



At Lake Scugog

Troy Jollimore

Princeton University Press (May 2011)

Softcover \$16.95 (96pp)

978-0-691-14943-1

How is the heart won? Laughter certainly loosens the bars; cleverness occupies the mind, leaves the creature unprotected. After that the heart is easily cleaved in two. Troy Jollimore sneaks up on you. You'll think the clap upside the head is all in good fun, but just as you're laughing it off he's got your heart in his hands and you're wondering how it happened—you had no intention of falling in love. You're in a pickle—and you're in good company. In 2006, Jollimore's first book, *Tom Thomas in Purgatory*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry. His enthusiastically anticipated second book does not disappoint.

In *At Lake Scugog*, Jollimore moves in, around, and between interiors, consciousness and the subconscious, the thing-as-it-is and the thing we perceive, as in his title poem: “while in the cabin's shade, the gap between / the words I said /and those I remember saying / is just wide enough to contain / the remains that remain / of what I assumed I knew.”

Perhaps this is not altogether surprising coming from a philosopher: Jollimore holds a doctorate in philosophy from Princeton and teaches at California State University Chico, where he is director of the Humanities Center. But these poems succeed by craft and heart, not philosophical argument. Their content is humanity and what we make of it, mortality and what to do with it, not epistemology. They sing and lull, pick fights with themselves. Lines get up and lie down missing letters. It seems a cunning and dangerous tango between poem and poet, poet and inner poet, reader and poet. There is the sense that language if we look at it rather than through it may break like glass—or, as in the long poem “Imperceptibly*,”* that looking hard at something makes it harder to see. We cannot see milk spoil, a window pane succumbing to gravity, the sense in premature death, but the milk has gone bad, the pane is wavy, and a friend has abandoned the world in his prime.

Fans of *Tom Thompson in Purgatory* as well as new readers will delight in a fresh batch of Tom Thompson sonnets, as well as a trove of new work whose ingenious play with form and notions of selfhood is not to be missed. Certainly, Jollimore's second collection of brilliant, humorous, and heart-breaking poems show that unlike Tom Thompson, Jollimore needn't worry “he wasn't as good as people thought, a one-trick pony from a one-horse town.” It can't be overstated—he isn't overrated.

JENNIFER SPERRY STEINORTH (May / June 2011)

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