



Autobiography of Red

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Since 1995, Anne Carson has developed a reputation for poetic innovation in substance and structure merging classicism with experimentation. This complexity has made her work as interesting for the poetic technician as the lay reader, and such virtuosity has led to high praise in critical commentaries. Yet Carson's sometimes top-heavy gamesmanship and use of obscure allusions prove distracting, notably when she is not writing from her personal experience. Such criticism of her previous books will again trouble some readers of *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED: A NOVEL IN VERSE*.

This novel in verse is not an autobiography of her protagonist, the red monster Geryon, nor is it a retelling of the original Greek epic by Stesichoros. Instead, Geryon lives in a modern world, is molested as a child, and is betrayed in a love affair. The narrative is partially about the writing of Geryon's autobiography of artistic discovery. At its deepest level, the book is about the search for understandable meaning. Employing visual metaphors, as Geryon grows from childhood to college student to worker, he learns the coldness of words. This interplay makes *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED* the sort of text teachers love to explicate in the classroom. However, Carson's use of non-metrical prose and lines more poetic for the eye than the ear may annoy readers who want easy definitions of genres to label their artists. Carson's classicism tends to make this work occasionally over the top. Top heavy insertions of scientific data both slow the pace and seem metrically out of place, and her whimsical footnotes and appendices seem to be more frames than helpful illumination.

In the main, Carson is not as remote as Ezra Pound's uses of world culture, but non-academics may be unhappily distracted by her esoteric allusions. Yet, a work with as many layers and poetic explorations as this modern epic, *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED* should appeal to a wide range of readers for precisely that reason.

Sources for Further Study

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