



The Red Shawl Poems

Poems in Response to
Vote: A Centennial Celebration

February 8–April 5, 2020



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The Red Shawl Poems were written in response to 30 powerful pieces of visual art on display for the exhibit

Vote: A Centennial Celebration of women's suffrage.

The "red shawl" refers to the shawl that Susan B. Anthony wore; it became a symbol of her leadership as she wore it to legislative sessions and suffrage conventions.

Letter to Martha

August 22, 1920

Dearest friend Martha,

I had to put down my embroidery to write to you. No longer are we to be **mute** at the ballot box. We can vote! The 19th Amendment has secured for us what was ours as citizens. Doesn't that take your breath away? And it was your state of Tennessee that made it possible! Grateful to all those **wise** and **strong** women who spoke truth to the **powerful** men. My how those women never gave up. Why even Reverend Willis was preaching just last week how women need to be **obedient** to their husbands. He is so **obstinate**. I guess he never did the **dirty** business of housework. He thinks **nice** is women in their place looking **pretty**. I think it is beyond him to come around. Nice. Well nice is being fully franchised or at least it's a start.

I'm working on a muslin piece, flower in the background, one word on the flower. It came to me in a dream. You'll see it when you visit. It's not **perfect**. However, it's simplicity is what I love. I'm aware that it might be **irrelevant** to some but I believe its singularity of flower and word is what appeals. I call it: Words for Contemplation.

Martha, how I gush... I'll save the rest for your visit.

With deepest love and affection,
Margaret

Sandra McGarry

To Transcendence

“Once made equal to man, woman becomes his superior.”

Socrates

Maybe I was born on a blustery rain-soaked afternoon in an upstairs bedroom of a house at the end of the road. Maybe my mother was an ambitious self-educated schoolteacher. Maybe my father’s true love died during the influenza pandemic of ’18. Maybe the Great Depression forces us to move—wind-swept high plains, cold, dusty prairie. Maybe my father endures grueling indignity, goes on the dole, frustrated, angry, guilt ridden. Feeling inadequate and wretched, he leaves without a word. Maybe my mother rents a small house in a college town, rooms and boards eleven university boys. Mother cooks all day. I make beds, clean rooms. Maybe I meet a young man, a roomer, fall in love, look forward to an idyllic life. Maybe Japan bombs Pearl Harbor and the boy joins the army only to die during his first week in New Guinea. I receive a letter from his mother, “maybe it’s better this way,” she writes on tear stained stationery, yet sunless grief survives peace. Maybe another man, a wedding, hope for children, yearning, craving seven long years, a baby is born. Maybe he has a heart murmur, not vigorous, dies before kindergarten. Maybe the marriage collapses under crushing agony. Maybe chains surround a disintegrating world, my world, constricted by metal shanks, my body an empty vessel, coiled.

Maybe a friend, an angel? vision? revelation? consoles, cajoles, encourages a new life. Maybe I’m happy, swallow a merry-go-round, red, blue, yellow. Maybe I encourage women’s rights, freedom to choose, equality not to the detriment of men, but parity for all. *Arise*, I say, *question*, *confront*, *argue*. *You can please no skin but your own, soft sometimes, abrasive when threatened.*

John Blair

Birth of the Vote

“Look at that face. Would anybody vote for that?
Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?
I mean, she’s a woman, and I’m not supposed to say
bad things, but really, folks, come on. Are we serious?”

Donald Trump, 9/9/2015

See this poster’s Lady Liberty,
blood red, of numbers made,
avenging, fertile, unafraid.
A liminal iconography:
what was, what is, what will be.
Why a woman, why a fire?
To what does she aspire?
See the torch, what is it for?
Simply light or something more?
A beacon does not merely cheer,
but sears the darkness of its fear.
It was meant to immolate
words of fools and of hate.
With fire man’s hypocrisy
she cleanses from democracy.
Are we serious? Wait and see
what comes of scorn and mockery.
Daughters of the Suffragettes,
not one of them today forgets
the sneering nor the gall,
one hundred years come this Fall,
win or lose, they one and all
will wear again their red shawl,
and wield votes up like a switch
against the sitting sonofabitch.

