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metonymy, metaphor, and simile in Angela Carr's *The Rose Concordance*

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Just Like a Barrette that Claws, that Clasps, that Clips, that Cunts: metonymy, metaphor, and simile in Angela Carr's *The Rose Concordance*

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LIKE as a noun

A CONCORDANCE IS A MUSEUM, a fine archive, a lovingly assembled and (usually) alphabetically distributed collection. A concordance is a gathering, a compendium, an album, and it is a catalogue — spirals and constellations of appendages, ever reaching outward, hugging back in. Angela Carr's *The Rose Concordance* (BookThug, 2009) ostensibly translates, and creatively responds to, lines in the keyword index to the thirteenth-century poem *Roman de la rose*. Carr lives and works as a translator in Montréal. Previous to *The Rose Concordance*, she published the poetry book *Ropewalk* (2006), as well as several chapbooks; her poetry was included in the trail-blazing anthology *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women* (2012); and she is co-founder (with Bronwyn Haslam) of the feminist poetry and poetics press Tente. *The Rose Concordance*, then, roams through poems and references, through the language of coming together, and the linguistics of uncoming. According to Carr, within the poetics of her translation process, “adjectives turn to adverbial forms,” and a “proliferation of new concordances arises” (53).

But, in this book, its title tinted by the noun *rose* functioning as an adjective, the concordance comes to readers as metonym and allegory via the dastardly simile. This concordance is not like a rose; rather, this rose concordance is like a book of poetry, and like other books, previous books; it likes *like* and presents its likes as a compilation of medieval romance symbols. This rose concordance is like an authoritative expression, one that likes a sincere parody of self-expression and parodies its own sincerity. This book, like, you know, thrives on its own argument and, like, *so* denies that it has an argument at all. Like a colour in the

absence of that colour, *The Rose Concordance* presents a particular hue in the absence of that hue, for it is a hue that has faded due to centuries of literary comparison. How best to articulate my likes and dislikes? This poem, this thorned rose, this bleeding and drowning corpus — Oh, how I like it!

As a creative writing instructor, I never let my students use the word *like* that way, as in the phrase “Oh, how I like it!” — never. Recently, I made a particularly stubborn class pay a loonie for every time that, instead of providing a critical analysis, they used the word *like* that way. I frowned when they substituted “I enjoyed this poem,” hoping to fool me through thesaurus use. I told them that liking or disliking a poem is immaterial to poetic scrutiny. How can liking a poem possibly contribute to an analysis of what’s going on in this or that poem, how the words converge into style and pattern and design and intelligence, the ways that the structure enacts itself on the page, the form that sponsors cause and connotation? Yet here I want my first remark to be *I like this book*.

But what does it mean for me to say I “like” Angela Carr’s *The Rose Concordance*? It is not, after all, the only book of poetry that I like, nor the first I rake through for clever words or phrases. Why begin on *like*?

LIKE as a preposition

My focus on *like*, on liking and disliking, and on all dis-things, has taken a convoluted route into this essay. In poetry, the preposition *like* shouts out “simile,” though many poets have leaned away from simile in recent centuries. Indeed, language poet Lyn Hejinian argues that metonymy has replaced metaphor as providing dominant “logic” of an experimental poem:

Metonymy moves attention from thing to thing; its principle is combination rather than selection. Compared to metaphor, which depends on code, metonymy preserves context, foregrounds inter-relationship. And again in comparison to metaphor, which is based on similarity, and in which meanings are conserved and transferred from one thing to something said to be like it, the metonymic is unstable. While metonymy maintains the intactness and discreteness of particulars, its paratactic perspective gives it multiple vanishing points. (38)

Conversely, a poetic logic where metaphor dominates is rather preva-

lent in the Romantic version of Modernism, as one finds it in Wallace Stevens, for instance.

The convention of simile — and, in particular, the overuse of the preposition *like* for declaration-of-love comparisons — saturates Western poetry. “He’s like a flower” or, to quote Carr, “The anarchy of this poetry is like the colour of leaves” (22). But the exact same prepositional usage also allows for non-simile comparisons, such as when the persona’s handwriting copies her lover’s (30). When one presupposes that anarchy is like a certain kind of colour, one begins with the assumptive foundation that poetry may not be *like* leaves but that verse can make it seem so. Conversely, the claim for a gesture such as the *I* deliberately imitating her lover’s handwriting style is not a simile but merely notes a relationship or link between two like objects. What I mean is that the comparison is not what one is led to expect from a simile. Comparisons themselves — especially to do with love — are like poetry. One thing is like another. Because *it is*. Or because the poem leads readers to think that *it is*. Or it leads readers to think that *it isn’t*. *The Rose Concordance*, like *Roman de la rose*, proffers *rose* as metonymic for *lover*. But of course, it isn’t. *Concordance* leaps from *Roman* like a desperate speaker who leaps at simile, just to make a point, here.

