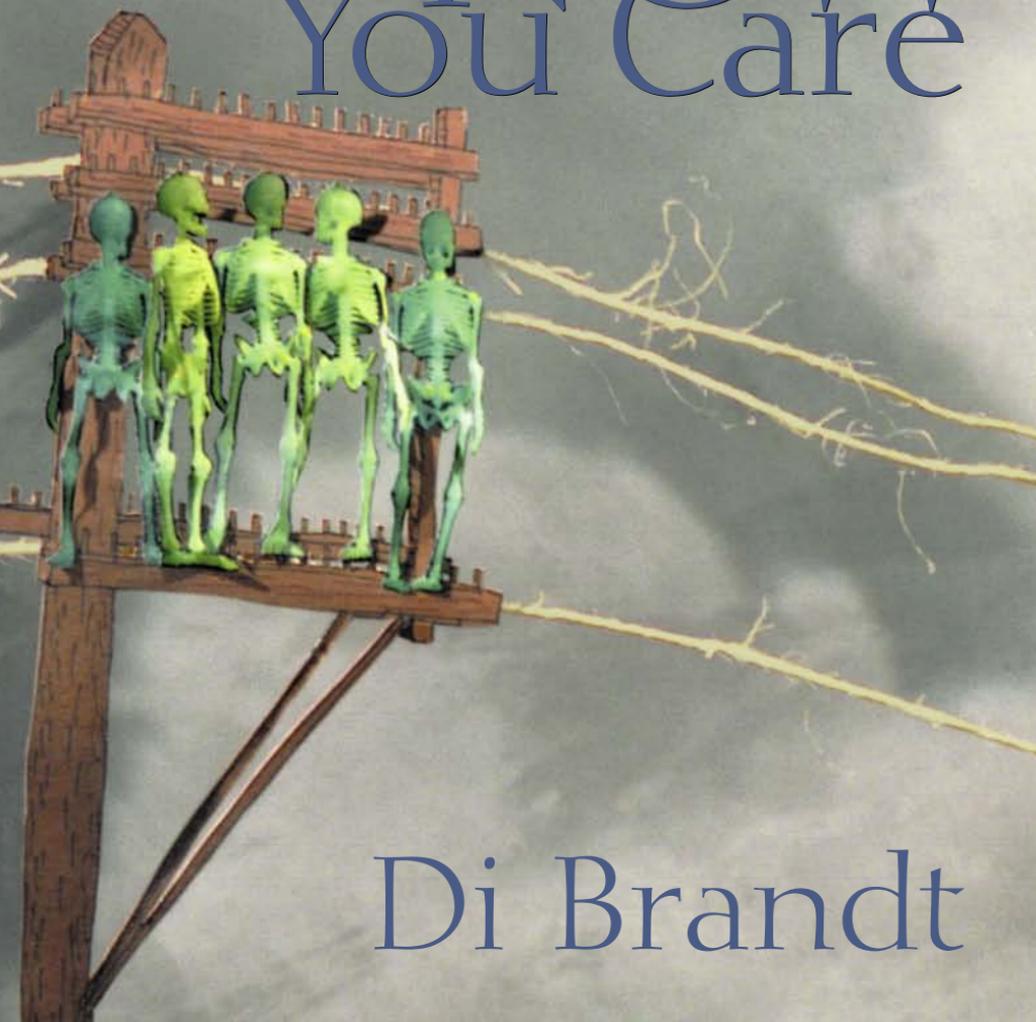




NOW You Care



Di Brandt



*I was mixing stars and sand
In front of him
But he couldn't understand
I was keeping the lightning of
The thunder in my purse
Just in front of him
But he couldn't understand
And I had been killed a thousand times
Right at his feet
But he hadn't understood*

– Sarain Stump

Zone: <le Détroit>

after Stan Douglas

I

Breathing yellow air
here, at the heart of the dream
of the new world,
the bones of old horses and dead Indians
and lush virgin land, dripping with fruit
and the promise of wheat,
overlaid with glass and steel
and the dream of speed:
all these our bodies
crushed to appease
the 400 & I gods
of the Superhighway,
NAFTA, we worship you,
hallowed be your name,
here, where we are scattered
like dust or rain in ditches,
the ghosts of passenger pigeons
clouding the silver towered sky,
the future clogged in the arteries
of the potholed city,
*Tecumseh, come back to us
from your green grave,*
sing us your song of bravery
on the lit bridge over the black river,
splayed with grief over the loss
of its ancient rainbow coloured
fish swollen joy.
Who shall be fisher king
over this poisoned country,
whose borders have become
a mockery,
blowing the world to bits

with cars and cars and trucks and electricity and cars,
who will cover our splintered
bones with earth and blood,
who will sing us back into –

See how there's no one going to Windsor,
only everyone coming from?
Maybe they've been evacuated,
maybe there's nuclear war,
maybe when we get there we'll be the only ones.
See all those trucks coming toward us,
why else would there be rush hour on the 401
on a Thursday at nine o'clock in the evening?
I counted 200 trucks and 300 cars
and that's just since London.
See that strange light in the sky over Detroit,
see how dark it is over Windsor?
You know how people keep disappearing,
you know all those babies born with deformities,
you know how organ thieves follow tourists
on the highway and grab them at night
on the motel turnoffs,
you know they're staging those big highway accidents
to increase the number of organ donors?
My brother knew one of the guys paid to do it,
\$100,000 for twenty bodies
but only if the livers are good.
See that car that's been following us for the last hour,
see the pink glow of its headlights in the mirror?
That's how you know.
Maybe we should turn around,
maybe we should duck so they can't see us,
maybe it's too late,
maybe we're already dead,
maybe the war is over,
maybe we're the only ones alive.

