

## Loving Luba

By Philip Dacey

Book Review:

*Luba Poems*, by Colette Inez,  
Red Hen Press, 2015.



Colette Inez's *Luba Poems* is a feast and a festival, nothing if not cornucopian. I have read her poems for decades, always impressed by how her work is simultaneously brainy and sensuous (as well, at times, sensual). Inez seems incapable of a vulgar gesture. Her sophistication precludes anything prosaic or pedestrian; likewise, her work never takes an easy path, never settles for a neat (and therefore false) resolution. If one had to sum up her art in a phrase, “serious play” would be the most fitting.

The character or persona Luba, arguably an alter ego of Inez, takes her place alongside Berryman's Henry—an Other who is the Self. Luba's, like Inez's, knowledge of astronomy and the cosmos informs and pervades the book, giving it a broader range and focus than most books of poems. Luba is a space traveller and a lover, and when she's not also being a “pop-up tart,” she's a philosopher (“What's real?”) and a scientist (“What are the coordinates?”). Luba is a devotee of jazz, of “Dizzy G.” and “Billie's gardenia . . . blue jazz in riffs.” Inez riffs dizzily on consonants and vowels.

The poems are full of wonderful local moments and felicities of sound effects and vocabulary, e.g., “tangle of strangeness,” the strangeness there being the difference between the “ang” in each word. There's a Lorca-like wildness—a reach and daring—about the voice throughout; in Inez's (and Luba's) world, the moon and sun can “rattle.” Memorable adjective/noun combinations abound: “seamless opalescence,” “cockamamie porcelain.” Color is important as well, the book painterly, a kind of rainbow book, spectroscopic, with blue dominant.

Reading Inez, one thinks of Verlaine, his insistence on "*musique encore et toujours*," how "all the rest is literature"—Inez is never guilty of writing mere literature. Reading her is always an adventure and a challenge. Subtlety and respect for the reader's intelligence are hallmarks of her work, which contains spaces and silences that act as invitations to the reader, habitations, as it were, to which the reader can return for further exploration.

Yet, for one whose work is so individuated and stamped with a distinct signature, Inez keeps in touch with the literary tradition as background and anchor. One enjoys her sly and indirect nodding to Chaucer in "Aprille, the Mansion," as well as the detection of Emily Dickinson's "my shoes would overflow with pearl," in Inez's "scooping up imagined pearls." A number of the poems, with their 14 lines, flirt attractively with the sonnet. Has anyone else ever rhymed Byron with iron?

The success of this book creates an appetite in the audience for the next collection. How will the poet follow in the footsteps of Luba? Inez writes of "clouds, lightweight / champions of longing." A champion of longing herself, Inez is no lightweight. Though her touch is airy and graceful, and her lines are always spry, what she gives to us here has the heft to guarantee it will be around a long time.