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**Larissa Lai (2018). *The Tiger Flu*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
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Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* is a novel set in the Pacific Northwest after an ecological disaster. What humans are left, experience waves of epidemic flu. In the farthest quarantine rings outside Saltwater City is the Grist Village, populated by a group of humans that were mutated generations ago and were exiled from Saltwater City. Certain sisters can self-produce (doublers) or re-grow organs (starfishes) that can be used for ailing Grist sisters. This is the world of Groom Kirilow Groundsel, who tends to her lover and starfish, Peristrophe Halliana. Saltwater City is a dystopic cityscape with collapsing plague houses, drugs that alter perceptions of reality, gangs of men that have the flu but survive, and 'dancing' girls that forage pre-disaster goods and steal to survive. This is the world of Kora Ko, the granddaughter of the man who caused the flu outbreak, who is later sent to the 'dancing' school. An attack on the Grist Village begins to set in motion events that weave together Kirilow and Kora's lives. The heart of the novel's narrative tension is the use of the flu as a form of population control and biological warfare. This is coupled with a project that tries to upload the mind, or consciousness, into a satellite orbiting Earth and divorce the mind and body from one another.

This is a conceptually difficult novel to read. Lai is a poet, novelist, and academic at the University of Calgary teaching Creative Writing. This is not the first time she has engaged with themes related to human cloning and fictional disabilities/debilities. Lai's previous novel, *Salt Fish Girl*, featured a fictional disease, the Dreaming Disease, which caused infected people to

experience multiple ancestral times simultaneously, as well as humans who manufactured and copyrighted a process whereby they merged fish DNA with their own DNA.

Lai, in an interview with Paul Semel (2018), discusses some of her influences for *The Tiger Flu*: “I’m so conscious of how progressive community members can hurt each other from within. So then I thought, What if the women in Grist Village were biologically dependent on one another for survival?... I wanted to track the interaction of concepts because the world we live in is produced that way. So I placed my tiger flu beside ideas of de-extinction and a cyberpunk upload.” Sami Schalk pushes us (2018) to acknowledge the differing realities of speculative fiction: “An important difference between speculative fiction and realist fiction is that speculative fiction does not purport to reflect reality directly; rather, speculative fiction brings *aspects* of reality into newly constructed worlds in which realist rules regarding time, space, bodyminds, abilities, and behaviors need not be followed” (21). In beginning to consider *The Tiger Flu* from a disability perspective, we need to be conscious of the ways that Lai is creating new realities, yet at the same time is very much thinking about the world in which we currently live.

While race is not in the forefront as in her other novels, the world of *The Tiger Flu* is one where white people no longer dominate, at least in the Pacific Northwest. The name of the principal city of the novel, Saltwater City, invokes the naming of Vancouver by early Cantonese immigrants, “Haam Sui Fauh,” ‘salt water city’ (Thom 2018). As such, the legacy of Chinese migration to the Pacific Northwest should not be left out as a distant, but lingering, memory in *The Tiger Flu*. Unlike *Salt Fish Girl*, it is not clear how Lai grounds the novel in Indigenous epistemologies, an idea that she highlights as crucial in her academic scholarship. On the other

hand, location markers such as the ‘Coast Salish Timeplace’ and the anti-capitalist practices of the Grist sisters is a possible attempt to sync with Indigenous decolonial practices.

There are three important strands of thoughts in Lai’s novel that should be of particular interest to scholars in disability studies. First, as suggested via Lai’s quote about the production of the novel, the practice of resilience in the world of *The Tiger Flu* is entangled with themes of interdependence. Lai’s novel investigates questions similar to those proposed by Daniel Heath Justice (2018) regarding Indigenous Critical Kinship, “How do we learn to be human? How do we become good relatives? How do we become good ancestors? How do we learn to live together?” (p. 28). I also believe that these questions are important to consider from the angle of disability and the concept of interdependence. Second, disability scholars have space to investigate how Lai forms new disabilities and how they interact with a curative imaginary. This is an intellectual trend recently emerging, especially with the release of Schalk’s new book on Black women’s speculative fiction. Lastly, her centering a mind/body split as a crucial form of narrative tension mirrors Disability Studies scholars and activists call to critically interrogate this rhetoric in our own realities. The push towards the concept of ‘bodyminds’ is present in Lai’s world, in which the Grist Sisters believe the two to be so deeply entangled with one another. And the potential separation of the two then becomes a central tension in the narrative. Lai’s novel then gives space to interrogate the space where bodies and minds are physically separated from one another. I am not sure if Lai deliberately created a world that explores some critical themes for disability scholarship. But, *The Tiger Flu* should be of particular interest to disability scholars who are interested in Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction and Animal Studies.

My only substantial critique of the text is that Lai does little to challenge the cisnormativity of gender. It seems like in a world where gender is so tied to disability and

debility, where men are more susceptible to the flu than women, and all Grist sisters are women, that there is nothing nuancing gender. Because disability in the novel is so entwined with gender, it is a disappointing absence that could have been unraveled further.

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