

GV6, The Odyssey: Poets, Passion, and Poetry

Film: GV6, THE ODYSSEY: POETS, PASSION, and POETRY
Graffiti Verite' Documentary Series

Directed by Bob Bryan

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Running Time 72 Minutes <http://www.graffitiverite.com/>

Reviewed by Richard Wilhelm

Emily Dickinson famously said that real poetry made her feel as if her body were so cold no fire could ever warm her or as if the top of her head were taken off. For Johnny Masuda, "Poetry is about kicking your fucking ass." It amounts to the same thing. All poets strive to write the poem that shocks the reader into awareness, changes the reader in some way, expands a reader's consciousness. This documentary is a tapestry of 31 voices talking about their views of poetry, what inspires them to write, and their process. I'll state my one criticism of the film and get it out of the way: one wishes more time were spent with fewer poets so that the viewer got to know several poets and their ideas about writing more intimately. But, as with criticizing a sumptuous seven-course Italian meal because you just can't eat everything, it's not the worst of complaints.

Of the 31 poets interviewed in the documentary, only Wanda Coleman and Luis Campos were familiar names to this reviewer. Happily, that is no longer the case. Many fine poets are featured in this film though space does not allow listing them all.

Kamau Daaood describes the writing process as a process of self-discovery, a "looking outward, and a looking inward, looking out again and looking in." "I'm talking to me, the me that exists in my imagination," says Wanda Coleman. She

says that, for her, the poem is often written before she sets it down on paper.

FrancEyE talks about writing as self-discovery. "I don't know who I am and I want to find out." She adds in the bonus Words of Encouragement feature: "You are the only person who ever was, or will be, you." Chungmi Kim also describes poetry as a search for oneself. She feels that anyone can join in the process, adding that English is not her first language but that she has discovered the joy, the necessity, of trying to render her experience of life into language. Regarding language, Elena Karina Byrne notes the similarities in usage of children, schizophrenics, and poets: "They all use personification, synesthesia, imagery, and different types of poetic language. When a child bumps into a chair, he may say 'The chair grabbed me.' Poets want to say that kind of thing."

"The power of poetry lies in its ability to lift the spirit, to reveal, to make life shimmer with vitality," says Rod Bradley. Bradley seems a kind of a Keith Richards of poetry, gesturing gracefully with his hands as he speaks, a la Keith, and conveys the impression of having worked at his art a long time. "I don't feel I have talent sufficient to what I'm feeling but it allows me to try to grasp this thing and, in the end, I feel like I understand something—I don't know exactly what—a little better. It's an act of discovery." He advises poets to be "fearless. Write without fear."

The 31 poets featured are a diverse group ranging widely in age and ethnicity. Nineteen are women. Most seem to be West Coast poets but there are folks from other areas as well. Many indicated that they also teach. Brendan Constantine observes: "I think that children are pretty much in a state of shock from the time that they are born until they are about 21, which is why so many of us spend our early adulthood deciphering what happened in our childhood."

The DVD includes as special bonus features: Wise Words of

Encouragement From The Poets; Complete Poetry Readings
By The 31 Poets; What Is Contextual Poetry?; What Is A
Chapbook?; and Poets Contact Info.

The DVD is a stimulating film about poetry and the writing
process and a great introduction to some lesser known but
compelling voices. Yes, it is a sumptuous feast.

