

## Evidence of Red: Poems and Prose

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# Evidence of Red

POEMS AND PROSE

LEANNE HOWE



CAMBRIDGE

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*For DR.*



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# Creation



## IT Geography

When we leave our body,  
the sound is so potent  
it cracks open the stars  
and our momentum ricochets around.

Then *fichik heli*, streams of radiance  
shoot across the darkness and we speed up motion.  
Our mind is space unbounded  
everywhere we are, everything is.

Time becomes a deep breath,  
a pause in the telling  
as rivers of ash collide with memory.  
And for us nothing will ever be over and done with.

*Allahe.*

We circle the heavens.  
Then one day we create something unexpected.  
A pulse, a hot flash.  
And it flows through the veins of space.

*Allahe.*

We blush  
and tiny beads of perspiration  
form on the brows of heaven  
reflecting light.

*Allahe.*

We are hot, we say!  
Soon we spasm in a spiral of passion,  
mounting and arching, expanding, and contracting  
we expel volumes of water the size of blue green oceans.

*Allahe.*

We are *born*.

\* In the title, IT stands for Indian Territory.

## Evidence of Red

First, night opened out.  
Bodies took root from rotting salt  
and seawater into evidence of red life.  
Relentless waves pumped tidal air  
into a single heartbeat.

In the pulp of shadow and space,  
water sucked our people from sleep.  
That's how it all began. At least  
that's all we can remember to tell.  
It began with water and heartbeat.

In minutes we tunneled through  
corn woman's navel into tinges  
of moist red men and women.  
Yawning, we collected our chins,  
knees, breasts, and sure-footed determination.

A few thousand years before  
Moses parted the Red Sea, and the  
God with three heads was born in the Middle East,  
the Choctaw people danced  
our homeland infra red.

Finally when the stranger's arms  
reached to strangle the West,  
Grandmother eavesdropped  
on the three-faced deity  
who said that chaos was coming.

When he puckered his lips and tried to kiss her  
she made it rain on him.  
“Maybe you’ve forgotten  
you were born of water and women,”  
she said, walking away laughing.

# Hashi mi Mali

## I

Each morning, *Hashi*, the stark red creator rises,  
swelling,  
she passes over the ground,  
spilling a drop or two of her blood  
which grows the corn and the people. *Okla* are we.  
Naked, she goes down on us,  
her flaming hair burns us brown.  
Finally, in the month of *Tek Inhashi*, the Sun of Women,  
when we are navel deep in red sumac,  
we cut the leaves and smoke to her success.  
Sing her praises.  
*Hashi* won't forget.

## II

When *Ohoyo Ikbi* pulled  
freshly made *Chahta Okla*  
out of her red thighs,  
we were very wet, so  
one-by-one,  
she stacked us  
on the mound,  
and *Hashi* kissed our  
bodies with her morning lips  
and painted our faces with afternoon fire,  
and in the month of *Hash Hoponi*, the Sun of Cooking,  
We were made.

### III

It is said that  
once-a-month warriors can kill a thing with spit.  
So when the soldiers came,  
our mothers stood on the tops of the  
ramparts and made the *Tashka* call  
urging their men on.  
Whirling their tongues and hatchets in rhythm,  
they pulled red water and fire from their bodies  
and covered their chests with bullet-proof blood.  
When it was over, they made a fire bed on the prairie that  
blew across the people like a storm.  
Melded our souls with iron.

### III

And in the month of *Hash Mali*, the Sun of Wind,  
We listen for the voices  
that still urge us on  
At sunrise.

## The Unknown Women

*Stage Directions: (Minimal staging and props. All action takes place on an empty dark stage. Use spot lighting to highlight actors during narration.)*

### FIRST CHARACTER — THE SPIRIT

From the landscape of imagination,  
I noiselessly dream beneath clouds  
illuminated like bleach on blue silk  
And in a vision  
I am told to create a poem  
to live inside of.

There is breath  
Inhaling past and present forms everything—  
Tender shoots of cosmic energy  
aim their sperm into the sun  
and she spasms  
launching a pulpy sweet body.

I become irresistible in a dress  
Made of *Fichik isi nala sil h hi*  
Brilliant white stars.  
Serene, yet steamy,  
I use the light coming from inside me to attract attention.  
Something thrives and mounts the mist

Silhouetted insinuations  
we form people,  
Things with underpinnings.  
Purpose.  
All properties that are necessary,  
but not sufficient to define.

What they will say is  
my poem is *Anuk la mampa*.  
Anuk la mampa  
the power of thought  
represented as food.  
Are you surprised?

Look beyond me. At us. It. This moment. Can you see what just happened? Copper masks made by my children appear in the Field Museum's case. They rest in the future—from the past—folded together pinioned to a web of metallic shadows. *Huh*, the power of poetry! I feel just like William Shakespeare will feel in a distant moment, from my words, generations of artists are born.

*Music Directions: (A refrain that is the signature melody for FIRST CHARACTER — THE SPIRIT.)*

I begin to think of myself as a cosmic dress.  
Here are my underpinnings:

Ho tan tona—"She who seeks—goes along and gets there."  
Be-ia—ya e-e hona—(Baiyillihona) "She who follows another and gets there."

Ho tima—"She who seeks and gives advice."

Mantema—"To go and carry or deliver something sacred or particular."

Wak a ya tema (Wakayatima) "Get up and deliver it."

I deliver myself unto you now. My intent is breath and mind, the power of thought represented as food. *Anuk la mampa*. I AM the one you long for.

*Sound Directions: (Use a sound to evoke Ohoyo Chish-Ba Osh. THE UNKNOWN WOMAN.)*