

Poems by *Christine Casson*

Impromptu

She stands there, ironing. Her arm moves back
and forth — her body slightly bent — with each
drag across the board and then a pause ...

She shifts the shirt's yoke, adjusts its angle
on the arm; water splutters into steam;
then pressure, slow draw until the wrinkles

disappear. She's staked her claim in the living room.
She likes to move her work around the house —
her sewing she can do most anywhere —.

Bored, she puts a record on; chords of sound —
a piano's hammered keys — released,
rise with the vapor's hiss, then veer and fall.

She rests her iron on its heel, recalls
her own impulse to sing, to feel the tones
vibrating in her throat, the firm funnel

of her chest supporting air, and then
the letting go, each note freed to settle
in the world with other ordinary sounds.

She listens to the cello's quick response,
the increase and diminishment of strings
that speak under the pressure and release

of rosined bow. Its weighty speech awakes
her need to sing. She draws in breath...and more...
resists the tautness of her sluggish lungs,

her torso now an amphora of air
that, pliable, controls the steam of breath
that burgeons, lifting from her throat

to fill the room. The fullness of her chest
is more than this. The late-day sun persists
through half-drawn shades, reddening, it burnishes

CHRISTINE CASSON

the walls, drifts in lusted portions on the floor
like the portioning of breath that resonates,
augments, and falls, flares on the discarded shirt.

Apophatic

It's quiet—so quiet—these few hours
snatched near the close of an afternoon--

no screeching children, no cars, no birds,
no conversation, everything settled

into itself, the earth holding its breath,
as though it ceased turning; neither heavy clouds

nor sun, but steady light, dull glow of gray,
no rain, no certain wind, an untranslated

pause, this exhale of curtains a shallow
breathing that won't last. My body listens hard,

drinks of this rich calm, almost too fragile
to hold, or hear, this fullness that floods all,

my senses soothed by this potent drug
that whispers in my ear, a haunting voice

that wears away—my hunger to be sated
only when I lie down late, in dark, alone.

Christine Casson is currently working on a study of the poetic sequence titled *Sequence and Time Signature: A study in Poetic Orchestration* and is also writing a sequence of poems about composer Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel. Most recently her poetry has appeared in the *South Dakota Review*, and her essays on Native-American literature have appeared in *Celebration of Indigenous Thought and Expression*. She teaches at Emerson College, and is Executive Coordinator of PEN New England.