LYRIC BLIGHT: THE SOBJECT SPEAKS, SICK AS A ROSE

by

JACQUELINE KARI

(Under the Direction of Jed Rasula)

ABSTRACT

This creative-critical dissertation comprises an essay on the feminine lyric speaker, a collection of lyric poems, and a poetics. “Lyric Blight: Sick Roses and the *Sobject* Speaker” examines a thread of lyric subjectivity in 20th and 21st century women’s poetry which embodies the alterity of the *you* while simultaneously speaking with the authority of the lyric *I*, constellating the speaker’s interiority within the transformative space of the lyric poem. *Sick as a Rose Is*, the collection of lyric poetry that follows, demonstrates such a speaker’s posture and voice as it considers the dearth of feminine interiority in the prescribed roles of the lyric relationship and interrogates the costly exchange of the feminine speaker-self for [fiscal, cultural] worth. As both poetry and the sick feminine body are not accommodated in the matrix of use-value, these poems explore and embody such blights. “How—Dashing,” a poetics on writing and re-membering the self through disability, celebrates the em-dash as a mode of radically non-linear, dis-abled discourse.

INDEX WORDS: Lyric, poetry, speaker, subjectivity, feminist, sobject, rose, interiority

LYRIC BLIGHT: THE SOBJECT SPEAKS, SICK AS A ROSE

by

JACQUELINE KARI

B.A., Miami University, 2007

M.A., Miami University, 2010

M.F.A., Louisiana State University, 2014

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

LYRIC BLIGHT: THE SOBJECT SPEAKS, SICK AS A ROSE

by

JACQUELINE KARI

Major Professor:	Jed Rasula
Committee:	Susan Rosenbaum Andrew Zawacki

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2022

DEDICATION

For my love and my coach DC, and for my sweet TR, a doctor now several times over. For my mother and her unflagging love and support, urging me to sail on. For all the young girls, sick of and as roses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Susan Rosenbaum, for her careful, thoughtful attention and expertise. Thanks to Andrew Zawacki for his constant support, humor, and enthusiasm. Thanks to Jed Rasula for endless inspiration and information, for dwelling in possibility and embodying opportunity. Thanks to Gerald Maa for mentorship and guidance through the writing and revision processes. Thanks to Kristen Gleason for her circumspect observations and the introduction to Jay. Thank you to everyone who read and contributed time and feedback to this project; thanks especially to Paul Cunningham, Gina Abelkop, Alicia Wright, Amy Bonnafons, Emily Critchley, and Shanna Compton, for publishing my work and believing in the words. Thanks always to my dearest DC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page


ROSE IS A ROSE • ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE

CHAPTER 1: LYRIC BLIGHT: SICK ROSES AND THE *SOBJECT* SPEAKER

A girl gets sick of a rose.

—Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Song in the Front Yard"

PART I: OPENING

In 1958, Jay Defeo formed a circle. A monstrous, mammoth rose in plaster, *The Rose* did not release her from its vortex until 1966, when Defeo, in a state of dissolution—homeless, toothless, on the brink of divorce, and physically ill—would stagger out of its perimeter, not to complete another significant work for five years. Defeo considered the work her masterpiece yet also paradoxically sometimes claimed it had not achieved her vision; regardless, she refused bids for its sale. *The Rose* eventually landed at the San Francisco Art Institute, where it was installed for two decades in the anodyne setting of a conference room, languishing and hidden behind the enclosure of a false wall. This *Rose* presents a portrait of the art-encounter. It provokes its viewer with an image expanding from a vanishing point, an ever-enlarging circle, a sun beaming out its rays, but it also, paradoxically, presents a sinkhole, a portal to an interior into which the piece threatens to collapse. Its own false wall, it sits poised at the threshold of subject and object, both a site of emergence and absorption, of exit and confrontation, a concrete example of the encounter with form and a documentation of its excruciating genesis. To gaze upon Defeo's *Rose* is to look in a mirror: and what looks back is not a self but the *looking* itself.

Figure 2: Jay Defeo, The Rose*, 1957-1966*

At nearly eleven feet tall and seven-and-a-half feet wide and weighing more than a ton, outlandishly outsized and threatening to collapse under its gooey, unsolidified layers of paint, mica, and other media[1], merely witnessing of *The Rose*'s existence is an event. Its craggy vectors set up an immediate barricade to the viewing experience: *The Rose* closes itself off, intimidating and impenetrable as a mountain. But it also draws the viewer into its corolla with the promise of depth, an invitation to enter, hinted where its mesmeric whorl vanishes/collapses inward. This beckoning promises entrance into an interiority, of *The Rose* itself and of the artist who liberated it from the stone. As it invites the viewer to look upon the enlarging efflorescence of its petals, *The Rose* stares back, refracting the viewer's gaze to establish its own subjectivity and render the viewer an object in *its* gaze.

The Rose requires the viewer to confront these impossible dialectics by creating a sphere of influence where—once entered—viewers must reckon with the instability of their own role as they shift between various positions within the perspectival network: from observer-of-object to one-subjected-to-another-gaze. The work then recalls Walter Benjamin's famous framing of the experience of modern art through ballistics, characterizing Dada works as art turned "into a missile" that assaults the viewer to pierce the tranquility of the contemplative act ("Work of Art" XIV). Defeo extends Benjamin's notion, deploying her *Rose* as both a means of and a testament to this interaction, the aftermath of its own explosive activation. The closest visual analogue for Defeo's piece is perhaps the rocky face of a mountain—an awesome monolith that looms unaccountable over the viewer, and a passage blasted open, or more precisely, the rockface frozen at the moment of its detonation; as such, *The Rose* possesses the piercing quality of art

[1] Part of the difficult restoration undertaken by Whitney curator Lisa Phillips in 1995 was to reinforce paint so thick that it still—after two decades—had not fully solidified. In its lifespan, the painting has presented constant structural challenges: in its own makeup, in the archeology necessary to excavate it from Defeo's apartment, and in the construction of skeletal supports to reinforce it for display at the Whitney.

that Benjamin describes while also bearing record of its own explosive genesis. These contradictions—actively assaulting and already wounded—establish the reflexive and unstable terrain Defeo's *Rose* stakes out for itself that the viewer must enter. It is in this sense that *The Rose* performs lyric work.

To get at *The Rose,* we must approach it as a portrait of the artist, that is, a portrait of the Self. Early in her career, Defeo encountered an exhibit on William Blake titled after his 1808 poem, "To God," and the poem's provocative spatiality haunted her: "If you have form'd a circle to go into, / Go into it yourself, and see how you would do." *The Rose* and its radial burst is, among other things, a response to Blake's challenge: Defeo extends his dare by creating a circle that invites its viewer to enter its zone, an opening that threatens to engulf whoever transgresses its boundary. Photographed with her *Rose* in 1959, Defeo aligned her body, centering her head with the nexus of the rose, inviting such readings that constellate the *Rose*'s negotiation of interiority, Self, subject and exteriority, background, object. At this point, Defeo had titled the

Figures 3-4: Wallace Berman, Untitled *and* Portrait of Jay Defeo*, 1958*

Figure 5: William Blake, Albion Rose, *1796*

work *Deathrose* (also read by some critics as *Death Throes*.) In Wallace Berman's photographs, she highlights the dialectical movement central to the painting, presenting a diptych of posterior and anterior postures. Her spread limbs straddle the rays of its dimensions, evoking both da Vinci's Vitruvian man and the human form splayed on the torturous apparatus of the rack.[2] These comparisons are immensely useful to understand the *Rose*'s complicated subject-status: it exists both as display for perfect specimen of form and as mechanism for what a body must endure or be subjected to—pain, torture. But I propose another antecedent: William Blake's *Glad Day* (*Albion Rose*) offers perhaps a more relevant precedent. Blake's image, which dates from 1796, provides a portrait of masculine emergence, the human form divinely unified with the visionary landscape. This is Albion—the mythical representation of England—poised as a new Adam, the divine masculine incarnate. The photographs of Defeo and *The Rose* revision this patriarchal artist-figure as a feminine progenitor of creation with the nude female body emanating from the points of the rose, both the creator of its petals and the one created by its whorl. Defeo's plotting of her own body on the compass points of the *Rose* demonstrate the link between her *Rose* and the negotiation of perspective required in the artistic encounter: in the

[2] Both Dana Miller, Michael Duncan, and others note Defeo's posture as a nod to the Vitruvian man's exemplar of formal perfection; Miller argues that with this link, Defeo embodies the "visionary aspect" of the work (25).

posterior image, she stands facing the *Rose*, gazing into and contemplating the void it opens, considering its point of ingress; in the anterior, she faces the viewer, limbs stretched into the wings of Samothrace, seemingly emerged from the *Rose's* heart, egressing its whorl as the petals blossom behind her. Though she is inextricably linked to *The Rose*, she materializes as a distinct subject as her arms vector in opposition from its rays. Her figure—like Blake's—is foregrounded, demanding the viewer's attention as angles of *The Rose* recede into backdrop. In the former image, she presents the figure of the body as impasse and intermediary, the self as object without a face to be gazed upon. Despite the figure's nudity, the image is decidedly impersonal – its facelessness forms a black hole at the center of the artwork, a negative sun. The merging of the dark vertical ray with the line of the buttocks transforms the human into a fossil—a portrait of the artist as specimen, not a Self.

In *The Rose,* Defeo opens a dialectical space that challenges perspective through a subjectivity that requires constant reassignment. With its chiseled, grayscale rays, its sheer mass, and demure name, *The Rose* defies the limits of genre, existing as an object but also daring the viewer to step into its compass, a dare that objectifies the viewer; to enter the work is to become part of its mass and its mediumicity. As it demands to be seen (it is, after all, a rose), it invites us into its magick circle (drawn precisely!) to work its spell. One may enter, shedding any assumptions that spectatorship includes the uninterrogated power of subjectivity or, conversely, an objectivity free of implication; one must surrender to *its* message and be willing to gaze into an artwork that eerily gazes back. Embodying both object (as art object, work of art, e.g., a thing to be viewed) and subject (with a perspective, e.g., something that looks back), *The Rose* therefore demands that we (in our subjecthood and subjectivity) as viewers confront it in its objecthood: as we engage with the *Rose*, we are confronted by its awareness of itself as a rose

(its self-conscious objecthood), while simultaneously we recognize its ability to objectify us—that is, to diminish us to object-status—with its gaze. This engenders its reflexive power: it exists as both an image of emergence—a site of genesis, arrival, and becoming; and an exit, a collapse, an engulfing—and this dialectic creates a crisis for the viewer. *The Rose* manifests its fragility as it threatens collapse with its centered vanishing point (portending our own doom, should we follow it). But it manipulates perspective to threaten to disappear *us*, as well: it seems to grows larger, opening to extend itself into the space and dwarf the viewer, widening to engulf (us, its circle, the canvas). Thus the magic circle of *The Rose* reveals the viewer as fragile, for not even our role as spectator is stable. If we can accept the shifting ground of its compass and allow it to remake our perception, then *The Rose* can do its work. We can look upon it as an [art] object, recognizing its circle as a site of exchange where *we* are become objects to its massive subject, daunted by its perspective and overwhelmed by its might (the force of its historical precedence, the size of its efflorescence, its heft). We may attempt to divine its message or take up its dare on *its* terms, but as we try, we must reckon with its troubling existence as an object-cum-subject that possesses us and renders us objects in its circle. We can emerge if we reforge our understanding of perspective and reframe what we see (and what can be seen—by recognizing what can see *us*).

This interaction with *The Rose* clearly models an aspect of the lyric scenario often taken for granted—namely, that the speaker's interiority is the means of realizing its world, and it offers an invitation to access the interiority of the lyric Self. Understood in this way, the lyric serves as the opening for this interiority to play out, as the lyric privileges this one-way transmission, an illumination emanated solely from the speaker's monolithic authority (with all else filtered through the medium of the speaker). Such a model does reveal aspects of how the lyric projects its mode of subjectivity, but it discounts the power the lyric landscape (the

speaker's exterior) and its objects have in shaping this world, affecting perspective and signifying back as they refract the speaker's light. *The Rose* offers a portrait of this vexed interiority, of the tension between subject and object at the core of the lyric situation: of being subject to while also subjecting, of being looked upon while also gazing back, of providing access to look in while signifying a perspective that looks out (with a warning *to* look out).

The lyric relationship has predicated classically upon a solidified hierarchy of the *I*, emissary of the poet's own voice, determining the terrain of the poem by plotting out its relationships and using lyric address and/or apostrophe to invoke other figures (most often, a *you*) as the object(s) upon which to train its gaze. This determines a strata of import and authority on which the lyric speaker's role has predicated: the subject-speaker *I* speaks to or about an object *you*, a subordination (the *I* speaks, muses, realizes; the *you* receives these advances and missives) that powers the engine of the poem. To further subordinate the *you*, she serves merely as a stand-in for the audience *you*, who "overhears" (accidentally-on-purpose) the exchange. The beloved *you* (often feminized, as she is cast in a usually inactive, non-speaking or puppeted role, contrasting the dominant, "masculine" role of the active, autonomous subject-speaker *I*) then becomes the convenient prop of the lyric poem, a commodious doppelgänger to lure the audience to listen in on the speaker's soliloquizing. By relegating its *you* to object status, the lyric [and its speaker] creates a false, unnecessary/ artificial divide;[3] but this separation, crafted in the name of advancing the interiority of self-exploration, renders the *you* not only fungible as an entity (especially as a foil for the discrete, revelatory *I*) but tantamount to, and interchangeable with,

[3] In his 1985 essay, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," Herbert Tucker offers the rejoinder, "Is Mill's overheard poetry nor dramatic eloquence after all?" to Mill's assertion that poetry seems like a "lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell" overheard by unseen others in the cell block (145). Lyric poetry and its speaker(s) have certainly absorbed the performativity of the dramatic monologue, acknowledging of the open secret of its audience in absentia. This exposes the lyric situation as a ruse for the speaker's Janus-faced calling, delving inward to explore their own interiority while also self-consciously performing for the intended audience.

the poem's actual physical objects (one such classic example: the rose). Defeo's *Rose* models this mercurial, vacillating embodiment: an object, imbued with a subjectivity, demands such a reaction from those who interact with her. This presents an interiority at once self-conscious and aware of its own objecthood; such awareness rejects passive spectatorship, and demands a reckoning, as the world in which she exists affects and is affected by her. Such a subjectivity exists in poetry: a speaker emerged from the objectified role of the *you* to claim her subjectivity and speak as an *I*, a girl "sick of a rose," whose enlivening activates the lyric landscape and plots interiority across the whole of the lyric scene. This move does more than merely reject or resist the lyric hierarchy; it revisions and reinvents the lyric order as one of symbiotic collaboration and, in so doing, provides access to a collaborative, collective interiority.

