



# The Red Shawl Poems

Poems in Response to  
Vote: A Centennial Celebration

February 8–April 5, 2020



## The Red Shawl Poems

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

♦ In response to Bonnie Lebesch's *Nice*

## 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

♦ In response to Julia Mulligan's *Birth of the Vote*

## 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*

♦ In response to Melody Epperson's *Minnie Reynolds*

## **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*

♦ In response to Judith Brunko’s *As the Wind Blows*

## **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*

♦ In response to Heather Schulte's *See(the)ing Red*

## 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

♦ In response to Mary Nash's *Sojourner Truth*

## 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*

♦ In response to Tracie Jenkins' *Fashion Statement*.

## 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

♦ In response to Carol Schinkel's *Defiance*

## 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*

♦ In response to DJ Hill's *Release*

## 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*

♦ In response to Laura Ethridge's *China Hutch*

## 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*

♦ In response to Phylicia Mann’s *Give Me Liberty*

## 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

♦ In response to Anne Skok's *WANTED On The Twenty Dollar Bill*

## 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

♦ In response to Kamilah House's *Be Counted*

## Across a Chasm

Within the tidy but elegant edifice  
of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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*

♦ In response to Rosario Weston's *We Shall Not Be Denied Our Vote*

## 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 Jakobsson*

♦ 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*

♦ In response to Kimberly Hart's *Suffragette*

## 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*

♦ In response to Jane DeDecker's *Every Word We Utter*

## 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

♦ In response to Melody Epperson’s *Amelia Bloomer 3*

## 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*

♦ In response to Leona Lazar's *HOORAY!*

## 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

♦ In response to Anne Skok's *WANTED On The Twenty Dollar Bill*

## 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

- ♦ In response to Bonnie Lebesch's *The Wife*

## 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*

♦ In response to Lori Acott's *Fearless*

# 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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503 N Lincoln Ave  
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[lovelandmuseumgallery.org](http://lovelandmuseumgallery.org)

# *The Red Shawl Poems*

Poems in Response to the exhibit  
*Vote: A Centennial Celebration*

February 8–April 5, 2020



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