

***Heart Mechanic* by Gisela Ruebsaat.
Quadra Books, Victoria, 2016.**

Reviewed by Sheila Martindale in Island Writer

A hint of sadness tinges the poems in this excellent collection; the title poem ends with *See my tear ducts open/feel the flow of salt water/over my ancient wound*. Many of the poems refer to the poet's heritage of war, to a mother escaping under difficult conditions – *the swell of your abdomen/ripe with child*. The poet's mother was held up to her class as a perfect Aryan, a photo of her *a gift of honour/and shame*. One imagines how it was in Hitler's Germany, the schoolchildren learning what to love and what to hate. It seems there are many questions which could have been asked, as Ruebsaat ponders on her parents' past, when it is too late, in the section of the book titled *Going to the Ghost World*.

Even the lighter poems here, in some of the other sections, hold a subtle air of menace – blow drying her hair in a public pool change room, where *floor grout rises up, slime between my toes*, makes the ordinary slightly off balance. Or, in a poem about turning fifty with a friend at a cottage, *even the trip to the corner store for food/seemed perilous, a flight to the red planet*.

These are fine poems which make the reader think about the darker side of life. And there is hope as well, even at the convent school, when the girls *hold our breath to bursting/bubbles of laughter escape out throats*

A poem about getting rid of the excess rabbits at UVic might be the only real humour in *Heart Mechanic*, a collection best read in small doses rather than all at once. This is a beautiful first book by a talented poet!