

IN A PRIVATE FIRE

Alice Mackenzie Swain

I would rather perish in a private fire, fully aware the phoenix
 is a myth like Santa Claus,
 and the wind will blow my anonymous ashes
 on the vast dust pile of technology.
 Yes, I would rather,
 but the whip-master is at my back
 and wavering flesh is weak, when I am daily faced
 with public rings of flame,
 fire hoops of compromise that shrivel dreams.

His power is stronger; he is amply paid
 in coinage of his tarnished market-place,
 and sees me as a property—a puppet to perform.

But who, in all the disaster-craving audience
 laments my spirit's mortal wound
 as I leap through and through and through again,
 weakening behind my smoothly-stap'ed smile.