

# DISINCLINED TO RUN WITH THE HERD: *THE MAVERICK POETS* AND THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE APOCALYPSE

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## ABSTRACT

The historical avant-garde attempted to develop “an alternative relationship between high art and mass culture” (Huyssen VIII). However, this is a project that ultimately failed. In 1988, Steve Kowit put together an anthology entitled *The Maverick Poets*, bringing together American poets from various backgrounds. What these poets have in common, though, is their integration of art into life, which they achieve through careful weaving of life into art. By ultimately succeeding where the historical avant-garde failed, the Maverick Poets represent a “neo-avant-garde” with work that is edgy, and poets who are “disinclined to run with the herd” (Kowit 1). This disinclination allows for a collection of poetry dealing with various themes of survival through careful representation of the mundane activities and events of everyday life.

KEY WORDS: Survival, neo-avant-garde, American, poetry, revolution.

## RESUMEN

La vanguardia histórica intentó desarrollar “una conexión alternativa entre el arte elitista y la cultura de masas” (Huyssen VIII). Sin embargo, este proyecto fracasó. Steve Kowit logró editar una antología en 1988, titulada *The Maverick Poets*, donde reunió a poetas americanos con diferentes orígenes. Lo que les unía era su interés por integrar el arte en la vida y lo llevaban a cabo a través de un cuidadoso entramado entre vida y arte. Al triunfar donde la vanguardia histórica había fracasado, los poetas Maverick representan una “neovanguardia” y “sienten aversión a ser simples borregos” (Kowit 1), escribiendo una obra que se puede calificar como arriesgada. Esta aversión ha producido una poesía que trata sobre varios temas de supervivencia a través de una cuidadosa representación de actividades mundanas y de hechos cotidianos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: supervivencia, neovanguardia, poesía, revolución, americana.

Post World War II America was a land of triumph. Fresh from a victory in Europe, many Americans felt secure in the knowledge that the United States had finally become a respected world power. With the advent of the 1950s, however,



doubt began to creep in. America was suddenly plunged into a world of ideological war, which manifested itself in the form of such conflicts as the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Viet Nam War. Still, from this catastrophic world emerged a new group of poets, a selection of artists whose work reflects the main theme of America: survival. These poets, coined by Steve Kowit as “The Maverick Poets,” crafted works reflecting the very core of what America really means, and turning the paranoid existence of the United States into a mutation of the old Avant Garde style of the earlier half of the twentieth century.

The Maverick Poets, as editor and poet Steve Kowit notes, consist of a group of men and women who are “happily disinclined to run with the herd” (2). In 1988, Kowit put the anthology *The Maverick Poets* together. The authors featured in the book create a category of verse specifically their own, challenging the form and content of other late 20th century poets. These poets, ranging from Antler, Charles Bukowski, Sharon Olds, Jayne Cortez, Raymond Carver, and many others, candidly showcase reasons why their poetry places them in the category of “maverick.” This anthology uniquely highlights various moments of American Culture that relate to neither masculine nor feminine discipline; rather, the poems and poets featured in this anthology seek to erase cultural and gender norms by writing, quite frankly, about occurrences connected to the condition of being human. These experiences, relating to death, sex, drugs, and survival, belong to no specific group, and offer a release from the paranoiac view of Cold War America. As a result, the Maverick Poets embrace Allen Ginsberg’s idea that “War is abstract/ the world will be destroyed” because “only... poetry... will save the world” (62).

The world that will be destroyed is, in a sense, one which promoted a specific kind of literature. Modernism has, as Miklos Szabolcsi points out, “the pejorative secondary meaning of bourgeois disintegration, decay, decadence... more temperately... [the] literary phenomena... fall[ing] outside the line of realism and... reveal[ing], as an essential feature, an attempt to find refuge in the increasing isolation of the artist” (50). For many, Modernism represented a separation between high culture and mass culture, and the works produced by such writers seemed inaccessible to the everyday reader. Modernists embraced this divide, and what resulted was the historical avant-garde movement. According to Andreas Huyssen, the revolt against modernism and high culture by the avant-garde “was directed against the totality of bourgeois culture and its psycho-social mechanisms of domination and control” (8). The avant-garde ultimately failed to thrust art into life; however, in the latter half of the twentieth century, a new avant-garde movement, distinct yet closely tied to the postmodern movement, appeared.

