THE MONSTROUS UNCANNY IN *ANCHORESS* AND *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED*

THE MONSTER INSIDE US: THE MONSTROUS UNCANNY IN ESTA

SPALDING'S *ANCHORESS*, ANNE CARSON'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED*,

AND MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*


By

Amanda Huai-Ying Lim, B.A.


A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts


McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (2006)                    McMaster University
(English and Cultural Studies)            Hamilton, Ontario


TITLE:        The Monster Inside Us:  The Monstrous Uncanny in Esta Spalding's
              *Anchoress*, Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, and Mary Shelley's
              *Frankenstein*

AUTHOR:    Amanda Huai-Ying Lim, B.A. (University of Alberta)

SUPERVISOR:        Professor Lorraine York

NUMBER OF PAGES:        vi, 102

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of the monstrous in two contemporary Canadian poetry books, Esta Spalding's *Anchoress* (1997) and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998), in relation to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Drawing from the idea that each person possesses monstrous qualities identifiable in the "other," I will focus on the monster as a literal and a symbolic double for the poem's characters that crosses multiple boundaries: life/death, creation/destruction, personal/political, feminine/masculine, and spirit/body. Spalding and Carson practice what Alicia Ostriker calls "revisionist mythmaking," questioning the ideological frameworks of classical myths such as *Antigone* and *Herakles* and complicating the political, social, and ethical issues already presented in the originals. Their narrative choices, in terms of chronology and viewpoint, for instance, reflect their interest in destabilizing popular portrayals of monstrosity and, by consequence, portrayals of humanity. In addition to Ostriker's theory of revisionist mythmaking, I also employ Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic in my exploration of the monster as a problematized double or doppelganger, and Jacques Lacan's theories of the imaginary and the symbolic order in my examination of how the monster troubles the self/other division. Finally, I use theories that examine the role of love in political change—such as Jacques Derrida's arguments on friendship and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's vision of the multitude—in my final assessment of the monster as a figure that can represent and incite productive political dialogue and action, and of love as a concept whose effects extend beyond the personal realm. Ultimately, the thesis supports the idea

that love as a social network amongst various people has the potential to galvanize radical political change because it breaks the division between what is considered to be human and what is considered to be monstrous.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction and Chapter 1 – Revisionist Mythmaking

The concept of the monstrous has always been central to classical and popular

mythology, like the Greek myth of the Medusa, accounts of lyncanthropy in early modern

Europe, and, more recently, Scottish tales of the Loch Ness monster. I will examine the

concept of the monster in two Canadian poetry books, Esta Spalding's *Anchoress* and

Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, in relation to Mary Shelley's seminal narrative

about the monstrous, *Frankenstein* (1818). While Anne Carson's work has been

examined in academic circles, there is relatively little that has been written about Esta

Spalding. Both of these writers, however, are immensely talented, challenging the

boundaries of genre and culture in their work that is experimental and complex, yet also

accessible and lucid. Moreover, I am particularly interested in how both poets employ

politics and how monstrosity becomes central in their political revisions, as well as how

their modernization of myth is itself "monstrous" in that it questions conventional

narrative practices.

For clarity's sake, I will refer in my thesis to the monstrous figuration as the

"monster," although my primary texts do not necessarily use this term and, in fact,

problematize it. Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny, Jacques Lacan's theories of the

imaginary and the symbolic order, and G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic form my

main theoretical framework. This intersection of contemporary Canadian poetry, British

Gothic novel, and continental European theory suggests that the concept of the monstrous

crosses spatial and temporal boundaries. Clear echoes of, if not direct references to,

*Frankenstein* appear in Spalding's and Carson's poetry, specifically of the monster as a

double.  Of particular interest is how readers have associated the name "Frankenstein"

with the creature instead of the scientist, Victor.  This confusion over the name's referent

establishes Victor Frankenstein and the creature as doubles of each other; as George

Levine argues, "'Frankenstein' as a modern metaphor implies a conception of the divided

self, the creator and his work at odds.  The civilized man or woman contains within the

self a monstrous, destructive, and self-destructive energy" (Levine 15).  Furthermore, it

suggests the conflicting attraction and repulsion of the monstrous, and demonstrates

Hegel's master-slave dialectic, according to which the master and slave realize their

individual existences only by "recognizing" each other.

Drawing from the idea that each person possesses monstrous qualities identifiable

in the "other," I will focus on the monster as a literal and a symbolic double for the

poem's characters that crosses multiple boundaries: life/death, creation/destruction,

personal/political, feminine/masculine, and spirit/body.  In *Anchoress,* Helen functions as

a double both for her lover, Peter, and her older sister, France.  Peter perceives himself as

a victim of Helen's radical political beliefs and her resulting self-immolation, but being a

scientist like Victor, he positions himself also as a potential (re)creator of her memory

and even of her physical body.  In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson situates Geryon and

Herakles as doubles, and shows how Geryon must cope with a form of "double

consciousness" by acknowledging his own physical self as a monster and as a

homosexual, and by reconciling his self-conception with the image constructed by others.

Hegel argues that all self-consciousness is formed through a kind of double

consciousness since "*self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-*

*consciousness* " (110; italics in text). In my analyses of Peter's and Geryon's self-

conceptions, I will draw on Lacan's theory of the imaginary and the symbolic order, since

Lacan speaks of the mirror-stage by which the self recognizes itself as a whole,

individual being (or *Gestalt*) and constructs from this an ideal image of itself, which

belongs to the world of the imaginary.

Firstly, both Spalding and Carson partly perform what Alicia Ostriker calls

"revisionist mythmaking" (215). Peter and Geryon acknowledge the monsters within

themselves and in the external world, challenging the traditional monster/human binary.

Furthermore, Peter foregrounds Helen's narrative, or her story (*her*story), over both his

personal narrative and the political narratives constructed by the mainstream media (*his*-

story). Geryon also challenges narrative agency by retelling, from his perspective, a

popular myth traditionally focused on the hero and his self-glorifying quests that succeed

only through masculine modes of power and violence. Ostriker argues that in revisionist

mythmaking, women appropriate conventional (read: masculine or androcentric)

narratives and language use in order to retell these stories from an empowering, feminine

perspective, showing how they "deviate from or explicitly challenge the meanings

attributed to mythic figures and tales" and deconstruct myths as "foundations of

collective male fantasy or as the pillars sustaining phallocentric 'high' culture" (215).

This project is possible because of "female knowledge of female experience" (215).

Ostriker's views on myths and myth narration are useful, but they tend to reinscribe

essentialist notions about culture and gender. While all of my primary authors are

female, their narratives concern *male* narrators first and foremost. Spalding and Carson

revise the image of the female and of the feminine role (Helen and France, in the first

instance; Geryon as the "female" element in the homosexual relationship, in the second),

but they also clearly revise the image of the male and the masculine through a coming-of-

age or *bildungsroman*, with Peter learning to cope independent of Helen and Geryon

accepting his monstrosity and homosexuality. The first section of my thesis will deal

with Spalding's and Carson's use of the monster in revisiting well-known classical and

popular myths and how they complicate Ostriker's arguments about the function of myth.

In her book *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, Lillian E. Doherty

explains the seemingly paradoxical role that well-known myths, such as classical Greek

and Roman myths, play in contemporary culture. On the one hand, she says, "It can be

argued that the notion of a 'common culture' is itself obsolete. Europe and its former

colonies no longer share a widely-known body of traditional stories" (9). At the same

time, "the mythologies of the past have never been more popular—or, arguably, more

widely known—than they are today. Greek and Roman myths are among the most

prominent, thanks to several television series and to Disney films based on Hercules and

Atlantis" (9). Though television and film have helped to popularize classical myths, I

would argue that their presence is more a symptom than an actual cause of the

prominence that myths have enjoyed in popular culture. Doherty claims that the

attraction of myth lies in its doubleness, both in terms of its role as a cultural and social

marker and its presentation of universal issues and relationships. She writes that myths

"differ from newly created fictions in having the weight of tradition behind them. Yet

they are highly flexible: when closely examined, the versions in circulation today often

vary widely, not only from ancient versions but from one another. They have the virtue

of combining strangeness with familiarity" (10). Myths offer "the glamour of

strangeness, based on the remoteness of their settings in time and space and on the

improbability[...] of their events" (10), while simultaneously reiterating "story patterns

[...] based on conflicts that arise within the familiar frameworks of the patriarchal family

and of a wider society" (10). Even today, many classical and popular myths remain

relevant to people's experiences of family, work, and school even though they "carry no

overt religious or political messages that could offend the citizens of an increasingly

secular and 'globalized' society" (11). The doubleness of myth, however, does allow

myth "to be used either to shore up traditional values or to contest them in an acceptable

way" (11). Indeed, Spalding and Carson do traverse the "familiar frameworks of the

patriarchal family" in their revisionist mythmaking, and they certainly do not shy away

from contentious political and social issues. Pointing out that even classical Greek myths

did not exist as "single authoritative versions" (10), since poets such as Ovid would

introduce new themes or revise old ones in ancient stories, Doherty concludes, "Thus the

modern rewriting of myths is a continuation of ancient practice [...] even the ancient

versions do not present a monolithic endorsement of the prevailing ideologies of their

times" (11). Indeed, Spalding and Carson might then be seen as poets who inherit this

practice of rewriting myths from their forebears, and help shape the legacies of future

generations. As poets who revise myths and re-vision them, they are also invested in the

concept of love as a kind of politics, the issue of which I will deal with in more detail in

my last chapter but which will be addressed throughout the earlier chapters in my

discussions of Hegel, Freud, and Lacan.

Second, after dealing with Spalding and Carson's response to Ostriker, I will

argue that Spalding's and Carson's monsters both support and challenge Freud's theory

of the uncanny, which Freud calls the *unheimlich* and "a sub-species of *heimlich*" (Rivkin

157). Thus, something familiar and homely morphs into the *unheimlich*. Freud also

quotes Otto Rank in claiming that the double represents the "'energetic denial of the

power of death'" (Rivkin 162) and adds that the double constitutes a form of narcissism

by embodying the self's unfulfilled dreams and fantasies. Spalding's and Carson's

monsters do require this Freudian framework to be better understood, but they signify

more than a death denial or unfulfilled fantasy. Towards the end of both poets' books, an

acceptance of death and a beginning reconciliation with the uncanny demonstrate that the

transformation of the *heimlich* to the *unheimlich* is not simply a unilateral process. My

resistance against unilateralism is driven by Spalding's and Carson's portrayal of the

monster and the monstrous as potentially *revolutionary* agents, whose doubleness

challenges personal and political motivations. Helen, as a double of Peter and France,

bridges the gaps between personal commitment and political involvement. The

monstrous applies both to the political injustices that Helen protests and to Peter and

France's reluctance in recognizing the wide-ranging social impact of political crises like

the Gulf War. At the same time, Spalding questions Helen's actions and suggests that, at

least to her loved ones, her politically-motivated suicide assumes the mantle of the

monstrous narrative of terrorism. Carson's Geryon does not enter the *public* sphere of

politics as Helen does, but his homosexuality and his critique of autobiography and photography might be construed as *personal* revolts against conventional norms surrounding sexuality and representation.

Third, I intend to show that both poets have a redemptive and transcendent quality in their poems' endings, and that this overcomes the entropic stages that Levine discusses as central to the revolutionary spirit of *Frankenstein* and which initially characterize the poems' narratives. The monster becomes a symbolic double that crosses the life/death, creation/destruction, and spirit/body boundaries. Levine argues that *Frankenstein* illustrates the "scientific myth of entropy: that in any closed system, the new energy generated will be less than the energy expended in its creation, and that ultimately the system will run down" (17), and claims, "Without the incalculable presence of divine spirit, creation can only entail destruction larger than itself" (17). Neither poet invokes a form of divinity or spirituality which would result in redemption. However, whereas *Frankenstein* only gestures towards redemption in its despairing ending, *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* rise above their characters' pain and loss to posit a more hopeful world driven by love, the feeling that, according to Che Guevara, must guide every revolutionary spirit. However, I do not wish to claim that either book makes a case for complete and/or literal redemption. Instead, Spalding and Carson show that the journeys undertaken by the characters, on a physical and emotional level, are redemptive in that they reveal their doubleness to themselves and prompt a productive engagement with this doubleness. This is an engagement that does not entail killing or ignoring the double as

embodied in the monstrous other—actions that Hegel seems to suggest are necessary in the formation of self-consciousness.

Ostriker's basic premise for revisionist mythmaking is that women writers "have always tried to steal the language" (215) in order to rebut the "encoding of male privilege" (215) in our common speaking and writing language and to disrupt dominant male discourses. In *Stealing the Language* she deals primarily with poets who, instead of advocating and using a "shared, exclusive *langage des femmes* desired by some" (211)— a concept that Ostriker rightly points out is questionable and requires further consideration given its tendency towards gynocentrism—exercise a "vigorous and varied invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasuries where our meanings for 'male' and 'female' are themselves preserved" (211). Even though "mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer" (211-212) because she claims that "[i]t is thanks to myth that we believe that woman must be either angel or monster" (212), the social and political role of myth through time is undeniable. When a poet takes up myth, "the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends" (212). She argues that myth "belongs to 'high' culture and is handed 'down' through the ages" (213), though much of its consists of issues, relationships, and emotions that the everyday person can identify with, as Doherty has also pointed out. Women poets who practice revisionist mythmaking change old stories, which is possible "by female knowledge of female experience, so that [the old stories] can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy or as the pillars sustaining phallocentric 'high' culture. Instead, they are [...] representations of what women find

divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival" (215).

Alicia Ostriker's arguments about myth and myth narration, while very valid in its claims about the androcentric nature of numerous myths, still present some significant problems. First, Ostriker appears to reify the high/low culture divide with her argument that myth comes only from "high" culture, which seems to contain at least a trace of Eurocentrism in it. The problem with Ostriker's argument resides in the fact that she does little to challenge the initial assumptions used to define and justify the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, a move which would aid in destabilizing the seemingly fixed association between "high" culture and mythology. Second, Ostriker reinforces the conventional association between gender and culture that pairs men with "high" culture and women with "low" culture; although these binary pairs are true in many instances, she does not seem to attempt to complicate them. At times Ostriker tends to fall back upon a kind of biologism or essentialism when she implies support for a form of "authenticity" in honouring certain narrators and speakers (that is, female narrators and speakers) over others (male narrators and speakers) in rewriting old stories. In response, I would ask, does belonging to a particular gender immediately accord one more "priority" or "right" to tell a narrative than someone of another gender? Also, it seems to me that it is necessary to complicate gender further. For example, transgendered persons and their shifting experiences of gender and gender norms do not easily conform to Ostriker's linear correspondence between gender and knowledge, and

her seeming reiteration of a binary-gender system that theorists like Judith Butler have long troubled in seminal texts such as *Gender Trouble*.

Gayle Greene in *Changing the Story* notes how feminist fiction has enjoyed a surge in productivity and popularity in recent decades, and that the protagonists in these fictions often critique " 'images of women' and the plots of the past" (8). However, in contrast to Ostriker, she clarifies that "feminist fiction is not the same as 'women's fiction' or fiction by women: not all women writers are 'women's writers,' and not all women's writers are feminist writers, since to write about 'women's issues' is not necessarily to address them from a feminist perspective" (2). As I mentioned earlier, Doherty points out how even ancient versions of popular myths differed: "Although most were composed by and for elite males, ancient versions belonged to diverse types or *genres* of literature, and there is increasing recognition that women and lower-class men could be included in the intended audiences of some of these genres" (11). Doherty, in fact, complicates Ostriker's readings of the relationship between myth and gender when she argues, "Even within the male elite there could be strong disagreements and 'subversive' viewpoints. [...] *A fortiori*, the self-consciously pluralistic culture of our time should make room for retellings of the myths from a wide range of perspectives, including some with the potential to unsettle hierarchies that the stories assume" (11).

Unsettling hierarchies is exactly the task that Spalding and Carson perform in their texts, as they take up *Frankenstein*, by now a firmly-ensconced classic tale of the monstrous, and reiterate and extend the questions Shelley raises about science, creation in its religious and secular contexts and connotations, good and evil, and ethics in general.

