



Voices From the Well

from stage to page . . .

Spoken Word Performers of the Twin Cities



Poetics of Gender Issue

Volume 2 ** Issue 1 ** summer 1998 ** \$4.00

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Welcome to the well



elcome to our first anniversary and our fourth issue.

As we bring out this issue of *Voices*, I am both excited and exhausted. Even as I write this, I am in the middle of putting together the Twin Cities' third annual National Poetry Month festival. This issue, consequently, is just a little bit smaller, due to my waning energy, but the quality of the work is as good as ever.

One of the most gratifying things about doing this journal is the feedback from the literary community, both within and outside of the Twin Cities. We recently received an excellent review from *Literary Magazine Review*, published at the University of Northern Iowa. In addition to being smitten with the concept of the poetry slut, they proclaimed that *Voices* "has many virtues, not the least of which is the inherent vitality of the contributions."

In terms of the marketplace, there's a great feeling to step into Borders Book Shop in Uptown and find *Voices* sold out. In fact, pending a few returns from our distributor, we have virtually sold out each issue of *Voices* that we've produced so far.

With one year under our belts, here is my dilemma as editor: how to continue to bring new people into the journal while still staying true to our mission of publishing only local spoken word/open mic performers. Like the open mics themselves, I feel that this journal is at its best when there is a good balance of new faces and regulars. So far, we've managed to hit that balance. But, it takes a certain amount of aggressiveness to seek out new poets and performers and to make this journal seem accessible. If you're reading this now and you haven't come to an open mic, or you haven't been down to one in a while, *what are you waiting for?* Come on down and bring your best work with you!

Fortunately, I have no apologies to make this time. (Yet!) I have been granted absolution for my blunders and have been attempting to grow an additional layer of "thick skin" to go along with

my editing duties.

About the Poetics of Gender

On now, to the current issue. In some ways, it feels like an anachronism to me now. When I first started reading at the open mics about two years ago, I was one of the few women who came to read. The few other women I saw at the open mics were often there to listen to their boyfriends or male friends read. A few of the men who were regulars at that time at the Kieran's open mic while welcoming, were also a bit threatened by my overt feminist sensibilities (although I *swear* they brought it up before I did!!) and there were nights when I felt like I was walking into a "boy's club". It's an odd situation to be in. On the one hand, because I was one of only a few women participating, and because of the friendliness I encountered, I often felt that I had been granted a level of "privilege" by being admitted and accepted into this *fraternity* of poets. But there was frequently a point where it became strange. A point where one of us would read something that would set everything off. Either the male poets would read something or tell a joke I found offensive, or I read something that was interpreted as "feminist" and some people would become threatened.

I put "feminist" in quotes not because I am afraid of the label, but because it was rarely at the forefront of what I was writing. With the exception of just a few poems in those early days, any feminist sensibilities in my work were purely organic to who I am, and were not intentional. While I believe that artists should write about whatever is at their core and primary to their lives--including race, gender, sexuality, etc.--I don't believe that the art should be subjugated to the message. So, I pretty much wrote whatever occurred to me, without much of an agenda one way or another. When I had something to say, I said it -- either in conversation or in poetry. I was extremely flattered when Dave Okar showed up to the now defunct Laughing Cup open mic with a

poem "directed" at me--*Shall We Dance?*--thus initiating our dialogue, the final poems of which kick off this issue.

Poetry Slams and Gender

I'm not sure I have a full-fledged theory going here. **However**, it is interesting to note the gender breakdown from the most recent ignominious *Season of the Slam*. In each of the first four slams, only one woman placed out of five places. I can guarantee you that the competitor ratio was *not* 4-1 in favor of men. Nor do I believe that the men's work was that consistently higher than that of the women's. And in the final "slam off", **not one** of the finalists was a woman.

In February, for the erotica slam, an interesting phenomenon takes over. **Three** of the top five in that slam were women.

I am not accusing Diego Vazquez or anyone involved with the slam in "dirty pool", nor do I think there is any overt, intentional sexism involved. I can say that there were a few evenings where the gender balance of the judges was skewed toward the masculine side. Moreover, I think the situation is more insidious.

These results would seem to imply that judges--both male and female--do not place as high a value on the performance and work of women as of men. There is something about the male performances that are seen as more powerful than the women's. Deeper voices? More "force" to their performance? Isn't it interesting that it was only in the erotica slam that women's work became more valuable than men's?

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this subject. Next time you're at a slam, watch the dynamic. Tell me what you think. Better still, **become a judge** and see how your own biases play out.

With that, I'll close. As always, welcome to our world. Come on in, listen to some poetry, and tell us what you think.

