



PARLIAMENT | PARLEMENT
CANADA

Parliamentary Poet Laureate



POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

Colin Smith (1957 –) was born and raised out of Oshawa, Ontario. He studied creative writing at York University and graduated in 1983 with a BFA. He moved to Vancouver in 1987 and immediately became part of Kootenay School of Writing milieu and was an active collective member 1989 through 1996, and again from 2005 to 2007. He proofread many issues of *Writing* and *Raddle Moon* magazines. His first book of poems, *Multiple Poses*, was published in 1997 by Tsunami Editions. A second, *8 x 8 x 7*, was published from KRUPSKAYA in 2008. He is now living for the second time in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Poem for discussion:

Desprit

From: *Carbonated Bippies*

Nomados, Vancouver, 2012

from Desprit

Salt Lake ... Salt
Lake! This is Columbia 409! It's Nancy
Pryor ... stewardess. Something
hit us! All the flight crew
is either dead or
... or badly injured! There's no one left
to fly the plane! Help
us! Oh,
my
God ... help us!

And what a view!
All you can see

for miles and miles is
 -- miles and miles!

I don't have to prove
 my revolutionary credentials to you. If
 you don't tell me where the bomb is I'll
 plug your friend here so full of holes he'll look like a Swiss cheese. I
 need that ransom money. That queen of mine
 wears a mink stole like nylon.

*

Your whole
 caper's a boodle
 of bad jive. You're
 comin' strictly
 from Squaresville. Ha
 ha. What
 a gas.

Son, this may not be the best
 life, but it's all we know: This rotten town
 suits me just fine. I love hamburgers. May the Seven Doves
 rest on your shoulders. Drink your way to the bottom. I
 should have played house with her
 more often when she wanted to. If you ever decide
 to swim the Channel, I'd like to handle the grease job!
 As long as you give, I'll take! Henceforth, I will be
 as you call me -- terrible!

You get away from me,
 you phony-baloney! You
 liar you!

*

He'll get his crown in heaven.

I know I am a dog
 but a faithful dog.
 You are wrong, Czar,
 to prefer a priest to a dog.

That's not the real secret
of Christmas, Phil. Give it a try! Stop bending your elbow
and start bending your knee!

Oh now, Dealey, you know how
I promised Mama
about Christmas.
You see, While she's trimming
her tree in Peoria, I'm trimming
mine right here.
It's almost
as if
we're together!

Honest, Roxy! I
believe you! I swear
on my Elvis Presley LP!

*

You're in a fine state! God,
has someone cut your tongue off? Why
do you get like this? Is it the altitude
you're in — or is it
something you've eaten?

I'm
in love
for the first time in my life! It's
the voodoo, Dr. Gavin! It's the voodoo,
I tells ya!

Yes, I know,
but the moment I buy it, it turns
into something else, usually genius, and it isn't
worth a dime. Now if you could stay just as simple
as you are, you'd be invaluable to me.... I'll
put you on my staff.... I'll give you a title:
"Miss Humanity." Don't rush, you can finish
your ice cream soda. Do you realize,
Miss Welles, that you are the most beautiful girl
that ever left lipstick in my office? I must
have you alive. Alive, as you have already been
every evening, for weeks, for months —
I'm sorry. With you, it seems like

the sun *is* shining.

Patronizing makes you
very boring, monsieur.

It's pretty
difficult
to cash that!

Research:

1. Look up the meaning of the visual arts term “collage.” Find some recent examples of collages, and some examples of collages made before 1960.
2. There is a poetic form known as the “cento.” Find out what a cento is, then find and read at least three examples of centos.
3. Find the name of at least one of the movies Smith quotes from in “Desprit”. Watch the movie, noting where in the movie the quoted dialogue appears.

For discussion:

1. Is it possible to express your own feelings or ideas in a poem made up entirely of someone else’s words?
2. Is the language in “Desprit” poetic? Is it comical? Is it “good” language? Why or why not?
3. How do the line-breaks that Smith adds change the way you read the quotes he uses?
4. What makes “Desprit” a poem? Think of at least two arguments for why it is not a poem, and think of at least two arguments for why it is a poem.

Writing prompts:

1. Using short stories or novels as your sources, compile a page of sentences or statements that end in an exclamation point ("!"). Use this material to compose a poem, with line breaks and stanzas.
2. Compile the punch lines to at least 15 "bad" or "stupid" jokes. Throw away the jokes, keeping only the punch lines , then either :
 - a. compose a cento with these punch lines
 - b. compose an entirely new joke to set up one of the punch lines
3. Write a poem about your favourite "bad" movie, or write a poem using language from that movie.

(Notes prepared by Donato Mancini)