

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Kevin McGowin

SO TODAY I got my copy of *The Best American Poetry 2000*. And no, I didn't buy it – I am one of ten winners of the AWP's "What Are Your Favorite American Poems of the Twentieth Century?" contest, which I'd forgotten I'd entered. The contest is obviously random, as none of the poets I mentioned are included in this book (they rarely are, or in the *Best Short Stories* books, either) – and after leafing through it hoping to get a jolt, I'm gladder'n'ell the thing retails for \$30 so I can take it to Borders and tell them it was a gift, but I'd already read all the shit in there years ago, as it's all the same poem, and might I exchange it for three pounds of coffee so I can save my \$30 for booze? That's what I'm gonna do with it, and it's gonna be tomorrow.

Why? Because it fucking *sucks* is why, and it sucks because it's the same boring and predictable "contest" shit that's been held up as the "best" ever since I can remember, which is why no one reads poetry anymore save for you on the lunatic fringe, and it ain't *this* crap you're reading, either. I guess academics and pedantic neo-PC grad students affect to appreciate its measured whimsy, but it has no *blood* in it, and the people that write these poems and the people that publish them are the lousiest fucking assholes and enemies of Art in America, just like King points out in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" that the true enemy of civil rights isn't the Kluxer but the white moderate.

This is poetry for white moderates if ever there WAS some, bub, and the fact that some of these white moderates want to cloud the issue by being of ethnic decent and writing shitty poems about it makes their "political" stance even more liable to make you *heave*, if you've got any blood, semen, vaginal juices, bone marrow and can or have been passionate or angry at least *once* in your life. This is the point: so long as you're *lucid*, you had *better* not write with your head but with your liver, heart, and genitals, or you suck. Would you like to reply to that last line with some balanced whimsy designed to show veiled hostility at my philistine ignorance? Well, there you go, then.

Poetry and literary fiction in America are not dead, like they say every year or so – we could only be so lucky! They're in the ICU hooked up to machines to keep them breathing and alive, sallow *corpses* of logos, pretentious and lying like somebody fronting for the health of some Old Fuck who shot his wad 35 years ago – *no, my dad*

*is fine!* Say, have you read any of that *New Yorker*-ish shit lately? And people wondered at me when I wrote in these pages three years ago that Lou Reed was one of the five or so greatest active poets in America.

People laugh at me less and less, actually.

I think I rather miss it.

When the bullet hits the bone I might or might not have been worth a shit at anything I set out to be worth a shit at: a writer, a teacher, a lover, a friend, a boozier, a womanizer, a devotee of Christian mysticism, fencing, chess, Bach, Mahler, and laughing about it all the whole, damn time. But I don't give 20 kilometers in a leaky old boat anymore, and that's why I still do it – I rarely give public readings, but I churn out a private and impassioned manifesto every night at the keyboard and then put them aside, drenched in sweat and piss and having just attacked the paper with my very last regret in the world. I take cheap speed and I drink cheap booze, I stay up all night and write my cock off, and you know what? I don't especially think anyone else *should* carry on as such, that's not my deal. My deal is that all right, I'm an asshole, my writing was shit and I couldn't make you come, so now you don't have ME to blame if you ever, EVER, want something in your life with a passion that thins out your blood and you piss it away. Get it? Life is not meant to serve Art. Art is meant to serve Life, and hopefully to serve an ace right through your cerebral cortex while it's at it, and if it doesn't, well, do something else.

In these pages we have the work of men and women who lead a myriad of different lives, in different places, and yet all come together with some fucking *passion* that you rarely ever found and sure as shit find a lot more rarely these days. Why is that? I don't know, nor do I care, and every generation thinks it's the Lost Generation and everybody's got a bitch. The question is, how well can you bitch, huh? Because there's nothing worse than a Pedestrian Bitcher, and when I bitch I want to shove out words like the most violent jail buggery, and I want whatever tenderness is left between those lines to sing for themselves.

And sometimes, the bitching isn't so . . . plangent, it's subtle, sophisticated, a transcending of argument at all. Can you hear it? *Will* you? I once thought I was preachin' to the choir when I wrote in a forum such as this. Now I know that to not be the case. We're all over

the world, and in said *world*, love and beauty come at a fucking *hell* of a price, and writing about them is a brawl, man. To express honest emotion in literary form today is a goddamn internal BRAWL, because part of you is dying and something's veritably raping its *corpse*, or, as Yeats would put it, "The winds that called up the stars / Are blowing through my blood."

You might consider this when you read some of the work in this issue, because whether a particular author agrees with my assessment or my means of expressing it or no, this work hits a Standard. And I'm goddamn proud to have been a part of it all these years and still be here to rant on it. For over 1,000 words, guys, and hell, that's good enough.