

PAUL MARIANI

Christmas Eve 1945

They've propped me with a comforter
there in the living room just off the dim-lit kitchen,
where reddish bubble lights keep winking
from the etched-out blue black spruce. The scratched

mahogany top of Uncle Charlie's secondhand
Dumont lies pried open at an angle like some coffin
lid, flickering gray images off its five-inch screen.
I'm five, alone, enmeshed now in the first TV

pictures I've ever seen, the strains of a violin
playing klezmer music as Army bulldozers nose
white manikins forward, legs and arms flailing
as they tumble headlong into the pit. A pall

of snow pitches forward into the darkness
of these tenements as a voice keens there
from the console, though it's the music I keep hearing,
notes long since tattooed upon my tattered brain.

For the thousandth time the Army bulldozers
turn again, nosing the bodies forward into the waiting
maw. Once more the dark night the Psalmist sang of
hunkers down, as if keeping watch, except that

they're all gone now, the once-living and the dead, returned
now to the depths from which we all once sprang. Nothing
for it then, old cantor, but to sing them on their way, all those
with names, names only, and the million nameless ones.