
WHEREAS



POEMS LAYLI LONG SOLDIER

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The astonishing, powerful debut by the winner of a 2016 Whiting Writers' Award

WHEREAS her birth signaled the responsibility as mother to teach what it is to be Lakota therein the question: What did I know about being Lakota? Signaled panic, blood rush my embarrassment. What did I know of our language but pieces? Would I teach her to be pieces? Until a friend comforted, Don't worry, you and your daughter will learn together. Today she stood sunlight on her shoulders lean and straight to share a song in Diné, her father's language. To sing she motions simultaneously with her hands; I watch her be in multiple musics.

—from “WHEREAS Statements”

WHEREAS confronts the coercive language of the United States government in its responses, treaties, and apologies to Native American peoples and tribes, and reflects that language in its officiousness and duplicity back on its perpetrators. Through a virtuosic array of short lyrics, prose poems, longer narrative sequences, resolutions, and disclaimers, Layli Long Soldier has created a brilliantly innovative text to examine histories, landscapes, her own writing, and her predicament inside national affiliations. “I am,” she writes, “a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation—and in this dual citizenship I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live.” This strident, plaintive book introduces a major new voice in contemporary literature.

Whereas Details

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Author : Layli Long Soldier

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From Reader Review Whereas for online ebook

Meike says

Layli Long Soldier is a citizen of the United States and of the Oglala Lakota Nation. Her collection "Whereas" won the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry and was a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry.

In the first part of her collection, Long Soldier talks about her identity and how she came to re-assess it when she became a mother - as she wants to teach her daughter what it means to be a Lakota, she contemplates what it means to her, what she herself knows about her roots. The last poem of this first part talks about the "largest 'legal' mass execution" in United States history: President Lincoln ordered the hanging of 38 Dakota men - they were hanged one day after Christmas, the same week Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Thus starts the second part, in which Long Soldier comments on the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans, signed by President Obama in 2009 - the resolution did not contribute to the improvement of the current situation of Native Americans, on the contrary: Funding is being cut, although "the root of reparation is repair".

Long Soldier plays with language and form, applying different poetic ideas and switching between formats. As a non-native speaker, I found some poems to be very challenging, but I enjoyed the variety of form and how the author combines different ideas and moods.

Highly recommended.

(What I found interesting (as I used to live in Minnesota): Long Soldier is published by Graywolf Press, a nonprofit publisher set in Minneapolis, a city built on land that was originally owned by the Dakota people (both the Dakota and the Lakota belonged to the Great Sioux Nation).)

Rachel León says

(4.5 stars, rounded up for it's rawness)

I'll admit I don't know a lot about poetry, but I thought this book was fantastic. It made me FEEL so much. It's so sad and beautiful and so worth reading.

Joan says

Loved some, some left me cold, just as it should be with poetry - every reader and every reading is different - this is a rich collection I'll be reading again.

Jerrie (redwritinghood) says

The first section of the collection plays with language and form. The second section is more grounded and is a response to the formal apology given by congress to the native peoples in 2009. Here again the author plays with language to demonstrate the emptiness of the apology. These poems are complex and working at a different level than many others I've read. A great, important collection.

Tim says

I find it hard to rate this book. I feel it is one of those books where any rating would take away from the message and power it clearly holds.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Before I read these poems for the first time, I listened to an interview with Layli Long Solder on the On Being Podcast, which helped provide some context for the poems. Krista Tippett doesn't always get it right, but her questions were often good places to start the discussion.

Layli Long Soldier does not want to be seen as a representative voice, which should be understandable, but if you read reviews of this collection you will see how many people get it wrong. The poems reflect her own experience as a daughter, mother, student, American, and Lakota. She plays with form and sometimes the sentences or fragments in her poems seem to be out of order, so these poems often require more than one read, deeper attention, and an understanding of historical events.

You may read or listen to the poet reading [38](#) on the On Being site. ('38' being a poem to and for the 38 Dakota men who were hanged the same week Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.)

(I read this partly for my Borders 2017 project, which includes indigenous groups, and partly for National Poetry Month 2017.)

Danielle says

I can't get over this book. It arrived on my doorstep yesterday, and already I have read through it 2 1/2 times. The 1/2 times being the poems I keep reading obsessively, like I do my favorite songs.

