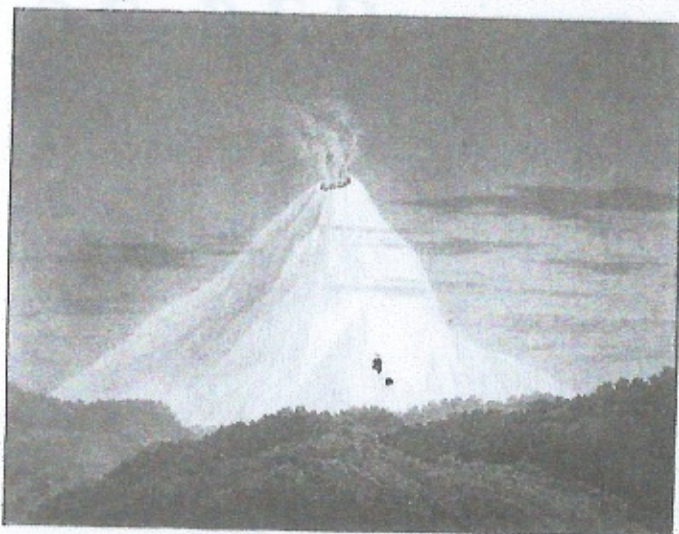


AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

RED



A Novel in Verse

VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES

1962

A Division of Random House, Inc.

A N N E C A R S O N

"Anne Carson is, for me, the most exciting poet writing in English today.

—MICHAEL ONDAATJE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF RED

A Novel in Verse

ANNE CARSON

VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES

Vintage Books

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New York





RED MEAT:
FRAGMENTS OF STESICHOROS

I. GERYON

Geryon was a monster everything about him was red
Put his snout out of the covers in the morning it was red
How stiff the red landscape where his cattle scraped against
Their hobbles in the red wind
Burrowed himself down in the red dawn jelly of Geryon's
Dream

Geryon's dream began red then slipped out of the vat and ran
Upsail broke silver shot up through his roots like a pup

Secret pup At the front end of another red day

II. MEANWHILE HE CAME

Across the salt knobs it was Him
Knew about the homegold
Had sighted red smoke above the red spires

III. GERYON'S PARENTS

If you persist in wearing your mask at the supper table
Well Goodnight Then they said and drove him up
Those hemorrhaging stairs to the hot dry Arms
To the ticking red taxi of the incubus
Don't want to go want to stay Downstairs and read

IV. GERYON'S DEATH BEGINS

Geryon walked the red length of his mind and answered No
It was murder And torn to see the cattle lay
All these darlings said Geryon And now me

V. GERYON'S REVERSIBLE DESTINY

His mother saw it mothers are like that
Trust me she said Engineer of his softness
You don't have to make up your mind right away
Behind her red right cheek Geryon could see
Coil of the hot plate starting to glow

VI. MEANWHILE IN HEAVEN

Athena was looking down through the floor
Of the glass-bottomed boat Athena pointed
Zeus looked *Him*

VII. GERYON'S WEEKEND

Later well later they left the bar went back to the centaur's
Place the centaur had a cup made out of a skull Holding three
Measures of wine Holding it he drank Come over here you can
Bring your drink if you're afraid to come alone The centaur
Patted the sofa beside him Reddish yellow small alive animal
Not a bee moved up Geryon's spine on the inside

VIII. GERYON'S FATHER

A quiet root may know how to holler He liked to
Suck words Here is an almighty one he would say
After days of standing in the doorway

NIGHTBOLLSNORTED

IX. GERYON'S WAR RECORD

Geryon lay on the ground covering his ears
The sound
Of the horses like roses being burned alive

X. SCHOOLING

In those days the police were weak Family was strong
Hand in hand the first day Geryon's mother took him to
School She neatened his little red wings and pushed him
In through the door

XI. RIGHT

Are there many little boys who think they are a
Monster? But in my case I am right said Geryon to the
Dog they were sitting on the bluffs The dog regarded him
Joyfully

XII. WINGS

Steps off a scraped March sky and sinks
Up into the blind Atlantic morning One small
Red dog jumping across the beach miles below
Like a freed shadow

XIII. HERAKLES' KILLING CLUB

Little red dog did not see it he felt it All
Events carry but one

XIV. HERAKLES' ARROW

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

I I . E A C H

Like honey is the sleep of the just.

When Geryon was little he loved to sleep but even more he loved to wake up.

He would run outside in his pajamas.

Hard morning winds were blowing life bolts against the sky each one blue enough to begin a world of its own.

The word *each* blew towards him and came apart on the wind. Geryon had always had this trouble: a word like *each*,

when he stared at it, would disassemble itself into separate letters and go.

A space for its meaning remained there but blank.

The letters themselves could be found hung on branches or furniture in the area.

What does each mean?

Geryon had asked his mother. She never lied to him. Once she said the meaning it would stay.

She answered, *Each means like you and your brother each have your own room.*

He clothed himself in this strong word *each*.

He spelled it at school on the blackboard (perfectly) with a piece of red silk chalk.

He thought softly

of other words he could keep with him like *beach* and *scream*. Then they moved

Geryon into his brother's room.

It happened by accident. Geryon's grandmother came to visit and fell off the bus.

The doctors put her together again

with a big silver pin. Then she and her pin had to lie still in Geryon's room

for many months. So began Geryon's nightlife.

Before this time Geryon had not lived nights just days and their red intervals.