it in the original German will have to wait in hope of an English translation.

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Di Brandt, *The Sweetest Dance on Earth: New and Selected Poems*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2022. Pp.221. Softcover, $19.

Di Brandt's latest book, *The Sweetest Dance on Earth*, revisits and adds to a nearly four-decade literary career. Reading across her work, it is clear that many of her poems relate an exodus: her intellectual, spiritual, and physical departure from her Mennonite community, in which her voice was silenced. Others showcase the "afterlife" of that young self, taking place during the many years in which Brandt experimented with her voice through various encounters with histories, communities, and selves. Full of honesty, wit, and joy, *The Sweetest Dance on Earth* is a lovely tribute to Brandt's career.

The collection includes a rich array of work, including poems about social media, loss, motherhood, travel, and various cultural communities. After all these years, however, the poems from *questions i asked my mother* still feel like Brandt's standout work. Consider these lines, first published in 1987:

> another time i asked her mom i been thinking about
> arithmetic & what i'm wondering is do you think arithmetic was
> invented or discovered i mean it seems like it must have been
> invented because all these signs numbers & things they didn't find
> those lying on a rock somewhere (9)

This hurried scene perfectly captures the frenetic thoughts of a child, and the lines that follow brilliantly depict the panicked voice of a mother ill-equipped to handle her child's precociousness:

> well i just don't know she says
> wonderingly i've never really thought about it you sure come up
> with the strangest questions really i don't know how you got to be
> so smart (9)

Brandt's stream-of-consciousness writing in *questions i asked my mother* is compelling because it manages, all at once, to voice the anxiety and cleverness of a childlike voice as well as the panicked

ignorance of a community suspicious of a young girl who is "so smart." Indeed, the speaker's interlocutors find her intelligence exhausting and frustrating: "she sighed my mother / sighed a lot when i was around" (10), the speaker acknowledges. The defensive anti-intellectualism recounted in Brandt's earliest work remains sadly relatable today, as social media has made clear that a rejection of expertise and distrust in education is not (and may never have been) unique to isolated religious communities.

In the poems selected from volumes that followed *questions i asked my mother*, Brandt's voice is more rooted in her present. Often, these poems recall the comforting naïveté of a younger self: a child who believed her "father's hands could fix anything" (44) or a young woman who found it "so much easier to talk about forever" at age nineteen (36). The smallness of that child's world frequently occurs to Brandt's speakers as they navigate adulthood, as in "The Phoenicians," first published in *Walking to Mojácar* (2010):

> In my little village
> in the harsh climate
> of Manitoba,
> we thanked Jesus
> for our food,
> though I couldn't see
> then what he had
> to do with it (131)

Notice Brandt's decision here to abandon the lowercase "i" from *questions* in favour of the more adult "I" who apprehends a larger world. This is a much larger, and more brutal world than the one she wrestled with as a child. In "teaching in prison," for example, she reflects on learning of "the dignity of desperate / men" (39); in "The Phoenicians," she realizes that the world has made "eager / if squeamish killers / and invaders of us all" (134). Much of the power of this later work comes from its contrast with the naïveté of her earlier work: the speaker moves beyond a child's point of view, but still gestures touchingly to a childhood both claustrophobic and, paradoxically, comforting in its reassuring smallness. In that vein, the latter half of Brandt's selected poems shows a greater awareness of complicity and of the fact that a world where cruelty, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation go unremarked cannot last. "Shouldn't we," she says at the end of "The Phoenicians," "be discussing these / things more?" (137). It is a lovely conclusion to this poem, not least because of how it echoes the kinds of "questions" Brandt's speaker asked her mother much earlier in life. The poet is, again, asking questions too difficult for anyone to answer.

Given the strength of the collection as a whole, I found it a bit disappointing to see Brandt's *Selected* move toward its conclusion with several sonnets and other work that felt oddly out of place. "Let me not to the extreme beauty of Winnipeg," reads one awkwardly comedic poem, "Winters admit the weeniest of arguments! / Winter is not winter where it melting finds" (193). Compare these jesting lines to the ones that conclude "So close, so far away," which comes immediately before it: "The great mix up, mash up, giveaway, take-away, getting and / losing. Life in the earthly dimension. Harsh. Torn. Mortal. Full / of holes. Broken promises. Streaked with light" (190). When these kinds of poems appear side by side, the reading experience is awkward and peculiar, with the comic poems appearing less significant and assured—less authentic, even—in their sharp contrast to the gravity and power of her more serious efforts.

The poems in which Brandt's past and present collide, leaving her speakers to ponder what that collision means for the future for both herself and her community, have always been her best work. As a whole, *The Shortest Dance on Earth* is a fitting retrospective on a major poet's career, a welcome reminder of Brandt's remarkable talent, and a wonderful collection of questions everyone should, from time to time, be asking.

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Bianca Lakoseljac, ed., *Rudy Wiebe: Essays on His Works*. Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2023. Pp. 376. Softcover, $25.

Bianca Lakoseljac's edited collection brings together writers and critics who have engaged with Rudy Wiebe's writing since his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962). In the span of over sixty years, Wiebe has published ten novels, several books of non-fiction, numerous short stories, and shorter pieces of non-fiction, and he is often celebrated as the most prominent Mennonite literary voice in North America and beyond. I once interviewed Wiebe, however, and remember how he rejected the idea of a single voice representing an entire community: "I'm a Mennonite from generations back, but . . . I'm not *the* Mennonite voice, right?"[1] Wiebe is right: the Mennonite (or any other) literary tradition does not and should not

[1] Janne Korkka, "Where Is the Text Coming From? An Interview with Rudy Wiebe," *World Literature Written in English* 38, no. 1 (1999): 74