
Departure of the Sabbath Queen

Richard Chess

At the hour of the Queen's departure, they dance
To the music of American masters
Who return, note by note, the century

In which they were born, its atonality,
Its atoms, its refugees, the spears
Of grass on which with anonymous lovers they lay

Leisurely afternoons, for this
Is what they would like the Queen to take
With her as she ascends beyond the rafters,

Beyond the roof of the known
Universe, this innovation, this shame
By which they are shaken into even more

Frenzied playing, amplified
To reach the limits of the city
Within each dancer, their faces ablaze

With a refining fire, as the musicians of this
Yeshiva purify themselves in the presence
Of the queen whose presence is peace

And whose departure is imminent, — the tension
Mounts as they present her, through song, with the shorn
Hair and the leaky rafts and the makeshift sanctuaries

And the final calls of vanished species, turning
In two chaste circles, the dancing men and women,
Improvising a post-psalm, the musicians

Who to their maker's laws have returned.



Richard Chess has published one book of poetry, Tekiah (University of Georgia 1994). His poems have appeared in many journals as well as in Telling and Remembering: A Century of American-Jewish Poetry.