of birdsong and insects – the *synthetic* relation between the Romantic world and the Modern world, or a *synthetic* relation between the natural and the technological – in a pastoralism that recognizes a deconstructed (but problematized) collision between nature and culture. The speaker is simultaneously “lonely as a cloud” among the idylls of nature while contemplating the sites of genocide, asking “How far Auschwitz? Darfur?” (6-7). After “two hundred Post-Romantic years” (7), the flâneurial meanderings of the Romantics (and the early Moderns) transforms into the high-speed expressway of today – the expressway as the borderland between the competing desires for both Arcadian paradise (“Nature . . . is nostalgia” [7]), and Modernist “progress,” something Jacqueline

Larson calls “white line fever” (“White”). Travelling along an interstate becomes travelling along a liminal “inter-state.”

Expressway moves beyond a simple rendering (and re-thinking) of Romantic tradition. “A Memorable Fancy” takes up prose narrative (counterpointing the lyrics in each of the book’s nine sections). “Crash” builds a poem from Google search results, and “Lines Written Many Miles From Grasmere” collates fragments from Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal. “Cloverleaf Medians and Means” depicts a syllogistic dialogue between two undifferentiated “positions” (“A” and “B”), a form that returns throughout the text. “Cloverleaf Medians and Means” recalls many of Carson’s poems from *Men in the Off Hours*, such as “Sumptuous Destitution” (a dialogic collation of contemporary observations and Emily Dickinson’s letters), “Interview with Hara Tamiki (1950)” (a fictional interview with a writer who survived the Hiroshima bombing), and “TV Men: Thucydides in Conversation with Virginia Woolf on the Set of *The Peloponnesian War*” (a dialogue between a figure from the Classical world and one from the Modern world on the set of a TV production). These dialogues are more than the scripts of imagined meetings, however; they open up a cognitive “passage” between the past and present. In “Cloverleaf Medians and Means,” from *Expressway*, the dialogical form of the poem relates, not an exchange between allegorical positions or distinct characters, but a *synthesis* of response to the social and ecological challenges of Modernity. Like the chorus in Greek tragedy, “A” and “B” are not individuated speakers. They *synthesize* objective and subjective positions. “A” and “B” speak in unison; they speak in counterpoint; they echo one and other and finish the other’s thoughts:

A: Who can resist
 The slide of modernity, of being elsewhere always, ahead of
 Oneself, texting oneself – not to bring modernity into
 the poem
 Pristine modernity, the dream – but modernity leaks,
 modernity

B: Is uncontainable, because transnationalism presents no
 barriers
 To the acquisition of self, lease of self, layaway-plan self,
 because
 Every transaction, even the most minute, considers
 The implications of transactions, we don't care for smooth
 rides,
 We care for opportunities to charge, you see? Liberty is

A: Defence of fees. The ability to charge a fee, liberty is worth

B: Charging for (we all agree) and every breath a logical
 measure,
 Small gates inside our veins that open and shut, never
 Mind thinking, never mind how the self will be outside

A & B: Of body and measured, as the roads are measured, as
 The air is measured, as every resource is measured. (16-7)

The poem portrays the social, critical voice of the chorus – the figures of Greek tragedy who provide a voice of interiority, who present the internal conflicts and the desires of the main actors, and who comment directly on the themes of the play. The form of presentation (as a kind of choral script), illuminates the thematic sensibilities of the entire text, such as the illusion of progress, the dangers of ecological destruction, the psychopathy of capitalistic enterprise, and the commoditisation of the natural world (as “resources”). Although Carson’s poems do not share the ecological sensibility of Queyras’s, Carson’s “interviews” reimagine the past through the lens of Modernity. In “TV Men: Thucydides in Conversation with Virginia Woolf on the set of *The Peloponnesian War*,” the poem presents Thucydides (a Greek historian) as the director of a television show starring Woolf as host, rehearsing her script about the total financial

cost of the First World War. Like Queyras's "A" and "B," Carson's Woolf relies on abstraction in the description of loss: a monetary figure, like an epitaph, becomes a commensurate figure for the legions of dead. For Carson, the television show transforms historical knowledge, an extension of the historian Thucydides's objective rendering of history in the Classical era. Carson's poem is intentionally ironic; the bathetic effect of Woolf meeting Thucydides in preparation for a television show only draws attention to the abstract figure of expenditure that devalues of such a tragic loss of life.

The intersection between the Romantic and the Modern in *Expressway* suggests an ironic relationship between the humanist ideals of the nineteenth century (as they anticipate a utopian future) and the reality of Modernist "progress." "History," for Queyras, has "multiple pathways" (8), is "filleted" (11) – paradoxically suggesting both indeterminacy and preparation. As Erin Wunker asserts in "O Little Expressway: Sina Queyras and the Traffic of Subversive Hope," "Queyras's poetics are *both* backward-looking *and* forward-moving" (39, emphasis in original). In looking back to the Romantics, Queyras takes up the Romantic preoccupation with oppositional states of being, something that both Wunker and Kolewe link to William Blake. Kolewe goes so far as to suggest that the shadow of Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* could mean looking at *Expressway* as a "Marriage of Nature and No Nature" ("Naturalization"). The ecological concern that marks Queyras's engagement with the natural world emerges from the pastoral sensibilities of the Romantics (especially since the Romantics have first encountered the negative side of industrial progress), but this engagement sharpens itself against the Modernist myths of progress – a progress defined by technological innovation. In Section III, "Because Every Road Is Made With Dynamite," Queyras

describes how people remember automobiles as they move past the “Geiger counters,” and “those // Guarding toxic wastes” (26), while nature has reclaimed the surface of the earth (and its roads). The poems in Section III draw together idyllic memories of childhood (one can only assume that they are Queyras’s own) together with an anxious futurism, anticipating the end of petroleum culture. Queyras’s pastoral vision projects a future looking backward to the present – in much the same way as Carson’s “Life of Towns” poems from *Plainwater*. *Expressway* depicts the sublime shock of both personal loss (in the death of the speaker’s father), and the loss of innocence in the “marriage” between nature and culture, symbolized by the expressway that cinches the landscape, “Smoothing each nuisance of wild, each terrifying / Quirk of land” (6). The speaker recognizes that the sublime magnitude of nature (in the Burkean or even Kantian sense) has been supplanted by the existential sublime, where the roads that criss-cross every nation on the Earth might be the only epitaph that survives humanity’s demise. Even the nightmare of the “Alps bursting into flames, // All the way to Mont Blanc” (7), cannot compare to the recent horrors of Darfur and Auschwitz. The poem portrays a paternal relation between Romanticism and Modernism. It is a paternalism that metaphorically refracts through the poetic speaker’s sowing of her father’s ashes across the landscape of Canada. A father that, as the speaker tells us, was one of the road-builders himself.

Men in the Off Hours uses the past as a critical lens with which to view the present, combining the distinct, divergent concerns of the past with those of our contemporary world. Carson calls this the feeling of being “inside creative power” (“Decreation” 46). The feeling, for Carson, connects to the epitaph. As a form for the sublime feeling of loss, the epitaph preserves the deterritorializing “texture” of the

experience of death. Carson's poems prove to be epitaphic in both structure and theme. In "TV Men: Sappho," Carson builds the sublime sense of death into the narrative of the poem. Through the conceit of filming a television show (perhaps the most Postmodern of all media), the poetic speaker ("Sappho") describes a surreal *tableau vivant*, where she uses a rope to pivot like a draughtsman's compass around the absent centre of "Death" (who is also the cameraman), "circl[ing] Him / at a consistent focal length" (63). The connection between the camera's gaze and the recorded image is cognitive, though: a moment where the subject anticipates their own objectification through the lens of the camera, connecting the "living" moment of filming to the "dead" record on film. In the photograph, as Barthes theorizes in *Camera Lucida*, "we enter into *flat Death*" (92, emphasis in original). Sappho, ironically, both develops a sense of her own mortality, and projects her image to the future (the scene is staged); the digital record of magnetic tape supplements the historical record of Sappho's life. In the camera's gaze, the "gravestones in the background / spill slowly // out of the frame" (63). The poem is strange and complex, echoing Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" at points.¹⁰⁴ Carson's poem anachronistically modernizes the moment of Sappho's sublime dissolution from fr.31, where the speaker describes herself as "greener than grass / I am and dead – or almost / I seem to me" (Carson "Winter" 63). The poem takes up the thanatographic as a thematic concern, portraying the performance of the sublime as epitaphic gravestones that "spill" out of the frame to infect the audience. Death, in

¹⁰⁴ Donne's poem metaphorically presents the draughtsman's compass as a symbol for the relationship between body and soul in the expectation of death, a figure that influences the dramatic arrangement of "actors" in "TV Men: Sappho." Donne's poem connects earthly love with divine love – a *synthesis* of physical experience and metaphysical concept in the platonic metaphor of a draughtman's figure. See Donne 1275.

Carson's "TV Men: Sappho," is both an absence and a presence; despite the emptiness of the camera's gaze, the speaker ties herself to death, circling it on all fours. In *Men in the Off Hours*, the epitaph is a formal model that Carson uses to express sublime thought.

"Epitaph: Zion," for example, imagines a burial monument for an ambiguous site:

Murderous little world once our objects had gazes. Our lives,
Were fragile, the wind
Could dash them away. Here lies the refugee breather
Who drank a bowl of elsewhere. (9)

Carson maintains a poetic conceit whereby the epitaph supplements an imaginary memorial for an imagined loss. The poem reads as an epitaph for an epitaph – as if the mute, stone monument looks out at the living world, suggesting a two-way traffic between death and life. Although the poem's subject is obscure (given the breadth of possible references indicated by "Zion"), the poem is an encomium – a public type of mourning – and not a lamentation, providing a memorial for the loss of safety and homeland. The encomium of public mourning strongly contrasts with Carson's "Appendix to Ordinary Time," an elegy for Carson's mother, Margaret Carson. The elegy is a personal narrative, an expository piece that narrates both the sublime sense of loss and the extraordinary comfort that Carson took from the published diaries of Virginia Woolf.¹⁰⁵ "Appendix" explains the *catharsis* of finding a form for grief. By both quoting from crossed-out sections of Woolf's diary and paraphrasing Woolf's description of the relief that comes from "forming such shocks into words and order"

¹⁰⁵ An embedded citation in *Men in the Off Hours* identifies this text as Woolf's *Moments of Being*.

(165), Carson suggests that consolation comes from devising a form for the experience of grief. For Carson, the crossouts in Woolf's journal are powerfully revealing:

They are like death: by a simple stroke – all is lost, yet still there. For death *although utterly unlike life* shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time. Death hides right inside every shining sentence we grasped and had no grasp of. Death is a fact. (166, emphasis in original)

It is from these crossouts, a gesture simultaneously towards absence *and* presence, that Carson forms an epitaph for her mother. The epitaph examines the relation between the living and the dead but it is redacted, and beside the crossed-out epitaph Carson writes, “such / abandon / ment / such / rapture” (166). In “Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson,” Sophie Mayer interprets the inclusion of these crossouts as Carson's attempt to “[employ] a documentary practice that negotiates between visible and invisible excess” (112). Carson's supplemental writing (“such / abandon / ment / such / rapture” [Carson “Men” 166]), according to Mayer, “encompasses desire and the terror of lack” (112-13), and “forms a visual image of thinking” (113), suggesting that the poetic speaker identifies with Woolf's paradoxical erasures. On the opposing page is a photograph that appears to be an image of Carson's mother and Carson as a child. Beneath the photo is an inscription: “Margaret Carson / 1913 -1997 / *Eclipsis est pro dolore.*”¹⁰⁶ The page is bereft of any pagination, almost as if the epitaph breaks through the conceptual unity of the book. The photograph, like a

¹⁰⁶ “She is eclipsed/obstructed/crossed-out by loss/grief/sorrow.”

headstone, substitutes for the absent mother. For Mayer, the photograph of Carson's mother is a trace, a presence that survives beyond the terminus of death – as the daughter also survives the mother, and thus an aspect of the mother never dies (113). The magnitude of loss is such that, for Carson, the book ceases to be epitaphic in design, and instead becomes epitaphic in actuality.

Expressway, on the other hand, makes use of the elegy in the writing of loss. In the first section of the book, "The Endless Path of the New," Queyras begins with a lament for her deceased father, but she soon transforms this lament into an elegy for the natural world. In the third poem of the series, Queyras signals a shift through a recurring question, "What / sympathy of sounds?" (10) – a question that moves through the entire section, harmonizing oppositions: nature and culture, the pastoral and the technological, and the Romantic and the Modern. In the third lyric, the elegiac focus shifts from lament to encomium through the aural "mirror" of a rhyme ("Do tell me his pain // Was not in vain. Do say the bees will return, / And with them, seasons" [10]). Personal loss transmutes to public, social loss; the father's belief in progress becomes nothing more than a sick irony. By the fourth lyric, the poetic speaker forms all poetic observation in the grammatical "guise" of "what" questions – rhetorical questions that demand assertions of being, assertions of definition, and assertions of fact as response. The speaker becomes frenetic, as the walking pace of Romantic contemplation shifts to the expressway pace of Modernist invention. The questions come in a barrage: "What melting of rubber, what extension of self, what / Squeak of progress, what eye, what level, what / Parcelling and flattening, what neatly bundling, / What legacy? What future? What expressway?" (11). The interior processes of dialectical knowledge-making

become externalized for the speaker, as the work of the expressway is in “Parcelling and flattening” and otherwise disincorporating the whole into constituent resources. The questions emulate the “sympathy of sound” that emerges from the collision between the natural world and the Modern world. In *The Economy of the Unlost*, Carson explains the “sympathy” of Simonides, accounting for the “acoustic fact” of an awkward line of poetry in his epitaphic design. Carson valorizes Simonides’s genius, writing that

. . . human meaning does not stop with the physical facts. Facts live in their relation to one another; and language is able to objectify facts insofar as it can name (or as the Greeks say, imitate) these relations . . . We are recognizing his ability to make the same relations occur among a set of words in a poem as obtain among a set of facts in the world. (93)

Simonides’s poems show “sympathy” in their radical mimesis – they recreate an experience of the world in an experience of poetic language. The radical apposition of “facts” produces the consciousness necessary to draw them into a meaningful, epistemological relation. For both Carson and Queyras, the elegy and the epitaph constitute a *synthetic* naming, exposing the relationships between phenomenal objects.

