

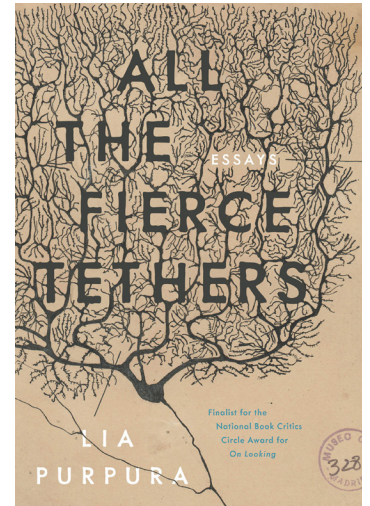


ALL THE FIERCE TETHERS

LIA PURPURA
READER'S GUIDE

TEN QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. The title of the book, *All the Fierce Tethers*, offers two concepts to consider: that of ferocity and that of tethering. What do you see as fierce about these essays? You might consider the way these essays face off with drives to use the land, and other non-human beings for human centered purposes. How does tethering work? In what ways do these essays assert connection or commitment to ruined or misused land/beings? How do these essays address our interdependence?
2. Many of these essays explore the notion of “prayer” in nontraditional ways. For example, “Of Prayer” embarks on a search for a viable form of address in response to two sudden, brutal deaths, and “Small, Three-legged Branch” addresses the reciprocal feel of being seen and trails that back to childhood. How can perception be a part of anyone’s practice?
3. In “Walk with Snowy Things” I catalog objects that “find an order” in their own way, and think on the importance of attention in valuing the degraded and the strange (and by extension, in other essays, the damaged, unattractive, borderlands). How does the gathering up, the accretion of stuff, in this essay eventually lead to the essay’s final thought?
4. I am a hybrid creature—drawn to both urban/citified and wooded/oceaned/greened land. Questions form, understandings come, perceptions expand in both places. What can you say about the urban explorations and the “natural” explorations in the book as a whole?
5. The “Bloodspot” series addresses a few interrelated questions I’ve been working on recently: how exactly do we draw boundaries around ourselves and our communities? How do we “read” our land? How do we manage to pass through local places and “not read?” How do we consider or not consider ourselves “relations” to the land we live on? What questions about your relationship to your “land” do these (and other) essays raise?



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CONT.

6. My essays have been called “lyric essays”—which I certainly understand (I was a poet before I started writing prose.) I write the way I think and perceive, which in many ways might be identified “as a poet.” What do you think this sensibility makes possible in the essay form?
7. ...Nevertheless! Most of these essays engage with other texts, concepts, thinkers, and are full of all kinds of primary and secondary source research. Essays like “My Eagles”, “Scream, or never minding”, “Loss Collection,” and “Metaphor Studies” dig into primary sources. How do the dual drives (the lyric and the “researched) feed each other?
8. I walk a lot in these essays (and in life in general). What about the essay form is like a walk?
9. Many of these essays are written in sections and are fully realized as the sections accrete and converse, as the parts build towards a dimensional understanding of an issue or interrelated issues. How does this form ask you to read differently than, say, a more strictly narrative or chronological essay?
10. In organizing these essays, I noted the word “radiance” appearing in different contexts. Ruin, voraciousness, manipulation of a natural order, the impulse to “Scream” rather than passively “never mind”—all these impulses exist in the book up against and in consort with a belief in the radiant, the repair and sustenance that’s possible if attention’s paid. If these essays don’t “resolve”—what exactly do they suggest about the importance of “the radiance?”

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Go for a walk (or walk through your day) and notice what you’ve never noticed before. Yes, this IS a paradox! How can you notice what’s not noticeable? Well, to start, you’ll have to use your body differently. As you walk, turn your head and look under stuff you usually don’t look under. Slow down where you usually speed up. Note occurrences at different distances (listen to sounds occurring close up, in the middle distance, and far off). Let your sight linger on that which you usually pass over quickly. (Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Fish” zips around precipitously, focusing in and out constantly, brilliantly.) The space you move through then should begin to layer up, animate, and deepen in unexpected ways.
2. Be alert to surface irritants. Often, what comes to us as an “annoyance” or that which triggers a flinch or quick judgement is an early warning system, cueing us to an Big Issue that we’ve not yet fully named or explored. So, for example, in the essay “On Photographing Children in Trees,” I noted the bodily flinch I felt when passing this seasonal occurrence in a local park—noted my judgement, noted the desire to turn away from the scene. But then, later, as I was writing in my notebook (i.e. staying with the scene/response) I uncovered way more intricate roots that tethered my response to way more substantial thought.