Now I am going to go read it again.

Tori (InToriLex) says

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These poems are memorable and moving, but most of all they're important. Being Native American is existing in a place that has massacred and stolen from your ancestors and now expects you to be appreciative for surviving. This poetry explores how hard it is to gain understanding from a government that downplays its transgressions while apologizing. This author plays with language throughout her poetry, and used formatting to add depth to her poems. Most public schools do not explain who Native Americans are in history, leaving most people to stumble upon the horrors that occurred against them on their own.

From "38"

The Dakota 38 refers to thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln.

To date, this is the largest "legal" mass execution in US history.

The hanging took place on December 26, 1862—the day after Christmas.

This was the same week that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

The ideals that America are modeled on do not ring true when looking at history. This book of poems explores how the author learns to express her identity and hold on to her culture. A large portion of the poems are in response to the apology that Obama signed in 2010. The poems point out the inadequacy and insulting nature of how the apology was done. The lyrical poems help shed light on the reality of Native American reservations. The truth and emotions of what she shares is essential reading. I would recommend this book to all readers who want to learn more about the history of the people who survived the creation of the United States.

Rodney says

Incredibly powerful. Essential reading.

Nadine Jones says

Layli Long Soldier's poems really make you work for your reward. Maybe it was just too much work for me, or I'm not smart enough to "get it." She likes to play with formatting and language like a modern day e.e. cummings, and many of her poems are very long and change format as they go along. I do most of my poem-reading first thing in the morning and I was not always up to the challenge. I was exhausted each time I finished one. So I can appreciate that she's brilliant and mind-blowing but I can't say that I loved the poems. Sometimes I felt like I'd just been knocked over and flattened and left for roadkill with just the breeze of the poem left blowing over my face and that's probably her goal but ... whoa.

My favorite was a very simple poem about grass.

Look

The light

grass

body

whole

wholly moves

a green hill

'til I pull

stalk 'n root

up

from

black matte

soil bed

bead s

from grass-

head s

one by

one a

part I

s p l i t

grass wires

little bulbs

silver

green

drop

lets I

sentence

to life

less light

quick dead

grass

skulls

weight

less pile

dry mound

in cupped palm

what have I

done

what

now

to do

whythisimpulse

to

shake the dead

light

why do

I so want the light

to

blink look

alive move

why

do I so want it

still

A good example of confusing and mind-blowing is from Vaporative (this is not the complete poem, I took excerpts because it is very long).

from **Vaporative**

However a light may come

through vaporative

glass pane or dry dermis

of hand winter bent

I follow that light

capacity that I have

cup-sized capture

snap-like seizure I

remember small

is less to forget

less to carry

tiny gears mini-

armature I gun

the spark light

I blink eye blink

at me to look

at me in

light eye

look twice

and I eye

alight

again.

When I want to write seriously I think of people like
dg for whom I wrote a long poem for whom I revised
until the poem forgot its way back troubled I let it go when
you love something let it go if it returns be a good mother
father welcome the poem open armed pull out the frying
pan grease it coat it prepare a meal
apron and kitchen sweat labor
my love my sleeves pushed
to elbows like the old days a sack
of flour and keys I push them
typography and hotcakes work
seduce a poem into believing
I can home it I can provide it
white gravy whatever the craving
poem eat and lie down full
poem rest here full don't
lift a single l
etter.

...

promise:

if I read you
what I wrote bear

in mind I wrote it

down only

so that

I remember

example:

I have always wanted opaque to mean see-through, transparent. I'm disheartened to learn it means the opposite. Why this instinct to assign a definition based on sound. O-P?K—

I interpret the O: open P: soft ?: airplane or directional flight K: cut through / translating to that which is or allows air, airy, penetrating light, transparency. To say, You don't fool me for a second you're opaque. To say, I'm partial to opaque objects I delight in luminosity. To say,

I'm interested in this painting on glass opaquely bright. I understand the need to define as a need for stability. That I and you can be things, standing understood, among each other.

One word can be a poem believe it, one word can destroy a poem dare I. Say I am writing

to penetrate the opaque but I confuse it too often. I negotiate instinct when a word of lightful
meaning flips under / buries me in the work of blankets.