Evan Oakley

What My Mom Told Me

If clothes make the man, do shoes make the woman?

My grandma was a suffragette, wore flat heeled lace-up boots
made by her cousin, hand-tooled with hidden steel toes.

Mom told me Grandma kicked a man who tried to wrench
the VOTES FOR WOMEN sign from her hands
as she marched with her sisters, and he didn't try again.

Mom says her high heels hurt her feet but she wears them
with tailored wool suits to her job downtown, typing
75 words a minute in the insurance office on 10th Street.

She's proud her wages helped to buy our house, the new
Dixie stove, my red leather shoes that stay snug
when I race across the gravel schoolyard,
faster than all the boys, even the older ones.

I always let out a big whoop, nothing ahead of me
but a short metal fence under the big blue sky,
because Mom says it's okay to be fast,
to be first, to be heard.

Lisa Zimmerman

◆ In response to Kayo Peeler's *Her Shoes*

The Suffragettes

“Women belong in all places
where decisions are being made.”
Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Single
Married
Hard Working
Mothers
Daughters,
Sisters,
Curious
Capable
Able
Artists
Writers
Activists
Tax Payers
Dedicated
Courageous
Crusaders
Championing
WOMEN'S
Rights
WOMEN'S
Voices
WOMEN'S
Votes
WOMEN
Being part of the
HUMAN
RACE

Maria Maldonado-Dunn

Justice for Lulu, Colorado Pioneer

“...if every nation on earth was run by women,
you would see a significant improvement on just
about everything.”

Barack Obama

I. Tall

in stature, in spirit
proud, unbowed, dignified
Free.

Survive, prosper in a white man's world
Face them with a smile

Embrace family, neighborhood,
Hard work, our children's future

Leave partisan rancor and
narrow ambition to the hyper-testosteroned

Don't settle
Be impatient, but practical.

II. Reparations?

Modest, inadequate dollars for the descendants of slaves?

For centuries of discrimination against women?
Maybe a 100-year hiatus on all male voting?
Though ten would probably be enough.

Roger Clark

Self-Portrait of a Feminist as a Young Girl, 1972

I traded *Seventeen Magazine* for *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a field guide of the female body by the Boston Women's Health Collective. Recently radicalized by reading the *Kama Sutra* in secret, I declared Typing 101 sexist and French kissed my boyfriend in protest in the high school hallway rather than attend class on time angered by *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party* as practice for getting up to speed. I was already up to speed riding the first wave of feminism cheered by the white noise of Congress passing the Equal Rights Amendment and 36 states ratifying it, certain at least one more state would follow suit

and drove from Bennington, Vermont to Times Square, New York just for the day to march for woman's rights with Gloria Steinem. Our loud and brash stance resurrected the voices of women of Seneca Falls, framers of the *Declaration of Sentiments* in 1848. I decided to take back the night of my body and got on the pill as precursor to losing my virginity. Back street abortions and wire coat hangers to terminate unwanted pregnancies were not urban legends. Our bodies the front lines of that battlefield and we all knew casualties of that war for young girls bled out from mutilations or had surprise babies.

We were harassed by our physics teacher on the first day of class for taking a place better suited for a boy as he barked college education was wasted on women and declared our sole interest was to procure our M.R.S and not a B.A. I sat in the front row, did my homework, and wrecked the bell curve with my straight A's. I wanted to be a lawyer or doctor or an astronaut, all career paths blocked to me. They tried to sideline and silence me, but for women, there is always a work around as on the nightly news Shirley Chisholm, the first black major party candidate to run for president, offered this advice:
If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.

Kathleen Willard

If You Look Closely

Look closely. Come nearer. Peer
Into my face and the lines that cross
and cross it, and bind my body,
arms, and between those lines,
can you make out the tiniest
of words stating and restating?
The lines are marks left by invisible
ropes wound round me, so afraid
were those who tied me that they
set their machine to write on me.

