Clarion Review

Poetry

Coping with Madness
Philip Fletcher
Lulu
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Coping with Madness is "not for the slavishly politically correct or over squeamish," warns author Philip Fletcher in this audacious and gritty book. Readers brave enough to pardon the narrator's homophobic remarks and chauvinistic attitudes towards women will also have to withstand the many glaring references to the narrator's own genitalia and that of others, and forgive the blatant misanthropic tone. But beyond this noise, there is something stirring about the volume's subject matter and Fletcher's writing style.

Coping with Madness is written in a particularly strong voice. It gives a full-throated song to those who are downtrodden and weary, to the disabled and the marginalized in our society, to the voices we often ignore. While cheeky and snarky (think of Grandpa at the dinner table badmouthing everything around him, much to the dismay of his family members), the writing is also extremely authentic and honest.

Fletcher often makes clichéd blanket statements like, "Women are all the same, only after one thing…your cash! Bleed you dry then cast you aside like a used condom. God! It's all so depressing, who needs it anyway?" But in the next breath he says something quite endearing, such as, "On the days when you can go out and do your careful shopping, your sadness is intensified at the sight of all the healthy, good-looking people, who seem to have the life you crave so intensely."

Fletcher's writing resembles a junky old truck that is whiny and repetitive in its persistence, but that one loves to hate. Most of *Coping with Madness* is written in a form that loosely resembles poetry, but seems more like journal entries filled with imbedded rhyme. One of the greatest downfalls of this collection, however, is that there is no structure to it. It is full of clunky, unwieldy sentences that exist without order. The text is also filled with many typos and mixed with oddly placed commentary about Fletcher's own writing. A more obvious plot or

smoother transitions between the disparate pieces could potentially offer a way to see deeper into the character without losing the intensity of the voice.

At one point, Fletcher describes his own writing by stating, “The need to create is never ending, a compelling force from within; the urge to go on and on in an untried and undisciplined manner, an overwhelming desire to ‘come of age’; to combat the futility of my existence by using the written page.” *Coping with Madness* offers a unique and terrifying glimpse into the world of the lonely and listless—those among us who are searching for meaning and are often forgotten.

Colby Cedar Smith