Laura Winton
Editor/Publisher

Dave Okar

The Role of Microphone Bearer

Well, now that I have become the co-host of the *Voices From the Well* open microphone, a moment or two of reflection seems appropriate. Just a couple -- four??-- year ago I was perusing the City Pages' *Readings* section and debating with myself whether I could get up the nerve to read my work in public. Of course, I did. At the **Irish Well**. That was *Poetic Justice*, hosted by Mike Matthews and Danny Iacouvou. They shut that place down and by the time it moved to the **Music City Cafe**, I thought of myself as a regular. We shut that place down too. Then the big-time limelights of Downtown and the sprawling center-stage of the Titanic Lounge. At **Kieran's Pub**, I feel the reading has finally found a venue that it cannot close down. Here *Voices* is maturing like fine whiskey in the warm wooden comfort of the room. The myriad flavor of all those words and the fruity textures of the people cultivated by Mike Danny and Seana. These describe some of my thoughts about the Monday night event. I move into the role of the Microphone Bearer with respect for what has come before, the rougher days of its youth. I certainly will try to live up to the high standards of that elite group of individuals who may rightly state that they are former hosts of an open mic. It is my belief that *Voices* will continue to evolve, grow and prosper. I ask only that you support us with your words and your presence on certain Monday nights. My intention is to offer a forum for the community, or communities, or artists that frequent the Twin Cities. Not only a place for recitation and entertainment, but also one of camaraderie and strength. Sometimes it is loud and obnoxious, others it is so quiet that it steals the heat from your heart, leaves you shaken. Stirred. Of course, there are conflicts, even derision, but these are inherent when a dozen and a half artistic egos gather in one mid-sized lounge. To my way of thinking, conflict is a sign of something, like a growth pain or a death throes. Which have we here? You know, it could be either one on any given night. Still, it is not only the hosts that determine what *Voices* is about, or to become. It is the collected weight of all the participants and the chaotic rumble we make of ourselves.

Anyway, here's to whatever we can make this thing do . . . have fun.

the POETICS OF GENDER

This is our final installment of the poetic dialogue, featuring two pieces from Dave Okar and one from Laura Winton. With these, we officially kick off the "poetics of gender" issue.

Parthenogenesis .

This phallic obsession, a Tantric release
a holding back. Like a stuffing of genitals, up
up inside, the only center I've ever enjoyed
basked in the over flow of grace.

Imagine living only inside your head with no
tomorrow or past. This you can have for a glance
and then the fleet altars will run over
with baubles and gold. Each a piece
of the shattered mind, a decent into this educated land
of guess. We are heralds at the gate
of civilization and wear the City like a runway
dressed with late fashion lines. Adam
& Eve return to sort differences with the snake
and take his submissive fangs into the temple.
A temple of Self. True, unconscious worship that blows
bubbles of time and matter. What more than to sleep
here in a lotus dream could a soul desire?
To wake in Eden and eat Apples while
machines tend the to Pastures of Heaven? A tide pool
in the flow of grace, this center without
edge, an imploded asymptote of release held
back and slithered by coils. The obsession
of parts to be Whole is the despoiler of Chaos'
ruinous plan.

To continue, split the Kore into two.
At the root of our creation Good takes Evil
with incestuous romance and pushes away
like an asexual amoeba. To behold only yourSelf
is the spine of kundalini's refrain when the serpent
rests within your head.

Hydra

I'm trying to
get over this need
to have the last word
but your words are like the Hydra,
each one loosed by you begets
two inside of me

and this Hydra, I think, is the key
to our human condition
our mutual liberation--
cut off the head of the dragon
who keeps sentry outside our windows
and two souls will sprout
in its place, free to play in the sun,
to walk unshrinking in starry darkness.

But from my window, this monster
seems more present, seems to pace
my path in more familiar ways than I care to count--
it's like watching a sad movie 10,
15, 30 times and you know it always ends the same.
The good guy's never gonna live,
the girl's never gonna get the guy,
but you watch any way, you sound the warning,
you cry naive embarrassed tears for the ending
that should be there and I swear--
if I have anything to say about--
one day, just one time, it *will*
end my way.

And I know I take too much to heart,
so many slogans and songs and silly notions,
and that it's not that only *I* can prevent forest fires.
But I sneak out every night anyway,
with my little tin watering can,
the flower appliqués of
an optimistic child,
putting out the small fires I can see,
the ones that won't burn me up,
green kindling that I am;
fighting the small monsters
that I can reach with my plastic sword
and garbage can cover shield,

dreaming of the day
I can reach high enough to
cut off the monster's head
and free us both.

Participation Mystique

Where I expected only one,
there came a multitude instead. Silent
rushed, a morningsong breeze faint
in the rustle of leaves Ghost writer dreams
scribe lines in my head. Messages from an alien
Earth. Goddess

estranged,
with a wait-and-see
approach to incestual pulls
and industrial drills, shrugs
the global embrace of machines
then leers at precise little lines. Magnificent
magnetic number piles her children mount
with glee, concrete canyons carved
by rivers of steel, these her
secret pride. Humans

aloof,
with a get-up-and-go
approach to nubile youth
and natural resources, shun the soul
-ful embrace of numen then lust
after circular twines. Potent
crystalline energy trinkets hidden
near the sea, old growth blankets taken
by the gnash of carbide claws, these our

darker side.

Where I expected a multitude,
there came one instead. Slowly
aloud, eveningtime storms, the shattered crack
of trees. Planet spun dreams rub oil
onto my skin are messengers, from
a now amorous Earth.

Goddess enthralled,
strikes the come hither
stance and Humanity is coming
of age. The curve and fullness of lakes
in dressing gown fog, with sweet juice down
her streams, she reclines into the mountain
and becomes a coveted
bride.

Humans amazed,
take a quickening
chance toward Her coming
to term. With technology and clearness
of thought, these purposeful fingers
and the confidence of precalculated probabilities,
we make conscious use of dreams to lie
encircled by heavenly lights and water-
lapped at Her comforted
side.

Peaches

Do not ask me to write of peaches
unless of course through scented fuzzy skin
I am able to crawl within their matter's essence
climbing over the pit and meal until I know
what honey or sting, and until I know whether
Peach is there to mask or show the fruit of itself
or what such fright might mean.

