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As Cupid's Arrows Fall: Sexual Growth, Abuse, and Coping in Phillips' *From the Devotions* and Carson's *Autobiography of Red*

Derek Mong '04

"I am that queer monster the artist, an obstinate
finality, an inexhaustible sensibility."

—Henry James

Children are innocent, adolescents less so, adults downright weathered. Well at least that's the convenient model for the convenience of thought. However, in reality no one fits this block logic and aging remains as particular as fingerprint. Between the child and the adult, we can count on change, but little else. Puberty and society both play a role. The final outcome? A new person with experiences ripe for the writing. Salinger told us this much and then told us no more, prompting Mailer to brand him, "the greatest writer to never leave prep school". Joyce wove a similar tale for the Irish Catholic, before Fitzgerald sold it to white bourgeois. Eventually Plath feminized the story. To this day, the *bildungsroman* remains one of fiction's most vital and salable genres.

And yet what of poetry and (its faithful subject) the purely erotic? What of the gay youth whose sexual growing pains eclipse Holden's split psyche or Daedalus' Catholic guilt? We find the answers in two unlikely sources: Carl Phillips and Anne Carson. Both poets depict, in their respective book, gay youths negotiating sexuality with their abusive partners. And yet both avoid any categorization that would pin them to a poetic movement or type. Carl Phillips, in particular, comments that, "I've been surprised to see how what, for me, are the incidentals of identity have sometimes been forced into a political arena charged with gender, race, and sexuality" (Rowell 204). Phillips isn't a "gay poet", but simply a poet who happens to be gay. The poem precedes the pulpit. Carson's no different, but her stance as a straight female rarely elicits that same sort of branding. Nevertheless, their depictions of sexual growth remain emotive and true. We attribute this feat not only to their poetic skill but to a universality of experience. Gay or straight, there's no easy answer to burgeoning sexuality.

On the surface Phillips' *From the Devotions* and Carson's *The Autobiography of Red* remain an unlikely pair. Phillips collects autonomous poems spoken through hushed and varied voices. Carson's louder, more comical, and driven to sequence through prose-like narration. This difference in style, purpose, and form affects their treatment of sexual growth and abuse. I'll begin with Phillips who explores early sexuality through three distinct lenses: wounding, instinct, and initiation. Poems like "Alba: Innocence," "Honey Hush," and "Arcadia" reveal, and then attempt to explain, a dark connection between the young Eros and pain. Child abuse becomes central to my reading. Carson, in her own unorthodox way, tackles up these same issues within a different context. Appropriating Greek myth, Carson writes a story of

passion and abuse, though she concludes with healing. Because *Red*'s a novel in verse, she's drawn to a certain narration. This difference in style, purpose, and form affects their treatment of sexual growth and abuse. I'll begin with Phillips who explores early sexuality through three distinct lenses: wounding, instinct, and initiation. Poems like "Alba: Innocence," "Honey Hush," and "Arcadia" reveal, and then attempt to explain, a dark connection between the young Eros and pain. Child abuse becomes central to my reading. Carson, in her own unorthodox way, tackles up these same issues within a different context. Appropriating Greek myth, Carson writes a story of passion and abuse, though she concludes with healing. Because *Red*'s a novel in verse, she's drawn to a certain narrative completion left open by Phillips. Namely, she provides Geryon with photography, a doubly creative and therapeutic gesture. Carson thus answers both her protagonist's whimpers as well as the voices whispering *From the Devotions*. Geryon survives as that "queer monster the artist."

I'll begin with Phillips' "Alba: Innocence," a poem which presents the body in its primary state, the erotic equivalent of *tabula rasa*. Phillips makes specific his subject matter when he writes, "the 'Innocence' alba has more to do, it seemed to me, with childhood innocence, that stage of vulnerability, etc" (Dykes 7). Appearing early in the book (page five), this poem sets the stage for subsequent poems about abuse. "Honey Hush" and "Arcadia" begin when innocence fades, or according to "Alba: Innocence", as "beauty, / when it occurs, surprises even itself" (lines 16-17). Phillips intends, with this poem, to show that one's initial lack of sexuality doesn't equate to emptiness, but instead to potential, a thirst for bodies and, as Phillips will have it, also pain. "Therefore it is innocence. Therefore/ a capacity for suffering" (lines 21-22). This information doesn't emerge until stanza six, and we attribute its placement to the poem's backwards narration. One can't fully grasp the innocent until they've peeled away the experience layered over top. Those layers are not always attractive, as we find in the poem's most potent image: "a bruise/ lifting itself over time from the darker/ blues to, slowly, something like amber, / to at last whatever, before the wounding, / the flesh was" (lines 10-14): an image so frighteningly gorgeous it threatens to outshine its thematic punch. Phillips writes wounding on par with satiated desire, and thus reveals a theme that will continue throughout "The Living", his book's first section. "I should mention that behind... most of the poems that make up the first half of that first section of the book, is the notion of abuse, of children in particular," (Dykes 3).

