Clarion Review

Poetry

Dead Serious
WF Postle
WF Postle, illustrator
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Dead Serious is a mature but not at all staid fusillade against the difficulties of maintaining relationships and the stubborn persistence of uncrackable existential mysteries. Men and women operate in opposition, although at other times they exalt in attachment. Joy from physical relations contrasts with gradual alienation of affection. Figures in the poems approach mythological stature when they're unified, and conversely shrink when they fall into weary repetitions of the same old conflicts, as in "Summing Up":

> *Now, it's Winter and War that follows,*
> *as is the usual progression,*
> *with maxed out credit cards,*
> *idol worship and irresolute resolutions.*

Low-grade cyclical strife is eventually replaced by a separatist détente tragicomically outlined in "The Infernal." Husband and wife are each ensconced in their own rooms of the same house, clinging to big screen televisions and communicating only by cell phone.

One problem of writing which gets under the poet's skin is the challenge of locating precise expression and slipping it by the internal gatekeeper of the superego. In "The Voice" he writes:

> *I hear what I'm about to blurt,*
> *before I blurt, and thereby*
> *sensor the extemporaneous.*

Other themes include dislike of war and distaste for religions built around a too-arbitrary God who is already accessible by direct appeal. A hint of mother issues barely registers on the radar, which is surprising for a poet past the summer years of life. The contortions of aging are addressed with grace.

Postle speaks more hopefully in the book's centerpiece. "From My Stoop" is a long-form nostalgia of boyhood replete with the reverence of the surrounding society which precedes an adult understanding of its sometimes cruel realities. The defunct occupations of the '40s and early '50s each make cameos: milkman, ragman, iceman.

Outside references present are both high culture (Baudelaire, Shelley, Monet, Lady Godiva) and the objects of everyday consumption (Wal-Mart, Spam, *People* magazine). In a turn of, well, pettiness, "The Tank" is a mocking of a stranger's appearance. The poet seems to realize how he's perceived even while poking fun:

> *Would she not kick my ass all over the parking lot*
> *if she knew what I'm writing?*
> *truth is, I'm a narrow-minded coward—*
> *but, a svelte, stylish coward.*

Postle varies the balance and patterns of rhymes, poem lengths, tone, and subject matter quite effectively. The language ranges from salty to suitable for children's ears. The overall quality is there, but a handful fizzle out on the launch pad. Example A:

> *The orange is a proud orange,*
> *as proud an orange*
> *as an orange can possibly be.*

Orange, be not proud.

Previous volumes include *99 Cents Worth* and *From My Stoop*, the latter featuring some of the poems that appear here. *Dead Serious* is funnier than the title implies, though darkly so; it's a mix of tributes to small pleasures and frustration at the varieties of dysfunction which may never be set to rights. Postle's earnest desire to be understood shines through, casting light and a measure of heat too.