



**WRITE**

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**THE WRITERS'  
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CANADA**

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**Indigequeer: A  
Writer Pushes  
Back Against  
Marginalization**

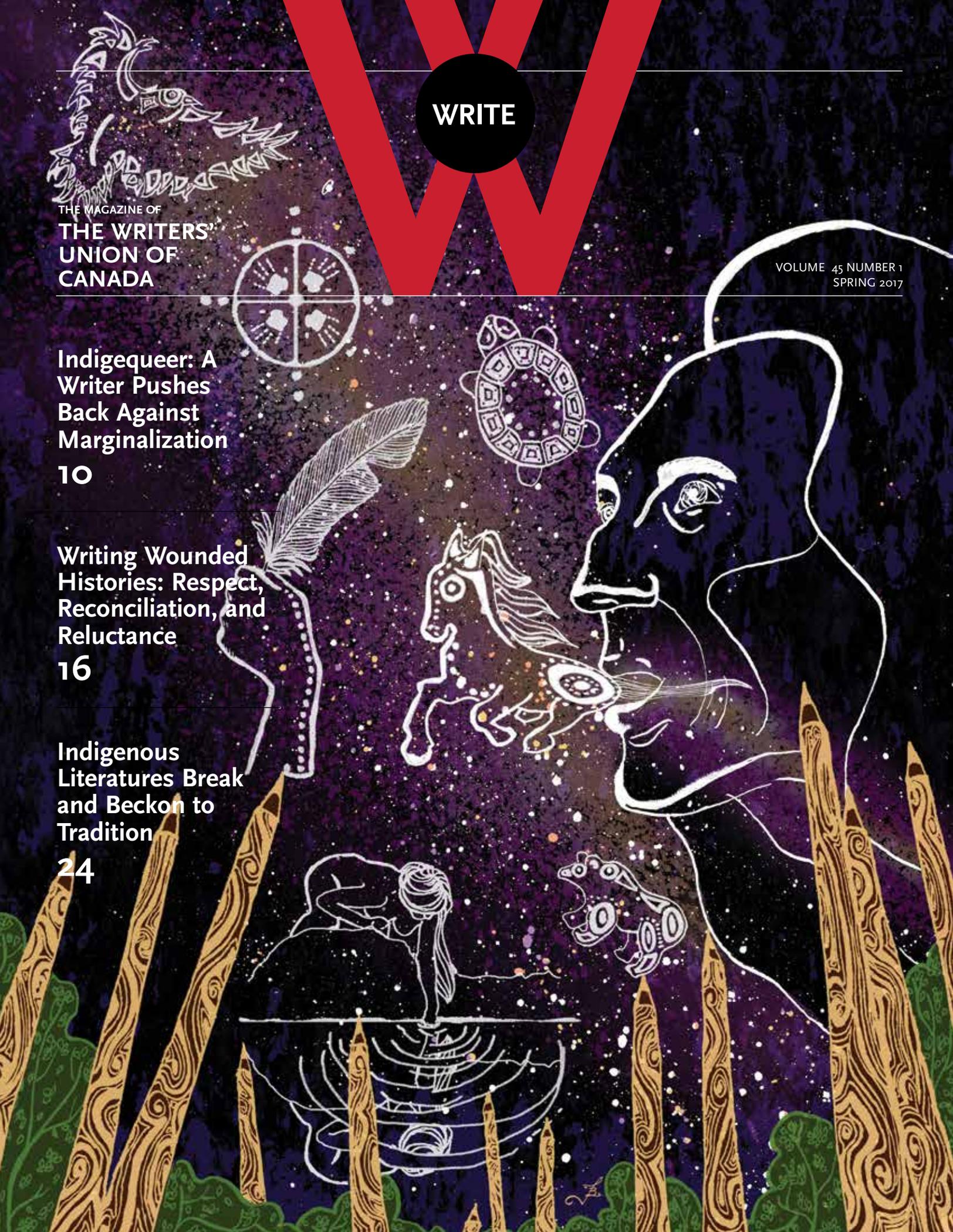
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*By the time you read this, the Vancouver AGM and OnWords conference will be right around the corner. As Vancouver is my home, I thought that many of you who will be visiting from other regions might appreciate a little local info.*

If you're like me, and like most other writers I know, you enjoy browsing bookstores when you travel. Vancouver is far from being Canada's most bookish city (that would be Victoria/Sydney) but it has managed better than most other places to retain at least the core of its once vibrant bookselling sector. I don't mean Indigo and other cookie-cutter places, but rather stand-alone establishments with distinct personalities — and books you're highly unlikely to find elsewhere. Harbour Centre, the downtown satellite campus of Simon Fraser University, is where our meetings and events will be held. As luck would have it, it is within easy screaming distance of a number of the most interesting bookshops, the kind where highly knowledgeable staff sell out-of-print books along with some new ones.

