

PAUL MARIANI

Solar Ice

The sudden shock of what you really are.
Early March. The tentative return of afternoons.
Saturday, and Mass again. The four.
All about swelling buds on beech & ash
& maples. Crocuses & snowdrops
trilling. Four months impacted ice at last
receding from the north side of the house,
and bobbing robins back & soon, soon, red-
winged blackbirds strutting on the lawn.
Soon too the sweet familiar groundswell
of peepers in the marshes. Reasons
enough to melt the frozen heart.

Father lifted the host above his head & prayed:
a small white sun around which everything
seemed to coalesce, cohere & choir. But
as I raised my head, the thought
of some old insult likewise reared
its head, and in that instant the arctic
hatred flared, shutting out my world
& spring, along with, yes, my lovely wife & sons,
a no & no & yet another no, until I caught
myself refuse the proffered gift of Love.

At once the host diminished to a tiny O:
an empty cipher, like some solar disc
imploding on itself. Only my precious
hate remained, the self-salt taste

of some old wound rubbed raw again,
a jagged O at the center of my world.
Ah, so this is it, I whistled through my teeth.
So this is hell, or some lovely ether
foretaste of it, alone at ninety north,
with darkness everywhere, & ice & ice
& ice & more ice on the way, and this
sweet abyss between myself & You.