STATELEW: The Gathering Place

(a poem based on the Kwantlen village site
in New Westminster)

We are not going to the reserve, but past it
down this road to a place that didn’t exist
one hundred years ago, and I wonder how many
reserves there are in this, the farthest outpost.
This idea is new to me, based on a black
and white photograph of a man in a canoe
between two places. The strands coming together
from where they have been interned. All is built
upon invention and what lies beneath becomes
a question slowly unraveling in time, a forgotten word
upon a tongue, a memory of remembering. I am not
home, and it is not mine to remember, not my
language nearly lost, yet the curious seed is planted,
unfurls. There, the sign, the surface of the road, where
the machine is taking its load to see sights from the other
side, somehow not real, the sibilant tunnel walls hush,
obscure, and in me yearns to know the name,
the word of the place beyond and its meaning.
I am invited, the wheels running between these two
hemispheres over and over whispering I am ignorant,
dumb, the tasteless shape of a colonized mind to eschew
the remains of middens and longhouses, the name of this
place, the single word and its meaning. For once, it knew
a land not bandaged with foreign names, their language not
so darkened, not so hidden. Mother England, you promised
a city; all I see is loss. Don’t say the means have
justified the hiding of the buried song, the cleansing breath.

Moss Whelan

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