Literally a one-minute walk north of Harbour Centre is MacLeod's Books, an immense regional institution run by Don Stewart. It is a magnet for visiting writers from around the world and has often been used as a set in feature films and television shows.

I once wrote a *looong* magazine article about the complicated workings of MacLeod's and its owner in the context of Vancouver's bookselling heritage. If you're interested you can find it online at [geist.com](http://geist.com); just search the name of the bookstore or my name. I once called MacLeod's one of the city's three most important cultural institutions (along with the louche Penthouse nightclub, established 1947, and the bar at the Sylvia Hotel). Its inventories in literature, history, and art are outstanding, but there's hardly a subject area in which it does not also specialize. For example, it has the best selection of Indigenous books I've ever seen and a notable inventory on women's issues.



MacLeod's is located at 455 West Pender (at the corner of Richards, kitty-corner from where you'll find Albion Books). Just down Pender is the Paper Hound Bookshop at no. 344. The owners, Kim Koch and Rod Clarke, run a beautifully curated store that specializes, they say, in "Arts Amatoria, Abecedaria, Beatnik, Costume & Textile, Botany, Rants & Incendiary Tracts, Vancouver Stories, [Lewis] Carroll, [Roald] Dahl, [Edward] Gorey, [Maurice] Sendak."

Of course there are other bookshop clusters that require more than walking. Kestrel Books in Kitsilano is an excellent example. Numerically the largest number of bookshops is located in East Vancouver and North Vancouver. There's one chain (but not a chain in the Indigo or mall-store sense) with locations in both these places. This is Pulpfiction Books, with stores full of new and used books together, on Main Street and Commercial Drive in the east end and a third one on West Broadway, way across town by way of the Granville or Burrard bridges.

The above falls comically short of being exhaustive, and I of course apologize. There's just barely enough space here to mention what will be Vancouver's newest bookshop, with one of the city's biggest inventories. It is Massy Books, named for the proprietor, Patricia Massy, at 2206 Main Street, just down the street from one of the Pulpfictions at 2242. It's set to open on June 1 — the day our TWUC gathering gets under way.

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### LOOKING AHEAD: JOIN THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA AT OUR UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

**OnWords & AGM in Vancouver, BC**  
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# Opportunities and Challenges at Long-Running Indigenous Publishing House

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

*Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, who founded Kegedonce Press in 1993, discusses the current climate for Indigenous writing in Canada.*



**How does Kegedonce Press determine who is eligible for publication by the press?**

We try not to impose boundaries except insofar as to ensure, as much as is possible, that the Indigenous writing we publish is written by Indigenous writers who identify with specific nations and/or communities and who are recognized and claimed by them as well.

**What trends are you seeing in Indigenous writing?**

We're seeing more genre writing and, in general, more fiction than we did in the past.

**What unique challenges does an Indigenous publisher face?**

We continue to try to develop audiences and to educate them about the depth and breadth and diversity of Indigenous literatures and writers while trying to maintain a robust and exciting publishing program. It's a challenge to be doing development types of projects and advocacy at the same time that we're doing the usual work of a publisher. We are constantly pushing against limitations and challenging them in all areas of the industry from funding right through to distribution and promotions. We do a lot of extra work because we genuinely want to see every one of our writers achieve the success they're seeking and because we want to be able to continue to do what we do but better, bigger, and brighter. We are very proud of our successes, but we're never fully satisfied that we've "made it." We won't be until we've got a list of writers who

have won Pulitzer Prizes and Governor General's Awards and made international bestseller lists.

**What kind of reception do your books get outside of Indigenous communities? What is the reception from reviewers, literary festival programmers, etc.?**

Very positive, although we've definitely struggled to break down various stereotypes and misconceptions. Considering the size of our list, many of our books have been extremely successful in terms of awards and sales. Some have also really had legs! Our anthologies, especially *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, which was published in 2003, and Richard Van Camp's short story collection *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, published in 2002, for example, continue to sell very well more than a decade after their release dates.

**Have you noticed significant fluctuations in interest in Indigenous writing since you've been a publisher?**

In general, readers are more open-minded and willing to embrace a wider range of Indigenous literatures than when we first started publishing. That said, we still see many beautifully written books by Indigenous writers struggling to fully achieve the sales and wide acceptance that they deserve. The Canadian reading public tends to embrace only a small handful of Indigenous writers, and we'd like to see that change.

**What is the market for Canadian Indigenous writing outside of Canada?**

We've worked on this and there is some interest in a few markets. The ones that we've made some effort to break into are the U.S., Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. There's also great interest in Indigenous literatures in Germany and India.