Contemporary conceptions of poetry have altered over the past century. When Ginsberg calls for the “new revolution” of literature, it seems he is asking for a response to what Huyssen notes as “the historical realities of massive technological, social, and political change, which had given the myth of avant-gardism and innovation its power, persuasiveness, and utopian drive in the earlier 20th century to reappear from some banished place (169). Furthermore, as American art and intellectual life became increasingly depoliticized, authors like Ginsberg were seek-

ing to rebel against the cultural politics and conservative liberalism of post World War II America (Huyssen 169). Through their writing, the Maverick Poets manage to spawn a whole new breed of “Avant-Garde” attitude: the poetry became edgy on its own terms by doing precisely what the historical avant-garde failed to do.

Art, specifically poetry, which tries to convey a message on any level is constantly challenged, and poems that place an emphasis on the human experience tend to garner little attention. Peter Burger states, “The avant-gardiste protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences” (22). The Maverick Poets, however, integrate art into life by conversely integrating life into art. If the historical avant-garde aimed at developing alternative relationship between high art and mass culture (Huyssen vii) and eventually failed, then the Maverick Poets, writing “an underground poetry that avoided the preciously self-conscious diction of mainstream verse on the one hand and the unrelenting incoherence of conventional avant-garde poetry on the other” (Kowit 1) ultimately succeed. The only consequence to be found in this collection of poetry reflects the idea that *life happens*. As a result, masculine and feminine become hybridized, as the life experiences related by each poet reflect not gender issues, but themes of the past and survival.

Furthermore, as Kowit points out, these poets produce “heroic and colloquial poetry: large-spirited, socially-engaged, heart-centered and defiantly wacky” (2). The “socially-engaged” poets of this anthology cover anything from Che Guevara to rape, parenthood to parental distrust, as well as the ultimate goal of survival from a past littered with problems. It is in this survival mode that all these poems truly fall: each author thematically deals with various methods of surviving in a world where things ceased to make sense and where, as Antler points out, poetry is no good because it tries to convey a message. Increasingly afraid of the world around them, people see that these poets, who try to convey the simplest of messages, “come[ ] to propose poetry as a practice of nonidentity, a means of rescuing the kernel of *emergence* at the core” (Evans 15). As a result of this quest for survival, “poets have increasingly turned to non-literary analogues such as conversation, confession, [and] dream,” which allows them to express “messages” (Holden 245). These “non-literary analogues” are precisely what the neo avant-garde movement embraces — “good” poetry is created, and the messages conveyed are subjective rather than far-reaching. It is at this juncture that the Maverick Poets become completely hybridized; after all, both genders survive in much the same way, in spite of the contest presented before them. Life and art are integrated together, and the accessibility of the poetry achieves the bridge between high culture and the masses.

Much of the reason the Maverick Poets reflect a Darwinian, survival of the fittest mode lies in the fact that they were born during a turbulent time in American history. Many of these poets came to consciousness during World War II, as well as during the Viet Nam War. John F. Kennedy had been assassinated, and the world seemed a turbulent, difficult place to make sense of. Baudrillard suggests that Kennedy became the victim of a successful revolution, and as a result, his murder “has been neither avenged nor elucidated, and with good reason... It is the energy of Kennedy’s murder which radiates out over present-day America” (88). The vio-





lence of America is very self-conscious, as a staggering number of ordinary people became casualties during these wars and revolutions, and many of these poets struggled to understand why the world did not seem to make sense anymore (Evans 87). Ginsberg's idea of a "bloodless revolution" of literature can especially be seen in such a violent, irrational world. Huyssen points out that "The promise of unlimited abundance, political instability, and new technological frontiers of the Kennedy years was shattered fast, and social conflict emerged dominant in the civil rights movement, in the urban riots, and in the anti-war movement" (164). These conflicts, and the self-consciousness felt as a result, shaped many of the Maverick Poets, who wrote in order to offer work which erases identity and focuses on ideas of what to do with a seemingly nonsensical past, as well as an insecure American character.

