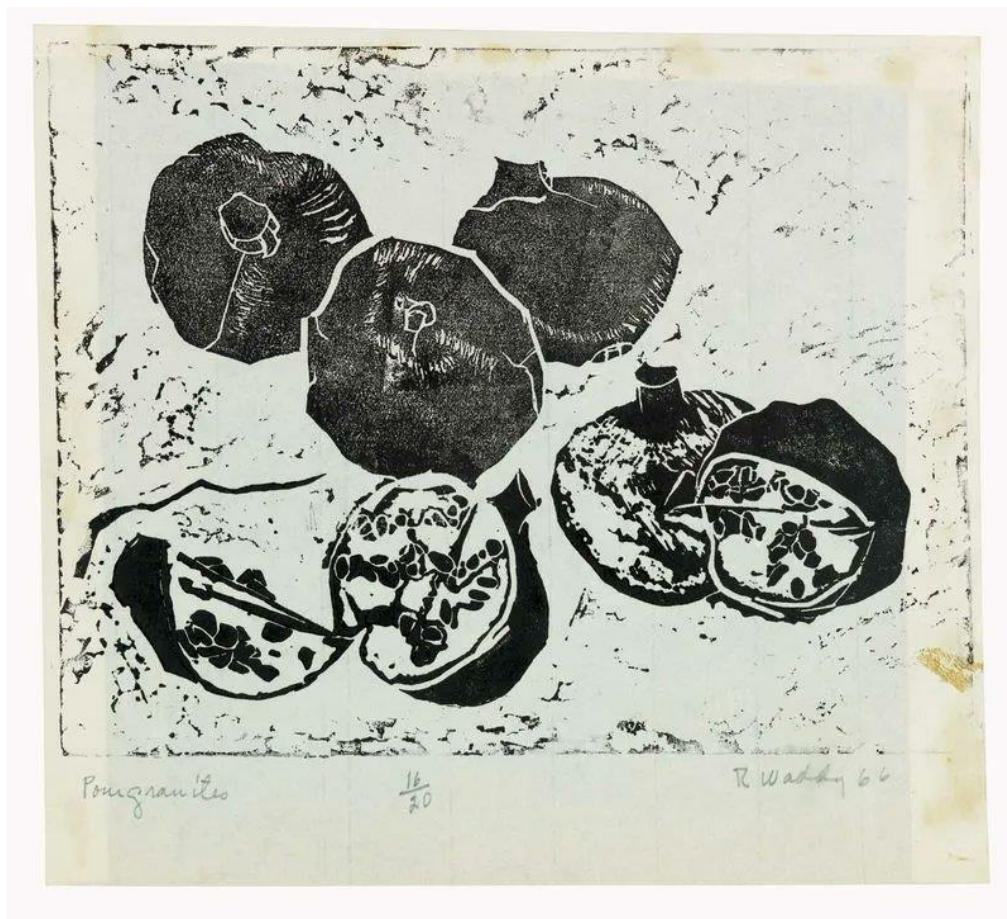


الأستاذة فاطمة بشر



Pomegranates: The Beauty of Opposition



by Ruth Waddy 1966

*{what, when we are dead and become
dust and bones, shall we indeed
be raised up?*

What, and our fathers, the ancients?

Say: “Yes, and in all lowliness.”} [37:16]

Death, as regarded by most religions and philosophies, is a home-coming: the body returns to the earth, the soul to its creator. A reunion of matter, this cycle is, a redistribution that results with a new birth. To regard death from a religious view, it is a mere gateway to an endless life, where in this case we can define this process as a rebirth.

The course of birth and death is pretty much surrounding everything in life around us; it is the core cycle on which it stands. What has drawn my attention recently is how in our arrangement of the four seasons, “autumn” (death), precedes “spring” (birth), when this circle of natural changes is highly regarded as the metaphor of life by various poets and artists. It is strange how in such an important process humans have collectively agreed that autumn and winter’s destruction and death of nature must precede spring and summer’s birth and fruitfulness.

Nevertheless, and despite the semi cessation of nature’s work, many trees start to bloom and give their fruits during that part of the year, and it is beautiful how most of these trees are considered holy by Abrahamic religions, such as figs, olives, grapes, and pomegranates...

The pomegranate, a tree perceived as holy and heavenly by most religions, holds thousands of secrets and meanings in its graceful stretched branches with its delicate green leaves and fiery red globes that dangle from it like jewelry boxes. In literature and myth, pomegranates are used to symbolize several things, which are associated with either life or death. This contradiction in its meaning has attracted many poets who found it as a very inspirational muse for their work.