In “The Endless Hum,” the seventh series of poems in *Expressway*, “Progress” parodies the logical structure of propositional knowledge. The poem presents a series of equivalencies that mix logical formulations and self-reflexive statements. Such a form suggests Classical education; Classical *trivium* included the study of logic, grammar, and rhetoric (the three “roads”). “Progress” is a column of repetitive descriptions of the word “One,” where “One is not simply. / One is not. / One is ever after. / One is as much as this” (60), playing with the grammatical value of “One” as a pronoun or “One” as an

integer – all of them ambiguous, Steinian statements that maximize polysemy in the proliferation of meanings. By the middle of the poem, however, the subject shifts to “Freedom” and “Healthcare” and merely “A” (recalling the *synthetic* chorus of earlier poems in the collection). At the halfway mark, Queyras offers a brief explication: “The expressway was born in A. / What is more self-referential than A? / Either, or. / The thing goes round on itself, the thing goes round” (61). The expressway becomes a self-justifying (but ludic) discourse, where progress generates progress for the sake of progress. The logic which severs such representations from material reference is the logic of simulacra. The expressway transforms into an epitaph for the Modernist dream, a logical system that acts like one of Baudrillard’s “original machines”; self-generating and self-perpetuating, the expressway opens up a passageway between the past and the present.

When Carson writes in *Economy of the Unlost* that the epitaphic exchange between the world of the living and the world of the dead provides comfort in times of loss, she considers the epitaph to be a distinct epistemology with which to “think through” the *manifold* of sublime mourning. The epitaph provides a *synthetic* consolation. She writes,

Our minds seek shelter from a world of barely controlled flux in such forms of order. The ancient epitaphic order, brought to perfection by Simonides, sets up a mimesis of exchange whose consolations are not only rhythmic and conceptual but something more. Salvation occurs, through the act of attention that forms stone into memory, leaving a residue of greater life. (95)

The monument transmutes into memory, ironically leaving “a residue of greater life.” In the sublime absence of the dead, the epitaph traffics in memory, leaving a “gold trace” of presence in the mind (95). For the speaker in Queyras’s “Solitary,” scattering the ashes of her dead father is the metaphoric equivalent of scattering the ashes of a dead tradition – a suggestion that Romantic utopianism is no longer tenable in the grind of Modernist progress. The epitaph provides a way of seeing, a certain *synthesis* of interior contemplation and exterior observation. Through the sympathetic attention to the epitaph, a person occupies two perspectives in equipoise; she sees herself as she is, and she sees herself as she is likely to be remembered. In “Father’s Old Blue Cardigan,” from *Men in the Off Hours*, the poetic speaker imbues her deceased father’s sweater with the memory of his death, an event she likens to the “shock” of a child’s experience riding backward on a train. Carson’s poem mobilizes a standard trope for (Modernist) progress. The train moves through a pastoral landscape but, because of the child’s rear-facing orientation, it is the landscape that appears to move. The experience is defamiliarizing: moving forward but facing backward. As an elegy to her father, the poem apostrophizes; the sweater substitutes for the father who has worn it. The speaker can now “put it on whenever [she] come[s] in” (47), and thereby occupy memory, in a transaction between the world of the living and the word of the dead.

The epitaphic constitution of these poems by Queyras and Carson recognizes a Postmodern impulse to make alliances between the sublime experience and representation, or as Lyotard has it, “[t]o make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible” (“Condition” 78).

Queyras and Carson proffer, variously, the elegy and the epitaph as Postmodernist forms

par excellence. The elegy and the epitaph draw the past and the present, absence and presence, into a dialogical, *synthetic* relation. For Carson and Queyras, the sublime is the category of such paradoxes. Like a radiographic image, the sublime flashes a glimpse of the mind in the acquisition of new experience. In Carson's work, *autopoiesis* most cogently appears as a "Brechtian" fascination with the mechanisms of artifice, focusing on both photography and the event of mass communication. *Men in the Off Hours* presents countless uses of photographs and televised media, but even more than that, the text portrays artifice as a recurrent thematic concern, especially in the poems about Hokusai, Audubon, Flatman, Hopper, the TV Men, and even in her "translations" of Catullus's "Carmina." "TV Men: Sappho" (the second poem with this title), describes the scene of television production where Sappho, dressed like a "Beijing concubine" (118), suffers a *textual* annihilation; Sappho loses the sublime experience (the "Tongue Flesh Fire Eyes Sound disappears" [118]) into the flatness of the TV narrative. The significant moments of Sappho's fr.31 disappear as the television production "flattens" the text, so that what remains is a Sappho "smearing on her makeup" (118), appearing in front of the camera with very little to say about desire (but, as a sign, exposes much about the audience's desires).

In *Expressway* the "surface" of the expressway is the aesthetic surface of the poems. Queyras writes, "O little expressway, miracle of expressway, upended galaxy, extended Adirondack slither, downhill from Syracuse to Manhattan, glorious, glorious, no longer carrying but being us, us moving everywhere, all around the globe" (64). The "upended galaxy" (a galaxy of contraction, not expansion) signifies a kind of reverse sublimity, where the magnitude of the globe is only eclipsed by the magnitude of

progress, as the highway (like a sensible form) shrinks the undiscovered world onto the simulacra of a road map, containing the entirety of the globe within a manageable discourse. Significantly, the poem orients the cognitive journey from Syracuse (a city of the Classical world) to Manhattan (a city of the Modern world) – no matter that Syracuse, NY reflects anything but the grandeur of Classical civilization. In “Proverbs of Hell,” Queyras enjoins the reader to look beneath the myth of Modernist progress to the historical and cultural circumstances that such a myth conceals. The first line of the poem hints towards the thematic culmination of the text: “The body sublime, the heart SUV” (96). The line gestures to the ecological sensibilities of the text, coupled with a sense of the sublime, and the conjunction of Romanticism and Modernism. Queyras then addresses the reader to “Fuel your plow with the blood of war. / Drive your car on the bones of the dead” (97), imperative statements that, although ironically employing “martial” rhetoric, describe the quotidian chore of filling a car up with gas (petroleum is quite literally derived from extinct life). The last lines of the poem signify the *indeterminate*, dialectical qualities of the text, spilling out of the page to address the reader directly: “Go forth and undo harm. / Go forth and do” (98).

Postmodern Longing: Anne Carson and Lisa Robertson

Lisa Robertson’s *The Men* is an unusual book for the way that it engages the generic formality of the lyric poem. Like Carson’s *The Beauty of the Husband* and Queyras’s *Lemon Hound*, Robertson’s *The Men* portrays the dynamism of erotic experience. Whereas Carson turns the lyric against the intensity of erotic longing (“the sweet”) and instead fashions her poems in relation to the magnitude of erotic loss (“the bitter”),

Robertson centralizes the sublime constitution of *eros*. For Robertson, the lyric is the preeminent mode for representing the ontological “motion” of erotic desire – the sublime rupture that displaces both metaphysical structures and epistemological structures. Robertson maximizes the non-semantic features of the poem in order to “carry” meaning across the schism between experience and thought, eschewing traditional poetic narrative. The poems in Robertson’s *The Men* utilize the acoustic elements of language, its poetic rhythms, to suggest a sensual, immersive message to the reader. Robertson writes, “Men deft men mental men of loving men all men / Vile men virtuous men same men from which men / Sweet and men of mercy men such making men said” (9). The poem “sounds” incomprehensible: a cacophony of voices crowd the poetic line. Despite the potent rhythm, the line reads more like a list of observable types or figures. The incessant repetition of “men” diverts readerly attention to the acoustic surface, flattening out the poem’s content and drawing the reader through both the semantic and non-semantic possibilities of the text. The poems portray a speaker in the ecstatic throes of desire, where aural rhythm and lexical meaning compete, so that a reader finds themselves torn between “listening” and “hearing.” Dwelling in the sensual, luxurious “field” of erotic possibility, the speaker notes that “the men find themselves happy only insofar / as they gratify an inclination” (18). The line paradoxically reflects the dialectical “doubleness” that constitutes the men as both subject and object, “gratify[ing] an inclination” that is simultaneously their own (in the pursuit of their own pleasure), and yet also belongs to the poetic speaker (as objects of *her* pleasure). Further on, Robertson writes,

They are both sublime and

Beautiful, delicate
And copious, rolling and touching
And rubbing one against another
In their most serious actions. (18)

“The men” exist between states of being (a significant enjambment, here), appearing as both radically individual (“sublime”), and reassuringly categorical (“beautiful”). The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, as Edmund Burke theorizes, is a distinction between varieties of experience: the experience of the beautiful reaffirms the principle what is already known and already thought; the experience of the sublime revitalizes the principle of uniqueness through an astonishment of both reason and “all the motions” of the soul (Burke “Origin”). The men are both beautiful and sublime; as a category, they affirm the epistemological, ontological, and metaphysical systems that determine them as objects of longing and, as such individual objects, they provoke an intensity of experience which obliterates the possibility of enfolding them within a category. “The men” render desire an experience of paradox.

The Men challenges the usual representation of desire in lyric poetry. Most commonly, the lyric portrays a male suitor in the aggressive pursuit of a female object. In Robertson’s *The Men* however, the lyric serves a more feminine conception of sexual desire – a feminine subjectivity – which reverses the lyrical “gaze,” so that “the men” feature prominently as objects. The book examines the very constitution of longing through such a reversal of the normal relationship between subjects of desire and objects of desire. For Tom Thompson writing in the *Boston Review*, this reversal in focus marks a significant challenge to contemporary lyrical practice, because Robertson presents a

feminine “I” (a feminine “eye”) that observes the lyrical moment through “a tradition that established the male *I* as the chief subject of poetry” (emphasis in original). Robertson suggests such a reversal of gazes in the poem itself, writing “Goya painted their eyes / Into women / Thus / The psychic life / Of pigment” (19), implying both an inverse relationship between subject and object, and a kind of agency for the aesthetic depiction. “The men” in *The Men* lose individual definition; they generate pure, undifferentiated desire. As in certain poems by Queyras, Robertson’s speaker takes on the social power of the Greek Chorus (a lyrical “I” which is sometimes a “We”). The poetic speaker in *The Men* achieves a constitutive power, determining the epistemological “shape” of “the men” as a category of thought. The “I” of the lyric also loses its individual focus, so that the subjectivity of the speaker disappears in the experience of desire and the evolving category of “the men.” As individual men recede into the category of “the men,” the individuality of the speaker dissipates into a similarly diffuse conceptualization. In “Evening Lit the Gnat,” Robertson ponders the recursive problem that links desire and subjectivity:

By means of the construction of concepts
We shall not discover men in the concept
In my intuition no man belongs in the concept
Of necessity. Obscurely the men are preamble
My concatenation admits each flesh
In its silky conceptual covering
Thus the acute men produce themselves
In fully the era of my adolescence.

Trashfuck or hydromel:

How do I make them actual? (33-4)

The poem presents a tension between the conception of “the men” and the appearance of “a man” as an object – a tension empowered by the representational schism between “the men” as a category of thought and “the men” as a “concatenation” of anecdotal experiences. The concept of “the men,” although “obscur[e],” acts as a “preamble” to “acute” experience. For the speaker of the poem, the problem comes not from the way sublime experience shatters the provisional limitations of a concept. Instead, the problem becomes a difficulty in formalizing sublime experience as knowledge, and determining how the concept of “the men” adapts to the experience of “a man.” The speaker suffers a crisis in her attempt to represent the sublime magnitude of her experience faithfully:

“Trashfuck or hydromel: / How do I make them actual?” (33-4). The crisis is simultaneously a crisis of identity and a crisis of longing. With an almost flippant irony, the poetic speaker offers two representational “failures,” where “Trashfuck” describes the profane, excremental experience of indulging “desire for desire’s sake” – an experience of category that differs significantly from the experience of a unique or special object. “Hydromel” (literally “honey water,” a name for mead), on the other hand, describes sensual desire as almost sacred, slightly intoxicating, and highly sentimental. The speaker’s plea (“How do I make them actual?”) is doubly-layered: the question recognizes that there is a fissure between concept and actuality, but also expresses a longing for a transcendent unity. Desire craves impossible satiation. The sublime, erotic experience fails to satisfy the demands of pure concept while, at the same time, the *ekstasis* of such a raw, visceral experience shatters the limitations of the concept. For the

poetic speaker, *eros* allows a “glimpse” at the “mechanism that originally shapes a notion of ‘self’ in each of us” (Carson “Eros” 37). The experience of desire throws the concept of the self into transformational crisis. Through both the *ekstasis* of longing and the *catharsis* of indulgence, subjectivity suffers a complete transformation.

