

LANDLOCKED PLUTONIC CONSTELLATIONS

Author name: Tiana Lavrova's

Reviewed By: Terry Trowbridge

Eighteen-year-old British Columbian poet Tiana Lavrova's first chapbook of poetry is *Landlocked Plutonic Constellations*, consisting of eleven poems, divided between free verse and prose poems. There are no illustrations inside the chapbook, but the full colour cover image of a distorted cathode ray portrait suggests that Lavrova might have a parallel talent for videography or digitally manipulated visual art. Lavrova's author's bio also stakes a claim to printmaking and sculpture, suggesting that even though this is the poet's first significant cross-Canada artistic statement, there is a promise of a multimedia career in the near future.

Landlocked is a strong artistic introduction for CanLit to meet a young poetic talent. The verse is not ground breaking, but it is stylized. Lavrova's poetry will be a bit of a drag to readers who prefer plain-spokenness. This is not the book for them. However, at only eleven poems long, Lavrova offers a perfect portion of her bombastic, breathless, lexicon stretching visions. *Landlocked* is readable if the reader is in the mood for musicality and a few minute's entertainment.

There are three ways to read the chapbook that make it notable. It is a declaration of her arrival on the literary scene, including the mordant wit of the publisher, Grey Borders, as the platform she is standing on. The poems suggest Lovrova's career will involve a continuum with Canadian poetry about science and regional geography or civic landmarks. Furthermore, in an age of AI and procedural text generation, Lavrova is a reply from the flesh-based literary organisms.

As Lavrova's first published chapbook *Landlocked* is an artist's statement. Lavrova is a prolific Tumblr geek, so there is a question of why she would choose to pursue a print medium and move beyond self-publishing. She has found a good fit with Grey Borders, the publisher from Niagara Falls that has spent fifteen years seeking out poets in the earliest stages of their careers from across Canada and the USA. She joins a stable of cynical, sesquipedalian, province-

hopping unreliable narrators like Maia Kachan, Jade Wallace, Mercedes Killeen, and James Millhaven.

As a first chapbook, Lavrova is choosing to make the move into print media in a way that will define herself, rather than push the boundaries that have been established by other poets in British Columbia or Canada. Her voice is rhythmic and breathless. Her images are cumulus combinations of concepts from religion, theodicy, natural sciences, metapsychology and occult psychonaut gnosis. She wants a reputation for being ambitious and erudite. Her next few projects will help us to know if she is leaning toward 'Pataphysics or metacognitive critical theory. What *Landlocked* does is guarantee her readers that, were they to parse her poems and dissect them, they will find she already has a skillful ear for the harmony of meaning and sound, and superior sense of rhythmic pleasure.

The second reason to take interest in Lavrova's early poems is that she carries on a longstanding tradition of Canadian poetry. Her poems amalgamate geography with wintery images with scientific paradoxes and celestial entities. In a contemporary context, her poems fit onto a shelf with Rasiqra Revulva, Christian Bök, or Gary Barwin. Her geographical sense, though, stands out as the agreed upon reality that her readers can use to anchor themselves in her otherwise hyper-subjective radiating fields of interpretation. The poem "Clearwater Calculations" is pure Canadiana about "Inukshuk landscapes as cryptic as the Western Wall - /chasms of Canadian collective consciousness/cascade as if pre-semiotic" and elaborates a narrative of "The Clearwater fauna welded into model/food courts – its wordiness./A moose jaw's numerology – a coniferous pattern..." These poems are the next generation of 'pataplay and could be an extension of the Canadian geographical literature into the era of Gen Z.

The third reason to pay attention to Lavrova's work is the word salad quality of her poems. She has developed a writing voice that stands out as important in the era of algorithms and generative poetry. In the deep catacombs of Computer Science departments throughout Canadian universities, there are students learning to code generative poetry. Their goal is often to make computer programs that can replicate the voice and vocabulary of a human poet. Lavrova, however, has developed her own human version of early generative poetry. It is hard to parse for the novice English reader. It encodes her own voice in the cadence, the rhythm, and the feelings

of glottal ecstasy from reading her verse aloud. It relies heavily on juxtaposition and a reader's desire to suspend their picky frictions about genre.

Therefore, the poem "Kompostery" might seem like a randomly generated word cloud. Within the context of Lovrova's other poems, though, the rhythm is distinctly organic, and distinctly her own. In other words, her poems would make a generative poetry coder like Charles O. Hartman cry. There is an unnamed quality, worth investigating further, by which her seemingly randomized poems pass a Turing test in ways that the schizotypal early iterations of generative poems cannot. Early generations of algorithms attempted to write like humans, but Lavrova writes like an early genetic algorithm if it was not merely generative, but creative. Her poems, therefore, are worth keeping on a shelf as a canny reflection of the uncanny valley.

Bio

Terry Trowbridge is PhD candidate in Socio-Legal Studies in York University.