

Freddie. Best's muted, unostentatious, common-sense feminism can be detected in her choices to shun the reconstruction aggressively peddled by her doctors and to expose the medical establishment's collusion with the dominant ideal of femininity, while also unabashedly naming the sites of pleasure, erotic and maternal, on her body. In a culture obsessed with breasts, she manages to find and redefine beauty in her experience of living in the post-mastectomy body.

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PAPER WINGS

Rosemary Clewes
Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2014

REVIEWED BY JORDANA GREENBLATT

The work of a consummate outdoor-person, Rosemary Clewes' writing focuses on wilderness travel, and *Paper Wings* is no exception. However, Clewes' newest collection ranges farther, both in familial time and in space, juxtaposing her wilderness and northern experiences with a poetic reconstruction of her father's time as a WWI fighter pilot (based on his pilot log) and meditations on her own experiences of love and loss, her travels more broadly, and her participation in an 8-day silent retreat. While consistent with the contemporary Canadian lyric tradition (it comes as no surprise that Clewes

thanks Don McKay), *Paper Wings* is also informed by Clewes' work as a photographer and artist, resulting in poetry that straddles lyric inner space and evocative description of the visual landscape. Inevitably, *Paper Wings* both draws from and participates in the literary tradition of the Canadian North, in some ways reproducing its virtues and failures and exceeding them in others. The end result is a collection that is beautiful—sometimes insightfully critical—but also largely lacking introspection into what entitles Clewes to, as she puts it in "Untitled," her "self-imposed summer exile,/ a yearly pretense of simplicity, solitude."

Some of strongest moments of *Paper Wings* combine ekphrasis with attention to constructions of nature and/or gender. In "Raphael's Galatea," Clewes contrasts her immersion in nature with Raphael's use of "sky and sea-sward ... as backdrop/ for the dramatis personae" in a fresco in which "Nature, it seems,/ wandered off into its own dark wood." Questioning "Such heady celebration/ of artifice and brawn," Clewes mediates on Raphael's iteration of a Galatae stripped of agential sexual narrative: "No hint in this freeze-framed/ fresco that our lady is hastening to a rendezvous with a lover." Raphael's banishment of nature to the background and his "docile" Galatea contrast strikingly with Clewes' embodied description of kayaking in "Grow Me Gills," a few poems earlier: "It's all in the hips they say./ Kayak-skin, hip and knee."

The movement from Clewes' solo summers in the Bruce Peninsula to her father's stint as a fighter pilot during WWI is eased by the use of birds to figure both kayaking and flight. Undermining the conventional opposition between "masculine" wartime experience and feminized "nature," Clewes' take on her father's pilot logs balance the fear and human

loss of war with the exhilaration of exploring the open space of the sky. In "Clouds," Clewes writes to her father "If you were alive, I'd beg you to talk, not of war/ but of the sky's white desert and the birth of clouds," consistently refusing stark divisions between war as a human construction and nature as a space of introspection.

Nevertheless, in *Paper Wings*, human history and culture are distinctly Western and colonial. The North, and the wilderness, are sites of natural history, interrupted only by Clewes, other visitors, and, in "Let the River Speak," a single "Inuk who knows/ the old ways but won't tell where muskox graze/ and who knows how the earth shakes out its water." Referring to her kayak, in "Grow Me Gills," as a "sea gypsy" and the imagined experience of riding a cargo train as "fleeing like an African god" in "Letting in the Light," Clewes' poetry instrumentalizes non-Western and pre-colonial culture and spaces even as Clewes questions Western culture's instrumentalization of nature. Thus, in a sense, Clewes engages in her own processes of relegation to the backdrop, a process that largely evades her often otherwise critical and introspective eye. If, as the book jacket contends, each section of *Paper Wings* asks "'Where is home?' The conclusion: Home is found within ourselves and without, anywhere, anytime," Clewes' poems retain a colonial lack of perturbation about who gets to be at home anywhere—and why.

