

Oh how I love how

by Siel Ju

Locket

Catherine Daly

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Ray Bianchi wrote of Catherine Daly's debut book of poems: "*DaDaDa* is a book worth buying and reading because it uses lines that no one has ever thought to bring together." As if taking this compliment as a renewed challenge, Daly, in her follow-up *Locket*, shows us what she can do with words we *have* seen together — specifically those three hackneyed words: I love you. In "Love Potion Recipe," Daly writes:

Oh how you

I love how

you are

you are love a
and a

even
match

This book of love poems is an effort to recharge tired words with poetic love, to make them mean again, to give both writers and lovers words that mean. Daly is taking a risk here, after the largely enthusiastic reception of *DaDaDa*, described lovingly by reviewers as "esoteric" and "intimidating." *DaDaDa*, too, contains many love poems, but the style there is more fractured, the emotions somewhat more muted, discreet, disembodied — more recognizably postmodern, for the lack of a better word. In *DaDaDa*, language is filtered by machines, technology. The series "Palm Anthology", for example, is a love poem both to the speaker's lover and to her handy Palm Pilot:

Place me at the base of your throat

spine
set to vibrate.

Palms don't vibrate
pulse

no
beepers do.

By contrast, *Locket* at times can sound almost conventionally lyric, as in “Sweet Mistake”:

I should say I love you no more
and no less than writing
I love you. No more could I say.
Nor could I write
less.

This lyricism, however, is meticulously combined to an exciting synthesis with other languages — languages of science, of religion, of pop culture. Through these juxtapositions, Daly performs for the reader a spectacular balancing act. In “Oscillate,” we receive an erotic geography lesson:

Negotiating between *sentiment* and *sediment*,
like *precipitate* and *precipitation*,
as though we differ
by suffix only,
we oscillate.

and in “Latin Kiss: Love’s Language,” biology:

Orbicularis oris closes, compresses,
moves the lips,
integument and mucus membrane.

In fact, *Locket* is bursting with a joyous sense of serious play, wordplay. In “Couple,” Daly writes:

Two tippable tea, tuppable, Tippacanoes,
sumptuously sip, sup, supple.

and in “Sweet”:

Bees may bumble, drunks stumble,
other loves mumble words in bower after bower,
but this is my hive

Throughout *Locket*, we rediscover words we used to love — words with which we feel a sense of long-lost kinship, words with fond, bittersweet reminiscences. We hear echoes of Dr. Seuss and P.J. Harvey in “Evening” (“one fish, two fish, red shift, blue shift”) and of the Beatitudes in “Approaching San Luis Obispo” (“But look, consider, count the grains, recount, lie, quest, ask:”). *Locket* beckons us, sensuously, to remember words — what they meant, what we can make them mean.

Siel Ju is a 26-year-old poet and graduate student living in Los Angeles and attending the University of Southern California. Her poems have been published in Gargoyle, So to Speak, The 2River View, and various other journals.