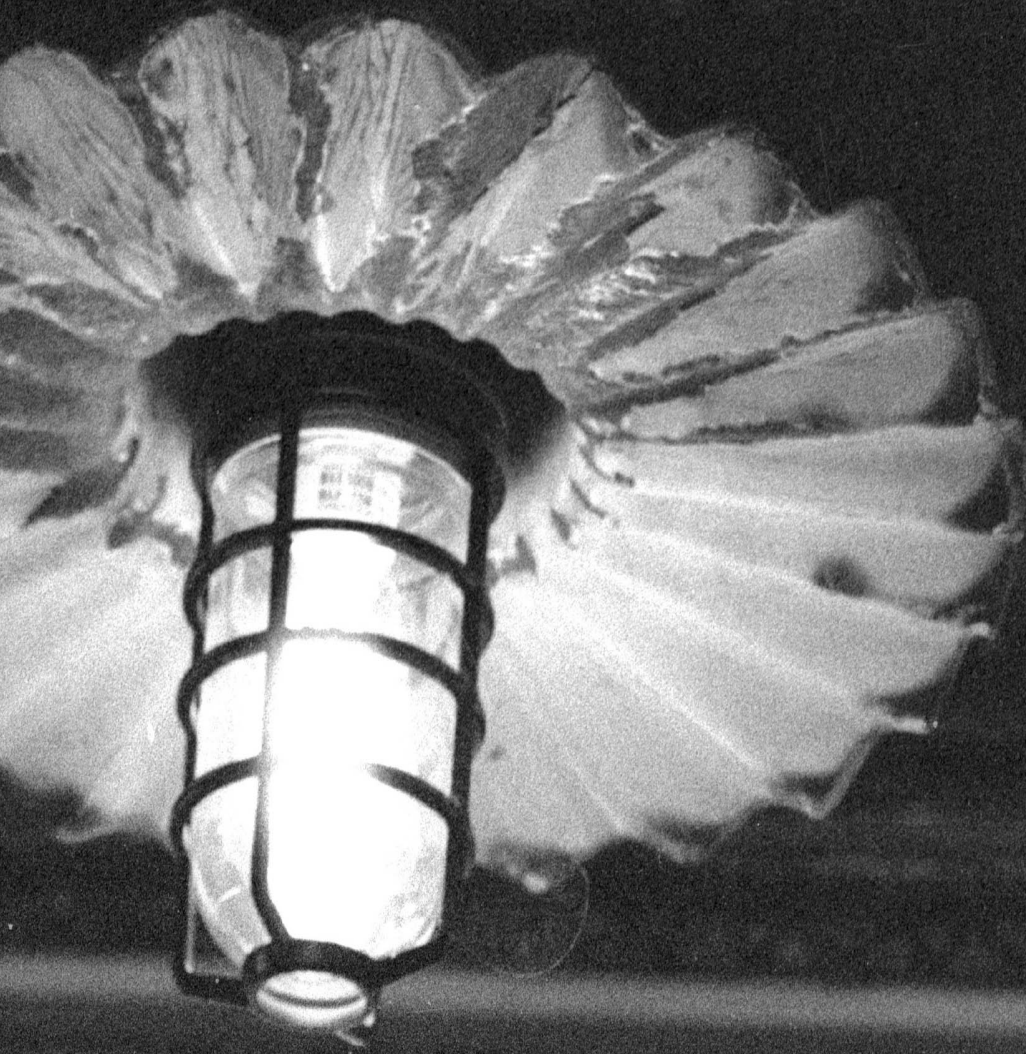


Bloodroot Literary Magazine

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Bloodroot Literary Magazine

Bloodroot is a nonprofit literary magazine dedicated to publishing diverse voices through the adventure of poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Our aim is to provide a platform for the free-spirited emerging and established writer.

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The editors want to thank everyone who contributed, spread the word and otherwise built community around this project, especially James E. Dobson and Left Bank Books.

Please note: Laura Foley's poems that appear here were previously published in *A Quiet Courage* and are reprinted with the author's permission.

Introductions

Welcome to the *Bloodroot* revival. When we put out a call and held our first meeting and reading at Left Bank Books in Hanover, NH, no one knew who would show up or what this would turn into. Ivy, Phyllis and I designed this inaugural digital edition using a radically inclusive strategy. What started as a print literary magazine has evolved into an author platform designed to support a writing community. I am hopeful *Bloodroot* will grow and change, rooting down into the Upper Valley community and blooming out into the digital literary scene. Special thanks to Jed Dobson for technical support and for the photo that graces the cover of this issue as well as the banner of the website. *Bloodroot's* print covers always featured a depiction of a bloodroot flower: Jed's photo electrifies this theme. Thank you to everyone who sent us work and who came out to Left Bank and urged their students to do so. You champions of poetry and literary fiction, this smorgasbord offering is for you. I hope you cherish it as much as I do.

RENA J. MOSTEIRIN

This first on-line issue of *Bloodroot* has been a long time in the making. It has been over two years since the magazine's founder "Do" Roberts died suddenly just after the 7th edition had arrived from the printer. There was enthusiastic support for the idea of continuing the magazine from many of its writers, but it became clear that no one of us was prepared to give the time or financial support that "Do" and her co-editor Deloris Netzband had done. Eventually the three editors of this 2016 issues patched together times to meet and work to revive the magazine as an on-line journal. We have learned a great deal about how this should best be done in the actual doing of it; we know that future editors will post a clear and concise list of requirements and expectations from submitters, and we hope that there will in the future be yearly editions. We know that the contents of this first issue are diverse in content and craft, and as the magazine grows, so will the expectations and goals of the editors change. We hope that you will be pleased with this on-line *Bloodroot* and that you will continue to offer your best work to it.

PHYLLIS BECK KATZ

This inaugural online edition of *Bloodroot* gives me joy and hope. Joy in seeing “Do” Roberts’ late-in-life mission to support writers in the Upper Valley revived and given a sleek new and, we hope, sustainable, form by our web guru, Rena Mosteirín, who is no slouch in the writing department either, and will be starting an MFA at Bennington College this summer. Congrats, Rena! Joy in seeing the indefatigable work of Phyllis Katz on behalf of *Bloodroot* come to fruition. For over two years, Phyllis has cast about for a way to feed the flame that “Do” and Delores Netzband kindled, organizing meetings, sending out emails and letters, chatting up publishers, insisting that we could find a way to make this revival work. And with an infusion of Rena’s can-do spirit, we did. Phyllis’ faith in the power of poetry and in the value of this project has buoyed us; this would not have happened without her. This issue gives me joy because of the superlative poetry and short fiction it offers. We accepted at least one piece from everyone who submitted work because our goal is to build community around the arts and around poetry in particular. We recognize that an online publication will flourish only if it nourishes the community of writers and readers it also helps to develop. It was thrilling to receive submissions from so many wonderful writers, whose work I have known and admired over the years or have just come to admire and look forward to seeing more of in the future. Finally, this issue gives me hope because of the wide range of writers it encompasses, from well-known and well published writers to local and yet unsung wordsmiths; from a teacher of poetry who has just joined the Dartmouth Creative Writing faculty, to an undergraduate student in her Fall 2015 poetry class, the youngest writer in the group. That poetry continues to inspire and delight the upcoming generations as it sustains so many of us gives me joy *and* hope.