In Guillaume de Lorris’s part of the story, the rose is wooed as a lofty ideal; in Jean de Meun’s part, the rose gets to be physical and bawdy, but only within a misogynistic philosophy of love. As most readers know, one of the most recognized similes in English literature is Robert Burns’s “My Luv’e’s like a red, red rose, / That’s newly sprung in June” (214), which is a reworking of a traditional Scottish song. By 1794, the type of flower is already a given: love object and rose fuse into a corporeal floral ideal. For Burns, the emphasis in this lyric line is on the *kind* of rose, the *intensity* of hue. The love is novel, active, organic, growing, but also temporal, unsullied, and inexperienced. Moreover, even the opening lines display the persona’s awareness that new love, true love, everlasting love is still susceptible to coming decay. “As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,” the persona promises, vowing to love the *you* through all time, beyond time, even, “Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,” because going dry is inevitable. The rocks will melt, the sands of life will disappear, but the persona’s love will not waiver. The beloved may be a budding rose (one with whom he pleads to fare well for “a while!”), but the persona’s affection — how much he likes her — is steadfast. Love is itself

like eternity, and *for* eternity. And so *like* delightedly enacts constant transformations and conversions of itself.

It is easy to contrast apostrophic love language of medieval times through to early Romanticism with Angela Carr's own refined sensuality. In the poem "of covers and of seeming," she writes, "uncover the manuscript / where laughter seems welcome / her hand covered in pine needles / what uncovered loves?" (31). Here, a love has been uncovered and *addressed* in its unearthing. But the lines also pose the questions: What other love and which other lovers now lie uncovered? Who covers and who reveals? The lines gesture toward a lyric history of personae addressing lovers, bodies lying tangled on the ground, covered in leaves, softness itself a metonym for the pastoral tradition of young, budding (usually heterosexual) love. And what other loves might such a poem as this uncover? The poem severs itself from lyric tradition at the very same moment it excavates from and burrows itself into that tradition. This poem *uncovers* the layers of previous manuscripts that propose coupled love in a particularly pronoun-gendering way. But it also insists on "manuscript" as a process, as a writing that is unfinished, incomplete. And it elegantly offers a (supposedly the lover's still) monogamous hand as corporeal promise, as tantalizing synecdoche.

The soft sensuality of that hand, brushed with pastoral overtones and scent, precedes a question that reveals the lover's vulnerability but also covers that exposure to exploit the turn to pathos: "when the poem covers bitterness / almond blossoms are plentiful." The poem, then, is like the surrounding nature. Or the bitter persona is like her own words. Or the almond blossoms are like the arsenic taste they emulate and anticipate. Not a single use of *like* as a preposition appears in the poem "of covers and of seeming," but the gesture is toward pathetic fallacy, the persona as (bitter) lover, the love object as distant and blossom-like. These images converge and gesture toward the liking of the telling. Here's the story: uncover it. Here's the manuscript: Who composed it? The scene may be set in the past tense, but the act of covering endures. The poem ends with a question, "who got under the covering and wrote," but ends without a question mark. The lack of punctuation bares the sentence to readers' scrutiny, invites readers to reread — back to front. The poem ends on the word *wrote* — describing how the persona returns? Or what she was once able to accomplish? This is a poem

about what happens to like, what happens to those who love, those who write of love, and those who love to write.

