

DUPLESSIS, RACHEL BLAU. **WRITING BEYOND THE ENDING: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF TWENTIETH - CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS.** BLOOMINGTON: INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1985.

Describing her study as "a culturally necessary production of possible meanings," Rachel Blau DuPlessis undertakes a critical interpretation of twentieth-century women writers in terms of their attempts to "delegitimize the cultural conventions established by a sex-gender system and its values."

Based on the belief that "any fiction expresses ideology," DuPlessis sees women's questioning the traditional structure of narrative forms - hence the title **Writing Beyond the Ending** - as a means of invalidating its underlying assumptions about gender and cultural institutions.

After a consideration of the conventional marriage/death/madness narrative closures, the book examines, through a series of highly intelligent analyses of writers as dissimilar as Olive Schreiner, Muriel Rukeyser, Dorothy Richardson, Doris Lessing, among many others, the several strategies employed by contemporary novelists and poets to break codified literary behavior.

The study is rich and complex, and a detailed review of all the issues raised would require more space than we can afford. Some of DuPlessis' major concerns, however, deserve special attention.

One of the most frequent strategies she recognizes and examines is the recovering of muted narratives by means of the rupture of well-known "stories." Such is, for example, the case of **Wide Sargasso Sea** (1966), in which Jean Rhys "revises" **Jane Eyre** by displacing the narrative focus from the main character - the woman who succeeds against all odds - to the victimized (or "colonized") personality of Antoinette/Bertha, Rochester's mad wife. By bringing to the fore the West Indian woman who colors the background of the original tale, Rhys manages to release a muted unspoken narrative and thus challenge the social and political values which determined "the closures and precisions" of Charlotte Brontë's novel in nineteenth-century England.

A similar pattern of recovery occurs in contemporary poetry through the reinterpretation of "culturally resonant" materials such as myth, biblical stories and fairy tales.

DuPlessis also examines the traditional "romance" and "quest" plots and their modifications by twentieth-century novelists. In narratives by Richardson, Hurston, and Lessing, for example, the hero has been reconceptualized as a "multiple individual" or communal protagonist.

In the chapter devoted to *Künstlerromane*, DuPlessis analyzes fictions of female development from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) to Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), showing how the figure of the female artist differs from that of her male counterpart. Especially important for the contemporary woman writer is the obliteration of aesthetic distance "in favor of the ethical and social bases of experience."

By focusing on typically female narrative strategies, **Writing Beyond the Ending** illustrates in a comprehensive and challenging way the great contribution that a gender-based textual analysis can make to literary criticism.

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