



## Welcome...

**poetry/in/canada** is a collective that recognizes the rich diversity of voices in Canada's poetry community. Our main goal is to work towards a national poetry centre in Vancouver, BC, and as we continue inching towards that aim, we want to regularly share our highlights with you—what we love about poetry, who we are reading now, which events are on our radar, and some inspirations for all of us writers and readers of poetry!

We are also deeply committed to embodied practices of Land Acknowledgments, and we understand that our main goal of a poetry centre has to intersect with an interrogation and decolonization of what/who/where is canonical in so-called “Canada” and its cultural productions, such as poetry. **p/i/c** is mainly operated from the unceded and stolen territories of the hə́nqəmiṇəm and Skwxwú7mesh speaking peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, but our editorial board members are scattered all over “British Columbia.” We continue working with these goals and practices in mind, and are hoping that the spaces we create can be a site of conversation and dialogue among us.

**p/i/c** also wants to hear from you! What do you want to see from this newsletter? Is there anything you want to share with us? **p/i/c** fosters a space where inclusivity, equity, and community building is integral to the literary culture within this geographical space, so we want this newsletter to also be a way for you to communicate with us.

With that in mind, we are excited to share with you the first **poetry/in/canada** newsletter. And check us out online at: [poetry in canada \(poetrycanada.org\)](http://poetry.in.canada(poetrycanada.org))

## Poetry in Canada is pleased to announce...

... **Liz Howard** as the **2024 Phyllis Webb Memorial Reading honoree**. An award winning Anishinaabe/settler poet, Howard will be joined by special guests for an evening of readings and discussion on *April 13 2024, 7PM at the SFU Segal Building, 500 Granville Street, Vancouver.*



## shelf notes 1

On Liz Howard's *Letters in a Bruised Cosmos*, by Stephen Collis

**“I am a feeling thing ... inside entropy”**

I am drawn to Liz Howard's work for the Big Think—for the reach in this work towards essential things—meaning and the mind and history. Howard is a poet who would visit at once cosmic outsides, and psychic insides—the mysteries of the universe and the self—how they pull the human stitching apart, and how they might

be sutured again via “a sewing motion / along a thin membrane.” Howard does not, however, close the wound—she indicates that it’s not possible, our severing is foundational to our form of being. But one can work along the seam, making incomplete repairs.

Howard plumbs the bruised cosmos from the first line of her book, when she refers to entropy and the “lifespan” of the universe. The “cosmic bruise” is a real thing: a vast gap in the universe’s cosmic background radiation—a cold hole in the heat dispersed by the Big Bang which, Howard’s note reports, has given rise to the theory “that it was caused by the collision of a parallel universe early in our universe’s formation.” The colliding parallel universes that have “bruised” Howard’s personal, psychic “cosmos” are those of Western, settler science and Anishinaabe cosmology, to which another of her notes refers. The “cold spot” of contemporary astrophysics finds its parallel in the constellation known in Anishinaabe as *Bagone’giizhig*, “The-Hole-in-the-Sky.” This duality, and the bruises it leaves behind—the effects of being torn between worlds, or living in the aftermath of their colonial collision—can be traced throughout her book, vivid in terms of the direct connection between cosmic violence and the pain of daily life and the traumas one feels as permanent psychic sore spots.

In “Letter from Halifax,” for instance, the speaker of the poem finds the cosmic/psychic seam in attending their father’s deathbed. It’s here they learn of *Bagone’giizhig*, the hole “A portal between this world and spirit.” The speaker would not appear able, or ready, to step through that portal; they remain with the very immediate, material facts of their father’s death—remaining in the space of the unstitched wound, where, in combing through their father’s belongings, they find “a picture of me as a baby, a drawing of electrical currents, / a knife.” I find this simply list of artifacts utterly devastating, undeniably authentic, and completely moving.

How do you work your way along the seam of the “thin membrane”? You work relationally, as Howard is always trying to do. In the poem “Settler” the speaker brings into relation their efforts to be a “good daughter / of the colony” AND to listen to her great-grandmother who “said, don’t ever / shoot a black bear, they are my people.” The challenge at work throughout the book would seem to be how to think relationally between a relational culture/mind (exemplified in the poet’s Indigenous heritage) and one which refuses relations (to be found in their settler roots)? That is,

can one find or forge a relation to the non-relational or anti-relational? Howard certainly tries.