What pinpricks did it use? What
sharpest of needles with such
piercing and pain over my eyelids—
DO NOT SEE—over my mouth—DO
NOT SPEAK—I've spent hours
deciphering bits of phrases, “where
darkness” or “not remem” that
their machine worked into me
night and day marring my flesh
and garments till I'm a walking book.

What does my face ask? Can you read
me yet? I'll answer: I'm a not-quite
woman, some claim a not-quite
human. But I'm one who's had
a salty taste of glory, heard a bugle
in the night, and felt dreams explode.
How can I sit idly knowing what
I know? There's rain. Green leaves.
My season grieves. Out of
these tattoos, I compose my song.

Mary Crow

She VOTES

with heavy gray flowers tangled around her feet.

FOR
WOMEN

she drops the pure weight
owned by a ship in heavy waves.

Surrounded by dawn
she harvests
THE GREATEST NUMBER OF
wild birds on the flight.

Providing
FREE TICKETS
like a mantle of music

the first true notes
EVER ISSUED FOR A PUBLIC MEETING
free of wooden eyelids.

With light from your hips
YOU MARCH FROM
an unconscious heavy hand.

Green forests meet at sunrise on
VICTORIA EMBANKMENT
the world more radiant blue

as you awake from sleep
to ASSEMBLE
and close the gaps in the darkness.

Tony Park

Pulsar

Her body is a freeway
a thoroughfare of road rage and narcissism
travelled by angry souls in luxury trucks
fat with manufactured desires
and starved by insatiable consumption

It is entitlement
that wants to cross her body with tire tracks
wear ruts in to her back
apply yellow stripes across her mouth.
Heavy tires crush hummingbird throat
as she gasps panicked breath for light and clean air

Rationed to be an empty vessel,
and conditioned to believe she should not.

She moves
propelled by internal daggers of sharp lights
exploding in frenzied dance of color
Her longing for voice burns
so strong, so hot,
she will collide, break open, and spill forth
into the light and onto the ballot

Nothing can stop the pulsar of her form
Her soul a super colliding particle accelerator
unbound by the laws of gravity and men.
Historical alchemy transforms her from footnote to author
She's your direction, your compass from point *a* to *b*
You did not emerge from Adam's dry white rib, but from
Eve's dark womb of stardust and magic

Laurie White

The Unbinding

First: rays of light
like a crown of petals, or thorns.
Then the long wire body
like a skin prison.
Then the metal mesh
like fences around pasture,
keeping property in.
Then the feet turn out, marching, marching.
Then the hands,
rays that rivet, heal, bake, calculate, arm, birth and bury.

Only then, the face—
eyes asking permission to never need permission again.

E.A. Lechleitner

Plymouths, China and More

Today is my mother's
birthday. If still alive,
she would be 95,
a chemist who spoke
German. I am told that
she translated important
documents during the war.

A photo of her holding
my sister and me was
posted on Facebook.
A smile so beautiful,
pleased to be holding
her two young daughters.
At age 26 to be exact.

I write poems about my
youth in Spain as I sketch
the sweet face of my
husband, no longer here.
Masculinity still
surrounds me, but at
age 69, I am alone.

The good family china,
passed down from mothers
and grandmothers, rests
on the rear shelf of the bright
blue 50s Plymouth. "Plymouth"
is scripted elegantly in
silver on the back of the car.

Beth Franklin

Four Questions for a Suffragette

“Mr. President, How long must women wait for liberty?”
Inez Milholland Boissevain, 1916

As you sat astride your white horse
on that bright, chilly March morning
the eve of Wilson’s inauguration in 1913,
leading thousands of women toward the future,

Did you sense the spirit
of another young woman,
500 years before you
leading the French army into battle and to victory?

Were you surprised
when they dubbed you,
Joan of Arc
of the Suffrage Movement?

With the riches of birth and education
that you carried at twenty-seven,
working as champion
for the disenfranchised,

Did you envision a century ahead
how the world might improve
for all—women,
children, workers, even prisoners?

Could you have imagined a future January
where millions of women gathered,
again in our capital, across the nation
and around the world, too?

Still, Miss Inez,
in this land of liberty
too many millions remain
shackled but not secure.