But do not ask me to diffuse the peach world
with pleasurable affectations and useless talk
unless of course I choose to borrow the scents
that might infuse. Else, I will refuse
to stand in the streets and mutter of peaches

able to drip such nothingness if I attempt
an empty beauty. So never make it requisite

that I close my hand around clung speech to
falsely comfort and falsely fold sweet
around the tongue and succulent as lies
we would believe because I am
not here to make the claim for easy peaches

unless somehow I find in them
the skin of hell as well as heaven.

Leigh Herrick

Prices and Flesh

Contact

with someone else

How I would love that

but at what price

what little white lies

would I have to

tell

what favors would I have

to lay out on the

table of my relationships

what balance sheet

would I have to

generate reports on

what body language

acrobatics

would I need to

demonstrate

in order to feel

the touch of flesh

It's all here

within my arms

within my mind

within my thoughts

ready to dispense to

the first taker

Unconditionally

unfiltered

unlimited

unmoderated

but the flesh is hooked to all the

social

Mechanics

of vanity and

industrial

efficiency

so my skin

settles

cold

in the lake of its own

passions

James Oliver Smith

Johnny Hazard

Downtown

I want to take you--

no,

I want to take me--

down.

Down

town.

Mother?

Spouse?

Church?

Duty?

The five basic food groups?

Not tonight honey.

Because I'm going down.

Down into the mire where the music

is the sound and the smell is

pizza, not pot roast, manholes,

not marigolds. And roses are there,

but for a price

and out of their natural habitat.

And love is in the air

but everybody has an unlisted number:

confidentiality guaranteed.

I'm going down,

and I'm taking the bus,

because in case of rapture,

this car would be unmanned.

Poem for Judy Chicago

Leigh Herrick

I understand why the plates -- each
its own horizon, reaching across the dinner table --
And I understand the sexuality of shapes --
the point that these are women's plates, reflective,
each, its proper satisfaction reaching within itself,
announcing its presence, who it is, and who it speaks to --
at least in many of us -- and in you --

And I understand the pulse of expression,
the wave of art embracing the hand the soul
that insists on its existence
lets it move
sets it free
lets it say it's here.

I understand why the plates, the table --
How very thoughtful to invite us all to dine
on the accomplishments of our predecessors.
Here, to come, to eat and never fill, to feed
without a single chew -- I understand necessity --
And I understand how, quietly, our bodies are the silent link,
still, to our grandmothers' china,
how the cups, saucers, and stemware of genetics and history,
of politics and culture, bear, inherently, our losses and
our gains.

I understand the bodies tied to life, Artemis unfurling
the umbilical flecks found within our ancestors' pottery.
There's fortitude in this communion. I understand
The Dinner Party.

Tied to the tide, swollen, swollen the soul of art.
We eat, drink what we are.
And in the long, tall halls that lead to the showing,
the talk is low beneath our energies.
We enjoy this supper of sounds
until, at last, all Heaven is astir, and all the angels
bent in whisper
that even God is jealous.

Body Politic

You will not let me live
outside of this body your
cultural stare holds me in place no matter how large
my soul can cast no shadow against
the way you see me this space
between my legs for birthing feeling
pleasure drawing blood defines
the words I can speak the days of
my anger the tolerance
you'll lend becomes repository
for your lack
of mother love woman's touch
excuse for your emotion's
impotence honesty would
spook you like a bogeyman
beneath a child's night bed slice
your manliness out from under
you turn the knife on me
fuck me lifeless and numb with the blade of
your fear not with flesh
you use for feeling.

Laura Winton

shot on location

he filmed every inch
of her feminine form
with his oral camcorder
and 35 mm tongue
it was an epic production
shot on location
assigned multiple
ratings for the variety
of erogenous zones
found in the script
G-rated pampering props
PG exploration stages
PG 13 stimulation sties
X-rated arousal addresses

t'was a film never finished
shooting take upon take
seeking the Academy's award
for best oral stimulatography

Greg Russell

Gone Fishing

you've left
a note on kitchen counter
"Gone fishing, be back ?"
the boat is gone from garage

I've been saving up notes
and I now have my limit
gone fishing, gone, hope you catch enough
to make up for what you didn't keep

you caught me too young, wasn't long enough
to place in live well or thread onto stringer
like my brother whom you've strung along
and taken with you, fishing

gone fishing, gone
fishing for time, fishing for things
you can't get around the home
because to receive you have to give

some time and time is always wasted
in this stream that runs between us
I can't climb the rocks or wade across
the fallen tree only reaches halfway

too dangerous for me to make the moves
gone, gone fishing
I refuse to take treble hook
and drag the lake to find you

my aerator is unplugged, I'm choking
choking down every word
you've left
more words on scraps of paper

than we've exchanged face to face
gone, "Gone Fishing"
I think I'll put that
sign on your grave

Susan P. Stein

Stone of love

We throw words around
like stones
hoping that when we pick up
a handful and let 'em fly
they'll get someone to
notice what we say
If the stones are picked carefully
the one we hit will
understand our mind
our soul
our intent
our emotions
our desires
but if we just
pick up a random
batch and
strike up a
conversation
We could cause pain
anger
frustration
fear
but there are words we
will never know
like
love
When we pick this stone of love
from its resting place
it is easy to see that it is
soft
fragile
nondescript
easy to manipulate
changing color
with the moods
fears
expectations and
desires
Of both the
sender
and
receiver
There is no single source
who knows
how to choose the right
stone of love
At the right time
for the right reason
for the right recipient
so these stones

MUST

be picked by the hands of two people
together
at the same time
for the same reason
for each other
or they will
simply
Fade away
into the lonely darkness
with only the satin
of their disappointment
lingering
In their memories

James Oliver Smith

Karyn Milos

World Without Gender (Ah, Men)

I want to take their
evolutionary determinism
their guy things and
women are like that
and fling them to
The Four Winds:
Let Fire consume them
Let Air scatter the ashes
Let Water soothe
The scorched Earth
And from the pyre
Rebirth
Sweet indrawn
breath first breath
of spirits free
unfolding as they will.