Inasmuch as Robertson’s *The Men* seems unique in the dynamic reversal of the traditional lyric presentation of desire, *The Men* bears a strong resemblance to Sappho at a thematic level. Like Carson, Robertson conceives of erotic experience according to a Sapphic model, a model of desire which inverts the normative, “I-You” structure of the lyric, and repudiates the masculine form of longing. Echoes of Sappho appear in the imagery of the poems. In “Men Deft Men,” for example, the poetic speaker obscurely references Sappho in an image that *synthesizes* gustatory and olfactory senses: “And their shirts are sweet / And their sweat bitter: / Just delicious” (21). The poem portrays an almost synesthetic experience of heightened desire, where the apprehension of data from multiple senses produces an image that violates epistemological boundaries. The line also recalls Sappho’s fr.130, and her characterization of *eros* as a “sweetbitter unmanageable creature” (Carson “If, Not” 263). Robertson’s mixing of senses suggests the same closing down (or even confusion) of sensory perception that Sappho describes in fr.31 (“no speaking / is left in me // no: tongue breaks,” “in eyes no sight and drumming / fills ears” [Carson “If, Not” 63]), as if the poetic speaker from “Men Deft Men” recognizes such an affinity with Sappho’s speaker, and recognizes a parallel experience of desire. Robertson’s speaker remarks, “The men close my eyes” (Robertson 25), and further on, “I’ve touched the men who stopped / My tongue” (26). The Sapphic echo grows stronger when the speaker from “Men Deft Men” refers to the men’s

“poverty” (Robertson 9, 13) an allusion which becomes clear only in context with fr.31’s ambiguous – and unfinished – final line: “but all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty” (Carson “If, Not” 63). Robertson’s speaker offers an equally ambiguous line: “This may be ventured – ” (21). The line introduces a scene of reminiscence, where the speaker remembers “The morning of the men” in a series of paired descriptors (“Singly and steadily / Light and livid / Lovely and most loveable” [21]), that resolve in an ironic deadpan, “Ditto the men” (21). The irresolution in Sappho’s poem is a palpable tension, an absence that makes itself felt. Robertson suggests that Sappho recognizes not only a truth about the sublimity of desire, but also about the way desire becomes the very media of subjectivity.

The Sapphic fragments that influence the lyrical design of *The Men* also elucidate the relationship between desire and subjectivity, and highlight the speaker’s difficulty in experiencing authentic desire (that is, experiencing desire which is not always-already “shaped” by phallogocentric codes). The speaker’s concern for an authentically feminine subjectivity and an authentically feminine experience determines many of the text’s theoretical and aesthetic movements. Because Robertson’s “men” lack unique individuation, and thus remain “categorical,” the phenomenal intention of sexual longing fills “the men” with a kind of subjective content. Desire restructures objects according to its own rule. “The men” function as ciphers, and so the speaker’s longing produces “the men” in its own image – a *mise-en-abyme* revealing the cognitive processes of both subjectivity and desire. “[T]he men” provide an *autopoietic* opportunity for the speaker of the poem. She experiences subjectivity – her own subjectivity – as a defamiliarized object. The speaker suffers a *synthetic* annihilation, paradoxically becoming less distinct

even as “the men” become more distinct. Robertson ironically reconsiders Woolf’s famous assertion from *A Room of One’s Own*: “women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (43). In *The Men*, “the first webs of lust / Flicker / Near the window” (21), reflecting the speaker’s desire, where sometimes “the men” “achieve both / Clarity and embellishment” (19) and sometimes the speaker has “sexually seen the opacity of men” (24). The speaker in *The Men* magnifies “the men” to such immensity that they no longer resemble themselves. Instead “the men” become figures for the logic of representation, and mirrors for self-examination.

The interplay between the poetic speaker (as the subject of desire) and “the men” (as objects of desire) in *The Men* echoes Carson’s tango motif in *The Beauty of the Husband*. In Carson’s text, the tango represents the dialectical “push and pull” between husband and wife – between part and whole – an aesthetic performance of what is, ostensibly, a relationship of power. Like Robertson’s disappearing subject, Carson’s tango portrays the constitutive, dialogical relationship between a subject and the object of desire. Subjectivity crystallizes in the sublimity of erotic experience. By shifting between prose sentences and lyrical lines, *The Men* dramatizes a fragmentary, elusive subjectivity that slips between forms in the contemplation of desire. The lyric moments, like Wordsworthian spots of time, reveal the *autopoietic* operation of selfhood. The prose fragments of “Men Deft Men” provide a metaleptic commentary on the experience of desire. The speaker notes, “The men change limited constructs into easy patterns. / They determine on it. They point to the picture and / they nurture their hearts. They find time to analyze / conditions frequently” (15). The prose sections confront the lyrical

impulse of the other, contextual fragments, as if the two distinct poetic modes reflect the relationship between knowledge and experience. The lyric fragments present the experience of “the men” in a greater, sublime immensity: “The men / Exist / Against gravity and they fail. They form / Precisely and in great / Density / Too much information” (23). The enjambments overlay the syntactic units with an excess of meaning; breaking the sentences down into fragments, ironically, increases the semantic carrying capacity. In a lyrical formulation, the precise enjambments generate a surfeit of “density” and “too much information.” The tension between wholes and parts, in making sense of the unifying relation between prose and lyric fragments, implies a tense, charged relationship between raw experience and abstract knowledge. In *The Men*, the speaker counterpoints lyric and prose sections, structurally imitating the recursive, reciprocal process of action and reflection, dramatizing the conflict between the mysterious immensity of lived experience and the precise containments of intellectual form.

Like Carson’s experiments with genre, Robertson mixes lyric and prose sections to represent different ways of conceptualizing experience. The prose sections suggest normative language use (the form by which language achieves its communicative, social purpose). The lyric sections suggest a more intimate and mimetic use of language (the poetic lines describe experiences that are polysemous, synaesthetic, and highly individual). For the speaker, there is a disjuncture between the way something is “felt” in experience and the way something is “known” in thought. In response, the poems attempt to represent desire authentically and to describe how these subversive, lyrical representations provide an alternative manner of “naming” experience. The oppositional relation between private and public forms of knowledge (between lyrical subjectivity and

discursive objectivity), suggests an affinity with Sapphic verse that extends beyond thematic concerns. As in the poetry of both Sappho and Carson, subjectivity becomes defamiliarized; Robertson's speaker experiences the self as an Other. The first-person, singular pronoun of Robertson's speaker slips into first-person plural – an "I" becomes a "we." The shift in pronoun use implies that the speaker has, in the *ekstasis* of sublimity, developed a split persona, experiencing the moment of sexual desire as both self and other. The doubleness that characterizes Robertson's poetry makes *The Men* ambiguous, utilizing the lyric form and yet recognizing the lyric's formal limitations. *The Men* satisfies the lyric's formal criteria, but does so subversively. The poems offer the hallmarks of lyric experience, such as moments of personal crisis, epiphanic resolutions, and generic concerns for subjectivity. However, Robertson's *The Men* turns the lyric into a counter-song, using the genre to undo its own epistemological and ontological distortions. The lyric undoes its own secret ideology, inverting the normative, masculine figuration of desire and substituting a feminine experience in its place. Like Queyras, Robertson uses the lyric to both examine the sublimity of desire, and examine its limitation in the "naming" of experience. Like a negative statement, the poems paradoxically both affirm and reject the lyric's imperatives, reversing the gaze by which a subject perceives an object.

Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband* also performs a significant "doubling" effect in its use of the lyric form, but the poems in *The Beauty of the Husband* – despite their lyricism – turn on bitter ironies. The entire design of the text is ironic. From the presence of Keatsian epigraphs to the metaleptic commentary that introduces each poem, *The Beauty of the Husband* turns against the Romantic fetishization of beauty, and

instead presents its opposite – a grotesque mask. The poems, as Carson announces in the commentary before the first poem, identify beauty as a core value: “I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO KEATS (IS IT YOU WHO TOLD ME KEATS WAS A DOCTOR?) ON GROUNDS THAT A DEDICATION HAS TO BE FLAWED IF A BOOK IS TO REMAIN FREE AND FOR HIS GENERAL SURRENDER TO BEAUTY” (5). The following poem, however, immediately turns the ideal of beauty into something grotesque: “A wound gives off its own light / surgeons say. / If all the lamps in the house were turned out / you could dress this wound / by what shines from it” (5). The poem ends by considering the word “marriage,” demanding that the reader notice “how the word / shines” (5). The poem acknowledges the speaker’s duplicity, both by recognizing the impossibility of beauty in the situation of a failing marriage, and by recognizing beauty’s guise in uniting lover and beloved. The poem’s dominant image (a “shining” wound) is *synthetic*, comprehending revulsion and attraction, pain and pleasure.

Postmodern Loss: Anne Carson and Lisa Robertson

Lisa Robertson’s *Magenta Soul Whip* employs a diverse array of poetic forms. Robertson counterpoints lyric with prose, the Classical with the Modern, and English with Latin. Such an assemblage of different materials echoes the experimentalism that Carson undertakes in many poetic works. Ultimately, these experiments draw attention to the limitations inherent in the concept of the book or the *codex*. Such mixing of discursive modes, the lyric and the expository, throws each into sharp relief; the rigidity of genre breaks down in *Magenta Soul Whip*, suggesting that “genre” is little more than a habit of thought or a habit of observation. In an email interview with Rob McLennan, Lisa Robertson addresses the question of genre by stating, “I write sentences. They

comport themselves in any genre” (Robertson, “12 or 20”). While echoing an attitude shared by Carson, Robertson avails: “In terms of disciplines, I don’t experience borders” (“12 or 20”). Robertson both comments on her poetic strategy, and conveys a sentiment that Carson shares. When asked about genre, Carson responds with another question: “What do ‘shelves’ accomplish, in stores or in the mind?” (Carson “Interview” 7). Both writers play with the conventions of the lyric poem and the conventions of the expository essay in an effort to break down the epistemological constraints of discourse. In *Men in the Off Hours* the poem “Essay on What I Think About Most” is a notable example of Carson’s *synthetic* experimentation with genre, where an essay about error and metaphor takes up the generic proclivities of the lyric poem, so that expository discourse feels strange as it moves through linebreaks and the traditional elements of lyrical poetry. Carson writes,

Aristotle says that metaphor causes the mind to experience itself

in the act of making a mistake.

He pictures the mind moving along a plane surface

of ordinary language

when suddenly

that surface breaks or complicates.

Unexpectedness emerges. (30)

Carson’s poem self-reflexively describes its own procedure. The poem also describes the cognitive relationship between lyrical form and poetic content, where a “surface” produces the “unexpectedness” that “emerges” from an error of identification. The essay

is no less rigorous for its transmutation of form; the poem is no less poetic for its essayistic discourse. In *Magenta Soul Whip*, “Essay on Lust” also takes up a poetic impetus: “Identity can’t be concise. It’s knit from sequins and lust and scatters.” The poem continues, “[f]rom an interior space we heard the word *sequin* repeating in relation to leaves and the image was yellow gold leaves moving on dark water” (89, emphasis in original). In lieu of direct exposition, Robertson’s “essay” describes the theoretical relationship between desire and subjectivity. The poem compares the concept of identity to garments which can be worn or taken off (sequins are generally reserved for formal attire or costumes). Despite the essayistic premise, Robertson’s poem satisfies the generic demands of the lyric. The mixing of genres, more than anything, portrays how significantly form determines the possibilities of both communication and experience.

The poems in *Magenta Soul Whip* also narrate the rationale for the book. In “A Modest Treatise” Robertson writes, “[a]gainst history I looked and against poetry also” and further on, “[a]s a form of modest ornament, I intend to articulate / transitions” (64). In “Coda: The Device,” the poem begins, “My premise is simple. All method is a / Demonstration of history. All change / Is substitution” (83). Robertson’s poems dramatize a fascination with surface, skin, ornament, and clothing – the reifications of form that enfold a hidden content. Robertson’s fascination with surfaces extends to the media of film and television. In “Draft of a Voice-Over for Split-Screen Video Loop,” Robertson presents two speakers, one voice distinguished from the other by the use of italics. The voices begin with the same descriptive, narrative line: “A young woman looks openly out of the picture” (45). It is unclear whether the two speakers present in counterpoint or in unison. The lines of the poem echo irregularly from speaker to

speaker, and offer moments of both harmony and dissonance in the juxtaposition of poetic content. Although suggesting a correspondence with both Carson and Queyras, Robertson portrays an unstable subject, caught between competing moments of narration that reader experiences as a simultaneity. Carson's "TV Men" poems, however, synthesize historical representation and Postmodern forms of representation. Literary and historical personalities meet in the supplementary texts of television production (scripts, shot-lists, treatments, and voiceovers), so that the director of photography narrates the experience of filming an historical scene. The effect is bathetic; Lazarus, in a moment of existential contemplation, becomes the punch-line in a grotesque joke:

I have grasped certain fundamental notions first advanced by Plato,
e.g. that our reality is just a TV set

inside a TV set inside a TV set, with nobody watching
but Sokrates,
who changed
the channel in 399 B.C. (89)

The poem offers a commentary on an imaginary scene, where the artifice of the image breaks down into the Brechtian world of pre-production. The poem also describes the filtering of reality through layers of consciousness and perception, even alluding to Sokrates's death by suicide in 399 B.C. Robertson's "Draft of a Voice-Over for Split-Screen Video Loop" never resolves the divergences between each screen, as the voiceover performs an elaborate chiasmus, so that each narrative voice occupies the position of the other, echoing the opposite narrator, reading from the opposite script. The

poem exploits hypotaxis, the chronological and spatial “movement” of grammar, to suggest the *ekphrasis* of an endless video loop. Where Carson uses the artifice of television to emancipate historical time, Robertson uses the artifice of television to show the dramatic polysemy in each articulated moment. The recorded image persists while the competing narrative voices loop through an endless collage of possibility.

