

*Oh There You Are I Can't See You Is It Raining?*

by Laura Broadbent

Montreal: Snare Books, 2012, ISBN 978-0-9865765-9-1, 76 pp., \$12.00 paper.

Reviewed by Andrew Vaisius

With a title sounding much like that of a poem by Diane Wakowski, Laura Broadbent's first book of poetry runs at the reader full out, leaving her/him just enough time either to sidestep her barrelling through or accept in full force the rush of her poetry. Most of the writing in this book is engaging and very good indeed, but some of it is almost embarrassing. That's the price you pay for knocking the rust off the vehicle – and it's certainly worth it. Contained within are many memorable lines, images and directions to pursue.

The initial section, "Between A And B," a truly excellent suite of poems, asks the reader to expand ideas rather than whittling down the possibilities. As Broadbent writes, "Observation incites opinion, opinion encourages names, names are made of language and language is made of chains" (8). Rattle them chains! She's extremely sharp and perceptive here. The sections read quickly; the stated containment between A and B becomes an order of poetry, an assuring voice: "You and every annoying song you ever heard, just a wave, baby, just a wave. Don't worry you're a great dancer" (14).

Next up are three suites that beg decoding. The first consists of repeated lines appearing in other stanzas. In the second section the last line of one stanza transforms into the first line of the following one, and in the third section Broadbent reconstructs lines and patches them into other parts and lines. It might sound like a game of sorts, and it is, but there is also a lively intensity at play here. Her epigrams by David Shields and Gertrude Stein help clarify the technique.

The last and longest section – "Men in Various States" – is the most satisfying and accomplished. Into it she packs insights and images of the dumbest shticks to the most sensitive dicks. She knows men and thankfully leaves them in their myriad splendour and muck. She edifies no one, yet eyes them (almost uncomfortably) with penetrating acuity. This section improves with each read, except for part XI, a "he-says-she-says" poem that carries on for two pages and sounds exactly like one of those inane arguments in which couples wallow. That is the point, but does anyone really want to go through it in such detail? My advice: carefully excise these pages from the book. You will never notice them being gone.

The other noteworthy dud is the reproduction pages of a found poem in part XVIII – someone's handwritten agenda. The handwriting is illegible and absolutely no fun to try to make sense of. I took several stabs at it but could get no further than a few lines. It is like reading two pages of a particularly rushed physician's scripts. In spite of these missteps I look forward to seeing more of Broadbent's poetry in print. ♡

Andrew Vaisius is a childcare worker living in Winkler, Manitoba.

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