

Leaving Now

Arleen Paré

Halfmoon Bay, British Columbia: Caitlin Press, 2012

REVIEWED BY DORSÍA SMITH SILVA

Told with poignant candor through an unnamed protagonist, Paré unfolds *Leaving Now* with a fluid rich mixture of poetry, prose, fairytales, and dramatic monologues. As the words pour onto the page, readers are drawn to the narrator's journey as she leaves her marriage and children to live with another woman. This painful unraveling of the narrator's family highlights her feelings of guilt, denial, sadness, anger, frustration, and love. By fully reflecting on these emotions, Paré bares the protagonist's deepest self and offers to readers a touching story of how we transform life and restore love.

Paré begins the narrator's journey with her leaving her husband and sons. When she announces that she will depart the household, she centers on her sons' faces and witnesses how their countenances become broken, split, and cracked—reminders that she is the catalyst for their pivotal shift of unhappiness. This opening scene sets the stage for a tender examination of how we navigate through the many dimensions of hurt and affection. Consequently, it perfectly lends to the following section, which focuses on the history of the protagonist's marriage. Instead, of writing a fairytale of romance, Paré addresses the narrator's pushed initiation into marriage because she was pregnant during the 1970s. Recalling how she sensed the marriage would not last, the narrator reveals how her husband oddly compared her knuckles to Polaris missiles: "That he thought my fingers looked like Polaris missiles was not a good sign" (15). Other tensions haunt their union, especially when the protagonist wants to work and her husband flaunts his medical career. The protagonist feels unfulfilled, until she falls in love with another woman. This pivotal moment brings her to the precipice: "First principle: how could I stay? Second Principle: how could I not?" (36). Paré invites readers to explore the constraints within the multiple constructions of mothering and motherhood. In doing so, she presents a detailed picture of how some modes of mothering and motherhood may have to be reconfigured for mothers to achieve personal empowerment and agency.

The next sections grapple with the difficult decisions of whether the narrator should stay in her marriage and household. As she contemplates leaving, the narrator sharply reminds readers that mothers are missing in fairytales. With her own forecast for her blissful fairytale ending in doubt, the narrator ponders, "What happens to the gone mothers? Do they live inside their own

fairytale?” (58). The answer is not clear as the narrator feels revitalized when she divorces her husband and embraces her lesbian identity. However, she also finds herself becoming the dreaded guilty, shameful, and grieving mother for not staying with her children and being more emotionally involved with their lives. The narrator begs the question about how she can pardon her choices: “How to forgive each one by one by one?” (147).

By the end of the text, the narrator’s fairytale comes to an end and she closes the book. By reconciling her definition of mothering, she has assuaged her guilt and anguish for dismantling her familial dynamics and leaving her sons. The narrator also finds forgiveness from her children and the opportunity to recover their close relationship when one of her children calls her. This parting scene is vividly heartfelt; it is a moving reminder that Paré’s work is a powerful read that will leave readers looking forward to her subsequent texts.

A Pomegranate and the Maiden

Tamara Agha-Jaffar

Augusta, Georgia: Anaphora Literary Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY CASSIE PREMO STEELE

This is an engaging novel in which the characters from the myth of Demeter and Persephone come alive in ways that speak to current relations between mothers and daughters and between men and women. In chapters narrated by such figures as Demeter, Zeus, Hades, Hekate, and Persephone, readers are given diverse—and opposing—points of view about the abduction of Demeter’s daughter by the god of the underworld. Perhaps the most interesting and innovative part of the novel is the way human society is woven into the narrative. By incorporating characters from the palace at Eleusis, such as Queen Metaneira and King Keleos, we are given an opportunity to see the allegorical nature of the abduction parable as something that is strikingly closer to reality than myth, even today.

From the very first chapter, Demeter tells her daughter, “Listen to me, my child....[Y]our father, your uncles, all the gods—they are capable of doing terrible things, especially to women” (17). And in the next chapter, Persephone admits to Hekate that she finds her maturing body “awful” (21). Thus the young woman is portrayed as refusing to eat as a way of both rebelling against her mother and attempting to ward off puberty.

This is bookended when, near the end of the story, Metaneira tells her hus-