IVY SCHWEITZER

What Was I Then

TO YOU: The witch. The guide. Your mother. That
 girl after drinks. The father who beats her.
 Follower. Runaway. Titmouse. Daddy.
 The antagonist to your pro. Sojourner.
 Woman in a three-piece suit. Woman bound
 by ties and boy shorts. Switch and hook.
 Swatter. Wailer. Lover of bears.
 Canine in the lip. Slip and slide.
 Batter. Baller. Hero. Hooker. What
 was I to you? Damselfly. Pot liquor.
 Hurricane. Harridan. Fuck. Fucked.

Nothing. And no one. *Mercy*.
 That's what I asked for. Instead:
 Belted. Bent. Stoppered. Broken.

Left
 to wander the desert of myself.
 Thirsty for... and why not? Shameless.
 Guiltless. You dowsers. Berater. You picker
 of stones. It was you who threw it, but
 so very silent. I never saw it coming.

Now look...

VIEVEE FRANCIS

Speaking of Ponies -

Truth be told
the one trick pony had several tricks,
was practiced in the art of illusion,
knew the difference between trick
and truth. A silver streak ran down
its mane. A kind of magic, time –
and the experience it allows.
The pony could lift its legs regally high,
keep them extended far longer than most.
Though it could talk, it refused. Preferred discretion
and was thus favored. Red ribbons
and lavender. Bells and leather harnesses.
The pony could disappear, and reappear
upon a simple apology. It knew the power
of an incantation: “I am sorry.” “Forgive me.”
“I love you.” “Don’t go.” “Fuck
you.” Watch the pony climb the walls. Watch
the pony play dead. Watch the pony sit
at the table and eat with a knife and fork as if
this were nothing unusual. Happy pony.
Pony of a thousand faces. Tonight,
the amazing pony will cry like a man.
Birthday pony. Retirement party pony.
You must be 5’9” to ride this pony.
This pony is as strong as any horse.
One trick? Please.

Watch this pony pull
a rabbit out of her hat. Follow that bunny
down,
down,
down.

VIEVEE FRANCIS

Note to the Cloud
that Hung Blue Over the Mountain
of that Year

I won't give you this autumn –
not one paper birch, not one white-tailed
deer. I won't give up my view from the porch,
not a glimpse, not an acorn, not a single leaf
from this season of leaving. I walked the path
from this house to –
and I have stopped resisting the silence.
Let there be silence. Let the silence break
the skin. Insufferable –
the thought of giving this too to you.
This cool that turns the sugar maple.
Your feet will not cross these plank-boards.

Dolor,
whatever you wanted I have already given
and I gave until the summer split me like buckshot
through quail. I who have never trusted summer am
proven right. But now the more honest fall
with its undercurrent of death doesn't promise anything.
And I won't hand it over to you. No apple from the limb.
Did you expect temptation darling? My hand free of yours holds
no offer. What I have left is mine alone –
Time enough
to watch the greedy birds swallow their smaller prey,
to rake this yard before the snow.

VIEVEE FRANCIS

Levitation

Forget the Ouija board.
 The best fourth-grade sleepovers
 went down in the den in the unsupervised
 80s when someone's mother let us
 have a couple of candles, our shadows
 flickering on faux-wood walls.
 Abby's big brother and his best friend Sam
 blasted Q106, flew their Galaxy Commander
 played Atari till midnight in a locked room
 but we knew power lay in numbers
 and we bid the chosen girl lie down
 on the carpet in her white nightgown
 her limbs assembled perfectly straight
 willing herself into a visible line
 her molecules already loosening for us
 as we each hooked two fingers
 beneath her quiet body
 and murmured the spell somebody had found
light as a feather stiff as a board
light as a feather stiff as a board
 Disbelief giving way to wonder
 we kneeled at her altar
 balanced her like a tray of pencils
 on our twelve fingertips
light as a feather stiff as a board
light as a feather stiff as a board
 forgetting what the boys had wanted
 in the tent with their hot flashlights
 forgetting our names
 in the nylon dark as steady steady
 we crouched and trembled
 steady steady we slowly stood
 and she rose like a baby doll, her eyes closed
 she rose like a bright ghost
 she rose and rose.

DIANA WHITNEY

Kindergarten Studies the Human Heart

Nothing like a valentine,
pink construction paper
glue-sticked to doilies downstairs
in preschool, the sand table
filled with flour, the Fours
driving trucks through silky powder,
white clouds rising
to dust their cheeks. Up here
the Fives are all business:
four chambers on the chalkboard,
four rooms colored hard
in thick-tipped marker, red and red,
blue and blue, oxygen rich
and oxygen poor, the branching vine
of the aorta hanging
its muscled fruit, dark apple
blood flower blooming
in a thick jungle.
My kid squeezes her fist
to show me the size of it.
Pulses it like a live animal.
Taps the double rhythm
that never stops, not a trot
but the echo of a trot, not a drum
but the echo of a drum,
small palms on the art table
laying down the backbeat:
become become become.

DIANA WHITNEY



Decomposition

I struggle to create a composition that can take it all in—
 old blue truck, modern army of sun-seeking solar panels,
 stalwart lavender mountains, golden grass, all under a rising moon.

“You have to pick and choose,” the photographer warns me,
 “Decide what it is you are trying to say.”

“It’s the photojournalist in you that craves it all,” she concludes,
 with a nod and a period
 as if that settles the matter.

It doesn’t. The story pretty much tells itself.
 I have nothing to do with it.
 An innocent bystander like the rest of you
 Observing it all—

Blue truck giving up the ghost, array of solar panels
 following in its wake, old giving birth to new
 giving birth to old, giving birth to new—again.
 Hope bowing to disappointment
 Under the watchful eye of the stalwart mountains,
 And, the moon that never ceases to rise.

It is the only composition there is
 Yet, we remain optimistic that we can change something
 While the moon and the mountains smile
 And, the truck and solar panels,
 And all our best made plans—
 Decompose.

KIM J. GIFFORD

Someday

I'd like to shake out the
floral down comforter on my bed.

I know it's not much
of a dream,
but you'd be surprised
how hard it is to accomplish.

I'll open a window, my hands
will grip one end tightly and I'll shake
and enjoy the lift, the loft, the billowing pause
of fabric in the air, as if it might defy gravity
before exhaling itself back towards earth

Can anything be more satisfying than tracking the ripples
as they trampoline the useless away,
knowing the crooked will be made straight,
if only for a day?

Afterwards I'll sit on somebody's
fine red bench
under a blooming magnolia

KEVIN O'KEEFE

What Month is This? What Year?

Finally you end up being naked places you never imagined yourself naked
in plain sight of people before whom you were always impeccably clothed,
as in your sons and daughters learning now to touch your skin.
If your skin was your own business at this point, something private.

