

Dilla Narduzzi

Di Brandt's Un-Elusive Worlds

A Review of

Brandt, Di. 2008. *So This is the World & Here I Am In It*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest.

✕

In *So this is the world & here I am in it*, poet Di Brandt combines memoir and critical acumen. Throughout the book, Brandt's writing does much *for* the reader as they are swept up by her words. Whether its "the poet and the wild city" (73), where she examines how erotic landscapes interacted with her "desiring" body as an adolescent, or the politics of Berlin in "Berlin notes" (89), Brandt's words compel the reader to think deeply about their interactions in and with the world. She reminds us about wildness, describing it as something "profoundly about otherness ... an energetic fiery free-spiritedness that also connects these differences in unexpected, erotic and magical ways," while simultaneously reminding us of Western culture's desire to "domesticate" wildness and keep our "obedience" intact (84, 74). It is this juxtaposition between wildness and domestication that structures *So This is the World & Here I Am In It*.

As Scott Bryson observes, while "a precise definition of ecopoetry has not yet been established, we can note that "ecopoetry is a subset of nature poetry that,

while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues” (2002: 5). It is helpful to bear Bryson’s definition of eco-poetry in mind when entering Brandt’s collection of essays. In “& then everything goes bee: A poet’s journal,” Brandt responds to the work of Winnipeg-based artist Aganetha Dyck, an artist best known for her sculptural “collaborations” with bees. Brandt’s essay on Dyck explores how bees evoke our connectedness to nature and call up our “knowledge of mortality, of our physical limits as humans” (176). Dyck’s “collaborations” are contrasted with the often destructive practices found in contemporary apiary farming where hives are routinely gassed at the end of the summer. In the process, Brandt raises complex ethical concerns that any environmentalist must consider—and non-environmentalists more so. How do “end results” change when humans interfere with nature? How are humans destroying nature’s elaborative creative constructions? These are the kind of eco-poetic deliberations that arise in reading Brandt’s book.

Another chapter, “Twins are not the same baby twice,” explores current debates on biotechnology, the use of new technologies in birthing practices, as well as ethical concerns about “genetic engineering” (154). Here, Brandt forges intersections between science, ethics, fiction, poetry and visual imagining. Again, she asks difficult ethical questions and warns against our manipulation of “nature” for ends that are unknowable at this time. Throughout the chapter, she also foregrounds questions concerning what constitutes intimacy and care in the context of childrearing. For example, what are the implications of biomedical planning?

In the last chapter, “So This is the World & Here I Am In It: Orality and the Book,” Brandt returns to her childhood and talks candidly about the enduring grief over her connections and disconnections to and from her Mennonite family and community. Throughout, Brandt is able to observe her own legacy and history, even as she mourns being shunned by family for her movement into life on her own as a writer and outside of the Mennonite community (210). There is a palpable grief to many of the pages where Brandt tells her own life story, but this is one of the book’s strengths. Readers will encounter richness and strength, precise criticism and humour in Brandt’s compelling creative prose.

Reference

Bryson, Scott J., ed. 2002. *Eco-poetry: A Critical Introduction*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.