

No New Clothes for the Empress

by Neil McCarthy

Because I was not sure if the poet had said *yearn* or *urine*, I zoomed in on her mouth as she commanded the lectern, saw the lipstick smudge holding its own on her left incisor, watched her tongue conduct its vortex of epeolatry as the thirty or so in attendance slipped in and out of consciousness.

Whether the subject of her next poem was a warrior or a worrier was beyond me, but he or she was a mighty one at that. We nodded, as if in an AA Meeting, encouraging the speaker to let it all out, which she did in lexical military fashion; metaphors storming the floor, assonance choppered in to provide back up.

Next up was *Paris*, or *pears* — I angled for context with bated breath, but nothing bit; her shy lock of hair flicked every now and again to bat away the doubt. She leaned in ever closer to the mic as if delivering a mayoral inauguration speech to the delirious masses, although 'masses' conjured up a different suffering.

We waited for the cue to signal the end of the service, the "and I'm going to finish now with this piece" so that we could go in peace, doing the thanks-be-to-God murmur with a few stretches in the outside foyer where, we were told, books would be available for purchase, or purges — I couldn't say for sure which.