If the avant-garde artists of the earlier half of the twentieth century sought to reconcile life and art together, the neo-avant-garde artists featured in *The Maverick Poets* take this to the next level. Full self-conscious of the world around them, each author represented in the anthology offers a hybrid of art and life. Kowit includes pictures drawn by Charles Bukowski, Ron Koertge, Hank Malone, Jose Montoya, Harold Norse, Austin Straus, and Al Zolynas, which points to the notion that it is not just words that make this anthology so avant-garde. Rather, the mixture of mediums allows for the neo-avant-garde in the United States "one politically feasible way to react to the classical avant-garde and to cultural tradition in general [by] declar[ing] the death of all art and literature and [ ] call[ing] for cultural revolution" (Huyssen 165). Of course, the Maverick Poets, in producing such forms of poetry and line drawings, are declaring not the death of *all* art and literature, but the demise of the canonical "high" forms of each. Their revolution calls for simplicity and canonization of mass culture —something everyone who was a product of World War II and other historical atrocities can enjoy, recognize, and be moved by. For example, Charles Bukowski, poet of the drunk and disaffected, finds a place beside Sharon Olds, whose frank descriptions of sex and motherhood mesh with the idea of feeling lost and finding inspiration in the most seemingly banal of places.

This somewhat successful revolution of the written word put forth by the Maverick Poets seeks to explain this method of coping, and this idea of survival. Loverne Brown says in "Checkmate," "That sense of peril" is "endemic to the times we live in,/ keeping nerve and eye alert" (19). Furthermore, the message of tumultuous times comes through in Antler's "You're Poetry's No Good Because It Tries to Convey A Message":

Tell it to all the ears, breast, cocks and balls cut off in every war,  
Tell it to all the beautiful eyes gouged out in every war,  
Tell it to the pyramid of human skulls that never stops growing,  
Tell it to the decapitated head held up to gape twitching corpse jeering crowd  
Tell it to the fact we're all in Auschwitz because any second every city can become  
Holocaust (9)

Antler warns of the perils of forgetting the horrible past, which is, as Brown notes, endemic to the times we live in. America is, as Jean Baudrillard notes, "pow-

erful and original; America is violent and abominable. We should not seek to deny either of these aspects, nor reconcile them” (88). As a result of this “paradoxical grandeur” (Baudrillard 88), America continues trying to reinvent itself through various means, but the chaotic world that spawned these poets must remember the past so they can endure the present.

America may be powerful and original, and even violent and abominable in many respects, and the Maverick Poets embrace this landscape littered with desperation alternating with hope. The lives of the men and women portrayed in the anthology intertwine themselves in an effort to reconcile this violent, abominable past with an uncertain future. The unstable past plays a large part in shaping not only the lives of these poets as it relates to their national identity, but also to their personal lives. For example, Raymond Carver’s “Rain” relates the idea of a person lying in bed, deciding whether or not they should get up and have a productive day. Carver decides to stay in bed, musing over the idea of “Would I live my life over again?/Make the same unforgivable mistakes?/Yes, given half a chance. Yes” (30). Brian Scobie comments that, as we read Carver’s work, “We are invited to enter not a “place” but a predicament. The question remains how far that predicament is culturally determined” (275). Carver’s predicament indicates a problem many of us face: whether or not our past is littered with mistakes (and it most often is), and how to feel about those errors. Similarly, Dorianne Laux, in “Teaching Poetry with Pictures,” states, “The past pushes through me” (95). The past becomes a predicament, or perhaps predicaments are always part of the past, and this idea is further exacerbated by a country whose history is laced with war, and the push to reconcile a world that

tends both towards absolute insignificance (all things tending to become equal and therefore canceling each other out in their power) and towards absolute originality —today even more than 150 years ago, the effects having been multiplied by geographical extension. *This is a world that has shown genius in its irrepressible development of equality, banality, and indifference.* (Baudrillard 89)

This “irrepressible development” of reconciling the past allows for America to live with itself after such a bloody, violent history. Both Carver and Laux express the idea that the only way to reconcile that past is to write about it, and hope that the mistakes made show the genius Baudrillard attributes to America. One cannot go forward, one cannot simply end up where they are with no justifiable reason whatsoever unless their past, as Laux notes, “pushes through.”

