

Catherine Cohen, *God I Feel Modern Tonight: Poems from a Gal About Town* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 69 pp. ISBN 978-05-93318-33-1 (hbk); RRP: \$18.00 (US).

This attractive and supremely readable book is a collection of sixty-nine short poems by actress, stand-up comedian, and co-host (with Pat Regan) of the popular *Seek Treatment* podcast, Catherine (Cat) Cohen. Poetry goes in and out of fashion; presently a type of ‘Instagrammable’ verse has become popular. The Canadian writer and illustrator Rupī Kaur (b. 1992) is the best-known exponent of this type of poetry, and like Cohen Kaur originally performed her texts at spoken word gatherings. The similarities end there; Kaur’s poems are often cloyingly sincere, where Cohen’s verse voice is cynical, self-aware, often very funny, and gives the impression that the poems are vehicles for comic observations about contemporary life, especially for young women in America. Cohen’s themes are sex and dating, work, the online sphere, popular culture, and politics, broadly defined. The poems are stream of consciousness, idiosyncratic, and personal. The humour is often at Cohen’s own expense: for example, “and I am still reeling from the time/ I slept with someone who didn’t know/ who Greta Gerwig is” (p. 27); “I’m okay my work isn’t good but it’s online/ and that’s what counts” (p. 3); and “one time I told this guy I loved him/ and he said ‘I don’t know what love is’/ anyway he just got engaged” (p. 10). The tone is cool and disengaged, even when insecurity, anger, grief, pain, and other intense emotions are clearly present in the verse. The biological obstacles and sheer daily grind of being female are also clearly expressed: “but now I know the only holy trinity in my life/ is yeast infection, diarrhoea, period blood/ do you like this?” (p. 12) There is sexual content, and loathing, as well as some affirmation of life.

The current age is one in which learning poetry by heart is a lost art. While reading Cohen’s verses is entertaining, it is hard to know whether this book would become beloved, whether an engaged reader would want to commit Cohen’s sharp, almost acrid, thoughts to memory. I resonated with “poem I wrote after I read an article om why it is so hard to go upstairs” (most texts are named “poem I wrote after [something]”). Something of the exhaustion that makes it difficult to climb stairs in a multi-floor dwelling (a sensation I am familiar with) is conveyed, and the concluding lines “it would be nice to be thinner but/ I have all the working parts/ I don’t want to get hit by a car at all” (p. 29) are a mantra that I chant (silently) almost every day (the sentiments are identical though the wording is different). Life goes on, it would be good to be different, but what exists will do, and yes, today I want to live, not die.

Cohen’s book may prove ephemeral, or her short thoughts may catch and be posted on social media, shared among friends. It was happenstance I bought the book, but I enjoyed it and recommend it to others interested in contemporary introspective poetry by women. There is sexual content, and loathing, as well as some affirmation of life. It is very realistic, and therefore relatable.

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