

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Richard Oyama: The Poet as Comedian

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Richard Oyama has published his poetry, reviews, fiction and creative nonfiction in *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry*, *The NuyorAsian Anthology*, *Breaking Silence*, *Dissident Song*, *A Gift of Tongues*, *Malpais Review*, *Mas Tequila Review*, *Cultural Weekly* and other small presses and literary publications. *The Country They Know* (Neuma Books) is his collection of poetry. He has a Master's degree in English: Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Oyama has taught at California College of Arts in Oakland, University of California at Berkeley and University of New Mexico. *Orphans in the Storm*, his first novel, is forthcoming.

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## The Poet as Comedian

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*For Richard Pryor and Eminem*

The wrecking ball is a useful project.

Keats was wrong. Beauty is a bombing pattern.

The poet listens to a backstabber who's loaded because: (a) he's socially dysfunctional;

(b) he's sad; (c) he's happy; (d) because all his suburban homies back in dull

Connecticut do it. Yo.

O & because Pukowski did it. The Quiet Man declaims with Barry Fitzgerald stage-Irish

brogue like he just stepped off a coffinship from Galway Bay. He's the cause celeb of

himself. He wants to be blessed for his outrage.

He listens to poets who're elegiac-

nostalgic for: (a) the aquarian boomdays; (b) the bra-

burning days; (c) the kill honky days (me too)

All the bitches he's ever known are grayheaded whitemen in feathered bows and  
 earrings and heels.

They are pale gatekeepers, simpering machos, hypocrites, quislings, publicity hoes,  
 poseurs, self-important brownnoses & u-seta-be friends.

He listens to a feminist poet who pledges fealty to her labia majora while he ponders  
 the contradiction between porn & high production values since, aesthetically, that  
 cinema should be messy as shit, furtive, unclean, a Cassavetes handheld job.

He listens to the endgame ironists whose tone control is immaculately freeze-dried to  
 tamp down hysteria. They evade what they mean. Like, one claims to be "bored" by  
 white privilege.

These mothafuckers are lined up like Goya's The Third of May 1808 against the wall.

He listens to the wanna-be pachuco, the genteel poet who dreams of reinstating Mozart's Austrian court, the flowercrone in a bourgeois hottub. After the  
 strangulation, she looks like Shelley Winters drowned in Loon Lake, her doughy face  
 floating upon the surface like a Monet lily.

He listens to a hepcat who shoots up under the misapprehension Bird soared on heroin,  
 not genius. He offers to show me the exhibitionist tracks of his tears. No thanks. Da  
 junkie kicked. Americans love a rehab narrative. The abyss stares back.

Blake was wrong. The road of excess leads to the brokedown palace.

The silent biracial Chicana thinks poetry is the weeds of her disordered garden. She  
 kisses Plath's dead flesh. Neon sirens shred the night. / Another school on lockdown.

\* \* \*

After the introduction, applause drizzles on the poet like tepid rain  
. He's the feature,

the B movie after the newsreels /cartoons. They think he wears a  
crown of barbed

wire. His eyes slant in an epicanthic fold. He stumbles to the stage,  
feigning cowboy

ease. Man, that mota was some potent shit. He plays with his mic  
. He worries about

the hugeness of his

talent that, depending on the company, is either an elephant's

phallus or an icebath'd nub (I mean, like, the Ecumenical Council  
of Eunuchs knows

no sizequeens!).

He looks out at the crowd. The chalk faces look not happy or expectant  
but like a

submissive dog waiting for a biscuit. The fey poetaster thinks Oh  
how I love

cherryblossoms. Would you be my geisha? My Chinadoll?

He sprays a metaphysical Glock

enspiel at the motherhugger with bell-like sounds.

He begins to read but his internal metronome is off. What does this gibberish mean?

Faces cloud over like normal disaster weather, asscheeks squeak against metal, a

cough explodes like a fertilizer bomb. He fidgets with a sheath of proof, gesticulating

like Olivier doing Dick the Cripple. His voice grows taut as piano wire. He wants to

plug in, to burn baby burn, to spit

a well-chosen insult at the frieze of caucasoid

faces, to shit his pants like the ooze on his Buster Brown shoes  
(busted on the top,

brown on the bottom) on the way to P.S. 125 in Harlem, to say you  
cracker-ass

doofuses can suck my uncircumcised X-rated manga cock & leap off the stage like  
an assassin to run guns in Gaza.

He thinks I don't represent NOBODY but myself (whoever that is. I is another. You

all make me want to shed my seal skin like a Sekie & be nothing but invisible

poetry, Shinto essence. No model minority no doctrine no exemplar

.

I'd rather be Urashima Taro the Fisherman who rides a five-colored turtle to the

Eternal Mountain on an island of jeweled palaces beneath a sea of green. The gods

sing & dance like the waves. Urashima & his maiden make whoopy. But he rows his

boat & returns to Tsutsugawa. It's 300 years in the future.

Everything solid melts into air.

How a poet's born is squalid shit, unless you're of the manorborn. It could start with

pre-language when you're birthed into sound:

Clank of kitchen pots, foreign syllables: shi tsu fu, How much is that doggy in the

window? Radio = Sound Salvation.

The poet-as-

boy was bullied by José of the Gap Tooth who hit him up for nickels on

Amsterdam Ave. He was a biology geek in sixth, morphing into The Good Boy

outwhiting the whites,

whereas, latently

He bullied Michael Maiz for his poundcake sandwiches & his pool of lagrimas &

yanked the chair out from under Stephen Cram who bonked his bloody skull.

Maybe the poet was destined for a life of bondage like his dominatrix community college

student who crucified herself on meat hooks. What is the pedagogy of the colored

poet?

Words corrupted silence the first time he heard pussy or cocksucker & didn't know

what they meant. Language feeds the devil's work. The mauve shadow  
 eats the  
 granite ledge.

He dropped his baby fat, aced the mathematics, got into the swim of things,  
 scuttling  
 like a crab in the soundless blue, splashdash of sea-change.

The poet's family was a cabal of strangers: a Bellevue'd sister, her  
 dream of genocide was

a conceptual art gesture, dumping a sack of sand at his door's threshold.  
 A delinquent

brother sickened by self-hate & 20/200 blind rage who ZZZ'd on the IRT with the  
 queens all night & came back from Bien Hoa looking for alcoholic  
 nullity. A father

who loathed hakujin, except for Henry Wallace & Pete Seeger, artifacts  
 of the Old

Left who went to Columbia & arbitrate taste. The mother: an enigma,  
 a carapace.

These are the irreconcilable contraries out of which poetry is born.

\* \* \*

Sage orientalist wisdom:

Less cheese,  
 More rats.

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The poet doesn't say fuck you to the audience. He's too well-brought-up  
 for that. But he

feels pompous & mildly ridiculous. He imagines it preferable to wear  
 a red clown's

nose & enormous shoes & squeeze a big Harpo horn. The poem whimpers  
 to an end.

The sad colorless rain pees on him, a Burque squall. Gas escapes from  
 the gray faces

like a Hindenburg crash&burn.

What poetry is is a telegram about the human death / the savage wisdom  
 of animals / a

pogrom of the one percent / articulate stone / the assassination  
 of positivity /

samizdat / the ghosteyes of a seahorse / dismantling the structure  
 of whiteness / the

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sniper in the jungle /the naked heart of a child

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