For the Maverick Poets, this idea of a past closely links itself to methods and modes of survival. In Charles Bukowski’s “History of a Tough Motherfucker,” the poet describes a cat he finds on his doorstep: “a white cross-eyed tailless cat” which he takes in, feeds, and nurses back to health. Bukowski notes that the miserable beast “grew to trust me until a friend drove up the driveway/ and ran him over” (27). Again, Bukowski nurses the creature back to health, and during an interview detailed in the poem, the author suggests that it is the indomitable spirit of the cat that inspires him:

and now sometimes I'm interviewed, they want to hear about  
 life and literature and I get drunk and hold up my cross-eyed,  
 shot, runover de-tailed cat and I say, "look, look  
 at *this!*"  
 but they don't understand, they say something like, "you  
 say you've been influenced by Celine?"  
 "no," I hope the cat up, "by what happens, by  
 things like this, by this, by *this!*" (27)

Influence for Bukowski comes in the most basic form of survival. It's not enough to say that the great writers of the world inspire him; rather, Bukowski realizes that it's the miracle of endurance in a seemingly cruel world, one where, once you've been healed once, there's still the chance of getting run over by a friend. For most of these poets, then, the idea of influence seems non-existence; that is, the *emergence* of a kernel, as Evans notes, takes precedence over all other events. Something so small, such as the appearance of a sickly cat, can produce great things.

The emergence materializes in the form of an identity related to ideas that life happens, rather than being attached to something else. At the end of "I Go Back to May 1937," Sharon Olds comments, "Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it" (116). Describing the life of her parents before they had children, Olds reflects on the idea of people who may belong together actually may not. Although she loves her parents, and is appreciative of her life, Olds says,

I want to go up to them and say Stop,  
 don't do it —she's the wrong woman,  
 he's the wrong man, you are going to do things  
 you cannot imagine you would ever do,  
 you are going to do bad things to children,  
 you are going to suffer in ways you never heard of,  
 you are going to want to die. (116)

Olds recognizes that her parents had a bad marriage, a mistake, and wishes that she could allow them to rewind life, to return to an idealistic past when her mother and father believe that, instead of being the "wrong" woman and man, they are right for each other. However, she stops these thoughts, noting, "I want to live" and decides to record their history, and their pain, instead (116). This mode of survival closely links itself to Bukowski's; after all, this bad marriage provides inspiration in the sense that the author's parents, like the cat, will suffer, and cause others to hurt as well. Out of this, though, emerges the idea that, in spite of all the suffering, the past is always tied with the present. In order for Sharon Olds to exist, she must write about the pain, and record survival in whichever way she can. Olds, like Bukowski, finds influence in survivors of immense pain.

Other poets featured in the anthology detail different aspects and definitions of the meaning of survival. Jayne Cortez's "Rape" asks, after describing the rape of various women who murdered their predators, "just what the fuck else [were they] supposed to do?" (42). Cortez continues to describe similar scenarios,



detailing survival by pointing out what seems obvious: one must endure in spite of the laws and rules of society. One must find a way to, as Cortez notes “celebrate[ ] the day of the dead rapist punk” (42), despite a crippling and painful past littered with the atrocity of rape. Conversely, Wanda Coleman, in “Somewhere,” lets all the would-be rapists know that “there’s an alley with my name on it/ cold gritty pavement/ crushed glass.” She ends the poem with, “I will meet you there,” (Coleman 36), and by doing so, lets others know that she, too, is a survivor, like Cortez, and that she is prepared—and willing—to take anyone on who would attempt to harm her.

Violence done to the body constitutes one form of battle; however, America breeds a fighting spirit. After all, the country itself was founded on one war after another, and, as Baudrillard notes, “America has never been short of violence, nor of events, people, or ideas” (80). “World War II,” a poem by Edward Field, illustrates a more literal battle when describing a plane crash that occurred when he was fighting over Berlin. Field says, noting others who die around him, that he “chose to live rather than be a hero,” adding, “although at the time I believed in being heroic, in saving the world/ even if, when opportunity knocked, / I instinctively chose survival” (58). Choosing survival does not necessarily make Field less than a hero; after all, as Olds notes, someone has to live to write about disasters, as a way to remember times past and those lost. It seems that Naomi Lazard perhaps puts this idea best in “Ordinance on Arrival”:

Welcome to you  
who have managed to get here.  
It’s been a terrible trip;  
you should be happy you have survived it.  
Statistics prove that not many do. (98)

Being the “hero” to a country founded on violent actions lends itself to many ideas, and as Lazard points out, statistics do, indeed, lend themselves to the lack of actual survivors in any situation. Cortez, Coleman, and Field project this image, in spite of the fact that the battleground each project remains quite different.

