



## Trouble in Mind: Poems

*Lucie Brock-Broido*

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### **Trouble in Mind: Poems** Lucie Brock-Broido

With *Trouble in Mind*, her long-awaited third collection, Lucie Brock-Broido has written her most exceptional poems to date. There is a new clarity to her work, a disquieting transparency, even in the midst of the wild thickets of language for which she is known. A poet “at the border of her own allegory,” Brock-Broido searches for a lexicon adequate to the extremities of experience—a quest that is as capricious as it is uncompromising. In the process, she reveals, unsparingly, things as they are. In “Pamphlet on Ravening” she recalls, “I was a hunger artist once, as well. / My bones had shone. / I had had rapture on my side.” The book is laced with sequences: haunted, odd self-portraits; a succession of poems provoked by discarded titles by Wallace Stevens; an intermittent series of fractured and beguiling lyrics that she variously refers to as fragments, leaflets, and apologues.

*Trouble in Mind* is a book that astonishes us afresh at the agility and the uncanny will of language, which Brock-Broido is not afraid to follow where it may lead her: “That the name of bliss is only in the diminishing / (As far as possible) of pain. That I had quit / The quiet velvet cult of it, / Yet trouble came.” Even trouble, in Brock-Broido’s idiom, becomes something resplendent.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

### **Trouble in Mind: Poems Details**

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## From Reader Review Trouble in Mind: Poems for online ebook

### Ellie Botoman says

how to beautifully devastate the reader in less than 100 pages

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### Brian Wasserman says

A terror to behold, pretentious verbal diarrhea, prepare to be thoroughly amazed by the author's talent for spewing meaningless rhetoric!

Darwinism as Spite

There heart is a place made slippery  
as a minnow confused out

of its school and caught on  
A plaid pink dishtowel forty years ago

In Canada, startled as a hood-shy  
falcon seized in

flight, bewildered as a mine pony  
sudden take up

from an underground of shale  
into the hinter of stark light

blinded by an eye accustomed only to an  
underworld of bower, lake or coal

why was none of this written down?

why was this written?

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### Justin Boening says

In this volume, her third full collection, Lucie Brock-Broido flexes her already singular gift into a more argumentative form. This is a mind done with destructing. She writes: "To maul is to make a massive loss / Of the history of a body's history." Within persistent grief, one comes to alter oneself inscrutably. This is my favorite of hers.

## Diann Blakely says

When did western culture decide that being, publicly at least, a "cool customer," responding to visits and casseroles with suppressed emotion and minimally interesting conversation, is what our most civilized reaction to loss, no matter how devastating, should be? Fifth-century etiquette in Periclean Athens, when both the cool outward pose and the inner dignity of classicism reached its height, demanded that newly-widowed or -son-less Greek women were expected to run into the street and keen and rend their cheeks and tunics with their nails. Much-acclaimed poet Lucie-Brock-Broido, whose superb third collection, *\*Trouble in Mind\**, has just appeared in paperback, recounts a series of losses-- parents, lovers, friends, places--that would knock most of us to our knees. The difference between Brock-Broido and most of us is that she has no problem staying there, singing exquisite dirges and calling in rage to God. In *\*Trouble in Mind\**, she delivers her pain in newly austere yet gorgeous ululations to Him, to the lost ones, and to anyone else who might be listening, whether or not they might respond.

If the publishing industry has made discovered the riches to be made from books-on-tape such as Patchett's *\*Truth and Beauty\** and Didion's *\*The Year of Magical Thinking\**, respectively, poets--like the blues singers whom Brock-Broido loves--have always known the *\*ultima thule\** of their work to be its oral utterance. The *\*Iliad\** and the *\*Odyssey\** were written to be recited by various wandering bards whose arrival in small Greek states was an occasion for decidedly uncool joy. The thudding Anglo-Saxon recitation of battles won and sinners punished comprise the next generation of poets to whom "the spoken word" was particularly important. In the Victorian era, a unique but similar form called the "closet drama," where several actors got together to read long, multi-sectioned or multi-charactered poems for the radio sprang up, and it lasted far into the twentieth century, as a masterwork such as Plath's "Three Women" was composed and broadcast.

In *\*Trouble in Mind\**, Brock-Broido, singular and stone original yet, in some ways, a descendent of Akhmatova, of the hermetically private Dickinson, of Stevens, and of Roethke, most decidedly completed her first book, *\*A Hunger\**, with the blessing of the Plath who said, in her last recorded interview, that her poems" changed style owed everything to "having to say them to [her]self." The dramatic elements of some of Plath's most famous, or infamous, poems, like "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" become even more audible when we remember when she insisted that these were persona poems, not poems in which she was to be understood as the actual speaker. That they are calls with no possibility of response is only underscored by Plath's suicide, the final and most absolute silence.

