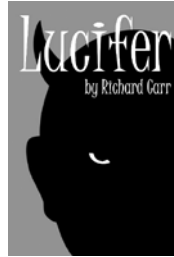


Regular Routines with the Devil

By Katie Manning

Book Review:

Lucifer, by Richard Carr,
Logan House, 2013.



Richard Carr's *Lucifer* simultaneously repulses and entices readers with the malaise that pervades these numbered poems. The unnamed speaker tells us about himself, Juliet, and Mick the Bastard, as they perform their regular routines: work, meals, sex. Lucifer, who is always present with the speaker, appears to be just as apathetic as the rest of the characters. Far from C.S. Lewis' scheming Screwtape, this devil simply hangs around as an extra weight, a lingering feeling of dissatisfaction, and a redundant voice of temptation. Most of the time, Lucifer does ordinary things, such as buying a candy bar from a vending machine in XXIV, but many of his mundane actions are surreal and not quite human, like when he "pecks grit with the pigeons" in XXXII.

As a counterpoint to Lucifer's apathy, these poems are packed with grotesque, sharp images that keep luring me back to the book and continue to haunt me. These are poems of blood and puke, dirt and grubs. Because Lucifer is present, even innocuous images become dangerously charged: a blouse button held between teeth, a candy bar wrapper slowly peeled back.

Alongside the intense imagery, the occasional slippages between characters are pleasantly disturbing. The speaker sometimes stalks Juliet, as Lucifer stalks him, but then the line between the speaker and Lucifer is not always clear. In XXVII, the speaker watches Juliet and Mick eating fries together:

I play with Lucifer in the sand outside the restaurant,
kick-boxing the plastic clown on a spring.

When I press my nose against the window glass,
I see Juliet's lips move, then Mick's.

Then they both notice me, and wave,
and smile weakly at my faces.

In other poems, we see Lucifer attached to the speaker—hanging from an earlobe, for instance—but the shift from the singular speaker to “faces” in that final line of XXVII is chilling.

The portrayal of women is not-so-pleasantly disturbing. In VIII, the speaker claims, “It’s not cheating if you don’t kiss”; and, as he and Mick drink, he says, “Our dates walked away / like zoo animals.” Later in the collection, in XL, we’re let into an intimate scene between the speaker and Juliet, and the undercurrent of violence swells:

At my touch, Juliet's bruised arm quivers,
but she is strong
and holds my gaze.

Her swollen lip still tastes salty, of blood.
My nibbling must sting
because there are tears in her eyes.

The world of these poems is dangerous for every character, but between the apparent abuse of Juliet and the speaker's dehumanization of other women, this poetry collection is an especially unsafe place to be a woman.

For readers, as well, this collection is dangerous. It causes us to question our perceptions. It forces us to be voyeurs and accomplices. It whispers secrets to us and lives up to its name.