In plain sight of people before whom you were always impeccably clothed,
we touch your hair, smooth down the spot you missed with the brush.
Your skin no longer your own business at this point. Nothing private.
My brother and I exchange looks above your head. We nod at the doctor.

We touch your hair, smooth down the spot you missed with the brush.
Scolding you about the red marks on your forehead, I put your hands in your lap.
My brother and I exchange looks above your head. We nod at the doctor.
Doctor taps your back. Asks you questions. What month is this? What year?

He doesn't scold about the red marks. You keep your hands in your lap.
Trained as you were as a child to sit up straight. Polite. Obedient.
Doctor listens to your heart. Asks you questions. What month is this, mother,
what year? You answer each question carefully as if there were comfort in it.

Trained as you were as a child to sit up straight. Obedient.
Your sons and your daughters learning now to touch your skin.
You answer each question thoroughly as if there were some comfort in it,
sitting up naked in places you never imagined yourself naked.

CAROL POTTER

Purple Hope

It is sour as often as sweet. The
 Promise perceived deceives
 Even in the purple-stained name,
 Blackberry is no berry.
 Fear can be the size of the aggregate fruit.

Though still, hope for blackberries

Because nothing hurts more than empty,
 Because finding full is worth the risk of a bite that bites back,
 Because the thicket contains a purple-stained love;
 A heart shaped like a blackberry.

Then there's hope in blackberries

When the photos reveal a blurry view:
 A blackberry in the black & white womb.
 The mother caught in the bittersweet bramble
 Of a fruit that grows thorns before flowers,
 But such is life.
 Purple-stained blood is risked to be alive.

Hope for the blackberry

To pick the world by a child's handful,
 To sign the hour in purple permanent ink.
 Memories make messes, sticky fingers & lips,
 But these dyes flavor time purple-stained.

Hope, blackberry,

And always choose with hunger.
 Take the gamble of tart and sweet,
 Taste the world with purple-stained teeth.

MICHAEL SUN

The Way Out

Spring's dusting takes a frosty morning breath
and sublimates, taking with it cherry blossom petals,
a disappearance one could only long for.
Or is a fadeout better-?
Plaudits to those who know how to leave:
the ballerina, radiant, off with a grand jeté.

September warms up like an orchestra
for October's technicolor strip show;
oak leaves are party guests
who just don't get the hint. Mud season
says the snow has stuck around too long.

Crimson sumac candelabra light the way to summer
when we notice that we hadn't noticed when
they fell. I want to fully appreciate every loss
of season. The space left inside me
wants space to leave you in.

FLORENCE FOGELIN

The Waterman

He checks the mooring lines and sits,
careful of his Sunday suit,
and looks across the swamp into the bay,
enjoys going down to see the view
he was born with.

Six days a week he's out there—
(never *in*. Funny but he never learned to swim.)
—hunter-gatherer
of fish, oysters, clams, and crabs—
He knows their seasons.

She's fixing Sunday dinner,
now just the two of them.
Ham or chicken. Fish for everyday,
crabs and oysters for the money.
The children left for town years ago.

FLORENCE FOGELIN

I wanted to write something about waiting:

About scratch off's and sitting on the stoop,
kids kicking rocks,
young men strolling up the block,
elders on front porches,

and about the woman across the street
who cycles between hope and sorrow
with such speed
that if a person didn't stop to pay attention
they might never guess
that she, too, is waiting.

But all I can think about is my brother-in law
since his last stroke,
lying in the bed, sitting in his chair
as hours, days, and weeks pass.
He wakes, eats, sleeps, shits,
and we are worn with the smell of it.

Up for an hour, then he begs to sleep again.
Another hour, Rick, then you can get back in.
I find myself wanting to shake him:
Live, damn-it!

It's not impossible,
to hear Mom tell it:
That slight movement of muscle
was in direct response to Ms. Bank's prayer.

And perhaps
if we all pray more fervently
Rick will heal, the woman across the street
will know exactly who her baby's daddy is
and Jesus will come down from heaven; Mercy
will follow all the rest of our days;
goodness over flow, our sorrow
cups fill...

in this neighborhood,
stranger things have happened.

DEBORAH MASHIBINI-PRIOR

Bouquet

Pear blush and cedar bough
borders grove ferns dripping

Whitman – frond water
from drunken ledges.

Plath in the river valley
Burns off by ten.

Antler velvet, crow feather.

Broken eggshell sky
in the morning.

India ink filling in
the little wood by night.

ROSS THURBER

Blue Notes

The grass is spellbound under a golden horn
with an ensemble that beach heads and slips into a grove.

Windrows tedded at noon, raked and woven at two
baled round three o'clock.

The player's throat is dry and hunger air cured
aloft with each green blade buzzing

when summer enters the room.

The fuel pump on the tractor chortles diesel,
the cable on the baler splinters,

the valve stem on the wheel is shot,
studs loosen from their rim; the hub cracks a high treble.

Evening follows the rhythm section and trickles in.

Bruised light is sweet on the metal,
shadows reach across the field and meet.

Dew in her club dress will make rust float in a droplet.

A fox with one sable leg arrives at dusk, cases the meadow
Stays until closing time.

ROSS THURBER

It's Like Going to College

It's like going to college, I told myself.
 She's leaving home; she'll be away,
 Yet we can visit, and she can come home.

But...she's three and a half.

How can she understand
 When we don't appear for six weeks,
 How can she understand,
 It's so others can take our place in her heart,
 How can she understand
 That we still love her?

It's a fine place; the owners are kind,
 Knowing, sensitive to each child;
 That's why we chose it.

Yet we chose it,
 So I could keep loving her,
 And not hate her,
 Not resent her.

Caring people will bathe her, feed her,
 Try to teach her to speak, to go potty, to nod a yes or no.
 Will they hold her in their arms and look lovingly in her eyes?
 Will they sing to her?

We will come and hold her in our arms,
 And I will sing to her.
 They may, too.
 We will bring her home sometimes.
 They will love her, too.

ZARA

New Moon

Tonight, one of those fingernail-paring slivers
behind the red maple not yet in leaf.
Next to it, a little higher in the sky, one star.
It's like a scene from one of those first books
I read, or, more accurately, had read to me.
The moon stirs faint memories, vague regrets, and of course
longing—what does that mean now, when chances
for stereotypical moon-driven love seem slim
to nonexistent? For tonight, though, I can deal with it;
for tonight, I can keep it this way, and then tomorrow
the moon will no longer be slim and evocative, but
becoming fat and ordinary, and it will have started
on its inevitable way to disappearing entirely,
except for that one accompanying star.

