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THIRSTY FOR THE JOY

by Brian Doyle

review by Lina María Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas

In *Thirsty for the Joy: Australian & American Voices*, Brian Doyle captures “salty and graceful stories” told to him mostly “in streets and lanes and alleys,” as he wanders through Australia and then America. The book is an elegant arrangement of these commonplace narrations into beautiful “fact-poems” that, despite line breaks and lyrical elements, remain—through un-elaborated and familiar language—wonderfully accessible.

Most of the pieces start with lines like “I get to talking about . . .”; “A man tells me that . . .”; or “I meet a man who used to be a . . .” that situate the reader immediately, without pretension or overly-eloquent distractions. The book moves smoothly through the narratives in long sentences, paced by the rhythm of ordinary speech and by poetic line breaks. Despite the simplicity of the essays’ construction, they stand alone

elegantly both in form and content, mimicking ordinary speech while simultaneously offering up poignant and revelatory insight into the contrastingly complicated human psyche.

Brian Doyle is the editor of *Portland Magazine* and author of eight other books. He has published extensively in journals and magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *American Scholar*, *Orion* and in the *Best American Essays* anthologies of 1998, 1999, 2003 and 2005. Through this illustrious career he has demonstrated a talent for finding beauty and poetry in the ordinary. *Thirsty for the Joy* is the result of this talent, and a product of a gifted hand that seems to make the condensation of full human experiences into lyrical essays, fact poems, or short nonfiction pieces seem effortless.