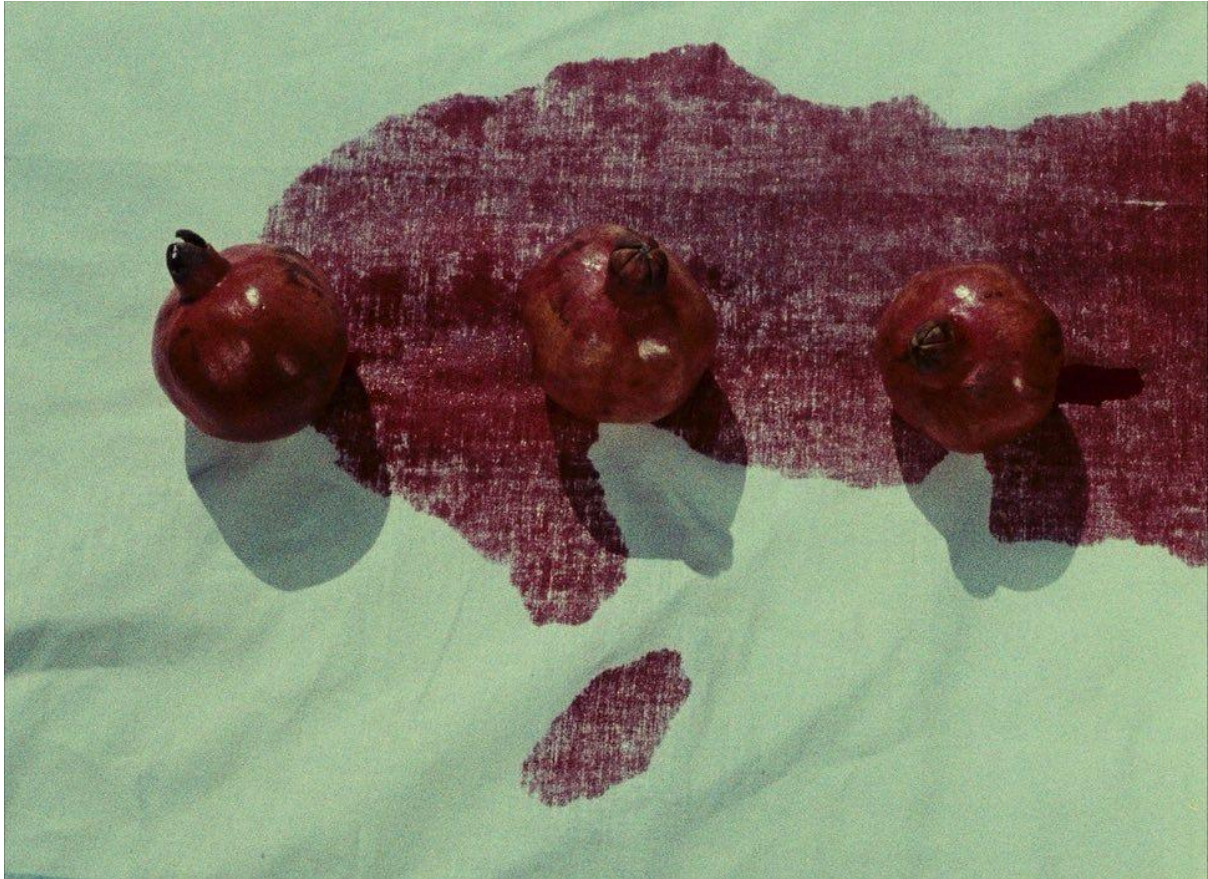
In Ovid's "Metamorphosis", as he was describing Venus's arrival to Adonis's dying body, he informed the reader of the goddess's purpose and wish: Adonis's blood will be turned into a flower. Anemone, the blood red flower, in Greek mythology has a deep connection with pomegranates, for it was also believed that the pomegranate tree has sprung from the blood of the god in demise.

*... a flower sprang out of that soil,
blood red in its color,
just like the flesh that lies underneath
the tough rind
of the seed-hiding pomegranate.
Brief is its season
for the winds from which it takes its name,
the anemone,
shake off those petals so lightly clinging
and fated to perish."*

[The Metamorphosis book X, 850]

Pomegranate seeds and juice have also been associated with blood in “The Unicorn in Captivity”, a medieval European tapestry which shows a unicorn bearing his bloodied wounds beneath a pomegranate tree which he’s chained to. If we take a closer look at the animal’s wounds we realize they aren’t bleeding, but crying red seeds. It is said that the captivity of this unicorn under a pomegranate tree is a symbol of the fertility of a soul’s marriage with Christ. Viewing this piece of art from a religious point it reminded me of the Quranic verse {and palm trees, and pomegranates} [55;68] for the great likeness that this pomegranate tree in the tapestry holds for Rhaps palm trees.

Contrarily, in Armenian mythology, the pomegranate was a symbol of life, fruitfulness and fertility, though in the Soviet–Armenian director Sergei Parajanov’s film “The Color of Pomegranates”, pomegranates were used as symbol of martyrdom and sacrifice, imagery for blood–shed and suffering.



shot from "The Color of Pomegranates" 1969

To dive deeply into the contradictory meanings of pomegranates we find the beauty of opposition lying in the myth of Hades and Persephone, which narrates the story of the goddess of life and spring who fell in love with none other than the god of the dead and underworld. Hades kidnaps Persephone and takes her to his kingdom, making her a ruler of the underworld alongside him. Demeter, Persephone's mother, goes mad after her daughter's separation, she lets the crops die, starves the mortals, replaces spring with an everlasting winter, disguises herself as a mortal and suffers with them. As the goddess of spring was living in the realm of death, the gods feared no one would survive the madness Demeter has put the

people through, so they ask her to return to her mother, ending the debacle. Before Persephone left her husband he makes sure she eats some of his pomegranates, the fruit of the underworld, to make sure she would return to him after. The pomegranates here signify a link between the two lovers, a strong bond that even the other gods can do nothing about. When Persephone reaches her mother, the goddess quits her mourning but she is not quite satisfied, her daughter has changed, she's seen the dead, married their king, and must return back to him; her mother's green kingdom did not really suit her anymore.

The myth of Hades and Persephone has intertwined the concepts of life and death into one, Demeter and her daughter rewound the cycle of death and rebirth, the cycle of winter and spring; and this specifically is the essence of pomegranates. Pomegranates are exactly the goddess of spring entering the kingdom of Hades and becoming its queen, they represent the queen of the dead, the wife of Hades returning back to her mother's green kingdom; uneasy and off putting in all places.

Spring arrives with death still on her.

It hurts to be born.

–Emily Kendal Frey, from *Sorrow Arrow*

We bury our bodies in the earth we eat our food from. Pomegranates represent this cycle which we might view as contradictory. Nowadays, and

despite the brutal modernity off our flesh alive, many people still seek nature to find refuge and inspiration there.