

Trailer Trash - (book review)

By Kenn Hartmann

A hundred sonnets grace the pages of Jamison Mahto's TRAILER TRASH, a book of poetry that weaves through the fabric of bikerhood like dust rising in the moonlight from a full-throttle Harley crossing the desert at twilight. Just because I used the "S" word please don't turn off your mind remembering the horrors of high school English's strict interpretation of Shakespeare, Dante or Milton left you feeling the limitations of the Elizabethan Age weren't relevant to everyday shit happening on the street, well, you might have felt alone, but you weren't the only one thinking school sucked. What of Berryman, Rilke or Lorca? Maybe a teacher or two vaguely heard of e e cummings but nary one would have known what to make of him. Be that as it may, Jamison Mahto wrapped his soul around the form and came out kicking poetic ass.



There are 3 of Mahto's sonnets in TRAILER TRASH that I'm going to concentrate on, perhaps pick apart and toss remnants to nocturnal creatures prowling through the trash. The poems are "Kickstart" "My Blue Harley" and "Get On That 45-45" which I believe is pronounced "forty five, four five" referring to Harley's legendary World War Two machine, the machine that Mahto's brother Nates refers to as "da bike dat won da war. Duel 45's 1945 45."

Mahto has set up "Kickstart" in the classic form, like Willy the Shake, the rhyme scheme goes like this: the first line rhymes with the third, the second rhymes with the fourth, for a total of fourteen lines. So the first line "Kickstart my motherfuckin' panhead when life gets this hard" rhymes with the third line "He just didn't know i had an ace and i can play cards." The second line "I had to do the cat 'cuz he pulls a knife like he's bad" rhymes with the fourth line "He lie there without movin', left wife and kids feelin' sad." The poem actually exudes a blues motif; it feels like a blues song, like the classic about bad man Stack-a-lee, old Staggerlee's graphic murder of Billy Lyons, shot dead in some sinister St. Louis Mississippi riverfront saloon. In Mahto's version, although the witnesses said it was self-defense, a warrant is issued for the killer's arrest with the lament "no justice for a just cause." The killer becomes a "renegade renegade" whose only solace is "Hot exhaust, cold beer, coupla joints, on the run all the time." The fugitive's saving grace, "like an eagle i'll fky/Gonna jump that blue harley over there, ride 'til i die." Lest you think this sort of stuff isn't real, check "Bingo's Downed Biker Fund" on Preacher's page in this issue of Free Riders Press. I'll tell you right now some brothers and sisters reading these very words right now are down and out of circulation.

With a hundred TRAILER TRASH sonnets from which to chose, it was easy to pick "My Blue Harley" not only to talk about here in FRP, but I included it in my book MILWAUKEE BIKER BARS co-authored by Charlie Hartmann. The poem begins with a simple plea, the desire "to know how it feels when you ride wearing leather/When you ride with a pup tent, fishing pole and a feather." I guarantee, if you dear reader, dear lonesome traveler, if you have a pup tent and a fishing pole on your bike, you damn well have a feather tucked away too. While it seems the poet desires to know all these things, the images that keep cropping up indicate the poet knows more than he admits. "How it feels to ride wearing sunglasses/Under the moonlight, slung low and as smooth as molasses" has a total rock and roll feel, ZZ Top, hell, country Johnny Paycheck as the poem goes from "run hard and fast, to die young, to forget all the grief/To tell my boss he put his paycheck where the sun don't shine/I know it ain't much but, this life i got to live is mine." While the poem progresses through many travails, eventually "It's not about the future or the past, it's the moment/It's about bein' free, it's about goin' where you're sent" as if the poet is on a spiritual path guided by a supreme power.

Throughout the book, poet Jamison Mahto reveals his influences from the beat generation to Joy Harjo, artists Kandinsky to Warhol, jazz to rock, Oscar Peterson to Carlos Santana, but no where is the influence more pronounced and obvious as it is in "Get On That 45-45." The influence is deep and familiar, his own brother Nates is the culprit, Nates, who goes by the alias "zippie" but in true, hardcore fashion, his real name "Nates" is also an alias. His alias has an alias. He also had the 45-45, the war machine.

Mahto changes up the rhyme scheme, still in sonnet form line one rhymes with two so "Gotta get on the 45-45 take a ride" rhymes with the second "Gonna fight the good fight with all these dark demons inside." The poem takes us on a wild ride through everyday living biker lifestyle from smoking joints, riding hogs and being free. He even bales hay. The biker poet can "Stand, elbow on this bar and hold my own with anyone." But then reminisces about some petty crime, some larceny, the high school glory days playing ball, making it in the record books "Maybe i don't sky like Michael Jordan on asphalt joy/I can shoot hoops, play defense, beat your ass, one on one, boy." Although he goes to work everyday to "pay my bills just like you/Always somethin' tragic happenin', nothin' you can do." To ride a bike put together by your own hands is as bikered out as it gets.



Nates on 45-45

Alright little tykes, I expect a book report on this tomorrow, a couple of paragraphs and don't get too wordy, no fluff and please use proper grammar, I do grade accordingly. Try to get your report in before ten; I don't want to mark you tardy.

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