Paper Wings deftly moves between seemingly divergent episodes in her own and her family's histories, and I would recommend it to anyone looking for an elegant take on the Canadian lyric tradition and idea of the North, one that navigates less obvious connections often very successfully. However, readers hoping that Clewes' collection will fulfill the promise of her observation, in

“Tree,” that “Sometimes you make up history, lacking facts, / eye-witness. / History is, after all, the version you walk with now” may find themselves disappointed.

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THERE ARE NO SOLID GOLD DANCERS ANYMORE

Adrienne Weiss
Gibsons, BC: Nightwood Editions,
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**REVIEWED BY TIFFANY
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Adrienne Weiss does not simply write poetry; she builds poems. The density of her pieces immediately impacts the reader as s/he wades through Weiss’s skillful use of colourful language and copious references to popular culture. The overwhelming sense of abundance that is crammed into Weiss’s fairly slim collection sets the stage for her exploration of capital/consumer culture; as such *There are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore* presents itself as a microcosm for the very social climate that Weiss critiques, thus transforming the reader into a microcosm for the capitalistic consumer, making him/her keenly aware of the media and product bombardment s/he is subjected to during daily life. Weiss’s collection, however, does not simply make a manic consumer out of its reader. Rather, the very density of her pieces forces a response opposite to passive media baths we endure ev-

ery day. The longer lines and generally lengthy pieces encourage, if not force, a slower reading pace and greater alertness. Each reference to popular culture (e.g. songs, movies, plays, celebrities etc.) draws on the reader’s own knowledge of and/or exposure to the referenced material, thus creating a deeper connection between reader and the text than necessarily prevalent in everyday media encounters. Furthermore, the abundance of references, overwhelming as they may be, and the reader’s potential ability to make personal references to many, increase the collection’s ability to highlight the degree of media we consume every day.

But to what effect? Weiss’s stylistic approach to her subject aptly foundations her varied but interconnected themes as they relate to consumer society’s values and ideals and the media’s role in establishing and promoting such ideals, as well as an idealistic vision of continual, social progression. More importantly, Weiss further focuses her reader’s attention around her major theme by addressing smaller issues that consumeristic social climate creates. “Once Upon a Time” and the collection of poems in the section entitled *Production 1960*, demonstrate how fairytales and the film industry impose unrealistic and limiting ideals of beauty and self. Even more focused, Weiss pays special attention to the effects of the media’s power to control gender perceptions; in “The Way You Look on Love”, the speaker struggles “to shun the books, / spent terminologies and years of obsessive scrutiny” that consumed Princess Diana’s life and painted her as a fickle young adventurer.

Weiss’s poems reveal how we often become what we consume, holding the same idealized standards and expectations that our consumer-based culture feeds us. The more we passively consume the ideas that our media and product based culture readily offers,

the more they consume our selfhood and ideals. What is left, as “Heads or Tails” highlights, is only a wrapper of ourselves. Just as “Leftover Doritos and Twizzlers wrappers / archive” the trip and act as “archival debris of our time together,” so does the history of our consumption and the “trash” we leave behind—whether a figurative economical and socio-political climate or a more literal and material, environmental pollution—become an archive of our capitalist culture and ourselves. Consumer culture encourages sameness and uniformity, it literally consumes us, leaving a trace of society and humanity rather than solid gold dancers of striking differences and individuality. As Weiss’s speaker sarcastically notes, “technology will save us all, make us all the goddamn same.”

Additional to Weiss’s attentive, relevant, and effective critique of the culture we live in, *There Are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore* showcases the work of a finely tuned poem. Weiss holds a firm grip over the language she deploys and her attention to detail ensures the strength of her grip; her capacity to convincingly embody not just one but many voices is a subtle but powerful skill. As a result, Weiss smashes any lingering ideas about a “female voice” or “female themes” in poetry. Furthermore, she brings life and relevance into a genre often left by the wayside and reminds us of poetry’s capacity to inspire and encourage fresh perspectives on the social norms we live with.

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