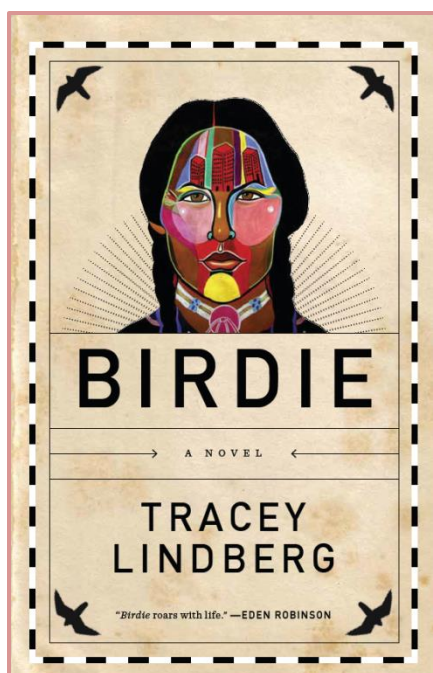


## SPOTLIGHT



April 21, 2017

Sometimes after someone has had an emotional breakdown, counsellors will try to direct the sufferer to a path of healing by referring to the event as a *break-through* rather than a *break-down*. It might, on the surface, be a cheesy exercise in semantics, but it can be helpful.

For all intents and purposes, Birdie, Tracey Lindberg's titular character, is having a breakdown. She was the victim of chronic sexual assault from a young age, had identity confusion, and made some decisions along the way she wasn't too proud of. Now she's drawn into herself, not communicating with those around her, and not eating. Needless to say, on an emotional level, *Birdie* is a difficult read.

But it's difficult in other ways as well. Because much of the story lies in Birdie's reflections, the timeline is often confusing and the details are sometimes scattered. Sometimes, too, the story switches to the women around her. For non-female, non-Cree readers, the perspectives might also be unfamiliar. Furthermore, Lindberg invents new composite words to capture a feeling or image (e.g., smilesnarl). Sentence fragments are par for the course.

For all of this, readers may feel particularly rewarded in the end having learned about female relationships, about Cree culture, about the written language, and about mental/emotional recovery. Nonetheless, it never comes across as preachy as it is all wonderfully grounded in the complex, immensely likeable and often funny character, Birdie, who, (spoiler alert) has a break through.

Tracey Lindberg is one of the many talented guests coming for this year's NorthWords Writers Festival and coming up in the fall, Jamie Bastedo will be defending *Birdie* in Yellowknife Public Library's 2<sup>nd</sup> Yellowknife Reads debate.

John Mutford

Library Manager