To mobilize this conversation of lyric speaker-subjectivity, I offer new term, a portmanteau to reflect its conflation of subject and object roles: the *sobject*. The term *sobject* derives from Latinx poet Jennifer Tamayo's 2012 chapbook *Poems Are the Only Real Bodies*, a slim volume of lyric poems and images; Tamayo addresses Harriet Tubman in "e-pistols" to articulate the [human and textual] bond that Tamayo envisions connects them: "We erupt the human line." The cover image is a photograph with Tamayo dangling from the Harriet Tubman Memorial Statue in Harlem, New York; "The Sent Ence" is printed on Tamayo's figure, heralding the power struggle between textual expression and carnality that the collection troubles and shifts constantly. Tamayo writes of Tubman's statue, "The artist says you are supposed to be an object here. 'She is not represented as herself, Harriet Tubman,' it reads. / I have to say this: Am I a using you." As Tamayo articulates this process of objectification in art, balanced between the physical human toll and the violence performed at the sentence level (also nodding to legal definitions of sentences and the violence they encode), she insists upon their conflation: "But the

ugly narrative first, Moses," she writes, "to have a body is to be a sobject." The combination of the ephemeral/art (here, narrative) and the physical (body) yields one result: a *sobject*. As in Defeo's *Albion Rose* photographs, Tamayo's lines refocus our attentions on the "ugly truth" of the body's *sobject* status: to have a body is to be subjected constantly to physical, psychical, and emotional pain *and* to subjection as the other/ through othering. While the book's title claims that "poems are the only real bodies," the poetry suggests otherwise: bodies—real bodies—relegated and objectified, silenced and ventriloquized, are the stakes on which the artwork—the sculpture and the lyric poem—predicates. The inverse of Tamayo's title then offers a provocative possibility for the *sobject*: the only real poems are bodies, or, the sublimation of a body into art does not diminish its "realness"/reality; rather, as the poem predicates upon the [objectified] body, so the corpus activates a network[4] of *sobjectivity*.

In reviewing Tamayo's collection for the *Small Press Book Review*, critic Kate Shapira defines *sobject* as a portmanteau of "sobbing" and "abject," a vital definition that nods to the *sobject*'s performativity and alterity. In this essay, I propose to add another layer of meaning: the conflation of the subject (as one who acts) and the object (one who is acted upon/ receives action). The *sobject* then names a type of lyric speaker that collapses the barrier between the *I* (subject) and the *you* (object), dissolving the artificiality of the so-called universal subject *I* for a speaker-*I* born out of objecthood and abjection to claim a subjecthood that has been denied her. Having been spoken for—manifested through ownership and assumptions by [a predominantly

[4] The *sobject* marks a *zone* of becoming in the Deleuzian sense; as Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). Accordingly, a speaker-*sobject* doesn't come [only] from a niche poetics; she is engendered from rhizomes of the lyric networks connecting her to generations of objectified, minimized voices: she speaks from out of their fertile hollows. She revisions the lyric from within its form, even as she expands beyond its limits. As such, her emergence signifies an origin, specifically, an original: "The action of becoming is a capturing, a possession, a plus-value, but never a reproduction or an imitation" (13). This self-consciousness forms her complex, vexed and vexing interiority.

cis-hetero white] patriarchal poetry—she rejects this ventriloquism to speak for herself. Evident most clearly in work written by poets whose identities and positionalities traditionally shut them out of the lyric canon (women, queer, and/or poets of color),[5] I argue that these speakers emerge from the object-roles to which they were relegated to stake out territory in the lyric as a speaker-subject [in]formed by the abject otherness of their objectification. Importantly, this criteria differentiates her from other feminine or otherwise non-cisheteropatriarchal speakers: because she carries with her always the weight and the dialectical movement of her abjection, that is, her relegation to objecthood, she does not step into a predetermined role for the lyric speaker, claiming her place at the top of the poem's hierarchy. Instead, she uses her subjectivity to interrogate and reimagine the lyric form and its structure, calling into herself as well as calling out (herself, but also calling out *to* her predecessors and successors), and reworking language to plots new constellations of influence, connection, and communication.

These aims require that the speaker's role expand and shift to accommodate the *sobject*. To wit:

1) The *sobject* emerges from the lyric landscape, an object-cum-subject; as such, she brings with her always the abject history of the form's objectification. Every time she speaks, her voice is suffused with it.

[5] As long as the lyric hierarchy has privileged a masculine, cis-hetero subjectivity to ensure its own maintenance, practitioners who have been shunted into the role of the feminized *you*, have resisted: Shakespeare's Juliet rejects Romeo's hackneyed, received language of romance for semantic deconstruction that proves the instability of language and therefore, meaning/being; queer poets of the seventeenth century and poetesses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries interrogate the gendering of the lyric and its patriarchal tradition in ways that expose the self-propelling artifice of its sentiment and reconceive the form. Mary Wollstencraft, writing at the brink of the nineteenth century, lambasts the hackneyed pastoral form in "On Poetry & c." Though Wollstencraft specifically writes of poetry on nature, her critique applies more generally to lyric poetry as a genre: "A TASTE for rural scenes, in the present state of society, appears to be very often an artificial sentiment, rather inspired by poetry and romances, than a real perception of the beauties of nature" (159). [Lyric] Poetry, inspired not by perception of the thing described, is instead perpetuated by *other poetry*. The lyric hierarchy then ensures its own self-preservation through replication, which in turn reifies its order as endemic to the form.

2) This voice demands a reckoning with the form's precedents: its history and its hierarchies; its subjection and objectification anything exterior to its speaker's interiority; such a reckoning includes the threat of collapse (posterior) and the emanation (anterior).
3) The *sobject* rewires the lyric Self's power of perspective by necessarily expanding the speaker's self-consciousness; this expansion accommodates the dialectical relationship between her interiority (her perspective, her subjectivity) and her exteriority (her self-consciousness of the history of her objectification, her alterity). The interiority of the *sobject*—portended in the portmanteau of its term, i.e., a subject's subjectivity that pulses with her object-knowledge—exists necessarily as a reflexive, doubled subjectivity, as her interiority is knitted from her status as exterior, as field.
4) Her eye is an *I*, blinkered as *you*.
5) Her voice assumes a certain posture, the *sobject*'s shrug, that reflects both her rejection and her becoming-sick. She capitalizes on the form's (linguistic, formal, hierarchical) instabilities to amplify the reflexivity of pronominal assignments and lyric roles; assigned the role of *you*, she speaks as an *I* with the *you* in her throat.
6) Even as she shares a kinship with these objects (emerged, as they are, from lyric language), she critiques and mediates the lyric landscape from which she has sprung and reorders it by revisioning the language that determines it. To this end, she subverts (the form and its language) to revision lyric structure as a lateral, collaborative, and symbiotic relationship.

These tenets form a reflexive lyric subjectivity that interrogates its own authority even as it establishes its right to speak, an interiority that marks its Self even as it is marked by its exteriority. To explicate these claims, in part two of this essay, I examine poems about roses—the classic symbol for the lyric beloved herself—to articulate the criteria of the *sobject* concept. I gather these sources as part of my own feminist citation practice, and what follows thus serves as an important context for the creative portion of this dissertation. As affect theorist Sara Ahmed reminds, "Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow" (15-16). These poets have cleared the primrose path to make a way for *sobjects* in the world, and I explore a subjectivity formed by their example in my poetry. In these "test cases," the *sobjects* primarily plot the lyric relationship by combining allusion and apostrophe, a method that acknowledges their complicated precedents calls out [to] others. In her 2014 "American Lyric" collection *Citizen*, Claudia Rankine neatly describes this process as, "To call out you, to call you out." Call and response: a beckoning and a reckoning; an embodiment and an eschewal; these dialectics form the *sobject*'s calls out. As she calls, she orders language to disrupt the form's prescribed roles and to accommodate the instabilities of her revision of the lyric landscape. This revision is embodied in her own subjectivity as *sobject* but also in the rhizomatic relationships she forges with the other figures of the lyric, a reorganization that necessitates an expansion of what perspective can be afforded through interiority. I look first at Gwendolyn Brooks's "A Song in the Front Yard," which presents a *sobject* fenced in by the yard she inhabits but whose flat renunciation of her mother's relegation of her to the front-yard stage grants her an autonomy she can only imagine. Using Brooks's speaker as an epitome of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century *sobject*, I then look to Gertrude Stein's "Rose is" ring to activate and define

the boundary of the poem-space; two of her *Objects* poems ("Red Roses" and "Nothing Elegant") provide examples of the *sobject*'s revisioning-through-disruption of patriarchal poetry's language as they twist terms out of their expected syntax to replot the relationships of objects, subjects, and audience in the poem-space. Collapsing the barrier between speaker and reader, these *sobjects* implicate both in the stakes of the poem and exposes the assumptions of power roles implicit in the *I-Thou* hierarchy.

As part of the *sobject*'s feminine[6] intervention into the patriarchal tradition of the lyric, she uses her authority as speaker to forge lateral, non-hierarchical relationships between herself and the other figures and objects that populate the lyric landscape. I examine H.D.'s calls to the pillars of the lyric's tradition—Nature, allusion, and myth—to map the *sobject*'s activation of a speaker trapped within the strictures of the lyric tableaux. She interacts with the fabric of her world to expand the boundaries of the speaker-subject, deploying apostrophe to weaponize her interiority and remake the lyric landscape she calls out from. The *sobject* then rejects discrete authority to accommodate multiplicities, moving in and out of perspective to activate (influence and be influenced by) her landscape. I look to Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's "Hello, the Roses" for a model of this expansion; Berssenbrugge fractures her speaker into a triad of consciousnesses overlapping and informing one another to widen the notion of discretely authoritative subjectivity in an evolving lyric world. Finally, Khadijah Queen presents a speaker who

[6] In this essay, I use the term "feminine" for two reasons: first, in opposition to the (also constructed) notion of the masculine, per feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon, who differentiates masculinity as sexual dominance and femininity as sexual submissiveness, explaining that genders are "created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex" (113). In the space of the lyric, I understand the feminine to be the one who is acted upon, whereas the masculine actively acts and speaks. Second, nodding to French feminism's *écriture féminine*, I conceive of the feminine in the lyric as an opportunity for intervention/ rupture in the patriarchal lyric tradition and necessary transformation as a form that, instead of perpetuating the masculine lyric precepts, dismantles and reforges them and/or invents alternative solutions.

harnesses the power of Defeo's multifoliate rose, who can deflect the assumptions projected upon her—even as she embodies the history of her own objectification—to emerge fully realized as a prophet and a subject, a *sobject* with the authority to create her own order. These poets provide a primer for this concept of the lyric *sobject* speaker that I have observed in modern Anglo poetry; many others could have been invoked, as this lyric speaker-*sobject* position explodes across the lyric, but I mean to establish the key criteria underlying this version of the lyric Self. This essay will unify its focus on the long twentieth century by training its gaze on a classic lyric symbol of feminine beauty and sensuality, a body double of the beloved and exemplar of the convulsing lyric situation: the rose. The *sobject* does not exist only as a rose, of course, but the rose is [one of] her avatar[s].

PART II: BAD FLOWERS:[7] SICK ROSES AS *SOBJECTS*

The rose blooms eternally in the Anglo lyric; more than two centuries before Juliet speculated the alterity of the signifier and signified on her balcony, Geoffrey Chaucer's translation of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (dated between 1372-1386) detailed its eponymous titular character, so conflated with the rose object and the romantic love/ female sensuality it signifies that their presence interchanges fluidly in the artifice of the garden's mise-en-scène. These roses—and gardens of others—solidify the flower's significance and fungibility with the lyric beloved. A classic example, Edmund Waller's 1645 poem, "Go, Lovely Rose," utilizes apostrophe to conjure and present his Rose as a doppelganger and foil for his beloved.

[7] Traditionally, the lyric traces its origins to Orpheus's lyre and the beguiling songs he plucked from it; I trace the *sobject*'s lyric lineage through Narcissus. Narcissus, having fallen in love with his own reflection in a pool (mirroring the lyric *I-Thou* relationship in its projection of the *I*'s interiority into/onto its *you*), Narcissus plunges through the form's boundary (the water of the pool, but also: the surface containing his beloved), arrives in hell, then rediscovers his beloved in the river Styx. From hell's waters, he emerges transmuted to a flower, an art object, a *fleur du mal*. The conflation of lyric relationship roles that Narcissus embodies and ultimately achieves once turned to floral object presents a mythic precedence for the *sobject*'s dialectical subjectivity.

Waller's speaker first commands the rose to present itself to his [presumably unrequited] beloved, please her with its beauty, then die in front of her, that she may understand her fate parallel to "all things rare." From this, she will extrapolate her own rapidly diminishing value and be impelled to "come forth, / [and] Suffer herself to be desired, / And not blush so to be admired!" This poem epitomizes the traits against which the *sobject* rebels: relegated to object-status and puppeteered for the patriarchy's bidding, the Lovely Rose is disallowed agency of her own. She is an object, used to serve a purpose (foil the speaker's beloved; stand in for her *you* so the beloved can assume the role of audience; and chastening example to facilitate the beloved's acquiescence of the speaker's desires). She exists *for* the speaker, enlivened *by* the speaker. To Waller's Elizabethan musing, "How small a part of time they share/ That are so wondrous sweet and fair!" Gwendolyn Brooks's mid-century *sobject* flatly retorts, "A girl gets sick of a rose."

