



Reseñas / *Book reviews*

Anne Carson: Antiquity (Laura Jansen, ed.), London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021, XVI+304pp. ISBN: 978-1-3501-7475-7. PRICE 33,95 €. *Reviewed by María Elena Higueruelo, Universidad de Granada.* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3307-6170>.

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The oeuvre of Canadian poet, essayist, and translator Anne Carson, also Professor of Classics, is outstanding because of the irreverent originality of her writing. Carson's experimental drive tests the stability of well-defined artistic categories by combining scholarly erudition, wit, humour, and an attentive and curious way of looking at the world that can only be poetic. The reception of her work in Spain has gone through new flourishing since Carson was distinguished with the Princess of Asturias Award for Literature in 2020. In the last few years, publishers have translated and reprinted many of her early books such as *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), *Glass, Irony & God* (1995), *Plainwater* (1995), and *Economy of the Unlost* (1998), as well as some of her most recent titles, for instance, *Float* (2016) and *Norma Jean Baker of Troy* (2019)¹. Furthermore, many readers have come back to Carson's most consoli-

dated works in the Spanish market, that is, *Autobiography of Red*, *Men in the Off Hours*, and *The Beauty of the Husband*² above all. This editorial phenomenon is nothing but the echo of Anne Carson's international impact, which is both institutional, as proved by the many prizes she has been awarded, and commercial, for she is one of those unusual poets that become bestsellers even though their writing is far from resembling the aesthetic codes of mass literature.

Despite Anne Carson's unquestionable literary success, there is not a high number of monographs devoted to the study of so complex and demanding a poet, which is striking. For a long time, only two of these could be found on the book market: the special issue launched in 2003 by the academic quarterly *Canadian Literature* (number 176) and the collective volume coordinated by Joshua Marie

¹ Published in Spain as *Eros dulce y amargo* (Lumen, 2020), *Cristal, ironía y Dios* (Vaso Roto, 2022), *Agua corriente* (Cielo Eléctrico, 2021), *Economía de lo que no se pierde* (Vaso Roto, 2020), *Flota* (Cielo Eléctrico, 2021), and *Norma Jean Baker de Troya* (Vaso Roto, 2022).

² *Autobiografía de Rojo* (Pre-Textos), *Hombres en sus horas libres* (Pre-Textos), and *La belleza del marido* (Lumen).

Wilkinson, *Anne Carson: Ecstatic Lyre* (2015), a miscellaneous work where artists and scholars meet to discuss different aspects of Carson's oeuvre from very diverse foci. Considering this, there is no doubt that the publication of *Anne Carson/Antiquity* (2021), edited by scholar Laura Jansen, specialist in Classics and Comparative Literature, is a very welcome novelty for researchers interested in Anne Carson. Unlike Wilkinson's monograph, Jansen's proposes a common approach: as the title suggests, this compendium collects twenty essays by different authors who study the role that Greco-Roman antiquity plays in Carson's mindset, offering a panoramic view of her writerly project that stays coherent and integrating, yet plural at the same time.

Among the diversity of ideas, interests, and analysis displayed by collaborators of *Anne Carson/Antiquity*, some major lines of thought can be traced. There is one primarily shared, which is the conviction that Anne Carson's writing oscillates insistently between two grounds and settles comfortably at the interstice where any kind of reductionist understanding of reality is erased and invalidated. So is it evidenced, for instance, by Phoebe Giannisi and her analysis of Carson's hybridisation of genres and discourses through the figure of the chimera; by Elizabeth D. Harvey, who explores the constant presence of doubles in Anne Carson's oeuvre; by Vanda Zajko and Kay Gabriel, who observe in their respective works the intricate relationship established in Carson's texts between two temporalities and world views: past and present, classic antiquity and modernity; and, finally, by Paschalis Nikolaou and Gillian Sze, who address the intersection between academic and poetic activity in Carson's thought through her own use of paratexts, according to Nikolaou, and her practice of