The relationship between surfaces and contents, in both *Men in the Off Hours* and *Magenta Soul Whip*, ultimately become a thanatographic concern for the way memory and history interrelate and become representations. Robertson’s “A Hotel” for example compares roads to “the entire moving skin of history” (18), thematizing historical representation as a meandering, perhaps even stalled, traffic of ideas (that nonetheless plod along set pathways). The speaker in “A Hotel” describes the *eros* of utopia, but then goes on to note that,

. . . History does not respond
To this project – History, who has disappeared into
Architecture and into the
Generosity of the dead. This states
The big problem of poetry. Who could
Speak for the buildings, for the future of the dead
The dead who are implicated in all
I can say? (19)

For Robertson, the *thanatology* of history directly opposes the *eros* of utopia. The past leaves only its traces in the lasting architecture, which is both a literal architecture and an epistemological structure, and the “generosity of the dead,” which is both a literal

inheritance and a commemorative epitaph on a gravestone. The poem reads as if “the dead” alone determine the shape of the future, so that the “big problem of poetry” comes from its constraints, that the dead traditions “are implicated” in all that is possible to know and to experience. The speaker of the poem suffers a sublime realization – a realization that enfolds aesthetic and existential concerns. Although framed as a statement about history and death, the speaker decries the way that the past imposes its form on the future, so that the “big problem” is a problem of finding a form for the presentation of authentic experience.

Such a problem manifests not only as a thematic concern of *Magenta Soul Whip*, but also in the way the text utilizes its literary past (and literary influences) in the development of these poems. For Emily Critchley, the intermingling of Latin and English in “Early Education” attempts to “[interrogate] the tradition and authority that language carries” (Critchley “Review”). According to Critchley, the poems perform their histories and their influences. The use of Latin in these poems provides a revisionary context for the “pure” lyrics; Robertson’s loose translations and “corruptions” (as Critchley calls them) transform the ancient source texts according to acoustic or even idiosyncratic means. Furthermore, in *Magenta Soul Whip* Robertson utilizes the lyric form in much the same manner as she utilizes Latin – to examine how the lyric is determined by tradition. In “About 1836” (a poem subtitled “an essay on boredom”) for example, Robertson uses the lyric form ironically. The poem’s title comes from the date that scholars use to determine the end of the Romantic era. The poem also follows a formula that Romantic poets often employ: the mode of observation. Like Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” or many of Wordsworth’s lyrical ballads, the speaker

seems transparent in the recording of a received epiphany at the end of a minor narrative. In “About 1836” however, the Byronic hero (also the author of the sublime epiphany) is a dog. The poem ironically parodies the “Romantic situation” by which an extreme personality (“the dog of Latinity / and non-knowledge” [53]), forces the speaker of the poem to witness the retelling of past experience. The image of the dog is biting, offering a bitter commentary about how the past exerts pressure on the constitution and experience of the present. Robertson’s use of the Romantics is consistently ironic; the Romantic belief in an idyllic future stands in sharp distinction to the actuality of the present moment. Robertson writes,

‘By cosmology I mean
‘out in the shadows, out at the edge of the parking lot, just beyond
‘the signage, and beyond the erotic even
‘one’s relationship to utopia is elegiacal.
‘Time there is other time.
‘Forget the nostalgia for singularity. (56)

The speaker of the poem instructs us to forget that both fantasy and actuality emerge from the same utopic thinking – the same moment. The speaker (the dog) ironically describes both images, the actual and the possible, in equipoise. The mixture of the present with the past (or with the past’s fantasy of the present) in Robertson’s poems draws an epitaphic relationship between the past and its elegy. The present and our historic vision for the present stand alongside each other, trafficking between the actual and the possible, the living and the dead.

Because such confrontations to the epistemological ground of history constitute one of the most compelling (and perhaps most discussed) themes of Postmodernism, the way in which Robertson, Queyras, and Carson utilize the literary past – not to mention the historical past – becomes the aspect of their work which most closely appears Postmodernist in orientation. For all three writers, the lyric contains its “countersong”; the lyric mediates desire, subjectivity, and tradition while simultaneously positing a critical, skeptical attitude about such mediations. In their poems, Carson and Robertson bring the past and the present into a close relation, in the sense of both poetic form and historical content, offering the “double articulation” of the Postmodernist text. The alliance between the past and the present, in Robertson’s lyrics, serves both to sanctify the dead (a dead tradition; a dead past; a literary corpus) and to draw attention to the epistemological limitations of the lyric. Where many of Robertson’s poems portray the genesis of subjectivity in the contemplation of sublime experience, the lyric’s double formation problematizes the manner in which the lyric engenders subjectivity. Like Coleridge’s quasi-Kantian theory of lyric subjectivity (the lyric poem is a “repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” [202]), Robertson’s poems portray a similar relationship between subjectivity and sublime experience (what for Coleridge is the “finite mind” in contemplation of the “infinite I AM”). The double articulation in Robertson’s lyrics challenges the ontological status of the poetic speaker in two ways. First, in the suggestion that the tradition of lyrical forms portrays desire in a masculine figuration, Robertson recognizes an epistemological limitation in the possibility of the lyric to describe feminine experience. Second, in exposing such limitations, Robertson suggests that the lyric may be unsuitable for describing sublime

experience. The lyric loses an ontological and epistemological rationale. However, Robertson and Carson derive meaning from the lyric's instability as a discourse of desire and subjectivity. The lyric's instability, in other words, provides a figure for the *autopoietic* experience of coming to knowledge; the lyric becomes a discourse of response rather than a discourse of containment.

All three poets (Carson, Queyras, and Robertson) draw a counterpoint between desire and death, *eros* and *thanatos*. Such a comparison implies a common source for the dialectical motions of both loss and longing. The formal precedent for the twinned exploration is Sappho; Carson, Queyras, and Robertson centralize Sappho in their thematic and formal experiments for good reason. Sapphic verse motivates the lyric with the intensities of extreme circumstances and the complexities of subjective response. In many ways the most salient and the most compelling feature of the lyric has always been its instability. The doubleness that normally registers as the preeminent condition of Postmodernism is perhaps an originary, constitutive feature of the lyric poem. The doubleness of the lyric recognizes a radical breach, not only in the condition of knowledge, but also the condition of the subject – the purveyor of such knowledges and such experiences. In Carson, Queyras, and Robertson, the lyric presents subjectivity as the mediating surface that collects the fragments of experience and knowledge; the lyric's instability mimics the instability of the subject, who faces new experiences for which there is no corresponding knowledge. At the same time, a unified, sovereign selfhood eludes even the possibility of definition. These Postmodernists utilize the lyric in service of an experience which has not yet been defined, and in service of knowledge which has not yet been codified. The instability of the lyric form becomes a figure for the fluid

contingency of all knowledge, recognizing the ad hoc condition of subjectivity. Like the work of her peers Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson, Anne Carson's poems suggest that such instability in the lyric is a persistent, originary feature, implying that the lyric aims for irresolution, and not for neat, standardized epiphanies. The condition of the lyric reflects the fragmentary, elusive condition of knowledge in our contemporary age.

CONCLUSION: *RED DOC*>

In this dissertation, I elucidate not only the ways in which Anne Carson reinvests the lyric poem with the potency of the sublime, but also the ways in which Anne Carson's experimentalism illuminates the relationship between poetry and knowledge. I have endeavored to contextualize Carson's poetry alongside the work of her significant influences and her significant peers. This dissertation traces the development of a poetic "movement" in contemporary and recently-contemporary lyricism that, though unacknowledged, manifests the sublime as an alternative to the "ideology of the beautiful" and an alternative to the neo-Romanticism that pervades lyrical practice in Canada (and thus makes her work particularly difficult for critics). In three distinct, critical inflections (Classicism, Modernism, and Postmodernism), I have illustrated how Carson's poetic, formal experiments provide a ground with which to question the relationships between tradition and innovation, between representation and experience and, ultimately, between poetry and knowledge. Each inflection of Carson's work reveals similar philosophical underpinnings and similar aesthetic orientations in the design of her poems. The focus of each chapter evolves into the next: the discussion of Carson's use of the Classics in the first chapter transforms into a discussion of Carson's Modernist concern with history in the second chapter, which in turn forms the basis for the discussion in the third chapter about Carson's Postmodernist use and abuse of inherited epistemological forms. Carson's *synthetic* approach to poetry, as I have termed it, reaffirms the consanguinity of philosophy and poetics. She raises questions that, in her work, suggest a Classical origin for our contemporary concerns.

I have structured this dissertation historically, beginning with Carson's use of the Classics, extending the discussion to the influence of Modernist thought, and ending, finally, with a discussion of Postmodernist epistemology. Each chapter traces two significant themes that pattern Carson's scholarly and creative inquiry – the erotic and the thanatological – in an attempt to illustrate the poetic uses to which Carson mobilizes the sublime. Carson's poetry offers *synthetic* resolutions for sublime rupture; her work centralizes the *aesthesis* of lived experience as an overarching theme, concentrating especially on events like human loss or sexual desire, all of which challenge ontological and metaphysical certainties. Scholarly criticism has glossed over the affinity between Carson's presentations of desire and loss, overlooking the motivating force behind such a similarity of representations – an aspect of her work central to this study. I focus not only on the ways in which the erotic and the thanatological emerge as themes in Carson's poetry, but also on the relationship between these themes, and what such a relationship suggests about sublime experience and *synthetic*, ameliorative, poetic representation. Carson's work addresses anxieties about poetry that have persisted throughout time – anxieties that she locates in Classical sources, as the foundations of Western literature and Western philosophy.

By way of a conclusion, I offer the following discussion of Carson's recent *Red Doc*, a loose sequel that resuscitates the characters from her earlier *Autobiography of Red* (a text that receives significant treatment throughout this dissertation). *Red Doc* is, perhaps, Carson's attempt to represent the abatement of desire – a thematic closure to *Autobiography of Red*. By reimagining characters from her previous text, *Autobiography of Red*, Carson disposes the adolescent Geryon and his love interest, Herakles, to the

anomie of contemporary, adult life. The book, however, deals exceedingly with loss. *Red Doc*> is surprising for the way it revises the erotic paradigm that Carson develops earlier in her career; *Red Doc*> remains a sequel only in the sense of theme, reinventing the *Geryoneis* from the perspective of loss. Where *Autobiography of Red* both formalizes and thematizes desire and difference in the red, winged Geryon – a symbolic *bildungsroman* for desire itself – in *Red Doc*>, “G,” on the cusp of middle age, faces the impending death of his infirm mother. He is joined by the shell-shocked “Sad But Great” (“Sad” for short) newly returned from war and suffering from PTSD. Although *Red Doc* travels the same thematic ground as *Autobiography of Red*, the text is more like a metacommentary on the original, showing the limits of *eros* and the limitations of the erotic sublime – where the transformational character of sexual desire loses intensity and youthful desire begins to pale in comparison with the urgency of loss in middle age.

Red Doc> proceeds from *Autobiography of Red* like a dream proceeds from reality – in difficult associations, leaps of logic, and a displacement of time and space. Unlike *Autobiography of Red*, Carson’s *Red Doc*> departs from its mythological origins, leaving behind its Classical, Stesichorean precedent, along with the *testimonia* and *apocrypha* that constitute its performative legacy. *Red Doc*> signifies an important departure from the substantive intellectual program that makes *Autobiography of Red* unique in its *synthetic* incorporation of academic essay, translated fragments, multiple appendices, lyric narrative, and even the celebrity interview. *Red Doc*> sheds the scholarly apparatus that so strikingly forms the relation among fragments in *Autobiography of Red*, forming the bulk of its substance from three distinct forms: dialogical interview, narrative poem, and choral lyric. Instead of the scholarly forms for

which *Autobiography of Red* is so well known (and in which Carson parodies the discursive presumptions to historical knowledge by emphasizing the artifices of desire that pattern such presumptions), the forms that Carson uses in *Red Doc* foreground the threadbare inconsistencies of memory. *Red Doc* also relies on hypodiegesis (narrative frames – a design of self-reflexivity) to tell the continuing story of G and Sad. The text opens in the midst of reminiscence, with G’s mother asking, “GOODLOOKING BOY wasn’t he” (3), and G supplies details as a spur to her memory. Beginning at the far left margin, Carson presents this dialogue in long first lines that immediately break into centre-justified short lines, piling up in middle of the page. The dialogue is almost impossible to follow; the two voices unfurl, tangling up with each other almost indistinguishably. With minimal physical descriptors, the text reads like a transcript, an early draft of a Greek tragedy, or even the discovery of a Greek scroll:

WATCH OUT FOR THAT WOODEN DEER I

yelled so loud you drove
off the road into a guy’s
hedge and

burst into tears [she laughs he laughs] / speaking of

tears / listen [gets out a
cigarette] to that wind /
storm coming / or is it the
traffic / wind I think /
from the north sounds like

/ so your surgery is

scheduled (5)

The setting is indeterminate; the poem describes a meeting between G and his mother that neatly foreshadows the ending (an image of a funeral and a period of mourning) through the too-casual mention of the mother's surgery. The poem also suggests one of the main thematic concerns of the text, the relationship between representational form and experiential reality, in the mother's anecdote about mistaking a lawn ornament for a "real" deer. In order to make the scene intelligible, the dialogue must be rewritten, mentally – re-arranged according to a normative spatial "logic" (like a play) so that it becomes clear who is speaking. The reader must re-order the dialogue, much as a Classicist might, in making the discovery of an ancient text comprehensible to a contemporary reader. The poem's "sense" and the poem's form work against each other; form displaces semantic clarity. The effect is of halting speech, and light conversation punctuated by irruptions of more weighty subject matter. Actual line breaks confront implied line breaks, so that the form of the poem reproduces a conversational rhythm – the tortured speech of G's sick mother during one of their final conversations.