LIKE as hiccup or throat-clearing interjection

The word *like* has acted as a colloquial place marker, a slightly more intelligent version of *um*, that may be sprinkled through any spoken sentence or utterance: “I’m, like, going to have a drink after this reading.” “Are you, like, in love with her?” But even here, in such deliberate Valley-girl speak, *like* resonates with *The Rose Concordance*. In “sleep water,” the poem leaps from the epigraph by Djuna Barnes, to grabbing her antique somnambulist, to:

Mauve emerging in a
reclining sky like
an ache emerging in the authentic, splitting it (20)

The “like,” here, fragments the line, breaks the sky from its emerging ache, clasps the authentic and casts it asunder. The *like* in these two lines is still the conjunctive preposition, cleaving and sundering them. Yet a few lines later, immediately following “clouds of green paint,” the *like* takes on that very hedging role of syntactic filler: “How like the present” (20). Indeed, the poem may be like the present, or the hues of the sky may resemble contemporaneity. More likely (ha!) the *like* sanctions that previously referenced “ache”; it legislates the poetic world obscured “like a curtain” (64), presumably protecting performance from stage. More overtly, Susan Holbrook faces, challenges, and attacks the grammatical like-as-filler in her poem, “I Thought You Were Different.” Listing what she likes, what a red, red rose is like, and asking readers about personal likes, the poem interjects its own would-be Steinian core: “I didn’t say I liked it / I said I, like, liked it. / I wasn’t all like, I liked it” (28). The almost in which the community of readers and writers reside, Holbrook concludes, is why a transitory term such as *like* compels “everything” toward movement “all the time” (28). More than playing with the like of liking, Holbrook holds and humours the textual packing material that pervades colloquial English idiom. “Earn the respect of native speakers / by using English fillers such as uh, / like, and um. You will come across / as more authentic, and like earn the / respect of um” (28), she writes mid-way through her poem. Her “like”-as-“uh” commands readers to aspire for “native” authenticity, but

also suggestively ends on the *um* as if mid-speech, or as if readers like landing on a site of syntactical esteem. “Please take a moment to Like / my page” (28), she humorously pleads.

LIKE as digital button-icon (press for approval)

Most recently, of course, *like* has taken on a new resonance through social media: to “like” a page or a Facebook entry or any blog comment signifies not only enjoyment or fondness but, in addition, support and agreement and sympathy, and also — ironically, perhaps — goodbye-I’m-done-talking-about-this-topic: “like” (user disappears).

Does anyone (besides politicians and e-card websites) like poetry in an easily-clickable-but-now-I’m-done-with-this-topic mode? Besides this one particular Facebook function, the internet provides various methods and software for individuals to create a virtual self or virtual selves. Curiously, those selves can be fully situated avatars, or they can be partial identities that serve as screen names. Although Angela Carr does not directly interface with the digital world — her fonts are more water-spilling than fountain-pen-typeface — she does take on the interior/exterior facets of the subject and of subjectivity.

Who, exactly, speaks these poems? One of the gifts of a concordance is a poem sans persona, a poem that offers modes of classification as process. *The Rose Concordance*, among other things, is a procedural project, much like internet-generated Flarf or digitally created computer poems. As such, *The Rose Concordance* offers readers a simulation (like, don’t like, it’s up to readers . . .) of procedural poetry, as there are virtually no notes describing the procedure. Yes, the book includes several indices, but these seem to operate more on the level of explanation parody than on that of offering literal clarifications. Indeed, often a poem will retreat into a satirical line to contest any desire for such elucidation. For example, in “Of Containment,” the persona explains that the fountain, though seemingly literal, cannot “allay our thirst for knowledge” (40).

This book admits the poetic reversal that occurs when poets exit the procedural poem in order to explicate its process. In such cases, no matter how disjunctive the text, no matter how far the poems may stretch into the conceptual realm, an explanatory addendum about method serves to unite the disjunctive pieces. By externalizing the underlying idea of the procedure, making it explicit in an afterword, the poet

inadvertently provides an overall arc for the book — that is, an overall arcade for what Walter Benjamin would call the *flâneur* of reading.

Angela Carr does, however, provide a works cited of sorts. Readers may turn to the end of the book and discover a list of source texts, of original lines, of texts and artwork that have “informed” the work (81). But this textual fluency offers readers yet another tangent or corridor into which to wander. Here, readers might choose the same text as the poet, yet linger on other pages and prefer to favour different lines. As well, such an acknowledgments page suggests the poem-as-argument, the possibility that this book is as much a poem-essay as it is a series of poetic disjunctions.

