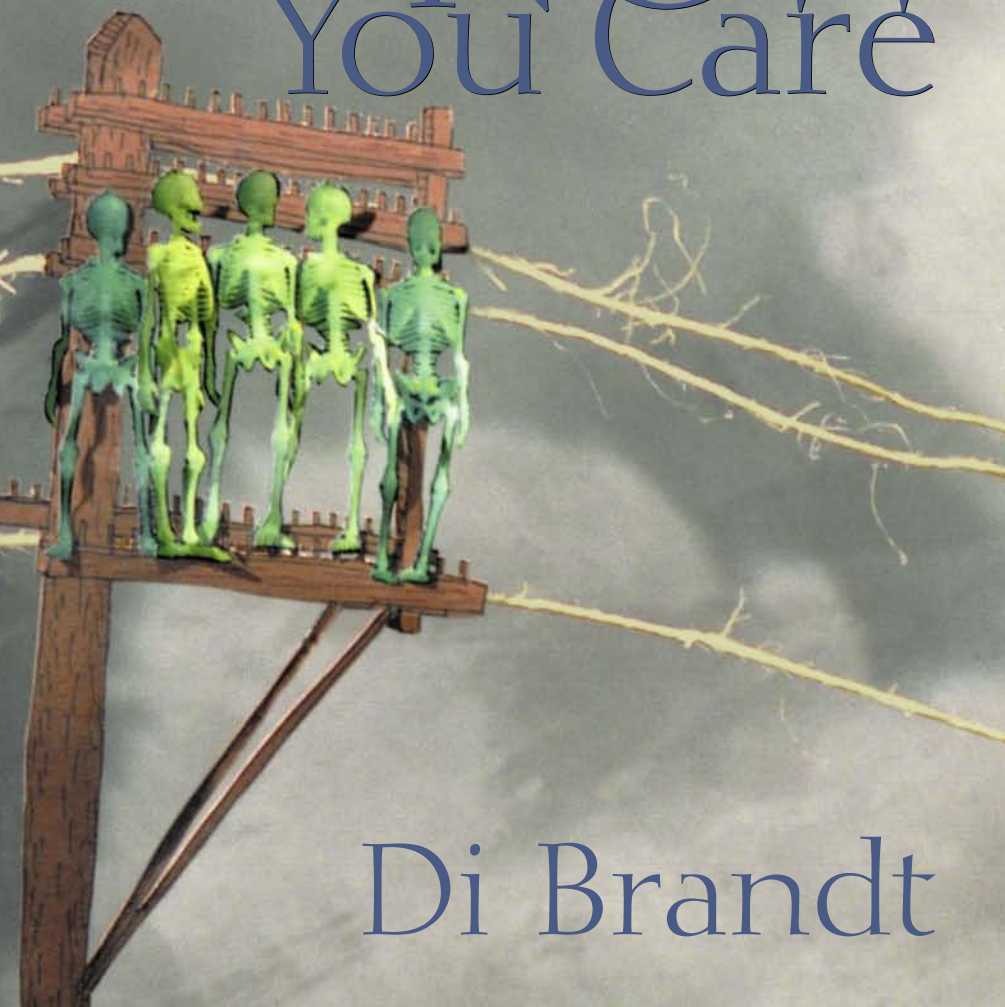




# NOW You Care



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.