MAME WILLEY

Cage

Trees are always a relief, after people.
After people, a stiff one and a handful
of aspirin might get you through, ease you
out of that wingback, tongue tired out,
supper heavy in your belly. Even music
makes a cage, its mathematical skeleton
and hand wrought contrivance equal
to the iron mesh that traps every animal
instinct since Adam. Trees, their spines
aching in the wind, their arms
outstretched to catch us, they know
to keep silent. No song, after all, erases
cacophony. Only wind rattling the branches,
only your own breath let go as vapor –
the sustenance of the forest.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

Hotline Trainee

The officer demonstrates how the toilets flush by push button outside the bathroom. He laughs when he explains how they sift through feces looking for contraband. He points out surveillance cameras and the Intoxilyzer 5000. We nod, crane our necks to peak inside the holding cell. Mostly drunk guys sober up in there, the night's criminal mischief bookings underway. While our guide details how they puke and pass out and bloody themselves, the 6 year-old's 9-1-1 call we heard this morning plays again in my head. She hiccups through hysterical crying. She explains that her step-father has the baby, that he has made *bad red marks* on her mother's neck. She screams. *He has the baby*, she says again. *You can't hold a baby like that*, she explains. The call had lasted 7 minutes, though it seemed much longer. After, Chelsea, the volunteer coordinator, explained, *This is why we're here*. Around the table, heads bowed, some of us wept. It's day two of volunteer training, and there's no holding back. The officer offers a tour of the cruisers, yammers on about their sophisticated equipment and what weapons he carries headed out to "a domestic." One trainee asks, *Do you like your job?* He's dumbstruck for a moment then says *It's changed me*. Even out with the wife and kids, he scans for trouble. I'm thinking ahead. The call will come late, likely wake me. The caller may simply need to talk. Or, I will meet her at the station, listen to her story, walk her through the paperwork so the night duty cop can wake the judge, who, if convinced, will grant an emergency "relief from abuse" until the close of the next business day, when the caller will return to file for a temporary order until a final hearing, at which her abuser will also appear, and where, if another judge concurs, an actual restraining order will be issued. One woman raises her hand. She wants to know what we do if, in the middle of the night, the judge says no. *We'll go over safety-planning in detail next week*, Chelsea answers. There are no windows in the police station training room. It's Mother's Day, coincidentally. When we exit the building, an extraordinarily gorgeous spring afternoon blinds us.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

Telepathic Dispatches from Tuesday Evening's Reading

I do not trust young poets
or old ones, either–

the young poets
whistling through gritted
teeth to the tune of early
ejaculate and other narcotics
silhouetted yet identifiable
behind lilac curtains stitched
of extended metaphors stolen
from the Beat and postmodern
coterie 'cause professor said

–“ Great Artists Steal ” –

stanzas hemorrhaging
black ink after being
smacked stupid and silly,
beaten, bruised, bloody
by aggressive alliteration;
they watch this crowd,
starving to feast on
knowing glances

&

the old poets
clearing gin-and-cig-spun
cobwebs from throats over
ersatz-crutch, stained-oak
podiums, incanting their mothers'
and/or fathers' scent never
ever replicated by Yankee
Candle or other kitsch merchants,
their final stanzas a face-in-palm
pace up down up down hospital
wings white-lit and thirty degrees
like standalone ice-cream
freezer boxes in the grocery

while panning for sand-granule
gold pieces out of dad's final sighs;
they watch this crowd
starving to feast on
knowing glances

while, sitting smackdab
in the middle, my pupils
bounce to and fro between

young /// old young /// old young /// old

like nauseous bookends
to a drunken Newton's cradle,
my ass doing that hot rash
pain thing that happens
when you've been sitting
in the same chair too long
and you're more than ready
to get up, dust off your thighs,
and leave the room.

TIMOTHY HALTEMAN

Animal Behavior

Once I heard how a
clever crow coaxed
a tethered dog
in tight circles
around a post
until the rope
was too short
to reach his food
then calmly feasted
while the furious canine
snarled and raged
only inches away
Something familiar
in this tale of hunger
and deceit and a rope
yes there is always
a rope too short
with someone
in a room upstairs
on the losing end
coiled and full
of venom
without the sense
to turn around
and slowly unravel
what's already been done

DANNY DOVER

The Swimming Hole

I used to go swimming at Great Falls,
where the Potomac slows and blackens
its skin over a deep hole. Rocks crater
there and make a rim. And eddies
indicate the scale of danger.
But who cares when a rope is limp
and you grab it with your sopping hands.
You swing free of the earth, sailing
through the chaos of the trees
hanging with white feet over an abyss.
The thrill of dying needles up your legs
as you taste vertigo on your tongue.

How rare and dignified it is to let go,
to sleep through the steep air
like a suicide already dead with fear.
Down you go, weighted like lead,
dull as fate when you know the outcome.
When the water parts its flabby arms
to take you to the devil, you crunch
into a ball and fight for air.
The foam surrounds you like a bed
of snow, cold to the heart, turning
your blood into an iceberg in your head.
Coming up, taking back your life
is like the first time you touched yourself,
so blind with fear, so lax with elation.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

Bosch's Eve Considers Her Image in Eden

I had just been pulled from Adam's rib, but
 only the giraffe and owl show interest
 and they are viewing us—Adam, the Lord, me—
 from behind. The owl is tucked in a porthole
 in a pink Boschination of genitalia, cacti,
 and arabesque fountain. Clearly, there
 were no expectations to upset.

Do I show a gloss
 of suddenness? I can't tell. In Eden, all
 is equally lit. Of this moment I remember
 nothing but try to iamgine into the intricate
 entirety of me, my knees bent as if
 about to fall, my hair, long and striped
 like the birds' feathers, pulling me back,
 inarticulate neatness of my breasts, light flecks
 on the later to be shameful part, eyelids
 lowered, eyes cast down.

The divine hand holds
 my wrist, my hand droops in His,
 inconsequential— If I was encore, capper,
 key, to the whole shebang, no one told me
 and I had yet to inhabit myself.

Adam's likeness
 captures him, some say, just as, at the sight of me,
 he becomes the first person to lust. I disagree.
 He lies on the ground, still, his left foot placed
 awkwardly on the foot of the Lord, as if
 that were the act essential for the moment.
 Meanwhile

animals scattered
 at our feet drink, graze, preen, sunbathe,
 hop, and hunt, with no sign of fear,
 though some are devouring others, and
 one of the Lord's eyes
 looks out at what now exists. The other
 turns inward, back. A creature duck-billed,
 fish-tailed, wearing a little black jacket,
 floats in the pool, holds a book without text.

PAM MATZ

The Cataract Surgeon

At first my vision becomes blurry in the left eye
and I don't even notice it. My other eye compensates
with the ability to see this life sharp like ice glare on a glacier.

But then, a funny thing happens. I begin to see, to really see:
the futility of the world, the banality of existence,
the loss of love so great it reaches the full mark

on a test tube; the gas man delivers what is yours,
fuel to heat the house, leaving the doorknob sign
trembling in the winter wind. The cold,

once so great it filled the marrow of your bones,
makes snow pile up in some white but earthen grave,
burying the bodies, yet still they come up to the surface

of memory. There are so many it is hard to keep track –
this killer, that gun, this subway, that airport –
but there are the other tragedies that only in my life I can know:

the father, the friend. I do not want to lose them but I have already.
Like a cataract surgeon, I look in through the looking glass,
dull lights spin around until I lock the lens. The world is

my prism; I can change the channel and watch Paris burn.