10

The emphasis on the fragment is central to Ostriker's argument about the divided self, as she argues that "the central project of the women's poetry movement is a quest for autonomous self-definition and discusses a set of images for female identity which register the condition of marginality: nonexistence, invisibility, muteness, blurredness, deformity. Each of these images may be understood as a variation on the theme of a divided self, rooted in the authorized dualities of the culture" (10-11). As female writers whose protagonists are male, Carson and Spalding complicate the gender politics that inform and shape discussions of the relationship between the self and the other. Ostriker writes that "violence against the self and against the other are equivalent expressions of rage at entrapment in gender-polarized relationships, and that satiric and retaliatory poems which dismantle the myth of the male as lover, hero, father, and God are designed to confirm polarization and hierarchy as intolerable" (11). I do believe that, among other myths, Spalding and Carson demystify the traditional narratives of the male as a hero, father, and so on. They do so by questioning masculinity as a construct and, in doing so, critique femininity. They do not, however, employ either satire or an acerbic tone but, rather, heavily use what Ostriker calls a more "emotional" method of expression, which, again, challenges the assumptions of both masculinity and femininity.

Carson and Spalding's texts revise monstrosity as something that exists beyond the status of "other" by personalizing, but not romanticizing, it. Their deliberate reworking of monstrosity, in the context of historical, political, and social "grand narratives," supports Ostriker's argument about the function of myth: "Myths are the sanctuaries of language where our meanings for 'male' and 'female' are stored; to rewrite

them from a female point of view is to discover new possibilities for meaning" (11).

Moreover, a structural critique of myth through the use of fragmentary material or

fragmented narratives illustrates how "the strategies of defamiliarization draw attention to

the discrepancies between traditional concepts and the conscious mental and emotional

activity of female re-vision" (236). Ostriker notes, too, that "the private-public

distinction is one that contemporary women poets tend to resist and attempt to dissolve in

favor of a personal-communal continuum. As in women's love poems, the tacit

assumption in women's myth poems is that the self in its innermost reaches is plural.

The 'I' is a 'we,' the myth contains and conveys common knowledge. The effectiveness

of these poems rests on their power to release meanings that were latent but imprisoned

all along in the stories we thought we knew" (235). Although I agree with this argument

to some extent, Ostriker's emphasis on latent meanings seems to assume a top-down

model of knowledge in which all female meaning is somehow imprisoned and needs to

be freed, and that freedom merely requires some hard work and dedication to excavate

the "concealed" information. The proposed idea that knowledge is power is one that is a

little problematic, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4, in which the seemingly

ideal linkage between "I" and "We" is further troubled.

Shelley does challenge normative definitions of monstrosity and inverts the

master-slave power dynamic when she illustrates how the creature blackmails Viktor and

lures him on what seems to be an infinite pursuit. The creature declares, "Slave, I before

reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension [...]

You are my creator, but I am your master;—obey !" (Shelley 168). Viktor's initial,

hubristic control over life when he constructs and induces life in the creature gradually

disappears when the creature turns against him and begins killing his loved ones, whom

Viktor finds himself powerless to save. However, Shelley still retains a *moralistic* power

dynamic during all of Viktor's negotiations with the creature, when Viktor chastises him

and refuses to bridge the gap between himself and this other that he has created:

"Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are

enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall" (Shelley

100). Moreover, in Viktor's mind the creature's blatant physical deformities correspond

to his wickedness, a physical-psychological link that Spalding and Carson continually

trouble in their texts. This is not to condone the creature's responses either, but Viktor's

persistent refusal to take any responsibility for the creature's development and

motivations demonstrates an appalling lack of self-reflection, maturity, and humility.

Moreover, the creature arguably still sees himself as somewhat bound to Viktor, whether

by love, obligation, or vengeance; the creature continues to acknowledge Viktor's power

over life when he promises to leave Viktor in peace if a female companion is created for

him. Unquestionably, Shelley intends to invoke the Biblical story of God's creation of

Adam and Eve and their subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden. Although

Shelley questions Viktor's motivations and actions and, in doing so, probes the human

psyche's response to an "other," she remains wedded to the concept of a binary master-

slave relationship. After Viktor dies, the creature completely loses his sense of purpose

and reason for living, even though he presumably has the upper hand, in all respects—

physical and psychological—in the latter stages of his relationship with Viktor and he

had vowed to make Viktor suffer and die for abandoning him.  For Shelley, death appears

to be the probable and expedient solution to such power struggles.

However, Spalding takes Shelley's challenge several steps further when she

immediately questions the foundations upon which a master-slave relationship is

constructed.  *Anchoress* implicitly refers to *Frankenstein* on several occasions but never

mentions the classic text specifically.  Unlike Viktor's relationship with the creature,

Peter's relationship with Helen cannot be easily divided into dialectical stages because

neither of them conforms to Hegel's "master" or "slave" roles.  Peter's division of his

narration is temporal but not chronological, defying the conventionally linear trajectory

of the standard narrative.  When Peter perceives himself from the beginning as occupying

a less powerful position than Helen, he disrupts the gendered power dynamic that

conventionally exists between master and slave.  Although Peter is a scientist, like

Viktor, interested in preserving bodies and life, he is positioned in the role of the creature

in *Frankenstein* with Helen as his "creator."  His apostrophe to Helen expresses both

desire and agony, and he soon assumes an accusatory, somewhat self-pitying tone that is

reminiscent of the creature's tirade against Victor Frankenstein, though less vehement

and vengeful because it is constantly tempered and countered by his extreme longing for

her: "*Helen, one year of drowning.  Seeking you where you are hiding, I crawl into a*

*beast.  One part of this is rage, I was your creature and abandoned*" (4).  Peter's feeling

of abandonment recalls the creature's similar feelings of outrage: " 'Accursed creator!

Why did you form a monster so hideous that even *you* turned from me in disgust?  God,

in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy

14

type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his own

companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred'

" (Shelley 131). Peter's constant feeling of alienation, abandonment, and irresolvable

despair mirror more closely the creature's self-loathing than does Geryon's sense of

isolation, which more readily coheres with the physical and emotional tumult associated

with adolescence and young adulthood in general. Helen's death incites Peter's growing

sense of his own death, as he writes, "*Helen, I'm drowning. If I lie down in darkness will*

*you come, if I lie down in rain will you rescue me, arrive with torches to dry my skin, tell*

*me again the things that mattered?*" (3). When he accuses Helen of abandoning her sister

France as well, saying, "*She was halved without you*"(3), he implies that he, too, has lost

a part of himself and, in fact, perceives himself as increasingly more grotesque and

monstrous because of Helen's departure: "*Look at me, a half-man who can't sleep, who*

*doesn't own his dreams, who lives with the manure stink beetles leave*" (4).

 Spalding refers to at least two other important narratives in her text, the first being

the Greek myth *Antigone* and the second being the Biblical stories about young women

who devoted themselves to the love of God, also known as anchorites (or anchoress, in

the singular form). Spalding compares Helen to both the character of Antigone and to an

anchoress—hence, the inspiration for the book's title. Benedicta Ward explains in her

preface to Anne Savage's and Nicholas Watson's book, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, that an

anchoress believed that "the only virginity possible is that of the indwelling life of

Christ" (2), and that "what was important was the central love of God directing them

wholly" (2). Savage and Watson note that an anchoress's life consisted of strict self-

enclosure driven by "penitential and ascetic" impulses (16), and that an anchoress essentially married herself to a higher cause above the petty, worldly, and physical concerns of the world. Although Helen does not exercise religious devotion or literally seclude herself, she does believe in, and utterly devotes herself to, the higher cause of engaging in public and political struggle. Spalding re-interprets the Christian story in a largely secular framework and explores the ethical implications of Helen's anchoritic life. Thus, although the figure of the anchoress obviously has a long Christian history and is significant in Christian myths as an example of devotion to God, I will not be addressing the Christian aspect of the anchoress since it would be too large for the scope of my current thesis, though it is certainly something to keep in mind and that is worth further exploration in relation to Spalding's text.

The combination and juxtaposition of the personality traits from Antigone and the anchoress portray Helen as a saintlier, godlier person but also undeniably reveals her to be extremely human in her flaws. Spalding thus rejects both the myths that ignore and undermine women and the ones that tend to romanticize and idealize women as objects of worship.

As a myth, *Antigone* also centers on a female protagonist, not a male one. In the original myth, Antigone must struggle with patriarchal rules and conventions. Northrop Frye and Jay Macpherson in *Biblical and Classical Myths* summarize the famous tragedy of Oedipus, discussing how Oedipus blinds himself while his wife and mother Jocasta hangs herself after they discover their incestuous relationship. Jocasta's brother, Creon, assumes control of Thebes while Oedipus roams in exile, accompanied by his daughter

Antigone, and eventually dies in Attica. When Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and

Polynices, reach manhood, they agree to rule for alternate years but Eteocles refuses to

transfer control of the kingdom after his first term as ruler to his brother. As a result,

Polynices invades Thebes, the two brothers kill each other in battle, and Creon makes the

highly controversial decree that "the body of Eteocles should be buried with funeral

honours, while that of Polynices should be left outside the gate for carrion beasts and

birds" (Frye and Macpherson 354). Frye and Macpherson further explain the intense

significance of such a decree: "This was more than an insult, because while a body lay

unburied the ghost could not cross the river of death but wandered miserably up and

down the shore" (354). Antigone defies Creon's orders and buries Polynices, in response

to which Creon, "afraid of disorder in the state if her action went unpunished, had her

walled up alive in a tomb" (354).

Peter refers to *Antigone* on a few separate occasions, comparing and contrasting

his own personal tragedy with the more epic Greek tragedy and his struggles with

Antigone's moral dilemma. Peter resembles Antigone in several ways, excepting his

gender, since he, too, must make some difficult decisions in response to a loved one's

death. Though his difficulties do not fall within the same league as Antigone's, his

decisions risking neither the wrath of metaphysical entities or of flesh-and-blood rulers

and having no instrumental and direct effect on anybody's afterlife, Peter does have the

choice and power to determine both the trajectory of his own life and the consequences of

Helen's ghost and legacies. This is not to argue that Peter situates himself in a position of

authority such that he believes it to be his indisputable right to assume Helen's voice and

speak on her behalf, but rather that Peter, in his newly-found psychological maturity, recognizes the necessity of confronting the various ghosts that Helen has presented and resurrected for him. He says, "You cannot outrun the dead. They are in the elements" (26) and, later, tells himself, "Go back to the beast, / enter it" (53). Moreover, it is Helen who first identifies herself with Antigone when she plays the character in a university drama.

Spalding's invocation of *Antigone* demonstrates numerous parallels between the original myth and Spalding's own text, but further complicates the conflict between family and nation that forms one of the central tensions of *Antigone*. *Antigone* raises several ethical quandaries, the most central tension probably the one existing between loyalty to the family and loyalty to the state. Some would argue that Antigone should obey the wishes of Creon, as the chorus says, "[Creon's] will is law" (Sophocles 191, Banks 8). In the play, Antigone's sister Ismene refuses to help bury Polynices, saying, "No, I dishonor nothing. But to challenge / Authority—I have not strength enough" (Sophocles 77-78, Banks 5). Mark Griffith argues in *Sophocles: Antigone* that the play presents an ethical dilemma between the *polis*, or the city-state, and the *oikos*, or the family. Whereas Creon "insists on the need for citizens and rulers alike to disregard kinship and personal favouritism and to set the highest value on discipline and 'obedience to authority'" (48), Antigone believes that familial obligations override and precede one's fealty to the nation-state. Griffith also presents the opposing arguments commonly (presented) in favour of either Creon or Antigone, pointing out that "Greek drama is full of morally evaluative language, and seems constantly to invite its audience to think about

18

the personal choices and confrontations of its main characters. In the modern era,

hundreds of books and articles have discussed the degree to which Kreon, or Ant[igone],

or both, should be held responsible for the deaths of Ant[igone], Haimon, and Eurydike,

and what we should learn from their catastrophe. No consensus has emerged" (28). On

the one hand, "[m]any have found Kreon to be wholly at fault, his authority illegitimate,

his edict impious and foolish, his behaviour and language intemperate and vindictive.

But to others he appears a well-intentioned ruler, sincerely committed to laudable

political principles [...] and civic piety [...], and reasonable enough to change his mind

and rescind punishment—twice—when the error of his policies is pointed out by

trustworthy advisers" (28-29). For those who hold the latter view of Creon as

benevolent, if sometimes misguided, ruler, his only fault lies in "misjudging the gods'

attitude to non-burial, and of intemperate reactions to what he sees as disloyal opponents"

(29). By contrast, people praise Antigone for defending " 'higher' truths—individual

liberty, family loyalty, and religious duty—whose other-worldly independence and

determination, in the face of a bullying male-chauvinist civic authority, are finally

vindicated by Teiresias and by the gods' destruction of Kreon" (29). Still others perceive

Antigone's "inflammatory words and disruptive behaviour" (29) as the main cause of the

tragedy and which also "alienates the sympathy both of the other characters and of the

audience" (29).

   As a result of Oedipus's (inevitable) act of murdering his father and marrying his

mother, his children, including Antigone, must bear the burden of Oedipus's tragic legacy

that has consequences both for his family and for the nation. The play ends with the

chorus: "The crown of happiness is to be wise. / Honor the gods, and the gods' edict

prize. / They strike down boastful men and men grown bold. / Wisdom we learn at last,

when we are old" (Sophocles 1266-1269, Banks 38). Similarly, in *Anchoress*, the tension

between family and nation is one of the central focal points around which the narrative is

structured, but Spalding broadens this conflict by demonstrating its significance on a

more global scale with the Gulf War as the central site of tension. Also, the reliance

upon fate or preordained destiny in the original myth gives way to the varied and difficult

questions Spalding poses about individual and collective action and responsibility.

By referring back to *Antigone*, Peter demonstrates the necessity of revisiting the

past—his past, the literary past, and (his)tory—in order to formulate a present and a

future. He demonstrates the necessity of revisiting these ethical questions about family

and state when he asks, "What happens to a man who realizes his lover / desires a whole

nation?" (110), and later tries to sort out the circumstances and consequences of Helen's

death by reading *Antigone*: "Everything I look at / should tell about her dying. /

Everything should be a sign. / I read *Antigone* again, again / only the baldest tragedies

make sense" (112). Although France is unaware of Helen's intention to commit suicide,

Spalding does suggest a similarity between France's reticence in, for example, joining her

sister in the protest march and between Antigone's sister Ismene's refusal to help her

sister bury Polynice; both women feel that the male domination of politics cannot be

contested effectually and that, perhaps, it is in their best interests to simply accord with

the status quo instead of challenging it. However, this passivity, which has generally

been attributed to women, is challenged by Spalding. Ostriker notes that many women's

poems "tend to stress female power as against feminine passivity, and the possibility or

actuality of pleasure as against the older tide of suffering and victimization" (168), which

is significant since "much feminist criticism rests on the assumption that female authors

necessarily write from a position of powerlessness" (168). Helen's narrative stems less

from powerlessness than from a desire to challenge those currently in power. However,

Peter feels drained from Helen's narrative. Spalding draws upon Antigone's live

interment in a tomb, the punishment decreed by Creon, in describing Peter's decision to

distance himself from Helen's overshadowing presence on his life: "Finally I am sick of

it. / Tired of your body tenured / between the walls. / An ash house. / [...] I want you / in

the ground / outside the / gate. Your own plot. Want you to knock / before you come in.

Just that much privacy" (103-104). The dual meaning of "plot" as a grave and as a

narrative suggest how the recovery of other's stories and other's bodies are closely

intertwined, and that (monstrous) bodies construct language as much as language shapes

our definitions of monstrosity. Peter writes, "Analysis: to write of her is to raid her

grave. / Dismember. In English 'remember' means / to put the body together again" (71),

illustrating how his assemblage of whale skeletons enacts his dream of re-membering

Helen's physical body and remembering, and renarrating, her story for all those alive to

hear.