Phillips continues, searching for analogies to that "flesh before/ or without knowledge" (lines 14-15). We're given three: song untrained, meat, and good soil wanting (they appear in lines 16 and 19). Each comparison adds

another interpretive layer to innocence as it asks for something to affect the untouched flesh, to fill the "capacity for suffering." The flesh as "song untrained", for example, invokes Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric" and the rich homoeroticism we associate with his verse. Meat, however, infers hunger, another bodily desire Phillips often equates to sexual need (for other examples see "The Blue Castrato," section II, line 14 or "In the Borghese Gardens" lines 15-16). Finally, when "good soil waits" it waits for something, namely seed. That metaphor implies spring farmland before planting, but also seeds of the loin: semen. If one reads these analogies as I have, then it's obvious that the flesh without knowledge beacons another man. Thus Phillips' primary sexual stage doesn't present itself as blank canvas, but as flesh waiting and wanting other flesh, perhaps before it's even aware of what it's asking. Pain and wounding will inevitably follow.

A question, however, remains: what compels the wanting, on both the adolescent's side, and his (solicited or unsolicited) partner? This seems pivotal to Phillips' exploration of early sexuality and the repercussions of abuse. The poet has said, "I believe that there are, for lack of a less worn-to-the-bone term, forces—the erotic, of course, also the violent, also trust..." which the ancients considered akin to gravity or wind (Dyke 10). Along similar lines (though more narrowly defined), may be the term *instinct*, and I believe Phillips wrote "Honey Hush" with this word in mind.

One glance at "Honey Hush" reveals two distinct visual characteristics at play: 1) The opening use of italics juxtaposed with its plain font response and 2) a division between sections. This is a good point with which to form a reading. Phillips explains the first characteristic when he writes, "the italics often [serve] as the voice of somebody dead, or of a deity, or of no one identifiable except as another part of the narrative self by whom the poem is being primarily laid out" (Rowell 213). His first two possibilities apply to *Devotions*' later sections, leaving "another part of the narrative self" the source for this frightening voice:

It will be as if: fur. As if trust
could be fur. Imagine,
bees coat the sugar body
That is yours...
see how your body hums?
Say you love them. Now. You must
say you love them... (lines 1-7)

In these lines Phillips speaks as the actual abuser, the man (or woman) pressing himself or herself against the child. (It's important to note that this poem does not specify sex or sexuality, though we generally conceptualize men molesting boys, a model Phillips uses in "Arcadia" and "Alba: Come"). The abuser tries to persuade the child into the sexual unknown, while also easing his discomfort through explanation. The aggressor begins by equating fur to trust, a logical connection for any child who owns a teddy bear. He then compliments the child's "sugar body" and tells him to expect a new sensation: "see how your body hums?" The voice

ends with forceful words that demand the child's love, a love the child can barely explain, though he attempts to do so in the following lines: "I could love the bees, / and neither mind nor be surprised / by their weight, slow as drones / and as deliberate, upon me" (lines 10-13). The bees and the weight represent that man consummating his perverse desires.

The second, more narrative section of this poem stands in stark contrast to the first and initially yields few links to its companion. Again we find children who "make of their small hands small binoculars" as well as some words that remind us of section one (line 19). They are weights (line 23 and 27), persuasion (line 28), and a phrase I'll highlight for its overall importance: "Their instinct is that they [the deer] need more; and that, here, / they will find it" (lines 16-17). But how do these pieces explain child abuse? We begin with the narrative, deer crossing a channel in search of something left intentionally vague, the it-they-need-more-of. What remains important is their reason: instinct, an animal urge programmed into existence. This instinct necessitates their crossing and drowning, and through his diction Phillips equates that drowning to the preceding voice of the abuser. Asking a question we often pose to unthinkable crimes Phillips writes, "How else understand it, / this swimmer, that one, there and then / not, except as when sometimes the body / meets a weight sudden, unlooked for, / and large, the way persuasion is large—" (lines 24-28). The description of drowning, a weight placed on the deer, a weight large like persuasion, matches the child's description of his aggressor's body pressed upon him. The deer find this weight through instinct, and thus we're led to believe the aggressor is driven to his sex acts for the same reason. In the author's own words, "we can think of the abuser as someone who is very much in the service of—if not in thrall to—Eros gone awry" (Dykes 3).

