

Amaranth
by Robert Carr
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review by Alice Weiss

These poems are rhythmic, unabashedly erotic, in the broader sense of Eros, love of body, its joys and breakdowns, unabashedly homoerotic. The populations of Robert Carr's sensibility cluster in dramatic stretches. They include the "Clay" of his childhood, a molester, an abandonment, and the earth from which he blooms, muscular and wounded. Those who hurt and those who nurture: the difference is almost invisible. Love in "Porch in a Storm" is

*blood-lipped, standing flame,
fast wood with tearing eyes*

*we burn in a forest of distant
beating hands. Collapsed
in our sorries, on the floor*

*beneath his weight, I understand
why he cries and licks
my familiar salt.*

In "Milk Bath," where the speaker is no longer on "location" when a former lover dies, finds "Behind the desk drawer pull . . . our rings. . . .

*Relieved I'm not there to see your body
I run a scalding water in the tub.*

*The velvet ring box is open on the sink,
bath salts turn a steam to milk.*

*Once again, a slippery knuckle refuses
your band as I lower myself into a burn.*

The vivid sensual imagery in these lines, coupled with the grinding honesty of the speaker and the way the physical images carry the emotional weight is characteristic as is the accurate tradeoff of relief and scalding.

The organizing metaphor, starkly intellectual amidst all the sensuality, is the Amaranth, the flower of the title. The book is divided into three sections, each named for a particular species of Amaranth: Prince's Feather, Goosefoot, Wormseed. The three species all contain healing, nutritious, and poisonous properties. The term Amaranth itself comes from a Greek word meaning unfading, or undying, and indeed memories of boyhood and family appear here, sometimes poisonous (as in "Clay") and some-



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times healing. Even funny, unfadingly funny, as in "Before you," which begins, "there was a youth/he jerked off. . ." and goes on in a long phallic shape, but charmingly.

Throughout the poems there are moments that stop you with their wit; in Hawk, a hawk, "cocky/ as a bar stool drunk/ with a bowie," a "Valentine,"

*White tulips—along one binding petal
We cross a red line*

*a small streak of mosquito
on our white wall[,]*

or in "Two,"

*We rarely talk, except through blue jeaned
knees beneath a diner counter.*

This collection is above all about a life, family, lovers, disease and healing but it is a life lived with hands deep in the dough with which we make feeling and muscles, mourn and cure ourselves of mourning, if not of loss. It is a book which does what poetry, I think, is destined to do, heal with the twists and plays of language, that which is otherwise appears to be incurable.