Joanna Rago

What Now, America?

She, a slave girl in Maryland
under cotton clouds,
did not read could not know
a strong American leader
from Tennessee used his power
to crush Native Americans in the South.
Later, she, then herself
a strong American leader
in patchwork blue,
used her power to follow a star
through breathless night terror
of forest and swamp
to freedom
and return South
to find others still captive.
Their feet and wills made strong by her
fierce light followed her North Star
to safe houses and new lives
Should our current currency
reflect and honor
a power used to cause pain
or a power of light
and sweet compassion?

Cynthia Tremblay

The Colors That She Wore

“You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs,”
Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, 1895

If she could have painted the world
In the colors that she wore
The sky troubled, the ocean red
Swaths of round blue sorrows
Disturbing the departed dead
Uncounted amongst the living
Just washing, always sweeping
Someone else’s floors
Unseen, mute behind the veil
Brilliance like shells washed out to sea . . .

Until the day the tide of 1920 arrived
At last on the shore of our sisters
We had left behind. The Voting Rights Act
Of 1965 loosening the grip of the noose
Around her velvet throat
Slipping the veil down over
Her naked body she then began
Painting rainbow colors, yellow, purple
A thousand shades of red
Staving the hemorrhaging of the ages
Spurting out words like truth, like matter
Like I matter.

Lynn Kincanon

Across a Chasm

Within the tidy but elegant edifice
of the 19th Amendment
two young women contemplate
each other warily
across a colorful chasm.

One hundred years after women
became men's ballot-box equals,
these two know
that the larger and whiter of them
has never faced the rites of inequality
that dog the smaller and blacker,
and her mothers and sisters before her:
purges of voter rolls
Voter ID demands
gerrymandering
"Citizenship exams"
poll taxes
Is that guilt running down the redhead's forehead?

But then, look closely at the yes, so great
a cloud of witnesses
gathered in the rafters of that edifice—
at the mere handful of faces of color amid
the cloud, the crowd, the collage
of those who fought and won and thrived.

Only when true suffrage replaces
suffering and injustice
will the number 19
deserve to look so festive.

Janet Kamnikar

No One

No one.
No one here. Ever.
Elsewhere and elsetime
Golda and Margaret, iron ladies both.
Corazon, fighting corruption in yellow.
Indira, proving women, too, can be corrupt and
assassinated.
Angela and Benazir and Jacinda
and dozens I've never heard of.

No one?
What about Edith, called Mrs. President
because she wore the pants
behind the locked sickroom door.
And what about Eleanor?! Her husband's legs
and her own arms that
United Nations?
And Michelle? And Hillary who came so close.
What about ABIGAIL?

The day will come. She won't be
The Woman Behind the Man,
The Woman Behind the Man
will wash out to sea like a sand castle:
The Woman Behind the.
The Woman Behind.
The Woman.
The Woman.
The Woman.
No One

Emily Rodgers-Ramos

Priory for an Apple

The dreamer painted a garden of almost-children and red lipstick
with an old wooden paintbrush given to her by kindly god.

Royal communion, salient bees and virgin lambs
she found by walking in love-tended garden.

Master of ash, in his fur of silk and ire
did curse and decry the dreamer.

She knew of betrayal's spark
ephemeral eyes now dark.

Too quick his trespass
her heart, lost glass.

A garden of his own he did sow, tainted words free to grow.

Edicts from his furnace of terror and envy
made by rancor in the lungs of a dying sunset.

To protect the garden, a crusade against her parish
their congregation forgets she is mother to one and all.

Jasper and indigo suns reflect from eyes of pandemonium.
The consort of sin offered her a beautiful profane abomination.

While day and night open their many jaws and the garden remembers
crows now collect thumbs of different colors to sign their spells in the sky.

The dreamers song fell nine times the space of day to a land of the mad giants.
Question or demand not one alive could tell, too great was their deafness.

Tavish Roberts-Mitchell

We Made Up Vanity

“Man is the vainest of all creatures
that have their being upon earth.”