erring, as Sze explains. The untamed and anti-academicist nature of Carson's writing is a matter of interest for Sze as well as Rebecca Kosick and Laura Jansen herself; all of them emphasise Carson's bent towards forms of misreading that lead to very creative interpretations of classical texts—an attitude that relates to the Carsonian way of irony, studied by Yopie Prins. It is no surprise that another cornerstone is thus Carson's rewriting of classical myths; the reader can consult chapters by Zajko and P. J. Finglass on her rewriting of Helen of Troy and Stesichoros's Geryon, respectively.

Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi and Ian Rae—an indispensable expert on Anne Carson—try to understand the aesthetic thought of our author by tracing the theoretical influence of the most significant debates in academia during Carson's early years as a classicist. Peponi reads Carson in the context of French literary theory of the second half of the 20th century, in line with Barthes's and Cixous's notions of the concept of *écriture*. On the other hand, Rae turns towards the feminist classicism of the 1980s to argue the invisible presence of the intelligent goddess Metis in Carson's poetics, which was a subject of great interest at that time. In order to comprehend Carson's writing, collaborators reflect on several crucial concepts that maintain a radical relation to Classical Studies: such is the case of the fragment, which affects the form of texts (see Sean Gurd) as well as the poetic subject (see Hannah Silverblank). Consequently, the notion of gap or *lacuna* (see Giannisi, Jansen, or Prins) is also essential, for they become forms of emptiness that revitalise the stream of thought instead of nullifying meaning. As a matter of fact, Anna Jackson, Jansen, and Gurd expound the importance of motion in Carson's mindset as a way of escaping conclusive and stagnant ideas. This attitude

characterises Carson's understanding of classics in good measure and influences her literary praxis, as this collection evinces. Is it even possible to reach true and stable knowledge about a cultural event that comes to us in fragments? Does not whole humans' historical experience consist precisely of this? Can we perhaps inhabit the world somehow else? These are some ultimate questions that arise when thinking about Anne Carson's poetics after reading *Anne Carson/Antiquity*.

To examine Carson's understanding of culture, readers will find relevant chapters by Kay Gabriel and Ella Haselswerdt and Mathura Umachandran, who discuss some of Carson's works from a political and cultural perspective—Gabriel's postcolonial critique of *Autobiography of Red* deserves special mention because of its sharpness. Lastly, those interested in Carson's facet as a translator must consult chapters by Susan Bassnett—capital figure in Translation Studies—Eugenia Nicolaci, Grace Zanotti and Elena Theodorakopoulos, along with those by the aforementioned Jansen, Nikolaou, and Prins. All these studies highlight once more the “undisciplined” (in Jansen's words) character of Carson's creativity, for she leaves a personal mark in all her translations, both in the most literal, such as her version of Sappho's fragments, and the ones that like *Antigo-*

nick stand in the midway between translation and rewriting. Most of the contributions pay attention to Carson's labour as a Hellenist predominantly, except for those few that, like Nicolaci and Theodorakopoulos, focus on *Nox* and study Carson as a Latinist.

Due to the variety of problems that this volume addresses, this book will be a pleasant and fruitful reading not only for those studying Anne Carson's oeuvre but also for any other scholar whose realm might comprehend the contemporary reception of classical tradition, translation studies, literary theory, comparative literature, or cultural criticism, among others. *Anne Carson/Antiquity* makes clear that Anne Carson's attitude towards Greece and Rome is not at all a return to Neoclassicism. In her writing, classical culture shines under the light of a modern and imaginative look that stays free from rules and precepts. Anne Carson travels a two-way road, which means that her use of classical literature is not a simple rhetorical gesture. On the contrary, her way of reading classics is always inspired by relentless intelligence that lets us find in antiquity new meanings to understand the past better and to think about our present alongside, in an indefatigable and enthralling dialogue.

REFERENCES

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