In *Killdeer*, Phil Hall also takes on notions of self and self-reflexivity, but in a direction unlike Angela Carr’s — in the direction, that is, of carving out an interior space where the thinking and feeling subject may think and feel, and where subjectivity may exist. In doing so, Hall gestures equally to both canonical poets and to fellow-nation poets. Unlike Michael Gottlieb’s *The Gorgeous Plunge*, in which the poet comes to his craft through the give-and-take of a community of poets,¹ Hall offers a poet-figure who emerges from isolation and literary loneliness — in Atwoodian survival mode, perhaps — through the alienated individual’s awakening to verse. Much of *Killdeer* comes across in first-person expressive mode yet an expressive mode steeped in poetics and in the persona’s desire to re-construe his own personal experiences through a recollected discursive analysis. In *The Rose Concordance*, subjectivity is fully externalized in a collection of public — civic — tropes and figures surrounding (oft times literally) the fountain. Water in *Rose Concordance* is always plural, the eroticism of water, and its various states and stages of wet and dry, always communal, never coming from, or coming to, isolation, but publicly insistent on itself as accompanying the steamy gestural language of flowers.

LIKE as a quotative

Just past the middle of the book comes the long-poem section, “of the middle.” There’s a bit of jostling, here in the middle, about place and positioning and format, and even repetitive demand. This middle poem is about endings, but can such a poem truly be *about*? “An ending is love / of an ending” (48), Carr writes, and even, “An ending loves an ending” (49). Not because the end is nigh but because it isn’t. Even in the

midst of writing about ending, the poem is muddling about its middles, pushing forward and going back, suturing lines into and against previous lines, repeating words or phrases so that the repetition itself is the suturing, the writing into and against. Rather than a poem that repeats in order to list (think of Robert Kroetsch's two-page list of "absences" in *The Seed Catalogue*), this poem repeats in order to challenge repetition, to question the rectilinear linearity, the unbending of multiple bends and contortions. By the last page of the section, readers fling away any promise to hear "what happened" between this "institution of pairs" (51), and instead plunge into a series of lines, so like each other that the poem manifests similitude, as it tenders the merest of word-position adjustments.

So, *then*, Carr's poem is, like, "still in the what happens middle of never / still in the what middle happens of never / still in the middle what happens of never / still in the middle what of happens never / still in the middle of what happens never" (52), and I'm, like, *whoa* — idiomatically, let me catch up! But the poem doesn't; the poem takes a breath, and then is, like, "still in the middle of what never happens," and I'm confused because, like, is that a correction or a stanza all by itself, or is that a reboot, a visual break? Is that line, "still in the middle of what never happens," the still middle that the title has promised? Are readers in the middle, now, especially as the poem — at its end — is farther from the middle of the book (and further from the middle of the relationship? and the middle of ages?) than when this section began? Can one ever be in the middle of a relationship? Isn't it always ending? Is that the crux of the poem? But the poem doesn't leave much time for asking these questions, let alone endeavouring to answer them.

Because then Carr's poem is, like, "in still the middle of what never happens / in the still middle of what never happens / in the still of middle what never happens / in the of still middle what never happens / in of the still middle what never happens / of in the still middle what never happens," and I'm, like, what is the function of opening this last section with the preposition *in*? And Carr's poem is then, like, "of in the still middle what never happens," and I'm all like, I get it, I get! But I don't. I'm trying to get the poem to stop. Which it does. Right at that line. Except, of course, it doesn't — how could it? Repetition has a way of repeating itself, and causing the eye to continually skip to the words below. Because "getting" the poem is so far from the point even

I recognize that I've left the realm of the middle, here; this repetition isn't *like* something else; the repetition and minor line amendments are the entire poem, its abandoned mirror corridor, after this poem endlessly repeats. The forgotten corridor that reflects everywhere, but can be located nowhere. Readers do not discover the poem, the poem finds its reader. And finds the reader. And finds readers.

LIKE as mimesis

Opening with an epigraph that mentions the "mirror world," a gesture toward Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, Carr's book borders its ending with several appendix and gloss pages: "This book was conceived of as an allegorical mall with a central fountain and concordance corridors leading away from it in several directions" (72). Here, readers discover the "mirror corridor" (72) whose features have been distributed (or perhaps redistributed) to other parts of the lexical mall. Has this corridor been abandoned because of lack of funds or imaginary geography? Or does the notion of the reflexive spin too tightly upon that reflective surface, repeat a reverse mimesis in apprehensive pursuit? The other in this book draws the writer in, draws her under, speaks with a mirrored voice (76), and slips across the polished floors — across the "baleful sheen of lack" (77) — disappearing into the eternally reflecting corridor, leaving the sensation of mourning in her wake. As she leaves the text, so, too, do writer and reader, slipping out of the pages and into another version of text. A note slipped onto the back cover claims, "the book's completion / is a softness," but are readers to trust this end-paged poem as final observation or as textual invitation? Because to come to the end of one corridor is to enter another. The mall has many diversions but also hidden arcades, pathways that lead out of one narrative and into another. Or others. *Like*, in the mall, in the bedroom, out and about in the city, proceeds as verb, a doing as much as a being.