Physical battles are not the only things the Maverick Poets comment on. To a certain extent, these poets want to impart the notion of living life to the fullest, and not allowing ourselves to become bogged down in the various day-to-day activities of life. After all, waking up every day, and living life in general, can be battle enough. Steve Kowit’s “Notice” offers this warning:

Take heed you who read this  
& drop to your knees now & again  
like the poet Christopher Smart  
& kiss the earth & be joyful  
& make much of your time  
& be kindly to everyone,  
even to those who do not deserve it.





For although you may not believe it will happen,  
you too will one day be gone. (88)

This admonition Kowit delivers addresses no particular battle; rather, the poet comments on the absurdity of every day life, and the need to embrace and enjoy the time we have, as well as the people around us, because, whether we believe it or not, things happen for no particular reason. The small, difficult conflict of the everyday seems just as significant in many senses as the larger battles dealing with rape and war. In fact, Kowit asserts that we need to pay attention to events of the past —particularly those that happen for no reason— in order to appreciate and value the present.

Awareness of our own mortality, as well as the absurdity of the everyday life, shows itself in other ways, too. For example, several of the poets in *The Maverick Poets* deal with events in their own lives, while also paying homage to those who have gone before. This is simply another method of addressing and recognizing the past, this time in both people and pets. Alta's "LOL" reminds us that "little old ladies is the term they use/ to make us laugh at the women who/ have been fighting for 60 years" (7). Equally, Jana Harris memorializes her horse, and the moments they shared together, in "Portrait of a Girl and Her Horse, 1965," stating "I think of you often,/my sorrel Goldico horse," finishing with, "But now... I cannot touch/ what has gone" (77). The memory of those who have gone before us, who have helped to shape our lives, whether it is the little old ladies we sometimes laugh at, or a particular creature with which we've shared loving memories of better times, represents a different form of survival: that of endurance. What endures is often overlooked, and it can be easy to dismiss those whose lives don't seem to affect our own, such as unknown "lols," or sorrel horses.

Perhaps one of the most striking notions of survival recounted by the Maverick Poets is universal, and not uniquely American: surviving the break up of an intimate relationship with a significant other. Relationships between people end for various reasons; sometimes because they are "wrong" for each other, as Sharon Olds points out, while other times because a partner dies. However, the Maverick Poets take this universal theme and put their own unique twist on it. Most poems about a significant other highlight good qualities. Laurel Ann Bogen's "I Coulda Been a Contender" takes Terry Malloy's speech from *On the Waterfront* and puts a new twist to the words. Addressing an old lover, Bogen notes, "I got it back/ pug-scrappy." She further states,

I don't need it anymore  
I have enough bullshit of my own  
than to cope with yours  
I got it all back—  
the call,  
the blue-white voltage,  
the singular identity—  
I have escaped  
with my life. (17)





For Bogen, relationships take away identity, and the end of a relationship signals a return to the person she once was. Furthermore, the sparring match between autonomy and dependency is one that needs to be fought on one's own terms, not dictated by someone else. Bogen's "escape" signifies another form of survival, one where the battle was between herself and her relationship. In the end, however, she manages to "escape" with her life—and her independence.

When the death of a loved one occurs, the Maverick Poets highlight these particularly painful modes of survival rather well. For instance, Judy Grahn points out that the death of her friend is odd because they "will be 34 years old/ the rest of my life"; however, Grahn realizes that when she surpasses 34, "you will still be 34,/ & how can we ever understand/ what the other has been through?" (70). This rather simplistic statement on the nature of death, and the fact that we go on living despite it, reflects the careful maturity and unique style of the Maverick Poets. After all, when death occurs, it is usually a devastating event for all involved. We can never understand fully the import of another person's impact on our lives until they have passed, but when they do, and we go on living, the realization of changing times can be particularly difficult to endure. As Laurie Duesing notes, separating "the living woman from the dead man" is impossible, because "the living and the dead never let go/ simply because they don't have to." However, she concedes, "But even with the sweetness of nothing, flesh longs/ for its kind" (52). This longing, and holding on to the memories, represents a form of survival in an odd way. As Grahn points out, death stops a life, and Duesing makes the claim that, although the living and the dead are connected in some way, the corporeal still longs for a solid being. Otherwise, a form of stasis occurs, which stops someone from going on with their life. This idea of surviving the death of a loved one indicates a different sort of battle, an internal fight to hold on to the past and the knowledge that there is a future that needs to be accepted. Grahn and Duesing show that it is possible to do both, given enough time. And time, after all, is the most important thing when dealing with questions of survival, whether it is reconciliation with the past or with an eye towards a brighter, happier future.

