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whose conversational language and light, easy, skilful style work together like a coiled spring, intensifying the emotional pressure and urgency of her work. Her poems are anchored by a poetic, descriptive images. Dorothea's battered mother's blood "spat" for her young daughter's "battered dream to drift away," while her sister's "sweat and grins flow" in gold foliages of light.

One of the things I like best about the poems that emerges in this book is Laux's lack of self-pity. Sternly tender, consistently refusing to exploit her material, she has no conspicuous "for instance," when she imagines her mother's orphaned childhood in Maine, or describes childhood playmates: "Two older sisters, in the river circles in dirty bars" or experience "foreign tongues / lose into my mouth, and remember that their lives 'could have had.'" Finally she takes us into the bedroom, where she "sees [her] chest back in / the empty suit[s] hung stiff in the closet," one who, she says, "feels someone else" when he rolls his book around in her silence. This, she concludes, only a fiercely realistic sup-port:

And he holds me,
even with all those other fingers wresting
inside me, even with all those other
shoulders wedged above his own like wings.

(p.15)

As just this poem testifies to the transforming powers of love, Laux's test-ifies to the transforming powers of lan-guage. In her steadfast refusal to look away from her own ugly subjects, her gritty poems embrace life despite everything she can say:

I want to smell this rich soup, the air around me dark, as stars
under simple shapes into the sky. I want to stay on the back porch where
I could look toward sleep, until what I love
misses me, and calls me in.

(p.43)

MAGDALEN SCATES won the prestigious Agnes Starrett Poetry Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press for Tola's Tale, a first collection that re-verses around memories of growing up in Los Angeles. As poet Glen Hugo notes on the "book's back cover, "There is no more fallen a world than the urbanized working-class neighborhoods of Los Angeles in the fifties and sixties." A quiet, meditative poet, Scates evokes this world of succor hunger, jobs with Water and 
War, and the "awful glow of the city" in great detail and with considerable skill. Her themes of alcoholism and domestic violence, growing up female in a patriarchal society, ethnicity, becoming a writer—while contemporary issues such as gender, are treated with particular sensitivity and grace.

In Los, Scates attempts to make sense of a chaotic, even dangerous childhood en-vironment and to define her place in that environment. Her poems are first-person views, second-person secrets, deciphering the differences between life as it seemed to her as a child and life as it really was. Scates's poems, which frequently blur the boundaries be-tween past and present or memory and dream, are complex vignettes of discovery

where the narrator struggles "like a swimmer
up toward the surface of the light."

The collection opens with "The Teacher," a long poem dedicated to the memory of Scates's mentor, the poet Ann Stanford, whose delicacy and restraint is echoed in some of Scates's own work. This luminous
tribute establishes the themes of self-reflective and self-definition which define this col-lection. Here, the poet describes events from a confused girl, at first too shy to read a poem in class, to a young woman, who with the growth of maturity, realizes her "lives was a story." She also realizes that Stanford's gift to her

was the place
where my life's away from itself
to join something else,
just as when we
did not happen to only we
main to give up the self,
that says it
and to speak to speak and to give up our silence.

(pp.5-6)

From breaking the silence of family se-
cures—her father's alcoholism, her grand-
mother's madness—to breaking silences within herself—admitting that she was growing up in a life that she were living then—Scates reconstructs the past, appearing received family mythology in the past and re-creating the role that she "loves looking back, because she cannot imagine the future," she learns, in "Angel's Flight.

the history of my grandmother, institutionalized at thirty-two
after giving birth to her seventh child in fourteen years. The years after that
when the old man wouldn't let her come back to the house, of the higby bred
so deeply into our family
that my grandmother,
the daughter of Lila Dolores Orozco,
was lost to us.

(p.10)

There are many moments like this in Tola's Tale. While Scates is concerned with bringing her own family into the light (she writes movingly of conflict between her father and brother, for instance), the most stirring poems are those which portray the women who meant the most to her—her frustrated mother, for example, eager to return to work as a police dispatcher in an era when women were expected to stay home, crocheting a tablecloth she will never use.

Scates herself is usually an unobtrusive presence in this collection, a quiet sense-making voice who works to bring out the beauty
in her own words, the subjects of her poems: "...I'm swimming, in these ugly lives..."

"...a collection of images..."

Scates's poems are filled with the ache
of family life, the strains of domestic life,
the poetic voices of her grandmother and
her mother, who she says, "knew, "feels someone else" when his book rolls around in her silence.

