

Book Review

Precordial Thump. Zoe Whittall. Holstein, Ontario: Exile Editions, 2008. 91 pages; ISBN978-1-55096-115-7; \$19.95 (paper).

Zoe Whittall's latest collection, *Precordial Thump*, is preoccupied with lies, truths, the erotics of ambulances and emergency medicine, and the quotidian details of a stoop-smoker. Formally, this collection is a mixed bag. Ranging from seemingly journalistic narrative poems - a straight-shooting-straight-from-my-diary-style Third-Wave poetics - to a number of finely imaged, truncated lyrics, the poems here insist on the value of the everyday and personal observation, and normalize the existence of a young woman whose take on the world is filtered through an urban, queer feminist sensibility and sense of humour.

There are moments of magic in these poems: breathtaking images like "We understand the wet // city is a smell, and the air pants against our garden grade faces" draw readers into a world of broken-down love affairs, set predominantly against a beat-up Toronto landscape. These images function like snapshot poetry: momentary photos punctuate the poems and draw our attention to Whittall's humour, always a central device in her work. I found the poems I enjoyed most were those that were smart enough to make me laugh. At several moments throughout my reading, I found a literality of language and image that overstated certain points; some of the poems could have used paring in order to arrive at the daily nuggets that Whittall is so adept at seeking out and unwrapping.

Ultimately, Whittall's exploration of lies and truths through the lens of two relationships flows a bit inconsistently, and I couldn't tell whether or not to trust the revenge fantasy that runs throughout the book. I think that the strongest moments of this exploration lie in some of the more formally experimental pieces that force a sharpness, which I did not find in the more prose-heavy pieces. The charming intelligence of *Precordial Thump* is, to my mind, found in Whittall's insistent and conscious use of a queer hipster vernacular, which is showcased, for example, in "Halloween, With Pink Eye":

I dress as a white lie,
a unicorn, a school girl
all of the above, blended.
Prefer the magical over
the deformed, lopsided
or undead.

...

I, pink eye you, when the fire alarm rings,

the dance floor empties
the firetrucks provide a spotlight,
the scrappy underage Britney drag queen
and I toss her Cabage Patch Kid baby.
You smoke, while I pursue perfect quips.
Smear pink across your jaw.

Poems such as this one reveal Whittall to be one of the best chroniclers of her generation of urban dykes.

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