This subtle connection between abuse and instinct raises questions I've no doubt Phillips himself has asked. What would it mean if child abusers acted on instinct, were acting according to their nature? Do we side with Nietzsche when he writes, "All naturalism in morality, that is, all healthy morality, is ruled by an instinct" (27)? Phillips certainly does not agree with instinctual living, condone child abuse, or pardon its perpetrators (a point he's made apparent in interviews). Nevertheless instinct may explain the aggressor without justifying his behavior. The moral question's left unanswered in the poems, though Phillips expects us to ask it. The poem following "Honey Hush" expands this theme, but provides instinct and complicity on both sides of an abusive relationship. I'll label this stage initiation.

Phillips describes "Arcadia" as an "inflected collage" or a sequence assembled through "disparate sources [brought] together as one" (Rowells 213). Though hardly disparate, "Arcadia's" narrative does reflect (as Phillips asserts) the inflected language used throughout the book, a style that forces the reader "to adjust one's psychology, one's sense of expectation" (213). Perhaps the most cohesive collage, "Arcadia" tracks the sexual growth of a gay farmhand

across four distinct stages. The poem's broader trope is horse taming, a comparison Phillips makes to the boy's sexual initiation/abuse. And it is a horse Phillips begins with: "The horse does not drink, but I am sure/ he is wanting" (sec. I, lines 1-2). Two elements, not uncommon to this book, must be made immediately apparent: the voice and the thirst. Phillips begins this poem speaking as one of the boy's co-workers. This experienced lover looks to train the next generation of both horses and farm boys. The language infers this double meaning. "His body like mine,/ in places: what would, but does not" (lines 5-6). It's not just a horse that won't drink, but a boy not yet aware of sexuality. We've previously seen Phillips equate hunger/thirst with sexual desire, so this comparison comes as no surprise. Thus when the speaker ends the poem with "bring him to me" he's figuratively commanding the boy to join him in sex acts. The conceit remains gorgeous throughout its frightening implications, especially considering the re-imagined cliché underlying it all: *you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink*. The older man intends to prove this maxim wrong.

In section two, "He is a Lover of Horses," the older farmhands tempt the boy and then leave him to question his mistaken sexual conduct. The boy's first problem? "He does not know the difference between the smell/ of his body and the hay it has always been/ his one job to carry. He does not know the difference/ between horses and men" (lines 2-5). When the boy offers the men hay, they repay him with a "grief that he knows/ when they leave him" (lines 7-8). If there's a moral question here it remains murky. Both horse and man act upon instinct, pleasuring themselves with the boy. The boy complies while remaining confused. The pain he feels when the older men leave encourages him to bring them a body and not hay. This is their intention and just another part of the initiation.

Section three builds on this further, positing masturbation as the next step towards sexual freedom. "The one hand down his pants is not- however/ mathematic- a proof, but feels good" (lines 3-4). This solitary pleasure gives the boy enough confidence to continue despite previous setbacks. No man accompanies him, leaving self-stimulation his one and only goal. He ends with confidence and an eroticism blooming like spring: "The field that contains him is a wide one/.... He is sure he is the one flower in it" (lines 7-9).

After experiencing these stages, the boy can now complete the process by sleeping with one man. "This one-done, but still stiff- is a dark/ weight upon him, that stays, groaning/whispering/ *baby* and *pie*" (lines 2-4). Remnants of "Honey Hush" linger (the sexual partner as weight, the child as sweetness), positioning this older farmhand as just another sexual aggressor. Furthermore, Phillips titles this section "The Taming" directly equating the sex with horse training. The other farmhands have finally initiated and trained the boy; he's ready to receive other men. However, one can't deny the beauty written into these lines. Phillips describes the boy's partner as "not like the others, who say nothing and leave/ soon" (line 1-2). Though perhaps not an equal,

the older farmhand remains after climaxing, and seems to have approached the boy with his permission. The description of orgasm should also be noted for its warmth: "the sun maybe, maybe buried inside me" (line 8). Finally, a quick tally of line numbers reveals the poem's form: an unrhymed sonnet, the volte placed at the boy's climax. These contrasting depictions of the sex act leave the reader unsure of Phillips' stance in the matter. He offers no opinion on the rightness or wrongness of sexual initiation, but merely depicts its occurrence. For better or worse, this remains one possible road towards sexual maturity.

