



Parliamentary Poet Laureate



POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

Sina Queyras (1963 –) is a poet, novelist and the founder and editor of *Lemon Hound* www.lemonhound.com, a very active poetry and poetics website. Her third collection of poetry, *Lemon Hound* (Coach House Books, 2006), received the Pat Lowther Award and a Lambda Literary Award.

In 2005, she edited *Open Field: 30 Contemporary Canadian Poets* (Persea Books), an anthology of Canadian poetry published by a U.S. press. She later edited *Canadian Strange*, a folio of contemporary Canadian writing for *Drunken Boat*, where she is a contributing editor. From 2005 to 2007, Queyras co-curated the Belladonna* reading series in New York. Her most recent work, *Expressway*, was written mainly in Calgary, while she was the Markin-Flanagan Writer-in-Residence.

Her work has been published widely in journals and anthologies, including *Joyland | A hub for short fiction*. She teaches creative writing at Concordia University in Montreal, and has taught at Haverford College and Rutgers University.¹

Though she works primarily as a poet and editor, her novel *Autobiography of Childhood* (Coach House Books, 2011) has garnered significant praise. Marilyn Bowering comments, “A family saga with the sweep of Ann-Marie MacDonald, the poetic depth of Anne Michaels and the tragedy and resilience of Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*.”

Unleashed (BookThug, 2009) is an intriguing collation that probes the conceptual practice of blog documentary, an “experiment begun for many reasons – a way for an expat to keep in touch with fellow Canadian writers and artists, a way to come to terms with the increasing relevance of the internet in literary lives, and a way to figure out why, after decades of gains, women writers are still grossly underrepresented in critical dialogues.”

¹ Wikipedia, “Sina Queyras” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sina_Queyras

Besides *Lemon Hound*, some other recent collections of Queyras' poetry include *Expressway* (Coach House Books, 2009), *Teeth Marks* (Nightwood Editions, 2004) and *Slip* (ECW Press, 2001).

Poem for discussion:

Here she is inside

From *Lemon Hound*

Coach House Books, 2006

On her website (www.sinaqueyras.com), she situates the writing in this book: "As meditative practices focus on the axis of breath, these poems focus on the moment of action, of thought, on the flux of speech. This is a poetry not of snapshots or collages but of long-exposed captures of the not-so-still lives of women. One sequence imagines Virginia Woolf's childhood; another unmakes her novel *The Waves* by attempting to untangle its six overlapping narratives. Yet another, 'On the Scent,' makes us flâneurs through the lives of a series of contemporary women, while 'The River Is All Thumbs' uses a palette of vibrant repetition to 'paint' a landscape."

Here she is inside. Walls and windows. Appendages and openings. Here she is sitting on a stack of books. Here she is digging out from under an avalanche of paper. Here she is swatting words with her coattails. Here she is wondering what to do with outdated memory. Here she is boxing and unboxing. Here she is moving stuff. Here she is deleting whole files, randomly. Here she is perplexed at the mounds of paper. Here, I tell you, here she is hiding under the Xerox machine. Here she is communing with resonators. Here she is clucking the MRI tune. Here she is earplugged and eyeshadowed. Here she is tall and long in the stride, here she is a force of circulation. Here she is sideways in a windstorm. Here she is teal and persimmon. Here she is Italian plum. Here she is the palest interior of the pomegranate. Here she is. Here she is in Banana Republic. Here she is black and black. Here she is thinking of the colour blue. Here she is trying to see underwater. Here she is reading on the train to New York. Here she is wiping coffee from the seat. Here she is sitting next to seven young rappers, pants like circus tents, durags and ball caps piled on high. Here she is. Here she is in an

office in Philadelphia thinking of the letter R. Where would we be without R, she asks? Where would we be without E? Where would we be without arms? Here she is with meringue and milquetoast. Here she is hiding behind a maple tree in October, the weather having changed too quickly and she without a sweater. Here she is walking down Bleecker thinking, how? How? How can she describe the windmill of her aorta? How tibia is her confusion? How like the Microsoft song her frustration flits and crescendos. How like the blue of the XP screen her mood flickers in the traffic-jam hour. How archaic the need to open a window and breathe.

For discussion:

1. “Queyras’ language— astute, insistent, languorous—repeats and echoes until it becomes hypnotic, chimerical, almost hallucinatory in its reflexivity. How lyrical can prose poetry be? How closely can it mimic painting? Sculpture? Film? How do we make a moment firm? These ‘postmodern,’ ‘postfeminist’ poems pulse between prose and poetry: the line, the line, they seem to ask, must it ever end?”²
2. “Laced with Virginia Woolf-inspired content, Queyras cultivates a rhythm that rocks the reader through a frontier map of the twenty-first century woman...*Lemon Hound*’s unique rhythms provide immediate gratification while its layered substance affords greater fulfillment with each reading.”³
Discuss this quotation.
3. How is repetition used for effect?
4. Comment on how the poem references contemporary technology (i.e., “Microsoft,” “XP screen,” etc.)

² Sina Queyras website, “Lemon Hound” www.sinaqueyras.com/lemon-hound

³ Ibid.

Writing prompts:

1. Create a character and make a list of his/her interesting obsessions, frailties, vulnerabilities, passions and/or choices. Use one-line descriptors. Edit the lines that don't work in an overall sketch.
2. Place a poem in an urban or suburban setting. Choose depictions of the setting for the tone of your poem.
3. Borrow one of these lines from "Here she is inside":

Here she is communing with resonators.
Here she is sideways in a windstorm.
Here she is in Banana Republic.

Use the line as the opening line for a poem.

4. Use repetition to create a comic book hero/heroine. Base the writing on the style of "Here she is inside."
5. "Here she is sitting next to seven young rappers, pants like circus tents." Queyras uses simile to create an image both humorous and photographic. Using similes in the same manner, create your own poem in an urban setting. Suggestions: coffee shop, bus depot, taxi stand, street musician, street artist, hitchhiker.