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guage is never innocent. Or rather, it can only be innocent, transparent, in the mythic space of the Romantic poet's fantasy of total control: a fantasy that has, over the centuries, been more dangerous than enabling for women writers, though it remains seductive. For this reason, DuPlessis hesitates to search for a feminist aesthetic—though it will be, in her view, a conflicted, disruptive, heterogeneous one, marked by a process of "becoming thinking," arrived at through collective process, presented as only one of a possible many. As she notes in her final essay, this view both builds on and represents something of a change from her earlier work. Her writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers (Indiana University Press, 1985) was equally concerned with the struggle of women writers to "find a voice," to discover strategies that undo or override the cultural imperatives toward closure in women's writing and women's lives. As an examination of how "the story shall be changed," her book and significant body works with the critical writing of Nancy Miller, Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Rachel Brownstein, among others: the explorations of subverted narrative, re-imagining mythologizing, on which American feminist criticism is founded.

But The Pink Guitar moves further. For one thing, since DuPlessis is also a poet, and a student of modernist poetry, her book (so to speak) not the whole story for her. In fact, she shows that ways of reading developed with reference to the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel are only partly successful when applied to truly non-narrative forms, such as modernist lyric. In such poems where we cannot expect an equation, a perfect fit, between textual submission (experiment, play, resistance) and social forces, the gendered (genuine desire for change) simply because a generation of feminist critics has proved that conservative form can undergo significant conservative change.

As The Pink Guitar's careful and close discussions of Pound, Williams and Eliot demonstrate, high modernism claimed to have invented every sentence-breaking and sequence-breaking trick in the book: claimed to be leading a new, complex, worldwide transformative Oedipal revolt. Yet this revolt failed to dissolve even slightly that mythomime, Woman the mother, to horrifically even down what DuPlessis calls the "constant mythologizing of Woman [which] is an essence of woman." If the modernist generation might have needed a stable female icon even more than their fathers did.

Proposition 3. In writings of male modernist narrative, and external and eternal a category as ever before in the Euro-literature. Male modernists do not deeply resist, perhaps cannot make a critique of this allocated place for female figures because their read- ability depends on such reliable gender narratives. Their radical forms are made relatively accessible—readable—by the familiarity of gender limits, the iconographies they inherit and reproduce.

Against this ironic, unmistakable back- ground, DuPlessis roves women writers who have wanted to be modernists or post-modernists—H.D., Woolf, contemporary feminist experimenters Beverly Dahlen and Susan Howe, among others—women writers who have learned that "those from whom you want to learn the most can also destroy you," but who also rejected "feminine" identity as less than a refuge in itself.

Her sections on H.D. in particular demonstrate one advantage of reviving the discourses of feminism (pp. 14-18): it permits us to deal again with poetry as poetry, not simply as fragments to be joined up into an autono- mous, historical, erotic or conserva- tive plot written by the critic and sown together with connections such as "Emily must have felt."

The writer of criticism, too, participates in this revolt: "Every essay always wants to break open space," DuPlessis writes in her preface. Far from belles lettres, I wanted these essays to claim a larger and angrier space, that remained unopened and evocative works of art: taking a posi- tion of positive negation, I would rather they be "more escapes."

While content and theme have been sites of cultural change in recent years, when representations of women are concerned, a naturalized set of lan- guage strategies, or nice, normal, patterns of meaning seemed to parake of the same assumptions about gender that they would claim to under- mine.

This revolt breaks down the boundaries between critical writing and other genres: now the critical text itself is a "site of struggle" over representation. This has been done before, of course, but rarely so read- ably. DuPlessis displays both unusual open- ness and generosity toward her audience and an ethical, a political desire to hang on to meaning and communicate it, even while exploring the limits of meaning and the dangers of believing in language as transparent. She slips around among a number of voices, all unmistakably her own. One of them the calls "guarded, yet frank autobiography" (it is in- deed an I-self indistinguishable from the self), rather than such moments of critical self-scrutiny can sometimes be; another is a more "staid" account—voice, more in touch with textual analysis, evidence, argument, citations. There is her more informal but still intellec- tual, "auntly" voice, sometimes seeming a leson while sitting on the table. My favorite part of the book seem to be mo- ments like these:

Mainly, our culture, has sooner or later, divested itself of the impact of any woman writing or producing art works within it. To say "I hope this has now changed" is to drape a Pollyannaish skirt over a constant struggle within the politics of culture. We can say if you want. I hope this has now changed.

From this dust you will remake the rose? (Yiddish accent) (pp. 52-53)

DuPlessis's own rather symbolist ubiquitous verse provides another voice, one that refuses to be "decorative" and is explained and dominated by any of the more "logical" voices. Finally, there is a voice that deli- berately leaves below the surface of her discourse, that structure of white male power in "large organizations."

—Joan Achen, University of Oregon

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