Abstract

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Construction of Marginalised Identity in the Poetry of Six Female Slammers

The main aim of the present study is to show how female slammers construct their marginalised identities through performance at slam events. It demonstrates how construction of identity, performance, and aspects of embodiments represented in the poet's speech, gestures, voice and body reflect the cultural differences that written poetry cannot represent. The study illustrates the performance techniques employed by slam poets to perform their sexual, racial, and ethnic marginalised positions in the society and denotes the strong link between authenticity and performances of those marginalised identities. Poems of female slammers Staceyann Chin, Maggie Estep, Patricia Smith, Jessica Care Moore, Gayle Danely, and Suheir Hammad that project their expression of lost, marginalised racial, ethnic, and sexual identities are analysed. The study's theoretical framework is based on Judith Butler's conception of performance in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (200) Deryn Rees-Jones' differentiation between performativity of the self and performance of the poem in Consorting with Angels (2005) Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World (1984) that analyses the liberating force of laughter and the market place language in carnivals and Laura Severin's Poetry off the Page: Twentieth-Century British Women Poets in Performance (2004) explaining the techniques women poets adopt in performing poetry. The paper reaches the conclusion that female slammers' poetry about marginalised identity represents construction of a second self perfectly performed on stage to distort ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual stereotypes and that the audience does not only construct the identities of the slam performers, but also construct identities for themselves. Consequently, through slam poetry marginalised identities are constructed. Key words: Slam poetry – performance – performativity – marginalised identity – identity construction