*\*A Hunger\** (1988), drew a great deal of attention in part because of these persona poems, which include works spoken by Jessica McClure, the eighteen-month-old who gained the nation's prayerful attention while stuck in a Midland, Texas well for fifty-eight hours; Birdie Africa, or Oyewolffe Momar Puim, one of the children who survived the attempted obliteration-by firebombs and -hoses of the MOVE enclave in Philadelphia in 1985; Edward VI, Henry VIII's only male child, who succeeded his father at the age of nine and died of consumption six years later; and, perhaps most chillingly, June Gibbons, one of the British twins who developed their own language and their own forms of self- and sisterly destruction, including arson, and were subsequently sentenced to Broadmoor Prison for the criminally insane. Perceived innocents who meet with fabulously murderous circumstances--or who create them--are and were almost immediately canonized or demonized, which is to say deprived of their humanity. Does death do the same to all of us, even in the smaller sphere of the family? Do we lose the truth of a person in favor of the idealization or caricature memory can offer?

Perhaps it's even more important to ask the extent to which these characters are stand-ins from Brock-

Broido herself. It's hard to say. What's easier to see is that she has stuck to her promise, made with increasing vehemence over the course of the past several years in essays and interviews, to divest herself of false self after false self, of biography in favor of "the cruel and \*auto\*biographical," as she said of the progress of her second book \*The Master Letters\* (1995). "For there's more enterprise in walking naked"--that's Yeats's declaration, not Brock-Broido's, but it's one she echoes in "A Kangaroo Among the Beauties," a magically elliptical piece in Molly McQuade's \*By Herself: Women Reclaim Poetry\*, a collection of interviews, essays, and critical pieces published by Graywolf. Or, to borrow some lines from Stevens's "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay":

"I have said no  
To everything, in order to get at myself.  
I have wiped away moonlight like mud...."

The grieving Brock-Broido's final poem and one of its most affirmative, if perversely so, is "Self-Deliverance by Lion," which is glossed by the following footnote from Kay Redfield Jamison's \*Night Falls Fast\*: "In 1995, the body of a thirty-six-year-old transient woman in Little Rock was discovered by a worker at the National Zoo in Washington. She had scaled a barrier, ascended a rough high wall, and crossed a twenty-six-foot moat in order to make her way into the lions' den. Her death by mauling was ruled a suicide." And--"From Daniel 6:24, I've adapted the following: "The lions had the mastery of them / And broke all their bones in pieces."

But \*Trouble in Mind\* can hardly be called bleak. As title indicates, it's in the blues tradition: quote Ralph Ellison. There's too much irony and humor here: of a former lover, to whom she can finally speak again, she says "Once I adored you. How nice for me." And there's too much relish in form, in language itself. Even when there's nothing to answer our calls except the white page, the language formed by a poet, however it comes to inhabit us, may be the highest form of response we can hope to receive.

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## Chris says

Lucie sounds like no other writer. Her poems are ornate and baroque and bizarre.

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## Julie says

7.0/10

While the language is beautiful and the imagery stunning, at times, this did not speak to me in any visceral way. These poems are too intensely personal, and too intensely intellectual to be good for general consumption. Yes, the paradox of good poetry -- but the distance created in this collection between the writer and the reader, between the giver and receiver, was out of sync with what touches the heart.

This \*has\* to be one of those lovely books that people point to when they say "I hate poetry": the esoteric oracle speaks to only some lucky ones who hear the mermaids higher pitched tones; unfortunately, the unlucky ones hear only a strange caterwauling.

## Olivia says

This book is probably the best poetry book I have read in a while, and so evocative that I cried several times while reading it (this makes me sound like I am a person who cries while reading, which I am not). It's a lot about death, and I've had some death-related life events in the past few months, and it is so amazing on these topics that it is hard to even describe. Basically, the poetry is amazing.

----- FAVOURITE QUOTES -----

"That even despairing relentlessly cannot  
Spare you what you fear the most" ("Gamine")

"There  
Are things which can dismantle entirely  
A spirit, such as the pathetic maledictive fear  
Of loss. Of loss:  
You get to speak of it, once  
You are its intimate, and not before; it would be  
'Appropriation'" ("Dire Wolf")

"I would have made of my body  
A body to protect her, anything to keep  
Her well & here - in the soul's suite" (Soul Keeping Company)

"I will go on loving as I love the backs  
Of things and the invisible,  
As I love the hideous or an attention  
So attentive it is next to worshipping" (Self-Portrait with Her Hair on Fire)

(and many more - I need to re-read)

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## Hoyadaisy says

I'm am happy to work hard with poetry, but this was ridiculous. It felt like a cascade of images that I would have to glue together without a map. I really felt like I could have swapped random chunks between poems and not have made the poems any less comprehensible or enjoyable.

