

Five Minutes for Fighting Monty Reid

Gregory Betts

A response to Monty Reid's "[Twenty Minor Improvements for Greg Betts](#)" from AngelHousePress Essay #19 (Winter 2011), itself a response to "[Poets Against Authorship: A 5 Minute Manifesto](#)" from *17 Seconds* (Summer 2011).

1. The authors write to the margins, pretending a claim on the centre, to keep everything in its place. But what if you find, as you try to recline with your smoke and your wine, your seat other-wise occupied?
2. The drama begins: you hear a we voice drumming we-we-we from the tinny typing of the dictionary; a we potential and a little less. It is such a small word for such a large stage.
3. And before you join in chanting that typewriting standard, sing cursively of handwriting to handiwork to manual labour to manifest-o: thee olde handy manifestations of power. (Only an underpaid author would see employment opportunities in a handjob.)
4. Beside you, leaning back in the aisles, Christian Bök says, "I became a poet because it is the only vocation where you are encouraged to drink on the job." A sober poet is one less poet, but there are lots of ways to see yourself deranged.
5. So, Monty, quit wrestling your program and go with the show's flow. It seems like a miserable French battle-cry: "The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man." Let it flow, let it flow, let it flow.
6. You mutter at the stage, "Are poets above the law?" That's like thinking yourself free on the top bunk in a 8 x 12 two-bit cell with a skylight. You're still in prison, baby, and prison minds don't have time to rhyme. In this panopticon, we're all soldiers for sale or rent. (*soldier, by the way, comes from the Roman word for gold; for 'one who is paid'*)
7. Speaking of prisons: you know that you are born into the house of language, and you can see you age in language, but when you die your body is returned to the State.

8. Scene change: forty years ago, our friend bill bissett sings true: “poetry is th peopuls its absurd evn that it gets sold but whenevr it is sold ther is so littul benefit from it anyway to th poet / writing can be used to free or oppress / poets can be used to free or oppress”.
9. Catholic McLuhan doesn't approve this radical interruption: an inverted Cassandra whom everybody heard and everybody followed, but nobody noticed that he was looking the other way in the rear-view mirror.
10. Even he knew that being Catholic isn't necessarily good. Poets, out behind, in the alley, get religion about as regularly as syphilis. Both can be cured in a clinic.
11. An author, inside, is a con-scripted writer.
12. Intermission recidivism: the Canadian authors sip together and marvel and hale the “Royalty Statement” that makes them deeply invested in the act. It sounds like a loyalty program for the interpollated. You know, they nod to each other, there's a grant program for every compromise you are willing to make.
13. Outside the financial fantasyland, a working class hero is someone who bleeds. Doped with religion and sex and TV, till you're so fucking crazy you try to write yourself free.
14. Or you flounder and drown: you fish your wish; book, line, and inkstain. Sinking into the remaindered bin until you are beaten and pulped.
15. Some poets know before they begin: when the best conceivable Royalty Statement is less than 1/10th the poverty line, sorry pal, you ain't in the system – you're the welcome mat.
16. It's true that Robert Service made it all the way to high tea with the Queen (the only true eventual source of royalties): his first poem was “The Shooting of Dan McGrew,” his second “The Cremation of Sam McGee.” His first book sold 3 million copies; the best-selling book of poetry in the 20th century. But now, do your author friends read him, or are they like me?
17. Now, for those sconeless poets, writing for crumpets isn't enough for to feed. As Guy Debord once said: “ideas improve... Plagiarism is necessary. Progress demands it.” (in a line naturally stolen from Lautréamont)
18. It may sound shocking, but nothing is the currency of poetry. It is also the hardest poem for a poet to write. It is most often the best.

19. The lights go out again, the show resumes: if you look different, you see differently. Instead of the apple or the forest for the trees; behind the curtain, the children working in the Apple factory.
20. The show empties out, the theatre cleaned until not an errant hair disturbs what must always be. The writers admire their hand in the pantomime, a travesty of dynamic characters undermined. For whom does this system toil? Radical poetry means no theatre, no tickets, no scenery: it means outside or not at all; it means total art, artifice, artistry.

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