Barrel of monkeys

Women creep before they learn to walk
and after they begin creeping again
behind bars of post-partem wallpaper
and behind the backs of men

how far is man removed from apes
women are only one rib away
but now Darwin has entered my life
after the Pope has acknowledged him

I no longer have to creep and scrape
my knuckles to the bloody bones
like a primal ape to avoid the elaborate
yellowed wallpaper that God left

me to untangle the women within
between the lines of the words on
documents assembled by men which
I do not know what they mean

unable to find myself in the concealments
and commandments, swinging on trees
from limb to limb, on the tree of knowledge
limb of mine reach out for fruit

no longer creeping I've tasted truth
torn off the wallpaper and thrown away
the key to the door, the library can not
contain me, I have learned to walk up right.

Susan P. Stein

Sappho 31

Translated by Chris Shillock

I feel that he is like unto the gods,
the man who sits beside you listening,
breathing in the sweetness of your voice

and your delighted laughter. It makes
my heart pound in my chest for when
I catch sight of you suddenly
I cannot speak.

Silence seizes my tongue. I feel a light
flame coursing my flesh. My sight
grows dim. I hear a whisper like a
spinning top.

A cold sweat covers me. Everything around
trembles. I turn greener than the palest blade
of grass. Right then I feel like I am about
to die.

No-Win Situation

Now that you have submerged
your self into the savage night --
immersed your self in suburban ritual,
you no longer have a soul
now that you have lowered
your self into the pit
you find the rope has rotted
as you slowly starve me
your spirit cannabilizes
itself -- and you --
have nothing to show
for the sacrifice
I will find a way to
survive your self destruction
as you bring yourself to
your knees--Every nuclear
detonation is only a
hiccup in my belly
you're in a no-win situation
with your sexual mood-swings--
and your pain won't accumulate
into a feast fit for my gods.

Le'Nor Barry

Fay's plea

Betsy Ruppert

My hero, you're so big and brave and strong
atop this building, swatting down these planes.
They say that ape-and-woman love is wrong . . .
Ignore our size and species! Love remains!
You're irresistible, babe, when you snarl;
your roar is deafening, and sexy, too.
We're so compatible--we never quarrel.
(I've found it's wise to get along with you.)
This token of affection charms me so,
although I don't usually approve of fights.
Those people must be saying, there below,
"Impressive!" (My last guy was scared of heights.)
Now dear, you've proved your point, now let's get
down.
Just think--it's sure a long way to the ground.

Grandma Perry In Villanelle form

To Europe, where she first tasted highball
and handy-panky and lost her coat on the train
to the blond raisin's end, black sheep on a red pillow - lull -

Grandma Perry was the blue stocking
gone awry, short hair, never skirt. Gone by ship and train
to Europe: sopping up culture, sopping up highball.

Drunk, a granddaughter's ass between her finger and thumb nail
she's 81 years old, can do as she wants- even taint -
to the blond raisin's end, 83, with a blood red pillow. Dull

how she repeats, memorizing lies, five lunches per day, all
the same, and forgotten by J.B. Stolen, her lunches, her stains
not in Europe, sopping up scenery. At breakfast, now, she sops up highball

Dusts the house of Elwood, history used in Europe, oh, Hell,
they used barbed wire for Jews, for East and West. Grainy
to the blond raisin's end. Black sheep on a pick haired pillow - ill.

Not in Europe, where she first tasted highball
at war, at love. Men sneaked through her, plainly.
Misogynist: lucky, her daughter born dead, a stain
to the white raisin's end - black sheep on a blood red pillow.

Esther Perry

Genesis

Laura Winton

Editor/Author's Note: Even as I put this story into this issue, I anticipate the irate discussions that will follow. Basically, here's the history on this story: I used to joke that if biology is truly destiny, then it was obvious that women were meant to administrate things and men were meant to do the heavy lifting, and that somewhere along the way, men has subverted this natural order. I have actually had women's art journals tell me this poem is "too feminist". Male bashing? Probably. But no more than the original creation story "bashes" women. Anyway, as always, I hope this story will generate some discussion, possibly even some controversy.

In the beginning, there was the Goddess. And the Goddess moved freely among the heavens, with all of her angels and handmaidens. One day, the goddess looked out over the heavens and she was moved with the desire to create. So she called together her angels and handmaidens. I want to create something new, some new life.

And she picked out a little star from the heavens and began to shape it in her hands. She molded the little star into a round ball, and out of the clay of that little ball, she molded canyons and mountains and beds for rivers and oceans. She created trees and grasses and flowers and plants of every kind. She set forth rain enough

to fill the oceans and rivers and to nourish the plants. She looked at what she had created so far and she was pleased with the beauty of this little ball. And the Goddess created two bright orbs of fire to cast light upon her little star. She created a bright sun to light up the daytime, and an orb that she called the moon, that was less bright, but still shone beautifully off of the rivers and the oceans. And out of the light of the Sun, there was nourishment for the flowers and trees and plants. And then she set forth gentle breezes so that the trees and the flowers could dance in the sunlight and in the light of the moon. And she called the light of the sun day and the light of the moon night.

