



Bruce Rice's "The Trouble with Beauty" is "a marvel...for its depth and lyricism"

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The Trouble with Beauty: Lyrical Nature Poetry

By Bruce Rice

[Coteau Books](#)

Reviewed by Devin Pacholik



Bruce Rice's poetry collection *The Trouble with Beauty* examines the alluring and treasured bits of life, from windy songs blowing across the prairies to the relationship between a father and son captured in memories. Rice's lyrical poems, as the title of the collection suggests, question the possibility of preserving and appreciating the beauty within and around us.

The Trouble with Beauty opens with wondrous descriptions of prairie scenes, which later transition into dilemmas of conservation.

Rice is a reveler of image and form first and a philosopher second. His balanced approach does well for his craft.

For instance, in “Deer Dream” the landscape becomes a fantasy seen through the consciousness of a deer:

The memory of light drains slowly

branches click as if they were talking to horses

the crown of the bluff facing west dusted with cinnamon.

The living branches and cinnamon-dusted cliffs Rice describes are sensual and fanciful.

And while poems like “Deer Dream” are light with commentary, “Poem for Looking Up” a few pages later offers existential queries like, “What was the land before it was landscape[?]” Perhaps, as Rice’s poem placement seems to suggest, we should consider the deer, the branches, and all things inhuman.

Eventually, nature poems blend with memories of childhood and significant sites found throughout rural Saskatchewan. At this point, Rice includes a number of bridge poems, which contemplate the human need to document histories.

Questions of moral responsibility arise: Rice often wonders who should be the custodians of history and nature. While he may not have an answer, “Seventh Bridge” describes the hopeful contentment in knowing beauty is always out there, waiting to be found beyond the horizon.

Of course, there is a danger in finding and exposing beauty.

Rice says in the title poem “The Trouble with Beauty,” “Beauty, it seems, must have devotion/We can’t just leave it alone.” The statement is somewhat accusatory.

Human curiosity is, generally speaking, destructive. From tourist traffic eroding paths in ancient places to the pain of re-surfaced memories, beautiful things can be vulnerable and even dangerous.

Sometimes, as in “Into the Wind,” memories, desires and objects persist without or despite human intervention. In this case, the speaker’s childhood memories abide like a dilapidated barn, which is a “creaking barb that will not fall down” against the winter wind.

Rice’s *The Trouble with Beauty* is a marvel of Saskatchewan poetry for its depth and lyricism. Rice is a careful poet who writes with humour and grace.



Devin Pacholik is a Saskatchewan-based journalist and book reviewer. His work appears on Global News, through Harvard Broadcasting and various publications across Canada. For more of Pacholik’s work go to www.pagesandpatches.com.