

MICHAEL S. HARPER

HOUSE ON MIRAMAR, SAN FRANCISCO

Five years in the house  
of pisces, the bellbottom  
faces of sons  
all shining in the mantel mirror  
and the fireplace  
stacked with matches,  
weeds, the dead books  
curled to unworkable precision;  
the western sun bleeds  
through the seasonal fog,  
the belly of woman  
pregnant and puffy  
with seeds from African pottery  
or the song of Billie Holiday  
on a big band of air.

Breeze from the open fireplace,  
the wind crookeyes down the flue,  
black ashes of newsprint and cartons  
milky and burnt: incineration.  
What they did to no. 2 and 3 sons:  
firebombed from the Kaiser nursery,  
the phlegm and algae cut away:  
medicinal incineration;

what they did to this young girl  
in the late cot sun  
is the workbench history of disease.

Dahlias in the yard  
the bulbs hammering up  
as snails after milky submersion;  
flower and weed,  
crossbred boys sway  
on the rusty trapeze  
of their mother's hipbones  
bent and billowy,  
womanous nursery with dugs.

Cherokee skin, Indian  
colors, bushes, sanitary  
padding, ridges of woman  
broken and panting in the sun.