DEDE CUMMINGS

Twelve

At the stroke of twelve, feel
 how each day teeters,
 teeters on a precipice,
 clock hands pointing straight up
 like two hands joined in prayer.

The twelve inches etched on rulers,
 the twelve hours marked on clocks,
 the twelve months of the year's creaking wheel—
 all tell us to measure well our allotted time,
 our plotted space
 and count each breath that brings us closer
 to our last.

We package things by the dozen fatalistically,
 as if it's foreordained—
 the eggs we carton so carefully,
 six-packs, twelve-packs, a case of twenty-four,
 a box of donuts, always a dozen,
 the perfect circles of dough
 whispering of eternity.

Why this endless catalog of dozens?
 We are taught to think in tens,
 but our lives are bound by twelves.

At the piano, count the twelve notes within each octave—
 seven white keys and five black,
 darkness interpenetrating light.
 The ladder of tones follows the wheel of hours.
 C ascends to a higher C, just as twelve comes round
 again to twelve,
 midnight to noon, noon to midnight,
 the hours growing narrower and narrower
 like the tightening frets on a guitar's notched neck.

How easily we could measure out the difference
 between destiny and desire—

the shortfall of shattered hopes and scuttled dreams
recorded as so many inches, months, or hours...
as so many minutes, miles, or days not granted us
before the dark auctioneer nods.

Tomorrow, pick twelve apples
and savor one each day,
then pick twelve more before the last is gone.

If pressed, barter apples for hours,
handing apples across to death's boney hand,
the apple seeds hidden within
like shards of hope infiltrating
the land of dust and stone.

TIMOTHY WALSH

Afternoon at Goodwill

For CL

We take her on an outing to the big thrift store,
a place she used to like,
one place she still seems to remember.

Today she rattles on about *Sheila's shoes*,
wanders the aisles, fixated
on finding stilettos, wanting to know
how it feels to walk in *Sheila's shoes*:
Sheila the babe, the centerfold fox,
the daughter-in-law enhanced, manicured,
polished.

In the shoe aisle, no second thoughts,
she chatters to a perfect stranger
Sheila has some—
angel man catches on and rummages,
discovering barely used (if at all) blue satin shoes,
a small miracle, his unselfish act of goodwill,
handing them to our sister who can still comprehend acts of kindness.

Like Cinderella's slipper
the five inch stilettos absolutely fit.
She giggles (does she remember playing dress-up?),
Scrunches up her baggy grey sweats,
calves still taut and cooperative,
and like a young woman on her 21st—
a tall-tottering to the full-length mirror,
a model's pose: left, then right,
then a checking-out from behind.

Satisfied, she abandons the dominion of stilettos
for the reassurance of slip-ons.

PAMELA AHLEN

At Night on the Island

The air is digestive here,
vegetables grow in the bowels.
All I feel is a draft like
fingers across my thigh,
deep underground, elemental as salt.
Now warm wind insinuates through
the jungle of hairs on the back
of my hand, like an army
on the move at dawn, camouflaged,
quiet beneath the guns of
enemies high up on the wall.
They're swarming like blood cells
to a wound.

How can a person become
blind and survive, black as this night
inside their skull, melting
in the fever of metabolism,
sizzling like hot milk
on a griddle?

One step, another.
Eyes open now to light,
not day, moonlight in trees,
a rustle of leaves.

PARKER TOWLE

The Taste of Nectar on the Castle Floor

I have to run out. You say, “see you later,” and turn towards the screen door with your hand basket full of garden goodies. You seem startled by my sincere grip, the clinch around your wrist whipping you around. My breath caroms off your cheek as my mouth settles on your ear lobe. I say, “I’m going to rip your clothes off when I get back.”

I’ve watched the sun shimmer off your long bronze legs all morning from the barn flanks where I’ve been tinkering on Rioux, the old camper van we park beneath tree canopies on crawling summer Sundays, in the valley. The fire still burns from the night before, when you danced in all your elegance under starlight to my stringed music.

*

The door to the truck cricks shut. You appear in the window reaching back for your hair tie. And as I amble up, you’re there, deep in the shadows at the center of our kingdom, filling up the frame of the screen door, hair down, rubbing the sole of your foot against the bare calf of your leg, sturdy below your skirt, staring in the way you’ve learned the looming passion we make on mornings after New Moons.

My tank rises over my head and slides off the back of my hand to the floor as your hands reach around my neck, pulling our mouths together, activating the tastes and the touches of our lust.

And soon, the noon bell rings from the firehouse, our cheeks pressed against the cool kitchen tile, locked eyes and interlaced fingers, reminded how our breath stretches when our sensual sex fills our spirits.

KYLE BARRETT

Yasumé

Dad made-up stories
about a girl named *Yasumé*
Yasumé, at ease, in Japanese,
his favorite word—
the Japanese who, that day,
would spare him the bayonet.
Yasumé on a flying carpet,
soaring over oceans
and countries, in sum,
the world,
powered by a word.

LAURA FOLEY

Tientsin, December 1941

The night before his imprisonment,
after a truly Russian feast,
toasting each course with vodka,
he danced and sang all night.
In the rickshaw at four a.m.,
he wore his Manchurian fur coat
pulled up around his neck
against forty below,
each star frigidly distinct
in foreign constellations.
The chill Gobi Desert wind
blew Japanese sentries in too,
surrounding his house at six a.m.
where he slept like a child
beneath a warm Tibetan carpet—
the man who would be my dad,
who never slept so well again.

LAURA FOLEY

The Sound of the Space

A man I know, witnessing a shoot-out
on September eleventh—
when the city air
was filled with death's debris,
didn't hear a sound
from the policeman's gun. Silence
had descended on the streets like snow,
like the sound of the space
between apple and limb,
before descent.

LAURA FOLEY

Shoah

As we travel to Dachau,
killing grounds for Stefan's mother,
sister, aunt, grandmother,
my brain's constant refrain
as we taxi from train to historic gate,
as I scour the benign driver's face,
wondering what he did during the war,
what I might have done, born to his life,
as my family strolls through shadows
cast by massive chimneys,
as I sit on a rusted bunk,
nursing our son.

LAURA FOLEY

Waiting for Someone

So much had changed. The dog bed was gone. There was a foot of new snow on the ground. Marianne had hung thick, oatmeal colored curtains in the windows to keep the heat in. Sitting on his own couch, watching the Patriots romp all over the Steelers, he felt it again, that sudden jolt of hunger to live. The hospital was the most beautiful place he'd ever been. He'd been saved. "Do you need anything?" Marianne came out of the bedroom and went to the window to look outside, again. "How's your hand?" He saw she was all dressed up. His hand, the one that had gotten infected from the dog bite, sat quietly in his lap. He'd almost forgotten about it, but how could he forget? If it hadn't happened, he wouldn't be here now, yearning for life. You have to go as low as you can go to rise.

