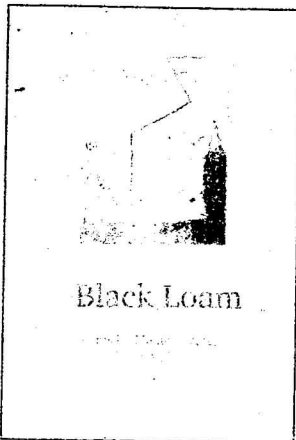


SOULMAKING

Black Loam by Maxine Scates. Cherry Grove Collections, 2005. Paperback. Finalist: 2005 Oregon Book Award for Poetry.

Maxine Scates' poems are personal, poignant recollections of lived family histories and hard-won moments when truth speaks clearly. Scates grounds her poems in the immediacy of the body and what it knows. I love the understated feelings in "Yellow Dog":

"and then in the woods
you closed your eyes,
is she gone? I looked up
the last day of August, leaves drifting
already, your head simply dropped
and we carried you, the ebbing warm weight,
the big paws I touched last."



My favorite poem, one which I've heard Scates read twice, is "The Mothers," a lengthy, layered work about the complexity of mother-daughter relationships — all that was, all that will never be — and the understanding "how if being born is forgetting, living a life is remembering all you've forgotten."

Cleaning "Mother's Closet" involves ambivalent feelings about what is left behind and what is taken away as well as the resonance of objects:

"I've found nothing I want but the purple mache mask
I made in the fourth grade. I like its yellow eyes.
She looks at each magazine I remove, saving every word about my brother, the coach. He's sixty and a long dead mouse has eaten the laces of his baby shoes. I want order. I say I'm old myself, I've started throwing things away. I'm lying. I've kept everything she's ever given me."

Some poems in this collection are about wounding, healing and forgiving, coming into the light, as in the last verses of "Forgiveness":

"One spring on that road
I crossed the train tracks,
I saw how the weeds lay down in the heat,
how the wild roses
tangled with the blackberry vines.
I knew I had come to love the stand of oaks
whose shape I could see even late in the evening.

They rise through me some morning when I wake.
Rise through me
like the herons from the fields
With unencumbered grace."

The poet lives in Eugene among us with her husband Bill Cadbury, and frequently reads poems at Tsunami Books and other venues here and in Portland. May she long walk with unencumbered grace.

— Lois Wadsworth

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