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ANNE CARSON'S SUBTLE GENRE IN THE *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED*

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ABSTRACT

The impeccable ingenuity of Anne Carson with an elite outlook to the *Autobiography of Red* edifies the subtle genre in the form of a poetic novel with its firm roots in Greek mythology. Carson, a professor cum poet attempts a precocious projection of the protagonist, Geryon, in the *Autobiography of Red* by which making an appeal to her readers to opine the literary piece to be the autobiography of Geryon. Carson's intelligence actually, lies in transposing Geryon's story, however, into the contemporary world, so that he is suddenly not just a monster but a moody, artsy, gay teenager navigating the difficulties of sex and love and identity. Even his persistent tormentor, Herakles, is delineated as a charismatic destructor who ends up breaking Geryon's heart. The bizarre brilliance of Carson as a poetic-story teller with reference to the *Autobiography of Red* indeed, snatches one's interest with its charming and hilarious remoteness of the ancient myth juxtaposed with the acquaintance of the recent environment which leads to the Carsonian effect tinged with subtle discrepancy between the weird and well-known.

Keywords— *Autobiography of Red*, Carsonian Effect, Poetic Novel, Greek Mythology,

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Canadian literature is well known for its literary pieces in French and English with a Canadian perceptive. Anne Carson, the recipient of award for her literary piece, *Autobiography of Red*, is an exquisite story teller of unexplored Greek mythology as deciphered from *The Autobiography of Red* published on 31st March, 1998. This poetic novel of 149 pages focuses on Geryon's accomplishments besides adventures. This protagonist is a Greek mythical monster who is represented through a small boy to amalgamate and bridge the mythological and modern ideas of Carson. In fact,

through the combination of ancient mythology with modern society, Carson transforms the entire ambience of the mythical character, Geryon, the monster of the novel. This poetic novel revolves around the feelings, the predicaments and sufferings of the small boy who represents Geryon of ancient times. Indeed, this article aspires to explore the nuances of this poetic novel, a subtle genre of Anne Carson that sets itself an exquisite tool to deal with the two extreme facets of times called ancient and modern.

2.1 A CREATIVE PROJECTION OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Geryon in Greek mythology is a monster born to Chrysaor and Callirrhoe with three heads and wings. He lives in Erytheia besides acting as a herder of Eurytion. Geryon's possession of a hound is observed with two heads named Orthrus. When Heracle sails to Eyrtheia to capture the cattle of Geryon as his tenth labour, he attains the golden cup through the sun god's by whom he reaches Erytheia in return. He kills Orthurus in a single blow further to his fight with Geryon is victorious by killing Geryon. In the Autobiography of Red, Carson strikes a good balance between the mythological cruxes described above with supremacy of modern conceptualizing. Carson's fascination for this ancient Greek mythology when observed from her verdict,

"You doubt God? Well more to the point I credit God with the good sense to doubt me. What is mortality after all but divine doubt flashing over us? For an instant God suspends assent and poof! We disappear", as a matter of fact, invigorates her sparkling perception to conglomerate the ideas of ancient with that of modern.

2.2 AN EMBLEMATIC COMBINATION OF MYTHOLOGY AND MODERNITY

The identical prevalence of poems and novels in literature is a usual feature. However, the combination of these two distinct features of poetry and novel are edified in this subtle genre called poetic novel. The subtlety is further intensified by the culmination of mythological characters accommodated in modern society. The verse style of this novel forms an effective equilibrium for the beautiful portrayal of mythical monsters as well handled by Carson. In Greek myth there are umpteen characters and stories like the story of Geryon and Heracles. Therefore, to the modern readers this inscrutable poetic novel proves itself to be an impeccable style handled for exuberantly projecting the Greek mythical characters. Even the traumatic temperament of Geryon shown as a small boy by Carson is enunciated by the authorial comment like;

"Depression is one of the unknown modes of being.

There are no words for a world without a

self, seen with impersonal clarity.

All language can register is the slow return to oblivion we call health when imagination automatically recolors the landscape and habit blurs perception and language takes up its routine flourishes."

to bring a blend of ancient and modern themes to promptly sustain the subtle genre. This innovative subtlety is of course discrepant from that of the other works which embark on the Greek and other mythologies. Actually, the complexity of Carson's work makes it holistically interesting. On the other hand, it is not entirely retelling the mythical story as there are necessary changes pursued to hold the attention of the modern readers. To state precisely, Anne Carson has wonderfully embedded Greek mythology with the facts of modernity in this poetic novel.

3.1 AN APPROPRIATE COMPARATIVE GENRE

The genre of this poetic novel sets an avenue to compare the weird and well-known or mythology and modernity.

