

POETRY AS MEDICINE

I Am a Body of Land

This series of readings from poet Shannon Webb-Campbell share the story of Mary - a Mi'kmaq midwife.

Listen to the audio recording for *I Am a Body of Land*, read by Shannon Webb-Campbell, then ask yourself the questions provided below to challenge your way of thinking about medicine. The transcript for this recording is also provided on page 2.

Questions: Review these questions before listening to the audio recording or reading the transcript. Answer these questions below, in a journal, or blank page.

1. How has colonialism invaded our understanding about health, and what can poetry offer to help us look at new ways of relating to one another?
2. Draw a picture from any of the systems of knowledges from the suite of poem from *I Am a Body of Land* and reflect on your own systems of knowledge and ways of seeing in the world.
3. Imagine a poem could help validate someone's health related experiences. Which poem would you prescribe to a patient?
4. How could Mi'kmaq poetry inform or help Western medicine?
5. How does poetry change your thoughts on what is or isn't medicine?



Mary Webb

I Am a Body of Land - Audio Recording -

Click the button to go to the audio recording.



Shannon Webb-Campbell

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National Collaborating Centre
for Indigenous Health



THE HEALTH ARTS
RESEARCH CENTRE

AFTER THE UPHEAVAL

I've landed here
my voice damp with shame
my insides burn
I wait for someone to ask me to leave

I'm a translation of a translation
somewhere on the chopping block
of cutting and absence I cower
I trace tree lines

I am looking for a root
a stem to grow a sense of who I am
metabolize where I come from
and process who I belong to

I'm afraid of all that came before

A SPHERE WITHIN OUR SPHERE

try different entry points,
avert your suffering eyes,
and intersect with love.

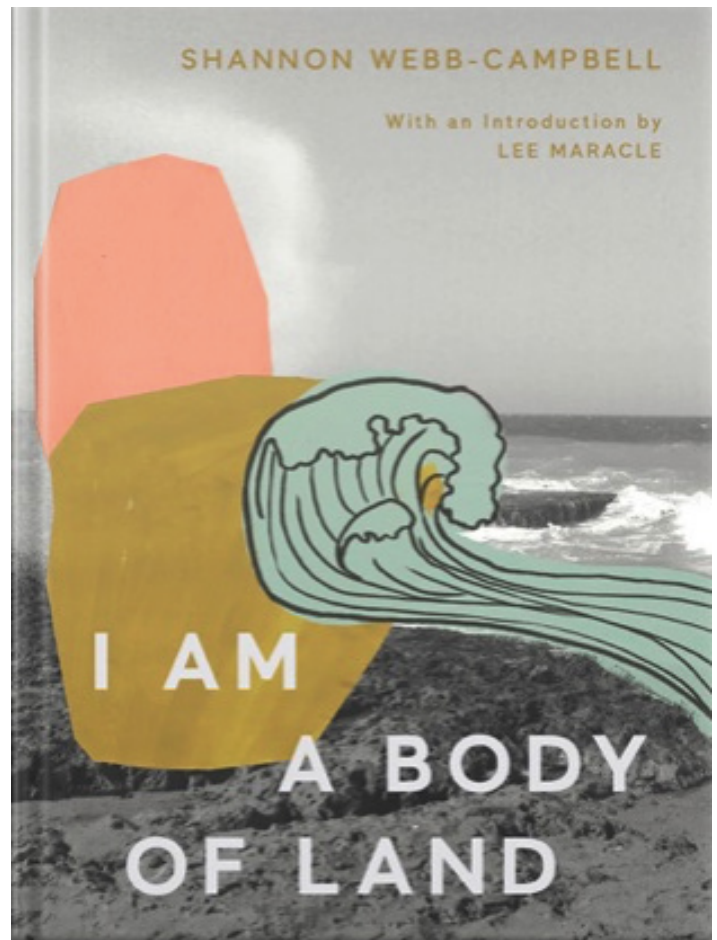
the body of this book is
traumatized
the body is a wound
we collapse on trauma's floor
we stand in the spine of
what comes after.

SOMEWHERE BEYOND KNOWN BODY AND SPIRIT

at an intersection between sex and rape
love and abuse – I hear whispers

Make room for violence
For the abusers and manipulators

generations move within
I enter spirit world
wade through lifetimes of shame
a mix of voices sing
clouds of smoke layered the lodge
like smoke the pain peels back
layer by layer



SEE HOW LOW THE MOON HANGS

when stars touch cliffs
land moves closer to sky
to meet earth's breath

return to where water
outweighs land. between
feral bog and the ocean's expanse
find remedy to temper your heart's fury

big skies heave shades of grey
winds howl their own voice

love needs truth and witness
no hesitations, always a spare room
to gather lifetimes and generations.

I ONLY HAVE ONE PHOTO LEFT OF MARY

for Mary Webb

No taller than wildflowers, with hands tucked into a soiled apron,
her hair covered. She looks into a lens with eyes that know
what plants are medicines, and which roots hold poisons.

In still-life photograph, Mary grew gardens, picked berries.
She distilled the moon's shine, pickled harvests, and kept meat.
Taught her youngsters to skin rabbits, make liquor blind.
Never drink the old stuff, she said.

Whenever I drink, or my moon bleeds, I think of Mary,
who travelled to women's wombs by dog team,
horses, sometimes even snowshoes.

Don't matter how many days it took,
or what storm railed down home,
she took medicines with her, bleached bloody bodies.
Mary always got there in time for the baby.

Grandmother went to the hospital sick in '78,
kept praying for young ones to grow old,
help them help those who carry on when she goes.
Mary died five years and four days before I got born
yet something inside me calls for her.

THEIR WORLDVIEW IS A NEW HOME IN AN ANCIENT LAND

If you think you can hold dominion over flora and fauna,
that a body and life can be property
you'd better try buying a constellation.

I am not landless, nor law.
in sorrow's aftermath remind me –
I am a body of land unlearning
what cannot be expressed.
Dig to find a physical knowing, ceremony.

Our cells remind us, we are living
in the intersection of trauma and desire
–a disordered state.

How can we imagine ourselves not broken?
Set vowels and variables.
Open to seven generations before and after.

LETTER TO JOSEPH R. SMALLWOOD

after Marilyn Dumont's "Letter to Sir John A. MacDonald"

Dear Joey: I'm still here and mixed
Mi'kmaq after all these years.
you're long dead, yet
confederation couldn't stop
Newfoundland's ongoing
colonial violence.
you continued so unapologetically,
telling Ottawa there are no red Indians
Nancy April, we killed them all.
and you know, Joey,
after all your declarations
bowing to the settlers,
we're still here, we remain
Mi'kmaq despite stolen status cards,
none of us landless
all of us Caribou.

IF LOVE IS OUR LAST HOPE THE MEDICINE WHEEL IS OUR COMPASS

look north to catch midnight
find death in winter

look east for dawn
find light in spring

look south at birth
find rebirth in summer

look west at dusk
find wisdom in fall

each direction: a spirit helper
an element, a sacred medicine

a circle embodies the passage of sun
and four seasons. I am of the dawn
here at the edge, knowing first light
you know longer shades of day

look to animal stars
find sweetgrass

look for mineral sun
find tobacco

look at plant moon
find cedar

look to human earth
find sage

our lives move in circles
we are sun-wise