

Didymoi—Peter Brennan

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I had to work hard to appreciate Peter Brennan's poetry. That's no bad thing. Poems which don't yield their treasures too easily and employ imaginative, dramatic phrasing tend to repay several reads. The style is distinctive and intriguing. The title poem, 'Didymoi', illustrates two sides of this writer's apt, because 'Didymoi' is the Greek sign of the twins. From the first stanza 'Across the gulf through greenhouse masts/ blurred mountains are rubbed in' is a dynamic and accurate image, but Peter Brennan follows it up with: Closer, lambent lamplight enchants the soft pink dusk. How enchantment is taking place and why Brennan thought the overused 'lambent' was the best word to use, complete with self-conscious alliteration, is beyond me, and I had several such moments of bewilderment when reading this pamphlet. But Peter Brennan is a great phrase-maker and his poems are peppered with original and surprising word combinations. The vocabulary is rich and (unfashionably) loaded with adjectives. The poems often seem to slip outside linear time, narrative and clear context. They have a mysterious, abstracted quality, often tinged with melancholy. Journeys through the Greek island of 'Amorgos' (the poem's title) yield atmospheric imagery: All distances shrinking towards the donkey braying from his field of constellated thistles; Gottlieb's Crimson Spinning No.2, 1959, on the other hand, exhibits a longing for something beyond the material world or perhaps a depth within it. Either way, it gives rise to lines like this: Metal ball punching a way out of the dying lot—; pursuing spaces where none were. Basking in the shape of separation. That's real ambition about this work. Peter Brennan doesn't always pull it off but I prefer poets who take a few chances (and sometimes fail) to those who play safe all the time. There's much to enjoy in this pamphlet. Rob A. Mackenzie