

Poets slam existential hope in face of soulless postmodern America

Local poets compete for a chance to represent Eugene in the National Poetry Slam

Joseph Bechard
Edge Culture Columnist

Lawrence Ferlinghetti said, "... I am awaiting, perpetually and forever, a renaissance of wonder."

Given the depressing state of American culture, it's going to be a long wait. But those of us riding with Ferlinghetti in that slow boat can't afford to lose faith. As maddened and confused as the world is today, a strain of human being still exists that burdens itself with such unwelcome themes as the depth of human sentence, piety and the "meaning of life."

Competition began Saturday, Sept. 28, at Foolscap Books at 780 Blair Blvd. for four seats representing Eugene in the National Poetry Slam,

to be held in August 2003. Anyone with a soul and \$3 to \$5 is encouraged to attend the slams, scheduled for the third Saturday of every month. The ninth and final slam will take place in May 2003.

Poet sign-in began at 7:30 p.m., and the list was full within several minutes. At 8 p.m., all the kooks, crazies and some who might be bothered by such crass appellations shepherded themselves into the small, dimly-lit room.

The emcee selected volunteer judges randomly from a hat, and of course, the crowd received the judging like it would a leper at an orgy. Whether this is the best method of judge selection is a moot issue. Sometimes it's best to just gouge the eyes of hindsight and let things be things.

Competitive poetry makes about as much sense as oarlocks on a bathtub. Maybe it brought out the best in the poets; maybe the real winner is off crying in a whiskey-stained shirt

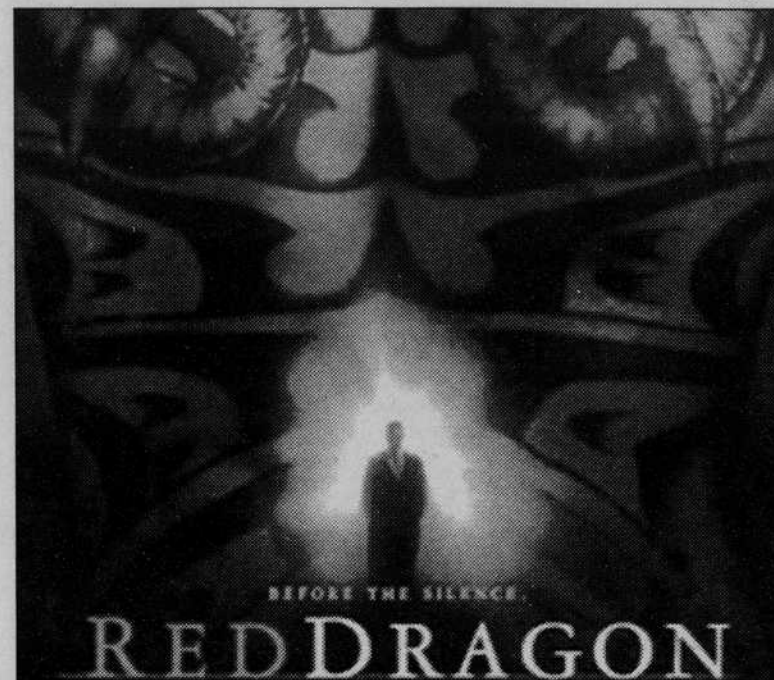
in some gutter — we'll never know for sure, but this impressed judge tried desperately to catch the readers' many nuggets of beauty.

Afterward, at a new watering hole in square, *moderne* downtown, I sat with a few participants. As I listened behind a distant stare, someone mentioned the presence of "hope" in some of the poetry.

Hope. While the president dances in front of cameras — chanting war cries in a loincloth with a dagger between his teeth, a meat hook in one hand and a skull on a stick in the other; Eugene recovers from a youthful waste of useful energy in the form of a "riot" that looked more like some mindless scene on MTV; and the very terra crumbles beneath our feet, it's reassuring to know that there are a few weirdos who still hang on to hope.

Contact the Pulse columnist at josephbechard@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

'Dragon' serves entree of delicious plot, acting



Movie review

Helen Schumacher
Pulse Reporter

The year is 1980, we're in Baltimore and Hannibal the Cannibal has just served the board of directors of the local symphony a delectable meal made from one of the missing symphony musicians. The opening credits haven't even started yet.

So begins "Red Dragon," the prequel to "The Silence of the Lambs." Anthony Hopkins is back as Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He's joined by Edward Norton as Will Graham, the ex-FBI agent who, after putting Lecter behind bars, needs his expertise to stop a killer dubbed as the Tooth Fairy — Ralph Fiennes.

Instead of Hannibal eating the brains in this film, the gray matter was saved for the plot. Graham, who has retired to Florida with his family after a near fatal run-in with Lecter, is asked to help the FBI solve the ritualistic murders of two families by a killer. The killer believes he is a reincarnated version of William Blake's "Great Red Dragon" painting. The cast is rounded out with Harvey Keitel as the FBI officer who recruits Graham for the case, and Philip

Seymour Hoffman as the sleazy tabloid journalist who penned the name Tooth Fairy.

The psychological thriller's best moments are not when you're at the edge of your seat (which is often), but during the tender exchange between Francis Dolarhyde, aka the Tooth Fairy, and blind photo lab technician Reba McClane, played by Emily Watson. It is in these softer moments, where Dolarhyde battles between his demons and his desire for intimacy, that the audience is drawn in.

Although Fiennes gives the best performance, all the acting is phenomenal. But what else do you expect from this group of Academy Award nominees?

The score was also phenomenal. Composed by Danny Elfman, known for his work on the Tim Burton films "The Nightmare Before Christmas," "Beetlejuice" and "Pee-wee's Big Adventure," it shifts from heartfelt to heart-pounding in minutes.

Thanks to stellar acting and a great score, what could have been a mediocre murder movie was made into something more gourmet.

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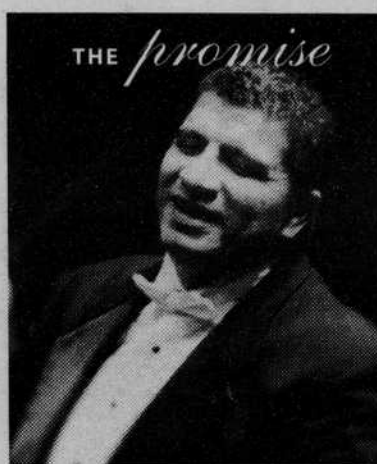
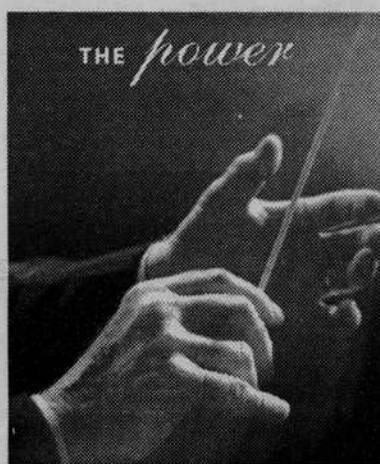
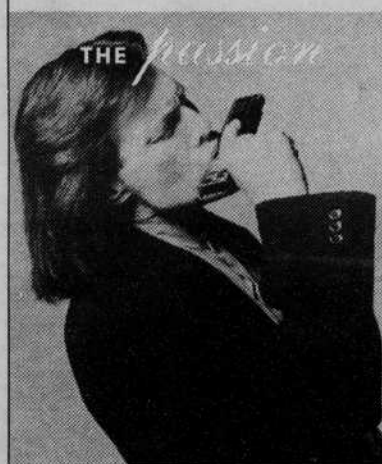
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