Homer

We make up vanity, shape it into things.
But I am learning nature's way. How
the rock is humble to the river.
Foothills are humble to the mountains,
and learn to live in their shadow.
The eagle soars, takes flight as a given.
Aspen shed their gold without regret.
The mountain bluebird finds his mate,
unaware of his bright plumage.
Water seeks its own level,
and isn't afraid of falling.
And the ancient oak
has learned to survive
grateful to the sun.

Nancy Jakobson

♦ In response to Laura Ethridge's *Makeup Vanity*

Dissidence

Deeds not words
June 4, 1919

Eons of needlework with
fingertips dry and peeling
for family and home.
Women plied their needles
marked time since Betsy Ross'
red, white, and blue.

Repurposed fabrics
purple, white, and gold
for loyalty, purity, and hope.

Embroider
suffrage in roses
for the dissident
sashes and banners.

Layers of women
throughout
generations pressed
one upon the other
dreams. Shoulder to
shoulder dressed
in white
carry signs stitched
Votes for Women.

Shirley Kobar

Ode to the Suffragists

For Susan, Elizabeth, Sojourner, Harriet, Alice, Ida,
and countless strong, eloquent, and dedicated others

they were fiercer than their own bones
wilder than any bird slipping the bars of cage
more insistent than ocean tides, coming ashore again and again
and they marched and sang
canny as water, freezing and melting to crack granite
sturdy as trees, rising on the branches of each other's shoulders
strategic as generals, marshaling forces, mapping the way
and they marched and spoke
their urgent words becoming a deep thrum
insurgent, outspoken, wise, undaunted,
patient and impatient, differing and agreeing,
fermenting, fomenting, witty, tenacious,
and because failure was impossible
they marched deeper into freedom
dissolving the mineral *no*

Veronica Patterson

The Eyes Have It

I see you

Remember the ladies

And I know you see me

Walking the walk, not forgetting to talk

And seeing is believing

“She is not bound by any laws in which she has no voice, or representation.”

But more is required. To see is to know and understand.

But we must understand enough to be launched.

We are determined to foment a rebellion,

And with that,

We Demand Our Own Political Identities

All in Favor?

AYE!

The eyes have it.

The ayes have HAD it!

Still some will say the “ayes” are the most vulnerable thing.

But know this

When tyrants conceive of laws in locked rooms

When autocrats disregard the ladies

We see you

And the world *may* remember what tyrants have expressed

But the world *will* long remember what the ladies, determined, have created.

And what we continue to achieve

Intelligence, light, vigilance, moral conscience, and truth.

The eyes/ayes have it!

Olivia Lowe

♦ In response to Julene Thom's *Forgotten*

Melting Pot

America with its rich mix of enclaves
starts to give me my fix
for representation in which I identify
hip, young women, very fly.

Red of blood, flower bloom,
feet printing earth path.
Arms encompassing
new direction.

Women who in diversity,
culture, life lessons
give fresh views—
tear down fences.

Fertile field
plowed—strengthened joy,
harvests bumper crop
yield of hope.

Blue of sky, bowl of sea
clean the air,
represent for you and me
opportunity.

Show us something new
let us imbue
an America working—
my voice, your voice,

listening when we can't agree.
Tolerant of each other,
remember counsel of mother,
compromise and see

forgotten unity.

Celia Turner

Sojourner Truth

You look out at us sternly, without fear.
How I wish I could have known you!
Your parents gave you a striking name
to encourage you to be honest and true
in your hard journey through life.
This portrait evokes a sense of your strength,
unblinking determination, bravery and persistence.
It is not a “pretty” picture, but somber and sparse,
just heavy black lines drawn on pale paper.

Slaves were all shades of brown and black;
owners came in various strains of pink and white.
Is this why the artist used a simple palette?
I might have chosen bold, bright colors to honor your courage,
a pattern of intricate design to pay homage to your intelligence,
keeping the stark black lines for the inhumanity of slavery.

When young, you fell in love with Robert, a slave on a nearby farm,
but were forbidden by your owner to see him after your daughter was born,
since subsequent progeny would be the property of Robert’s owner.
You were then compelled by your owner to marry an older man—
two more children—you finally escaped to freedom with infant Diana
where you joined the Abolitionists’ fight for emancipation.