It has been characteristic of these poems that they end without answers. Phillips is highly adept at presenting sexuality and abuse, linking multiple metaphors, chaining his inverted syntax, but he usually finishes in uncertainty. Questions are bountiful, resolution sparse. Partly, this has to do with his poetic vision: "For better or for worse, I see everything through the lens of loss" (Dykes 3). But perhaps a more substantial answer comes from his desire to skew narrative. Phillips had this to say *Devotions* just after its release, "I am increasingly less interested in traditional narrative in my poetry, and more in seeing how narrative can be constructed intuitively from remnant" (Rowell 213). Remnant resists explicit, on-the-page completion, and it's this sort of poetry Phillips currently writes. Thus he's not concerned with resolving issues of abuse and sexual growth, but more in presenting them through varied voices.

Anne Carson, however, begins with remnant (actual fragments from Stesichoros' poetry) and then deliberately moves towards completion through narrative. She fills in the holes that the Greek texts left. This tactic stands in opposition to Phillips who's more inclined to create holes. Nevertheless, their subject matter overlaps. In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson doesn't so much write single poems as she writes book chapters, each one another step towards a quasi-conclusion. Considering she began *Red* as a full-fledged novel, we're that much more justified in reading direction and conclusion in her verse. A year before *Red's* publication she says, "Well, there's a novel I've written that was all prose at first and very thick. Then I thought, 'What if I break these lines up a bit? Maybe they'd move along more smartly.' So now the novel's in verse" (D'Agata 22). The creative process and product hardly resembles *From the Devotion*, and it's precisely for those reasons that Carson moves towards an end Phillips abandons. Sexual growth and abuse, for example, a key factor in Geryon's development, need some concluding gesture, even if it be failure, to resolve the narrative arc. Luckily Carson does not end in pathos or even tragedy, but instead posits photography as healing for the abused. Photography redeems pain while simultaneously halting time. This comforts Geryon as it could likewise comfort the children in Phillips' poems. Not only can Geryon step back from the world when he lifts his camera, but he can also keep time from progressing, and thus delay his painful growing up. This twofold use of the camera neutralizes the troubles brought on by an abused and insecure

c h i l d h o o d

However, how does Geryon become an abused child? What creates the initial distress that will necessitate a healing tool like photography? The Herakles myth provides one answer. By appropriating Stesichoros' story (Geryon, the tenth labor, et al), Carson links her contemporary "Romance" to classical violence. The original text, some of which Carson loosely translates in *Red*, provides just such an image of wounding: "Arrow means kill It parted Geryon's skull like a comb Made/ The boy neck lean At an odd slow angle sideways as when a/ Poppy shames itself in a whip of Nude breeze" (13). When Herakles meets Geryon, according to Stesichoros, he simply splits Geryon's skull with an arrow. When the same characters meet according to Carson, they fall in love. This replacement of pain with affection is not accidental, but a deliberate connection underlying the whole book. Carson's initial choice to retell the tenth labor demonstrates her early and acknowledged wish to mix wounding with love. Furthermore, her description of Geryon's death, a poppy shaming itself in a nude breeze, makes Stesichoros's original image downright sexual. His lines read, "Geryon bent his neck aslant/ even as a poppy whose delicate structure/ decay, and its petals soon fall" (fragment, pg. 89). Carson's amendments are obvious. These general choices concerning *Red's* content and translations cast a cloud of sexual abuse over the book's particular events.

Nevertheless, it is those particulars, (i.e. actual passages from *Red*) which further establish Geryon as a victim of abuse. The most memorable and disturbing example appears in chapter II, "Each", when Geryon first discovers sexuality in his bunk bed:

His brother was pulling on his stick as he did most
nights before sleep
why do you pull on your stick?
Geryon asked. None of your business let's see yours,
said his brother. No.
Bet you don't have one. Geryon checked. Yes I do.
You're so ugly I bet it fell off. (27).