Peter's (unsuccessful) attempt to exorcise Helen from his life is indicative of her

constant, and partly undesired, influence on Peter and his wish to escape from her, an

"other" who has infiltrated too much of himself. Viktor in *Frankenstein* similarly wishes

to escape the creature, though he must do so ironically by chasing after the very thing he

wishes to escape since annihilation is presented as his only option. One of the most

notable things about *Frankenstein* is the title's seemingly inadvertent transgression of the

self/other boundary. The popular notion that the title refers to the creature, when in fact it

refers to the scientist who created him, and the obvious parallels Shelley portrays

between Victor and the creature suggest that the confusion over naming goes beyond the

superficial question of terminology. The creature blames Victor for failing to fulfill his

obligations as his creator and master. Victor's power over life and death, exhibited most

lucidly in the scenes of the creature's creation, turns back on him when the lives of those

closest to him are threatened by the creature. Spalding's and Shelley's titles similarly

hint to the ways in which their works question the distinction between the self and the

other. In *Anchoress*, Peter appeals to Helen in his apostrophe, "*I want you inside me, a*

*second, deeper skin, my anchoress*" (Spalding 4), a statement that remains relatively

cryptic until the section near the end of the poem titled "*France's song*" (117). France

compares her deceased sister Helen to the mythological figure of an anchoress who,

though ordinary in status and rank, achieves renown through her oracular visions: "Once

there was a girl who gave herself / to the Virgin, built herself behind stones / into

crumbling church walls. Anchoress, / she was fed through a thin opening, / passed out

her piss, her shit. / People came to her for prophecies: / who would give birth, which

fields to sow. / The girl saw pictures of animals, / grains, she saw gold threads, words in

red" (117). She then states, "My sister loved the world too much / and passed me her

waste. / I could bury myself inside her cave, / [...] / live the rest of my life trying to

rebuild / her body or cover her grave. / Instead I drop— / marry myself to myself" (117).

Peter's and France's shared desire to connect with Helen on what appears to be a metaphysical level, but which is expressed through bodily intimacy and physical proximity, blur the boundary between the self and other, and between the gendered spheres of private and public. Helen indubitably functions as an anchor to the public, political life for which neither Peter nor France have a natural inclination, and she anchors them psychologically, even as they constantly speak about her in terms of speed, flight, motion, and unpredictability. Thus, her death causes her lover and her sister to feel utterly lost, unmoored, and even unhinged.

Throughout the text, Spalding refers to the popular and mass media, indicating how these shape personal and political narratives. Peter challenges how the media portray Helen's political protests and suicide, just as Helen, during her lifetime, protested dominant media depictions of the Gulf War. The storylines, images, and rhetoric favoured and propagated by the mainstream media, and rejected by people like Peter and Helen, might arguably be understood as "myths" belonging to the "low" culture. Certainly, the everyday citizen with access to some form of media, whether it be the television, newspaper, radio, or Internet, continuously receives a variety of information that tend to correspond with and confirm each other anyway. The oversimplified portrayal of the Gulf War, for instance, as a battle between the "good" American soldiers and the "evil" Iraqi terrorists, repeats itself over and over to the average person, ignoring and obscuring the political and ethical complexities that alternative and independent sources of media explore. If one can perceive these mainstream media's information as myths—though of a slightly different sort than Greek myths such as *Antigone*—that are

widely circulated and accepted in the public consciousness, then Spalding, through

Helen, France, and Peter, rewrites—or at the very least dares to challenge—these myths

and, in doing so, greatly complicates Ostriker's high/low culture divide.

The fact that the revision of such well-known narratives and of Helen's public

image comes from a male perspective, Peter's, challenges some of Ostriker's views about

gender. Spalding's choice of Peter as a narrator could, arguably, simply reinforce the

androcentric narrative, but he seems to act more as a "channel" for Helen's, and also

France's, narrative and allows them to speak "in their own words" as it were. Likewise,

although the myth upon which Carson bases *Autobiography of Red* is definitely

androcentric, Eurocentric, and patriarchal, following in the tradition of most popular

Greek and Roman myths, Carson disrupts this quickly. The original myth of Herakles

concurs, for the most part, with Ostriker's assessment of myths as artifacts of cultures and

societies that revolve around elite male groups. There are few women who play

significant roles in the myth, and those who do tend to be negatively depicted, a pattern

that reflects the structure and power dynamic of ancient Greek society at the time of the

telling of the myth. The goddess Hera, for instance, exemplifies the archetype of the

insane, jealous wife. Carson modernizes the myth, setting it in contemporary times and

retells it from Geryon's perspective. Her unique vision accomplishes several things: it

challenges the high/low culture binary by removing a popular Greek myth from its

original context and modernizing it, changing Herakles from a demi-god and future

immortal to a mere mortal and downplaying the religious elements; it troubles the

relationship between the self and the monstrous "other" by forcing the reader to look

through a literally monstrous viewpoint and humanizing the monstrous. Furthermore, the myth of Herakles is rewritten from Geryon's male perspective, and not from a female perspective that Ostriker assumes is generally responsible for revisionist mythmaking. Like Peter, Geryon is certainly not female, yet he questions many of the norms and assumptions upon which popular conceptions of monstrosity are based. This challenges Ostriker's contentious point that only women can successfully rewrite myths, an argument that posits another form of gender oppression and centrism—gynocentrism. Geryon's homosexuality also complicates normative notions of sexuality by challenging the male/female binary and the heterosexual binary of desire and love.

Carson's text also challenges the original myth because it transfers Herakles's privilege of immortality to Geryon. Frye and Macpherson explain that, in the original myth, Herakles gains his immortality after his second wife, Deianeira, heard a rumour that he had fallen in love with a captive princess and sent him a homecoming gift. The gift was a shirt dyed in the blood of the centaur Nessus, who had claimed that Deianeira could use the blood as a charm to win back Herakles's love if necessary. However, the blood actually acts as a poison and causes insufferable pain, but because Herakles cannot be killed due to his divine birth,he asks his friends and servants to build a pyre upon which he is burned. The mortal part of him is burned away and the immortal part is carried up to Olympus where he enters the realm of the gods (325-326). In *Autobiography of Red*, Geryon's immortality results from having been burned in the fires of the volcano in Jucu, according to Herakles's friend Ancash. He relates to Geryon the myth of immortals borne from the eruption of the volcano in Jucu, Peru: *"Holy men I*

*guess you would say. The word in Quechua is* Yazcol Yazcamac *it means / the Ones*

*Who Went and Saw and Came Back [...] the Yazcamac return as red people with wings, /*

*all their weaknesses burned away-- / and their mortality*" (128-129). Ancash's story

recalls the words of Geryon's mother in his youth: "*This would be hard / for you if you*

*were weak / but you're not weak,* she said and neatened his little red wings and pushed

him / out the door" (36).

  Shelley's *Frankenstein* ends with the creature presumably seeking suicide, Peter

in *Anchoress* struggles with Helen's death and with his own subsequent desire to seek

death, and Geryon in *Autobiography of Red* has an obsessive fascination with mortality

and immortality and discovers near the end of the book that he is most likely immortal.

Their concerns over suicide and immortality resist Ostriker's claim that both of these

concepts largely remain as masculine interests or that are founded upon, and reinforce,

patriarchal ideals about power and authority. She says, in regards to female poets, at least

the variety of poets she has studied, that "[t]he desire to live eternally tends to be

mockingly deconstructed by women poets as a corollary of male aggressiveness and need

for control" (235), and that "[s]ince death is conventionally a masculine figure in our

culture, the feminine suicide conventionally perceives him as seducer" (146). To this

end, Spalding's treatment of Helen's suicide certainly challenges the gendered and

sexualized construction of suicide as a last resort and mark of powerlessness (which also

depends upon a normative narrative of heterosexuality, something that Carson questions

in her text). Similarly, Geryon's immortality is not sought after purposefully or

bequeathed as an award.

*Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* revise *Frankenstein*'s take on monstrosity

and gender in significant ways through their female speakers. Shelley's text, although

revolutionary in its discussion of monstrosity and investment in the human psyche, is less

progressive in its treatment of gender. Much like *Antigone* and *Herakles*, *Frankenstein*

reflects the contemporary society of its author, and though Shelley was a woman living in

a much more progressive world than either Sophocles or Euripides, women certainly

remained, or were expected to remain, subordinate to men. Elizabeth, for instance, while

a very attractive character in both body and spirit, remains peripheral to the narrative and

becomes one of the many female characters sacrificed to Viktor's pride. Interestingly,

*Frankenstein*'s narrative structure consists of a plot that is triply mediated in layers or

concentric circles. Viktor's long story is mediated and re-narrated by Walton, whose

own narrative, in turn, is contained solely in his written letters. *Frankenstein* is

composed, in fact, completely of Walton's letters that are addressed like apostrophes, to

an absent female reader who is revealed to be Walton's sister. Because *Frankenstein*

concludes, almost abruptly, with the creature's farewell to Walton, one can only

speculate about the thoughts and reactions of Walton's sister upon reading his letters.

We as readers, in fact, share the same position as the sister, since we can only access the

information that Walton chooses to disclose, who in turn only knows what Viktor

selectively tells him.

In Spalding's and Carson's texts, the female speakers play more significant and

complex roles. Without a doubt, Helen is the axis around which the world of *Anchoress*

revolves. Her sister, France, occupies a similar position to Peter in that she, too, is

Helen's double and has difficulty coping with Helen's death. In *Autobiography of Red*,

Geryon's mysteriously absentee father means that his mother plays a formative role in his

development. Even as a young man, various women continue to influence his personal

philosophy, such as Herakles's grandmother, whose photography fascinates and haunts

him, and the tango dancer who, though she interacts with him only very briefly, leaves a

lasting impression. Moreover, Geryon disrupts the conventional male/female binary

because of his homosexuality. Thus, Spalding challenges what is dominantly perceived

to be Geryon's lack of "maleness" or masculinity and his gravitation towards a kind of

"femaleness" or femininity.

While neither Spalding nor Carson subordinate the female perspective, they

certainly question the *reversed* tendency to prioritize female experience over male

experience in rewriting myths and narratives. Why is it not conceivable, for instance,

that male knowledge of female experience, or even female knowledge of male experience

(since the validity of female knowledge sometimes tends to be confined to female

experiences only), be just as informative and productive in revising dominant narratives?

As a slight, but relevant, aside, contemporary debates have arisen about "take back the

night" walks, intended to empower women to feel safe walking alone after dark in a city,

that raise similar questions about gender specificity and agency. Some people believe

only women should be allowed to participate, but others argue that men who support the

cause should be included as well.

Some additional questions that require consideration include: What is categorized

as "female knowledge" or "female experience"? Can knowledge or experience be

reduced to gender descriptors or validators?  Does this automatically mean that certain

types of experiences and/or knowledge are already "female"?  It is worth noting how

Ostriker veers/tends towards generality or universality by using the term "female" instead

of gesturing towards a specific "woman," as if assuming that *all* females can somehow

bond over particular types of knowledge and experience.  These questions will be implicit

in my following chapters, since gender becomes complicated by, and is implicated in, the

doubleness of monstrosity, the structure and diction of Spalding's and Carson's texts, and

the concept of political love.

## Chapter 2 – Hegel, Freud, and the Monstrous Double

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel discusses the manifold implications that self-consciousness has upon the relationship between the self and the other or, as he likes to call it, between "lordship and bondage" (111). He argues that self-consciousness "exists only in being acknowledged" (111) and, furthermore, that self-consciousness comes "*out of itself*" (111; italics in text). Hegel proceeds to argue that self-consciousness "finds itself as an *other* being" (111; italics in text), thus losing itself in the other, but then claims that "in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self" (111). For Hegel, then, although self-formation requires the presence and the interaction of the other, the self continues to rightly occupy a greater position of power and importance. Indeed, he deems it *necessary* for the self to overcome the other, saying, "It must supersede this otherness of itself [...] in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the *essential* being" (111; first italics in text, second italics mine). Whereas Shelley's *Frankenstein* confirms many of Hegel's claims in its portrayal of a largely straightforward master-slave dialectic between Viktor and the creature, Spalding and Carson complicate Hegel's evident unilateralism and contest the homogeneity of what constitutes a "master" and a "slave."

Their contestation of some of Hegel's basic tenets works in tandem with their similarly intriguing revisions of Freud's theories of the double and the uncanny. According to Freud, the uncanny occurs when the familiar becomes strange, which, in the case of personal relationships, illustrates itself in the uneasy confrontation between oneself and one's double or "other." Freud also argues that the double represents one's

denial of death, allowing one to escape the inevitable curse of immortality, and that the

double is a form of narcissism. By this reasoning, the existence of a double represents an

extension or inflation of the ego in the most literal or superficial sense, indicating an

overdetermined sense of self. However, both Spalding and Carson challenge Freud's

claims, demonstrating that, in fact, the double is not simply a conscious projection of the

self but reflects and refracts various fears and doubts of the self, thus complicating and

challenging the self that Freud claims to be narcissistically embodied in the double.

Furthermore, they challenge Hegel's master/slave dialectic as well, complicating the

power struggle beyond a predictable push-and-pull between two parties. Although

Shelley certainly queries the stability of the master and slave positions, Spalding and

Carson take this inquiry a step further by demonstrating how these positions are difficult

to define and clarify in the first place, let alone maintain. In *Frankenstein*, the position of

"master" and "slave" appear fairly clear and distinct until the creature decides to seek

revenge against Viktor.

 The power dynamic between Viktor and the creature seems to correspond quite

closely to Hegel's theory, in that Victor's role as the scientist and creator and the

creature's role as his experimental "slave" are quickly reversed, generating a power

struggle that is motivated and exacerbated by their mutual (but differing versions of) their

desires for agency and freedom. Shelley only seemingly resolves this master-slave

dialectic when both Victor and the creature die, Victor of his physical wounds and

emotional exhaustion, and the creature of, ironically, his loss of purpose and of his sense

of self once Victor dies. The creature, consumed by hatred and vengeance, bases his self-

worth on, and organizes his life around, Victor, illustrating Hegel's theory that the master

and slave are codependent. Although he announces and constantly reiterates his newly-

found power over Victor by killing those closest to Victor, including his wife Elizabeth

and his best friend Clairval, and by initiating their fatal chase across the barren Arctic

landscape, the creature's determination to torment Victor endlessly—but not to kill

him—signals the creature's perverse dependence on Victor's existence. This ironic

expression of dependence surfaces in the creature's final visit to Victor's deathbed, which

is tinged with a mixture of remorse and self-loathing amidst the bitter anger at his creator:

"He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more the very

remembrance of us both will speedily vanish…Blasted as thou wert, my agony was still

superior to thine; for the bitter sting of remorse will not cease to rankle in my wounds

until death shall close them for ever" (219). The creature's final decision to commit

suicide even after (or, perhaps more accurately and suggestively, because of) Victor's

death suggests, as Hegel does, that the power struggle between master and slave can only

be resolved through the deaths of master and slave: "That is also my victim! [...] in his

murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its

close!…Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in

death?" (217, 219). This rhetorical question certainly recalls Hegel's statement that "just

as each stakes his own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no

more than itself" (114).

Viktor expresses a similar sentiment of revenge that also reveals an ironic

dependence upon the "other" and exposes his own feelings of guilt and shame as much as

it justifies his actions.  He, like the creature, lives only for the ultimate goal of

eliminating the "other," as he confesses to Walton, "If I were engaged in any high

undertaking or design, fraught with extensive utility to my fellow-creatures, then could I

live to fulfill it.  But such is not my destiny; I must pursue and destroy the being to whom

I gave existence; then my lot on earth will be fulfilled, and I may die" (211).

Anchoress and Autobiography of Red, on the other hand, demonstrate that the

master-slave relationship is not so much a dialectic as it is a highly contested and

constantly shifting dialogue.  The two texts indicate how much more unclear and

complicated these positions really are, especially since they tend to focus more on the

similarities between the supposed "master" and "slave," as opposed to reinforcing the

master/slave chasm by demonstrating the irreconcilable differences that can seemingly

only be resolved through the death of one or both parties.  For instance, Peter's

description of Helen's response to the impending attack on Iraq closely corresponds to

his earlier description of himself, "Seeking you where you are hiding, I crawl into a

beast" (Spalding 4): "Swaying back and forth, trembling, / she crawls into herself— / I

begin to lose her" (62).  Moreover, Anchoress and Autobiography of Red expand the

scope of what constitutes or defines the "master" and "slave."  Both texts include

multiple speakers who, at differing times, might be "masters" or "slaves," many of which

contain characteristics of both roles.  The numerous, and intersecting, master-slave

relationships challenge the implicit notion of a unilateral, homogeneous, or otherwise

dominant master-slave relationship that supersedes other relationships between oneself

and an "other."  Neither Spalding nor Carson concludes her text tidily, though this is not

to imply that Shelley does so. However, Shelley does essentially kill both "master" and "slave" in the end, and thereby resolves the master-slave dialectic in a predictable and pessimistic, if not exactly perfunctory, manner, though Shelley's conclusion partially depends on Walton's (and, by association, the reader's) faith in the creature's sincerity in his admission of guilt and sadness and in his final declaration of suicide. Though the creature's tendency towards mendacity increases alongside his impassioned feelings of injustice and rage towards humankind, Shelley devotes quite a bit of time to illustrating the creature's equally committed and compelling, if perverse, tendency towards brutal honesty. Since the creature has, quite irrationally, focused all his energies on revenging himself against Victor, Victor's death almost inevitably signals the creature's sudden loss of purpose and sense of self which, up until this point, has been based more or less on *Victor's* self-identity. The creature tells Walton, "After the murder of Clerval I returned to Switzerland heart-broken and overcome. I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror: I abhorred myself. But when I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for happiness; that while he accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me he sought his own enjoyment in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was for ever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with an insatiable thirst for vengeance. I recollected my threat and resolved that it should be accomplished. I knew that I was preparing for myself a deadly torture; but I was the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested, yet could not disobey" (218). Whereas Shelley reinforces Hegel's arguments

concerning the power dynamics and eventual resolution of the master-slave dialectic,

Spalding and Carson challenge these extensively in their texts.