"Words bounce. Words, if you let them, will do what they want to do and what they have to do." says Anna Carson which in fact, proclaims her potentiality to entwine a phenomenal mythical blend in an autobiographical framework. The work kindles interest as Carson opines "Reality is a sound, you have to tune in to it not just keep yelling", which perhaps shall have paved the way for its huge success.

In the ancient story Geryon, the monster is observed with wings, three heads and six hands whereas in Carson's work except the wings of Geryon, his heads and six hands are left obsolete. However, Carson has projected this monster as a little boy who experiences great anxiety to know about his identity and exhibit a deep-rooted desire for photography. In Carson's description,

"Small, red, and upright he waited, gripping his new book bag tight in one hand and touching a lucky penny inside his coat pocket with the other, while the first snows of winter floated down on his eyelashes and covered the branches around him and silenced all trace of the world", a monster from the myth gets absolutely changed into a little boy of modern world.

In the Greek mythology, Geryon, shown as a terrific monster is contradictorily shown as a protagonist who vulnerably suffers physically and mentally in Carson's work. Perhaps, this boy delineated in the story endures with crucial sexual abuses by his own brother. Whereas, in ancient story Geryon is not shown as a protagonist instead as a warrior of Red Island where Herakles is assigned to slay down Geryon and capture his cattle. Carson fine tunes this mythical reference of Geryon into a new theme as "He was trying to fit this Herakles onto the one he knew" as "Herakles breaks Geryon's heart and steals his innocence" thus juxtaposing and precociously blending the ancient and modern times is fabulous.

4.1 HOLISTIC SUBTLETY THROUGH THE ASTUTE DICTION

The blend of human emotions and persistence of a monster's mental agony is well blended through lucid diction that exemplifies the romance, love, pain, sufferings, harassments, and mental agony of Geryon in the poetic novel. When Carson states,

"She stumbled then and Geryon caught her other arm, it was like a handful of autumn. He felt huge and wrong. When is it polite to let go someone's arm after you grab it?" the culmination of Geryon's emotion and his utopic feel is expressed through a coherent comprehensive discourse. This makes the literary piece stand distinct and well-ahead of other ancient mythological stories in the perspective of modern readers. Actually, this desirable comprehensibility is achieved through the simple diction that invigorates easy inference of cohesive conceptualizing. Above all, Carson's noteworthy diction which declares "Geryon was a monster everything about him was red" also describes how

"...some hours later they were down at the railroad tracks standing close together by the switch lights. The huge night moved overhead scattering drops of itself."

Even though this is a novel it is written in verse, it appreciably twines the story of Geryon with humane spectacles. This very reason has of course kindled the national critic, Bruce Hainley, to address Carson as 'A philosopher of heart break' for having

poured out all the emotions through simple and comprehensive diction. The subsequent line, through which Carson establishes Geryon's childhood, well edifies Geryon's sufferings and his traumatic sexual abuse by his own brother besides the inability of Geryon's mother to help him to get rid of that predicament.

"He burned in the presence of his mother. I hardly know you anymore, she said leaning against the doorway of his room. It had rained suddenly at supertime, now sunset was startling drops at the window. Stale peace of old bedtimes filled the room. Love does not make me gentle or kind, though Geryon as he and his mother eyed each other from opposite shores of light"

Carson has not swindled the diction to project the vulnerability of the problem of Geryon, instead has taken an easy means to highlight a cumbersome dilemma through comprehensive lucidity of the poetic diction wherever necessary. This is how Carson induces her readers' sympathy for Geryon.

4.2 A FAR-REACHING POETIC STYLE TINGED WITH A NOVELISTIC GENRE

This poetic novel has 149 pages. It is written in verse to exhibit the different phases of Geryon's life. In the preliminary phase Geryon's childhood in which he has crucially suffered the sexual abuse by his own brother besides the lack of his mother's help to get rid of that problem is explicitly narrated. In the consecutive phase Geryon's love over Heracle and his betrayal in return is delineated. In the final phase of the novel the passion over photography and Geryon's search for identity is finely dealt by Carson. It is noteworthy that even though this poetic novel extends up to 149 pages it does not create any distraction or mental fatigue while reading. Instead this lengthy poetic novel sustains the curiosity and interest of the readers.

5.1 CONCLUSION

Carson's Autobiography of Red is certainly different from her other literary pieces through her usage of subtle diction, style, genre, and conglomeration of themes from the extreme

ancient and modern times. When Anne Carson states,

“These days Geryon was experiencing a pain not felt since childhood. His wings were struggling. They tore against each other on his shoulders like the little mindless red animals they were”, she not only shows the struggle of Geryon but also the fine culmination of the meek human emotions merged with obstinate monster instinct which may not have been an easy achievement for any writer. This contrastive combination of makes this literary piece of Carson stands apart as a distinct literary treasure and has carved a niche for her in Canadian Literature.

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