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## Laura says

Loved this, but not quite as much as The Master Letters. (That would be a tall order).

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## S. says

My favorite of hers.

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## MJ says

I don't think I could choose a favorite line or sentence or even poem from this collection -- it would happen to be almost without exception whichever one I paused at to consider -- but, similarly, I don't think there's one I will come back to over and over again. Beautifully rich, lush language, and all of it works imperceptibly to create this tone that...

Well...I'm not sure WHAT it does, actually. I can't put my finger on it, but I guess I'd know it when I see it, now. I don't think I'm going to return to this collection out of love, but I'm making a note to myself here to return to it in six months and see whether I can actually cut through some of the beautiful fog it put in my brain in order to glean a little more meaning.

"Like a madrigal, a pastoral  
In the pocket of my houndstooth vest,

You are the only beauty in this  
Celestial torture I will call my own."

(How do madrigal and pastoral fit so well together, metrically and meaningfully? Why a houndstooth vest, how does a pastoral or a person even get in a pocket -- but that alliteration with pastoral and pocket! -- and how do those last two lines make me both wrinkle my brow in confusion and bite my lip in recognition?)

Or another example:

"I was not ready for your form to be cold  
Ever."

which is such a beautiful, blunt expression of grief, and here it's coexisting somehow in the same poem with:

"If you were a man you would be

An autumn of black carriages filled red with leaves  
From sycamore trees,

Not scattering. I was not ready for  
Such earthward and unease."

They hit me, both of those parts, in almost unmanageably different ways. It's like plunging your hands into a box full of gemstones, and coming up with handfuls at a time, and being unsure how they should be strung together.

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## Rick says

“And still the world’s a pretty one.” Made more pretty and more humane by the work of Brock-Broido, who passed away earlier this year at 61. Her work was new to me, but my poetry Twitter feed lit up with moving testimonials to her work—poetry and teaching—with linked poems that like illustrations in Medieval manuscripts or precisely made scrimshaw or intricate Cellini metalwork catch your eye and draw you closer and closer in increasing wonder and awe.

There is so much woe—broken hearts, shattered families, death, and death’s call—that such devotion to craft is a defiant hope in and of itself. There is so much magical beauty in her poems, in each line, image, word choice that you are inspired to deep attention, not just to her poems but to the world around you, to see and understand and celebrate what, despite all the trouble, we do with our lives.

Brock-Broido published four collections in her lifetime, a fifth is on its way, and *Trouble in Mind* was her third. My local public library had this and her fourth, *Stay, Illusion* available. So this is where I started after the memorial introduction of favorite poems by peers, students, and fans of her work. There are fifty poems in this collection, presented in five Roman numerated sections of ten each, like a Dominican rosary bead. And while there is little that is traditionally religious, there is much that is spiritual and prayerful in the poems.

“Let me list here the things I wish to bring with me,  
For the life after this or that. I will not go back the way I came,

Carrying my clay Picasso and my tin of ginger,  
Flying toward home on my way away from home.”

Her sentences spill down lines like streams of clear water down a rocky slope.

“Tonight the wind is hover-

Hunting as the leather seats of swings go back  
And forth with no one in them

As certain and invisible as  
Red scarves silking endlessly

From a magician’s hollow hat  
And the spectacular catastrophe

Of your endless childhood  
Is done.”

There are Dickensonion poems like “Fragment on Dissembling”:

Curious in your dark  
Frock-coat, do everything  
That you have to,  
If it is time;  
Leave nothing

Still unsaid.  
Once, to make of nothing  
Something was divine.  
To have made  
Of something  
Nothing, was sublime.”

But most poems are like no one else. They have a startling beauty and are elusive, compelling and will require re-reading. I feel lucky that I have her body of work ahead of me and to accompany me in my unexpected grief at her loss, someone unknown to me until her death.

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### **Kitty says**

Published in 2004, I have mixed feelings about this collection of poetry. Lucie Brock-Broido is obviously well-read and provides interesting notes in the back.

However, in the five sections, I felt as if stumbling on a well-written diary. It could be that it was just not a good day for me to be reading her poems which were more contrived than emotionally compelling.

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### **Michael says**

I read this during a tumultuous period of my own life, and it sang to me in the most eloquent tones of beauty, grief, and despair. There is a fearlessness about these poems, and a formal mastery, that I found irresistible.

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