Freud's claim that the double functions as a denial of death and as a form of

narcissism is complicated by both Spalding and Carson in their texts, which, on the

contrary, suggest that the double appears to heighten the power of death by serving as a

constant, haunting reminder of one's own mortality. Peter and Geryon, confronted with

their disturbing specters of mortality, attempt to reduce death's power over themselves,

though not necessarily to deny entirely or reject the presence of death. While Spalding

and Carson acknowledge the double's ability also to allow their speakers, at least

temporarily, to forget their mortality or to underestimate death, they argue that the double

does not only constitute a denial of death of the self, but also, and more importantly, a

denial of death of the "other." This claim at least partially refutes the notion that the

double is only a projection of the ego, since in *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* the

double represents the "other" as a necessary extension of the self and not just in the

egotistical sense, but more in alignment with Jacques Derrida's concepts of hospitality

and friendship, which are central for imagining a more radical and inclusive democracy.

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida asks, "Who could ever answer for a discourse *on*

friendship without *taking a stand* [...], hence without assuming the *responsibility* of this

stand—friend or enemy, one *or* the other; indeed one *and* the other? Can one speak of

love without declaring one's love, without declaring war, beyond all possible neutrality?

Without avowing, if only the avowable?" (228).

The double not only represents the fantasies of the self, but also, I believe, several of its nightmares. Insofar as the double, representative of the other, lures the self as a site of constant return and preoccupation—though this movement of the self towards the other is not always entirely conscious or willing, as both Hegel and Freud point out when they speak of the roles of mediation and repression—the double's ability to constitute and embody what the self fears (and thus wishes to escape) destroys the coherence and unity of the self that is implicit in Freud's privileging of the self's own image (narcissism) and that is confirmed by Hegel in his dialectical resolution when he states, "[T]hus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being [...] but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self*" (114; italics in text). So it is that Spalding and Carson are, I believe, more invested in the idea of the self as a spectre. They are less interested in the double as an ideal self that ought to be strived towards than they are in the double as a politically productive spectre that acts as a voice of conscience and memory. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues that "*one must* reckon" (xx; italics in text) with these spectres or spirits because they do not belong in or move towards death, but instead move towards what he calls "a *living-on*" (xx)—which I read to include the legacies of justice, responsibility, and memory that the life of living beings carry. For Derrida, it is essential for one to "learn to live—alone, from oneself, by oneself" (xviii) by following the lead of the "other" and coming to terms with death, and he argues that learning how to live constitutes ethics and can "happen only *between* life and death" (xviii; italics mine). As such, it becomes necessary to "learn spirits" and "learn to live

with *ghosts*" (xviii). The presence of nightmares as well as of fantasies in the spectral

embodiment destroys the coherence and unity of the self, since the self not only

*constructs* the other in its own image but, to its unease, *discovers* itself in the other.

Although Helen certainly embodies many of the ideals that Peter admires, as well

as possesses, Spalding makes it abundantly clear that she does not simply fulfill the role

of the ideal "other." Helen does not simply exist as a complement or contradiction to

Peter; she has a life (and death) of her own choosing and, in fact, frequently defies or

exceeds expectations and limits. Her inability to be contained or controlled is frequently

expressed through images of nature and landscapes, often oppositional, such as fire,

water, ice, and stars. In describing the "Last Party" (63) that Peter, Helen, and France

have together, Peter describes Helen in paradoxical, almost mystical terms. Her singing

is both "so bitter and so sweet" (63), she makes "preposterous" (63) claims, and with her

"[h]ead thrown back, [a] strange / wailing laugh" (63) escapes her. Helen's connection to

fire runs throughout the book, culminating for her in the visceral suicide whose scene

continues to haunt Peter. Her attraction to and embodiment of fire is significant since fire

has the capacity to both create and destroy and thus is a kind of monstrous element in that

it transgresses binaries. Fire encourages growth while simultaneously extinguishing it

and, often, resists attempts to contain it. Peter illustrates Helen's transgressive nature and

her resistance against assimilation when he states that she is "[q]uick as a firefly,

impossible / to trap. Helen burns / a trail behind her" (42). At the same time as Peter

emphasizes her rebellious personality and ability to transcend boundaries, he indicates

her concomitant tendency towards idealism: "Though it was Will's strength she craved, /

she was like Manon, / and I am too, always dreaming of something / wondrous overhead

[…] / […] A lullaby world—green hull, anchor" (56). Like Manon, Helen always strives

for something beyond the normal, seeking to accomplish extraordinary goals. She

inherits her mother's legacy of dreaming for a more harmonious world without war and

suffering, things that her mother experienced as a young child and from which she vowed

to protect her children: "She vows she will speak to them / only of the cave, not of her

war childhood, / a splinted bone. / Her children will never go to Europe, will live / in a

landscape where glass obscures the ghosts" (11). Spalding, however, indicates the

impossibility of entirely concealing or renouncing these "ghosts" of the past, as Helen

quickly learns herself of the many injustices that she does not directly witness. She

stages her first political protest when she is only seven years old, going on a hunger strike

to bring attention to starving African children. Already, Spalding indicates Helen's

dormant idealism but also suggests the frequency with which this individual idealism

clashes with, or fails to inspire and arouse, a collective public apathy about crucial but

seemingly distant issues such as poverty and racism: "Helen is grandstanding, she hasn't /

learned the world doesn't care / what she thinks" (15). The following stanza foreshadows

how Helen's political aspirations are perceived by France, and later by Peter as well, as

Helen's gravitation away from "conventional" love—the love of family and love of one's

partner—towards an inclusive, social love: "For two days she stares at a clean / dinner

plate. France takes seconds, / *Helen has left me for something brighter*" (15).

Peter's assessments of, and reaction towards, Helen's politics as an adult recalls

France's childhood feelings of loss and perplexity about her politics. He, like France, has

38

difficulty sharing Helen's optimism and faith: "*My father would be proud*, Helen says, /

*France should have come.* / I was too weak to stay away. / She thinks someone is

listening, / thinks they can raise the price of war too high" (66). Peter's evaluation of

himself as "weak" demonstrates both Peter's own lack of self-confidence and his

tendency to always define himself against Helen and, perhaps more important, his belief

that he and everybody else are helpless to influence any major outcome.

The doubles presented in *Anchoress* and the ensuing master-slave relationships

are numerous and complex in their portrayal of monstrosity, challenging boundaries such

as those between life and death, femininity and masculinity, and the personal and

political spheres. While the most obvious, and central, relationship is that between Peter

and Helen, the other significant double relationship exists between Helen and her sister,

France. Despite Spalding's beginning the text from Peter's perspective, she introduces

France as the book's first double figure. Although Helen and France are not twins,

Spalding uses many references to twinning and clearly portrays the sisters as doubles of

each other. For all their differences—Helen being associated with death, masculinity,

and politics and France with life, femininity, and the private sphere—the sisters are

codependent and complement each other. Spalding notes in her interview with Natalee

Caple that "[t]he sister, France, is someone who is totally caught up in the physical. And

Helen is entirely cerebral—she's in an ecstatic state most of the time" (Berry and Caple

392-393). After their parents' tragic deaths in an airplane crash, they rely upon each

other for emotional support and survival. As an act of defiance, they construct their own

monsters by casting their silhouettes on the walls of the cave to which they retreat.

Spalding writes, "Everyone is afraid to give them rules. The foster / parents' one rule: sleep alone. / A rule that has to be / broken" (19). Spalding suggests that Helen and France are like Siamese twins, which France explains to Helen are *"Babies born at the same time who share / parts of their bodies. / Sometimes their brains"* (21). Together, the sisters are frequently described as some kind of creature or monster, as in this brief description of them when France rides her bike with Helen on the handlebars: "From a distance they look like / a two-headed monster" (21). The differences that exist between the sisters when they were young become more pronounced as they mature, specifically with regards to the ways in which they deal with loss and grief, with men, and with politics. Peter becomes Helen's second double when he meets her, although Spalding suggests that Peter perceives Helen as his double more often and more intensely than Helen does.

Although the "other" has frequently been discussed as a double of the self, the significance of gender in the construction, maintenance, and perception of the self/other relationship sometimes becomes obscured or otherwise ignored, especially in relationships between and amongst men, where the instrumental role of gender and its accompanying norms in the social power dynamic can easily be downplayed and taken for granted. In *Autobiography of Red,* however, Geryon's sexuality forces the inclusion of gender in the self/other discussion, especially since his homosexuality troubles the conventionally distinct, and biologically-based, male/female boundary that might otherwise be occluded. Likewise, in *Anchoress*, Spalding pushes gender to the forefront and challenges this gender-blindness, especially since one of the central self/other

relationships is that between Peter and Helen, which both complements and supplements

the close relationship between Helen and France. Indeed, Peter's presence complicates

the double relationship that Helen and France share by introducing elements of

masculinity and masculine sexuality into a developing triangular relationship, which can

be read through René Girard's theory of triangular desire.

René Girard's theory of triangular desire is particularly cogent in beginning to

sort out the self/other relationships; it posits that a mediator exists between the subject

and the object of his/her desire and that this relationship is best understood as a structural

model that is a triangle. Girard points out, however, that "[t]he triangle is no Gestalt.

The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere; the triangle

has no reality whatever…" (Rivkin and Ryan 226), reminding us that the triangle cannot

be physically identified or grounded. As well, such a model "allude[s] to the mystery,

transparent yet opaque, of human relations" (Rivkin and Ryan 226); "[f]rom the moment

the mediator's influence is felt, the sense of reality is lost and judgement paralyzed"

(Rivkin and Ryan 226). In each of the three texts being examined, there clearly exist

triangular relationships: in *Frankenstein*, the Victor/creature/Walton relationship; in

*Anchoress*, the Peter/Helen/France relationship; and in *Autobiography of Red*, the

Geryon/Herakles/Ancash relationship and, prior to Ancash's arrival in the narrative, the

tension of Geryon/Herakles/Geryon's mother. Thus, the "self" and the "other" do not

exist simply as disparate terms divided by a chasm. Instead, a mediator—one that is

invested in the current relationship instead of occupying an ether as a disinterested

narrator—facilitates the dialogue between the self and other and whose position is itself

Love and desire, as in *Anchoress*, is shown in *Autobiography of Red* to be simultaneously productive, or creative, and destructive. It is perhaps noteworthy that in both texts, the main speaker, or at least the speaker with whom the reader is presumably invited to identify or at the very least, empathize with—Peter or Geryon—begins his narration by citing or predicting his own death. As well, their imagined predicaments (though this is not to deny them the validity of their feelings or the perceived "realness" of their deaths) seemingly originate from their love interests, Helen and Herakles, or, perhaps more truthfully, their own investment in their relationships and in particular notions of love. As I have already discussed in chapter 1, Spalding and Carson revise specific cultural narratives about gender and monstrosity, troubling the dominant male/female binary and challenging both masculinity and femininity as coherent, and opposable, sets of norms and social codes.

Peter's and Geryon's accounts of their own deaths, and their refutation of the dominant narratives, literally suggest the "death of the author," as Roland Barthes argues. He is critical of how the "[t]he author is to his text as God, the *auctor vitae,* is to his world: the unitary cause, source and master to whom the chain of textual effects must be traced, and in whom they find their genesis, meaning, goal and justification" (Burke 23). As such, Barthes subsumes the author under the reader, who "is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (qtd. in Burke 27). The death of the author translates into the birth of the reader, whom he calls the "monster of totality" (Burke 27).

Such a declaration of the death of the author also challenges traditional concepts

of authority, which are frequently bound up as well with dominant gender dynamics that

privilege the masculine perspective. The deaths of the "authors" signal, too, Spalding's

and Carson's mutual interest in questioning conventional definitions of masculinity and

in querying what "histories" (or *his-stories*) are told, privileged, authorized, and

immortalized as proper legacies. Helen and Geryon, in particular, defy social standards

of decorum in numerous ways that challenge the potential of love for personal, individual

fulfillment and for political, collective action. However, whereas Roland Barthes argues

that the death of the author signifies a new phase in modern literature and believes that

the death of the author is both necessary and uncontestable, Spalding and Carson seem to

argue that it is not so much the literal death of the author that is required or desirable but,

rather, the intellectual and social debates that such a possibility provokes. Indeed, to

them, the death of the author is tied to the moment at which individuality—and by this I

mean the individual constructed as a singular, cohesive, irreducible, and independent

element—begins to disintegrate in order to embrace the possibility of what Michael Hardt

and Antonio Negri call the multitude. Hardt and Negri posit the multitude as the new

form of politics by which we can consolidate a solidarity that does not risk slipping into a

unity (which would contribute to the erasure of difference and otherness). They also

discuss how the multitude is tied to biopolitics, which allows us to speak about power as

a network of possibilities of resistance, instead of as a dominating and exclusive force (as

it manifests itself through biopower, for instance). Instead of reminiscing about the

"modern social bodies" (192) that have disappeared in light of the current postmodern

society, Hardt and Negri instead encourage us to consider "the flesh of the multitude" as the new "living social flesh," a "flesh that is not a body, a flesh that is common, living substance" and that "continuously expands social being, producing in excess of every traditional political-economic measure of value" (192).

Spalding and Carson, in exploring the rejection and, indeed, *abjection* and *objection*, of their respective "authors," disrupt the self/other boundaries and disturb what is still commonly perceived as competing, polarizing definitions of monstrosity (abnormality) and humanity (normality). Because definitions of monstrosity are based upon certain concepts of abnormality, the question of what constitutes normality becomes central, thus redirecting the usually negative, stigmatized attention away from the "monstrous" (that is, Helen and Geryon) towards the "normal" people whose behaviours are frequently unaccounted for, pardoned, or condoned (Peter and Herakles). Thus, their texts illustrate how figures such as Geryon might be viewed as a monstrous flesh of the multitude, and how, in fact, the "concept of the multitude forces us to enter a new world in which we can only understand ourselves as monsters" (194). In fact, Spalding and Carson  raise the difficult, even traumatic, question of what constitutes *humane* behaviour, especially when Peter asks in anguish, "What happens to a man who realizes his lover / desires a whole nation?" (110), and Geryon considers his options as a red-winged and immortal monster forced to live amongst presumably less tolerant mortals who would, like most of the people in *Frankenstein*, reject him upon discovering his "real" identity. Geryon experiences this dilemma on a daily basis not only in his mind but in the physical demands of his body as well: "His wings were struggling. They tore

against each other on his shoulders / like the little mindless red animals they were. / With

a piece of wooden plank he'd found in the basement Geryon made a back brace / and

lashed the wings tight." (53). Such questions about humanity on a larger level extend the

relevance of challenging the self/other for personal reasons to the political sphere but

also, importantly, complicate the discussion of monstrosity by always forcing self-

awareness and self-reflection as a necessity. Thus, while Spalding may applaud Helen

for her courage, selflessness, and astute political vision, she questions too the efficacy of

Helen's suicide to further political motivation and action and its obviously painful impact

upon her loved ones. Although Spalding and Carson continually demonstrate the

importance of communicating with "others" on a social and political level, they remind

us that, conversely, personal agendas and considerations cannot be neglected, forgotten,

or abandoned. If anything, Spalding and Carson argue that optimism arises from the

personal and political spheres working in tandem.

     Peter's anguish comes from Spalding's own ambivalence who, in the interview

with Caple, explains that she based Helen's suicide on a young Massachusetts teacher,

Gregory Levey, who immolated himself to protest the Gulf War: "It was a demonstration

of commitment—extremist commitment, but commitment. It said to me that I wasn't

doing enough, but it also said to me that his death was a waste. I felt both things. I felt

the commitment of the young teacher's actions but also the narcissism of his actions. [...]