In the summer of 2012, poet Susan Steudel led a discussion on Carr's poems "of/fo untain" and "of the font to the fountain no avail" for the Kootenay School of Writing series "I'm In You, You're In Me." Since then, she and I have corresponded by email about this text we both like so much! Steudel says she wanted to bring into her presentation some questions about feminism and what contemporary feminist texts might be/enact/promise/suggest. Steudel is interested in disrupting, or at least interrupting, correlations between capitalist, imperialist, and

sexist narratives. She offers provoking insights into Carr's text and, for the purposes of this essay, I focus on her comments about the fountain as a gathering place and as a sort of translation of the notion of self — its image offering, says Steudel, “a fluid subject or permeable subject position.” The romance, then, is “a sort of gushing love, or a streaming love which is partly a result of the translation, a residue-affect from the male-written *Roman de la rose*” (Steudel, “Re: Angela Carr”). Steudel's reading of Carr's poem intermingles the love aspects of *like* where they emerge not only as emotion but as literary reading strategy. She goes on to say that she “likes” how that vitality “carries forward from the primary text” and “is repurposed in Carr's book with generous amounts of play.” For Steudel, the translation compels further readings (to engage with the gush of poetry and to participate in the ongoing pouring out of words²), further tributaries and run-offs, and compels the text toward a permeable subject position: “I fell in love with the visual poems and the magical quality generated by the translations in *The Rose Concordance* as an intertext. It translates, it dialogues with and across texts. It collapses present, past, and future to foreground a becoming subject or subjects” (Steudel, “Re: Angela Carr”). Like love: liking and playing and engaging and playing further. And farther, as far as the stream will gush.

LIKE as translation

The book opens and closes with fountains and intersperses many of the pages with secular fonts, with sensual and mystical founts. Malls show up in the appendices, as a post-poetic disclosure of the poetry's secret setting. But besides the lyrics that “echo in the paved courtyard” (34), besides the one “horizontal fountain” (21) and the voluminous spouting and spilling fountains throughout, besides the “unbarred world” (58) of hair fashion and gendered renderings, this book sets itself in Montréal. It engages with French in its history and its context, in its language and in its love. Nestled into the poem “sleep water,” a previous translation severs itself: “les couleurs culminant en un bassin / comme la couleur une absence” (23). After such translated likenings, the poem splits itself down the middle, the word *authentic* dividing and apportioning its phonemes in an ever-widening gap away from itself. Eventually, the lovers abandon their particular bedrooms to drift through Parc Lafountain (40). The private enacted via public space,

this particular representation enacting a distinct yet somewhat fragile performance of city.

LIKE as à côté de (sorta like the “Red milk of doves”)

In her chapbook “Of,” Carla Harryman confronts the troublesome politics engendered by that slight possessive *of*. In her piece, a “TV ANNOUNCER” addresses the character Kit Robinson on the narrative nature of prepositions. In response, Robinson claims, “I did eliminate the word from my vocabulary for a long time. It was a flimsy hinge. So I took the door off” (21). The “TV ANNOUNCER” and the disembodied voice-over then offer various diatribes and questions about the government, until Robinson interjects the formula “Of = ambience” (22). At this point, an “AUDIENCE MEMBER” responds with “the government of, is the rounding up of, herding dumb beasts” (22). Despite Robinson’s earlier assertion that he’s removed this hinge preposition from his writing, the TV setting insists on re-introducing the *of* and so emphasizing discernible stress with this dangling preposition: “the government *of*, is the rounding up *of*.” Harryman then spins into an allegorical tale of a girl in Iraq and offers (post what she calls “not the end”) a rumination on prepositions as being “compromised, as social and autonomous, visible and barely there, subordinate and subordinating” (29-30). She settles on a series of final statements: “Of would be a difficult person to like”; “If OF were a mythological character it would be the god of illusion and instability.” And she critiques the incorporation of ideology in the grammatical construction “government of the people” (30-31).