**What advice do you have for emerging Indigenous writers in terms of how to build their careers, get published, and sustain themselves as authors?**

Learn to perform your own work extremely well, become articulate in discussing your writing, and maintain a profile both online and through public readings and performances. Most importantly, maintain balance so you stay focussed on your writing and improving your craft.

*Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm is an Anishinaabe writer of mixed ancestry from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, Saugeen Ojibway Nation. She lives and works at Neyaashiinigmiing on the Saugeen Peninsula in southwestern Ontario. In 1993, she established Kegedonce Press. Acclaimed Canadian authors Basil H. Johnston, Marilyn Dumont, and Gregory Scofield are among those who have published books through the Press, for which she continues to work as managing editor. Her collection of short stories, The Stone Collection, received a starred review in Publisher's Weekly and is nominated for a Sarton Literary Award.*

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# Dispatches

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NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

QUEER WRITING /

## On Indigenegativity: Rejection and Reconciliation in a Pool of Liberal Tears

BY JOSHUA WHITEHEAD



*What means depression in the age of apocalypse? I write this during the era of Trump, the easement of Standing Rock, in the after-power of the Wom[y]n's March, and the inevitable futurity of the Kinder (Surprise?) Morgan Pipeline. I read, write, live, and love from within a milieu of political depression. I cry often — too hard, too easily — but remind myself that crying is an act of aggression, that pools of tears can shape a decolonial island.*

In 2016, I placed first in the Canadian Aboriginal Arts and Stories challenge. I was awarded for my poem “mihkokwaniy,” a reflection on, and eulogy for, my late kokum, Rose Whitehead, who was murdered in the Sixties. Winning with this poem gave it a platform to be read, heard, seen, and felt on a national scale. The poem was published in *Canada's History* and recognized at the Governor General's History Awards Ceremony. And while there is the pride I feel in having completed and shared this work, the pride comes with pain, sadness, anger. To publish on such a

scale, I was required to become complicit through proximity and a feigned gratitude to Enbridge, one of the Aboriginal Arts and Stories sponsors. A representative of Enbridge gave a short speech during the award ceremony. During his speech, I hid my veins as my blood bubbled with memories; I too am both a fossil and a fuel for settler colonialism and capitalism: pale(ontology). When I bleed I seep Cree.

In retrospect, the award was a ceremony for my kokum who lies unmarked in Saskatoon, but it came with the self-obliteration required of me by those complicit in the disenfranchisement, dispossession, and deaths of Indigenous lands, Indigenous bodies, Indigenous women. To publish a eulogy through such forceful demands hurts like all hell. There is an act of survivance in publishing myself through such momentous and monstrous means but, I must stake myself here, it too demanded a life. I hurt myself again. “Holy hell,” I think — this Indigenous apocalypse we live and thrive within.

The award came with a grand prize of a one-week stay in the Banff Centre's Leighton Artist Colony. I spent a week in Banff talking to no one but the trees, the snow, my relations, the creator; I spent a week listening to how loud whiteness can be, how it can howl over the little things I say, how it can feed me sugar to shut me up. During my time in Banff I worked diligently on my second manuscript, a sex-positive young adult novel titled *Jonny Appleseed*. It's painful work, if you think of writing as method acting; me,

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alone, splashing blood across the page and tracing out syllabics and characters from its messiness. Does your research hurt you? And there too is a price: giving birth to my self-ordained, glitter princess, decolonial lover required me to write in a colony within a colony. I spent too much time asking, “How much smaller can I make myself? How much more inessential?” And you may say, “But you’re enjoying spaces and opportunities that you’ve been gifted and shitting all over them.” You’re right, I am. And I hurt myself again. I was tribe-less in a barren land of Indigenous paraphernalia, bones, black blood, and IOUs (which I’m told are just as good as money).

And it’s these “tribes” I keep coming up against over and over again. In 2016 I was invited by Spur Festival to perform at their forum in Winnipeg titled “Our New Tribalism.” There I read a poem titled “a son of the forest, still” which tells the story of my father’s experiences with the Sixties Scoop as well as its intergenerational impacts on my identity. I performed for a crowd of mostly white settlers who cheered for me and thanked me after with tears and hugs. But I couldn’t help feeling like they came to me out of what felt like an attraction to pain, an elixir for alleviation. I edited my piece briefly before, much to the dismay of many, I’m sure, to directly hold those in attendance accountable: “I’m here searching for my identity while white settlers claim a new tribology.” If you put a microphone in front of me I will call out settler colonialism, ravage its thin façade like a sheet in the wind — and then cut myself on shattered bits of whiteness while I drown in a pool of liberal tears. And what can performance poetry even mean in such a space? When I’m asked to perform then sit down among the crowd, I’m gifted a cheap applause, no allowance for conversation, no means of response to realities I’ve internalized and lived through — to perform as an Indigeequeer poet I carve myself into a totem ready for transfer, a pass system into pseudo-tribologies. New-Age tribes everywhere: on Grindr, when I’m performing for social justice festivals, even while I write this piece I see the Canadian writing community called a “tribe” on the front page of The Writers’ Union of Canada’s website.