The text diverges from the dialogic form very quickly, however. Following, Carson inserts a lyric that closely resembles a choral poem from Greek Tragedy. Like the Chorus, the "Wife of Brain" poems act as social, narrative voices. The poems offer condensed, synoptic versions of the narrative, suggesting ways to interpret the character's actions, and commenting directly on the text's problems. Carson justifies the "Wife of Brain" poems so that the loosely alternating long and short lines spread across the centre of the page like a Rorschach test. The poem employs the conceit of the choral ode

(specifically a Parode, a type of introduction that follows the prologue in Greek tragedy). Such choral sections appear throughout *Red Doc*, commenting upon G's and Sad's relationship, the overall action of the story, and providing a mimetic "snapshot" of G's and Sad's inner thoughts. The "Wife of Brain" sections are the representations of thought – representational figures wedded to the complex of unarticulated desires and unarticulated fears. For example, the chorus imitates the obsessive, ordering logic of a character named CMO: "4-B Ration / 24-Hour Ration / Battle Ration / Combat Ration / boiled sweets / Combat Ration for One Man" (66). The poem dramatizes CMO's compulsive ordering, as he lists the survival equipment that a soldier takes into battle, accounting for each, individual piece of gear. The choral poems, more than anything, dramatize the inner workings of consciousness, providing the best clue to the overall design of the text.

After the choral sections, *Red Doc* presents sections of lyric narrative justified into narrow columns that descend down the centre of each page. Although arranged as columns of prose, the enjambments and line breaks compete with the full-stop caesurae in parcelling out meaningful units. The poem seems like an accumulation of run-on sentences intermixed with surprising fragments, as if the narrative information (the text's *diegesis*) cannot resolve into a temporal (hypotactic) form. The effect of such run-on sentences suggests the overwhelming of sense, where "real experience" irrupts into the washed-out, vaguely Technicolor, versions of memory:

LOVE'S LONG LOST

shock the boy the man he

knows him. Knew. The

lion head the sloping run a
lavishness in him made you
want to throw your soul
through every door.
Memory sucks it all
backward. Hands and no
place for hands last
morning later you realize
that was our last. (14)

The pastness of their affair, for G, overlays the present moment and suffuses it with meaning (a memory of desire that, in its youthful, nostalgic immediacy, destabilizes the reception of the present). The effect, on G at least, is depressing; burdened by the bittersweet sense of loss that taints the memory of adolescent desire, G equates the end of his relationship with Sad as a kind of death: “The man had been his / oxygen once. When he left / there was no oxygen” (14). The lyrical narrative unites the disparate poetic forms (dialogue, inner monologue, diegetic action), so that each “type” of poem offers a shift in perspective on the events of the story. Like the refractions of a broken mirror, the text both unites the poetic fragments and maintains their distinct character – a surface that, once assembled, still reflects in discrete, distinct units.

Despite casting off the scholarly apparatus that is so central to *Autobiography of Red, Red Doc*> advances a similar aesthetic program – but without mooring the text to the “real” *Geryoneis*. In many ways, Carson’s *Red Doc*> is, as one review calls it, like “discovering new fragments of a private *Geryoneis*” (Shulz “Time-travelling”). Whereas

Autobiography of Red formalizes the recursive act of scholarship in the discovery and translation of ancient fragments (*Autobiography of Red* emphasizes its own epistemological procedures), *Red Doc* adapts Classical, literary forms to a contemporary story. Unbound by the physical, material inheritance of the Stesichorean fragments – fragments that, in their phenomenal state, portray in the papyri gaps and textual lacunae a sense of the wear and tear of centuries – *Red Doc* instead embraces the freedom of invention. Carson still uses the poetic text to examine the relationship between *poesis* and knowledge, but in *Red Doc* Carson thematizes such concerns, working them into the very fabric of her poems. Unlike *Autobiography of Red*, the text does not foreground the hermetic procedures of scholarly epistemology or the dramatic confrontation (as Carson represents it) between the phenomenal fragment and the reader's imagination. Nor are the formal elements of *Red Doc* merely a pretty surface (as multiple critics allege).¹⁰⁷ *Red Doc* unites the thematic elements of desire, loss, and epistemology in a formal program, dramatizing their *synthetic* constitution.

Carson marks *Red Doc* with significant counterpoints. In *Autobiography of Red*, Geryon travels to Buenos Aires, unwittingly meets up with his former lover Herakles, and agrees to follow him throughout South America to record the audio of volcanoes for a documentary on Emily Dickinson. The culminating episode in

¹⁰⁷ In *Poetry Magazine*, Jason Guriel likens Carson's poetic, formal choices to a marketing strategy, and "[finds himself] wondering why a voice so unperturbed by its latest packaging – long and short lines, rival columns, the screenplay, the essay, opera – needed such packaging in the first place." Similarly, Michael Lista writes in the *National Post* that "this poem, like so many of Carson's, has no formal meaning. Its shape, how its lines are broken, is arbitrary." Parul Sehgal suggests that *Red Doc* is little more than an exercise in linguistic *jouissance*, calling Carson's text "a long, lovely line to nowhere, a beautiful surface," where "[t]he language doesn't exist to take us inside the characters; it's just so many daubs of paint, utterly its own end." See Guriel "Autobiography"; Lista "On Poetry"; Sehgal "Stories."

Autobiography of Red is the collapse of the love triangle that emerges between Geryon, Herakles, and Ancash – an episode patterned by the sublime, red imagery of volcanoes, fire, and mountains. In *Red Doc*>, G and Sad take a road trip north, into “an erased white / world” (34), where glacial “[p]anels of torn planet loom / and line up one behind the / other to the far edge of / what eyes can see” (39). A cool colour palette fills the mountainous, arctic waste with blues, whites, and greys. In the car, travelling north, the light is so dim that G cannot read the map (a detail that recalls Geryon’s inability to navigate his school). Sad directs the car through the dark, his eyes “BLUER THAN HOLES / in blue” (40). The journey that G and Sad undertake northward, ending abruptly at a glacier, stands in stark contrast to their “accidental” trip southward in the pursuit of volcanoes. The narrative design (a journey) remains parallel, even while the cool imagery implies opposition. The correspondence between texts, as thematic inversions, relies on more than the story and imagery. If *Autobiography of Red* narrates an allegory of *eros* and the emergence of sexual desire – especially illicit desire – using the figure of Geryon as a symbol of both difference and longing, then *Red Doc*> portrays an allegory of *thanatos*, using the figure of Sad But Great as a symbol for both loss and mourning.

The imagery of *Red Doc*> suggests more than a shift in a mood, however. The elemental opposition of equatorial heat in *Autobiography of Red* and arctic cold in *Red Doc*> also alludes to a late chapter from *Eros the Bittersweet*. Most of *Eros the Bittersweet* focuses on Sappho’s fr. 31, where Sappho likens the sudden, annihilating experience of desire to oppositional sensations (“fire . . . racing”; “cold sweat holds me” [“If, Not” 63]), but Carson also offers another paradox of desire, this one from

Sophokles's *The Lovers of Achilles*, which describes desire like the child's delight in holding onto melting ice.¹⁰⁸ As Carson interprets the analogy, the experience is a novel but compulsive pleasure (one that also borders on pain). She writes,

Ice is cold and the longer you hold it, the colder your hands get. But this care reminds us of another. The longer you hold it, the more it melts. So would it not be more reasonable to put the ice down, sparing hands and ice? But holding onto ice delights children, for that is a novelty . . . Time is the condition of delightfulness and of perishing both. Time brings the nature of ice into fatal conjuncture with human nature . . . (“Eros” 114-15)

The lover's dilemma is similar to the child's dilemma; desire “[pulls] the lover to act and not to act, / again and again” (112). For G and Sad in *Red Doc*>, plodding northward, the arctic setting and cool blue colour tones suggest an ice world, where desire is frozen in time. Entering into the “heart” of a glacier, G and Sad also enter into a refractory period – they no longer need to worry about the melting of ice. Carson portrays G and Sad as actors in the centre of desire's paradox, between states of love and loss. As Carson writes in *Eros the Bittersweet*, “[Sophokles's] simile involves you in a conflicted response: to save the ice, you must freeze desire. You cannot want that, and yet you do” (116). Entering the arctic wasteland, G and Sad explore the ruined landscape of their own, frozen past; in memory, the heat of their equatorial volcano transforms into the cold of an arctic glacier.

¹⁰⁸ This chapter of *Eros the Bittersweet*, “Ice-pleasure,” is integral to Ian Rae's “Verglas: Narrative Technique in Anne Carson's ‘The Glass Essay’.” Punning on the English glass and the French *glace*, as Rae notes, Carson fills her poem with ice metaphors. Carson's choice of setting for *Red Doc*> then, is not without thematic precedent.

As they move progressively northward, G begins to examine the absence of his desire in greater detail:

What was it like to feel
sexual. To want say this
person on the floor. Or
any person. Sexual
situations yes the haste
and ramming yes the hot
cold amazing difference
between before and after
as if a diagram shot inside
out he remembers the
diagram but the feelings
no. (35)

G's memory (where memory implies loss) portrays a Sapphic "flavour" in the representation of the contradictory sensation of desire. In the same manner that a "diagram" resembles an actual structure, longing becomes a way of conceptualizing experience. Desire, however, turns "inside / out"; Carson describes how longing *synthetically* bridges interiority and exteriority, so that desire propagates itself endlessly, independently of the outward objects that serve as temporary "placeholders." Desire becomes an entire worldview – but one that shifts unstably, according to fashion or fancy. For Geryon, who in the composition of his autobiography, "set down all inside things" while "coolly [omitting] / all outside things" ("Autobiography" 29), the recognition that

desire constitutes only a temporary epistemology suggests a thematic closure. In turning his youth into an autobiography (with the notable, *ekphrastic* addition of the photo essay at the end of the text), Geryon transfigures the intense, sublimity of sexual desire into a discursive form. The sublimity of *eros* finds *synthetic* resolution in aesthetic representation. Desire, becomes little more than a memory. Even as a way of knowing the world, desire has limitations. In *Red Doc*>, G recognizes such limitations while “[glancing] at mirror” but still feels shock when “[s]harp stabs his face” and he realizes he is “no / longer young no more / beauty impact. Get used / to this. Other ways to / navigate the world” (37). For G and Sad, *eros* remains an aspect of the past, where even in an inspired moment, their fumbling recognizes that there isn’t “enough / juice for the squeeze” (35).

The failure of desire to present a consistent, sustainable epistemology, changes the way that G appears throughout the text. No longer the youthful, naïve adolescent, G has become jaded, bitter. Sad, once the arrogant, selfish object of G’s tortured affections, returns home from his time as a soldier and suffers remarkably. The shift in name signals a shift in character. The movement in focus, from G to Sad, turns *Red Doc*> into an imaginative excursion on the contemporary experience of mourning and loss. Like earlier works of Carson’s, *Red Doc*> *synthetically* conjoins idea and thing, illustrating the great gulf between the chaotic reality of experience, and the abstract character of knowledge. The first thing the reader learns is that G knows enough to censor his curiosity about Sad:

While with Sad he knows
don’t mention warplay.

Funny word warplay.
Never says war or warfare.
I've seen a lot of warplay
he'd say. Warplay had me
pumped those years. Tip of
the spear. Flipswitch
inside. (25)

The image, “warplay,” links the games of childhood to the realities of war, harnessing two divergent concepts in the uneasy compound of two vitally distinct words. Like the pattern of images in Carson’s “First Chaldaic Oracle,” this poem from *Red Doc* connects the concept of “play” (as an activity of imaginative simulation) to the concept of “war” (as an activity of visceral reality), showing the corresponding relationship between the two, where “play” describes an abstract, representational discourse that empties the concept of “war” of any real meaning. In *Red Doc* however, this is a strategy of self-preservation for Sad, who cannot make sense of his own personal history because even if “[y]ou read a hundred / military manuals you won’t / find the word kill they trick / you into killing” (25). Carson characterizes Sad’s shellshock, his time at war, as an inability to make sense of the magnitude of his experience.

Sublime loss becomes the central problem of the book when, after experiencing car trouble while driving into the centre of the glacier and arriving at a private clinic, G and Sad meet the CMO (a chief medical officer and an amateur car mechanic). In the extremity of sublime loss, Sad is unable to make sense of his personal history and his time fighting as a soldier. In the clinic, the CMO provides an organizational logic – a

way of converting the vicissitudes of sublime experience into an orderly, accessible knowledge. The CMO becomes defined by the logical administration of rules, finding beauty in the simple examination of experience. In describing the word “*Ration*” as the “key to a / disciplined life. Latin / *ratio* ‘reason.’ Rationality. / Principle of order. A / prescribed amount at a / prescribed time. It’s how / you keep animals in line it / works for people too” (67), the CMO advocates the systematic, empirical acquisition of knowledge. When Ida, an artist-friend of G’s from home, also shows up at the clinic (on the arm of the CMO), the relationship between these characters also implies a relationship between their respective concepts (where the CMO is a figure of order, “Ida” is “a verbal word for / the way / / you see inside your mind” [18]). The dramatic scene of Ida and the CMO entering the clinic suggests both a confluence and a conflict, not only in the relation between epistemological strategies, but also in the manner of dealing with the intensity of sublime experience. Ida (“idea”) and the CMO are polar opposites; Ida represents the interior, subjective, *autopoietic* experience of aesthetic production, while the CMO represents the discursive, empirical system of knowledge. Sad, while suffering PTSD, does not benefit from the ministrations of either character, nearly disappearing into the narrative after a riot at the clinic. G, on the other hand, goes to the hospital to visit his mother. The text shifts in its portrayal of loss; now it is G who must make sense of his mother’s terminal illness, make sense of the loss that ends the book. It is only at this moment that the form of the text becomes clear, as G chooses to “[rewrite] his play as a / novel given the futility of theatre” (147), struggling with the sublime sense of loss that accompanies the imminent death of his mother and the difficult problem of memorialisation.

