



## Parliamentary Poet Laureate



### POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

**Roy Miki** (1942 – ) was born in Winnipeg but has lived most of his life in Vancouver. He is a professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University and has been very active in the Japanese-Canadian Redress and in significant social events such as “Writing Through Race” and “Truth and Reconciliation.” Besides several critical studies and being the founder and editor for many years of *West Coast Line*, he has published his own poetry since the late 70’s, his book *Surrender* (2001) winning the 2002 Governor General’s Award for poetry. He is a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. His current creative practice combines writing and photography.

#### Poem for discussion:

#### “A Walk on Granville Island”

From: *Mannequin Rising*  
New Star Books, 2011

1.

for Rita W

If you were to walk  
off this landmark pier  
and hold your pose  
for a sidelong glance  
What would it look  
like on the descent?

Where are the trap

doors that snap  
shots of the harbour  
in its comely doldrum?

How to explain to the  
kids feeding the pigeons  
the etymological drift  
of the Arterial Highway?

Look it up in the dream  
almanac of memorabilia  
in the lost causes that  
bewitch the clichéd ambit

There's the still born fancy  
of one Jack Price (yes Price was  
his name) who campaigned  
on the slogan that 'real progress'  
would entail the removal of all  
the waters under the bridges  
and voila so much real estate  
to boot for jack Price 'False  
Creek is nothing more than a filthy  
ditch in the centre of the city'

We could all be skate  
boarding on False Creek  
and our civic parties  
would be free of Dragon  
Races and regattas of all  
sorts wouldn't ruin our  
slumbering condo moment

That viscous wind blown  
video of pliant asphalt  
might have been a  
seawall of the rapt mind

In any case do you remember  
the lovely Mrs Percy Nye?

She Who in 1891 reported  
 'False Creek was so quiet  
 on a Sunday we could hear  
 the Indians singing at their  
 services on the reserve as far  
 as our place on English Bay'  
 from our place on English  
 Bay 'we used to sit on  
 the shore and listen'

So let's rendezvous the  
 appellation of muskrats  
 smelts salmon crabs clams  
 the glossary of eco-friendly in  
 the chemical bath of this inlet

Or would you rather wash  
 your hands of this stuff?

2.

for Ayumi K

*Where would we be  
 without the sea?*

*Likely, not here  
 Or like, not here*

*It was the sea carried  
 George Van Couver into  
 English Bay in June of 1792  
 exactly 300 years after  
 Columbus' historic voyage*

English Bay lay in waiting  
 for Couver and his sweet ship  
 June who was descended from a

set of numbers, likely the code  
for a lucky charm bracelet

Did Couver and Columbus then  
meet on the seas in a virtual  
space of mutual refinement?  
Exactly 300 years is a dead give  
away for the tags voyage and historic

The question why Couver was born  
and why in Vancouver of all places  
is a lacunae in the fold up tale

But listen, *mariners charted  
our globe for us*

(Much gratitude

*Remade our world  
from flat to round*

(More gratitude

*Ushered in the centuries  
that have given us today's  
'global village.'*

Now we're getting fusion  
with the centuries now we're  
getting baseball teams bowling  
leagues real estate companies  
the whole shebang all at once

*We mean the sea trade has forged  
the links that unite the earth's  
nations in a single marketplace.*

Those mariners mapped  
the seas that joined the nations  
that sprouted from earth to market

to market to choose a transgenic pig

Sorry not today May of 2010  
exactly 97 years after Snauq  
villagers were uncharted  
by Couverites on speed

Too much village is infectious  
was the headline in the daily

**For discussion:**

1. On Wikipedia, look up the following things: George Vancouver in relation to Vancouver City; lacuna in manuscripts; transgenic; etymological drift (under semantic change); Snauq (Senakw); irony. How does this background information help you to understand Miki's poems?
2. In what ways do both of these poems discuss people in love with and perhaps duped by propaganda?
3. Is Miki in favor of globalization? How does he create an ironic tone about it in both of these poems? Back up your view with as many lines as you can.
4. Compare how both poems talk about the treatment of First Nations people.
5. Miki includes two historical figures in "If you were to walk": Jack Price and Mrs. Percy Nye. How do they contrast in their attitudes? How does this contrast relate to the question at the end of the poem?

**Writing prompts:**

1. Choose a public issue that you are concerned about (it could be the plight of the environment, voter rights, the treatment of a minority, unfairness of public officials or whatever else interests you). Write a page or two of questions about this issue. Then cut up the page so you can experiment with putting the questions in various orders. Use this research to build a poem entirely out of questions.
2. Choose a historical narrative about a person or event in your region or neighbourhood. For instance, who were the people whose names got on your streets, highways and towns? Experiment with changing

certain elements of the story, as Miki has done in "Where would we be" (he changes names and blends George Vancouver's story with a nursery rhyme and other narratives). Retell your chosen story in a poem using the most interesting changes you discover.

3. Choose a piece of real estate or developer propaganda applying to your region or neighbourhood. Insert the following kinds of material between lines from this propaganda: sights, smells, sounds, tastes, touches, and memories from that area or neighbourhood that show what it means to you. Build a poem from this research.
4. Find out who and what was pushed off the land in your neighbourhood or region in order to make way for streets, houses, towns, mines, cities, factories, highways, etc. Build a poem that includes both what's present now and stories or voices of things that were destroyed, excluded or lost as a result of the current streets, towns, factories, etc.
5. Choose one of the following phrases from Miki's poems: "a lacunae in the fold up tale," "etymological drift/ of the Arterial Highway," "slumbering condo moment," or "video of pliant asphalt." Rapidly jot down all the things you can think of that this phrase brings to mind. Write quickly, in fragments, paying no attention to grammar, collecting a page or two of ideas, images, memories, words, phrases, rhymes or stories which you associate with the phrase. Build a poem from this research.