



[Living in a Glowing World by Trisha Howell](#)



Publisher: Howell Canyon Press
<http://www.HowellCanyonPress.com>
ISBN: 193121008X
Genre: Non-fiction
Subgenre: Poetry
Release date: April 2004
Format: trade paperback
Pages: 66
Price: \$9.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth Barrette

This collection of poetry begins with a thoughtful and creative discussion of the magical Elements – but Trisha Howell merges the Western (Earth, Air, Fire, Water) set with the Eastern (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water). She also tinkers with the four traditional seasons of the temperate climate (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) by adding two more: Thaw and Harvest. The result is a sensitive and dynamically balanced set of six Elements and seasons -- Water/Winter, Air/Thaw, Wood/Spring, Fire/Summer, Earth/Harvest, and Metal/Autumn. The author describes the natural and mystical characteristics of each. This system then forms the framework for the poetry collection, divided into six sections.

Water/Winter shares poetry from the resting season when all is dark and cold, waiting for rebirth. But not all the selections are actually restful. My favorite from this section is “Bad Boys of the Arctic,” which begins:

The frolicking fun of a frisky polar bear
Billowing snow becomes a sandbox
Inventing an island of imagination

Alliteration and assonance combine with playful imagery to evoke this arctic scene.

Air/Thaw introduces an uplifting tone as the snow melts away to uncover fertile earth. This invigorating season brings renewal and inspiration. It is flawlessly captured by these lines from “A Poem Is Like a Song,” featuring one of the most original similes for poetry and spirituality that I’ve encountered:

A poem is like a supple shoe
Running in the sunlight
Through a newly green path
Inspiring the spirit.

When the ice breaks and the sun returns, who doesn't want to dash outside and scamper down inviting trails?

Wood/Spring continues and elaborates on the theme of Air/Thaw, as the world bursts into exuberant growth. The flowers invite a certain timbre of philosophy, as in "If This Life Is the Only One," which concludes:

Whatever this life is and is not
May you never be benched by the blinding
Fear that's convention but ever
Zooming into the unknown on the tail of a star

This echoes the "upwardly thrusting" energy of the season by directing our attention not only to the sky but also to the afterlife.

Fire/Summer fulfills the promise of earlier seasons by reaching the peak of life, passion, and abundance. Here is heat, both literal and figurative. The poems here hold a subtle (and sometimes overt) sensuality, as in "Your Voice," which opens with this verse:

Your voice is like a deer
dancing in a warm meadow,
the play of light on a
river sliding into
deep places then surging
naked over glistening stones

The images flow together, morphing from one to another as easily as daydreams evolve on a lazy afternoon.

Earth/Harvest brings completion, as the maturity of Summer bears fruit for the picking. The sweet, nurturing energy of this season is better captured in other poems; but I've already shown you the seasonally perfect ones. My favorite in this section appears in two languages, showing the contrast between the rolling grandeur of Spanish and the whimsical introspection of English. So here is the first verse of "Noche de Viento y Estrellas" and "Night of Wind and Stars" respectively:

Noche de viento y estrellas
Me acaricias el alma
Amante oscura de misteria
Ladrona coqueta de calma

Night of wind and stars
You caress my soul
Dark lover of mystery
Coquettish thief of calm

To anyone fortunate enough to enjoy familiarity with both of these languages, this poem is a masterpiece in both, taking advantage of their respective strengths. It is one idea refracted through two different mental prisms. Bueno! Wow!

Metal/Autumn concludes the collection with a sense of gentle repose. It reminds me of the humble pleasure to be found in crawling into bed after a long day. Check out the way Howell uses envelope stanzas in the beginning of “Autumn” to echo the image of leaves moldering in forest hollows:

There’s bare beauty to the drowsy ground
When summer’s green is swept away
When leaves have started to decay
And sweet calm is all around

This poem reminds us that the whole cycle is precious, that we need a time to withdraw as well as a time to burst forth.

Single-author collections are hard to sell. They often suffer from uninspired organization. This one displays a delightful awareness of patterns and processes, both in the arrangement of the book as a whole and in the ordering of poems within each section. Howell’s style is diverse enough to sustain interest through a themed collection, and her grasp of imagery and other poetic devices remains charming throughout. This book is suitable for use in poetry classes, and some of the poems would serve well in seasonal rituals or other nature readings. Most highly recommended.

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