Yes, on a personal level, like any suicide, it was absolutely cruel and selfish" (Berry and

Caple 391). Levey, like Helen, was only in the newspapers the day after his suicide

before everybody forgot about him and the war continued.

Spalding and Carson portray love as productive on the most literal and personal

level, in the sense that it allows two people to bond intimately and to change each other in

previously unimaginable ways, but they also portray love as productive in the creative

sense, encouraging, facilitating, and inspiring a range of artistic and scientific

endeavours. Peter, like Victor Frankenstein, devotes himself to scientific endeavours;

Geryon, like Manon, comprehends the world through photography; and in both Peter's

and Geryon's worlds, references to classical myths, literary works, and academic theory

abound. These various artistic and scientific pursuits act as conduits through which

Spalding and Carson critique conventional norms and perceptions about monstrosity.

The productivity of love is, for Spalding and Carson, closely tied to what Jacques

Derrida calls the "politics of friendship." While multiple definitions of love exist, it is

likely that most people still conceive of love firstly as a romantic and sexual concept

expressing the private, shared feelings between two individuals. Certainly, this is the

definition that frequently comes to mind first when one considers the concept of "love."

Although this definition constitutes the nexus and narrative core of both *Anchoress* and

*Autobiography of Red*, Spalding and Carson explore love as a feeling that also might, and

does, exist between strangers and how this particular notion of love translates into a deep

respect for one's fellow human beings and, consequently, an increased acknowledgement

of the impact of one's decisions upon others. It is worth noting that Peter's and France's

love for Helen, and Geryon's love for Herakles, provide Peter, France, and Geryon

greater awareness about themselves as individuals and also about their roles as

individuals in a larger community. Helen, especially, encourages Peter and France to

figuratively think outside of themselves and to embrace others without condescension, patronization, naivete, or thoughts of assimilation. Spalding explains that Peter "is really a map-maker. He's coming to understand the tunnels and connections between different ideologies and different behaviours" (Berry and Caple 293).

In challenging the binary of the mind and body, Spalding and Carson illustrate love not only as an emotion, to be felt and expressed with the heart, but as an action that requires hard work and patience. Love becomes a verb in the truest sense of the word, an ongoing, mutable, and evolving action that constantly destabilizes and disrupts the status quo. Hence, love exists not only as an end result or product (that is, as a noun) but also as a *production*, which Peter demonstrates in his assemblage of whale skeletons and Geryon in his photographs. Caple informs Spalding, "What is really interesting to me [...] is the way that you write the body as a body. The body does not become a vessel or a metaphor. The bodies in your books are boned bodies full of blood with chambered hearts. They are bodies affected by the world in which they live" (393-394). Spalding responds that Peter's learning of the Spanish word "recordar," that "means to pass back through the heart" (Berry and Caple 395) signifies what she and Peter are attempting in the text—to reinvest the cold calculation and rationale of technological warfare with the heart's response, and in so doing to reject the concept of a "clean war" (Berry and Caple 395) and re-examine the role of ethics.

*Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* demonstrate the utility of both heart and mind and the dangers of falling to either extreme. Peter's almost fanatical devotion to science and logic completely fails him when he confronts the circumstances and

consequences of Helen's suicide and, similarly, Helen's impulsive and passionate personality prevents her from more closely examining her suicide both as a questionable political form of protest (questionable in the extent of its political impact and her motivation for doing so) and as an action that would destroy those closest to her.

These are the elements I am considering when I argue that love and desire in *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* are shown as both productive and destructive. Geryon's intense feelings for Herakles, while they stimulate Geryon to grow and mature as an individual and prompt him to deal honestly with his sexuality, also threaten to destroy him when Herakles decides to break off their relationship because these feelings are literally all-consuming. Similarly, Peter's love for Helen results in his near-destruction after she abruptly dies, and France literally feels as if she has been cleaved in half without her "twin." The characters' dependence upon their doubles or "others" complicates Freud's argument (and, indeed, the quite popular notion) that the arrival of the double signifies the death of the self. In *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red*, the self is so closely bound with the concept of its double, its own "other," that the other becomes, literally, necessary for the self's survival. While Spalding and Carson do critique the dangers of such an extreme co-dependency, they point out how such double relationships might be fruitful. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's gradual awareness and acknowledgement of the far-reaching consequences of his scientific experiments leads him to realize with horror that he has, in fact, created a "monster" who becomes destructive but, even more disturbingly, eventually forces Victor to examine the monstrous aspects of himself. Viktor attempts to relay his new-found awareness to

Walton, who represents a younger version of Viktor, consumed by his passion for

science. In fact, Walton recognises in Viktor a double of himself when he notices the

multiple personality traits, emotions, and experiences that the two share and that which

immediately creates an affinity between the two men. Though both Peter and Geryon do

not share their stories and revelations in the same way, their narrative and linguistic

techniques signal the breakdown between the self and other while avoiding the

assimilation of, and retaining the unique "otherness" of, the "other." This will be part of

my focus in the following chapter in which I bring in Lacan.

## Chapter 3 – Lacan and the Self/Other Relationship

The relationship between the self and the other, as I have mentioned in chapter 1, is one of constant negotiation and variable mediation. For Spalding and Carson, the tension that exists between the self and the other is a partial reflection of the self's internal conflicts. Hence, the speakers' conflicts with others prompt a re-examination of their own values and beliefs and, subsequently, personal transformations that resist the normative ideologies that they once more readily subscribed to or accepted as necessary, though painful, facts of life. While this theorization of the self/other relationship is hardly innovative, given the extensive research on texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Spalding and Carson rework the organizational structure and content of popular myths and narratives—including those of *Frankenstein*—in their attempts to question even the underlying rationale of what constitutes the "self" and its boundaries and, concomitantly, of what constitutes the "other." Shelley, Carson, and Spalding, respectively, depict varying degrees of *physical* monstrosity, from the most physically monstrous and demonstrate the contingency of definitions of monstrosity upon codes of normality.

In his essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan describes the mirror stage as a stage of identification. A young child can recognize his own image in a mirror and acts out a series of gestures "in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child's own body, and the persons and things, around

him" (178). He defines identification as "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*" (179). The subject perceives the growing/onset of his/her power, but this is a mirage and is presented as *Gestalt* in the form of an Ideal-I , "in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixed it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (179). *Gestalt* represents the "mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion" (179). The relationship between the actual self and the Ideal-I certainly recalls Freud's theory of the double and uncanny, since Lacan himself states that "we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which psychical realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested" (179). Moreover, the Ideal-I situates the ego in a "fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality" (179). For Lacan, the mirror stage is, in fact, a drama in which the subject dreams of a progression from a fragmented body-image to a wholly complete one. The appearance of the fragmented body thus represents

the individual's own feelings of disintegration. Lacan seems to challenge both Hegel's

dialectic (or at least the way Hegel conceives the dialectic as being solved, through

eliminating the other—which is also my criticism) when he argues, "At the culmination

of the historical effort of a society to refuse to recognize that it has any function other

than the utilitarian one, and in the anxiety of the individual confronting the

'concentrational' form of the social bond that seems to arise to crown this effort,

existentialism must be judged by the explanations it gives of the subjective impasses that

have indeed resulted from it" (182), including "a personality that realizes itself only in

suicide" and "a consciousness of the other than can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder"

(182). Furthermore, he also critiques the perspective that sanctifies empirical knowledge

to the exclusion of other forms of knowledge, stating that we should "not [...] regard the

ego as centered on the *perception-consciousness system* or as organized by the 'reality

principle'—a principle that is the expression of a scientific prejudice most hostile to the

dialectic of knowledge. Our experience shows that we should start instead from the

*function of meconnaissance* that characterizes the ego in all its structures so markedly

articulated by Miss Anna Freud. For, if the *Verneinung* [denial] represents the patent

form of that function, its effects will, for the most part, remain latent, so long as they are

not illuminated by some light reflected on to the level of fatality, which is where the id

manifests itself."

The links that Lacan makes between narrative and body, and language and self,

are clearly evident in Spalding's and Carson's work. In *Psychic Life of Power*, Judith

Butler argues, "Conscience is the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself,

reflecting on itself, establishing itself as reflective and reflexive. [...] In order to curb

desire, one makes of oneself an object for reflection; in the course of producing one's

own alterity, one becomes established as a reflexive being, one who can take oneself as

an object" (22). Peter and Geryon, through their narrative practices, express this constant

tension between subject and object, desire and reflexivity.

John Donne's now-famous adage that "No man is an island," a pithy observation

about the necessity of human interrelationships, is one that Peter and Geryon seem to

know implicitly but need to learn, or perhaps relearn, through their own personal

experiences of loss and grief. The creature in *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, must

literally navigate the unfamiliar and complicated terrain of the human psyche at the same

time that he acquaints himself with his physical surroundings and with his own physical

limits and capabilities. His experiments with social interaction and human customs and

behaviours test the boundaries between the self and the other, and these especially

challenge and test the definitions of selfhood and agency and the extent to which the self

defines itself against, alongside, within, and outside of the "other." The creature's naïve

dealings with and observations of "civilization," and his subsequent alienation represent

an extreme version of what Peter and Geryon when they discover the extent to which

their own monstrosities distinguish and isolate them from their peers. The creature's

psychic development suggests a progression from infancy to adulthood, as his repertoire

of knowledge expands from sensory information about his basic physical needs to

observations of human kinship and language, even though the creature has physically

been fully formed (and deformed, according to almost every person he encounters and even to his own creator, Victor) from the beginning of his existence.

The creature perceives and evaluates himself through the gaze of other people, especially since he soon discovers that his physical differences exclude him from healthy social interaction. As a result, he views himself with increasing self-loathing because humans respond to him based upon his unusual physical appearance, which in itself embodies various conventionally "monstrous" qualities. For instance, the creature's unusually large size extends beyond human proportions and defies conventional laws of nature and science. As the volcano in *Autobiography of Red* also demonstrates, things that are seen to be large beyond reason are also viewed as threatening and dangerous. Viktor reveals that he constructed the creature from body parts taken from multiple cadavers. The creature's biological origins thus disrupt what many people might consider to be a sacred boundary between life and death and the "natural" cycle of life. The creature's mosaic, cobbled appearance suggests a fragmented body that challenges and defies the traditional notion of the body as a single, cohesive, and containable functional unit. Also, his *perpetually* fragmented body would leave no room for a Lacanian progression (however much imaginary) from the *infans* stage to the Ideal-I, thus representing a threat to the conventional physical and psychological development of the self.

Moreover, the creature as a literal amalgamation of different bodies disrupts the boundary between the private and the public body and the barriers that people establish between each other's private bodies. Despite his initial naivete and altruism, the creature

slowly grows to distrust and hate as people reject him based on his physical appearance and reinforce his status as an unwelcome "other." His hatred of other people reflects his own self-hatred. Shelley describes the creature's trajectory as a gradual regression from his potential to "evolve" into the Enlightenment or Romantic ideal of a human being, or as a devolution. However, such a description still assumes and depends upon certain definitions of "civilization" and "savagery," despite Shelley's efforts at complicating these and indicating that Viktor, too, possesses his own monstrous side. The crux of the problem perhaps resides in the fact that Viktor, even if he does possess monstrous qualities, can still choose to conceal them and essentially assimilate himself into mainstream society, an option that is unavailable to the creature because of his apparent physical deformities.

I am interested in examining Peter's and Geryon's identity struggles and how their increasing awareness of their position (literally and figuratively) in relation to others impacts their changing perception of themselves, their personal relationships, and their personal politics. Specifically, the focus will be on the relationship between body, language, and narrative technique, and how this complicates the self/other boundary on a more textual level.

Peter's own present life moves in tandem with the life that he once shared with Helen, which becomes clear as Spalding's text progresses. Before he enters, and immerses himself in the process of (re)membering and (re)narrating Helen's and his own life—and those of others around them who have also been touched, both by love and by pain—Peter exists in a transitional phase of his life. His state of limbo is governed both

by his continued obsession with, and persistent inability to relinquish, the overshadowing

grip of the past, and by the corresponding inability to envision a future for himself that

does not include Helen. Thus, the beginning of Spalding's text proper is in fact

representative of Peter's engagement with loss and grief, and illustrates how he has spent

the past year mourning Helen without arriving at any discernible state of peace.

Peter's search for Helen also entails a search for himself; that is, for his own sense

of identity and a sense of location amidst a chaotic world that has intensified for him after

Helen's death. Peter expresses his loss as feeling lost, since he ends what I tentatively

call the "prologue" with sentiments that echo the creature's in *Frankenstein*: "*Helen, one*

*year of drowning. Seeking you where you are hiding, I crawl into a beast. One part of*

*this is rage, I was your creature and abandoned*" (4). Peter's feelings of dislocation and

helplessness (which seem to correspond to Lacan's description of the *infans* stage)

surface in his implied, and obsessive, turn towards death, which is matched only by his

consuming desire to resurrect Helen and, with her, the past life that they shared. This

simultaneous double expression of life and death indicates the extent to which Peter

depends upon Helen for not only life's satisfaction, but for life itself. However, Peter's

futile desire for Helen's return also appears grounded in thinly disguised fury and

vengeance, and as such his apostrophic engagement with Helen is less the beginning of a

productive dialogue than an accusatory plea that reveals his conflicting tendencies

between wanting Helen to return to life—and restore a measure of coherence to his

disintegrating life and self-confidence—and wanting to completely eliminate his

memories of her in order to erase the pain of losing her. Although Helen, as we later

learn, assumes an imperturbable stance again terrorism, war, and violence of all kinds,

Peter blames her for leaving him as well as her sister and calls her a "terrorist": "You left

[France] too, remember, terrorist. She was halved without you. Just like you to get the

last word in…" (3). Peter's submerged resentment at Helen having "the last word"

appears to have prompted him to tell *his* story in response (perhaps a version of *history*),

which is, in some ways, a reversal of the conventional trend that tends to favour male

narratives over female ones. Indeed, his "prologue" reverses several conventional

gendered trends and relationships, most significantly signalling how Spalding challenges

the relationship between creator and creation, and the boundary between public and

private. Peter's opening plea inverts the traditional gender power dynamic by setting him

up as a victim and Helen as his saviour, "Helen, I'm drowning. If I lie down in darkness

will you come, if I lie down in rain will you rescue me, arrive with torches to dry my

skin, tell me again the things that mattered?" (3). Helen literally becomes Peter's life

buoy, the only separation between himself and death: "Look at me, a half-man who can't

sleep, who doesn't own his dreams, who lives with the manure stink beetles leave. A

man crouched over his lover's grave, his hair in his face—mouth on your scalloped hip. I

want you inside me, a second, deeper skin, my anchoress" (4). Peter's reference to

himself as a "half-man" indicates his feeling of incompleteness, or fragmentation, in

Helen's absence and, moreover, suggests an element of monstrosity, evoking mythical

creatures who are also "half-men" such as the centaur or, perhaps more appropriately, the

merman. Indeed, Peter ends his apostrophe with words that allude to *Frankenstein* and

the creature's combined resentment, anger, and grief about his creator Victor: "Seeking

you where you are hiding, I crawl into a beast. One part of this is rage, I was your

creature and abandoned" (4).

Peter implies that his monstrosity is a consequence of, and response to, Helen's

death. Even so, he seems invested in reexamining their relationship, stating, "Let's start

over. Forget the whale, the aquarium, forget the tagged bones, shipwrecked on the

laboratory table. Melted, France said, not human (3)." He wants to re-establish a

dialogue between himself and Helen that not only functions in the most literal and

superficial way, as a mode of private communication, but that also serves to encourage

and foster social and political debate. He says, "I want to argue with you again, hear you

say, I have that bone to pick with you, love or politics or too many spices in your arms till

morning" (3). While his sentiments reflect a desire for renewal, they are largely self-

indulgent ones since Peter assigns responsibility to Helen for essentially beginning this

chain of events. Moreover, his anger at Helen for dying and abandoning him is closely

intertwined with his frustration about her politics, especially since politics assumes a

much greater significance in her life than in his. While his lurking feelings of pain are

legitimate, Peter unsuccessfully, and unadvisedly, attempts to cope with these feelings by

establishing an emotional and moral distance from Helen, classifying her as a form of

monstrous "other" by identifying her as a "terrorist"—thereby allowing himself to

reinforce the conventional us/them rhetoric employed as justification during the Gulf War

(and, in fact, commonly used for a variety of official political decisions), and to justify

*his* own sense of wounded self-righteousness and self-pity. Even so, he is forced to

acknowledge his *own* monstrosity when he views himself as a "half-man," even if he

attributes his dejected condition entirely to Helen, and this eventually prompts him to revisit and reassemble memories of her. He needs to acknowledge that he is still mourning Helen and that, if he is to continue living a productive life, he must confront his conflicting feelings honestly.