Just as Ezra Pound complained (in his essay in which he offers “a few don’ts” to writers) about abstraction in a line such as “dim lands *of peace*” (5), so, too, does Harryman wish to reveal and underline the dubious alignment between two disparate sides of a sentence that the preposition *of* too easily allows. Her opening stanza includes the seemingly modest line, “Red milk of doves” (21), which ultimately insinuates an easy reference to war and peace. And her last “stanza” includes the lines “Of is within / the center of the centers of the universe” (32), challenging the possessive precision that such grandiose constructs prompt. Similarly, Carr contests the idea that such cataloguing is uncomplicated, with her section titles such as “of containment” or “of the precious.” These and Carr’s other titles thrust the preposition into prominence on the page and also into an unexpected primary position in the sen-

tence. The opposite of a dangling modifier, perhaps, Carr's titles — and subsequent scatterings of *of*'s throughout — suggest, grammatically, a “bridging proposition,” a clinging modifier, a folding preposition. A proposition of a proposition. What, grammatically, does that *of* promise Carr's readers?

In the veritable centre of *The Rose Concordance*, the poem “of naturally” proposes a middle that slips into the gutter between pages. The gutter, much like a barrette, clasps and claws at the words until readers can only surmise the supposed totality: “now you speak na/ally”; “we said devils na/ally / believed in good people” (36-37). Given the title, readers might obviously assume that the partially consumed word is “naturally” and enjoy the humour of what devils do or do not “naturally” believe. Such humour blossoms in these pages. But if one is unwilling to rip out the pages (or bend them to the breaking point of the spine), one can — quite legitimately — read the words as they appear on the pages. The right side of the poem, then, is often a line's endpoint with the single word “ally,” but that word, “ally,” also adjectively divulges the metonymic nature of this conjoined piece: “ally adopt”; “ally due their leader”; “ally but with pleasure”; “ally it cracks” (37). Crack it does, the poem and the word, the page and the idea of page, the fragments shoved up next to each other, to rejoin or to insist on the incomplete, the nearly done, the constant renewal of partial subject.

LIKE as verbal metamorphosis

Intriguingly, this book constantly presents that self-reflexive persona, the poet as interior subject; yet, at the same time, the book refuses to utterly enact that overly coded private self. Carr offers such tantalizing lines as “we seem to be” (33), “as though enacting an allegory” (42), and “nostalgia / is glacial run-off” (34), yet sets them within the mall and fountain, public spaces and parks. As the language points toward a confessional interior (for example, “mine is inner confusion” [30]), the language also insists on exceedingly exterior contexts. The bedroom into which the lovers retreat reveals itself as a facade — or perhaps, as this book usually does not choose English over French spelling, the word *facade* is to rhyme with *arcade*. Carr writes, “The bedroom is none other than a frontage itself; an interior domestic is all ghostliness. We are nostalgic for it as for a nostalgic poetic” (42).

In Harryman's poem, Kit Robinson's explanation for removing the

prepositional-hinge is “You know, you see the inside differently, when you take the door off” (21). And Harryman’s physical renovation — much as it invites a re-evaluation of interior examination — resonates with Carr’s notion of privacy as hiding, and hiding as relational. Says Harryman, “The definition of privacy is in the public domain / and in the center of ‘the ends of the worlds’” (32). *The Rose Concordance* lovers — even in the midst of their erotic play — are nostalgic for a domestic interior. The bedroom, the poem, the nursing mother, the domestic realm — each is *like* the other, each enters and transforms the other.

UNLIKELY adverb

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, William Blake offers this short lyric on the nature of love: “O rose thou art sick. / The invisible worm, / That flies in the night / In the howling storm: // Has found out thy bed / Of crimson joy: / And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy” (39). Much has been written about the rose as lover but also as love itself. The worm embodies the Biblical serpent and also the phallus. The worm worms its way into the healthy rose via the lover’s bed and also into the earthy bed of decaying flowers. The joy in the poem is shaded crimson, for shame and for innocence pierced, and because “secret” love carries infection and contamination. I won’t delve into Blake’s metaphysics of corruption and unity (or is it depravity and harmony?), but I do, briefly, wish to touch on the metaphorical thrust of illness into the canonical hierarchy of love poetry. Or loved poetry.