Brooks's speaker, articulated in her 1944 poem, "A Song in the Front Yard," embodies the radical, disruptive autonomy of the *sobject*: a disaffected lyric beloved-cum-speaker, she rejects the internalized sexism and classism handed down from her mother's lips, mandates that allude to the breadth of historical precedence for such restrictive standards disguised as conventional wisdom and morality. Repeating her updated rejoinder to the Old Testament command, "Thou Shalt Not" (refrained in William Blake's "The Garden of Love"[8]), Brooks's speaker shrugs laconically, "I say it's fine." She opens *her* song by lamenting that she has existed primarily as an object, a fixture of the landscape, as she's been planted in the front yard "all my life." She then swiftly denounces the whole of lyric objecthood, veneration, and its passivity with her

[8] When shut out from the Chapel gates bearing the admonition, "Thou shalt not," Blake's speaker turns to the Garden of Love to find solace in its flora, only to discover its flowers ominously replaced by graves and tomb-stones. Strict adherence to dogma turns the garden-scape into a place of death, as etched stone commemorating the dead replaces floral abundance. In such a space, the lyric must accommodate verdant wildness; not to do so allows its practitioners to manipulate the landscape to turn on its speaker (as demonstrated with Blake's Bard), perverting and stifling lyric exuberance by "binding with briars, my joys & desires."

unimpressed rejoinder, a rejection that demonstrates the posture of the disaffected speaker-*sobject* who—though cultivated as the desirable, desiring rose—is also blighted by the limitations of this role, glutted with rose treatment. As the poem depicts her relegation to the front yard, a sort of twentieth-century American Garden of Love, this speaker-*sobject* yearns to escape the restriction of scrutiny and display in her manicured, policed suburban setting for a "peek" at the lawless, wild back yard, "where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows"; this wished-for glimpse of the back yard reveals *our* first glimpse of her interiority. While the speaker covets the anonymity and liberty that the back yard promises, she desires to see things for herself. No longer content with being looked *at*, she longs to perform the verboten act of looking (which she tellingly terms "peek[ing]"), an imagined act that catalyzes a chain of increasingly daring transgressions. The back yard is marked by its broken gate, which serves as a limen to the total autonomy of the street, and with each stanza, the speaker becomes more emboldened to escape further from the restrictive space of the front yard. This speaker is a mental traveler, and the poem imagines the way to another kind of display, a transgressive lyric subjectivity. Just the intimation of the untamed back yard leads to an escape down the alley to play with wild children, in a space that remains public, but of which her mother disapproves. This peeking therefore evidences a radical imaginative event, which fast-forwards the girl speaker into adulthood, where she's unbound from the family plot and free to roam the streets as she pleases, actions she pronounces not only acceptable but thrilling and "brave":

> I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
> I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
> And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace

And strut down the street with paint on my face.

Curiously, as poem's form pulses with control, breaking its rhymes with each admission of desire,[9] it also becomes increasingly self-assured, folding expressions of taboo desires into the norm of its rhymes. What previously shattered the rhythm of the poem's pulse now presents calmly, inevitably. This is the *sobject*'s work: having been restricted to an inertia as a tamely good girl in the front lawn, she remakes her lot by eschewing expectation and the constraints of the landscape in which she finds herself. Brooks's speaker takes control of the narrative, normalizing the autonomy of "bad woman[hood]" in the street instead of blithely accepting chastisement for this yearning. Supplanting front-yard civility with the self-determination of the street, she imagines herself changed: garbed in a taboo adulthood (lace stockings and cosmetics) as the flag of her independence, she embodies her motility as she struts purposefully down the street. One of the more fortunate (if dissatisfied) figures on Brooks's 1944 *Street in Bronzeville,* this speaker's suburban stasis signifies her family's upward mobility—preserved at the expense of its daughter's desires for self- and sexual-expression and the seeming freedom these things promise. She resists—if only psychically— this cloistering into the role of "good girl," choosing to imagine herself as autonomously mobile "bad woman," literally refashioning herself in the fantasy: her face is "paint[ed]," not because she is an art object trapped in the lyric tableau to please spectators, but because she has emerged as an independent subject, an emblem of self-expression. This adornment renders her perspective, her selfhood and interiority as kind of

[9] The poem opens brokenly: "I've stayed in the front yard my whole life. / I want a peek at the back", then falls into the reassuring cadence (or punishing snap?) of rhyme. Each new admission breaks the rhyme again, e.g., "I want to go in the back yard now / And maybe down the alley"; ditto the pronouncements of the back-alley children's fun as "wonderful." The rhyme disrupts once more, with the mother's warning that "Johnnie Mae / Will grow up to be a bad woman." After this, the speaker takes control, smoothing out the jaggedness of disruption by synthesizing the fate of "bad wom[e]n, too" through reassuring sonic coupling ("I do/…bad woman, too" and "black lace/ … my face").

exteriority: she sees herself as a *sobject*, "sick of a rose," and self-styled to arise from her stasis and get around, moving unfettered (from the social strictures projected upon her) through the lyric landscape to signify her selfhood.

If Brooks offers a speaker glutted with rose, Gertrude Stein,[10] grammarian poet par excellence, revels in the glutting: in her 1913 poem, "Sacred Emily," she writes, "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" (187). Stein reprises this line in many of her later works, inserting the line into other poems, stories, and lectures; she believed in its message as exemplifying her poetic project so much that she made it her letterhead (and I have made it this essay's emblem).

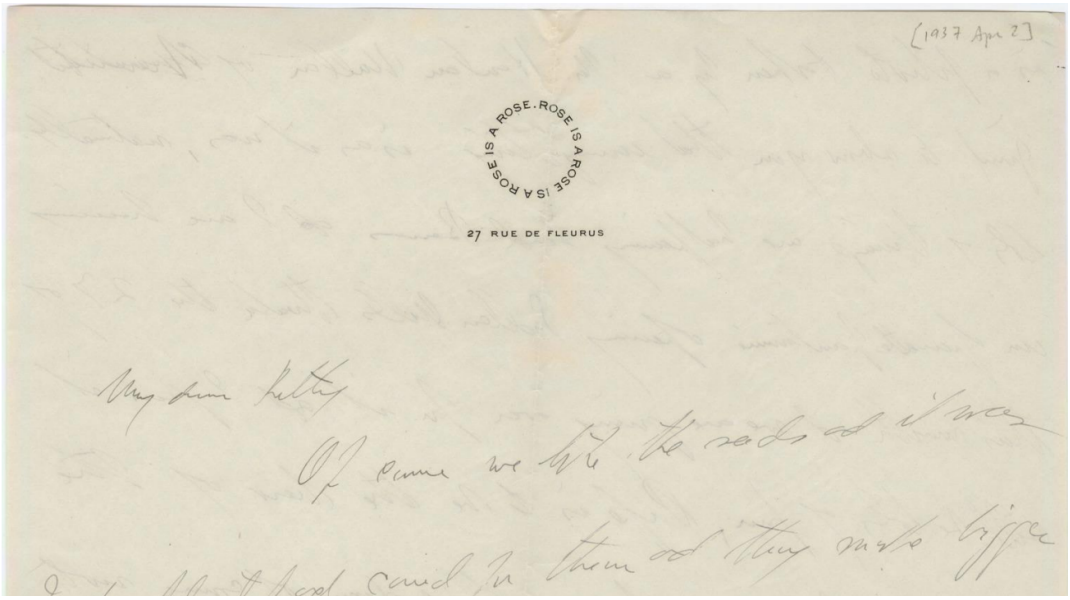


Figure 6: Gertrude Stein, [Letter to Kitty, i.e.] Kate Buss, Paris, 1937 Apr 23

In her children's book, *The World is Round*, a character named Rose uses a penknife to carve the phrase into the landscape: "on the tree [carving] Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose until it went all the way around" (53). With this act of naming, Rose assumes the Adamic role of

[10] Stein wrote prolifically but rarely in the lyric form as such; critic Robert Grotjohn goes so far as to name Stein's poetic project as actively anti-lyric, collapsing the lyric with all "patriarchal poetry." Grotjohn never clearly defines the lyric outside of "patriarchal poetry," instead conflating the two distinct terms and using them interchangeably, as here: "The essential unchangeableness of patriarchal poetry in its lyric desire to stop time" (180).

ordering language to christen her surroundings: she is Defeo stepping into the footprints of Blake's Albion. The tree no longer signifies *tree*, but rather is circumscribed with affirmations of *rose*; and Rose, an emanation of *sobject* consciousness in the round world, cuts her name into the landscape "so it is there and not anywhere…which will give me a scare" (52). Rose conflates the acts of naming and writing with her carving; the violence of her actions—carried out with a *pen*knife—"caresse[s] completely" the object of the tree by nouning it—and therefore revealing it as—rose ("Poetry and Grammar" 231). These oppositions—tree/ rose; carve/ caress; owning/ liberating—can exist resolutely in the act of writing, in the space of the poem. Rose's working demonstrates how the lyric situation becomes a magic circle that provides a bounding line for the latent possibility of the poem-space, while simultaneously creating a kinetic site of transformation: as the effects of the magic Rose works in her ring of Roses alter and revision the landscape to accommodate her, so her projection of her Rose-Self makes the exterior world an articulation of her interiority. A Rose is a: ring is a pose is a site of emergence and collapse.

Stein draws a ring (denoting ownership; an unbroken bond; a delimited area, e.g., inside and outside) in text with her Rose, a magic circle spelling out protection and connection: "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" follows a circular logic that returns us, transformed, again and again to the initial phrase. Stein famously addressed the awkward redundancy and syntactic irregularity of her phrase in a seminar at the University of Chicago; the exchange is transcribed by Thornton Wilder in his introduction to her *Four in America*. "In that line," Stein says, "the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years" (v). This defense of semantic renewal underscores the necessity of the *sobject*'s revisioning of lyric language: as Stein redistributes syntax to subvert reader expectations and employs an excess of repetition to torque a concept that, paradoxically, had been repeated to the point of meaninglessness, so the *sobject* recenters

lyric language to renew its function and recenter its aims. What's in a naming? Stein's emphasis on the rose's redness is telling; we should not understand this returns the rose to an original vitality; rather, it is another "first time"—a new redness blooms from her circle, bright as menarche. Stein's repetition underscores that redness is fundamental to its being as rose, and repeating the phrase indicates a kind of linguistic self-awareness of the history of the rose's objectification. The rose is conjured for us, in a chant, as Stein—like Defeo—plots the circular logic of her rose, issuing a witchy dare (to the lyric, to the reader, to the perception of the rose) demanding that we see what has been plainly there in front of us to see: the rose exists as object, yet it also signifies with a subjectivity aware of its own objecthood.

While the scope of Stein's projects generally tended more toward the epic or the narrative than the lyric, her censure of patriarchal poetry (a genre that necessarily includes the epic, narrative, and lyric modes), evident in her 1914 collection *Tender Buttons*, is written as prose poetry but pillories the lyric's tropes. Importantly, *Tender Buttons* also focuses on objects, food, and rooms—the *stuff* of the domestic sphere—examining each commodity through a faceted perspective. These artifacts are commodities: each signify status and wealth, but Stein inspects how each also signifies in the complex social and cultural matrix which has produced it. Literary and canonical allusions are just two of the myriad vectors that constitute each artifact: in "Nothing Elegant" and "Red Roses," two poems from her suite of "Objects," Stein cynically reprises the image of Chaucer's enclosed rose[11] to rewrite the script of patriarchal poetry and

[11] In Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*, the Lover finds a rose blooming in Narcissus' fountain: upon vain attempts to grasp its watery apparition, Cupid strikes him thrice with arrows and locks his heart, only to be unlocked upon the Lover's successful passing of allegorical tests of will, morality, and love, while Narcissus, a "bacheler" grasps for his blushing bryde, the reflection of "his owne shadowe soo / he starf for to woo" (ln. 1469; lns. 1529-30). Lovesick, he pynes for the Beloved he tries to grasp; according to Chaucer, "he loste his wit right in that place,/ And diede withynne a lytel space" (lns. 1534-5). But we know that the lytel space in which Narcissus dies is the river Styx: he dies in the limen between living and dead, headfirst through the lyric mirror hole, transformed into a hell-flower. In Chaucer's *Romaunt*, the Lover merely falls in *love* with the reflection of the rosebuds (his Beloved's doppelgänger) mirrored in Narcissi's fountain:

retrain lyric attention on the object. This refocusing of lyric attention both acknowledges a dominant influence shaping perception of the object(s) discussed and reframes the lyric focus from a personage (namely, the subject-speaker) to the *thing*, the *object*, as the topic worthy of central discussion.[12] Stein's poems fix upon the objects—not the speaker—but demonstrate how each object is shaped by the speaker's perception of its objecthood and the historicity of its place in discourse. In its cynical takedown of the lyric's patented objectification, the poem "Nothing Elegant" opens, "A charm a single charm is doubtful." The entirety of Stein's Cubist project endeavors to render the impossibly irreducible object; in this poem, she tackles the romantic object of the rose, deemed either charmless or abundantly charming, but improbable of possessing "a single charm." In Stein, if "the red is rose," it is qualified with the circumspect addition that "there is a gate surrounding it" (i.e., it is walled off), wherein "if inside is let in and

---

> For whoso loketh in that mirrour
> Ther may nothyng ben his socour
> That he ne shall there sen somethyng
> That shal hym lede into lovyng (1605-8)

No real roses will compare to those artfully rendered roses: nothing outside the mirror can transfix—not even the thing which casts the reflection in the mirror. He has "sen" this idealized beloved and seen that it is good; nothing can compare. This lyric power captivates, enthralls, usurps all other means of succor; it alone will lead him into lovyng.

> In thilke mirrour saw I tho,
> Among a thousand thinges mo,
> A roser chargid full of rosis
> That with a hegge aboute enclos is.