You discovered that your five-year-old son had been sold
to an Alabama man and were one of the first black women
to challenge a (white) male in a United States court, regaining your son.

In your adult life you earned the admiration of the antislavery leaders
such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Lloyd Garrison.
Your frequent, rousing speeches advanced the causes
of emancipation, pacifism, women’s voting rights—
remarkable accomplishments for a woman
who could neither read nor write.

Caroline Orman

Connections

“I think bicycling has done
more to emancipate women
than anything else in the world.”
Susan B. Anthony

Amelia moved
To Seneca Falls.
Fell in love,
Married Dexter
Bloomer.
~ *blooming* ~

Amelia wrote.
Wrote newspaper
Columns. Published:
The Lily was for
Women’s voices.
~ *changing perceptions* ~

Amelia, age 30,
Joined first convention
for women’s rights.
Right in Seneca Falls.
~ *joining* ~

Amelia, age 33,
Introduced Anthony
To Stanton. Both
Shared decades for
Women’s Suffrage.
~ *connecting* ~

When Libby Miller
Dressed Turkish style,
Practical comfort
Became a cause for
Amelia Bloomer!
~ *spinning into the future* ~

Doug Erion

Votive

With our one hand raised,
a mask as a door, we are the letter "F."
Almost. Where is the rest of the alphabet?
A mask on our hips is an alternate
pelvis, an always, a stack of mouths.
How many hands coming unstacked;
how many arms does it take to vote?
These slits, these gills on our stalks,
these fingers extend from our legs,
our want, our need, frozen in a gasp,
and another gasp, until they become sky.

This is called election. Bring us air,
money, lungs. Breathe. Our bellies
tick themselves to pieces. We have shadows,
countless, inside us. The world
is clay except where we stand; legs
hip to hip, sturdy like voices who climb
from the heart of a tree, out of soil
and back into life, we stack. One knee,
through our mask, points into sky,
opens the door. Like flame,
our one body on a wick, the mask
we balance holds us, breath by breath,
letter by letter, clay and word,
blue in the belly, together. We hold.

Jack Martin

Harriet Tubman's Wanted Stars

"Fantastic," a word not big enough to describe hoopskirts
Harriet Tubman wore, a slave's entrance to the Underground Railroad.
300 found protection, 19 trips from South to North in the 1850s before war.

Her skirt outlined in same bright gold, fire red edges a path to heaven
through rugged brown plantations
slip freedom's secret network of safe houses
kept silent but for the alizarin crimson of her bandana.
In 1849, she sought secret passages—three sisters of nine siblings
already sold to other plantations,
Mother Rit a slave, father Ben freed but not to the blue sky,
remained a timber estimator and foreman—
traveled 90 miles, Maryland to Philadelphia, a free state.
To see if she was the same person, she looked at her hands:
"There was such a glory over everything;
the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields,
and I felt like I was in heaven."

Star-like hands reach small homes,
precarious family trees with altered histories, clouds with cotton-ball flowers,
six sets of legs: Wanted: Other Words: Pride. Dignity. Amazing...Grace.
She, a leading abolitionist, the most famous "conductor,"
helped the Union Army, a nurse, a spy, a cook,
scarred from abuse, her head struck by a weight when she refused to help
restrain a runaway.
She had seizures, headaches, felt buzzing.

Slave, a word so awful, it fed her passion,
got the nickname Moses, a Biblical figure larger than the worth
of a wanted new twenty dollar bill.
Today wanted for arms held wide, conducting us to
the most beautiful word, Love, wanted, gave, found...Home.

Shelley Widhalm

Needle(breaking)point

The needle is stitching.

Together a picture. Perfect and precise and put together.

The thread is out of her wrists and into the flowers.

She is silent. She is listening. She is stitching.

And when he says “the wife and I”

She is silent. She is listening. She is stitching.

The needle is tugging.

Because she has to have her seams together.

Has to be composed. Complete.

There is no room for tearing at the seams.

No needle dull enough to keep her fingers un-pricked.