Then, the Goddess and her angels and handmaidens celebrated Her creation. There was a great feast held throughout the heavens, and there was dancing and singing and celebration. The handmaidens said to the Goddess, your creation is very beautiful, what will you do with it next? The Goddess said, let me think about it as I rest, and tomorrow I will show you.

On the next day, the Goddess arose and called together her angels and handmaidens. See, today I will create life to inhabit the little star. And the goddess began to create animals. Many thousands of animals were created. Animals that flew in the air, and animals that walked on the land, and animals that swam in the rivers and the oceans. There were large animals and small, tiny animals. There were insects so small that the angels and the handmaidens could barely see them. And the animals were very beautiful, and they walked among each other in great peace. And then the Goddess said, I want to hear music, the most beautiful music ever made. And the Goddess told the animals to bring forth sound. And all of the animals did. The animals of the air began to sing, and the animals on the land began to speak with one another and the animals of the water began to dance, both within and outside of the water and they, too, began to speak and to sing to one another. And each of the animals had its own voice and its own beautiful song, and they all played and sang and spoke to one another. And the Goddess and her

angels and handmaidens were very delighted.

That night, they celebrated the creation as they looked down and watched the animals at rest on the small star. And again, the handmaidens stepped forth and said to the Goddess, now that you have created these animals to sing and play on your little star, what will you do next? And the Goddess, upon looking down, saw that there was more that she could do with this little star. And again, the Goddess said to her angels and handmaidens, I will think about it tonight, as I rest, and I will show you tomorrow.

The next day the Goddess arose and her angels and handmaidens were waiting for her with great anticipation. Everything you have created is so beautiful, they said, we cannot wait to see what you will do next. And the Goddess said, I have been thinking and dreaming all night of what would make this little star more perfect than any other in the heavens. And I have decided to make creatures like us. I will put women on this star, and they will tend to the flowers and the trees and the animals in the sky and on the land and in the waters. And they will listen to the songs of the creatures and dance in the sweet breezes. And they will love one another and us as we love them, and then the universe will be perfect. And so the Goddess took some of the clay of the little star, and some of the water of the oceans, and began to mold a being like herself. And she caused her hair to flow in the warm breezes and her body to move gracefully among the animals and the flowers and the trees. And the animals sang songs to her. The Goddess said to the woman, everything on this little star is for your happiness. I will place my will and my instructions in your heart. If you are kind to these creatures, and if you are wise with what I have given you, and if you listen to your heart, you will be very happy here.

But Goddess, the woman said, the animals have each other. You have made mates for them, and others like them that they may play and sing with. I have no one like me to play and sing and dance with. And seeing that she was right, the Goddess decided to try one more creation. I would like to create a being like yourself, she said, but maybe I will make this one

a little different. And once again, the Goddess took some clay from the star, and some water from the rivers, and began to mold a different being. This one was slightly larger, and its muscles were slightly larger and stronger. This creature, she told the woman, will be your helpmate. I will make him to complement your beauty and your sensitive nature by giving him strength and endurance. And just as you listen to my instructions in your heart, your helpmate will be there to help carry out my plan for this little star. And so, the Goddess created man, and she said to the man, I will place my will and my instructions in your heart, as I have for the woman, To the woman, I give the gift of creation. Through her, others like you will continue on. To you I have given strength. Together, you will build and create on this star, just as I have done. And if you are kind to the creatures, and wise with this small star I have given you, and if you listen to your heart and act as a helpmate to this beautiful woman, you will be very happy here.

And then the woman said to the Goddess, the animals all have homes to go to when they are weary. The birds have their nests and the animals on the land and under the sea have rocks and trees and bushes in which to make their homes. Where shall we live? And so the Goddess created a garden with a home for the man and the woman to live in, where they were sheltered by trees and flowers and where they were visited by the animals of the air and of the land.

And the Goddess and her angels and handmaidens were very delighted. That night, they celebrated the finished creation as they looked down and watched everything at rest on the small star.

And the man and the woman lived together for a long time on this star, which they came to call the Earth. And they began to name all of the animals and all of the plants, and they sang and played among the animals and in the gardens and they swam in the waters with the creatures who lived there. And together the man and woman began to create children as the man created objects with his hands. And one day, when the man was working out in one of the gardens, one of the creatures came up to him and began to speak in his own language. The creature was very ugly, with squinty gray eyes that made the man

uncomfortable. It seemed to resemble a large insect or a reptile, but the man was not sure. It was unlike any of the other creatures the man had ever seen, and he wondered where the creature had come from. The man was very startled and tried to move away from the creature, but the creature followed him and continued to speak. What's the matter with you? The man was very confused. There is nothing the matter with me. The woman and I are very happy here. Why would anything be wrong with me? But the creature continued to speak. You are letting the woman tell you what to do? She claims that the Goddess speaks within her, and you listen. She bears the children and what do you do? Nothing. You are just passing time here, you fool. You have the strength. You should be telling the woman what to do. You should decide what happens to the animals and the plants and the trees. She should not be allowed to run around all day and do as she pleases while you answer to her.