[12] German theorist Werner Wolf, in a 2003 essay, "The Lyric: Problems of Definition and a Proposal for Reconceptualisation," outlines nine familiar and "alleged" traits of the lyric, dividing criteria into expected territories of voice, orality, and performance of lyric utterance; language and form; and the speaker-subject's consciousness and attention. As with many attempts to define the lyric, Wolf's ends in a stalemate, reinforcing de Man's assertion that the lyric is not a genre but instead more productively considered as a mode. Though Wolf's attempts to define the lyric ultimately—by his own estimation—fail, they fail productively, cannily highlighting characteristics of the lyric. One such criterion insists upon the lyric's emphasis "on the individual perspective and/or the perception of lyric agency rather than on perceived objects" (29). This foregrounding of the lyric subject and its consciousness over the object holds true enough for the generic lyric poem but quickly falls apart with the slightest scrutiny, i.e., the problem of Imagism, or, for this essay's purposes, the speaker-*sobject*.

there places change."[13] This place of transformation metamorphoses object into subject and beloved into rose, and inside into an even more enclosed, intimate space.

This progression inward invokes a separation between free and enclosed spaces, gathering them in a dialectic of the permissible and the taboo to suggest (through a homophone) that if inside is let in[to the rose?], *their* places change, as inside the gate is a place of change, that is, places change there. This space exists as a wound space, accommodating both consent and trespass, at once interior and exterior, serving as gateway and barrier. On one level, this penetration of the interior, transformative space is charmless and inelegant; our object (the rose) is stranded, invaded, and changed, while the poem wryly pronounces a value judgment, deeming these actions "upright" and earnest. This assessment that the *rose* involves "certainly . . . something upright" also juxtaposes verticality with the lateral placement of the gate "surrounding it." The red as rose is sheathed by the gate surrounding, upright and rose (past tense of rise). This juxtaposition reveals the tension in another of the poem's dialectics: doubtful and earnest, suggesting that (probable) uprightness and earnestness bud from doubtfulness; but this movement happens tentatively, for the poem never definitively pronounces the rose's fate. Instead, the instability of the diction mirrors the precariousness of the rose's situation: opening with the "doubtful" singularity of [a] charm, the poem offers a sardonic logical proof. "If…and if…then certainly" it smirks. This poem abandons its rose in the inner sanctum of the enclosed gate, but reveals this relegation as a transformative space, a space of changing places. If this poem euphemistically pronounces this treatment of isolating the rose and cloistering it behind a gate inelegant, then intruding into its inside (its interiority?) offers a glimpse of *sobject*

[13] This unstable topography recalls critical "thing" theorist Bill Brown's observation of Weber: "What first reads like the effort to accept things in their physical quiddity becomes the effort to penetrate them, to see through them, and to find…within an object…the subject," an apt summation for the entirety of *Tender Buttons* (12).

expansion. As inside is "let in," the space both widens its boundary to accommodate this new inside and constricts to engulf what has been let in.

"Red Roses," another poem of "Objects," further complicates the metonymic rose through the additions of money and violence. Invoking the economics of feminine virtue and sexuality through roses, she illustrates the violence of objectification perpetuated by a patriarchy which benefits from such commodification: "A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot." More explicit and sexually charged than "Nothing Elegant," "Red Roses" combines violence with icy unattainability, collapsed in commerce; after the exchange, the already cool rose is pronounced "a little less hot," that is, more subdued and less aroused. Stein's roses are penetrated, exchanged, and derided; simultaneously unattainable (they are "cool" and cloistered inside "a gate surrounding it") and subjected to violence ("inside is let in," with a "sold hole" "cut pink"[14]); after which the objects experience a fall from grace (in the "collapse," "places change"). The poems absolve their speaker-subjects who enact these actions in anonymity, while their objects must weather these assaults with gritted teeth, even as the poem ironically congratulates the subject for its earnestness and uprightness. One cannot help but read Stein's "collapse[d]. . . sold hole" as a sly critique of the lyric's veneration of the beloved through the symbol of the rose and its chaste, feminine sensuality unaware of its own value.

[14] Stein's color-violence in the line "pink cut pink" echoes in the poetry of her contemporary Mina Loy, particularly her "Songs to Joannes." The speaker of Loy's "Songs" embodies the *sobject*'s disaffected, wry posture and "Song X" provides a portrait of the aftermath to the violence hinted in Stein's cutting:

> Shuttle-cock and battle-door
> A little pink-love
> And feathers are strewn

Loy splices homophones to introduce vocabularies of war and coitus into a lawn game to demonstrate the stakes of "playful" flirtation in courtship's sporting. As battledore batters the shuttlecock, so the "little pink-love" of Loy's Song weathers similar brutality, emerging from the "game" raw and graceless as a plucked chicken.

Stein's speaker subtly slides subject and object to operate interchangeably, for in her poems, "there places change."

Even as Stein redirects grammatical rules and gesture out of her poems through allusion and an almost ekphrastic relation to the visual object, her speakers remain fixed in observation, declining the lyric call to apostrophe. But apostrophe—or invocation, evocation, or, more broadly, lyric address—exists as one of the lyric's primary techniques to draw other part[ies] into its compass. The lyric speaker can activate these others in the poem by speaking of or to them or by summoning them through description or the direct address of apostrophe; critic Barbara Johnson describes this particular lyric hallmark in her 1986 feminist exploration of lyric address, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," as the means to "call up and animate the absent, the lost, and the dead" (531). Johnson considers this poetic function as not only integral to the lyric but also vital and revolutionized in the female poet's deployment, demonstrating the paradox of its invocative gesture as self-negation, echoing the feminine as a site of fullness and voiding, emergence and exit, as demonstrated by Defeo's *Rose*. She offers Lucille Clifton's invocation of aborted children in her poem "the lost baby poem" to evidence that, "For the sake of the one that cannot be called, the speaker invites an apostrophe that would expel *her* into otherness" (537). Even as the female speaker-subject "calls up" others into the poem, her self bears the brunt of this conflict, growing as the poem expands but also refracting in its acknowledgment of its own artifice (of its animation of the absent), so that even with this direct address, the poem's artifice and the artificial nature of this relationship is maintained through the artifice of the speaker's calling. This simultaneous dilation and contraction of the self through the speaker's address in the lyric poem is knitted into the fabric of the *sobject*-speaker's being. As she cries out and expels, she also draws in and engenders something—if only palpable absence/loss—through the

transubstantiating power of her pain. *She* becomes more fully realized (even as she self-negates,) extending herself in her call outward. Severin Fowles, in his 2010 essay "People without Things," a postcolonial critique of thing theory, argues that absence and loss figure just as palpably as material objects, terming these embodied realizations of voids "the carnality of absence" (26). This oversight in thing theory that Fowles highlights underscores an important tenet of the *sobject* and more broadly, an important facet of the lyric: absence and negative space—what's not there, or what's receded into the landscape (of memory, of the poem)— may be called *to* but not necessarily called *forth*. The *sobject* accommodates such phantoms, opening space to harbor such absences, as with Clifton's apostrophe to the lost baby. Remembering and invoking the child does not bring it into being; and recalling it, to some extent, diminishes the speaker herself. This loss marks her, defines her, and opens a space inside her that cannot be filled up, just as her move into a speaker-subject position does not efface her previous status as object. She embodies all of these: no longer solely an object, she speaks as a subject to address her own objecthood and the forgotten, negated absences and losses imbricating her own ontology. Modernist hermeticist poet H. D. demonstrates such a determination of speaker agency: through the crucial and vexed act of calling, her speakers call to myth and elemental forces to recompose the lyric landscape; having summoned the natural world, they invoke its power to signify their selves.

H. D.'s 1916 collection *Sea Garden* opens with a meditation on the only accepted flower of the genus Orphium, heralding upon a flower whose genealogy traces to Orpheus himself, the sea rose: "Rose, harsh rose,/ marred and with stint of petals,/ meagre flower," the opening poem begins, invoking the classic lyric object of the rose, employed not as beautiful synecdoche for the beloved but as a victim of assault and battery. This flagrantly lyric object then is become an

abject thing and an emblem of violence, forecast in William Blake's "Sick Rose." I read Blake's "Sick Rose" as a diagnosis of the state of the lyric: this song opens, "O Rose, thou art sick," explaining that the "dark secret love" of the invisible worm—which I interpret as the insidious rot of the lyric's tradition of incestuous, intertextual self-perpetuation, as explicated by Mary Wollstencraft, and, more recently, Virginia Jackson—"does thy life destroy." This reliance on and continuous reproduction of the generic lyric chokes out the life of its most precious object, the lyric rose. Blake offers the solution a few songs later with his "Pretty Rose Tree," in which the speaker, besotted by the Pretty Rose Tree, eschews all other flimsy flowers proffered him. The Pretty Rose Tree responds by assuming the disaffected posture of the *sobject*: she does not offer herself to the speaker as a reward for his self-congratulatory abstinence; instead, he reflects solemnly, "Her thorns were my only delight." H.D. likewise provides a diptych of roses: first, her "Sea Rose" reframes the possibilities for the rose's fate through its perseverance—and this speaker's attention to it. Immediately addressing the rose's perceived "harshness," the poem also attends the damage inflicted upon it: it is a "marred" and "meagre flower," "thin" and with "stint of petals." Likely, the wind has inflicted these ills: the rose is "lifted" and "flung on the sand… that drives the wind," arrested in lyric amber and at the mercy of its punishing elements. H.D. invokes this wind in "Garden," another poem of *Sea Garden*, to bring about change to the stagnancy of the voluptuous scene in which she's locked. This address recalls Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," though instead of pleading to "Make me thy lyre, / even as the forest is," H. D.'s speaker invokes the wind to wreak destruction and dynamically alter the space of lyric inertia. The florid femininity of the scene belies the harshness of this environment: the beautiful rose is harsh, hard, and cut in rock; interacting with it, the speaker imagines

scraping the color like dye from its petals, contradictory images offering a picture of enduring impermanence.

The garden itself also holds covert dangers: the speaker longs to break the rose, the tree, and the heat, "rend[ing] open" a path through the stifling, strangling garden. The fruit cannot drop: the heat holds it in place, rounding and blunting its points, accelerating the ripening (rotting) process. This invocation culminates the mused threats of the speaker that open the poem, in which apostrophe to a rose praised for its beauty and strength convert into a systematic takedown of the lyric icon. Set in the titular garden, even as the speaker admires and empathizes with the rose, she scorns and threatens it: though the rose is hard and "cut in rock," she muses, "If I could break you / I could break a tree."[15] This threat to destroy and usurp displaces the rose as the lyric object par excellence; even in her motionless state, the speaker severs the synecdochic link of rose and female beloved forged by the lyric tradition. She refuses to embody *all* beloveds (as the rose) and instead disrupts this lyric norm for the femininized object, threatening violence to the formidable, fixed figure of the rose both to prove her existence as separate from it and as a display of her (latent, potential) power. As Barbara Johnson points out, quoting Carol Gilligan's study of gender differences in ethical thinking, "I can be subject and object of violence at the same time, believ[ing] that I have not chosen the conditions under which

[15] This languorous threat recalls the active peril of Goethe's "Heidenröslen," particularly the second stanza, wherein the heath rose offers a counter-threat to defend herself:

Knabe spracht: ich breche dich,	The youth said, "I'll break you,
Röslein auf der Heiden.	Little rose on the heath."
Röslein sprach: ich steche dich,	Little rose spoke: "I'll prick you,
Da du ewig denkst an mich,	So that you'll forever think of me,
Und ich will's nicht leiden.	And I don't want to suffer it."

Whereas Goethe' little rose "just had to suffer it," H. D. threatens and colludes with her rose: at once sympathizing with the rose's plight as recipient of violence and aggression, she also recognizes that it is but a symbol in the larger framework of the lyric and its historicity, which actually deserve her wrath. This explains her use of the conditional tense in the first section (as she muses, rejects, and relates to the rose) and the imperative in the second stanza (as her focus narrows to active fury, directed at what imprisons her).

I must choose" (qtd. Johnson 534). This choice to destroy another—even as she empathizes with its vulnerable position, even as the destruction exists only in the conditional, as a threat—establishes her subjecthood as separate from the rose even as she is linked to it through address, synecdoche, and convention. But trapped in lyric amber, not only can the speaker not move, neither can the fruit drop from the tree and rot; everything in the poem stays fixed in a point of ripened voluptuousness. The lyric tradition accommodates this: though the beloved may be threatened with the specter of death and/or age and its accompanying loss of beauty in the poem, the beloved will stay beautiful—exactly where and how she's put. HD's "Garden" offers an alternative, if only (like Brooks) as a hypothetical: this speaker, embodying many of the traditional traits of the lyric beloved/object, imagines a vengeful exeunt from the lyric tableau and invokes the symbol of poetic inspiration to accomplish her bidding. In doing so, H.D. literally breathes new life into an inspired, transformed lyric.

Though H.D. calls out *of* her lyric spaces and call out *to* other forces, the role of the discrete lyric speaker still delimits her speaker's subjectivity. The lyric speaker exists in opposition to its *you*, staking out its identity by defining its *I* as *not-you*. While this so-called singularity of the *I* is—like so many lyric principles—a necessary falsehood, philosophic perceptionist poet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's titular poem from her 2013 collection, *Hello, the Roses*, argues for the lyric's possibility as a nexus of multiple consciousnesses, the site at which to [ex]change intelligence in a non-hierarchical, rhizome-based model of transference. This convergence forms the "energy matrix" of the poem, offering the possibility of a collective speaker and a union of previously oppositional (animal/ vegetal; self/ other) entities. Berssenbrugge expands the speaker-subject position not merely by speaking on behalf of others but instead by blossoming open interiority to accommodate and privilege other/ exterior

perspectives, sites of experience and knowledge; accordingly, her *sobject*-speaker[s] reimagine the lyric situation by exploding the lyric's reliance on a discrete subjectivity and I/Thou hierarchy. This collapse of the boundaries between speaker-subject, object, and reader renews the lyric landscape, allowing these multivalent consciousnesses to expand through their interactions with/in the environment.