Some similarities exist between this passage and Phillips' sexual initiation, but on the whole Carson portrays Geryon's introduction to "stick pulling" in a far harsher light. Certainly there's complicity; Geryon does choose to commit (or submit) to these sex acts (see passage below). However, that's a small consolation for their perversity. By throwing incest, intimidation, and an exceedingly villainous brother into the mix, Carson firmly establishes the wrongness of this behavior. The moral questions brought out in "Arcadia" give way to pure condemnation. She continues:

... And so they developed an economy of sex for
A c a t s - e y e s
Pulling sticks makes my brother happy, thought
Geryon. Don't tell Mom,
said his brother.
Voyaging into the rotten ruby of the night be
came a contest of freedom
and bad l o g i c (2 8)

And so the incest takes on a nightly routine and Geryon retreats further, claiming the inside world as his own while the outside remains painful. Repeat offences take their toll despite the brother's efforts to appease. Before long, the red monster begins "his autobiography. In this work Geryon sets down all inside thing/ particularly his own heroism/ and early death much to the despair of the community. He coolly omitted/ all outside things" (pg. 29). This therapeutic journal slowly evolves from tomato sculptures to deterministic poems to photographs.

Of course Geryon's sexual growth and abuse continue after his brother, and his next partner becomes arguably as problematic: the hyper-masculine and insensitive Herakles. They "recognized each other like a pair of italics" (39) in chapter VII and have discovered the bedroom by chapter XVI. "Put your mouth on it Geryon please./ Geryon did. It tasted sweet enough. I am learning a lot in this year of my life./ thought Geryon. It tasted very young./ Geryon felt clear and powerful- not some wounded angel after all/ but a magnetic person" (54). This sexual milestone *does* parallel the last section of "Arcadia" easily linking Phillips' conception of sexual growth with Carson's. Again we have a younger male initiated by a more experienced lover. The two constitute a complicit though unequal pair. One can draw further parallels when examining this chapter's title: "Grooming." Carson uses a double entendre that's nearly identical to "The Taming", though grooming literally refers to the nat-picking (an act between Geryon and Herakles that, from outward appearances, resembles oral sex). Still Carson figuratively infers the cultivation of a lover. Through these sex acts Herakles prepares Geryon to be his concubine, dominating the boy as if he were a domestic animal. It takes Geryon a chapter to comprehend this arrangement: "Geryon did an early red-winged LOVESLAVE on the garage of the priest's house/ next to the Catholic church" (55). A precursor to his photography, this graffiti expresses his insecurity and sense of emotional confinement. Each word evokes his brother's abuse, the cage, lavaman, and Herakles domination. Again providing a multiply interpretive title Carson intends the "Walls" to be both a canvas and barrier.

Having shown the abuse that besets Geryon, I'd like now to examine the antidote Carson proposes for his suffering: photography. Geryon's camera first appears in chapter VIII, just after he's met Herakles, but photography's not fully employed as a thematic device until "Red Patience" and the chapters following Herakles' departure. Chapter XXIII, "Water", demonstrates Geryon's initial desire to ease his discomfort through pictures. Throughout the chapter Geryon's lost in the sorrow of Herakles insensitivity and departure. "Rain lashing the kitchen window/ sent another phrase/ of Herakles chasing across his mind. A photograph is just a bunch of light/ hitting a plate. Geryon wipe his face/ with his wings and went out to the living room to look for the camera" (71). Herakles' lingering comment reduces Geryon's art to a mechanized process devoid of creativity or metaphysical powers. Reacting to this memory and his overall

heartache, Geryon makes a picture that conveys the fatalism and confinement plaguing his mind:

... The photograph is titled "If He Sleep He Shall Do Well"
It shows a fly floating in a pail of water-
drowned with a strange agitation of light around
the wings. Geryon used
a fifteen minute exposure.
When he first opened the shutter the fly seemed
to be still alive. (71)

Geryon's photograph screams autobiography, not simply for its place in the journal, but through the content of the image. Carson doesn't veil this reading. Obviously, it's been raining since the chapter began, and as the opening line suggests, there's little escape from the water, "Water! Out from two crouching masses of the world the world leapt" (70). Furthermore, the fly's confined, literally caged as the rain collects and drowns him. The physical and emotional similarities between Geryon and the quickly appear. The "agitation of light around the wings" hints at Geryon's unique potential to fly. However this attribute does not occur to Geryon, who is merely aware of the fly's monster-like appearance and inescapable containment. Carson writes, "Weak as a fly Geryon crouched against the sink/ with his fists in his mouth/ and his wings trailing over the drainbaord" (71). Furthermore, the knowledge Geryon carries of his own "early death much to the despair of the community" has also been projected onto the fly. We're quickly reminded of "Red Patience", not simply from the 15 minutes exposure, but from the way Geryon captures and views the image. "What if you took a fifteen-minute exposure of a man in a jail, let's say the lava/ has just reached his window?/ he asked. I think you are confusing subject and object, she said./ Very likely, said Geryon" (52). In "If He Sleep He Shall Do Well" subject and object become nearly indistinguishable. Geryon viewing the photograph becomes intractably linked to the photograph image and the photo itself.