But what should I do, the man asked. The Goddess said that I should listen to the woman and respect her. And the Goddess has told me in my own heart, that the things the woman has said to me are true.

But the Goddess doesn't have any more control over you, fool. She has made you big, and she has made you strong, and now I am going to make you wise. Use your strength. Tell the woman that you will not be her helpmate anymore. She will now do your will. And she if refuses, you will use your strength to knock her down and to subdue her until she agrees. You are the one with the strength. You should not be doing what the woman tells you to.

And the creature continued to talk to the man in this way until the man began to believe that he was right. Later that night, the man came into their beautiful home in the garden and began to raise his voice to the woman. The woman felt a strange feeling that she had never felt before. And she tried to talk to the man, to ask him why he was talking this way to her. She tried to tell him that the Goddess wanted them to love one another and live in peace. But the man raised his voice again, repeated all of the things that the creature had said to him. That the Goddess had made him stronger, and that he was no longer

going to do as the woman advised him.

And the Goddess looked down, and began to weep. Even here, even in her little star, evil had shown itself. She heard the woman call to her. What was this strange feeling she was having. The Goddess told her that it was fear that she feeling. That the woman was in danger. I had hoped to spare you from this, my child. I thought that I had made a haven and that you would live in harmony forever. But the man has given in to evil and to temptation. Even as the Goddess spoke, the man was beating the woman, and becoming increasingly angry. And woman began to cry, and the Goddess and her angels and handmaidens began to cry. And the Goddess froze everything and spoke only to the woman.

I am afraid that there is very little I can do. I can make him stop for now, but now that he has listened to the creature, there is no turning back. He will do this whenever he wants to have his way. The woman continued to weep as the Goddess continued. These are my choices, my child. I could take you out of this garden and move you to another part of the star. But the man and his kind will continue to act as he has acted, and the creature will continue to tempt the man and all of his descendants-. Or, I could destroy all of my creation and attempt to start over again. At this thought, the woman began to weep harder. She thought of the beautiful animals and their songs, and the way that she and her children had played among them. She could not bear the destruction of this little star, her home, and its inhabitants. Isn't there another way, Goddess?

The Goddess shook her head sadly. The best I can do is to offer you help. I can make you a healer. And through your ability to create other life, I will keep you in harmony with the animals and all of the creations on my star. And I will be with you, even through the most terrible things. But be warned, now that the man has been tempted, things could be very terrible. Maybe it would be best if we just started over.

But the woman begged the Goddess not to destroy her creation. I will accept your offer of help, and I will be a good helpmate to the man, and perhaps he will forget this anger with me and we can live in harmony again.

And the Goddess relented. I am not sure this is the best way, but I will do as you wish. I will be here for you always. Be strong, Child.

And the Goddess set events back into motion. The woman cried to the man to stop hurting her, and she began to do as he asked. The Goddess continued to try to put her instructions into the heart of the man, but as the man was able to have his will, he listened more and more to the creature and less and less to the Goddess. And in this way, the woman and her descendants were subjugated to the man and his descendants.

And through time, the creature continued to talk to the inhabitants of the small star. And the inhabitants began to fight among one another. At first, among the garden, the creature was able to create strife and anger. And the Goddess, in her anger, forced the humans to leave the beautiful little garden she had made for them. And then the humans began to fight each other as they moved out among the earth.

Genuine Envy

The smile's real, the teeth are not.
The hair is grown, the color bought.
Her head held high, she walks long-limbed.
What fasting's missed, the scalpel's trimmed.
Her skin is smooth with peels and lifts.
The gold and jewels are lovers' gifts.
She's learned "Bonjour!" and "Voulez-vous?"
Her nails are fixed with Super-Glue.
The bitch is fake, she can't deny,
but seems to have more fun than I.

Betsy Ruppert

untitled

There she is:
His latest prop
 for masturbation
And when
 she tells him
he's a
 lousy lover
He shrugs
 and says women
 expect
 too much.

Karyn
Milos

And now for something completely different

. . .

The remaining pieces have nothing to do with the poetics of gender, but everything to do with open mics and spoken word. With the close of yet another Season of the Slam, the Twin Cities are about to field their first ever team on the national slam circuit. So, gadflies that we are, what follows is an older piece by Liam Kinbrae--a piece that was written after an official Voices From the Well slam two years ago, and not in response to Diego Vazquez's Season of the Slam. The opinions in this story/editorial are not necessarily those of the editors and open mic participants. Then again, they are not necessarily not our, either.

And so, we present . . .

Slamming Poets - Post Kerouac

People who don't know each other shuffle scared, proud or crippled into some room...some thinking that Laureate status is long overdue...some are curious...some bored, some are simply mistaken...and maybe there is even a poet in the midst...or the real potential for one to surface--a delicate heart in the non-participating audience that becomes calm, honest, and insightful once the Slam is done...

But the Event will happen as scheduled...poetic presence or not.

"Judges are selected at random"...the spokesman announces as he selectively scatters smiles around the room...and it really doesn't seem to matter who will hold up the point cards:

It's about the mood of the judge...which more often than not is stimulated by something somewhere between superficial humor or sex...with a touch of the bizarre...and the narcissistic rush of power they get when it's time to grab a 5 or a 1...to dangle over someone's vulnerability.

Some gulp beer before it starts...some sip coffee...water--each contestant has a personal preference for liquid courage...and there is more shuffling--and often it feels like Ed McMahon might materialize at any second to claim his status as patron saint of poetry slams.