"Is something out there? Are you expecting someone?" It was the third time she'd gone to the window. It stirred his insides to see her nervous. He patted the couch next to him. She was all worn out from caring for him and her new job detailing cars at A Clean Getaway. Marianne stood in front of the TV. He'd never seen the shiny pink shirt she had on. She even wore a silvery necklace with dangly, sparkling things.

"Are you going somewhere?" A swamped and tippy feeling crept through him, as if she was going to give him bad news, just when he'd been saved. Just when he understood that good really could come out of bad, that all the shit he'd received—and doled out—in his life wasn't all there was. He'd heal. He'd get back to work. The social worker was helping with the medical bills. The visiting nurse was coming back tomorrow. They didn't have to do the excruciating work of just surviving by themselves anymore.

"Esme is coming."

"Esme?" Esme, his first wife, and the mother of Lily, his beautiful daughter whom he hadn't seen since she was five, but sent letters to each month. His heart unzipped in his chest. His hand throbbed with the hunger and the blood pulsing through his body.

"And Lily?" It felt dangerous to hope out loud, but he wasn't going to keep anything from Marianne again; he'd promised her. Marianne looked away. She put a finger to her lip and picked it. A roar rose from the TV.

"I don't know, Adam." She shook her head and looked down at her toes, crossing her arms in front of her.

"But you talked to her. To Esme?" He felt like he was panning for gold, water pouring out of his sieve.

"I thought you were dying, or might lose your hand." She glanced toward the curtained windows.

Ah! A pebble of gold.

“She was upset? She wanted me to see Lily?” Esme was worried he’d die! She was bringing Lily; she had found a small space inside her to forgive him for the sin of not being there when she needed him; for the sin of not understanding; for the sin of going to war and coming back half the man and angry. He wished he’d been saved then!

Marianne shimmered through his tears, moving her head yes or no; it didn’t matter. He’d cried more in the past week than he had in his whole life.

Once, after he was banished, he brought flowers and an envelope of money to leave on Esme’s stoop; he thought he saw Lily in an upstairs window, her little face peeking at him from behind a lacy curtain. At the time, with the sun glinting off the glass the way it did, he couldn’t be sure.

Now, he got up from the couch, kissed Marianne on her cheek, and went to the window. The first thing Lily would see would be him, here, waiting.

* * * *

In the bathroom, Marianne put her fingers in her hair to fluff it. She literally felt sick ever since she hung up the phone with Esme two days ago, the same day she brought Adam home from the hospital. The week here without him was lonely. She had to put the dog bed in the cellar. She made curtains to keep out the dark, and that brightened things up a bit, too.

She listened for tires on the dirt driveway. The football game was all she heard. “You can do this,” she told herself. It felt a little better to dress up. She picked a necklace with garnet colored beads and clasped it around her neck.

Adam had been such a wreck before he went to the hospital, spiraling down after Banjo died, with the freak bite Banjo gave him as a parting gift, getting nastier. It wasn’t until Thanksgiving when the fever hit and she saw the angry red streaks of infection up his arm on that she knew how shitty it all was. He was on the mend. Now this.

“Do you need anything?” she asked, walking into the living room and looking out the front window, again.

“Is something out there? Are you expecting someone?”

When he was in the hospital, she just blurted out how mad she was. That he kept everything – the overdue bills, the seriousness of the bite, and the good things, too, did he really love her – all bound up inside. They both promised to do better.

She put herself between him and the football game. He shaved this morning. His hand lay bandaged on a little green pillow on his lap.

After a deep breath, “Esme’s coming.”

Sometimes she tried to picture him as a little boy, before the flogging that life gave him, and she saw him that way right now, without even trying. “Esme?” He blurted it, his expression confused for a second, and then – what she was afraid of – shining with hope. “And Lily?”

How Esme even got their number, Marianne didn't know. Esme's voice like a little spike. Tap. Tap. *Is Adam dying? He's texting Lily. How did he get her number? He said he'd been saved of all things.* Tap. Tap. *That's crazy talk. You tell him, she just can't bear it; I won't let him hurt her more. You tell him –*

And Marianne – feeling her insides grow big, feeling herself swell to larger than life, to larger than she'd ever felt before, thinking of Adam's painstaking letters mailed every month, picturing Esme throwing them away – had said I will NOT tell him. You come up here and tell him yourself.

"I thought you were dying, Adam." It was such a small white lie, who said what, and not saying who called whom. No need to tell him. Because he had loved Esme as best he could, And, Lily, she was, well, she was his reason. Adam said to her in the hospital, "Banjo bit me to save me, it was his last and kindest thing. Marianne. I still have time."

She watched him go to the window and push aside the curtain. He waited like that by the dark window, like Banjo used to do, waiting for someone to come home.

VICKY FISH

No Bargin

The circumference of our
expansive lives
is much smaller now
someone has come
to join us
our room to breathe
made smaller
by her being present
faceless in the corner
her dark shroud
falling loosely
into deep unfathomable folds
unmoving
unrepentant
waiting silently
to engulf

One could get lost in her
by being close
so we do not
befriend her
as wind has now
picked up/
we find there's ice
forming
upon the window sill
leaving us only
enough
time
to touch
before
our winter
comes

MARGARET HEMPHILL LANNAN

The Nuns

I have anosmia, a loss of the sense of smell. It's not total, and I don't know why some scents and not others come through. I do know that associations to a smell may trigger its memory, even if actual exposure to the smell doesn't register. I can't conjure up the smell of incense anymore, but thinking about it opens a Pandora's Box, and I remember the nuns.

I started school in 1959 in a catholic blue-collar neighborhood in Chicago, when nuns still wore the long habit, wimples and huge rosaries at the waist. Mass was in Latin and the air heavy with incense. The Sisters' voluminous robes smelled of incense, the scene trailing down the corridors behind them.

My mother, educated in a convent school, enrolled us in Saint Theresa's, in spite of being a divorced, single mother of 4 and consequently, we later realized, a scandal in the parish. Once, after she had complied with a summons to the convent, I was called to the Mother Superiors office and told "tell your mother the next time she comes here to dress like a lady." She had, apparently, fleshed out her scarlet woman reputation by appearing in toreador pants. I was to tell her that next time, she should wear a skirt. I did not. Looking back, I realize we never told, always assuming given the source that we must be guilty, and why look for more trouble.

My older sister was rebellious, mouthy and usually in hot water of some sort. My younger brother was a refusenik. He would refuse to enter the classroom, sitting in the cloakroom until forgotten, and then run home. The baby, Julie, wasn't in school yet, and too bad because she would have given them a run for their money. I was the compliant child; quiet, homework done, briefly famous when standardized testing came in and as a second grader scored at the sixth grade level in reading. This was considered either miraculous or suspicious, depending on who was talking. In any event, my profile apparently made me the likely candidate to task with carrying insulting messages to my mother.