In what ways does aligning the immoral with illness perpetuate ideals of the body, especially the healthy body as pure and wholesome, and the ill body as corrupt and somehow polluted? To demonstrate more fully what I wish to parse, here, I turn to Nikki Reimer’s book, [*sic*], which in part scrutinizes the pathologizing of the female body. In the first section of the book, “Illness Narratives,” Reimer deconstructs not only this patriarchal process but also the ways in which the medical establishment treats female patients, shifting the female body into the realm of illness and shifting illness into the discourse of disability:

very hard for a woman to penetrate

one of the most important
chronic diseases in canada

if there's not enough blood
 wishes are what we do
 you can't ask for miracles from our skin
 hormonal changes
 skin doctor
 please straighten out my bedsheets (16)

Who speaks (and dismisses the idea) of the difficulty for women to penetrate? Is it the same voice who rejects a request for miracles grown on “our” skin? Who then encompasses the “skin doctor” who reacts not to elective surgery but to hormonal shifts that require recycled blood (there’s never enough), cleaned up bedsheets, and wishes as verbs. Reimer breaks down the binaries of the male-doctor/female-patient as she breaks down the binary of a left-justified page that insists upon a cohesive narrating persona. Hers are poems that incorporate (and assimilate) the capitalist agenda at the same moment that her poems radically (and angrily) reject assimilation, demanding language that may sometimes politely ask readers to “please” straighten the (virgin? foolscap?) sheets (16), but more likely will bemoan the fact that “prince charles never even asked to be my maxi-pad” (20), and most often will furiously and humorously decry: “SIDS these days. cheer up, buckaroo. skin tags and pimples. devise an innovation, project yourself. zero returns. wedge a crack or butter a back. days of wine and fuck off” (26). Reimer’s seething verse refuses to let readers off the homeopathic hook, piling each image onto a further, more disturbing, image. Often, her prose rants come in the guise of advice: “stop sleeping attend the gala opening in the clothes you slept in stop washing your hair grow an ulcer” (73), with the ultimate “advice” being another medical ailment, another bodily “failure” that will likely be served up to the provoking medical gaze.

In similar methodology, Carr takes on the patriarchy of the traditional poetic address (in which even Marlowe’s persona is heterosexual seducer, promising the female lover “beds of Roses” [284]). Carr questions the role of the female figure within such structures, the way that the body does or does not run from lyric complicity. One side of another centred poem declares, “running dryly with fragile limbs” (28),

while on the facing page, the same line reads: “bodies dryly with fragile limbs” (29). The two pages are either companion pieces visually linked through mirrored images of their justified margins. Or else this is one conjoined poem, the book’s gutter disturbing its visual effect as solidly centred verse. The gutter has not grabbed words but expands to allow them to reflect each other. When Gertrude Stein writes, “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,”³ she not only opposes the metaphorical thrust of century-long imposition, her insistent grammar demands that readers accept this word as oblique material rather than transparent referent; she also *delights* in the word, in the repetition, in how slinging these words together compels readers to appreciate — nay to adore — an inadvertent and fortuitous grammar: “a roses a roses arose.” I’ll end, then, where Angela Carr (nearly) does, the final poem in “of potential”:

as restless as water
welcome I into the
would disappear (69)

Who or what is so restless? The answer is not nearly as important as the Steinian grammar: “water / welcome” “welcome I” “the / would.” This book is, like, a game, no, it’s like a hair ornament, no, more like an old-fashioned market: fountain in the middle, community interactions. This book is entrance, constantly becoming (67), it’s the logic of gutter (64), it’s “the shhhhhh of soft / and contrary kisses/” (26). This book’s an intertextual love letter, it’s under constant revision, it’s the “red SORTIE sign” (63); ultimately, this book’s, *like*, transformative.

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NOTES

¹ I come to this reference through Louis Cabri's article on Australian poet Ken Bolton. Cabri quotes Bolton speaking about "the formative influence" of poems "that address the growth of a poet's mind." The ensuing discussion encompasses "social, relational, poetically contextual, reflexive" poetry, with Cabri citing Gottlieb's *The Gorgeous Plunge* as a superb example.

² Susan Steudel and Christine Leclerc have also written (unpublished) translations of "of/fo untain."

³ The first time Stein wrote this phrase was in "Sacred Emily" (1913). She repeats versions many times, most notably in *Lectures in America*, "Lifting Belly," *The World is Round*, and reportedly having it painted on her bedroom ceiling.

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