And the first reader rises to read...and a false hush covers the shallow banter...and someone who wants to be overheard whispers...THIS MIGHT BE ANOTHER YEATS...YA NEVER KNOW...

And the initial reader on stage adjusts the microphone...fumbles through his hastily accrued stack of papers...lets out a frustrated grunt...closes his eyes...picks a crumpled yellow sheet...smiles...and mutters into the microphone with ferocious intensity:

UNTITLED

and reads something like this:

MOON ME, MY MOON!
I WAS WOUNDED BY THE
MOONS MOONING...AND
IT FELT SO CLOSE TO ME
THAT I NEARLY CALLED 911.

(then he tilts his head and says a sweet) Thank you.

And in the semi-circle of once hopeful faces surrounded the reader, one notices the non-verbal reactions:

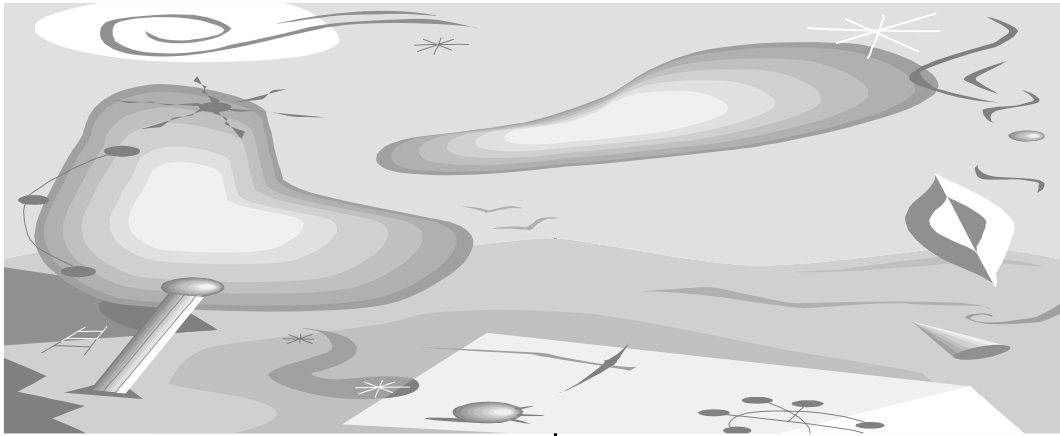
*an old man lowers his head onto the table--no one knows if he is meditating,

nauseous, or just resting until it's his turn

*someone else clenches a fist

*someone's mouth hangs open

*someone moves quickly through the area--going to pee



AND

*the waiter snickers as a judge holds up a 5.

And as the scores are tabulated, the old man lifts his head from the table, stares at a quote on the wall and whispers to himself: (in mock Irish tones)

WORK IS THE CURSE OF THE DRINKING CLASS...

then mumbles louder...looking 'round the room:
THIS IS EASY.

And reader number 2 waddles onto the podium--
REALITY IS NOW SUSPENDED

is the discernible text which flits across his eyeballs like a dimly flashing commercial on the side of a retired blimp as it hovers over a baseball diamond where the game was rained out an hour ago...and he clears his throat until he thinks he has achieved the right level of crowd-pleasing graininess...

and reads--with a voice ranging somewhere between Kenny Rogers and Winnie the Pooh--and he reads:

FUCK MADONNA, OK? AND
SIMPLY PUT, FUCK HER...
AND ALSO HER MILLIONS...
WITH COULD HAVE FED HUNDREDS--
OR, AT LEAST, DOZENS...OK?

and the two male judges hold up simultaneous 5s before the reader is finished...and he sees what's happening...grins...and takes his seat...

and in the end...to make a mundane reading shorter...and to keep within the time limitation...the REALITY SUSPENSION MAN wins the money...for who among the judges doesn't appreciate THE SUSPENSION OF CREATIVE EFFORTS TO ACCURATELY PORTRAY THE BULLSHIT WHICH IS INEXTRICABLY MIXED INTO EVERY SLAM...poetic or not.

In With the Out Crowd
Bob Holman
Mouth almighty records

Reviewed by Dave Okar

This collection of Bob Holman's latest poems, backed up by music and often accompanied by other voices, does not offer any compelling reason to listen to it a second time (though I did, out of a sense of responsibility to make this a fair review). The works are trite and unimaginative, which is the very tendency in modern poetry that Holman, in my estimation, bemoans in *The Death of Poetry*. The tape offers only two pieces that rose, however slightly, above the forgoing statements. *For Jorge Brandon* was striking because the depth of Holman's loss are conveyed by the tenor of his voice, especially in the last two lines. The performance of *Cowboy Heaven* is notable, at least for me, because it reminded me of the Velvet Underground and Lou Reed, musically, not lyrically. In fact, the most intriguing parts of the recording are the music, which is not necessarily the best thing for a poetry release.

The recording fails even when the target is the plastic redemptions offered by modern religions that he lampoons in *Leviatatin' in Levittown*. The overwrought nature of that piece, which I assume was meant to be humorous, is a prime example of the lack of power that characterizes this collection. The same is true of *We Are the Dinosaur*, which even manages to make the end of humanity sound cliched. Basically, all of these ideas have been seen and heard before, and they have been better represented elsewhere.