Bodily functions were a chronic sore point at Saint Theresa's. The Sisters did not appreciate nature's implacable demands competing with their own agendas. Going to the bathroom was considered a waste of learning time, and requests to do so outside of the designated break time could get you branded a malingerer. This meant someone regularly wet their pants, precipitating a flurry of consternation and disgust, but in the end no connection was made between these events and possibly a problem with the bathroom policy. Many years later, I heard a urologist speak of problems related to having a "catholic school bladder," meaning lacking normal muscle tone due to repeated overdistention.

Hand washing has always made me impatient; waiting for the hot water, soap, and the 15 seconds (happy birthday hummed twice) it takes to sanitize. Only now do I connect this with those hurried bathroom breaks, and Sister Name-Deleted-by-Subconscious saying, “don’t wash your whole hands, it takes too long, just wet the fingertips.” Which is what I did - for the next 30 years. I now wash my hands, but it’s an exercise in mindfulness, I have to consciously put myself in the moment and breathe through it

I remember preparing for first confession, prerequisite to the coveted 15 minutes of fame in white dress and veil that was first communion. We received laundry lists of sin to commit to memory and include as appropriate during our time in the confessional. To this day I remember the feeling of panic as I entered that dark claustrophobic space and recited the ritual “bless me father for I have sinned, this is my first confession,” my written list of sins on the floor next to the faint light provided to prevent stumbling. I was six years old and confessed to committing impure thoughts and deeds. This was one of several entries on the list that for a six year old really required additional information and Sister’s explanation was vague enough that given the stakes, I decided better safe than sorry.

Many years later I told this story to Crazy Aunt Mary. Mary regularly got my Mother in trouble in high school crawling up the aisle and hiding under her desk telling jokes until my Mother was laughing helplessly. This hilarious behavior resulted in my Mother being pegged as a troublemaker, and surely on the road to ruin. Decades later she went to her fiftieth class reunion, and had the opportunity to tell the Sister she had been right, my Mother felt she had indeed come to a bad end. Mary just laughed at my story; at her first, she confessed to committing adultery.

Sunday Mass, students sat with their class so Sister could document attendance. On Monday mornings, those who had not been checked off were sent to the head priest’s office to explain themselves. I was rarely in this line, but in spite of the terrorist tactics, it was surprisingly long, allowing plenty of time to get anxious and/or get your story straight. It strikes me now that this was considered an appropriate use of school time, when basic hygiene was not; different times, go figure. Anyway I told Father NDBS I had not been to church because our mother had taken us to visit relatives. He responded that the next time this happened, I was to run away and go to church instead, as my first responsibility was to God. Again, not happening...God, being pretty much theoretical in my worldview, was no match for my Mother.

Then, as hope emerging from Pandora’s box, we moved to New York and public school. It was as if we had entered witness protection; God wouldn’t know we were no longer in catholic school. Public school had plenty of potentially scary adults, but they each smelled and looked different. Their power was diffuse, no match for the monolithic presence of the nuns, swathed in black and redolent of God’s House.

SUZANNE BROOKS

Treeland

For Norfolk

We looked like wraiths amidst a legion of trees.
They grew faster than we did
turned the town into an emerald reverie in the daytime,
until Winter.
If a new building grew up nearby
we pulled up its juvenile roots.
Only the ancients lived.

Feed the animals before leaving
make way to the center-
and there was the Great Tree.
He was hardy and bowed to no one.
He wore his Christmas lights proudly, like trophies,
the town monument.
He was danced around by children when all
the other trees had shed and started to hibernate,
to wait for milder weather.
The Great Tree never hibernated.
The Great Tree *slumbered*, the essence of sleep.
We slumbered with him.

ABBY STARR

The Room of My Life

—after Anne Sexton

In my wickered room,
 books stack back to back,
 every page touched, eye-eaten.
 An antique phone, its rotary face
 unmoved, unstirred, rarely rings, never sings.
 A love seat worn to one side.
 Lithographs that cling to walls, mock me:
 old friends who stuck with print-making
 when I went off whoring with words...
 I drown in the ocean of voices...
 caught in my conch's throat.

Outside my window, that defectuous window,
 ravenous birds amass in oaks like fake leaves,
 congregate in corporate absurdity,
 call out their collective name.
 Hordes of them take to flight,
 a weaving bundle of social harmonies,
 cries cast on the wind,
 eager to broadcast any scrap of news
 with perfect authority...

those terrible dark eyes, dark like tar pools –
 eyes that suffocate souls.

JOHN M. DAVIS

‘Bout Time You Got Home

“‘Bout time you got home.” My mother to her sister, the rotary phone’s receiver squeezed in a vice of ear and hunched shoulder, probably a dish towel in her hand. Half reprimand, half teasing, the first line in every phone conversation where a previous call had rung and rung into seeming eternity without a response. No doubt that my aunt gave an excuse to counter the rebuke that lay like a thumb on the scale of my mother’s opener. “‘Bout time you got home.” Never said to an uncle.

There are all kinds of purdah. Saudi women are forbidden to drive; in other cultures a male relative must accompany women when they leave the confines of the house. Even in the convivial *passiegiatta*, where and with whom women walk may be cooled by a stern patriarchal eye. In my family, women obtained their drivers’ licenses; then they stayed home and waited for their husbands to take the wheel.

My mother, who learned to drive in her mid-40s and only in the crucible of my father’s sudden disability, drove little and reluctantly. She preferred to drive with no one else in the car, the experience painful and hers alone. Her accustomed role was the dutiful passenger, the ever-crisp license in her purse waiting only for a possible emergency. My father, compromised by illness and by the guilt of having had to surrender his breadwinner status, continued his role as driver-in-chief. He was, after all, her man. Decades later, when I was a single woman living alone, my mother would phone. “‘Bout time you got home,” she would say, bemused, just a whisper of irritation. In a long-honed call-and-response as inevitable as one would find in a gospel church, I would recite where I had been because that is what women in my family did. The content of my recitation didn’t matter, ending as it always did with the tacit assumption that I had succeeded in directing myself home, the true and proper harbor of choice.

Of course my mother knew I owned a car, realized that I drove myself to work and to the grocery store. What she didn’t fully comprehend was the freedom that a car—and the ability to drive it whenever and wherever I chose—conferred. It could take me to places where I made unhealthy food choices, met lovers who were thrilling or not, saw a movie, or two in a row. Holding the steering wheel in my hands was like rubbing the genie’s lamp.

During one of her visits, I was driving the two of us somewhere, making a left and then a right in that half-conscious way on a familiar route. My mother, having the rare experience of turning and seeing a female face above the driver’s seat, asked, “How do you know where to go?” I told her I drove all of the time, I had learned some things. Her face opened, her eyebrows rose in a kind of wonder. I continued on, as I still do, my bravado just translucent.

SUSAN B. APEL

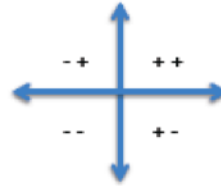
November

Bereft of leaves, trees appear in skeletal form—
the woods open to brilliant light
like windows newly washed of dimming dust.
Now this sudden light stuns the eye
grown used to darkness,
prelude to the time of least light
as winter's Solstice looms like
Great Bear climbing the northern sky.
Opening of the woods—this dying light—
illumines the path of descent into that
dark season of the year and the spirit
when the embryo of life slumbers
deep within the womb of winter.

