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Poetry Slam 2000: The Voice of Nobody

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Ordinarily, I am a great proponent of the importance of being nobody—assured as I am that anonymity will be the hot lifestyle of the future. That is, once enough people have blown their covers with fifteen minutes of fame or shame, or whatever passes for celebrity near the apocalypse of pop culture. Then, of course, tout-le-monde will begin madly clamoring to merge with the nameless mass in which genuine freedom involves nothing but knowing what to do with it.

But meanwhile, for folks what aint fortunate enough to have secreted themselves inside a folk culture cocoon like AS220, the scrabbling for positions in the hot lights of mass media continues. And there couldn’t be a more shameful or sorry example than R.I. poet laureate Ray Davies’ staging of the intergalactic poetry whiz in divine Providence during the second week of August.

While this event caused a number of very interesting and entertaining side effects or spin off events, the main feature, a kind of queen for a day contest for them what allege to be poets, brought some of the strangest, farthest-out, most madly disenfranchised, half-assed hipsters to the providence area, and, in particular, to the empire street compound for the most part of one relentless week.

"I'm nobody, are you nobody too? Good! Then there's two of us!"

FRESH EMILY D.
Ordinarily I categorize the contemporary mode of writing labeled "Poetry"

As

"writing for people who cannot write".

For some strange reason it would appear that the absence of constraints present in free verse has led to a widespread misunderstanding which suggests that any "word salad" can be poetry: If it avoids punctuation, is an unbroken stream of consciousness or is syntactically challenged enough it becomes poetry by the sheer power of its incoherence.

In the case of people who participate in poetry readings or the more outlandish form called "slamming", what we have basically is a kind of histrionic spiel or quasi-lyrical rap, employing affected forms of enunciation, repetition and a posture of faux passion. Poetry slamming is just one more in an endless sequence of "creative" modes in which the "art" produced exists to transform the maker into an artist. In the long run, it has no effect... except that it legitimizes the use of the term "talent" on beings like Britney Spears. Cause once you have seen a tear streaked, faux poet girl launch a metaphor like "SHE ....... IS THE LAST, DRY, KLEENEX!"

Then suddenly "OOPS I did it again"

begins to take on more lyrical quality than one might previously have imagined possible.

For them of us cursed with the tendency to bawl n blubber when rare and beautiful words are aggregated to produce perfect, incontrovertible truths... poetry slamming amounts to little more than yelling and venting for people who cannot command attention without the gigantic pretense of EVENT POETRY constructed around them.

As I mentioned earlier the size of this event generated what must loosely be called "a scene" and the most intriguing exhibitions there-in, seemed to manifest themselves on the sidewalk. The official performances on stage at AS220 amounted to little more than an encyclopedic array of artistic sensibility cliches, and a here-to-fore unavailable compendium of poses and postures popular in the ranks of the half-assed pseudo-literary set. These soi disant "poets" have created an "art" which amounts to a self-effacing appache dance enacted between their egos and a predictable array of adolescent issues. Never was being nobody so noisy.

I had exchanges with several "poets" on-line each evening, after I had absorbed as much of the real-time scene as possible. All of them denounced "slamming" unanimously because of "BAD WRITING". Hmmm. I found it very hard to associate this mad scene in any way WITH writing, much less the superlative form of writing which I CALL "POETRY".

PERHAPS IT IS SUFFICIENT TO SAY THAT AFTER TAKING IN "THE SHOW" AND THE STREET SCENE- I FOUND MYSELF THINKING THAT THE MOST ARTICULATE SOUL TO BE FOUND THERE, WAS A MAN BANGING A TALKING DRUM.