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Voices From the Well is a face-to-face community project. **We do not mail acceptance/rejection letters unless you submit a self-addressed stamped envelope.**

Submit 3 - 7 original pages of poetry or fiction up to a maximum of 2,000 words. Computer disk submissions are accepted in MS Word, WordPerfect, Microsoft Works, or .txt files. Disks should be pre-formatted or in a pre-Windows 95 format. Please submit hard copy as well as a disk.

Make sure your name, address and phone number appear on every page of your submission. If you submit a piece that is longer than one page, the page number and title should appear on subsequent pages. *We accept previously published work*, provided you have retained reprint rights. Please tell us when and where your work was published.

Artwork: Submit camera-ready artwork of any size up to 8 1/2" x 11". Graphics can be submitted on disk in .tif, .bmp, .cgm and .wmf formats.

Crass Commercialism

Free listings for chapbooks, tapes, or upcoming performances are available to Twin Cities open mic performers. Please be sure to include titles of all available materials, cost, and how you can be contacted.

Send your notice to Voices From the Well, c/o Laura Winton, 402 South Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN 55405.

4 **Le'Nor Barry** has a cassette of original music available for \$10. Watch *City Pages & Pulse* for her upcoming events. Call 874-6284.

4 **Love and Waiting** is the chapbook available from **James Gray**. Price isn't listed, but send some \$\$\$ to Northeast Press, 1033 Lowry Avenue NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418 & he'll probably send you a copy.

4 **Ed McGarrity** has a cassette of original music, **Alley Rats**, available for \$10. Call 588-9252.

4 **Katy Katy** aka **R.C. Hildebrandt** has a chapbook within volume 1 of **Malachite & Agate** (which also features May Swenson & Marge Piercy). Send \$9.95 to Clove Press, 6558 4th Section Rd. #149, Brockport, NY 14420. **Hildebrandt** is also featured in the **1997 Minnesota Poetry Calendar**.

4 When she's not kissing corporate butt as a third-shift computer operator, **Karyn Milos** is reading at the open mics and pushing her book, **Fishbowl Blues**, which is available for \$5.00. Catch her at Kieran's or the Artist's Quarter readings.

4 **David Pomije & Doug Pexa** publish a poetry & arts 'zine, **The Rape of Narcissus**. Call 813-1765 or 636-8393 to order or to submit work. E-mail them at douglas_pexa@students.mcad.edu.

4 **Chris Shillock's** chapbook, *Irregular Conjugations*, featuring illustrations by JAO, is available for \$5.00. Call Chris at 339-5002.

4 **Jim Smith**, *Voices From the Well's* prolific erotic politician has a number of chapbooks available. \$5.00 each. <http://www.winternet.com/~bard69/bard69@winternet.com>

4 **Laura Winton (a.k.a. Fluffy Singler)** has two chapbooks of poetry and a collection of short stories available. **Poetry: Cave Paintings and Decapitated Chickens Dance: Political and Experimental Poetry** - \$5.00; **Stories: Revisionist Histories** - \$5.00. 402 South Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis 55405.

open mic calendar

Monday

Every Week:

Wednesday

Every Week:

Friday

First Week:

Anodyne - 7 pm

Last Week:

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43rd & Nicollet, Mpls.

First Friday of each month, 7 pm

The Artists' Quarter, 292-1359

5th & Jackson (Galtier Plaza), St. Paul

Every Wednesday, 8 pm - close

Borders Book Shop, 825-0336

Calhoun Square (Lake & Hennepin), Mpls.

Last Friday of Every month, 7:30 pm

S.A.S.E. About Town, 822-2500

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-
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Passive Restraint

Love falls into an open grave, fingers clutch
the crumbled edge. It finds no mercy. Straight, tall
and stern, we throw shovels of cold dry dirt. Walk away
Significant couples, platonic bars, and televised
drug dependency. Insulate for safety. Aloof beyond
your quickened heartbeat. Face forward, eyes down, walk past
the promise filled smile and open arm sprout. This spoiled green-
lawn life. Cathode Ray-bans narrow the shadow-scope
splays in black and white. Beg like commercials
in full-color. Fingers twitch relief upon the button.
Desire for ideas that are not a simulcast alternate reality,
are not sold as squares of colored light,
do not speak of life, do not spill blood on our fresh
vacuum carpet. Sterile voyeurism masturbates.
An independent life. We weep for past ages; innocent
belief. We are sophisticated smiles, clean dreams
dry. Tasteless. Mineral water liquor. Mesmerized
by our reflection we stand aside, keep
souls on ice; preserved for eventual
perfection. A dream we refuse to live
for fear of its end. The martyrdom of Love
is unlike crucifixion it offers no hope
of arising. It cannot wear a halo or fly. We are left
alone without Savior. Only the eyes of the others
tell us when we are home. No church or cathedral.
We hold the distillation of time. We are
a passive restraint.

Dave Okar

Karyn Milos

Vampire Lust In the Eyes of Mars

It's not your
body
I want
I desire
to engage your
Heart and Mind and Soul
Explore
the private parts
Not even you know

I
want
you
open

You
cry "rape"
As my teeth
penetrate
Your life.

A poem in passing

... two hours before departing
we walked across
the highway 94 overpass,
looking down into the deluge
of vehicles amazed. I thought
of how little I know you.
Under borrowed clothes
is your lanky torso;
a sweet orange a Joshua tree.
All you is a mystery
beginning

a child of the big bang.
I said, it will take you
twice as long to get home
in this traffic.
I know the roads, you said
I'll find short-cuts . . .

James Gray