The poet does offer some hope for overcoming bifurcation. The speaker of these poems is one who has worked with Western science, on “research into the cognitive mechanisms of the human brain”—and yet they are able to deny the great Western mistake of Descartes (*cogito ergo sum*—I think therefore I am), claiming instead “The cogito / is the body / is nature.” No duality there. Nonetheless, perhaps the greatest struggle the poet attempts to overcome is the bifurcation of the self, where not only are self and world split (“a true separation between myself / and the world”), but the self is rent at its core, the speaker doubtful of their own authenticity, their “mistrusted I,” and the fate of only being “a dead ringer for the first-person singular”—but by this wording, not one and the same as that “first-person.” Who then? That’s the mystery—the wonder of not knowing, of having questions, but not answers, that makes this poetry so philosophically and emotionally powerful.

These are just a few thoughts and incomplete forays into this wonderful poet’s work. In the end, I’m a reader of poetry who likes, even seeks, complexity and irresolution. Lisa Robertson writes: “I think that the evasive part of language is the *materia medica* of freedom.” The opacity of poetry, in other words, is our herbal, our healing, our body of knowing what only the body truly knows. The poem may be difficult because it is trying to convey difficult things. And in that trying, the continuum itself may be healed.

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## announcements / events

[Inspired Word Cafe Open Mic with Brandi Bird](#)—February 12 (Kelowna)

[Author Reading at Iron Dog books](#)—February 18 (Vancouver)

[Writer’s Studio Reading Series](#)—February 20 (Vancouver)

[Lunch Poems at SFU presents Sneha Madhavan-Reese and Onjana Yawngwhe](#)—  
February 21 (Vancouver)

[Inspired Word Cafe February Writing Workshop](#)—February 24 (Kelowna)

[Inspired Word Cafe Open Mic/Slam](#)—February 29 (Kelowna)

[NEW FORMS IN WORLD AND WORD](#): Catalonia, Galicia, Mexico, Portugal, an online reading hosted on Zoom, hosted from Pamenar Press, with authors from Mexico City, Santiago de Chile, Galicia, Lisbon, the United States to launch their recent books, read and share ideas on poetry (Zoom)—March 10

[Poetry Reading by Peter Gizzi](#) (Vancouver)—March 11

Montreal Book Launch for *you*, *Oh Witness Dey!*, and *Medium* by [Book\\*hug Press](#) and [L'Euguélonne, librairie féministe](#) (Montreal)—March 14

[TWS Community Workshops: Successful Grant Writing Proposal](#)—March 29

***We are currently in the process of expanding this section to include more events—either in-person or on Zoom. If you have an upcoming event for late spring and summer, please send it our way and we will include it in the next newsletter.***

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recognition

A huge congratulations to B.C. poet Laisha Rosnau, for winning the 2023 Latner Griffin Writers' Trust Poetry Prize

The \$60,000 Latner Griffin Writers' Trust Poetry Prize is awarded annually to a Canadian poet in mid-career who has published at least

three collections of poetry that demonstrate mastery of the art.



## Sample of Work

### *As Gentle As Our Damage*

In the heat of her room, she holds  
a safety pin over the flame then pokes  
her earlobes. This isn't supposed  
to hurt. She stops the blood running

from her ears, between her legs  
leeching out of the picked scabs  
on her calves with cotton wool,  
Toilet paper, kitchen rags.

The house is rusted with the iron  
of her damage. She's a mess,  
old enough to know it, young enough  
to not know how to clean

herself up. *Here, I'll help,*  
says Iryna, her cousin, bathes her  
in black market micro-beads,  
smears eyelids, temples, collarbones

with glitter. Later she's tattooed  
under the weight of a man, his pain  
suckled at her bony breast. Mornings,  
she'll bruise as gently as the sky.

From *Our Familiar Hunger* (Nightwood Editions, 2019)

## Poetic Statement

Both the poems I read and those I write are a living archives, leaps of faith, aha moments and “f you” moments, reasons to pause and pay attention to not only page, the words and the space around them, but to the worlds around and inside each of us. Love, death, grief, anger, envy, tenderness, the ordinary, the sublime – and every mixed up, entangled, and conflicted combination of all of the above: that's why I read and poetry. Nothing makes sense without poetry; nothing really makes sense with poetry either. And that's part of the magic of it all.

## Bio

Laisha Rosnau is a poet and novelist living in Coldstream, BC, in the *suknaqinx* region unceded traditional territory of the *syilx* people of the Okanagan Nation. Rosnau is the author of two novels and four collections of poetry: *Our Familiar Hunger* (Nightwood Editions, 2019) *Pluck* (NE, 2014) , *Lousy Explorers* (NE, 2009), and *Notes on Leaving* (NE, 2004). She has been nominated for numerous awards, and is the recipient of the Dorothy Livesay Award, the Kobzar Book Award, and the Latner-Griffin Award. Rosnau is the Executive Director of Caetani Cultural Centre and she and her family are resident caretakers of Bishop Wild Bird Sanctuary.

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