

Mixtapes

POETRY
in VOICE
les VOIX de
la POÉSIE

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS/GRIEF/LOVE



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JESSICA'S LINER NOTES

We live in a time that feels like a tipping point. Global temperatures rising, permafrost melting, ocean acidification—the Anthropocene is wreaking havoc on the natural environment. Many of us feel unease, grief, and fear as we witness the shifts—wildfires, extreme weather events, plastic waste in our waterways—more plastic than fish in 30 years, they say.

And still. Still the green world goes on, still we can be humbled and uplifted by the beauty of an old-growth tree, a mountain, a dragonfly. Some of these poems ask this of us: to be brought to our knees before the majesty of the world. Some are outright tallies of ecological atrocities, and some pull us toward praise and prayer, towards the depth and necessity of our love for this place – for it is love that will lead us to take action to protect the earth.

Within the structures of colonialism and capitalism—our cities, for example—we are often cut off from nature: the ground is literally sealed off by concrete, trees are razed to make way for buildings, the water is poisoned by toxic runoff from construction and industry. In Lillian Allen's poem, a "man-child from Mississauga" heads to begin work in the Alberta oil fields, saying "I've never seen so many trees in my whole life!" How can we love and care for the natural world if we never experience it? The disconnect is dangerous, deadly.

In addition to the violent degradation of the natural world, colonial exploitation has led to the annihilation of entire peoples. "Erase them into cities

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named for their bones, until / you are the new Natives of your new cities," writes Natalie Diaz.

Can poetry help? Is it rather—and only—activism that's asked of us now?

I'm interested in how poetry orients us towards an honouring of Indigenous voices around our right relationship to the ecology—a current through several of the poems in this mixtape, including works by Joy Harjo, Natalie Diaz and Rita Wong. It is Indigenous water protectors and climate activists we need to be listening to.

One of the poet's jobs is to witness and bring feeling to what is witnessed. Ecological grief is present here, but the poems in this mixtape are not all lament. Some are calls to action—in Sherman Alexie's poem, he wryly imagines that "an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee dam and topples it"—this is a call to action, to dismantling colonial structures. "May we participate in the intelligence we're in," writes Erin Robinsong, in another kind of call, to presence. "To understand that I am present here, / that I am sensed, that the soil feels me," writes Laurie Graham in a kind of willful communion, grounding. And as Rita Wong writes, in an evolving incantation in her poem, "because we are part of the problem we can also become part of the solution." Poetry alone is not enough, but may these poems be the call to presence, communion and action we need.



THE POEMS

PRAISE THE RAIN

by Joy Harjo

MY SISTER CRIES THE SEA

by Pamela Mordecai

I SAW A PERFECT TREE TODAY

by Lillian Allen

THE POWWOW AT THE END OF THE WORLD

by Sherman Alexie

WEED KILLER

by Fiona Tinwei Lam

PLANET EARTH

by P. K. Page

JESSE'S FARM

LATE PRAYER

by Erin Robinsong

FROM EXHIBITS FROM THE AMERICAN WATER MUSEUM

by Natalie Diaz

DECLARATION OF INTENT

by Rita Wong

HAIL

by Adam Dickinson

FAST COMMUTE

by Laurie D. Graham

A poetry mixtape edited by Jessica Moore.

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