Despite Peter's distressing sense of isolation and hopelessness, exacerbated by the alienation he feels that Helen has unfairly subjected him to by essentially sacrificing their relationship to her steadfast political beliefs, he becomes more and more implicated as he re-examines the past that they shared together. His self-image disintegrates in the wake of Helen's departure, since Peter has frequently perceived himself through Helen's eyes. In a reversal of conventional gender roles that pairs the binary of creator/creation with that of male/female, Spalding characterizes Helen as the dominant partner in her relationship with Peter and the one who "shapes" Peter, rather than the other way round. Most noticeably, Peter's personal politics emerge and shift as a result of their relationship. His claim that he has "no politics" because he is "Canadian" is a trait that Helen finds simultaneously endearing and frustrating and, in fact, quickly becomes a source of one of their many inside jokes. First, Peter's use of nationalism and national identity as justification for his lack of interest and involvement—one might easily say apathy—is challenged vehemently by Spalding through Helen, who occupies the opposite end of the spectrum with regard to nationalism and political conscience. Whereas Peter relies upon science and logic for comprehending the world around him, Helen relies more upon instinct and faith. Spalding captures their differences succinctly in a lovemaking scene, which also disrupts the conventional boundary between the intimate relationship of

the private sphere and the broader social obligations of the public sphere. Peter insists on

keeping his eyeglasses on during their lovemaking, even though Helen wants to take

them off: "Because I am that explorer, because I / have crossed bridges and borders / to

come to her country, I convince her / to trust the lover who sees. / She talks so much, to

know what she says / I have to read her frantic gestures. / Her semaphore. / *You're like*

*my mother with her camera,* she says, / *a piece of glass, a lens between you / and the*

*world. Not to see more clearly, / but to obscure. To keep your private / world. A room*

*with a closed door.* / She knows that much about me" (37). Helen's preference for the

blind lover who relies on his intuition and non-visual senses challenges the rationalistic

and visually based culture that, as Lacan has pointed out in his critique of absolute

empiricism, Peter and many others have accepted as the norm. Earlier, Peter remarks,

"My eyesight always an issue between us" (27), reflecting upon his inability to

comprehend Helen's claim that she and France are "Siamese twins" (27) since they are

not twins at all. His failure to recognize Helen's and France's psychic connection and the

ways in which they act as doubles for each other, superseding any physical or genetic

bond that might be required of twins, also prevents him from recognizing his own double

relationship with the sisters and with his father. Peter begins to critique the role of

science and logic as he reflects upon Helen's death, recognizing how rationality often

fails to take into account or empathize with those things that cannot be measured

concretely. In writing about scientists who try to analyse a plane crash, he observes how

they "[insist] chaos has its / pattern. // I am the scientist gaping at the crash site / making

notes. / As if corpses made sense. / As if the second law of thermodynamics / could be

broken" (29).  Science and its foundational principles can distance us from the

consequences of applied science and obscure other possible modes of seeing.

Ostriker argues that "[l]ike charity, women's anger begins at home" (128) and

that "women poets' indignation at male power is deepened by its rationale of

rationality—by the assumption that masculinity represents the superiority of mind and

reason, logical objectivity and civilization over mere female emotionality, subjectivity,

and corporeality.  Many victimization poems are therefore preoccupied with the

demystifying of rationalism" (132-133).  Although *Anchoress* certainly challenges the

normative, overdetermined importance of rationality and science in personal and social

politics by emphasizing the destructive capacity of scientific logic and its tendency to

eliminate the question of ethics, as does *Frankenstein*, it seems improbable that one

would read *Anchoress* as a victimization poem.  While Peter and Helen undoubtedly

represent, to a degree, the two poles of the gendered binary reason/emotion, Helen is in

no way presented as a victim.  As I have pointed out already, it is the contrary—Peter

sees himself as the victim of Helen's selfishness, and Helen is preoccupied with reacting

against rationalism but in the public rather than the private sphere.  In fact, Helen appears

relatively content in her relationship with Peter despite the fact that he claims to have "no

politics."  She spends her energy instead on trying to impact public politics and the male

authority figures who control its institutions, such as President George Bush.  In her

tirade against Bush, she announces, "I am watching you, violent, vengeful man, at peace

with yourself, I want you at peace at me, or at least with Schwarzkopf, you called a *dove*

because he said that *total destruction of Iraq might not be in the interest of the long-term*

*balance of power in the Middle East*" (81). Her repeated warning that she is "watching" him and that she in fact constantly "hover[s]" over him suggests that Helen is like a ghost or spectre of conscience. It is also particularly interesting that, despite Ostriker's rightly argued point that much women's writing disturbs boundaries, Helen partially reifies the gendered reason/emotion binary. Peter writes, "She believes I / am harder than I am. I am not / steel, not the shores of Hamilton / though I have described / them to her. I am fragile / as sand through the throat of an hour glass" (80). Peter's admission complicates the self/other binary as his declaration is a response against Helen's own preconceptions that are entangled in her idealism. It forms perhaps part of his desire to be freed from the psychological restrictions she has helped construct. Likewise, he clearly shows his own ethical dilemma when he tries to distance himself from the scientific endeavours and dreams that result in death and destruction, although he himself is equally fascinated by such concepts as nuclear fission: "Science boiled up new ways to die: / bodies transformed into photographic light. / (I am no scientist. Not one of that rank. I am Jew Fish.)" (69). Peter's adoption of Helen's nickname for herself demonstrates his uncertainty about the self/other boundary, as he increasingly dissociates himself from what used to be his defining characteristic and obsession (his science) and aligns himself with Helen's politics.

Spalding further complicates the boundary between masculine reason and feminine emotion when Peter writes that, in the process of thinking and rethinking Helen's actions, he has ironically "changed places" (102) with her: "The answer, for you, / simple, clear as diamond. A crystal / at absolute zero. / For me, obscuring as a marrow

lens" (102). His declaration, "I am creature now / [...] If nothing is solid / then nothing is simple. / I must rewrite the three laws [of thermodynamics]" (102) indicates an important shift in his thinking. Whereas in the prologue he expresses monstrosity only in terms of victimization, monstrosity now newly assumes for him the possibilities of power that is *not* limited to scientific rules. Conversely, Peter indicates that Helen is also guilty of using the similar good/evil rhetoric that terrorists use, since she tells him, "*[I]t's us against them, fire against fire—*" (63).

Although Helen is physically absent, she continues to exist in Peter's mind through the numerous stories that she has told him about herself and her family. Peter addresses Helen, "You are not really gone until my skull is empty, those pictures, mines you buried" (3). Although he cherishes these memories, he expresses the simultaneous desire to rid himself of them because of the painful emotions attached to them, but later realizes the impossibility of such a task: "We can't banish what we carry / disembodied in our heads" (53). His realization that he needs to confront these haunting images and narratives, rather than simply try to forget about them or pretend that they do not exist, crystallizes when he tells himself, "Go back to the beast, / enter it" (53). His self-imposed order differs from his first mention of the beast in the book's opening—when he says, "I crawl into a beast" (4)—because Peter urges himself from a passive stance of self-pity towards an active participation in his own life story.

Although the title of the book's first section, "Origins: Stories Told to Me by Helen and France" (5), refers to Helen's and France's beginnings, and privileges their narratives and perspectives over Peter's, it is still significant that Peter chooses to tell his

story by revisiting Helen's origins and memories. Thus, Helen's origins are also, at least

partially, Peter's origins, since Peter would arguably be a "half man" anyway even if he

had never met Helen. Helen completes Peter, an observation that, once again, upsets

traditional gender expectations that demands that a woman be involved in a heterosexual

relationship in order to feel fulfilled. Contrary to this expectation, it is Peter who overtly

expresses his neediness and who asks Helen to forsake what she feels to be her broader

responsibility to the public in order to accommodate him in her life. Her marginalia in

her copy of H.D. says, *"I would risk / my heart to him / though he has / no politics—*

*something he claims / Canadian—he wants me to love him more / than justice—imagine /*

*France says I'm a fool / not to love him this instant"* (50).

    Although the term "origins" refers first and foremost to Helen's and France's

"origins"—their parents Manon and Will, their shared childhood, and their mutual grief

and loss after their parents' sudden and tragic death—Spalding indicates that these

origins are not simply confined to individual or private lives and timelines, but are

collectively shared. Lacan notes that the ego is formed out of the internalization of the

other, and Spalding indicates that the acts of remembering and of narrating the process of

remembering are, themselves, monstrous in that they explode and exceed the barriers

erected spatially between people's private stories, temporally between the past and future,

and ethically between simplistic notions of truth and lies, good and evil. Moreover,

because memory is tenuous and always dependent upon who performs the act of

remembering and for what purposes, Peter worries about whether he is, essentially,

"doing justice" to the memories of Helen and her family: "Do I have Will wrong? What

did either of them tell me about him? Quarries, cummings, Will's lazy beauty. And

Manon? They had to guess, she told so little" (30). His statement that Helen and France

"had to guess" about the details of their own mother's life further illustrates the

contingency of memory upon other people's disclosure; thus, remembering becomes not

just a form of re-calling the past as if it were a filed archive, able to be sorted through and

presented coherently and accurately at will, but more a form of re-imagining, or in a

Lacanian sense, a *re-imaging*. Speculation plays a large role in *Anchoress* as a

combination of imagination and reflection, and it also appears as a specular haunting that

plagues Peter, infusing his memories and his stories with spectral images and words and

transforming his own self-image. Ghosts and mirrors (as well as other glass surfaces)

infiltrate Spalding's text, offering complementary—at times refractive and alternative—

visions of the past and future and of the self's location in relation to others. While Will

wants children, Manon asks, "*Who wants children when life is a gift of loss?*" (11). Her

seemingly paradoxical statement disassembles the boundary between life and death,

highlighting the codependency and coexistence between creation and destruction, and

indicates as well the inevitable loss of innocence that accompanies the arrival of life.

Manon finds an unusual, necessary but painful, solace in her bleak but probably realistic

view of the world that prompts her to take black-and-white photographs in which "stone

martyrs bleed dust, gargoyle spouts / like vultures over empty sidewalks— / a city in

ruins" (10). She has no illusions about life, unlike Will who "looks / because he will

never see / through those eyes, / *No tourist will buy these photographs*" (10). As a result

of her own cynicism and Nihilism, however, Manon attempts to protect her children from

the kinds of experiences she suffered through and witnessed: "They are more hope than

Manon feels, / as promising as Chicago, glass / city built on flame-charred carapace. /

Chicago, a trick with mirrors. / She vows she will speak to them / only of the cave, not of

her war childhood, / a splinted bone. / Her children will never go to Europe, will live / in

a landscape where glass obscures the ghosts" (11).  The irony of her self-reflexive

intentions becomes apparent when Helen and France do learn about the horrors of war in

their own lifetime and Helen, especially, invokes the specters that Manon fights to

conceal.  Moreover, Helen and France early on learn about loss after their parents die in

the plane crash.

Peter often evaluates himself on Helen's terms, remembering her remarks about

the sad aspect of his face.  Peter's use of the metaphor of drowning signifies his feeling of

a lack of control and power, again suggesting his position in Lacan's *infans* stage, and he

attempts to (re)gain control by "reviving" Helen through (re)constructing her body as if

she were one of his whale skeletons.  He perceives himself as a (re)creator of Helen's

body and memory in order to regain physical and psychic control over his own life,

reconfiguring his job as a whale scientist to one who studies the human body and mind.

In his laboratory, Peter says, "The rod hangs, expectant, / swaying on ropes from a

ceiling beam, / hangs lonely, waiting for me to put the body / in order, to make it whole /

from memory, if I / deny this end, if I make the order / different, connections where there

were / no connections, if I tell lies / biological impossibilities, a new rough / beast will be

given a name" (72).

Much like Victor in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, what begins as a project driven by his own quest for answers and emotional neediness evolves into a project that raises even more questions and prompts him to consider the greater implications of his actions. His concern with truth and lies recurs throughout, and forms part of the basis for his growing uneasiness with rationality and simplistic, black-and-white explanations. Peter's increasing questioning of truth relates to Spalding's disruption of assumptions about the autobiographical genre. Patricia Hampl's argument that writing a memoir constitutes a form of "second living" applies to *Anchoress*, as Peter relives various significant moments in his and Helen's life in his reconstruction of both their lives. Spalding challenges our traditional definition of truth, which depends upon and requires factual evidence and indisputable certainty. For her, truth and fact constitute different things; instead, she suggests that people have differing versions of what they consider to be the truth and that truth exists in varying forms—there are emotional truths as well as scientific truths. She writes, "If a story doesn't rub off on you, then it is a lie. / If it does not marrow in, oily, greased, do not trust it. If the ink / does not sweat at the page, if it does not moisten / fingertips, wrists, that naked / edge of palm, curled, pressed against / paragraph, if there is no dark mark, / whale-shaped, then truth has fled" (31).

As mentioned earlier, Spalding challenges various binaries, such as those between life and death, and male and female, which contribute to her challenge of the boundaries between the self and other. While the deconstruction of this self/other relationship illustrates itself most clearly in Spalding's extended use of doubles, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the breakdown between the self and other also appears in her challenge

of temporal and spatial boundaries, which frequently fluctuates or becomes blurred. For

instance, she challenges the linear chronology expected of conventional autobiographies,

alternating between Peter's current situation and his recollections of the past. These

temporal shifts also act to bridge the spaces of the living and the dead, or the spaces

occupied by Peter and Helen. Spalding's observation that "so much is made to be

broken" (20), indicates this challenge of the boundary between creation and destruction.

Carson's Geryon in *Autobiography of Red* resembles Shelley's creature in that he,

too, is physically monstrous, though certainly not to the same extent, and these apparent

differences isolate him from other people. Carson, though, appears to emphasize that

Geryon's feelings of alienation stem as much from his own feelings of difference and

shame as from the rejection or, perhaps even worse, the indifference, of others.

Moreover, Carson provides no indication as to the extent of which Geryon's physical

differences are the reasons for rejection and, in fact, implies that it is Geryon's timidity

and dependence upon others that have helped to differentiate and isolate him.

*Autobiography of Red* immediately challenges the assumptions of the autobiographical

genre by questioning the location and role of the self. The "I" or first-person narrative

that lends the cloak of intimacy and authenticity to autobiography is noticeably absent,

having been replaced by a third-person limited point of view. Carson's inclusion of the

word "autobiography" in her title immediately categorizes her text and burdens it with a

specific set of expectations and norms surrounding its form and content. Firstly, it

suggests that the text delineates the life narrative of a particular person written by that

person, an expectation connected with Western notions of individuality and rationality

since the autobiographical form is assumed to be a complete and coherent, and confessional, distillation of a single lifetime. But Carson challenges these conventions by not naming any individual, avoiding a reference to Geryon, and instead identifies the colour red as the subject of the autobiography. Carson deliberately avoids identifying directly what "red" signifies, since she clearly does not intend it to be a person or object. Indeed, although Carson repeatedly associates Geryon with red, she illustrates that "red" should not be conflated with or correlated too closely with any particular person or object. Instead, red is both a concept and a metaphor, seemingly all-encompassing yet elusive in its polysemy. This paradoxical nature of red resists autobiographical norms that insist on individuality, unity, and transparency, widening the text's narrative and semiotic field to encompass more than just the individual subject of the autobiography. This seeming disappearance of the boundary between the self (as subject and as writer) and the speaking "I" (as individual and as persona) appears, to Ostriker, to increasingly characterize women's poetry because "[it] is the fact that the question of identity is a real one, for which the thinking woman may have no satisfactory answer, that turns her resolutely inward" (12). She further elaborates that poetry, as such, serves as a cathartic outlet in releasing one's inner, repressed emotions, painful though it may be. Interestingly, this seems to be the case in Carson's and Spalding's work, although the fact that Carson and Spalding are female writers dealing primarily with *male* speakers who require an emotional outlet questions, firstly, the foundations upon which masculinity is constructed and, thus, the foundations of femininity as well.