DONNA NELSON

How to Read a Powerpoem...

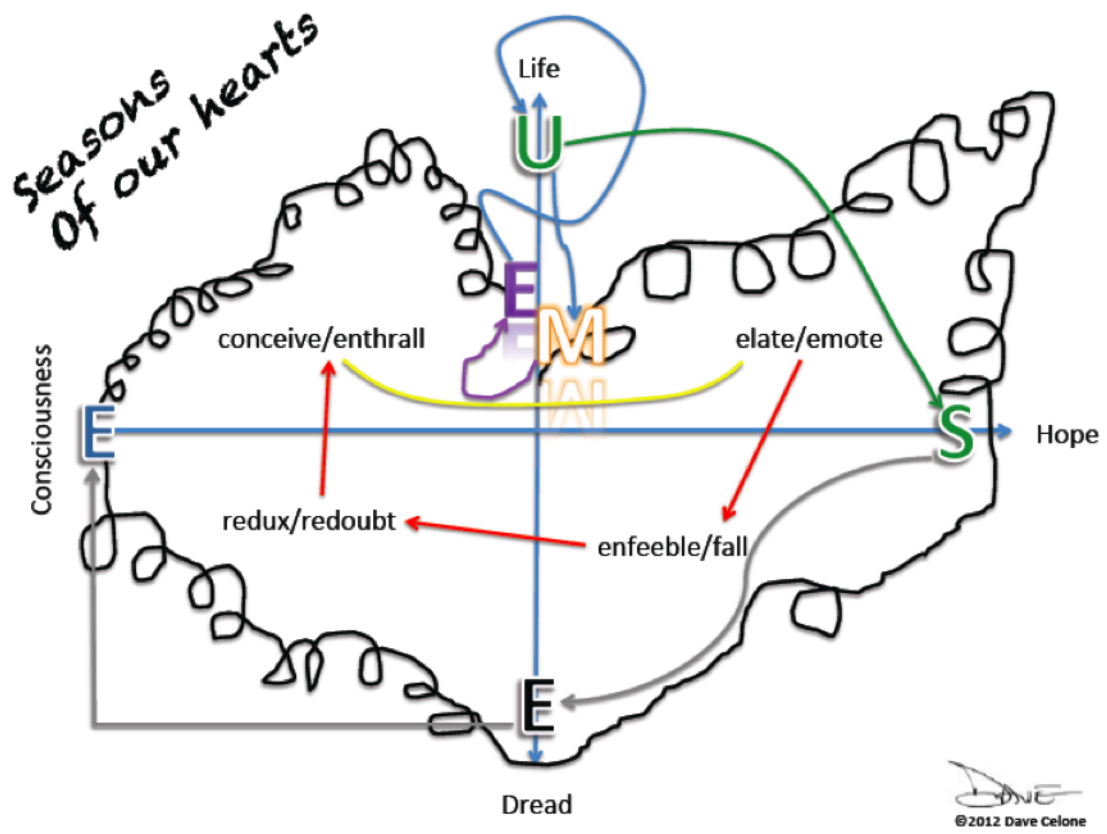
by Dave Celone



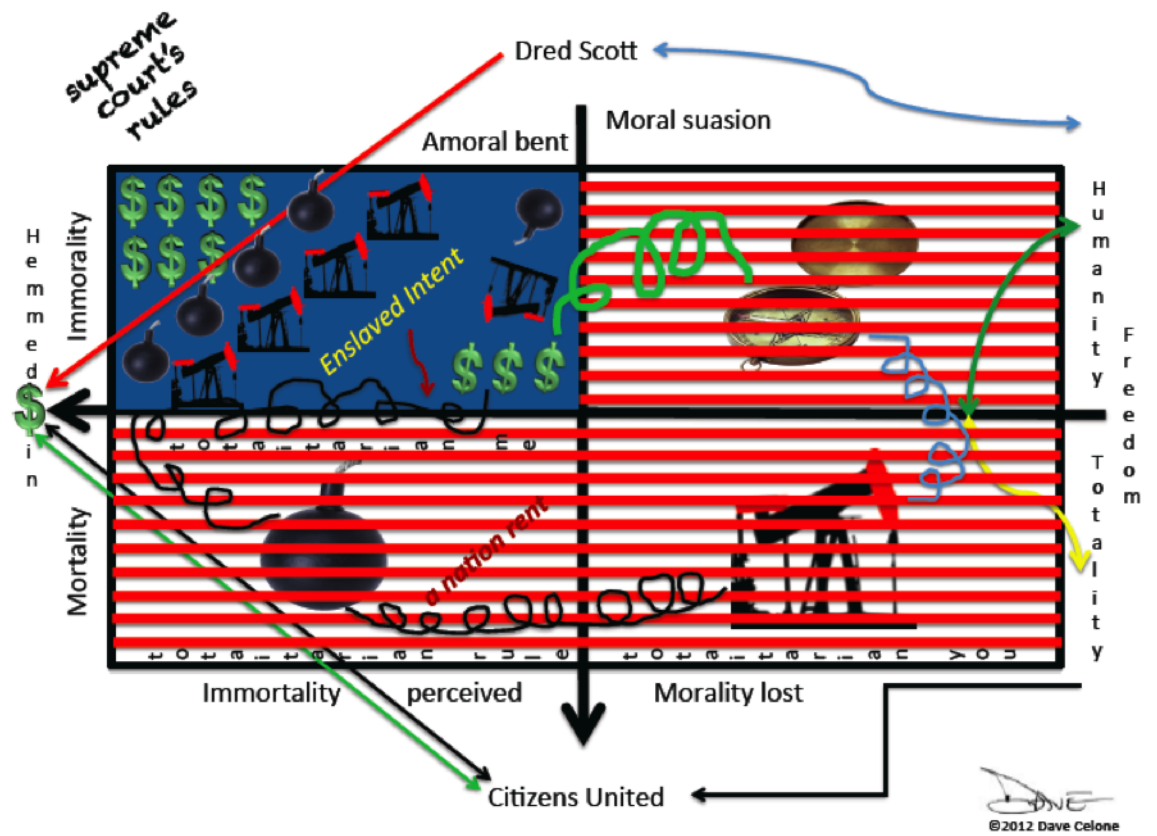
1. Think of an x/y axis.
2. Each quadrant is mathematically different.
3. The upper right-hand quadrant is + + (double positive) space.
4. The lower right-hand quadrant is + - (positive negative) space.
5. The lower left-hand quadrant is - - (double negative) space.
6. The upper left-hand quadrant is - + (negative positive) space.
7. Pay attention to the arrows.
8. Follow the flow starting at the top, or the upper right-hand quadrant.
9. Move in a clockwise direction, or however the arrows direct your gaze.
10. Unravel the word puzzle of each Powerpoem as you interpret it for yourself.

Have fun figuring them out!

DAVID CELONE



DAVID CELONE



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