
POETRY | FALL 2018

Perfusion

By Lois Leveen

The clear plastic tubing through which cherry
red your thinned blood runs. The perfusionist
sitting separate from the rest, organist
at Sunday service. This solitary

act of biomedical alchemy:
imbuing with oxygen, extracting
carbon dioxide. The whirring machine
transmuting blood to what blood is meant to be.

Blood, coursing extracorporeally.
The emptied patient heart made motionless.
Your heart, unseen by the perfusionist
who nevertheless keeps careful watch, three

times calling (as they do, who do no harm)
for your unbloodied, beatless heart to warm.

Lois Leveen, PhD, earned degrees from Harvard University, the University of Southern California and UCLA, and was a Kienle Scholar in Medical Humanities at Penn State College of Medicine. She is the author of the novels *Juliet's Nurse* and *The Secrets of Mary Bowser*. Her poetry has been published in literary journals and anthologies, and inscribed on a hospital wall. Dr. Leveen has given presentations and workshops at the American Cancer Society, the Health Humanities Consortium annual conferences, the Hippocrates Poetry & Medicine Symposium, the International Conference on Physician Health, and Stanford Medicine X. She designs and leads seminars that allow medical practitioners, patients, and patients' families to connect and reflect through discussions of literature and visual art. She welcomes correspondence at Lois@humanitiesforhealth.org

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