Carson also undermines autobiographical norms by employing self-reflexive techniques, most of which appear outside of the narrative proper but some of which are incorporated within the narrative. She probably comes closest to revealing the essence of red's signification and significance when Geryon reads from *Philosophic Problems*, " 'To deny the existence of red / is to deny the existence of mystery. The soul which does so will one day go mad' " (105). Even then, the irony is that the defining characteristic of red—mystery—simply reinforces the impossibility of defining red and its limits. Carson continually associates red with monstrosity or permutations of the monstrous, including Geryon, the mythical Lava Man, lava, and poppies, but I believe that Carson complicates the concept of the monstrous because these motifs are also demonstrations of the sublime, exhibiting the simultaneous ability to create and foster life and to cause destruction and death.

Carson's structural choices, I think, are useful in thinking through this dialogue between the self and other and the significance of the fragment. She does not begin the book with Geryon's narrative and instead prefaces it with her own thoughts on another author's rendering of Geryon, specifically Stesichoros's *Geryoneis*, which disrupts the concept of private authorship and ownership normally associated with autobiographical writing. Her deliberate deferral of Geryon's narrative, coupled with her engagement with the work of Stesichoros and her own work, performs a self-reflexivity that complicates, if not outright rejects, the concept of authorial intention. The three presented versions of Geryon's life in close proximity indicate the inevitable, and welcome, existence of different narrative permutations that Carson refers to and subtly champions at the end of

"Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" She writes, "Bergk says the history of a text is like a long caress. However that may be, the fragments of the *Geryoneis* itself read as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat. The fragment numbers tell you roughly how the pieces fell out of the box. 'Believe me for meat and for myself,' as Gertrude Stein says. Here. Shake" (6-7). The reliance upon chance and serendipity to structure a text, instead of upon deliberate decisions from the author, suggests that the very acts of writing and reading are forms of political and social expression that are vulnerable to different interpretative frames. The arbitrariness of this structural process emphasizes, too, that narratives, even and especially autobiographical ones, are necessarily constructed and *constricted* in particular ways and, as such, can never be read as a straightforward, unproblematic account of "reality" or "truth." It is also in this piece, which assumes the function of a preface or introduction of sorts, that Carson begins her exploration of the intimate relationship between body and text, or body and language. Her rather wild, yet peculiarly plausible, hypothesis that Stesichoros arrived at the final structure of *Geryoneis* by haphazardly mixing the poem with other, unrelated texts and with "scraps of meat" demonstrate the impossibility of understanding the body, and the self, outside of discourse and representation. Moreover, she emphasizes that narratives are always already intertextual and self-referential, and that they, like the bodies they describe and inscribe, include and exclude, may be understood as unified or coherent only through their paradoxical position as collections of fragments.

Geryon's photography, a hobby which he shares with Manon, exemplifies to a certain extent how the self/other binary is challenged. However, one photo in particular captures Geryon's imagination and constantly intrigues—perhaps even haunts—him. He learns that Herakles's grandmother was a photographer as well, and her photograph of the volcano entitled "Red Patience" complicates visual and ideological perspectives. The photograph complicates the subject/object binary, which also complicates the self/other boundary and the understanding of time. Carson suggests that there is a difference between personal time and public time, but that both are equally crucial in formulating and revising concepts of monstrosity. Geryon's fragmented photography—in which he focuses only on parts of people's bodies—is a literal translation of the developing ego's fragmented sense of itself at the beginning of Lacan's mirror stage.

## Chapter 4 and Conclusion – Love, Mortality, and Reconciliation

*Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* both end with a quality of redemption or

transcendence, though neither in the religious sense nor in a literal, physical sense.

Rather, I argue that both texts are informed by the *spirit* of redemption. The speakers

experience guilt due to their former rejection of the "others" in their lives, but Spalding

and Carson do not deal with the legalistic understanding of guilt—although they are very

much concerned with justice—since their interest in justice resides not so much in the

laws, authorities, official processes, and courts involved but in the role of justice for

everyday living and for enacting social change beyond what the normative judicial

processes and definitions encourage, allow for, and allow to be spoken. Instead, they are

invested in the kind of justice that Butler describes in *Psychic Life of Power*, and in the

subjection of individuals on a daily basis. Butler describes subjection as "the process of

becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (2), citing

Hegel's master-slave dialectic as an example that is preoccupied with the question of

subjection. She later concludes, "The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of

necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account

for our own becoming. That 'becoming' is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy

practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of

social being" (30).

It is clear that *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red* intertwine love and justice;

without love, there can no justice, and without justice, love suffers. The redemptive and

transcendent quality of these texts arises as the connection between the self and the other

results in a more potentially productive, and hospitable, relationship. I would argue that

love, in its various incarnations, degrees, and level of reciprocation, is central to the

development of the self/other relationship in Carson's and Spalding's work especially.

Love plays a significant part in Shelley's *Frankenstein* as well, and contributes to the

development of the relationship between Victor and the creature, but it certainly does not

exist as the kind of romantic love that connects Geryon with Herakles and Peter with

Helen, or the familial love that bonds Geryon with his mother and Helen with her sister

France. In all cases, however, love allows the speakers or protagonists to invite others

into their lives physically and emotionally, which has both generative and destructive

consequences. Carson, Spalding, and Shelley understand love's potential for not only

personal fulfillment and private conversation but also for social cohesion and public

dialogue, a possibility that Ostriker points to as central to women's poetry in particular:

"An 'imperative of intimacy'—touch, mutuality, the ability to challenge self/other

boundaries—shapes the way women write love poetry, poetry about family, about

spiritual ancestresses and sisters, about political life, and about self-integration. The

impulse here is to define an identity which is not merely personal but communal and

which may be experienced as 'plural' within and without. This impulse commonly

extends itself toward the poem's audience, in poems created to function not as closed

artifacts but as personal transactions between poets and readers" (11). Spalding's and

Carson's poetry function both as personal chronicles for the speakers—Peter with his

cycle of lab notebooks that chronicle his life alongside Helen's and France's, and Geryon

with what I will call his photo-textual-biography—and as meditations on the politics,

time, and space of the world at large. Shelley's *Frankenstein,* which is not a poem and

almost certainly would never be classified as a "woman's" novel (whatever that term

might mean, assume, or simplify), also works on a personal and communal level in that it

details the very specific experiences of Victor Frankenstein, and the creature he created,

but through the perspective of a detached narrator, Walton, who recounts the entire story

to his absent sister by means of letter-writing. Significantly, Shelley eliminates Walton's

(and the reader's) distance from Victor's surreal, horrifying story when Walton

encounters the creature for himself over Victor's deathbed and confronts him about his

crimes. *Frankenstein*'s abrupt ending provides no clue as to how Walton reacts to the

creature's parting, suicidal farewell or how Victor's story will actually influence his

future, nor does it suggest what Walton's sister's response might be. Such an unresolved,

and uneasy, ending illustrates how *Frankenstein* may be viewed as a "personal

transaction" between Shelley and the reader, Victor and the reader, and Walton and the

reader.

Instead of "overcoming" the "other" through rejection or annihilation, as Hegel

argues are the only available solutions to the dialectical struggle between the self and the

other, Spalding's and Carson's speakers eventually learn to acknowledge and accept the

"other" as parts of themselves, while still maintaining their own integrity as persons in

their own right. Such an attitude is, according to Charlene Spretnak, a feminist one that

is inherent in feminist spirituality, since "[Feminists] see *connectedness* where the

patriarchal mentality insists on seeing only separations" (xxiii). According to Alice

Ormiston in *Love and Politics: Re-Interpreting Hegel,* however, Hegel's "notion of will

rooted in love" (72) does suggest love's centrality in shaping political philosophy: "Thus the great importance that Hegel places in philosophy can be understood not in terms of a desire to find a reconciliation merely in the realm of thought, but in terms of the imperative of protecting and preserving the experience of love—the very basis of the actualization of right in modern history—from the eclipsing effects of the narrow reflective reasoning that has come to dominate the modern spirit" (72). Hegel's association between love and rights resembles Hardt and Negri's belief that "People today seem unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. [...] Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love" (351).

In chapter 2, I discussed the application of Freud's theories about the uncanny to *Anchoress* and *Autobiography of Red*, and his claims about the double's role in the self's denial of death. The issues of mortality and immortality are central to the theme of transcendence that these texts share. In *Anchoress*, death in its many facets and variations plays a significant role in shaping the personal and political consciousness of Peter and France. Helen's death and her potential legacies, both personal and political, influence Peter's and France's ability and willingness to continue living. Other, more public deaths, such as the deaths of soldiers fighting in the Iraq War, the death of the environment, and the death of democracy all contribute to Spalding's analysis of monstrosity. These public deaths, for instance, tend to also be more abstracted, not because they are less visceral in their existence or in their consequences, but because they

are mediated through numerous sources, especially the mainstream media. As a result, these public deaths are less directly accessible, ironically, by the public, and important issues become oversimplified, miscommunicated, or muddied. Spalding shows, too, how media co-optation operates to "other" elements deemed unacceptable by normative standards. Peter illustrates, for instance, how the media co-opts, commodifies, and simplifies Helen and the circumstances of her death, reaffirming widely accepted values and images of war, terrorism, and protest that polarize patriotic war-supporters and treasonous protestors.

Transcendence in *Anchoress* arrives through death. However, nobody actually transcends death physically, or even spiritually. Peter's mission to revive Helen does not succeed as a biological endeavour, and Peter and France cannot transcend their own physical limitations and desires. Death is, however, eventually accepted more or less as an irrefutable fact of life, though it is never simplified or reduced either as a concept for philosophical debate or as a harsh reality experienced on a daily basis. Spalding suggests that transcendence occurs when Peter, Helen, and France are, individually and collectively, able to look beyond their private pain and happiness and consider their current, and possible, roles in a universal collective. Helen's suicide, while demonstrating all too well and vividly her biological limits and capacities as a mortal, does much to highlight what one may laud as her immortal legacy. Though the media glosses over her death and belittles it, literally through its lack of coverage and ideologically through caricaturing her as a stereotypical hippie protestor, she remains immortalized in the eyes of many who witnessed the horrifying incident and who

recognized the significance and bravery of such a selfless act. Peter, in fact, calls her a martyr, recalling such historical figures as Joan of Arc who, too, died by fire although at the hands of persecutors. Spalding suggests that transcendence is achieved through the passing on of a legacy, which Zygmunt Bauman notes in *In Search of Politics* is a way to achieve immortality. In *Anchoress*, legacies are passed on through biological genealogies; Helen and France's parents, for instance, pass on personal and political legacies to their daughters, whether for better or for worse. Helen and France inherit various and complicated parts of their parents, taking on some of their personality traits, inheriting their happier moments and their zest for life but also many of their burdens and secrets. Likewise, Geryon inherits his unusual physiology from an ancestry created out of the volcano's eruption, and with it the stories of monstrosity and immortality that he willingly carries at the end of the text.

Nearing towards the end of *Anchoress*, Peter acknowledges the interconnectedness between himself and numerous others, not just between himself and Helen and France, recognizing how people's legacies operate in broad generational, historical, and social constellations outside the immediately personal sphere: "I know how [Will and Manon's plane] crash sent its debris flying / into all our lives. How my father's absence left / me absent to Helen. / But the circles move / beyond those small events, they can't / be held captive. / Holocaust. France / occupied. / The atom bomb, a deadly moon, / pulling history into a tide / of violence, genocides / of this half-century dragged in its wake" (115-116). Derrida addresses this memory debris in his concept of hauntology, which refers to the repetition with a difference that is endless. The

effectuality of the spectre resides in its continuous staging of an event: "Repetition *and*

first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of

it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time" (10). He also

argues, "Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task. [...] like all inheritors, we are in

mourning. [...] All the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be)

are questions of inheritance. [...] That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that

we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but

that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or

not. And that, as Holderlin said so well, we can only *bear witness* to it" (54). Inheritance

is important for Spalding and Carson, since legacies and bloodlines play central roles in

their speakers' struggle with personal and political memory and trauma. Thus, the

centrality of the body in being what we are, and of the language used to convey and work

through inheritance (language being what Holderlin calls "the most dangerous of goods

[...] so that he bears witness to having inherited / what he is" (qtd. in Derrida 54)), is

evident in the three given texts, as Viktor with his oral storytelling (and later transcribed

by Walton), Peter with his lab notebooks, and Geryon with his autobiography and

photography, each struggle to make sense of the monstrosities to which they bear

witness. Derrida says that "haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never

docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted

order of a calendar" (4). As such, Peter's comment, "I yell to the future / it returns as

past" (70), and Geryon's description of Herakles's photograph as "a photograph of the

future [...] [with] likeness [...] groping out of the bones" (144) illustrates Derrida's

resolve that the boundaries between past, present, and future must be undone and Peter

Trifonas's argument that "The creation of a chance for the future occurs by keeping the

memory of the past alive. There must be an archive, a body of knowledge, to work from,

for, and against. It is at the interspaces of old and new knowledge constructions beyond

the grasp of 'meaning' or 'reason' that risks are taken to move beyond what we already

know..." (213).

Spalding's *Anchoress*, which invokes and alludes to *Frankenstein* at several

points in the text but never references it explicitly, continues to bear similarities to the

classic text in its ending. As Spalding is wont to do, however, she invokes *Frankenstein*

only to reject some of its premises and implications. With regard to the concepts of the

double and the master-slave dialectic, death becomes an accepted element of the

relationship between the self and the other, instead of a state intended to further conceal,

eliminate, or assimilate the other based on its perceived threat to the sanctity of the self.

In *Autobiography of Red*, the question of mortality cannot be thought of as

separate from immortality. As discussed in chapter 1, Herakles in the original myth

redeems himself from the sin of murdering his wife and children, by successfully

accomplishing his Twelve Labours, and is eventually awarded immortality and a seat in

Mount Olympus. Geryon suggests in the original myth, that Herakles's killing of Geryon

represents the elimination of death itself. However, Geryon's perception of the ancient

Geryon, his namesake, as symbolic of death, becomes complicated due to his own

immortal status. The legend of Lava Man, christened thus because he supposedly was the

lone survivor of the volcano's eruption, coupled with Ancash's explanation of the

Yazcamac people, finally provide Geryon with a possible—though perhaps not entirely

plausible—clue to his physical differences, his red skin and wings, and indicates the

possibility that he, too, is another Lava Man destined for immortality. However,

plausibility, based on empirical knowledge, does not concern Carson, who continually

challenges the boundary between history and fiction, reality and illusion, throughout the

entire text. The possibility of Geryon being a descendant of survivors of the volcanic

blast, in fact, challenges the Eurocentric, logocentric, and egocentric theory of evolution

and progress that underlies Shelley's *Frankenstein*, since his monstrosity is a sign of his

body's ability to adapt to drastic environmental changes and may, therefore, be perceived

as a badge of survival and luck rather than a mark of exclusion. Photography, which was

raised briefly in the previous chapter, is significant because it complicates the concept of

temporality. A photo permanently captures one moment in time but has a legacy that

extends far beyond that moment. Spalding suggests that, through media such as

photography, one can transcend oneself and one's own individual time, in that the photo

represents a trace of the self that continues to exist even after the physical body dies—a

concept that Roland Barthes explores in *Camera Lucida*.

    As with *Anchoress*, *Autobiography of Red* includes numerous different types of

legacies that illustrate how monstrosity and death exist in various incarnations and

complicate the personal/public boundary. Geryon inherits numerous legacies from other

people that contribute to his self-image and shifting self-identification with, within, and

across different normative—and often binary—categories (such as hetero/homosexuality,

human/monster, and agent/victim). He inherits his brother's traumatic legacy of sexual

assault, Herakles's legacy as his first serious and committed relationship, and what he

presumes as his ancestors' legacy, resilience in the face of immediate danger and

personal obstacles and the gift of immortality. Legacies, admittedly, generally have a

positive connotation and suggest, too, things on a grand scale whether in tangible or

monetary size or in cultural value. However, I am using "legacy" in conjunction with the

concept of the trace to further emphasize the significance of relationships between the

self and numerous others. If anything, Spalding and Carson, and Shelley demonstrate

how something seemingly insignificant, such as a piece of wisdom passed from one

individual to other, contains the fragments or "debris" as Peter puts it, from countless

others. The legacies I have listed for Geryon exemplify the different self/other

interactions he experiences through the course of his lifetime up to this point in time,

from the most private and painful to the most potentially public and revelatory. Of

course, Geryon, like Peter, Helen, and France, does not simply receive legacies from

others but contributes and passes on his own legacies, the legacies of his memories and of

his photos.

