

BENT BACK TONGUE

POEMS BY
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CAITLIN PRESS 2022

This book is dedicated to
the murdered and missing men across this country.

Canada Day, July 1st, 2021

Canada, you have claimed this July day
to boast the birth of colonial takeover
a perpetual death warrant for my people
and a day in which you have held
your own citizens in scorn
when in fact, they are blameless
to your contempt and cover-ups
and bear your sins

tell me how can I celebrate
what arose from within the deep
corners of your mind
to wordsmith the Indian Act
policies of
decimation
annihilation
degradation
and starvation

I have 215 reasons
to be skeptical of your contributions
the price of their last breathes
at the hands of church and state
your residential school legacy of
child abduction
sodomy
rape
torture
and murder

to celebrate
your colonial birthday is an acknowledgement
that their lives and mine
were not a high enough price
to appease your ghastly desire
to abuse our bodies at your will
then use our blood as ink
to write your white paper policy

we will not admit defeat
under those circumstances
because those 215 ancestral bones won't allow
the river-songs still flowing
in my blood to die so easily
nor will they permit
the graveyards in my heart to enter rage

instead they whisper
from the orchards
“they have found us”
and I share that joy
and the newfound courage
to use my voice to thank
my ancestors and awakened citizens
breaking your shame
running for the dead
riding and driving in solidarity
the kind-heartedness of Sikh and other
strangers shedding tears with us
reminding us of this simple word
tsqelmucwílč— “I have returned to being human”
and for this, I celebrate

Thrive

stars beaming
from far off unknowns
brilliant in a nocturnal sky
reaching soul
shining words
from deep love places
illuminating an old river path
onwards towards a calling den
where hearts slow down in winter
to retreat
to return
to hibernate
a resting place
a dream place
a starvation place
where all things pure and simple
thrive in truth
a body of ancestral kin
easing their way
over rock skeletons
feeding movement
swimming in blood memory
through darkness
a sparkle, a small simple sparkle
beaming life
defying death

Land and Language

written on rock
taught through oral pastime
our language is old
it was born
from the land, this land—Secwepemcúlecw
the reverberations
rumbling from sky to mountaintops
into our throats formed words
creating Secwepemctsín
streaming from the sky
touching earth
reaching our souls
melting glacier tears
weeping
forming rivers
and our hearts released
sounds of land and language

R Tmicw-kt ell Xqwélten-kt

tsqéy ri7 ne scenc
tselxewílcste tems q7e7st.s
r xqeltén-kt tskul te tmicw
yi7éne r tmicw - Secwepemcúlecw
ell qeqnímete r secpéwt te tkmesqt
tkten skwelkwélt-uy
te sqwmellqwélt.s-kuc k'ult r seqwlút
m- secwepemctseném-et
stek te tkmesqt
kétes r tmicw
tskitses r stelsqélecwes
míxwes r skwelkwélt-uy r skwcust.s
ec r ts7úmes
k'ult r setétkwe
kellekstméte r púsme-kt
m-qeqnímete r tmicw ell xqwéltén-kt

Ink on Paper

he tells me
he has read my poetry
delved into it
repeatedly
believes
he knows
the secrets of my heart

he tells me
he has mingled in my metaphors
socializing with those tricksters in diction
imagining
that he is Koyoti himself,
crawling
in and out of my skin
howling in my silence

he tells me
he has bathed in my images
washing
himself with used textures
using the same bark
that I used to scrub my body with
the grit peeled away wetly, hauntingly
infatuated with the sap of trees in my words

he tells me
he has heard each tone
resonating from my voice
understands
my deep growls
can taste the pine pitch
sticking to my tongue
devouring my sounds

he tells me
he has a man-crush on me
wants to eat my words
wants to crawl into my bed

whispering
midnight sounds
he wants that magic touch
because of my poetry

I tell him
perhaps
he mis(s)-understands me
that my poetry is second-hand information
once it leaves my mind
and what the eye perceives is interpretive
but really, it is only ink on paper

Brown Man

a brown man slipping
white without purpose
can't whiten his race

obsession is an extraordinary risk
because decimation
angers other brown brothers

it is genuine departure of the self
attempting to be something
you are not

I can accept
you for the man you are
if you are true to yourself

but remember
being born brown
is the privilege