The music was fidgety, arch,  
an orchestral version of a twang.  
Welcome to atonal hell,  
Welcome to the execution  
of a theory, I kept thinking,  
thinking, thinking. I hadn’t felt  
a thing. Was it old-fashioned  
of me to want to? Or were feelings,  
as usual, part of the problem?  
The conductor seemed to flail  
more than lead, his baton evidence  
of something unresolved,  
perhaps recent trouble at home.  
And though I liked the cellist—  
especially the way  
she held her instrument—  
unless you had a taste  
for unhappiness  
you didn’t want to look  
at the first violinist’s face.  
My wife whispered to me,  
This music is better than it sounds.  
I reminded myself the world outside  
might be a worse place  
than where I was now,  
though that seemed little reason  
to take heart. Instead  
I closed my eyes, thought about  
a certain mezzo-soprano  
who could gladden a sad day  
anywhere, but one January night
in Milan went a full octave
into the beyond. Sometimes escape
can be an art, or a selfishness,
or just a gift you need
to give yourself. Whichever,
I disappeared for a while,
left my body behind to sit there, nod,
applaud at the appropriate time.