Any line separating the viewer and the viewed disappears completely in South America. Here Geryon takes his own portrait:

...he set up the camera on the windowsill and activated the timer, then positioned himself on the bed.
It is a black and white photograph showing a naked young man in fetal position.
He has entitled it "No Tail!"
The fantastic fingerwork of his wings is outspread on the bed like a black lace map of South America.
(9 7)

Once again we're given a beautiful and disturbing image, wrought with intimacy and a comic lining not previously at play in his work. The implications of self-portraiture cannot be overlooked. In photographing himself (or the fly for that matter, which one could label a symbolic self-portrait) Geryon temporarily moves his own fragile body from the pained, inexplicable, and temporal world, to the tangible and timeless print surface. Geryon's image(s) of self do not convey ego

tism or vanity, characteristics associated with the poorest self-portraiture, but instead an attempt at personal communion. Susan Sontag puts it best when she writes, "Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood" (3-4). For Geryon to photograph himself and then view the product of his labors, allows him to acquire knowledge of his existence and appearance. This may seem silly to the average, self-assured, and confident individual, but for Geryon such an act becomes monumental. Self-portraiture equals self-learning, and that's arguably Geryon's motivation throughout the novel. Sontag continues:

The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: "There is the surface. Now think—or rather feel, intuit—what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way." Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, sexually connotative language. He tells her, "Kneel down speculation, and fantasy. (23)

Not coincidentally, Geryon cannot explain or comprehend the full weight of his own sexuality, wings, or aging. He's often so starved for self-knowledge that he's left to intuit or feel his own place in the world. By photographing himself and then viewing those images, he invites not others (i.e. Herakles) but Geryon to deduce, speculate, and fantasize about his existence. Each photograph creates another pathway into his own psyche, one with all the possibilities Sontag outlines above. Photography allows Geryon to achieve a modicum of self-actualization.

But even beyond its therapeutic value, photography offers Geryon a temporal anomaly, which further aids in his healing: the ability to halt time, as we've seen in both "Red Patience" and his fly image. The question, "What is time made of?" plagues Geryon throughout the novel, tying into his fear of death as well as the difficulties brought on by aging. He senses an impermanence in his existence, dating back to his prophetic writing concerning his own death. This anxiety relates directly to the passage of time:

What is time made of?
He could feel it massed around him, he could see its big deadweight blocks padded tight to get her all the way from Bermuda to Buenos Aires—too tight. His lungs contracted fear of time came at him. Time was squeezing Geryon like the pleats of an accordion. (80)

The philosophers offer one possible answer to Geryon, "Time is an abstraction—just a meaning/ that we impose on motion" (93) but that hardly satisfies the boy. He prefers his own explanation and acts upon it in the last chapters of the book: "Much truer/ is the time that strays into photographs and stops" (93). It is here Geryon's photography flourishes.

Carson titles seven or her last eight chapters after Geryon's photographs while she her character learns wholeness through film. As he shots pictures Geryon can feel

attached to and yet paradoxically distanced from the world. He explains this unusual participation with reality: "I am disappearing he thought/ but the photographs were worth it./ A volcano is not a mountain like others. Raising a camera to one's face has effects/ no one can calculate in advance" (135). Others have noted the pleasurable voyeurism that accompanies photography, but few have linked it to participation as Sontag has: "Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening" (12). Through the camera Geryon both encourages and participates in the events around him. As opposed to simply being acted upon (both sexually and in general), he has found a moderating existence in which he too acts. He's found the place of the artist. With each shot Geryon authors some part of his life, controlling where he had otherwise felt controlled. His images connect the infinite slope of time with all its consequences: aging, death, an existential dread that relinquishes control. Sontag again: "the photographer stays behind his or her camera, creating a tiny element of another world: the image world that bids to outlast us all" (11). Permanence from an impermanent world: that's the effect of Geryon's camera. Through a lens he can both engage and contemplate. It's the sort of participatory balance he's lacked since his adolescence began.

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