And as time goes by.

She is silent. She is listening. She is stitching.

The needle is gathering.

Bit by bit. Her heart pulls tight to her chest.

Her body is scheming.

Her heart is feeling. Her mind is achieving.

And still.

She is silent. She is listening. She is stitching.

The needle is rising.

She is not complacent.

She will not be rustling drapery.

And

She will write her name a thousand times in golden thread if she has to.

She will break through the fabric. No matter how thick.

She is speaking. She is thinking. She is seam-ripping.

She is dreaming. She is breathing. She is preaching.

The needle will not sew her back there.

She will not. Be silent. Be listening. Be stitching.

Eloise Nelson

She Dares to Dream

She is not Aphrodite.

She did not swim up from the ocean's floor
to hypnotize us with beauty.

She did not fight to hold her breath
so we could admire her strength.

She is unconcerned with the nuances of grace,
although she embodies it effortlessly.

The creatures of a wild sea are her ancestors,
moon tides her lineage;

the crest of a wave her wingspan soaring on
convection from the fire of tectonic plates,

balanced on a fractal,
suspended in a matrix of possibility—

she is not a goddess.

She does not require worship
adoration
or even approval

to begin.

She is a Creatrix, alchemizing wind and water
casting webs within webs
spirals within spirals

eyes closed
heart open

launching off a hollow, glistening shell
that once contained the flesh of
all the sensible advice she refused to heed.

She is not afraid.

Cortney Collins

◆ In response to Bobbie Carlyle's *Women Who Dare to Dream*

South Pass City, 1870

Boom town born on the hope of gold
in windblown territory not yet named Wyoming
boasts 2,000 miners and 12 saloons
plus brothels and breweries,
chooses Esther Hobart Morris the nation's
first female Justice of the Peace.
They see strength in her, tough and tenacious as prairie grass.

She wears calico, a brooch and a shawl
to her first day on the bench,
sweeps the town clean,
judges 30 cases in eight months,
no rulings appealed, save one—
and that upheld by higher court.
She is “a terror to all rogues.” *

South Pass City, just two years later
reduced to 50 souls, mines petered out.
Now a ghost town, remembered for Esther
who raised three sons, outlived two husbands,
but who did not live to see all women get the vote—
fifty years after Wyoming set that precedent.

On the challenges
of fulfilling her public role, Esther writes,
“In performing all these duties
I do not know as I have neglected my family
any more than in ordinary shopping.” *

So, raise your voices, ladies,
don your undaunted shawls and fearless brooches,
set the silver at your throat, and ... all rogues, beware!

Lorrie Wolfe

(*From Frank Leslie's "Illustrated Newspaper," 1870)

♦ In response to Jennie Milner's *South Pass City*

Freeborn Fearless

From deep within the earth I come
rooted, rising, unashamed
trunked and hollowed for all I give
caribou crown to plow the ground
protect the space for those
who want to live
as I do
move through dark and light

Bravely I gather the missing ones
assembled we grow
we turn the herd toward calm
away from that place
once fruitful, now crushing
for both and all

I dug in through fire and rot
skull armored eyes
a thousand years or more
under old false rule
now foothold gained and shelter built
we undermine that stifling

I am the knower of the equal truth
helper, leader, head down fighter for
what is very old is now new
to protect and grow
if taken down and back
I will right it again
as my nature is to be
fearless

Eve Bingham

VOTE: A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

February 8–April 5, 2020

Poetry Program

Thursday, February 13, 5:30 pm

Poems in Response to *Vote: A Centennial Celebration*

Lynn Kincanon and Veronica Patterson, Loveland's Poet Laureate,
thank all of the participating poets for their poems of response
to this celebration of 100 years of women's suffrage.

They also thank Suzanne Janssen, Robin Dodge, Olivia Lowe,
and Heather Fortin Rubald—organizers of *2020 Women & the Vote*—
for putting together a framework for events honoring the
passage of the Nineteenth Amendment!

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Loveland, CO 80537
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The Red Shawl Poems

Poems in Response to the exhibit
Vote: A Centennial Celebration

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