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VOICE POEMS

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VOICE POEMS

Thomas Johnson called a recent issue of his magazine, *Stinktree*, an OUT LOUD issue. He asked his readers to “overthrow the country of the eyeball and discover again the aural world.” It reminded us again of the need to hear poems as speech, as utterance. With a few exceptions, all good poems rely on the strength of the poet’s voice. In the following pages we asked four poets whose work seems especially sensitive to the sounds of character, to give their impressions of “voice poetry.”

A “voice” poem, to me at least, is one in which the poet permits another person to tell his story in his own words and in his own way. The poet, however, must choose carefully the appropriate attitude, tone, and speech rhythm that his character would use in the particular situation he is involved in. We all hear the American idiom, in all its fantastic variety, spoken every day of our lives. Why not take advantage of this and turn some of it into art. You can write some pretty fair voice poems if you have the feel for language “as she spoke,” know enough about people and the way they live and behave, and are willing to write and think with your *ears*. Too many poets slip into their special “poetry” voice and stay there, poem after poem, book after book. The voice poem will help to break up this waterfall of sameness.

Dave Etter

HEAT WAVE

The house smells like we had smelly socks for supper.
Under my chair is no place for your roller skates.
I sure wish those cicadas would shut the hell up.
Movies, movies, movies, that's all you care about.
No, I aint worried, a tornado would improve Elm Street.
My front name? Now what kind of dumb lingo is that?
Let your mother explain "opera house," she's old enough.
Go join the 4-H Club, it sure wont bother me none.
Dont call me a grouch, young lady, and I mean it.
What? You drinking another can of Green River again?
I'll sit here and sweat in my shorts if I want to.
Monday night, and I feel already I've worked a week.

RETURN TO RIVER STREET

That's the place, 12 River Street, our old house.
And your tire is still hanging from the maple tree.
Let's get out of the car, shall we, son?
We'll stand on the sidewalk and have us a look.
Your mother would go right up and ring the bell
but I dont want to bother them for an inside tour.
Up there where the shades are pulled was your room.
Do you remember the Lionel train you played with?
The track went all around, even under your bed.
I cant believe we've been gone for five years.
Kansas City is okay and the job is going fine.
But you're not as happy as I'd have you, my boy.
You were a real Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn here,
the Ausagaunaskee River being just down the bank.
Maybe it was wrong to move, to leave this town.
Some men can be led astray and not even know it.
You'd better not swing on the tire, son.
Come on, get off, it's not yours to fool with now.
Oh, well, go ahead and have yourself some fun.
Then let's get a cold pop and get back on the road.