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-stapled smile.