

MY BOY

I was outdoors midafternoon,
working with words like *flame* and *stone*
and *sea* and *sky*.

The sheltering trees
who breathe the earth awake for us,
who serve, building all their lives to keep us,
gave me *green* and *gray*,
breath and *bone*.

I heard only the goodbye words,
the prayer, "Stay safe, son, I love you, son."
A neighbor, he turned to me for witness:
"My boy called from Iraq, it's midnight there."

A father's love, less told by its very nature,
ready, taut, held in place—bag of blood
clamped over the broken body.
For he would empty his bank of days,
give every drop of his own life,
take any wound
instead of his son.

He'd blessed him to join, even in war,
wife at his side for better, once,
and now for worse—
she would make the boy a small boy again,
the child who slept within her, safe,
just yesterday,
before going lost in the world.

But a father, he knew,
must save the man's soul in a boy
at any cost, as his had been saved.

I saw it in his tired eyes—no longer
does he know what he knew before,
neither does he doubt
for he is green and he is gray, love is, and flame
and stone and sea and sky and all the world,
bound and boundless,
whole and torn.