In "beans with garlic," Charles Bukowski asserts, "this is important enough:/ to get your feelings down" (24). For Bukowski, as for Olds, the idea of writing something down, of recording past pain and past haunts, allows us to "see and hear... everything that's happened to me all these years" because "Before long, before anyone realizes, I'll be gone from here" (Carver 34). It is not enough to merely survive in some cases; rather, the importance of recording, of pushing through a past littered with mistakes, allows us to continue living. Without realizing it, we are all part of Carver's notion that life is "A fine thread. Intricate" ("The Cobweb" 34). There is a connection to these poets, one which manifests itself in their ability to record life at its most base. These are the various functions so many people assume to be unimportant, and the Maverick Poets recognize the magnitude of small moments. Through this, they intricately weave life into art, while allowing for the presence of art into life, too. For these American poets, there is "joy in the collapse of metaphor" and through this "exhilaration of obscenity, the obscenity of obviousness" (Baudrillard 27), a true form of avant-garde revolution can exist. These poets succeed where the original avant-garde artists failed: they incorporate art into life,



this intricate thread, by “getting it down” and making it available, in the most basic ways, to anyone who wishes to access it.

Allen Ginsberg asserts that “History will make this poem prophetic and its awful silliness a hideous spiritual music” (62). Prophecy comes in many forms, and the Maverick Poets manage to stake their place on the battleground of literature. The hideous spiritual music Ginsberg alludes to is also related to the idea of a true revolution taking place through words. The Maverick Poets exemplify the very notion of change, of currents that cannot be stopped, in spite of a past that seems less than perfect—a predicament where Carver notes that he would “make the same unforgivable mistakes” and a place where Laux suggests that “the past pushes through.” The past must push through, and the history of various battles—whether taking place on the human body, such as rape, or during actual combat—allows this revolution to take place. Revolutions do not have to be large; they need only be acknowledged by those implementing them. Otherwise, as Loverne Brown states in “A Very Wet Leavetaking,” the project must be abandoned, because it “does not deserve to be saved/ does not want to be saved—since our warning cries went unanswered” (21). Wars take place every day, whether in a larger context, such as that of World War II or the Viet Nam War, as well as form inspiration relating to a more personal survival mode. The poems in *The Maverick Poets* represent dissidence, independence, and a certain restlessness for aesthetic and social transformation (Evans 86), which can enter and occur only when the past is brought to light. Progress, however, will not be achieved if one notes that poetry only tries, and does not succeed, in conveying a message. As Antler avers, “Tell it to the poets on Skid Row” (10).

The anthology which appeared in 1988 began as a project to showcase some of America’s more “off-beat” poets, those who wrote of everyday experiences containing references to drinking, drugs, sex, and relationships. However, *The Maverick Poets* deals more with the overarching theme of survival. The poets featured represent a new form of the avant-garde, where life exists concomitantly with art, and influences it thusly. The themes presented in *The Maverick Poets* rely heavily on erasing gender norms, as well as the trope of survival. Additionally, enduring a turbulent past ensures a better present and future, and the only way to overcome these hardships, according to the poets, involves recording these tumultuous times. Joanne Kyger proposes the

Experience of the simultaneity of all human beings on this planet,  
 alive when you are alive. This seemingly inexhaustible  
 sophistication of awareness becomes relentless and horrible,  
 trapped. How am I ever going to learn enough to get out. (90)

We don’t learn to get out—we learn to survive in spite of those around us, in spite of the crushing truths of the world. Or perhaps because of them. The simultaneity of human beings on this planet allows for hybridization of gender, art, and life to take place, and *The Maverick Poets* showcases not individual experiences, but a true comment on the condition of being human.

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