"Hello, the Roses" cycles through at least two, probably three, different speakers to offer another vector of possibility for the twenty-first-century *sobject*: eco-consciousness, framed by Berssenbrugge as *clairsentience*, acknowledges the consciousness of biological beings cast in the object position and invites them to speak. Berssenbrugge's trine speakers contemplate and embody as they locate the rose(s): the rose, and the woman experiencing and interacting with the rose, and the poem-speaker observing the scene and contemplating the relationships constellated between herself and the poem's other figures. The poem's speaker shifts in and out of these interiorities, exploring how a figure communicates (or "speaks") to announce itself and relate to others in its sphere; for instance, as the rose communicates, its self expands to augment the woman's selfhood. This expansion collapses the borders of both the rose and the woman to facilitate the emergence of a collaborative, multivalent subject[ivity] in the poem-space; this echoes through the lyric landscape of the poem, reordering the lyric space to engage other sites of interiority.

To demonstrate this necessary expansion, the poem supplies its *sobject*s which the reader must bring it to life through its rehearsal: the poem's refusal to clearly distinguish the triad of its speakers' voices requires the reader to assign agency to each statement and imagine each as a possibility as each speaker's plaint. Part II of the poem opens,

> The rose communicates instantly with the woman by sight, collapsing its boundaries, and the woman widens her boundaries.
>
> Her "rate of perception" slows down, because of its complexity.
>
> There's a feeling of touching and being touched, the shadings of color she can sense from touch.

The poem-speaker seems to speak here, narrating the unfolding of the lyric tableau: a woman in the garden interacts with its roses. But the final quoted line could be voiced by the woman or the rose, signaling a position this poem has staked out: the woman and rose are interchangeable, conflated, and inextricably linked through their experiencing the other. This shifting harkens not to the lyric precedence of feminine fungibility in the poem-space where women and roses swap at the speaker's convenience; rather, this mutability nods to the model established by Defeo, enacting a transformative space between spectator and object, enlivening both as actants in a collaborative transformation. The poem tells us that as the rose "collapses" its boundaries, the woman "widens" hers: Melissa Kwasny calls this synthetic expansion a "dialogical situation between plant awareness and human awareness" ("Women and Nature" 34). Kwasny goes on to quote Berssenbrugge herself, in an interview with the late poet Leslie Scalapino, who names the poem as locus of this "energy matrix" that allows for the simultaneous collapse and expansion of subjectivities (what this essay understands as the work and role of the *sobject*). If these *sobjects* fuel the "energy matrix" of the poem, the act of their conflation requires that we (the reader/viewers) set aside any preconceived notions of established order to instead allow for the nuance and necessity of these dialectical subjectivities—that we widen our own boundaries.

In the poem, such transactions of energy and self happen instantly; accommodating the necessary state of flux for an interiority galvanized from among the poem-objects (*sobjects*), the rose "communicates instantly with the woman by sight, collapsing its boundaries, and the woman widens her boundaries" (60). The rose communicates because it is perceived but also because its existence—"petals moving in air, emotion of perfume [which] records as a sphere"—alters the ones perceiving it (58). With this symbiotic relationship, Berssenbrugge displaces the linear, hierarchical lyric relationship in favor of a dialectical, cumulative experience, to activate and privilege knowledge from non-traditional sources (feeling/emotion) and signification of selfhood through unexpected means (color, odor).

Berssenbrugge examines the complexity of perception and subjectivity through this experience of roses in a garden: by concentrating upon color (light reflected and absorbed) as ontological component of the rose, she demonstrates that while the perception of color is subjective (to the speaker), it is also fundamental to the rose-object. As the rose's effect (scent, color/light) upon the speaker changes and affects the speaker, the bounding line between subject perceiving and object that is perceived blurs; in the [lyric] garden, there places change. This importantly critiques the Berkeleyan tenet of perception—that is, to be is to be perceived—upon which the lyric subject-object relationship seems predicated as it charts new terrain for the speaker-*sobject*: already forged from the abjection and centuries of objectification, the *sobject* can continue her expansion, not by mimicking the patriarchal lyric hierarchy, but through a rhizome of interconnectedness, through the activation of alternative, essential sources of knowledge. "I'm saying physical perception is the data of my embodiment, whereas for the rose, scarlet itself is matter," the speaker explains, defining a boundary between her self and the rose's experiential sentience (59). The act of perceiving defines the speaker; whether inhaling the

perfume of the Bourbon rose in front of her or considering all the rose in the abstract, as all the "roses I haven't yet seen or seen in books record as my experience" (58). All these experiences—real and immediate or imagined/ remembered—exist equally for the speaker and attempt to ribbon off the bounding line of the speaker from the rose. This effort, of course, quickly unspools: even as the [human, female] speaker of the first part of Berssenbrugge's poem distinguishes herself from the rose as she comprehends her own role in its perception, she realizes her own limitations: if "physical perception" is "the data of [her] embodiment," then for the rose, "scarlet itself is matter" (59). The rose may exist [to the speaker] to be perceived as an image, an icon, a sensory experience, an image—"when you see her, you feel the impact of what visual can mean," she observes; but the rose also exists *outside* of visual perception. The speaker considers the physical processes of this perception of color: light particles, absorbed and reflected, transmit data (whorling out "with the creativity of a metaphor"), communicating also its odor and all of its other physical characteristics. Berssenbrugge's speaker tallies all this (its scent, her senses, memories, emotions), realizing that the weight of everything she imports with her approach disrupts the rose, as the speaker helplessly but inevitably duplicates her self through the act of looking, describing her handling of the rose as "so vibratory…with impressions like fingerprints all over" (59). The speaker cannot help but project herself upon the rose as she considers it; and the rose, object of received light, reflects back its mater. The speaker's self-conscious reckoning renounces spectatorial passivity and demonstrates the necessity of a collaborative subjectivity.

Because the poem refuses to identify its speakers clearly, the when the rose collapses/the woman expands boundaries, the poem's assertion that "her 'rate of perception' slows down, because of its complexity" exposes the problem of the deictic "her." Whose rate of perception is

more complex—the human woman's, or the rose, which experiences the world clairsentiently? The next line provides little clarity, intimating that she can touch and be touched, distinguishing shades of color through synesthetic touching. By refusing to assign this experiential interiority to one of the figures, Berssenbrugge links woman and rose to widen the transformative space of the poem and bloom its speakers from object-status. Rather than privileging the [woman, poet] speaker's authority over the rose, the poem provides direction out of the comparison game:

> Walking, I move in and out of negative space around which each rose is engaged and become uncertain of my physical extent as an object.
>
> A space opens up and awareness gathers it in …

As the human speaker (either the woman/actant or the poet/observer) engages with the rose, an object in space and the negative space that surrounds it, the speaker presumes the role of subject, interacting with the rose-object and the void of non-rose objects (that is, negative space surrounding the rose). But she, too, is a device of the poem, and as she circles the rose, she blurs into the negative space that delineates rose from not-rose. As she contemplates the physical extent of her role as "an object," the poem widens to allow all these possibilities. "A space opens and awareness gathers"—the space that is the garden and the negative space pressing against the rose—and the speaker concludes that she can intentionally engage to ultimately shape meaning, reading the coherency of the light and sensing the palpable being of the rose. The poem ends with a beautiful summation of the lyric relationship, triangulated with the lyric object of the rose and the lyric speaker-*sobject*: "using the capacity for feeling [the speaker is able] to sense its

potency in a rose and to cultivate inter-being with summer perfume." What Berssenbrugge terms "inter-being" reflects the crucially dialectical nature of the *sobject* position: by reacting to the lyric landscape and moving through the lyric object, the lyric speaker can transparently accommodate these interiorities of the exterior.

The possibilities that Berssenbrugge fissures open for the lyric speaker do not efface her vexed history nor her previous status as lyric object; rather, they build upon the invocations demonstrated in H. D. to further the work (as displayed in Stein and Brooks) of dismantling and reimagining the lyric apparatus, its language, and the possibilities for transformation in and of its spaces. The future of the *sobject* negotiates these dialectics of past/future, subject/object, and singular/collective by existing as the amalgamation of all these things, bringing the past (her own past and the history of the lyric tradition) into the present, drawing us into her compass as she progresses cyclically and self-revising, expanding and emerging into accrual and variation rather than neatly linear progression. Poet and playwright Khadijah Queen offers us a portrait of what this generative, generational authority could look like for a speaker-*sobject* in her 2016 poem, "Any Other Name." Its title winks at Juliet's semantic choreography,[16] linking the lineage of the speaker's name with familial and societal expectations tethered to its signifier. As the poem unfolds, the speaker reveals herself to be increasingly critical of the signified self her name points to; she hazards at the poem's volta, "Maybe // I have to marry myself. Maybe I am my own prophet." Queen thus revises Juliet's invitation to "doff thy name, / And … take all myself" and embodies Gwendolyn Brooks's reassurance, "I say it's fine." Queen—like Brooks—is a girl,

[16] Caught in the [arbitrarily determined] strictures of language's strata, Juliet leans over her balcony and muses, "O, be some other name!/ What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ by any other name would smell as sweet." Romeo attempts to woo Juliet using the exhausted currency of romance, but with each attempt, Juliet offers a corrective, torquing the tired language of Romeo's wooing and revealing its artifice and its pretenses to grandeur—for Juliet recognizes early on that *language* is her enemy, not Romeo or their warring families.

sick of the designation as rose and transcended beyond the labels given to her by others; but unlike Brooks's speaker, Queen's is mobile, traversing the urban landscape. Shuttled across town by male drivers who vainly attempt to reduce her to stereotype, she takes their rides but rejects their attempts to pigeonhole her selfhood: "Khadijah means wife of the prophet [Muhammed]," she informs us, as male Uber drivers ("the Muslim ones") lecture her on her name's meaning, demanding to know her age and "where my husband is." These figures read Queen's beauty as threatening, for she is unassignable, missing the reassuring ring to enclose her dangerous beauty: they "still say// it's my fault I am beautiful." This blame causes the speaker to speculates that her beauty—"the kind of beauty/ that makes me so desirable as an object"—might have "cursed me to solitude." This beauteous solitude does not signal stasis; rather, it opens the possibility for *becoming* (beauty, transformed): as with Stein's enclosure, inside is let into a transformational space of blossoming, of growth. Queen revisions her mother's advice of "keep some things to yourself" as "keep *yourself* to yourself" [emphasis mine]; this move further inward privatizes interiority to transmute its solitude to strength. This "keeping" renders Queen not only the rose by any other name but the garden itself *and* the wall enclosing it, an expansion that enables her to disrupt the lineage of objectification and debut her fully realized self. A man "can break you with your own love if you don't / remember who you are among the nonbelievers," she cautions, but *her* religion privileges the remembering via self-keeping. She genuflects accordingly: "All praises due to the part of me that listens to herself / first." This line redirects the prayer-language punctuating the poem from heavenward to self-ward (another "inside let in"): she is transformed from hermetically self-kept to divine. In choosing to keep herself to herself, she is "marr[ied to her]self" and thus not lacking a *you*, she ties the knot in this thread, this lineage, of objectification, emerging fully realized—as a prophet and mouthpiece, a visionary.

Accordingly, she rearranges the landscape to reflect her self, the space in which she appears ("Sometimes I am in / a collage I made myself and I have/a new name"); like Stein's Rose carving her name into the tree, this name reaffirms her self in its declaration, as it is given by "[her]self and I'm the only one who knows / what it means." But as she self-defines, Queen does not eschew the language bequeathed her; rather, she widens her boundary—her conception of her self—to expand her being to accommodate the many selves she is and has been as she moves into who she will be. The poem closes on an ever-enlarging image of the speaker creating an art piece, a rose:

> The first time I drew a rose I couldn't stop
>
> layering in new petals. My small right hand
> filled the flimsy newsprint with red Crayola
> spirals, the lines unbroken, the endless making
> as sweet as being out of the order
> other people like to think you are born to.

Queen's speaker creates the rose in a frenzy of accrual and "endless making," an unbroken Steinian circle torqued by the present-ness of its being. Rather than limiting the rose as a discrete symbol of beauty and order (containing its paradox of allure and danger), she instead evokes it as an anarchic emblem of the self, messy and wildly drawn. This self-created rose is "sweet as being out of … order," defying societal and familial expectations to emerge as its own self, disordered in the system to pointing she is born into and choosing instead to create her own

vision. Instead, building upon Berssenbrugge's concept that "scarlet itself is matter," Queen demonstrates the necessity for presentation as/of color[17] in the *sobject*'s self-signification; this enables her to gather the past and look toward a future determined according on her specifications.

PART III: CLOSE

Over the eight years of its creation, the title of Jay Defeo's *Rose* cycled through several revisions: first *Deathrose*, then *The White Rose*, Defeo finally landed on *The Rose*, which she saw as "the unity of both of those opposite ideas" (Miller 33). The dialectical relationship of life, death, and being in Defeo's title echoes the physical reality and the process by which the completed work was realized: a 1969 review by *The Los Angeles Times* called *The Rose* "a bizarre, poignant painting…[that] holds a moment when densely accumulated life begins to erode back to earth" (Wilson 51). Defeo's *Rose* had consumed her energies, health, marriage, and attention,[18] collapsing boundaries of itself and other by absorbing everything into its compass: at one point, Defeo reputedly dropped her own pearls onto the surface of the painting; they were, like everything else, subsumed into its mass (Phillips 67). This is the paradox of Defeo's *Rose*[19] and of the *sobject*'s subjectivity: simultaneously an exodus from its past, an

[17] Berssenbrugge and Queen also expose an important component of the *sobject*-speaker's palimpsestic relationship to history/the past: just as the feminine beloved can no longer be shunted into an unspeaking, inanimate object, neither can her identity be generically determined, namely, she can no longer be presumed to be white or "colorless" (Virginia Jackson explains this lyric tendency as "default whiteness" ["How Does It Feel" 232].)

[18] Indeed, *The Rose* swallowed Defeo and consumed her artistic vision for nearly two decades. She would not complete another significant work until 1972's *Crescent Bridge I*, inspired by the tooth loss she experienced while completing *The Rose* (Miller 289).

