

to him are the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Geta, and the Lankavatara Sutra.

This may all sound a little heavy, but Professor Smith has other interests outside of such literature. He enjoys scientific journals and does quite a lot of walking, though the latter hobby has been curtailed by a breathing problem. He also enjoys bird watching. "Of all animals," he says, "I like birds best." He notes wistfully that some species are quite scarce around the city now, and speculates that may be a result of pollution and pesticides. Another favourite pastime of his is classical music, which he listens to a lot. "If you don't keep this music alive," he warns, "our culture becomes impoverished." Even greater than his love of music, though, is his passion for theatre. "I make on major trip each year," he confesses, "to indulge in my addiction for theatre, either London, or Ontario, or both."

Part from his teaching and his hobbies, Professor Smith occupies his time with his poetry, which has been collected in such books as Sucking Stones and Midnight Found You Dancing. When asked about the quality of his poetry, he says, "People tell me it's a different poetry, and it probably is. It strikes me as having a strong surrealist element in it. In the course of forty years I've gone through quite a number of different styles."

What motivates Professor Smith to write poetry is a complicated idea of creativity. As he puts it, "There are many answers to that: one reason is it's a means of discovery. It's like exploring an unknown country, where the country doesn't exist until it's written about. It's a low-risk-taker's means of discovery." There are different motivations behind his teaching. "My teaching isn't student-centred," he admits, "but text-centred. I have a burning desire to bring texts to life and to keep them alive, because they're such an important part of our cultural heritage, and without them we would all be much lesser beings." "I enjoy having students around," he says. "I enjoy the optimism and indomitability of young people. The world isn't a great place but they don't encounter it with a fear and reluctance. Working with young people is a very encouraging way of life... there's a lot of positive energy in students."

While John Smith will be retiring soon, he seems to have a great deal of that "positive energy" himself, as his students can attest. Whether he's snorting through a rendition of Falstaff or shouting the tragic elements of Richard II, he brings the texts to life in an entertaining and educational fashion. If you haven't checked out one of his classes yet, you may want to while you still have the opportunity.

Sean McQuaid