For me, writing Indigeequeerly comes from a space of negativity. It’s a harrowing emptiness, a kind of phantom limb composed of intergenerational trauma, cultural genocide, ongoing land

claims, MMIWG2S, and the bloodletting of memories that throb and ache to the bone. Again, I ask: How do we write in the age of *apocalypse*? How do we write for tradition, ceremony, reconciliation when we, as two-spirit/Indigeequeer peoples, are disbarred and dispossessed from those spaces, practices, ideologies, institutions, and calls for action? Does being Indigenous and queer cleave one away from Indigenous cultural nationalisms? Am I a trace? How do I write from a space of negation rather than relation?

I am an urban Indigeequeer who rejects reconciliation. Instead, I seek to *reterroritorialize* both settler-colonial and Indigenous-cultural worlds. I hurt, but there is a type of pedagogy, a type of creative energy, in loving one’s own sadness. The tongue is a prick that quills blood into words, urgency into utterance, power into words. What do essays and stories do for the dying and the dead? Is all writing for the disempowered a practice in eulogies? I do not want to believe that, but sometimes it simply is. How much time do we really have? How much life is left in these pools? The ducts are drying. Behind my eyes, muscle ache to close. Writing Indigeequeerly is an exercise in exorcisms; the page is a world of confession, consolation, contribution.

Ernest Hemmingway once said that writing is a well we must never empty, but to write as an Indigeequeer, hell, our wells are swollen with water, our stories float to the surface. I think here of my most ridiculous, although accurate, feedback from an anonymous reader who called me a “sad red poofter.” Maybe I am, but hey, I’m still alive and that’s worth something, innit? I’ll keep writing with all sorts of ectoplasms dripping from my pores, keep crying from the drudging, this grinding/ground work; I’ll keep hoping that these tears will fill my wells, pool into my clavicles, make a world. I’ll keep writing until Sky Woman falls from my hair and says, “Baby, you’re home,” and I’ll say, “Mama, I made this for you, too.”

*Joshua Whitehead is an Oji-Cree, Two-Spirit member of Peguis First Nation, Man. (Treaty 1 territory). He currently resides in Calgary, Alta., where he is working towards a Ph.D. in Indigenous Literatures and Cultures. He has a book of poetry forthcoming with Talonbooks in 2017.*

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# Poetry

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## On Receiving a Government Letter Rejecting Our Indian Status



BY SHANNON WEBB-CAMPBELL

Father calls, says they are revoking us.  
His voice gravel thick, we were Indians once,  
now we're unrecognized

a deadweight of shame returns,  
while thousands of papers soar  
through Grandfather sky, only to land  
like scalps on doorsteps of would-be Qalipu

my ancestors are on trial,  
we no longer live in No'Kmaq village  
mark Smallwood's infamous words,  
*there are no Indians on the island* of Ktaqamkuk  
despite 100,000 applicants

denial repeats to eradicate Mi'kmaq existence  
one too many anglicized names, webs of displaced identity  
Grandmother moon mutes  
another loss of kin, and spirit

God damn Jackatars,  
government commands colonial amnesia  
you beadwork in the suburbs,  
Google Mi'kmaq translations,  
only learned to bang your drum far from home

Ottawa notes: I'm not Indian enough  
still landless, no claim, no bones to hone  
Father says, it was good for a while,  
but what about the next seven generations

I tell him, L'nu Neuptjeg (I'm Mi'kmaq forever).

*Shannon Webb-Campbell is a Mi'kmaq poet, writer, and critic. Her poetry collection, Still No Word (Breakwater Books, 2015), received Eagle Canada's inaugural Out In Print Award.*

## To the High Steel Mohawk Worker



BY GLORIA MEHLMANN

the eagle's wings are clipped,  
the moon 'explained,'  
rivers have demanded dams  
and mountains excavation...  
far be it from us to complain  
except in this:

losing our old symbols, we must beg another —  
render our dismay inviolate that you,  
yes, you beam-walking man  
atop skyscrapers of New York,  
poised between life and death, sure-footed,  
should suffice  
beyond the street-bound grasp of inward sight.  
a cut-out silhouette against the light bends  
to foreign permanence  
that lends to us  
the fiercest passion of winged Icarus

*Gloria Mehlmann is working on a book of short stories about life on Cowessess First Nation Reserve, her childhood home in Saskatchewan. Her first book, Gifted to Learn, published by the University of Alberta Press (2008), illustrates how societal issues influenced teaching in the Regina Public School System.*