

Connecticut River Review, 2022

Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*

Ice coats everything, frozen again this morning
into a glossy crust, scarred and scarred
again by the dogs' crossing. I can picture Lucifer

in *Canto XXXIV* of Dante's *Inferno*, imprisoned
not in a fiery pit but in the remorseless dead center
of a lake of unyielding ice, the final 9th circle

in hell for those who betrayed their family,
committed treachery against those with special ties.
I'm sinking in shame over words shouted

at my husband who like Beethoven is almost deaf.
Snow persists like anger built month by month
grinding pills, funneling carton after carton

of liquid food through my husband's stomach tube.
To right myself, I read Beethoven's words
inscribed in *Missa Solemnis* to Archduke Rudolf

of Austria: *From the heart: may it reach the heart.*
His music may make my world bearable for awhile.
It's probably fifty-three minutes before I hear what

must have made it hard for Leonard Bernstein
to breathe while conducting the mass. In *Sanctus*,
the prelude of meditative strings with support

from flutes ushers in a radiant violin solo
in pure G major at its highest range entering like
a dove from heaven representing the Holy Spirit

descending to earth, *Him who comes in the name
of the Lord.* I gain solace from God's holiness
but in the final *Agnus Dei*, I hear what I am seeking,

that an appeal for outer and inner peace is far
from fulfilment, not far from menacing sounds of war,
trumpets and timpani drum rolling almost to an end.

Still, I'll hum Beethoven's *Blessed is he who
cometh in the name of the Lord*; it might lead me
to a riff, a song, even to a prayer, even to patience.