Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics

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Trouble in Heart

The trouble with a broken heart is it never stops bleeding. Angel Olsen sings either about trouble’s end or mend\(^{69}\) in “Unfucktheworld.” Either way, she\(^{70}\) lets trouble into her heart on song one of her 2014 album.\(^{71}\) It’s a risk and a wager in a world brimming with love songs and trouble. But if the heart has more than endless trouble — if the troubled heart won’t mend — we have something more than heartache. We have a wound that will not heal. And even if it did, we’d never see the scar among all that blood. And how would the wound ever congeal? Perhaps the troubled heart is already broken, already bleeding, already beating its regular irregular beat. Perhaps the heart is always already in trouble, always awash in its own blood, always dubbing itself one more version of the beat.

Let’s refrain with a difference: The trouble with a broken heart is it never stops bleeding, and how would we know if it did?

\(^{69}\) Accounts differ, but this ear hears mend, which has the advantage of mixing up the rhyme scheme, so end in the first line of the second verse (which sounds like a chorus but isn’t repeated) doesn’t rhyme with itself in the third line.

\(^{70}\) the singer, if not Olsen

\(^{71}\) *Burn Your Fire for No Witness*, an album of heartache released three days after V Day