

Dolors Miquel. JUDIT FERNÁNDEZ



Pagan feminist

Dolors Miquel (Lleida, 1960) has published over 20 poetry books, winning prizes from the Rosa Leveroni in 1989 through to the Ausiàs March in 2016 for the book reviewed here. She is a cultural agitator, iconoclastic and radical in her politics. From an early age she loved to perform her poems in public. A famous polemic occurred in 2016, when at an award ceremony she read her *Mare nostra*, a feminist and anti-war parody of the Our Father prayer. Partido Popular councillors walked out offended and then sought in the courts to have the poem banned. They failed. Of her *Truck Driver Haikus*, she wrote: "I don't want to talk about grand emotions in a world full of washing machines. No lyrical images. Only punches". After *Sutura* (Suture, 2021), she says that she will keep writing but publish no more poetry.

Death is real

The *Pink Plastic Glove* is a bilingual edition (with a startling yellow – not pink – cover) of **Miquel's sequence of poems, started she says in 2000 and published in 2016**

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The 36 intense, fierce poems about death, grief and beauty are connected. In her prologue, a prose-poem in itself, Miquel tells how the death of others close to her left her "a flower without roots" (p.17). She dwelt in "the belly of death" herself. Then she started to cry. "Weeping brings life. Weeping rents the air. To weep is to come out of the bier" (p.17). Death and decay, and the fight for life, pervade the book.

The central image is of a "man rotting in the sink" (p.35), the first of many dead bodies. Miquel states clearly that a dead man cannot fit in the kitchen sink, yet she puts him there under pots and pans unwashed for 300 days. This is a feature of her writing's power: her comments are colloquial and easy to understand, yet meaning is mysterious. She delves into a world

as disordered as her kitchen sink, whose chaos and decay she tackles with...a pink glove (p.59).

Surreal

Death dominates, with humour (the Psychiatrist for the Dead; a collection service for corpses), inquiry (poems on rubbing and scrubbing and kissing the dead), lyricism (a crow with a worm in its mouth), but most of all with rage. Miquel moves out from her own fight to survive to a poem listing animals made extinct or another recalling the massacres of Cathars and at Nagasaki. Several poems take place in the thanatorium, where the dead try to live on. At Auschwitz a three-year old says only one word, then dies. No-one knows what he said. "The secret is life, not death" (p.19).

The *Pink Plastic Glove* lives in the tradition of Surrealism, a movement with a very strong presence in Catalonia. Miró thought that painting was the same as poetry. In the style of Dalí, Miquel's poetry paints hallucinatory images combined with quite clear realistic detail. "Which reality are we in now?" she asks (p.83). It is death that is real and life, unreal (p.123). Another feature of her surrealism is constant playing on words. She loves distorting language, finding double meanings. This makes translation a tough task, but Peter Bush succeeds by translating loosely when necessary, prioritising rhythm and word-play over literal meaning.

It's a challenging book, but worth the effort. "We are all born perfect for death, / cack-handed for life" (p.99).



EL GUANT DE PLÀSTIC ROSA / THE PINK PLASTIC GLOVE

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