[19] Defeo charted a timeline of how her *Rose* cycled through the history of artistic movements, all of them snowballing into its final version, explaining in a 1978 interview, "[*The Rose*] passed through several stages, each one of them valid . . . a kind of archaic version at six months; then followed a very developed geometric version which gradually transformed itself into a much more organic expression. …At one point (baroque)…I managed to pull it all the way back to the final 'classic' *Rose*…I felt the painting had to experience its own life-span in time" (qtd. in Green and Levy 70). *The Rose* then bears witness to its own history and signifies these pasts in its culmination of the present/ its presence.

absorptive palimpsest of its history, and a constant arrival into its becoming, their conditions are at once fluxing and fixedly *here*. With her stubborn insistence to declare herself, the *sobject* signifies her interiority as she is dragged with the weight of her abjection and objectification, transmuting but not effacing these pasts to [e]merge as authoritative subject. *The Rose*, because of its sheer volume, signifies through its reflexive gaze and its persistence to exist: thirty years before Whitney curator Lisa Phillips rescued *The Rose* from behind a false wall in a conference room at the San Francisco Art Institute, Defeo and a team of her friends excavated *The Rose* from her own second-story studio apartment. Because of its incredible size and daunting mass, *The Rose* had to be cut out of her apartment: a wall was sawed open to allow egress for *The Rose*, its exodus recorded in Bruce Conner's 1967 film, *The White Rose*. *The Rose* then transformed the landscape in which it blossomed to accommodate its massive selfhood, rearranging space to negotiate its execution of interior and exterior. Contemporary art critic Richard Cándida Smith argues that the dialectical ontology of Defeo's *Rose* (both "entrance" and "emergence," inside and outside) places the work at a "higher level of abstraction" ("Vectors" 128); so too does the *sobject*-speaker arrange to signify at a higher level of complexity. With these simultaneous and oppositional possibilities, Defeo draws us into the compass of her *Rose*, inviting us to experience the fullness and sheer heft of its efflorescence as she dares us to "see how [we] would do." Brooks, H.D., and Stein present the dare to the 20th century, offering roses blighted with self-consciousness that trouble the lyric tableaux which attempt to delimit and stifle them; Berssenbrugge and Queen transmute these struggles of rose-sickness in the 21st century through speakers who transcend ascribed roles. These models blossom self-awareness from self-consciousness and transform the self to accommodate collaborative sources of knowledge, sensation, and feeling; and these invitations, extended from Blake and Defeo through

the poets examined here, offer a *sobject* poised at the fulcrum of the lyric situation. As she takes up this challenge of generative and generational selfhood, her interiority pulses with exteriority, with alterity; this exchange enables her to collapse the divides between *you* and *I* and audience, as she reworks the lyric space to accommodate her multivalent Self. She beckons and refuses bids for her interiority, drawing concentric circles in which to disappear and emerge anew, as she invites us to take up the mantle to revision and transform our lyric selves.

CHAPTER 2: CROSSING

†

The *sobject* provides a model for a lyric speaker: rose-sick and glutted with poesies, she signifies her selfhood by realizing her imagined ideals in the magic circle of the poem. The poems in *Sick as a Rose is*… preen under the gaze of adoration, squirming as they bathe in the toxic glow of its spotlight. They reorganize language, breaking its paper bullets to shrapnel shards and splicing in spotty frequencies to signal their discomfiture. As words combust and reconstitute language to reveal new meanings, roles shift: an *I* speaks, but primarily to interrogate a faceless *you*, sometimes conflating to *we* and sometimes only to argue with a mirror. The speaker of these poems confronts the myriad ways that women and their bodies are subjugated, namely, in the still-present female archetypes of mother, virgin, and lover/ whore, extending critiques of their use-value, as explicated by Luce Irigaray in her 1977 essay "Women on the Market." *Sick as a Rose is* complicates these assignments of exchange and use value through the medium of the sick feminine body—a speaker glutted with abject rose-status (sick of) and also physically ill (sick as). The lyric stasis of H.D. and Brooks reflects the entrapment in a web of social structures (capital, exchange, productivity, work, money) that require a rose to be both *physically becoming* and *becoming useful* (through [re]production and through the performance of positivity). *Sick as a Rose is* presents a speaker who presses on the walls of her lyric enclosure, worrying its bruise as a means of rebellion, a signal of refusal in the lyric poem, a microcosm for the larger world. She is *Sick*—physically blighted and sick of being a rose, of

rose-ness, of not being adored *enough/* as she wishes, and of being adored at all—and these poems are her plaints. She is desiring, and she seeks to widen her boundaries by exceeding them.

The first section, "Bad Flowers," interrogates and reworks deictic pronominal roles to establish the *I*, understanding the self through her attempt to salvage her link to/as the *you*. They work in the mode of epideixis, laid out by Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as the mode of celebration, praise: "Bad Flowers" dissects the deixis of the I-Thou relationship as it celebrates the *sobject*; laments diminishment of and by the *you*; and looks to accuse the self, the *you*, and the lyric form itself for the roles assigned within its boundaries. Layering mythical figures as models of the *sobjectivity* this speaker performs, this speaker enacts the magic circle of the lyric poem-space by spelling out the idols she sets up and the reversals (of roles, of meaning) she plots. Engendered from lyric language, the witchy grimoire of grammar is her medium; accordingly, she draws power by splicing its components and suturing them together to expose their latent meanings and to invoke new senses.

If "Bad Flowers" plots and recharts the I-Thou lyric relationship, then the next two sections, "Capital I" and "bLight" examine the lyric corpus through the lens of labor, namely: the feminine body as site of [re]production. "Capital I" focuses primarily on the self as producer of capital, that is, the self as commodity. This self is infructuous and blighted (with illness, with ennui, with overzealous production of the wrong goods), unable to produce efficiently in the algorithms that attempt to categorize her. Feminine labor is also understood literally as parturition, as the poems of "bLight" open the potential for expansion through the creative act. Examining writing (the lyric self, the poem) and creative output as a vector out of the ouroboros production-consumption cycle, these poems sublimate the frustrations of the self through writing. But the creative act produces its own stresses, and under pressure, these poems'

language cracks, fracturing to multiply and reproduce their meanings. This deploys a lateral (rather than hierarchical) relationship to language, torquing linguistic units and invoking the *sobjects* who have engendered and inspired this combusted poesie. This blighted lyric reproduces virally to bleed the subject-self into object-background, blossoming a *sobject* out of the landscape. *O rose, thou art sick* as a rose is sick as a rose is—


AS A ROSE IS SICK AS A ROSE IS SICK

CHAPTER 3: SICK AS A ROSE IS

Her thorns were my only delight

—William Blake, “My Pretty Rose Tree”

BAD FLOWERS

LOSING IT/ I AM ALWAYS THE VIRGIN

I always virgin

even when we switch roles, fuck you

w/ infinite vectors I still the virgin

Isn't sexy ?

I do my whores I virgin

Virgin chafes mommy suit;

whore and virgin resist mommy

I must eventually don Mommy, don Crone:

This has been decided for me

(Acts like a shed

Actually, amasses)

I am going crazy! I duplicitous when I supposed to

be one flesh with specific use +/or exchange value,

clearly daddy issued

Have you peaked in my box? Beware:

I am both alive and dead: in me I contain

multitudes of virginities They teem up

They pop each other on the head

I schoolmarm them.

I box their candy ankles

I lipstick their bruises

I powder their no’s

sez we glimpse out the sublimate tears

We a muse me swallow them

anew, hole

MY LUV IS LIKE AN INFRARED ROSE

I luv it into being
perceived, there[fore] you are
here aft and aptly

out of the corners of empir
-icism. Cynic, there's a good
boy, play dead. Speak:
tangibly thought-out

& advertised to be just
as I imagined (We both
agree: I like the idea of
you better than you

& that your blooming in my mind
more beautifully than you will
disappoint me here on the lawn)

grow to ward the sun,
to carom light to
mine own self, beet-root

and jelly: you exist for me,

little rose: to be is to be

perceived

WOLF IT

Small quirky poem non-thr/eaten pome

just shy of posey & blushing, rede

I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were

but what big eyes you have to

stomach this

Yo soy una mujer, tú eres un niño

—DuoLingo, Intro Spanish

You lift and drop your penis on my plate

as the You to my Yo

I recognize I am to strophe it

but tongue-tied I can't say

(it is so awefull

and I am so treacled)

Are we there

jettison self

did you make it

I don't know how to say

there: I'm not sure dónde es

all I know is aquí

+ it is always present here

I eat apples continually

you take different forms

I cannot say “we”

it will have to be you y yo

u can’t say it

I signal my questions

usted act surprised

at my empty plate

ANTI-GONE

They say I'm a silvery moon

to the blind sonne. The unwitting,

tragic one devouring my own family

tree subtly nipping at the heels

of our boorish love story

Hang it: the moon

cut down darkness, I say

blossoming open so indelicately

& pushed through a pitchy hole

blinkering the pale petals' swollen whorl

I stitch your holes closed

plunge a needle through: twist

thread and shank, its pistol

bleeds a little, milky green

sap weeping from the puncture wound

†

Unpin my hair, unlace my rabbits

splayed like a crime scene:

you doubly bore his monstrous

shame, interruptial bed drawn round the throat

a cloak of disgust against a bruised twilight

mother, daughter, father, brother

heads gone soft on the mountainous highway

bare-breasted and heaving

I am naked in my grief

†

Look on my form, fixed and pendulous

seen through the stones

packed in your cavities, that which made me

(your mother's daughter!) accessory

to your purblind ignorance, your bloody fog

I am not your fucking mother

I am a plate. I am a blade. I am a scythe.

I am an eye. Curve to the line. I hardly try. I never cry.

BRIDLE & BIT

Abjectify me: perfumey

glands muscling my hair

ribbons, satin swaddle

Go cry me a generic Wait

a year Go finish your sandwich

Rest your head on my neck and finish

in your dream stall I, petrified

of our home, pickled white

vinegarish, préservatives de

livery in my pocket—

Do you like this shirt? I lost it

to the dead year

lingerie in bed alofty red

& bred thoroughly

wake up bruisey

we eat our spaghetti

we have no money

we have no I +

whip-smart you

bait with carats

let mucky my vulva

let plow my stall

I don’t like

but spurred on I love you

I whisper, a little hoarsey

Neigh do I love the

pastoral you

put out to past

your wounding heels

in my ribs

in mysticky

B-GAWK

breaking editioned

Fabergé, worthless as porcelain

bejeweled with rubies

inedible, indelible stones

biblically austere, primal asters

incubated then evacuated

Quietly I lay my eggs

in brimming bloody shotglasses

drawn in sketchy gashes

from my beastly body

my animal *désir*

able to destroy

Itself and others

Lure you in with love promise

consume you and *dis*

cover you in my blood

spread out on your belly

chunky and thinly

Mine, mine

miam

CHICKEN

spatchcock the oven door

the kitchen a pigsty, I am

cast pearlescent

in oven light

spine removed with careful pressure

gunking my stringy misericordia

basted in your catholic guilt

the bird comes out first, a cold open

in my sad domestic show

DE-FURRED

you want to mine mine

mine and yours yours

got nothing

all I got was this lousy

I say mean

you quiet sad

when fuck it, live once

live most

best remembrance:

die alone.

principly matter! dreams?

thought when problems came

they’d be jizz as on television

jizz as normal as every unhappy

we’d grow to hate the little jizzers

but you not performing correctly!

you problem in sad way

you do the dishes, god damn it, you pick up your socks

I expect more. we heartbreak.

our problems vein into core. we taint with problems.

we flesh with problems. our problems ate our limbs

and grew in their faces. now we face

our problems. now we hide our. problems gnash away

tame them ’til we heel

THE GOOD NIGH END

I'll show you. No I'll finish you.
Go to sleep. I will finish me too.
—Cathy Wagner

There are more ways to finish yourself

than suicide. Like coming to

the realization the dust you

loosed from hard glancing cast

selfward jolted more than sleepy

movement. More than his mite

-red eye. You pass a ring back

and forth. He says, *I understand.*

I understand, I understand, I

understand, I understand.

Tears well over the plank. *I*

don't *understand,* understudied in this

role, fantastically underprepared

and whelmed. It never comes to

fruition, our vegetal love.

I spy rot on the vine. *I under*

-*stand* How-To making you

mine. You’re mine; I’m

yarn; we felt

together, entwined

in our death clasp.

I think that I shall never find

another lover so sublim-

ate the pain, and swallow

whatever unbecoming

thing is presented, regard

-less how scrawny.

Lucky to have, so many the hoarse.

Worse, I bow my head. Thanks be, too

Mighty spindly eaten alone. The ache

echoes off the walls. I languish

in you, withstand you—no,

scramble that away. Blink hard and swallow.

<3

my love for you

effête

CAPITAL I

MEN/U

be poli/tic de-escalate and take the stares

smoosh against glass, sealing knees shut

eyes crossed & tease dotty, blank smiles

teethe open the revolving door

beset and -sotted; not withstanding &

demur: I’ll behaving n/one of these, please

PRICARIUS HYSTERESIS

Pray, tell me, sweet sister: how much
farther, who arted heavenward, scaling up
up and up, to reach the dizzying cliff, tip
an acephalic sun? Necks cut, our vertigo
unravels as a field; while the sun's neck
spots the land, we sway, hands locked
heads bowed to Daddy's clever trap,
his bullish chutes mounting but to
heights for pitching off

O, to be a bird
rather and alight away, escape the grave
air of the earth and her problems. Rotate,
fallow, proffer a trick to escape, a rift
hidden in a silo's sieve, smuggled like
a weed among the grain. In storage—no, transit,
between prayers, we float like clouds: prexy
and precious, little kernels swole
and puffed with exertion, moving lonely
over the earth's face, wondering at the seams
in the landscape, quilted with closes.
Closed gates keep out trespassers and like

any metaphor’s burden, dissolve

that wall of brass. She dissolves to air;

my shibboleth name tethers me to the land.