So there I am, sniffing around
the railroad tracks
in my usual quest for a bit of wildness,
weeds, something untinkered with,
goldenrod, purple aster, burdocks,
defiant against creosote,
my prairie blood surging
in recognition and fellow feeling,
and o god, missing my dog,
and hey, what do you know,
there's treasure here
among these forgotten weeds,
so this is where they hang out,
all those women's breasts
cut off to keep our lawns green
and dandelion free,
here they are, dancing
their breastly ghost dance,
stirring up a slight wind in fact
and behaving for all the world
like dandelions in seed,
their featherwinged purple nipples
oozing sticky milk,
so what am I supposed to do,
pretend I haven't seen them,
or like I don't care
about all these missing breasts,
how they just vanish
from our aching chests
and no one says a word,
and we just strap on fake ones
and the dandelions keep dying,
and the grass on our lawns
gets greener and greener
and greener

This gold and red autumn heat,
this glorious tree splendour,
splayed out for sheer pleasure
over asphalt and concrete,
ribbons of dark desire
driving us madly toward death,
perverse, presiding over
five o'clock traffic
like the queens on Church Street
grand in their carstopping
high heels and blond wigs
and blue makeup, darling,
so nice to see you, and what,
dear one, exactly was the rush?
Or oceans, vast beyond ridicule
or question, and who cares if it's
much too hot for November,
isn't it gorgeous, darling,
and even here, in this
most polluted spit of land
in Canada, with its heart
attack and cancer rates,
the trees can still knock
you out with their loveliness
so you just wanna drop
everything and weep, or laugh,
or gather up the gorgeous
leaves, falling, and throw yourself
into them like a dead man,
or a kid, or a dog,

O the brave deeds of men
M*E*N, that is, they with phalli
dangling from their thighs,
how they dazzle me with
their daring exploits
every time I cross the Detroit River
from down under, I mean,
who else could have given
themselves so grandly,
obediently, to this water god,
this fierce charlatan,
this glutton for sailors and young boys,
risking limbs and lives, wordlessly
wrestling primordial mud,
so that we, mothers and maids,
could go shopping across the border
and save ourselves twenty minutes
coming and going, chatting about
this and that, our feet never
leaving the car, never mind
the mouth of the tunnel
is haunted by bits and fragments
of shattered bone and looking
every time like Diana's bridge
in Paris, this is really grand, isn't it,
riding our cars under the river
and coming out the other side
illegal aliens, needing passports,
and feeling like we accomplished
something, snatched from
our busy lives, just being there

Afterworlds

Gwendolyn, I call you back
from your bed of roots, delicious
under moist scented worm nudged earth,
speak to me,
rising from my bed of stone,
finding the courtyard empty,
the gate swinging open,

O prophetess of blood and fire,
your famous ancient lions crouched
beside Lake Ontario,
drunk on the jewelled wine of death,

tell me, in this unexpected resurrection,
as from drowned Atlantis out of the carnelian sea,
as from the sister watching the sister
who lies down
on the long stemmed wet grass under
rumbling steel bridges,

grateful after everything for he
who childishly plucked out her eye,
blinding her into buffalo hooped sage scented
seeing,
tell me, princess of Babylon,
what would you have said,

had you been able, in that last moment
before the animal darkness,
to speak,
your brutal jewels flashing ornate in the naked
prairie sun,
and in what tongue, outliving for one flaming second
the devastating stages of your catastrophic
loves,

tell me, Gwendolyn,
 how should I find my way
among these empty incantations,
 these chipped white dishes on soap sudded oilcloth,
 these nothing signs
among the walking dead,
 the lilies sprouting tiger lips and rust,

 the prairie struggling to remember
its dream wild partridge feathered feast, that exuberant
 drumming?

Castle walk

after Alain Robbe-Grillet

Curses on she who asked to be
ordinary
among painted plates and cups
and bits of jam left on spoons,
willing to forget
fire flashing through
silver sheeted clouds,
her forehead bleeding,
her ragged torn heart.

✧

*In prison we ate rats
after drying them in the sun.
Every night God visited us
in our cells,
soothing or frightening us
with his velvet hands
and invisible dark sword.*

✧

Even now I could leap
off any shining parapet
at high noon
into the Devil's arms
in search of that fire,
were it not for the garden warbler
nesting in the rhododendron,
pink and scarlet blossomed
under the Castle Walk,
the bluebells blazing
beside the sycamore.

✧

The water at the bottom
of the well
remembers Queen Victoria,
Sir Wallace, and the numbers
of the dead.

Here in this red rock
overhanging the sweet path
tremble the memories
of cave dwellers,
shuddering their easy
ecstasy.

✧

I cannot compute it.
Even on the windiest days,
the chorus of ancestors
full throated among the trees,
bits of severed limbs
float through the room,
the blue plastic thermos
in the window promises
black tea and landmines
halfway across the world.
The surface keeps slipping, Alain.
Somewhere deep inside us
the centre holds.
Say it is so, Chinua,
say it is so.