

Spoken Word

I definitely feel out of place,
at this late-night poetry
slam, over 30 years older
than this crowd of teens and
twenties
who are speaking
their bitter truth:

the fracture of relation-
ships, the lines of intersection,
narratives
of racist taunts
and kicks
to the fucking head
(from the anti-queer brigade),

and it's not that I can't relate—
fag! tossed my way
from all the kids
now grey with age, playing
sudoku by the fire
but that's *another* shoddy
poem I'll likely write—

for within this present moment
Naomi has hit her stride,
hooking me along
with her inflection,

familiar as it is,
an echo of a hundred thousand
poets who rarely glance
upon a page,

or don a pair of glasses
sliding down
along their nose, one that's
burrowed in a book
these flashy vogues
have yet to read,

and her eyes are seared in mine,
perhaps wondering
why I'm here,
so straight and pale a visage,
so Luddite
without a phone,

that I've likely never heard of
Twitch and TikTok,
knowing that I'd be lost—
especially in the latter,

where every word's a beat,

every syllable
always locked
in recollection,

where youth and fleeting beauty
pirouette,
in the shadow of a *bomb*
that's failed to show,
for generations,

of which poets
abandoned birds and blooms
to howl against its menace.

“me too”

When I tell you
I love you
you answer
"me too"

and perhaps
I misconstrue,
that you love
yourself
like the
affirmations
advise,

the ones we
see on Instagram,
that Rupri Kaur
is full of them,
churning them
out
like some poet in
a fast food
window,

where you pick
up a side of
"you're better off
without him"

plus some
platitudes
on the rain
to wash it down,

or maybe
"me too"
is a memory,
in the (not so)
recent past:

an abusive ex,
a diddling dad,
the gymnastics
coach who always
held you snug,

checked out your
ass
instead of your
landing,
after vaulting
and parallel bars

but then
I've always
read too *much*

into your
words,
thinking there's some
story
below the surface,

a recollection
that encircles
like a shark,
that you're afloat
in a punctured
dinghy
awaiting rescue,

by an aqua
knight who rides
the seven seas,

one who sees
a kraken
where there's not,

thinks "right
back at you,"
"ditto kiddo"

is the beast
of a thousand
fathoms
he's come
hastily
to slay.