

Vancouver Tectonics

Larissa Lai

I invited five Vancouver-connected poets to send work for this curated poetry selection, from across a range of practices, embodiments and generations. On the edge of the Pacific Ocean, well after the end of the twentieth century, we're a melancholy crew, still reaching for language, still hoping for being. I was more surprised than I should have been that there was easy conversation among these poets and their work, about the coherence of the speaking subject, Indigeneity and colonial inheritance, human and nonhuman movement, and the uncertainties of life on the planet Earth.

Anahita Jamali Rad's staccato couplets fire in and out of subjective coherence, chasing love as pure floating affect, entangled hopelessly with war and contemporary media language. A body is a factory that generates tears for media consumers. The conclusions made by the media are material enough to be the materiel of war, carried in canopied trucks. The self, like love, keeps popping to the surface, never lasting longer than a couplet, and yet returning constantly as traumatic repetition.

Jordan Abel's erasure poems take up bad cowboy and Indian narratives. There is a self at work here; his eraser is an agented one, breaking up the found texts so that we settlers cannot read them seamlessly. If there was once narrative pleasure for

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someone to be found in these texts, Abel shows us in no uncertain terms the deep discursive violence they did and continue to do. Our reading is fractured and discomfiting. We wish to be and to have better relations, but know that these texts and their histories must be reckoned with and accounted for.

The infrastructure of Cecily Nicholson's "rebar, bared bones" understands the entanglement of variously racialized movement across the surface of our home on Native land. Gesturing towards the burgeoning contemporary crisis over water, Nicholson reads historical postslavery movements over the surface of North America as continuous with contemporary movements, though their embodied forms are constantly shifting and not always human. Violent colonial and industrial infrastructures butt up against the seemingly natural movements of birds. The sun and moon still move in relation to one another, though there is an unsettling continuity between the moon's ancient craters and the contemporary damage endured by the no-so eternal large bodies we disconnected Western humans take for granted.

Like Nicholson, Phinder Dulai recognizes the profound danger the planet is in. The pockmarks of his "season changed" are made by falling cell towers smashing into roads-- the same roads travelled by the displaced post-slaves of Nicholson's poem. Though Dulai's "conversation" is a fraught one, the subtle differences between its interlocutors, trapped in their unfortunate masculinities, are still be valued, still to be desired.

Perhaps, post-apocalyptically speaking, we desire things and people more when we know we are about to lose them, as "cousin" echo-mocks in jam ismail's "taps":

"that's just like, wanting to be one last time with the girl you plan to leave .. when/ she is at her most seductive!" ismail's images are also celestial. Night is "blue/beauty a glow earth spun". Her "bright star" shares ground with Keats's, but the stakes, in "taps", are larger and more multiple than even the most romantic love of any individual. Rather, they "exceed the personal" self who has been "wellcomed" one time too many by avaricious supermarkets singing sweetly just to make a buck. ("Wellcome" is a chain of supermarkets, based in Hong Kong, where the always-returning ismail lives.) Even apocalypse is just another banale and over-marketed commodity: "the uses of the inevitable/ at the end of being empired". Gesturing towards a certain pair of itchy sybils, she looks to the raintree, also known as the casuarina. And the casuarina, we might understand as the caesura or the cause (without effect) that ends the poem, leaving us suspended, like rain waiting to fall to earth.

Larissa Lai is a novelist, poet and critic, based at the University of Calgary, where she is Associate Professor in Creative Writing. She is the author of six books, including the critical monograph *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s* and the novel *Salt Fish Girl*. A recipient of the Astraea Foundation Emerging Writers' Award, she has been shortlisted for the Books in Canada First Novel Award, the Tiptree Award, the Sunburst Award, the City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Award, the bpNichol Chapbook Award and the Dorothy Livesay Prize.