Red Doc> suggests a liminal, textual form; indeterminate in its orientation (as either a novel or a play), *Red Doc*> seems caught in between genres, appropriating the imaginative possibility of the novel, and the striking immediacy of a play. The characters (G, Sad, Ida, and CMO) are similarly caught between genres and modes of presentation, neither appearing fully realized nor completely flat. *Red Doc*> is, more than anything, an imaginative completion to *Autobiography of Red*, where the characters not only act out their specific parts (in the sense of realist drama), but also stand allegorically for the ways in which *eros* and *thanatos* form distinct manners of knowing the world. The text dramatizes these themes and dramatizes their interactions. Instead of developing a formal apparatus to highlight the relationship between poetry and knowledge (as she does in *Autobiography of Red*), Carson allegorizes these concerns, embodying a conversation (a word Carson defines as ““turn together”” [93]) between the two prevalent themes of her work. *Red Doc*> fulfills a thematic parallel to *Autobiography of Red*, and in doing so, stages an aporetic “drama” in which *eros* and *thanatos* play out two, interimplicated manners of constituting experience.

Affirming the significance of Carson’s work, to poetry generally but to Canadian poetry in particular, is an exercise of cognitive dissonance. In an international context, Carson’s poetic and scholarly achievements, while lauded for being “original” (Kellaway “Review”) and “enthraling” (Carey “Review”), still occupy a position of esteem shared with many other works and many other poets. Her formal and thematic concerns, though uniquely attended in Carson’s poems, provoke responses from many other contemporary, poetic voices (Jorie Graham and Geoffrey Hill come to mind). Her work exists within a clamour of competing practices and competing poetries – each sharing a similar concern

for the lyric. In Canada, Carson is unique in both her practice and her attention. Her work stands in opposition to her peers – not only because she is somewhat novel in shrugging off the standard, thematic tropes of Canadian writing, but also because her work suggests an alternative to the distinctly regional, neo-romanticism of Canadian poetry. As Ian Rae notes, Carson’s poetry confounds critics because it bears such a minimal relation to the *topoi* of Canadian writing, causing critics to “[wonder] how to situate Carson’s poetry within the context of Canadian literature when her writing features few explicitly Canadian settings, characters, or homages to Canadian artists” (“Verglas” 163). Rae’s implication, that literature is Canadian only so much as it reiterates a sentimental concept of Canada, perhaps unconsciously (but justifiably) indicts Canada’s critics as well as Canada’s poets. The problem that many critics suffer while reading Carson is a problem endemic to Canadian Literature. Recently, several notable scholars have begun to address the problems surrounding the idea of national literatures more broadly. In “Metamorphoses of a Discipline: Rethinking Canadian Literature within Institutional Contexts” from *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, Diana Brydon comments that “the very concept of national literatures is . . . a way of perceiving the world that may be losing its relevance or at least shifting its functions” (5). Such losses and transformations lead Brydon to theorize “Canadian literature” as a set of dominant traditions and historical practices (with outliers and alternatives) rather than as totalizing field of study (5). Likewise, Smaro Kamboureli notes that, although “CanLit” has been “instrumentalized by and concerned with the Canadian State,” “[CanLit] also contests the stateness, and boldly points beyond it, to an elsewhere that is not yet legible, that defamiliarizes the tropes that produce

transparency and its accompanying contentment and complacency” (Kamboureli x). Bryden and Kamboureli, both suggest that Canadian literature, in portraying largely nationalist concerns, must also become reflexive about the historical, social, and institutional circumstances that have produced “CanLit” in the first place. Carson’s work is important precisely because it challenges critics to re-evaluate what they know about both poetry and Canada, and it challenges critics to imagine an “elsewhereness that is not yet legible” (x).

Yet Carson’s greatest achievement remains mostly unacknowledged: in reorienting the lyric towards experiences of sublime magnitude, Carson re-establishes the connection between lyrical production and epistemological reflection. She presents lyrical thinking as a distinct epistemology, and the poem as a mode of cathartic *synthesis* (a *synthesis* that still aims to recreate the experience of sublime disjuncture for the reader). Carson’s lyric poems stand in stark contrast to most of the poetry produced in Canada. Yet, as this dissertation argues, there are a number of poets that display a similar poetic sensibility (if not always a similar lyrical aesthetic). In “Lyric Scholarship in Controversy: Jan Zwicky and Anne Carson,” a recent article published in *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Tina Northrup argues that Jan Zwicky and Anne Carson, despite vast differences in their approaches to both poetry and scholarship, are nonetheless united in their focus on “exteriority . . . and multiplicity,” “[demonstrating] that seemingly variant elements can ignite gestalt perceptions of wholes greater than the sums of their parts” (195). Although Northrup must qualify such a strange alliance (Carson’s poems tend toward Postmodernist ends whereas Zwicky’s poems are concerned with “ecological and intellectual ethics” [195]), her argument identifies some compelling similarities

between Carson's and Zwicky's theories, suggesting that, despite vastly different practical concerns, their respective approaches both endeavour to "[emphasize correspondences] through juxtaposition" (196) and "recognize the dissolution of the self as the outcome of lyrical culmination" (197). Differences in aesthetics notwithstanding, a similar assertion about the works of Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson, or even earlier, about the works of Phyllis Webb and P.K. Page, would likewise be true. In *Lyric Philosophy*, a collage-text made up of lyrical fragments, textual citations, and aphoristic insights, Zwicky's focus is "resonance," something she explains as "a function of the integration of various components in a whole. (Integration, not fusion. Resonance occurs in the spaces between)" (64). Zwicky similarly advances the idea that "Lyric is an attempt to comprehend the whole in a single gesture" (134), so that "an instant joins the ear, nose, skin, tongue, and heart with the eye and the mind" (120). That Zwicky's lyrical ideal anticipates the *synthetic* aims of Carson's poetry is evident. However, the similarities between Zwicky and Carson do not suggest that Carson's practice fulfills Zwicky's desire for a "lyric philosophy." Instead, Zwicky identifies a strain of poetry that both resists the lyrical consolations of the Canadian tradition, and also constitutes its alternative – an alternative in which Carson's practice is central.

The practitioners of such an alternative, though often disconnected from each other, can be found throughout Canadian writing. The most surprising aspect of this "non-tradition" is the tremendous divergence in aesthetic, political, and theoretical orientations of those who, like Carson, envision a poetic epistemology, and a *synthetic* manner of perceiving lyrical experience. Poets as historically or conceptually diverse as Louis Dudek (his *Ideas for Poetry* is a good prototype for both Zwicky's and Carson's

scholarship), Daphne Marlatt, or Nicole Brossard all could have been included in this study. By drawing together a coherent relation among disparate poetic practices and disparate poetic practitioners, this dissertation advances a provisional understanding about the pattern of influences, both national and international, that constitute an alternative lyrical prevalence in Canada. Anne Carson's work is, perhaps, the most recognizable in its divergence from the dominant tradition. Like the "rival strain" in Modernism that Marjorie Perloff calls a "poetics of indeterminacy" (an alternative to the dominant "symbolist" poetry of Yeats, Eliot, Auden, and their heirs [4]),¹⁰⁹ the work of such poets as Phyllis Webb, P.K. Page, and more recently, Sina Queyras and Lisa Robertson, questions, challenges, and subverts the scenes and symbols of Canadian poetry, preferring a lyric of the sublime to a lyric of the beautiful. This brief list is only provisional – a diagram rather than a blueprint – in tracing out an alternative tendency in Canadian lyricism, and one that does not account for the inter-generic differences that often leads critics to evaluate their diverse works according to very different sets of criteria.

In this dissertation, I have endeavored to illustrate the powerful way that Anne Carson's poetry engages the intellectual problems of our contemporary period, and the inventive way that such an engagement emerges as matter for poetic representation. In a sense, *Red Doc* is the perfect text with which to conclude this discussion. *Red Doc* contains all of the major themes that come to prominence in Carson's work, and yet also

¹⁰⁹ In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, Perloff traces this strain to Rimbaud, although in English poetry, the more famous early examples would be Stein and Pound – poets who, for Perloff, constitute a definitive break with their Romantic inheritance, and thus create the conditions for the Postmodernist work of the contemporary (and recently-contemporary) moment. See Perloff "Unreal Cities" 3-44.

represents a move forward in her experimentation with content and form. However, Carson's greatest contribution to Canadian poetry remains her recursive questioning about the relation between poetry and knowledge – a line of inquiry that leads her to challenge the dominant, neo-romantic values of Canada's poets, while simultaneously insisting on an alternate poetic tradition, a more compelling poetic tradition. Although Carson is not alone in questioning the dominant aesthetic in Canadian poetry, she is unique for the way her work, according to one critic, sits somewhere between “easy lyricism and the willfully opaque avant-garde” (O’Riordan “Review”). Carson invigorates her lyric poems with the sublime, an aesthetic value she traces back to early Greek lyrics and Sappho in particular, implying that this alternate poetic tradition has, despite its rarity, deep roots in Western literary culture. In spanning across centuries, frames of reference, and cultural texts, Carson slips between paradigms and periods, finding the ancient precedent in even the most progressive of forms.

Works Cited

- Abley, Mark. "Carson's work like pale fire amid smoke of others." Rev. of *Plainwater* by Anne Carson. *The Gazette* 15 Jul. 1995: 1.1. *Canadian Newstand*. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Addison, Joesph. "The Pleasures of the Imagination." *The Spectator* 25 June 1712: n.pag. *Joesph Addison, The Pleasures of the Imagination: The Papers from The Spectator (1712)*. Minnesota State U. Web. 8 Feb 2011.
- Adorno, Theodor. "Lyric Poetry and Society." *Notes To Literature: Volume One*. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson. New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1991. 37-54. Print.
- Alexis, Andre. "More Ambition than Execution." Rev. of *Decreation* by Anne Carson. *Globe and Mail* 17 Sept 2005: D24. *CPI.Q (Canadian Periodicals)*. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Altieri, Charles. *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: The Contemporaneity of Modernism*. NY: Cambridge UP, 1989. Print.
- . *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. Print.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Stephen Halliwell. Vol. XXIII of *Aristotle*. Loeb Classical Library 199. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005. 1-142. Print.
- Baker, David. "Story's Stories." Rev. of *Men in the Off Hours* by Anne Carson. *The Kenyon Review* 24.2 (2002): 150-67. Print.

- Barbour, Susan. "The Origins of the Prose Captions in H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*." *Review of English Studies* 253 (2011): n.pag. *Oxford Journals Online*. Web. 27 March 2012.
- Barnard, Mary, trans. *Sappho: A New Translation*. By Sappho. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1958. Print.
- Barnstone, Willis, trans. *Sappho and the Greek Lyric Poets*. NY: Schocken, 1988. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1980. Print.
- . *Critical Essays*. Trans. Richard Howard. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1972. 213-20. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. Trans. Nicole Dufresne. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007. Print.
- Beasley, Rebecca. *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound*. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Beasley-Murray, Jon. "Vilcashuamán: Telling Stories in Ruins." *The Ruins of Modernity*. Ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010. 212-31. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. NY: Schocken, 1968. 253-64. Print.
- Bentley, D.M.R. "'A Subtle Morning': P. K. Page's 'The Permanent Tourists'." *Canadian Poetry: Documents, Studies, Reviews* 19 (1986): 68-75. *Canadian Poetry Online*. Web. 28 Apr 2012.

- Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992. Print.
- Bidney, Martin. *Patterns of Epiphany: From Wordsworth to Tolstoy, Pater, and Barrett Browning*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1997. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*. New York, NY: Warner Books, 2003. Print.
- Bowman, Laurel. "The 'Women's Tradition' in Greek Poetry." *Phoenix* 58.1-2 (2004): 1-27. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Feb. 2011.
- Brandt, Di, ed and intro. *Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women's Poetry*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. Print.
- Brewster, Scott. *Lyric*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Brinkman, Bartholomew. "Making Modern *Poetry*: Format, Genre, and the Invention of Imagism(e)." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.2 (2009): 20-40. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Feb 2012.
- Brown, E.K. *On Canadian Poetry*. Toronto, ON: Ryerson P, 1943. Print.
- Bryden, Diana Fitzgerald. "Shards of Brightness." Rev. of *Men in the Off Hours* by Anne Carson. *National Post* 18 Mar. 2000: 6. *CPI.Q (Canadian Periodicals)*. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Brydon, Diana. "Metamorphoses of a Discipline: Rethinking Canadian Literature within Institutional Contexts." *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007. *Proquest*. Web. 12 Jan. 2015.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Snow. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.

- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime and Beautiful with Several Other Additions*. NY: Collier, 1909. Web. Vol. 24 of *The Harvard Classics*. Charles E. Eliot, gen. ed. 51 vols. *Bartleby.com*. Web. 4 Feb. 2011.
- Butling, Pauline. *Seeing in the Dark: The Poetry of Phyllis Webb*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1997. Print.
- Carey, Barbara. "Red Doc by Anne Carson: Poetry Review." Rev. of *Red Doc* > by Anne Carson. *The Toronto Star* 13 Sept. 2013: n.pag. Web.
- Carson, Anne. *An Oresteia*. New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2009. Print.
- . *Antigonick*. Toronto, ON: M&S, 2012. Print.
- . *Autobiography of Red*. Toronto, ON: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- . *The Beauty of the Husband*. New York, NY: Knopf, 2002. Print.
- . "Beauty Prefers An Edge." Interview by Mary Gannon. *Poets&Writers* 29.2 (2001): 26-33. Print.
- . *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. Toronto, ON: Vintage, 2006. Print.
- . *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.
- . *Eros the Bittersweet*. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1995. Print.
- . *Glass, Irony, and God*. New York, NY: New Directions, 1995. Print.
- , trans. *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides*. New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2006. Print.
- , trans. *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Toronto, ON: Vintage, 2002. Print.

- . "A _____ with Anne Carson." Interview by John D'Agata. *The Iowa Review* 27.2 (1997): 1-22. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 May 2010.
- . "The *Matrix* Interview." Interview by Mary di Michele. *The Moosehead Anthology #8: The Matrix Interviews*. Ed. R. E. N. Allen and Angela Carr. Montreal, QC: DC Books, 2001. 7-12.
- . *Men in the Off Hours*. New York, NY: Vintage, 2001. Print.
- . *NOX*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2010. Print.
- . *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*. Toronto, ON: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- . "Poetry Without Borders." Interview by Stephen Burt. *Publisher's Weekly* 247.14 (2000): 56-7. *General OneFile*. Web. 8 May 2010.
- . *Red Doc*>. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2013. Print.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. J. Shawcross. Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1907. *Internet Archive*. Web. 2 Aug. 2013.
- Collecott, Diana. *H. D. and Sapphic Modernism: 1910-1950*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Collis, Stephen. *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry/Anarchy/Abstraction*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 2007. Print.
- Cook, Arthur Bernard. *Zeus: A Study of Ancient Religion*. 2 vols. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1927. *Internet Archive*. Web. 9 Aug. 2014.
- Corrigan, Kevin and Elena Glazov-Corrigan. *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2004. Print.

- Critchley, Emily. "Review of *Magenta Soul Whip*." *HOW2* 3.3 (2010): n.pag. Arizona State University. Web. 16 May 2013.
- D'Agata, John. "Men in the Off Hours." Rev. of *Men in the Off Hours* by Anne Carson. *Boston Review* 25.3 (2000): n.pag. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Davenport, Guy, trans. *Archilochos, Sappho, Alkman: Three Lyric Poets of the Late Greek Bronze Age*. By Archilochos, Sappho, and Alkman. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980. 77-133. Print.
- Davey, Frank. *Canadian Literary Power*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest P, 1994. Print.
- . "Surviving the Paraphrase." *Towards a Canadian Literature: Essays, Editorials and Manifestoes*. Vol. 2. Ed. Douglas M. Daymond and Leslie G. Monkman. Ottawa: Tecumseh P, 1986. 428-37. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*. Vol. 2. Trans. Brian Massumi. New York, NY: Continuum, 2004. Print.
- de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1979. Print.
- . "Literary History and Literary Modernity." *Daedalus* 99.2 (1970): 384-404. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2012.
- Dewart, Edward Hartley. *Selections From Canadian Poets: With Occasional Critical and Biographical Notes, and an Introductory Essay on Canadian Poetry*. Montreal: John Lovell, 1864. *The Internet Archive*. Web. 24 Aug. 2014.
- Donne, John. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. James Noggle, James Simpson, Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York, NY: Norton P, 2006. 1275. Print.
- duBois, Paige. *Sappho is Burning*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.

- Duclos, Gloria Shaw. "Thomas Wentworth Higginson's Sappho." *The New England Quarterly* 57.3 (1984): 403-411. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 Aug. 2010.
- Doolittle, Hilda (H. D.). *Helen in Egypt*. New York, NY: New Directions, 1961. Print.
- . *Notes on Thought and Vision & the Wise Sappho*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1982. Print.
- Dudek, Louis. *Ideas for Poetry*. Montreal, QC: Véhicule P, 1983. Print.
- . and Michael Gnarowski, eds. *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Ryerson P, 1970. Print.
- Duplessis, Rachel Blau. *H. D.: The Career of that Struggle*. Sussex, UK: Harvester P, 1986. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism." *New Left Review* 1.152 (1985): 60-73. Web. 28 August 2012.
- Fetherling, Douglas. "Poetic Pickings: From a global garden of verses." Rev. of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. by Richard Telesky. *The Ottawa Citizen* 19 July 1998: C13. *Canadian Newstand*. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Fiorentino, Jon Paul. "Sexism and Silence in the Literary Community." *The Huffington Post.ca*. The Huffington Post.com, Inc., 1 May 2013. Web. 1 May 2013.
- Flint, F.S. "Imagisme." *Poetry* 1.6 (1913): 198-200. *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 18 Jan 2012.
- Flint, Kate, ed. and intro. *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. Toronto, ON: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Foster, Hal. "Postmodernism: A Preface." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, WA: Bay P, 1983. Print.

- . *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1996. ix-xvi. Print.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden*. Toronto, ON: Anansi, 1995. Print.
- Fong, Wen C. "How to Understand Chinese Painting." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 114.4 (1971): 282-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Apr 2012.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. NY: Routledge, 1989. Print
- . *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume Two*. Trans. Robert Hurley. NY: Vintage, 1985. Print.
- . "What is an Author?" *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. NY: Norton, 2002. 1622-36. Print.
- Freake, Douglas. "The Multiple Self in the Poetry of P. K. Page." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 19.1 (1994): n.pag. *érudit*. Web. 21 May 2012.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, eds. *Signets: Reading H. D.* Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1990. Print.
- Fritz Di Pace, Angela. *Thought and Vision*. Washington, DC: The Catholic U of America P, 1988. Print.
- Furey, Anthony. "A Thing of Beauty in Memoriam." Rev. of *NOX* by Anne Carson. *Globe and Mail* 10 April 2010: F11. Print.
- Furlani, Andre. "Reading Paul Celan with Anne Carson: 'What Kind of Witness Would that Be?'" *Canadian Literature* 176 (2002): 84-104. Print.
- Gibbon, John Murray. "Rhymes With and Without A Reason." *The Canadian Bookman* 1 (1919): 26-34. *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada*. Ed. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski. Toronto, ON: Ryerson P, 1967. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer*

- and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1979. Print.
- Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins P, 1965. Print.
- Godard, Barbara. "Kinds of Osmosis." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38.1 (2004): 65-75. *CBCA Complete*. Web. 17 May 2012.
- Green, Peter. "On Fire With Longing." Rev. of *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* by Anne Carson. *The New Republic* 227.15 (2002): 34-40. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 24 Apr. 2010.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston, MA: Beacon P, 1961. 3-21. Print.
- Greene, Ellen. "Introduction." *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*. Ed. Ellen Greene. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1996. 1-9. Print.
- Gregory, Eileen. *H. D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- . "H. D. and Translation." *The Cambridge Companion to H. D.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2012. 143-158. Print.
- . "Rose Cut in Rock: Sappho and H. D.'s *Sea Garden*." *Signets: Reading H. D.* Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1990. 129-154. Print.
- Gubar, Susan. "Sapphistries." *Signs* 10.1 (1984): 43-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Aug. 2010.
- Guerlac, Suzanne. "Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime." *New Literary History* 16.2 (1985): 275-89. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Jan 2011.
- Guriel, Jason. "Autobiography of a Reader." Rev. of *Red Doc* by Anne Carson. *Poetry*

- Mar. 2013: n.pag. Web. 11 Oct. 2013.
- . "Flaking-off Beautifully." Rev. of *NOX* by Anne Carson. *PN Review* 196 (2010): 46. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Jun. 2011.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity – An Incomplete Project." Trans. Seyla Ben-Habib. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, WA: Bay P, 1983. 3-15. Print.
- Hainley, Bruce. "Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse." Rev. of *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson. *The Nation* 266.20 (1 June 1998): 32-4. *CPI.Q.* Web. 3 June 2010.
- Halliwell, Stephen. Introduction. *Poetics*. By Aristotle. Trans. Stephen Halliwell. Vol. XXIII of *Aristotle*. Loeb Classical Library 199. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005. 1-142. Print.
- Hamilton, Jeff. "This Cold Hectic Dawn and I." Rev. of *Plainwater and Glass, Irony and God* by Anne Carson. *The Denver Quarterly* 32.1-2 (1997): 105-24. Print.
- Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1982. Print.
- Heer, Jeet. "Poet or 'Prize-Reaping Machine'?" *National Post* 31 Jan. 2002: B5+. Print.
- Hejinian, Lyn. *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2000. Print.
- Higgins, Iain. "Lows and Highs." Rev. of *Decreation* by Anne Carson. *Books in Canada* 35.7 (2006): 34-6. *Books in Canada*. Web. 3 Jun. 2010.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.
- , and Leo Spitzer. "Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender and Transmission." *Poetics*

- Today 27.2 (2006): 353-383. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Jun. 2011.
- Hirsh, Elizabeth A. "Imaginary Images: 'H. D.,' Modernism, and the Psychoanalysis of Seeing." *Signets: Reading H. D.* Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1990. 430-451. Print.
- Hokanson, Robert O'Brien. "'Is It All A Story?': Questioning Revision in H. D.'s *Helen In Egypt*." *American Literature* 64.2 (1992): 331-46. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Feb 2012.
- Hulme, T.E. "Romanticism and Classicism." *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*. Ed. Herbert Read. London, UK: Routledge, 1958. Print.
- Hunter, Lynette. *Outsider Notes*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 1996. Print.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*. Trans. F. Kersten. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998. Print.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. NY: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- . *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Irvine, Dean. "Fugitive Places: Anne Carson and the Unlost." *Language Acts: Anglo-Québec Poetry 1976 to the 21st Century*. Ed. Jason Camlot and Todd Swift. Montreal, QC: Véhicule P, 2007. 272-89. Print.
- . "The Two Giovannis: P. K. Page's Two Modernisms." *Journal of Canadian Studies*. 38.1 (2004): 23-45. *CBCA Complete*. Web. 17 May 2012.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.

- Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981. Print.
- . *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991. Print.
- Jennings, Chris. "The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 70.4 (2001): 923-36. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 24 Apr. 2010.
- Johnson, W. R. *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1982. Print.
- Kamboureli, Smaro. "Preface." *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007. *Proquest*. Web. 12 Jan. 2014.
- . *Scandalous Bodies*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. Print.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. J. H. Bernard. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005. Print.
- . *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ed. and Trans. Marcus Weigelt. Toronto, ON: Penguin, 2007. Print.
- Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*. Russell Noyes, ed. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1956. 1153. Print.
- Kellaway, Kate. "Red Doc> by Anne Carson." Rev. of *Red Doc>* by Anne Carson. *The Observer* [London, UK] 30 Jun. 2013: n.pag. Web.
- Kennedy, David. *Elegy*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Kennedy, Leo. "Direction for Canadian Poets." *Towards a Canadian Literature: Essays, Editorials and Manifestoes*. Vol. 1. Ed. Douglas M. Daymond and Leslie G. Monkman. Ottawa, ON: Tecumseh P, 1986. 283. Print.

- Kenner, Hugh. *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1985. Print.
- . *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971. Print.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983. Print.
- Killian, Laura. "Poetry and the Modern Woman: P. K. Page and the Gender of Impersonality." *Canadian Literature* 150 (1996): 86-105. *canlit.ca*. Web. 23 May 2012.
- Kirsch, Adam. "All Mere Complexities." Rev. of *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* by Anne Carson. *New Republic* 218.20 (18 May 1998): 37-41. Print.
- Klobucar, Andrew and Michael Barnholden, intro and ed. *Writing Class : the Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*. Vancouver, BC: New Star, 1999. 1-47.
- Kolewe, Ralph. "Naturalization and De-naturing, Or, the Marriage of Nature and No Nature after Two Hundred Post-Romantic Years." *Influency Salon* 1 (April 2010): n.pag. Web. 3 May 2013.
- Kroetsch, Robert. "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy." *The Lovely Treachery of Words*. Toronto, ON: Oxford UP, 1989. 21-33. Print.
- Kurtz, Glenn. "What Remains: Sappho and Mourning." *Southwest Review* 95.1-2 (2010): 246-54. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 4 Apr 2010.
- Larson, Jacqueline. "White Line Fever in Sina Queyras's *Expressway*." *Influency Salon* 1 (April 2010): n.pag. Web. 3 May 2013.
- Levensen, Michael. *Modernism*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2011. Print.
- , ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.

- Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short. "Ortus." *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon P, 1879. *Perseus Digital Library Project*. Ed. Gregory Crane. Tufts U. Web. 28 Apr 2012.
- Lewis, Wyndham. "Long Live the Vortex!" *Blast* 1 (1914): 7-8. *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 21 Jan 2012.
- . "Our Vortex." *Blast* 1 (1914): 147-49. *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 21 Jan 2012
- Lindley, David. *Lyric*. New York, NY: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Lista, Michael. "On Poetry: *Red Doc*> by Anne Carson." Rev. of *Red Doc*> by Anne Carson. *The National Post* [Toronto] 15 Mar. 2013: n.pag. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.
- Logan, William. "The Way of All Flesh." Rev. of *Men in the Off Hours* by Anne Carson. *The New Criterion* 18.10 (2000): 63+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 May 2010.
- . "Vanity Fair." Rev. of *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson. *The New Criterion* 17.10 (1999): 60+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 May 2010.
- Longenbach, James. "Disjunction in Poetry." *Raritan* 20.4 (2001): 20-36. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 30 Jan 2012.
- . *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot, and the Sense of the Past*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987. Print.
- Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Trans. W.H. Fyffe. Loeb Classical Library 199. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005. 143-309. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans.

- Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.
- . "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991. 89-107. Print.
- MacDonald, Tanis. *The Daughter's Way: Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2012. Print.
- . "The Pilgrim and the Riddle: Father-Daughter Kinship in Anne Carson's 'The Anthropology of Water.'" *Canadian Literature* 176 (2003): 67-81. *Canlit.ca*. Web. 12 Jan. 2015.
- Mackenzie, Geraldine. "Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*." Rev. of *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson. *Jacket 11* (2000): n.pag. Web. 3 June 2010.
- MacMechan, Archibald. *Head-Waters of Canadian Literature*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 1924. Print.
- Majercik, Ruth. *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, Commentary*. Leiden, NL: E. J. Brill, 1989. Print.
- Mandel, Eli, ed. *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971. Print
- Martin, Sandra. "Who's afraid of Anne Carson?" *Globe and Mail* 2 Feb. 2002: n.pag. *CPI.Q (Canadian Periodicals)*. Web. 3 June 2010. Reprinted: "Terrifying Anne." *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane, AU) 2 Mar. 2002: n.pag. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 3 Jun. 2010.
- Mayer, Sophie. "Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 38.1 (2008): 97-117. *érudit*.

- Web. 12 Jan. 2015.
- McCaffrey, Steve. *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986*. New York, NY: Roof, 2000. Print.
- McCallum, E. L. "Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*." *Postmodern Culture* 17.3 (2007): n.pag. Web. 10 May 2014.
- McFarland, Thomas. *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981. Print.
- McGann, Jerome. *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993. Print.
- McHale, Brian. "1966 Nervous Breakdown; Or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?" *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.3 (2008): 391-413. Print.
- McNeilly, Kevin. "Five Fairly Short Talks on Anne Carson." *Canadian Literature* 176 (2003): 6-10. CBCA. Web. 10 April 2010.
- . "Home Economics." *Canadian Literature* 166 (2000): 5-16. Print.
- Merkin, Daphne. "Last Tango." Rev. of *The Beauty of the Husband* by Anne Carson. *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 30 Sept. 2001: n.pag. Web. 3 May 2010.
- Most, Glenn W. "Reflecting Sappho." *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*. Ed. Ellen Greene. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1996. 11-34. Print.
- Namjoshi, S. "Double Landscape." *Canadian Literature* 67 (1976): 21-30. *canlit.ca*. Web. 24 May 2012.

- Norris, Ken. "The Beginnings of Canadian Modernism." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 11 (1982): n.pag. *Canadian Poetry Online*. Web. 28 Apr 2012.
- Northrup, Tina. "Lyric Scholarship in Controversy: Jan Zwicky and Anne Carson." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 37.1 (2012): 192-214. *érudit*. Web. 10 May 2014.
- O'Riordan, Adam. "Red Doc" by Anne Carson. Rev. of *Red Doc* by Anne Carson. *The Telegraph* 12 Jul. 2013: n.pag. Web.
- Padolsky, Enoch. "Cultural Diversity and Canadian Literature: A Pluralistic Approach to Majority and Minority Writing in Canada." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Ed. Ajay Heble, et al. Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 1997. 24-42. Print.
- Page, P. K. *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-fiction*. Ed. Zailig Pollock. Toronto: UTP, 2007. Print.
- . *The Metal and the Flower*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 1954. Print.
- . *The Hidden Room: Collected Poems*. Vol.1. Erin, ON: The Porcupine's Quill, 1997. Print.
- "Palinodia." *Suda On Line: Byzantine Lexicography*. Ed. David Whitehead et al. Stoa Consortium, n.d. Web. 18 Apr 2012.
- Parsons, P. J. "Waste Paper City." *Oxyrhynchus: A City and its Texts*. *POxy: Oxyrhynchus Online*. University of Oxford. Web. 19 Mar 2012.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *21st Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002. Print.

- . *Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. 1981. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 1999. Print.
- . "Poetry on the Brink: Reinventing the Lyric." *Boston Review* 37.3 (2012): n.pag. Web. 22 January 2013.
- . *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1991. Print.
- Phillips, Adam. "Fickle Contracts: The Poetry of Anne Carson." Rev. of *Plainwater and Glass, Irony and God*. *Raritan* 16.2 (1996): 112-19. Print.
- Plato. "Ion." *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb. Vol. 9. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1925. 530-42. *The Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory Crane. Tufts U. Web. 14 Jan 2011.
- . "Phaedrus." *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Trans. Harold N. Fowler. Vol. 9. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1925. 227-79. *The Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory Crane. Tufts U. Web. 12 Jan 2011.
- Potts, Robert. "Neither Rhyme, nor Reason." *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 26 Jan. 2002: n.pag. Web. 6 May 2010.
- Potvin, Liza. "Phyllis Webb: The Voice That Breaks." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 32 (1993): 37-64. *Canadian Poetry Online*. Web. 17 May 2012.
- Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. New York, NY: New Directions, 1987. Print.
- . "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste." *Poetry* 1.6 (1913): 200-06. *The Modernist Journals*

- Project*. Web. 18 Jan 2012.
- . "In a Station of the Metro." *Poetry* 2.1 (1913): 12. *The Modernist Journals Project*.
Web. 18 Jan 2012.
- . *Lustra*. London, UK: Elkin Mathews. *The Internet Archive*, 28 Sept. 2006. Web.
21 January 2010.
- . *Selected Prose: 1909-1965*. Ed. William Cookson. NY: New Directions, 1973.
Print.
- . "Vortex." *Blast* 1 (1914): 153-54. *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 21 Jan
2012.
- Powell, Jim, trans. *The Poetry of Sappho*. By Sappho. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2007.
Print.
- Prins, Yopie. "Sappho's Afterlife in Translation." *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and
Transmission*. Ed. Ellen Greene. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1996. 36-67.
Print.
- . *Victorian Sappho*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.
- Queyras, Sina. *Expressway*. Toronto, ON: Coach House, 2009. Print.
- . *Lemon Hound*. Toronto, ON: Coach House, 2006. Print.
- . "Talking Expressway at Truck." Interview by Jane Thompson. *FFWD Weekly*. 26
Feb. 2009: n.pag. Web. 21 Jan 2013.
- . *Unleashed*. Toronto, ON: Bookthug, 2009. Print.
- Quintilian. *Institutes of Oratory*. Ed. Lee Honeycutt. Trans. John Selby Watson. 2006.
Iowa State U. Web. 24 Aug. 2013.
- Rae, Ian. "Anne Carson and the Solway Hoaxes." *Canadian Literature* 176 (2002): 45-

- 65, 204. Print.
- . "Dazzling Hybrids." *Canadian Literature* 166 (2000): 17-41. Print.
- . *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel In Canada*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queens UP, 2008. Print.
- . "Literary Scenes in Canada." *canlit.ca: Letters & Reflections*. Canadian Literature, 26 May 2009: n.pag. Web. 13 May 2010.
- . "Verglas: Narrative Technique in Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay'." *English Studies in Canada* 37.3-4 (2011): 163-86. Print.
- Rasula, Jed. "Ten Different Fruits from One Different Tree: Experiment as a Claim of the Book." *Chicago Review* 43.4 (1979): 28-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Apr. 2010.
- Renner, B. "A Review of Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* and 'Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings.'" Rev. of *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson. *elimae* (archives): n.pag. *elimae*. Web. 10 Jul. 2010.
- Rehak, Melanie. "Things Fall Together." Rev. of *Men in the Off Hours* by Anne Carson. *New York Magazine*. New York Times, 26 Mar 2000: 36-9. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Apr. 2010.
- Robertson, Lisa. "12 or 20 Questions with Lisa Robertson." By rob mclennan. *rob mclennan's blog* 13 Jul. 2009. Web.
- . *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip*. Toronto, ON: Coach House, 2009. Print.
- . *Nilling*. Toronto, ON: BookThug, 2012. Print
- . *The Men*. Toronto, ON: BookThug, 2006. Print.
- Roche, Paul, trans. *The Love Songs of Sappho*. By Sappho. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998. Print.

- Rollison, Damian Judge. "The Poem on the Page: Graphical Prosody in Postmodern American Poetry." *Text* 15 (2003): 291-303. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Dec 2012.
- Rorex, Robert A. "'Setting Out at Dawn on an Autumn River': A Painting by Wang Hui (1632-1717) and the enigma of Kuan T'ung (Tenth Century)." *Artibus Asiae* 41.1 (1979): 13-40. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Sampson, Fiona. "Symphony of Sighs." Rev. of *Decreation* by Anne Carson. *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 23 Sept. 2006: n.pag. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Sehgal, Parul. "Stories in a Classical Mode." Rev. of *Red Doc* by Anne Carson. *Bookforum* Feb. / Mar. 2013: n.pag. Web.
- Shulz, Kathryn. "Shulz on Anne Carson's Time-Traveling, Mind-Bending *Red Doc*." Rev. of *Red Doc* by Anne Carson. *New York Magazine* 11 Mar. 2013: n.pag. Web. 12 Oct. 2013.
- Silliman, Ron, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, et al. "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto." *Social Text* 19-20 (1988): 261-75. Print.
- . *The New Sentence*. New York, NY: Roof, 1995. Print.
- Smith, A. J. M. "The Poetry of P. K. Page." *Canadian Literature* 50 (1971): 17-27. *canlit.ca*. Web. 16 May 2012.
- Solway, David. *Director's Cut*. Erin, ON: The Porcupine's Quill, 2003. Print.
- . "The Trouble with Annie: David Solway Unmakes Anne Carson." *Books in Canada* 30.1 (July 2001): n.pag. Books in Canada. Web. 18 Apr. 2010.
- Starnino, Carmine. "Iconoclast with a tin ear: McGill professor's novel-in-verse rejects standard notions of plot." *The Gazette* 24 Oct 1998: J.4. *Canadian Newstand*. Web. 3 June 2010.

Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997.

Print.

Stringer, Arthur. *Open Water*. New York, NY: J.J. Little & Ives, 1914. Print.

Swann, Jane. "Mapping the Mind's 'I': Vision, Perception, and Complicity in the Early Poems of P. K. Page." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 30.1 (2005): 181-97.

érudit. Web. 23 May 2012.

Taylor, Kate. "Ancient Myth Comes of Age: *Autobiography of Red: a Novel in Verse*."

Rev. of *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson. *Globe and Mail* 23 May 1998:

n.pag. *CPI.Q*. Web. 3 June 2010.

Thompson, Tom. "Sweet New Style." Rev. of *The Men* by Lisa Robertson. *Boston*

Review (November/December 2006): n.pag. Web. 16 May 2013.

Trehearne, Brian. *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*. Montreal, QC: MQUP, 1989. Print.

---. *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition*. Toronto, ON: UTP, 1999.

Print.

---. "P. K. Page and Surrealism." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38.1 (2004): 46-64.

CBCA Complete. Web. 21 May 2012.

Tschofen, Monique. "'First I Must Tell About Seeing: (De)monstrations of Visuality and the Dynamics of Metaphor in Carson's *Autobiography of Red*.'" *Canadian Literature* 180 (2006): 31-50. Print.

Uppal, Priscila. *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English-Canadian Elegy*.

Montreal, QC: MQUP, 2008. *Proquest*. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.

Upton, Lee. *Defensive Measures: The Poetry of Niedecker, Bishop, Glück, and Carson*.

- Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2005. Print.
- Webb, Phyllis. *Naked Poems*. Vancouver, BC: Periwinkle P, 1965. Print.
- . *Trio*. Toronto: Contact P, 1954. Print.
- Webster, Derek. "Changing Literature: Carson's impact on contemporary writing is comparable to that of Eliot's Waste Land." Rev. of *The Beauty of the Husband* by Anne Carson. *Times – Colonist* 22 Apr. 2001: D.10. *Canadian Newstand*. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Wells, Zachariah. "Citric Bitch's Thinking is Shit." *Career Limiting Moves*. blogspot. 7 Feb. 2009. Web. 1 May 2013.
- West, M.L., trans. *Greek Lyric Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993. 36-48. Print.
- , trans. and intro. "A New Sappho Poem." *The Times Literary Supplement*. The Times (London), 24 Jun. 2005. Web. *TLS Historical Archive*. 21 Feb. 2011.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London: Verso, 1989. Print.
- Williamson, Margaret. *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.
- Winkler, Jack. "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics." *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 162-87. Print.
- . "Gardens of Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho's Lyrics." *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*. Ed. Ellen Greene. Berkeley, CA: U California P, 1996. 89-109. Print.
- Wittig, Monique, and Sande Zeig. *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*. NY:

- Avon, 1979. Print.
- Wordsworth, William. "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads." *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Russell Noyes. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1956. 357-67. Print.
- . "The Prelude." *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Russell Noyes. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1956. 269-302. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Peterborough: Broadview P, 2001.
- . *The Waves*. Toronto, ON: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Wunker, Erin. "O Little Expressway: Sina Queyras and the Traffic of Subversive Hope." *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 36.1 (2010): 36-55. Print.
- Young, James E. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2000. Print.
- Zelazo, Suzanne. "Slipping Teeth into Lemon: Reading Sina Queyras Reading." *Open Letter* 13.9 (2009): 195-205. Print.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2003. Print.
- Zinnes, Harriet. "What is Time Made Of?" *Hollins Critic* 38.1 (2001): 1-10. Print.
- Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*. Toronto: UTP, 1992. Print.