

The Root of It

On the rug by the fire

a stack of vocabulary rose up, confidently

piling adjectives and nouns and

tiny muscular verbs, storey by storey,

till they reached

almost to the ceiling. The word at the bottom

was love.

I rushed from the room. I

did not believe it. Feverishly

I turned over the pages of the dictionary

to find the blank spaces

they had left behind them-and there they were,

terrible as eyesockets.

What am I to do? What

am I to do? For I know

that tall stack would collapse,

every word would fly back and fill

those terrible spaces,

if I could snatch that word

from the bottom of the pile-if I could learn again

the meaning of love.

NORMAN MacCAIG