In *Tendencies*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick talks in her chapter entitled "A Poem is

Being Written" about the relationship between poetry and the beaten child. Her

evaluation of the beaten, and shamed, child's body in response to the inscripted violence

is useful in reading how the monstrous body is politically and socially productive. She

states that the "insulted body"'s aptitude to "represent, among other things, the fears,

furies, appetites, and losses of the people around it, back to themselves and out to others"

(199) is also a site of terror because of the "leakage or involuntarity of meaning" (199)

that emanates. The idea of leakage recalls Derrida's concepts of the excess or supplement, and its relation to *différance* which Christopher Norris explains as being "suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer' (postpone)" and that indicates how " 'differ' shades into 'defer'…the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to this point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification" (qtd. in Hall 152). In relation to this, Stuart Hall points out how cultural identity "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (149) since it undergoes constant transformation and continually encounters and is submerged in "ruptures and discontinuities" (149). The significance of difference and of *différance* for Spalding and Carson are clear, since they show how the monstrous body, the different, abnormal, and grotesque, body, disrupts a variety of normative binaries and categories and thus can be seen as politically productive.

*Anchoress*, *Autobiography of Red*, and *Frankenstein* each contain metaphors related to imprisonment and captivity, which correspond with the speakers' feelings of difference, alienation, and lack of agency. Peter's fascination with the whales trapped in the aquarium, and Geryon's obsession with cages, indicate their ambiguous relationship with monstrosity, which is perceived as both strangely alluring yet oppressively limiting. Towards the end of the texts, however, Peter and Geryon learn to love themselves and their monstrosity. Peter and France eventually part at the end of *Anchoress*, recognizing that their brief if tumultuous relationship originated from loss, pain, and self-pity instead of from love and self-sacrifice. Also, Peter realizes that grief is not a containable emotion and neither is grieving a finite process, but that there are alternative ways to go

about grieving apart from his previously self-destructive mentality. Both he and France recognize that in order to love another, they must love themselves first. Peter compares himself to one of the orcas in the aquarium, but instead of falling back upon his previous emphasis on captivity, grief, and death, he embraces life: "*For a moment, below the surface, I find oxygen in water—against the loss, I sing myself awake*" (123). Moreover, while he recognizes the dream of solidarity that motivated Helen to commit suicide, he also recognizes that he cannot follow in her footsteps: "*Such temptation—to become the anchorite. But I could not enter there and live*" (123). He seems to suggest (as per Derrida) that the dead never really remain dead, but will always "live" as specters, inhabiting a variety of spaces and serving as constant reminders of conscience. Such a perspective provides hope for future political action, as even the most obliterated spaces demonstrate tenacity: "The grass grew over Baghdad, / as it has grown back over / the globe's skull, / again, again, / and the soil was rich / with hemoglobin / [...] if you want / the citizens, they are / blades" (120).

Similarly, Geryon learns to accept his own monstrosity. The volcano that Geryon and Herakles seek at the end plays a significant role in *Autobiography of Red*—so significant, in fact, that the cover illustration of Carson's book is a drawing of, presumably, this exact volcano. The volcano represents and bridges the tension between creation and destruction that seems to lie at the core of the self/other and human/monster debate. Traditionally, the other has been characterized as monstrous because it is perceived as threatening to the safety and sanctity of the self. The volcano in its eruption destroys the village and surrounding area but in the process creates the legendary Lava

Man, Geryon, and possibly other individuals with the same gift of immortality. Although

Geryon would never be able to, in all likelihood, confirm Ancash's story about the

volcano and the *Yazcamac* people, the explanation indicates the volcano's direct

contribution to Geryon's physical monstrosity. The volcano is thus itself an example of

monstrosity on various levels due to its immense size, its destructive potential, and its

fabled role in creating "monsters" such as Geryon. Its equal capacity to create and extend

life, even on a daily basis, illustrates how the volcano transgresses the life/death binary.

For instance, the Spanish soldiers claim that villagers bake bread in ovens that are built

into the volcano's walls, resulting in what is popularly known as "lava bread," a story

that seems incredible until Geryon and Herakles witness this culinary feat for themselves

at the end of *Autobiography of Red*.

However, Carson responds to the myth of the *Yazcol Yazcamac* as she does to the

myth of Herakles and his Twelve Labours, by allowing the myth's narrative to play a

central role without superseding or mythologizing the characters within it. That is,

Carson no more elevates and deifies Geryon than she does Herakles, even as she

demonstrates that Geryon believes Ancash and accepts, perhaps even celebrates, his own

immortality. When he records himself flying over the volcano Icchantikas, he does so for

posterity but only for Ancash's sake, whose one request to Geryon is, "*Want to see you

use those wings*" (144). Moreover, his words to the camera, "The Only Secret People

Keep" (145) directly quotes the last two lines from Emily Dickinson's poem no. 1748,

"*The only secret people keep / is Immortality*" (22), suggesting Geryon's intention to

conceal his immortality and avoid becoming mythologized, even if in a more positive

light than his predecessor was in the myth of Herakles.

Similarly, the three texts also share in their conclusions the symbol of fire.

Traditionally, fire has been connected with qualities and values such as purity, cleansing,

transcendence, renewal, and immortality, and psychological states such as anger and

passion. With regards to fire as a symbol of transcendence and renewal, one need only

think of the phoenix as the quintessential mythical creature who, borne out of the flames

that consumes it, is reincarnated and symbolizes new life and vigour. Fire has, as well,

been conventionally associated with the opposing, yet also complementary, processes of

creation and destruction. Johan Goudsblom in *Fire and Civilization* discusses the

increasing role that fire plays in technology and science, especially at the beginning of

the industrial era, and the fire's dual properties: "Every section of society was affected

sooner or later by a series of advances in the control of fire—in the capacity to

understand processes of combustion and to utilize them without being injured by their

destructive force" (161). The increasingly destructive dominance of fire in contemporary

times is best summarized by Goudsblom, who explains grimly, "Everything said in [my]

previous section about the decline in urban conflagration stands in need of one crucial

qualification: the decline obtains only in times of peace. With industrialization,

productivity has increased, and so, inevitably, has the social potential to destroy, or

'destructivity.' [...] Consequently, in the twentieth century acts of war have caused some

of the largest urban fires in history" (182).

*Anchoress*, like *Frankenstein*, poses difficult questions about the modern role of science.  If Shelley was already beginning to worry and warn about scientists experimenting with matters of life and death, Spalding's text serves as a memorandum to all humans of the potentially devastating applications and consequences of scientific discoveries, such as the atom bomb.  As Trifonas points out, Derrida expresses how naïve it is to still argue that certain disciplines such as philosophy might be "shielded from power" (qtd. in Trifonas 209), especially in a time "since the monstrous dawning of the 'post-critical' age of nuclear politics and in the wake of the informatizing function of science as research 'at the service of war'" (Trifonas 209).  Helen's self-sacrifice by fire, in her attempt to provoke political consciousness and to promote peace, is her response to the widespread use of fire in the Gulf War that she sees everyday on television.

Her response raises questions about the possibilities of establishing peace and a global community.  In his essay "Ourselves as Another: Cosmopolitical Humanities," Peter Pericles Trifonas explains how the increasingly urgent question of how to locate otherness in communitarian spaces gives rise to a difficult paradox: "The syncretic nature of subjectivity is symptomatic of the impossibility of pinning down the essence of being and the gist of what it means to be human.  *On the one hand* the demise of the autotelic subject—a subject defined *in, of,* and *by* itself—is fueled by a global vision of a shared community running rampant today.  *On the other hand* the idea of global citizenship as the seat of human hybridity nurtures the impetus toward a communal proclivity of the autotelic Subject as a shared identity, and produces the call for a leveling of difference, quite ironically, through what Jacques Derrida has called the cosmopolitical point of

view" (205-206). Trifonas links the question of community with Emmanuel Kant's problematic version of cosmopolitanism, of which its ethical universalism and Eurocentrism tends to inscribe community as a "homogeneous concept of culture" (218) that actually, in "[p]laying by the determinative ethics of these rules of consensus in the name of community and commonality, and also of communication, reduces the Other to the Same and minimizes the potential of a subjective resistance to the inclusion of contrariety within the sphere of a closed system of shared associations" (218). Moreover, he states (perhaps somewhat controversially) that "[t]he condition of peace represents the satiating of a reaction to nullify the difference of difference" (218), since "we cannot in good conscience subscribe to the constellations of a panoptic vision of an 'abstract universalism,' which strangles difference in the name of a general culture" (213)— thereby suggesting that violence might, in the end, be necessary as a tool against some by which to achieve peace for all. According to Derrida, the very concept of the "community" must be rethought such that it is always working towards "the possibility of its reinvention" (Trifonas 211).

Ormiston also points out, "It remains ambiguous whether, for Hegel, any relationship of love, no matter how developed, could be strong enough to withstand the crystallizing power of reflective rationality. [...] As Hegel later says in *Philosophy of Right*, 'Love…is the most tremendous contradiction; the Understanding cannot resolve it'" (24). Neither Spalding nor Carson, though they signal renewed hope and acknowledgement at the end of their texts, do not (nor do they want to) completely resolve the personal and ethical dilemmas experienced by their speakers. For instance,

Geryon's continued relationship with Herakles is particularly fraught with contradictions and complicates the self/other relationship. When Ancash asks Geryon, "*So what's it like fucking him now?*" (144; italics in text), he honestly and bluntly responds that having sex with Herakles is "*degrading*" (144; italics in text). Yet, Geryon still consents to sleeping with Herakles and Herakles's comment, "*Well Geryon just another Saturday morning me laughing and you crying, [...] Just like the old days*" (145) appears to suggest that Geryon, disappointingly, succumbs to the status quo of their relationship that positions Herakles as the masculine, manipulative partner and himself as the effeminate (or feminized, anyway), passive partner and "love slave." It would seem that Geryon, in the final instance, accomplishes nothing in challenging the master-slave dialectic that Hegel sets out. But Carson makes it clear how it is *not* like the "old days" anymore, and that something has shifted in the relationship between Geryon and Herakles (just the fact that Geryon is able to articulate his recognition of the inequalities in that relationship is a development from his previous silence about it). Moreover, Geryon expresses a kind of solidarity within their cohort of himself, Herakles, and Ancash when he marvels, "We are neighbors of fire" (146)—a connection on the most elemental level that precedes any interpersonal discord.

In both texts, the speakers' revelations, in my opinion, serve as an example of learning about what Sedgwick calls the "privilege of unknowing" (23), or the ignorance that can be "harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking enforcements—perhaps especially around sexuality, in modern Western culture the most meaning-intensive of human activities" (23). She quotes Sally McConnell-Ginet in

explaining how she understands ignorance as a term and mode of power: "[I]t is the interlocutor who has or pretends to have the *less* broadly knowledgeable understanding of interpretive practice who will define the terms of the exchange. So, for instance, because 'men, with superior extralinguistic resources and privileged discourse positions, are often less likely to treat perspectives different from their own as mutually available for communication,' their attitudes are 'thus more likely to leave a lasting imprint on the common semantic stock than women's'" (23). Sedgwick makes a compelling argument about the danger of "dwelling on the degree to which the power of our enemies over us is implicated [...] in their ignorance" (24). The tendency to express scorn and fear towards ignorance, casting it "in a demonized space on a never-quite-explicit ethical schema" (24), encourages one to always perceive "a political fight [as] a fight against *ignorance* [which is] invigorating and maybe revelatory" (24), but is ultimately not a perspective to be clung onto. In a nutshell, "Knowledge is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power" (23), a concept that theorists like Foucault and Derrida also recognized in questioning and complicating the ethical and political implications of the category of "knowledge." It is perhaps with something like this in mind that both Spalding and Carson end their texts, in the final instance, with images of community and desire that extend beyond the purely personal revelations and emotions that both Peter and Geryon experience. They illustrate Sedgwick's interest in pluralizing and specifying ignorance so that one may discuss a variety of ignorances that, "far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth" (25). Spalding suggests how "truth" might be

understood outside of its empirical definition: "If a story doesn't rub off on you, then it is a lie.[...] if there is no dark mark, / whale shaped, then truth has fled" (31). Peter demonstrates the productivity of personal narratives when he speculates, "[I]f I make the order / different, connections where there were / no connections, if I tell lies, / biological impossibilities, a new rough / beast will be given a name" (72).

Spalding's *Anchoress* and Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, in revisiting the concept of the monstrous that Shelley's *Frankenstein* helped to popularize, thus practice a form of revisionist mythmaking that Ostriker describes in *Stealing the Language* and complicate the theories of the self that Hegel, Freud, and Lacan explicate. Their revisiting of classical myths such as *Antigone* and *Herakles* but in contemporary settings prompts us to re-examine and re-imagine the definitions and limits of monstrosity, which is not only significant on a personal level or as physical deformity (itself dependent upon definitions of normality), but also significant in the public sphere. The doubleness of myth that Doherty speaks of is reflected in Freud's theory of the uncanny, and in, for instance, Peter's struggle to read his life through *Antigone* and Geryon's revision of *Herakles*. Both Spalding's and Carson's texts complicate Hegel's theory of the master/slave dialectic and his conception of the self/other relationship, thereby questioning the foundation upon which the binary of humanity/monstrosity is built. Their complication continues in their treatment of Lacan and his mirror-stage. But although I have discussed to a certain extent how Spalding's and Carson's narrative techniques, for example, in addition to some of their extant imagery relating to water and mirrors demonstrate a Lacanian struggle for the speakers to image/imagine themselves, a more

in-depth analysis would be worthwhile for future projects. The connections between autobiography, photography, the image, and the body is something that I would like to explore further; this thesis originally was conceived with the *bildungsroman* as the focus of one of the chapters, since I see Spalding's and Carson's genre-bending and gender-bending narrative forms to be closely tied to complication of the self and its portrayal in traditional autobiographical narratives.

Other subjects that have arisen but could be further developed and evolve from the thesis are national identity and justice and trauma. And though gender obviously plays a significant role in my analysis of monstrosity, the relationship between gender and monstrosity is one that could potentially spawn several more texts. I would be interested in looking at, for example, how monstrosity figures into specific familial relationships (mother/daughter, mother/son, father/daughter, and father/son), categories (mother, wife, father, husband, biological versus adopted children, etc.), and configurations (nuclear families, single-parent families, childless couples, heterosexual and same-sex couples).

Both Spalding and Carson, in working through monstrosity, eventually question what legacies will be left behind from people in the present. The transcendence that Spalding and Carson suggest may be aspired to through a combination of self-love and social love might best be understood in terms of Hegel's and Derrida's concepts of spirit, though they differ on this. Hegel argues that "What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect

freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (110). Although

Spalding and Carson reject absolutes—as evidenced, as I have already shown, in their

blurring of conceptual and textual boundaries—and would therefore reject Hegel's claim

for the existence of an absolute consciousness to which everybody can aspire to, Spalding

and Carson do present what appears to be a paradoxical combination of the singular self

and plural selves. The difference is that whereas Hegel conceives of the I/We as a

relationship that is ultimately united (though remaining on separate terms) in a single

entity (in a single consciousness), Spalding and Carson suggest that I/We exist more as

singularities that continually interact with each other. Interestingly, the idea of "'I' that is

'We'" is the very thing that Trifonas critiques about a concept of community that presents

an "illusion of unity [that] masks the radical violence of alterity and softens the risk of its

provisional acceptance by replacing the shock of its reality with the comforting image of

a single, harmonious group, a majority without difference" (218).

Hegel describes conscience as "the moral genius which knows the inner voice of

what it immediately knows to be a divine voice" and that "it is in its own self divine

worship, for its action is the contemplation of its own divinity" (397), before then making

the intriguing claim that "this solitary divine worship is at the same time essentially the

divine worship of a *community*, and the pure inner *knowing* and perceiving of itself

advances to the moment of *consciousness*" (397; italics in text).

Self-consciousness for Hegel, or the completion of the formation of the "I," is

achieved through the struggle between these antithetical elements, pure knowledge of the

self as representative of and constitutive of a universality and pure knowledge of the self

Ormiston, Alice. *Love and Politics: Re-interpreting Hegel.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. *Stealing the Language: the Emergence of Women's Poetry in America.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan. Ed. *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001.

Savage, Anne, and Nicholas Watson. *Anchoritic Spirituality:* Ancrene Wisse *and Associated Works.* Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Tendencies.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus.* New York: Dell/Laurel Leaf, 1979.

Spalding, Esta. *Anchoress: a poem.* Concord: Anansi Press Ltd., 1997.

Trifonas, Peter Pericles. "Ourselves as Another: Cosmopolitical Humanities." *Deconstructing Derrida: Tasks for the New Humanities.* Ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas and Michael A. Peters. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 205-220.