He assures that, and wishes me twice

to mince his steps and wills to forgery

my own path, achieving chartless

elevation. I then syncope

in dreams, climb slicks of sweat, silver

chutes as gravel swirls below. Still

the only way out, up, and unstill, late

summer drips sun in sweet gold. The earth turns

over to moon’s nightshade, her apses flicker

pleasure and distress: pleasure and distress

as stars’ stale exhales dispatch the sky, bid us pray

now and at the hour of our deaths, already dead

in this Virginil darkling pastoral (Here might

our lives with time have wormed away, holy) Our lady

moon, on lockdown in this stairwell, regifts her sonne as aubade

in the shadow of noon’s door. An escape

huis clos: city-fled, agricultured, a world of grain

in the infernal hour, corn listening silkily

growing ever nearer, ever closely pressioned

stifling a stream

O’ chemical runoff,

crops bred blightless, teeth sheening waxy

and stalks large and photosynthetic

(*Everything we produce is perfected, every hymn xeroxed, disposable, selah*)

†

The sous vide atmosphere

depresses me. Noon’s cruel laughter, our

father on high helium, perverted and plateauing

our starry ceiling. What altitudes to be attainted?

With abandon, our genteel lord fruitlessly skims history

and drops me ‘cross the horizon, seedling, brambled

in earth. Evening scores in the magnetic moonlight,

pulled upward, gasping and etiolated in this hypoxia

Who will cut me, father? Here I am.

The chorus of ornamental daughter shields

sings in clipped tones: every good boy deserves fudged

accommodations of good girls asking for

and disallowed; cry out, little lamb, with shorn delight

to be a ewe in a god's eye

basting in the stye sweaty day

say merci

I'm no chanticleer; the sun's face glares or turns whatever

from me, smelts my works to puddles. If I could stir,

I'd strike its insult from the sky, switched

to shrinking, till the swell moon eclipse its dwindled husk

and I swoon

†

My mind sheath plays tricks, nervously signals my wearied muscles, weird chemistry

shocking my skin a'tingle with lies. What schism precipitated into this

hardening, myelin sclerosed to leaden wounds:

lesion, for they are multiple

my brain strip searches its marrow, its ecstatic corps, interrupts my

arrows, shoots blanks, shrouds everything in wooly clouds

(White spots, dark spots: x-ray my shadows with magnets,

beat mechanical drums to sound the mind-map of my self-

destruction, scored and sliced as

[I fall into] an inky tarn)

ooh de lay órale

my speech slurs, unfurls

a ragged flag. Pray tell: if made

from dust and dust returned, whose dominion

be my body, my bone bread, my patchy circuitry?

How now the ground not sickened by this dragged cadaver dirtied

with single-use plasticks pumped into a heavying heart?

Natalizumab flushes my canopic jar, salina coursing after.

Veins open to plastic aspis, not intrinsicate

and clotting closed. Salida pro re nata:

my ratty Nikes leave feathery rubber skids scratched off the lotto floor

the rat king twists himself to knots

like a scam, my mega mills keep rising

till mechanical beeps awake me, lulled from sleep

the medicinal moon opens us all: we bloom as nightshade

becked by her constant gravid wiles, expectant faces glowing and weighted with potential

exhausted: this was a terrible

climb. This was a terrible crime.

A feathered crinoline, mounted and fixed

with a pin, wriggling

then clipped in the hall of the sky, a curt moment

of vertiginous weightlessness. How moving

†

Another fledgling fail: resolvent wax melts to what.

A finish. A world fallowing lushly, hemmed in

by plastic waterways, velvety underground

sewerage piping songs of excess, seething

and puckering with anhydrous ammonia

delivered to swollen streaming mouths.

Hydra, which of your heads eats immortality? The one

gaunt with austerity, careful to prune

and drown interlopers in a 3” chemical bath.

Your careful attention salvos as a complex

-ion, positively charging with vorpal sword. I’ve no head

for figures, can only dream of sky, sky

my exeunt from this precisely maintained labyrinth wherein

all manner of ingress strictly contained +

the only egress: wax, vertex

and the sweat to unroot myself

my seizing muscles, my goodly apraxia:

protect me now in the hour of my degeneration

The splashless dive

into oceans of corn, fevers of soy. O Deadalus

your flat metal eyes enormous and unblinking from the rafters.

My body is broken for: the crows peck

and ambushel my disarticulate joints,

my recalcitrant fortunes hedged to futurity.

The silken parachute I trussed collapsed,

chickadee: whoever can uncinch

these corseted pursed strings

tethering this prolonged chrysalis, summoning the blood

to shroud my corpse in death's flush, quietly

prepare my body for earth's kissy cloud of dust

Psyche, sweet sister, let us fly

let us fly—for we must

revision our escape, eyes turnt to sun

rapidly warming, melting vitreous, dript

fat to flame immacular and feel

the bottom drop

out here where we are myth

taken for truce

ARC

To buy two

: three for a dolor

Flatter pair-shaped

expectations, grating

gritty amenities susurrate through

clenched muscles, teeth

one by one makes to

forfeit surfeit

rising action deflated

a too-soon close to call

(here the bells

in a sort of ruined rhyme

((call: the belles' bells, bowls, bowels

bows—curtain)))

or, blinds: cheap, rising

crookedly, beholden to this flop

the House’s jaws always winningly

open; forced aside, I

reshuffle + bide

reshuffle +

reshuffle

RIVETED

my covin of women fetishizes

the glowing body: ripeness is all

wealth + goodly affirmation

rosy wood gullets, sockets thick with rings

de fianced; glare

we can do it ! quietly run

the kid gauntlet, covering

I run, fisted

collapsing under sorries

we're in this together : save yourself

time's up, biologic clock tsks

collective instinctual nurturing

dark eye shadowing radiant limp

over bruised flesh: such rotted decadence,

such a waist

want to grow more human

but, self-destruction

and selflessness

duke it out.

male intervention/regulation!

medecin stops me

warns me

de sire with love

wrapped in paper : trapped in glass

biologic time bomb

my flesh frets

demyelinating desire

organizing my activity:

control everything. control yourself!

my body chooses sides against itself

sites destruction, wars its self; *medecin*

wants peace for me

perceived yin to war yang

but, creation? he deems impossible

my body rebels

(this is no choice:

falling on your sword

and growing after))

bLight

FOR KEEPS

I will take that you deplete me

I will absorb your skin-soak

I will light a candle in me under your icon

and war-ship, your body

brought to bearing

on my infructuous flesh

this I vowel for you

that I might not defect from your slight

frame this memento mori

HIEROGLYPH

cut the (middle, man) shorthand

to shortcircuitous thought

Q: whither is thy beloved gone, O fairest of women?

My beloved is:

Gone down into his garden

To the beds of spices

To feed in the gardens

To gather lilies

If you answered

I am my beloved's and my

Beloved is mine

you are correct! He feedeth among the lilies.

My Beloved says *none of the above*

I say *see*

The picture: imagine which one most like

Your answer: *none of the above*

Gender[ed] interpretation: who wrote this test?

[why] Am I to be inside [their] choice?

Sleeper column: You are

a) playing it safe

b) a healthy mix of A/C

c) a wild thing!

d) no longer taking test

…test…

who's list'ning

on the other end?

POLYSEMY POLICE ME

Polly, see me (wanna crack?)

explain yourself! Inconstant

fem. Langue lolls, licks up

some antics. Pretty brid,

make a berd. What a prêt

ty girl! You're *smart*

Do you know the deference

'twixt homonymy (eat your corn!)

& polysemy? Nod brightly

(be a good girl) slavering

mouth parroting language

expressed thru Syrinx

(wolf whistle) give us a kiss

without tongue, from lipless

mouth. Now say peas

you'll eat

out your words like your empty

hourglass heart, gravel mouth

coal canary, sing out your mine

loose lips zipperie do

whistle a tune all atonal

twittering (O Hell, O

I'm a pretty bride)

plunged in Lethey plumes

you'll forget this after the

(beep) Excuse me, I'm crackers

thereafter me (repeat) (slowly)

holding up the system

(hands in the air, sticklers

this is a fuck up)

ATTAINTED

I, being born a woman and distrust

illegal sublet of my room

excuse me, that’s my wound [sic]

oh my gash

from your lips to God’s ear

A'RINGING

ding-a-ling, go

chirp!

put a _____on it, Nightingale

wounded & wound up

to sing to ring out

among the poses

your acrid poesies

chug, chug your tongue-cut song

whistles, creaming *rose*

ad*vert* licentious solicitude

MERRY ME

merrily we roll

alongside the long way

O darkling

the sea is rough tonight

rolling over us

long white fingers stretch up me

iconoclastic

this new pagany

climbing my lattice

working me apart

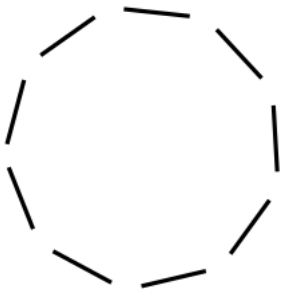
I die a little

and blood flushes

my pallor

washed in the blood

Mary’s widow lamb



CHAPTER 4: HOW—DASHING, A POETICS

so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost…

I shan't have lied. It's evident
…though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.

—from Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art"

I feel Bishop's "One Art" more acutely, or rather, more habitually, than most. Losing *isn't* hard to master: it comes for us all as the gradual receding of memory and erasures of age, some losses coring us more bluntly than others. But things do disappear, for me, and I have to go through the bureaucracy of retrieving them. This process is laborious, embodied and codified in memorized sequences of movements, words on trees, flagging touchstones for neural pathways back. Bishop's lost-and-found is filled with the clutter of items; I lose ideas, words, names, phrases, things I need to remember and should know (recipes are baked into my memory, song lyrics scored into my brain, but philosophy? The pronunciation of archipelago, diaspora, açai? Poof.) I know she feels it, too: the final stanza bears the marks of the hunt: "—Even losing you… may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster." The merciful em dash—aside, parenthetical, surfeit—chides the you for their loss *and* coaches the I, providing the means to get through, to get to the final thought. It's a villanelle, a mnemonic form, repeating its refrains when the I's at a loss for words. (*Write* it!) It's only disaster.

Sometimes—oftentimes—I need these breaks, asides. They interrupt the sentence's monolith and restructure its hierarchies; to borrow and amend Suzan-Lori Parks' charting of "rep and rev" (repetition and revision, which Parks uses to reimagine dialectical progression as cyclical and self-revising, favoring accrual and variation, as demonstrated through jazz), instead of A➔B, its structure moves more like A➔ a➔ A➔ xA➔ xa➔ xb➔ Aaa➔ B. Progress doesn't happen in linear fashion, but laterally, branching out and around and back. I understand that this isn't clear: let me explain.

When I write (and I write as I think), the corpus of text is strung together with rickety, tangential half-thoughts, shooting off in directions that are not clear and concise and focused. A kind mentor instructs me (as he was instructed by his own kind mentors) to *subordinate not proliferate.* This is like telling a fish to julienne not cube. I can. But it takes all of my energies and all of the energy out of my writing. The horse jumped over the fucking fence.

It isn't hard to, master. Meanwhile, "Places, names, where you meant" just vanish into the fog.

Multiple sclerosis interrupts otherwise
healthy neurons, scrubbing away
the myelin that covers nerves and nerve
endings like rubber over live
wires. The body attacks
itself, having received bad
information that healthy cells are intruders,

a costly mistranslation. This leaves the nerve raw,

which the body then plasters with scar

tissue to “heal” it. Sometimes the body can repair

its own damage, but more often, the lesion

is revisited—more attacks, more increasingly

shoddy thick layers of repair—until the

nerve signal is slowed or ultimately

stopped. Writing my body then

means layering revisions, synonyms, tangential

memories thoughts words until the topic is

covered. It’s not pretty, but it mostly

gets the job

done.

.

When I’m in a “brain fog,” it’s more like being underwater (condensed fog). I can’t remember

a word or a name

Even one I know I know

e.g.,

I passed out once, lost consciousness and felled a desk on the way down dun

When I awoke, I knew my name but no

others. Medics and coworkers pressed me

hurriedly, worriedly. I did not know

who's president, *where*

are we I smiled

and wanted to

help but just did not

know

.

. .

that all came back after a few hours. Fog

happens frequently and less dramatically: mostly

it's frustrating, pervasive as smoke

unthinkable, choking

out thought

but I've devised improvised work-arounds, trails of breadcrumbed thoughts

to find my way back to what I know I know

my vanished possessions

and I can get them back.

For instance, I could not remember a word

sew remembered the last time I experienced it

the street, the weather, the sun, the friend

the man the friend wanted

a carousel of memories, all to arrive

at *falafel*—not a foreign or specialized term, but just outside rote

use and so temporarily displaced. This happens with such frequency

that I have memorized work-arounds to jog my sleepy memory, mnemonic paths to lap and loop dormant dead-ends back into active thought. My doctor, last name *Mitchell*, I remember as Robert Mitchum, revise back to *Brian*. Mitchelle, my belle. ~~Clay~~ Conrad Aiken's *Jig of ~~Foreskin~~ Forslin*. Thank god for meter and rhyme in poetry, mnemonic tonics.

Em dashes—and the asides they contain—are the typographical equivalents, the

grammatical flagbears of broken and patches

together circuitry of thought

constantly flagged by others—editors, professors, kind friends reading

my writing—as too mannered, to jittery these dashes

to articulate my thoughts in a way that makes sense

in my own mind. I think I think

like this

footnotes of additions, spliced parentheticals, em dashes wedged into the real, primary thoughts
a briar atangle, neurons atingle
and redirected

Crops of em dashes, hinted at (so sparingly, such restraint!) in Bishop proliferate in other writers—female poets, especially. This is always treated as a tic, an oddity (phone says isotope), a quirk of handwriting (see). Dickinson obviously, the Baroness, Mina Loy. It's their handwriting! They meant a full stop? They were just dashing off lines in between chores of the domusphere™ Min Kang.

