

## Linda Scheller

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### Viriditas

“Thus am I, a feather on the breath of God.”  
--Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

A valley opened between the eastern mountains. The egg of the universe cracked and out flew a hawk with three wings, alighting on a column of topaz. At some distance stood a column of wood deeply carved with foxes vomiting gold. Between the columns rose a waxing moon. I heard thunder and the voices of angels singing, and each note fell from the heavens and lay on the earth like dew. From these shining notes, green tendrils and bright leaves emerged, twining round the columns, climbing and multiplying. The branches encircling the topaz column blossomed with roses of every color, and the air was sweet with their fragrance, but the leaves on the carved wooden column withered and became a nest filled with serpents, rank with the stench of decay.

Then I saw a woman dressed in robes of mist with emeralds in her hair riding a white stag. Her path was a river of lilies. The stag stopped and knelt beside the roses. She slid from its back and placed her hands over the animal's eyes. Rays of light issued from its antlers, and the column of serpents burst into flame. The woman spoke words in an unknown language, and the burning column became a waterfall filled with stars.

## **Raised in the Harem**

“The woman also demands with her loudest voice  
to be restored her political rights...”  
--Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947)

Raised in the harem, married at thirteen,  
I was owned and controlled by tradition.  
Why do you perpetrate this slavery?  
Seclusion degrades both men and women.

Remove the veil from your eyes.

Raised on the ladder of education,  
I was taught by books and travel.  
Why should we languish in ignorance?  
Nescience degrades both men and women.

Remove the veil from your minds.

Raised by the cry for independence,  
I was moved to assert my own being.  
Why would I hide my face in shame?  
Concealment degrades both men and women.

Remove the veil from your lives.

## Minty

“I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other.”

--Harriet Tubman (c 1822-1913)

Lord, your light guides me still,  
walking home with greens to feed  
Your blessed veterans. This isn't Egypt  
but it's not Canaan if Negroes can't get  
decent wages for work they did as slaves.

Slaves. My blood boils when I recall the whip,  
the screams of my sisters sold down South,  
the overseer who broke my skull. Master  
got ready to sell me, but I used everything  
Daddy Ben taught me to slip away.

Wading through swamps, up river,  
hiding on islands, sleeping in snatches  
ear to the ground, I followed the moss  
and the drinking gourd north  
'til You brought me to freedom.

It isn't enough being free  
if you can't share that meal  
with those that starve, and I did,  
thirteen times. You led me, Lord,  
to carry willing family and strangers.

You make me fall down and see  
visions. You speak. I have been  
Your scout and spy, Your mouth.  
You move the waters of sleep.  
Lead us. We'll keep walking.

## She Who Is of the Time of Green Corn

Hopokoekau, "Glory of the Morning" (1711?-1832?)

In the time of the Earth Digging Moon, I was born at dawn.  
In the Thunderbird clan of the Hočąk nation, to the great chief, I was born.

In the end of the Corn Popping Moon, when I was a young yugiwi, I became chief.  
In the sky at dawn, the Great Star, the warrior god He Who is Girded in Blankets,  
aligned with the crescent Moon, goddess who watches women.

In the ranks of the Spirit People who fought our neighbors the Fox, there came a man.  
In the time of the Elk Whistling Moon, this man and I were married.

In the seven years we lived together, the Spirit People fought against the Fox.  
In the eighth year, the war club was put aside, and my husband returned to his people.

In the time of his leaving, my two sons remained with me.  
In the place of his wife, the chief of her nation, my husband took our daughter.

In the years that followed, I led the nation on the warpath against the Illini.  
In the wars, we fought the Michigamea and the Cahokia, but with the Spirit People  
we were allied, and my son Čugiga fought the Zaganąš with his father.

In the conquest of the Spirit People by the Zaganąš, my husband was killed.  
In the time of peace that followed, with the Zaganąš the nation was allied.

In the time of the Deer Antler Shedding, among the pines, there came an owl.  
In the pine forest white with snow there came an owl who spoke my name.

**Linda Scheller** lives in California's Central Valley where she serves on the board of the Modesto Stanislaus Poetry Center. Her work has appeared in many journals and anthologies including *Notre Dame Review*, *Poem*, *Seattle Review*, and *More Than Soil, More Than Sky*. New work is forthcoming in *Steam Ticket*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Slipstream*. Her first book, *Fierce Light*, will be published in 2017 by FutureCycle Press.