And "Edge" which *almost* makes sense to me, but then ... nope, I don't get it. what thatched roofs? what edge? why don't say it? I don't know!!!

Edge

This drive along the road the bend the banks behind the wheel I am called Mommy. My name is Mommy on these drives the sand and brush the end of winter we pass. You in the rearview double buckled back center my love. Your mother's mouth has a roof your mother's mouth is a church. A hut in a field lone standing. The thatched roof has caught spark what flew from walls the spark apart from rock from stable meaning. Large car steady at the curve palest light driest day a field of rocks we are not poor sealed in windows. You hum in the back. I do not know what to say how far to go the winter near dead as we drive you do not understand word for word the word for you is little. But you hear how it feels always. The music plays you swing your feet. And I see it I Mommy the edge but do not point do not say look as we pass the heads gold and blowing these dry grasses eaten in fear by man and horses.

These poems speak to a lot of people, so I know it's just me. This is the type of review where I feel the need to clarify: my rating system reflects my own personal enjoyment while reading a book, and it has NOTHING to do with the quality of the book. I'm not a literature major, I am not qualified to judge a book like that, I'm just a reader.

Bogi Takács says

My lengthy review is now online! This was an amazing poetry collection:

<http://www.bogireadstheworld.com/poet...>

Robyn says

4.5 that I'm rounding up, because the poems contained within are beautiful, raw, angry, resigned, joyful, bodily real.

Allie says

A beautiful, difficult collection of poetry. I've said before that I'm not the most confident judge of poetry, and that stands (there was definitely some stuff in here I didn't "get"), but once I figured out the author's style, this work mostly flowed for me. I kept tearing my little library receipt into smaller and smaller pieces so I could bookmark my favorite phrases and poems.

The first tear, and I think my favorite, was "Wahpanica," about commas and poverty and the poverty of being denied your culture's language; she uses the word "comma" in place of actual commas, which was a cool way to pause, since few of these poems included punctuation.

I also saved several of the lines from the Whereas Statements, which centered around the United States' "apology" to indigenous tribes for like, everything that's ever been done to oppress those groups.

WHEREAS a friend senses what she calls cultural emptiness in a poet's work and after a reading she feels bad for feeling bad for the poet she admits. ... So I explain perhaps the same could be said for my work some burden of American Indian emptiness in my poems how American Indian emptiness surfaces not just on the page but often on drives, in conversations or when I lie down to sleep. But the term American Indian parts our conversation like a hollow bloated boat that is not ours that neither my friend nor I want to board, knowing it will never take us anywhere but to rot. ...

And regarding a man saying "Well at least there was an apology, that's all I can say" —

Whereas I drive down the road replaying the get-together how a man and his beer bottle stated their piece and I reel at what I could have said or done better; Whereas I could've but didn't broach the subject of "genocide" the absence of this term from the Apology and its rephrasing as "conflict" for example; Whereas since the moment had passed I accept what's done and the knife of my conscience slices with bone-clean self-honesty; ... Whereas truthfully I wished

most to kick the legs of that man's chair out from under him; ...

And one last one, because really you should just go get this book and read it yourself.

WHEREAS her birth signaled the responsibility as mother to teach what it is to be Lakota, therein the question: what did I know about being Lakota? Signaled panic, blood rush my embarrassment. What did I know of our language but pieces? Would I teach her to be pieces. Until a friend comforted, *don't worry, you and your daughter will learn together.*

Elizabeth Willis says

Thanks to Graywolf for the ARC!

WHEREAS is a breathtaking innovation. These poems breathe and grow and puncture; they consider grass and national identity and language and writing. Long Soldier wonders how we can capture a thing by assigning it a name, assigning words to it (Can we?), and especially how a government can atone for genocide. It is a song against silencing, against over-simplification, against homogenization, against misunderstanding, against misremembering, against nationalism. "I climb the backs of languages, ride them into exhaustion..."

Katie says

I felt out of my depth with this one. Some parts I loved, some went over my head. My favourite part was the discussion of the inadequacy of the congressional apology to Native Americans. It was well thought out and did interesting things with language and form. I think I need to reread this collection in a year or two when I've read a bit more modern poetry.