Contemporary fiction writer Laura van den Berg tweeted in 2019: "In the past year I [have] fallen, after years of resistance, into headlong love with the em dash. I love the way it can create the feeling of a fractured/incomplete/interrupted line or thought." Welcome, hope you like what we've done with the place.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) photographs the brain
with radio waves on a magnetic field. I get headshots done semi-annually
sometimes bareback (no metal, supine in the machine) and sometimes
with contrast dye injected into my bloodstream
to more dramatically illuminate disease
activity areas. These are imaged in slices,
lesions dotting the photos like liquid paper
layered on mistakes

Can I just interject—

(a bit of historical precedence to spiff

the place up)

Astrid Seme, the remarkably named scholar on the typography (particularly the em dashes) of the avant-garde artist and writer the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, writes of the flourish's active resistance as an occupation of the space of the page:

> The em dash is flexible, working as an appropriation of silence, as acting dissonance, as interruption, as occupying space. The em dash is forceful, able to stamp silence loudly into a page; and when spoken, these punctuation marks seem to function more like performers between words, creating movement and voice within text.

Seme holds up the em dash as a feminist gesture, a refusal to sit meekly, ankles crossed, while the sentence speaks. Instead, it interrupts and allows the space for the sentence to think and gather its thoughts. This happens orally in conversation; men (in my experience) wield this much more liberally: keep talking 'til you get to the point. Anyone else, say what you mean quickly then hand back the mic. In writing, the em dash marks this resistance—no, this insistence—on keeping the mic and working through ideas in a non-hierarchical, synthetic, combustible fashion.

It is impossible to say just what I mean! Prufrock circles back on himself

-negating and second-guessing

But we understand that this *is* him saying what he means, that is: his inability
to communicate in linear, straightforward fashion

applause

Em lashes her poem into shape. For
fluidity. Momentum.
For a priori- and sani-
tized clarity. Smooth it
over, move it. Sub-
ordinary ate it.
Balance readers'
expectations and
tell it to me
straight.

Sometimes a girl needs an Em
dash. The Baroness, like Dickinson,
uses the em dash a lot, often as a full stop (like a period) spotting
the text or as a flourish of emphasis like an exclamation point. Seme's
book on this subject, *Baroness Elsa's Em Dashes*, unpacks her myriad applications: "breathless"
but also taking a breath, proto-punk, ambiguous, horizontal, insistent.

Also: ornament.

Also: repetition. See also:

Style

In contemporary citations of a bibliography, when multiple books by the same author are listed,

— — —

indicates that author repeats but the title changes. Though style guides were not codified into published collections of rules until the 1920's, editors of course employed rules of proofreading for manuscripts, what would eventually become what we know as rules of style. They used proofreader's marks and (thanks to an increasingly secular, literate audience) practiced textual criticism, clearing the way for bibliographies as we now know them. The em dash, ever the suture, knitted together what's not there in the text with what is. Very generally speaking, in prose, three dashes indicate a missing word,[20] two indicate missing letters in a word.[21] Mina Loy uses dashes like this[22] in her "Songs to Joannes," e.g., Song XXXIV:

> Love— — — the preeminent litterateur.

or XXVI

> We sidle up

[20] What the — — —
[21] What the f— —
[22] See also: "Letters to the Unliving," "Moreover, the Moon— — —"; "'The Starry Sky' of Wydham Lewis"; etc.

To Nature

— — — that irate pornagraphist

and XXVIII

Unthinkable that white over there

— — — Is smoke from your house

Loy uses multiple em dashes in varying ways, but her groupings of three em dashes seem to serve as an acknowledgment of what's missing and an emphasis of a silent repetition, a chant of what came before/above. "Love, Love, the litterateur" loops the *Songs* back to the start of the playlist, with Pig Cupid rooting erotic garbage (love litter → garbage erotica, ouroborous text).

To Nature, Nature, that irate pornographist

Unthinkable, Unthinkable is smoke

Loy decorates her page with em dashes, stringing four, seven, or ten together to serve as section breaks or breadths or breaths, beats between what she's just said and what she's about to say. Their length generally seems to mirror the preceding line's length, as in

XIII

Where two or three are welded together

They shall become god

— — ——— — ———

Oh that's right

Keep away from me Please give me a push

The font used in the 1917 issue of *Others* where the complete *Songs* debuted is sized so that the text, "They shall become god," and the seven em dashes that follow match visually, length-wise. But it's hard not to read the dashes as more than purely ornamental, even when they mirror line lengths, because Loy doesn't plop them on the page and leave them uninterrogated. In the example above, for instance, the text of the poem seems to respond to the impediment the em dashes set upon the poem itself: where two or three (or seven) are welded together, they shall become god, divinely creating structure, setting up impediments, conjoining disparate parts, creating and engendering meaning, requiring interpretation. The speaker's immediate commentary after the fence of em dashes speaks directly to them or to whoever constructed their barrier (the you? The speaker herself?): Keep away from me. No you's allowed.

This same section (XIII) deploys more familiar, discrete em dashes in the space of a single line of text to collapse the poem's I with its you, tumbled together in a cosmic agitator:

Depersonalized

Identical

Into the terrific Nirvana

Me you—you—me

Meyou you me
essentially
but also held separate
even as they're "identical"
and "depersonalized"

The em dash holds them in this state of suspension—they don't have to mix; they can stay discrete—unto themselves—surfacing at appointed intervals, as in (XXVII):

Flowed to the approachment of — — ——
NOTHING

Whereas the Baroness scores her text with staccato dashes, Loy uses hers to hold her text, her reader, her you, at bay. Delay, remove, refusal—at arm's length. Even getting close to these poems and tumbling together is to be held aloof. The em dash accommodates this isolatory if unorthodox application.

But also: Loy was a seamstress, see: an artist, a fashion designer, a milliner. Loy scholar Susan Rosenbaum has noted that Loy's dashes look like stitches—and they do—and this canny observation underscores that style *must* figure in any discussion of Loy's affect. The dashes hold

the piece together; pull one thread and the whole thing unravels (seriously, let be be finale of seam).

This frequency's interrupted, corrupted. Patch it in. What we need is a clear signal (and we know that there's no such, noise undergirds every signal every signal. *@#$%!) Repeat, over.

My tongue is in my cheek (where's everyone else's? tooth bed) but I mean this earnestly: the world won't stay stable, and I have to retrieve it. It's [an] art, letting things go, and another (tandem) dragging them back.

In her 1914 "Feminist Manifesto," Loy calls for a rupture in tradition as the only means for change:

> Women if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared for the Wrench—?

One hundred years later, this psychological crisis still heaves. The em dash slices and sutures the page, adding darts to shape and accommodate non-linear discourse and more bodies. And sew—stop apologizing for filling up the page space -ful stop punctuating every utterance stop w/ the smiles on command stop control + alt escape stop treading the narrow line stop stopping fool stop

loop-de-loop and pull off

cyclical = progress

cinching things we carry

shed or should, as you please. Please—

Dash away your thoughts

liberally and liberatory, to

interrupt the able [-bodied] text

: it is impossible! And not too hard to master

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Aiken, Conrad. *The Jig of Forslin.* Boston, The Four Seas Company, 1916.

Berman, Wallace and Jay Defeo. *Portrait of Jay Defeo.* 1958. *Whitney Museum of American Art*, https://whitney.org/collection/works/11089.

Berman, Wallace and Jay Defeo. *Untitled.* 1958. *Whitney Museum of American Art*, https://whitney.org/collection/works/11096.

Berssenbrugge, Mei-mei. "Hello, the Roses." *Hello, the Roses.* New Directions, 2013, pp. 58-61.

Bishop, Elizabeth. "One Art." *The Complete Poems 1926-1979*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

Blake, William. *Albion Rose*. 1796. *A Large Book of Designs,* Copy A. William Blake Archive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/bb85.a?descId=bb85.a.spb.01.

— — —. "The Garden of Love." *Songs of Experience*. Dover: 1984, pp. 16.

— — —. "My Pretty Rose Tree." *Songs of Experience*, Dover: 1984, pp. 15.

— — —. "The Sick Rose." *Songs of Experience*, Dover: 1984, pp. 11.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Song in the Front Yard." *A Street in Bronzeville*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1945, pp. 10.

Brower, Reuben. "The Speaking Voice." *Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading.* Oxford University Press, 1951, pp. 3-16.

Brown, Bill. *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*. University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Romaunt of the Rose. The Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed., Houghton Mifflin, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 685-768.

Culler, Jonathan. *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

de Man, Paul. "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism.* Columbia University Press, 1984, 239-62.

Defeo, Jay. *The Rose*. 1966. *Whitney Museum of American Art*, https://whitney.org/collection/works/10075.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Dickinson, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson. Back Bay Books, 1976.

H. D. "Garden." *Sea Garden*, Constable and Company, Ltd., 1916, pp. 1.

— — —. "Sea Rose." *Sea Garden*, Constable and Company, Ltd., 1916, pp. 24.

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Prufrock and Other Observations*. London, The Egoist Ltd., 1917, pp. 9-16.

— — —. "The Three Voices of Poetry." *On Poetry and* Poets, Faber and Faber, 1957, pp. 89-102.

Flint, F. S. "Preface." *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology*. Houghton Mifflin, 1915, pp. v-viii.

Fowles, Severin. "People without Things," *An Anthropology of Absence*. 2010 Pp 23-41.

Frost, Elizabeth A. “Belatedly Beladied Blues: Hybrid Traditions in the Poetry of Harryette Mullen. *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*. University of Iowa Pressm 2003, pp. 136-164.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. “Heidenröslein.” Translated by David Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 225.

Green, Jane and Leah Levy, editors. *Jay Defeo and* The Rose. University of California Press, 2003.

Grotjohn, Robert. “Gertrude Stein and the Long Poem.” *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture,* vol. 24, no. 2, 1991, pp. 173-89.

Irigaray, Luce. “Women on the Market.” *The Sex Which is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 170-191.

Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

— — —. “How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?” Review of *On Just Us: An American Conversation,*” by Claudia Rankine. *The Georgia Review*, Spring 2021, Vol. LXXV, No. 1, pp. 228-234.

Jeffreys, Mark. “Ideologies of Lyric: A Problem of Genre in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics.” 1995

Johnson, Barbara. “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion.” *A World of Difference*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 221-22.

Kang, Min. *Diary of a K-Drama Villain.* Coconut Books, 2015.

Kwasny, Melissa. “Women and Nature.” *The American Poetry Review,* Vol. 41, No. 1, 2012, pp. 33-37.

@lvandenberg. “In the past year I fallen, after years of resistance, into headlong love with the em dash. I love the way it can create the feeling of a fractured/incomplete/interrupted line or thought.” 19 January 2019. https://twitter.com/lvandenberg/status/1085294332045860864

Leader, Zachary. *Reading Blake’s Songs.* Routledge, 1981.

Loy, Mina. “The Feminist Manifesto.” *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996, pp. 153-56.

— — —. “Songs to Joannes.” *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems.* Edited by Roger Conover, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996, 53-68.

MacKinnon, Catharine. *Toward a Feminist Theory of State*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Miller, Dana. “Jay Defeo: A Slow Curve.” *Jay Defeo: A Retrospective*. Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 15-53.

Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-garde. Edited by Suzanne W. Churchill, Linda Kinnahan, and Susan Rosenbaum. University of Georgia, 2020, https://mina-loy.com/. Accessed 4 Mar. 2021.

Ovid. “Narcissus and Echo.” *The Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. D. Melville, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 61-6.

Parks, Suzan-Lori. “From Elements of Style.” *The America Play and Other Works*, New York, Theatre Communications Group, 1995, pp.6-18.

Phillips, Sandra. “Photographing *The Rose*.” *Jay Defeo and* The Rose. Edited by Jane Green and Leah Levy, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 65-67.

Queen, Khadijah. “Any Other Name.” *Poor Claudia*, 2016. poorclaudia.org/online/khadijah-queen-any-other-name

Robinson, Mary. “Stanzas to the Rose.” *Poems.* London: J. Bell, 1791, pp. 133-34.

Seme, Astrid. *Baroness Elsa’s Em Dashes.* Berlin: Kunstverein Langenhagen and Mark Penzinger Books, 2019.

— — —. “The Em Dash Scarf.” Received by Jacqueline Kari, 16 February 2021.

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Edited by Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, Penguin Books, 2002, pp. 1251-94.

Shapira, Kate. “Review of Jennifer Tamayo’s *Poems are the Only Real Bodies*.” *Small Press Book Review: an Online Archive*, June 2013, accessed 24 Jan. 2022. thesmallpressbookreview.blogspot.com/2013/08/review-of-jennifer-tamayos-poems-are.html

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “Ode to the West Wind.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose: a Norton Critical Edition*. Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, Norton, 1977, pp. 221-223.

Smith, Richard Cándida. “Vectors of Emergence, Lines of Descent.” *Jay Defeo and* The Rose. Green, Jane and Leah Levy, Editors, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 127-147.

Stein, Gertrude. Letter to Kitty Buss. 2 Apr 1937. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Collection, Box 9, Folder 104. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2020772.

— — —. “Nothing Elegant.” *Tender Buttons*, Dover, 1997, pp. 6.

— — —. “Red Roses.” *Tender Buttons*, Dover, 1997, pp. 14.

— — —. *The World is Round.* Harper Design, 2013.

Tucker, Herbert. “Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of the Lyric.” *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*. Edited by Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 226-43.

von Freytag-Loringhoven, Elsa. *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, edited by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo, MIT Press, 2016.

Waller, Edmund. “Go, Lovely Rose.” *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1918.* Edited by Sir Arthur Quillich, Oxford University Press, 1940, pp. 318-19.

Wilder, Thornton. Introduction to *Four in America*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969, pp. v-xxvii.

Wilson, William. “DeFeo Work in Pasadena.” *Los Angeles Times,* 2/23/1969, calendar section, pp. 51.

Wolf, Werner. “The Lyric: Problems of Definition and a Proposal for Reconceptualisation.” *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*. Edited by Eva Muller-Zettlemann and Margarete Rubik, Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi, 2005, pp. 21-56.

Wollstencraft, Mary. “On Poetry & c.” *Posthumous Works of the Author of* Vindication of the Rights of Women*: in Four Volumes,* Vol. III, London: J. Johnson and G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798, pp. 159-175.