



## Parliamentary Poet Laureate



### POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

**Steven Ross Smith** (1945 – ) is currently the Director of Literary Arts at The Banff Centre, where he is also the Editor of BoulderPavement, the on-line multimedia arts and ideas journal. Since the 1970's, his poetry practice has sought modes of intervention and innovation, in sound and performance, libretto, and text. He has published over a dozen books, his most recent project is a multi-book long form he titles "Fluttertongue." *Fluttertongue 3: disarray* won the 2005 Saskatchewan Book of the Year Award.

#### Poem for discussion:

##### *Laden*

##### *In 'Emanations: Fluttertongue 6'*

BookThug, Toronto, 2015

i.

WHU                      what was that?

Waffle, whisper, a nothingness                      across  
   a jet of air                      jetstream

(Patience, it will come  
and come\again                      return of what's not . . .  
said

   from a suffering oesophageal  
all knowing, all known  
wound



Or with winged ululations flutter (through? over? Never seen again)  
 their tiny lives  
 hard-rock, hiding place writes the hill  
 's arc from beneath the hill's arc  
 takes the eye there and to the horizon, final  
 edge  
 all there is in this place for \ hide or \ hesitate or \  
 heave  
     'n hard-nosed, you  
 and me, bent  
 down against the mineral  
 taking mineral breath  
 our fingers, knuckle-skin pale,  
 nails to cuticles, pink  
     grip  
 shaded, laden as we must  
 It slips  
*WHU*                      what was it?

**For discussion:**

1. The poem opens and closes with a breathy sound. Where in part ii does the repeated use of the letter h evoke this breathiness again? Why do you think the poet does this at this point in the poem?
2. What words and ideas in the poem develop a contrast between something flowing vs something being cut?
3. What speech sounds in the poem involve cutting or stopping the breath? What sounds involve smooth flow? Can you relate these sounds to the ideas expressed by the words where the sounds occur?
4. How does the background behind the poet reading relate to the images in part ii of the poem?
5. In part ii, what are several things that the poet contrasts with stone?
6. The word "laden" means loaded or burdened. Who or what is carrying something in this poem? What are they carrying?

**Writing prompts:**

1. Choose five of your favorite spoken sounds. For each sound, list as many words as you can that contain the sound (at the beginning, middle or end of words). For each of your sounds, write a poem, developing contrasts and themes out of your lists of words.
2. Notice how Smith echoes "blossoms" with "blessings." The second word in the pair contains some of the sound in the first word but shifts slightly in a half-rhyme. Jot down a list of words based on what you see around you. For each word, experiment to find a matching word that makes a half-rhyme. Now put some of these into a poem.
3. List 20 pairs of opposites (example: flow vs stop). Weave connections between some of your pairs into a poem.
4. Choose one of the following words from Smith's poem: "oesophageal"; "undulations"; "stallactical"; "proclamation." Try breaking the word up into smaller words or suggestive half-words. Try inserting parentheses, hyphens, slashes and space between parts of the word. Then build a poem out of your experiment.
5. Choose any line from Smith's poem. What memories, events, ideas or thoughts does the line bring to you? List as many as you can, then write a poem based on your list.

(Notes prepared by Meredith Quartermain)