
★Complicity

by Adam Sol

To read poetry is to be implicated in the scandal of its creation. The poet writes lines, directs the movement, but it's the reader's imagination that resolves the poem. This is readily apparent in these exciting verses (many of which are political in nature) from Toronto resident Adam Sol. In "Op. 75 Sestina in B-flat for the Glockenspiel," a girl reflects on the toll taken by sexual assault, and in "Note Found in a Copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," the eponymous missive, written to reassure its recipient that what happened the night before wasn't rape, is juxtaposed with Shakespeare's play. The subjects of the poems, and the reader's potential responses to them, are sources of acute discomfort.

"Engagement" is an incisive look at the misguided assumptions about war made by both participants and observers: in Sol's conception, everyone is complicit in the effects of sanctioned violence. The opening poem, "Dwarf," begins with Pluto's demotion, 70 years after its discovery,

from full planetary status to dwarf planet, and connects this to life here on Earth, where men are no longer the universally privileged gender, and the pursuit of art has diminished in importance. Outwardly nothing has changed – heavenly bodies remain in orbit, men still exist (and, in many quarters, retain their privilege), and artists continue to create – but in each case their influence has lessened. The cumulative effect of this poem is incisive.

Other entries are more playful, notwithstanding their serious subjects. “Trial Notes” questions first impressions – the difference between the way things appear and the way they actually are – and “Disaster Contest” examines the competitive ranking of various tragedies, concluding, “Each year there were more and more entries.” “Template Poem” is wonderfully scathing, mocking the self-congratulatory reader, “a species no less endangered or precious / than the narwhal.”

Complicity is Sol’s fourth collection. His second, *Crowd of Sounds*, won the 2004 Trillium Book Award for poetry, and his previous collection, *Jeremiah, Ohio*, made the shortlist in 2009. The poems in *Complicity* are smart and challenging with a casual immediacy that comes across as effortless. “Magicicada” entreats the reader to recognize the range of what life might entail, while “Yellow House Spider” notes the titular arachnid’s struggle, then proceeds to ask “What should I not do?” The unanswered question invites the reader’s response, be it one of violence or mercy.

