



Parliamentary Poet Laureate



POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

Rob McLennan (1970 -) is an Ottawa poet and editor. He has been an agent of literary provocation for the past twenty years, particularly engaged with “small press” activities. Besides numerous trade publications of his own work, he is the publisher of Chaudiere Books, above/ground press, and ottawater. He was writer in residence at the University of Alberta in 2007-08 and his blog, www.robmcclennan.blogspot.com, is a central measure of his reviews, essays, interviews, and other literary attentions.

Poem for discussion:

Songs for little sleep - for *Christine McNair*

From: Songs for little sleep

Obvious epiphanies press, 2012

silhouette of the carnival wheel
before an eclipse

Jake Kennedy, *Apollinaire's Speech to the War Medic*

1.

The monotony, of beauty, rest. I slipped into, you pour. A given trance.

Someone said I should. Pave, a sequence. Witness a narrator, polite and silent. Bliss. A version, extra days.
In threes. A glance. My arrogance, those high-priced shoes.

Such little relation.

Propriety, adored. This, puritan thought. Once again, a poem, sourced. Burned up, raw. Wheeze of plastic fan, electric. What would suppose you, perfect. Phantom of the telephone. Engine roar of air, conditioned. Never rings.

2.

Our smarter causes, made. Green meadow, frame. This vein of pythons.

Swift, and overlapping surface. A wish for lungs, locked in a cage. Each thing, according to. A sleepy, dismal, routine. Reprimand, dimension. Gathered, nightmare. Its nature.

The stuff that weaves, are gathered. Sleep, a dream. No such beast, a neutral lyric. Winsome, loose. The lonely hunter. Bottomed out, a dark source. Ruins, wake. Self-sacrifice, and visible. Stringent.

Lone, wooden dumb-bell. Wilderness, skirts some.

For discussion:

1. How can language become “collaged?”
2. McLennan has commented about the composition of the poems in the book from which *Songs for little sleep* is taken: “ Each piece was composed quickly, one per sitting, using collaged words or phrases skimmed, misread, lifted, carved, twisted and/or mashed-up with other fragments, and inserted into the fray. What do you think about “quick texts?”
3. What can “trigger” a poem: visually, psychologically, metaphorically, aurally.

Writing prompts:

1. Make a list of the “distractions” in daily life. Turn the list into a poem.
2. Collage words into a tonal poem on several “themes”: love and death, age, decay, bugs.
3. McLennan often uses mis-readings in his poems...as he says “mis-read, carved, lifted, or mashed up with other fragments.” Compose your own poem using these techniques.

4. Make a list of fragments: use all the senses. Make some of your lines “collide” with each other.
5. Turn your attention to the musical cadence of a line. Compose a poem paying most attention to just the sounds of the words, their rhythm and cadence. That is, don’t worry about the “meaning” of each word, or even making “sense.”

(Notes prepared by Terry Ann Carter)