Poems
Fasces Americae and Walt Whitman’s House

by Fred Marchant
Fasces Americae

we are party to the sham,
endless weather reports,
each of us convinced
no harm will come if only,
if only, if only, and
nothing too cruel or violent
should ever touch us,
not really, not here, not now,
not in the midst of our
land of good and plenty,
yet as in the dry heat
of this August afternoon,
a moment’s chill point
penetrates, you feel it
come in over the air-
waves and settle in as
if poison has found
the place in the body
it had been looking
for all along, thus the heart
seizes in on itself and
the brain’s own round of
symmetry, reverts,
descends into a series of
crude punctuations,
an exclamation now!
like a stake in the heart
ellipses points that become
. . . nothing but a trail
down the wash leading
nowhere, while the real
questions sway before
our eyes like snakes
that refuse to be charmed
? ?  ?
and are bound together around
each other and under
the honed head of an axe.
Walt Whitman’s House

Camden

His last one, two floors, two granite slabs for his doorstep, empty lots and snowy vastness surrounding, rows of row-houses torn down.

Across the street the beige bricks of the jail, a bus-stop, a few metallic window-slots five or six floors up. I think mostly of his kind eyes, how they would have taken in the jail, the jailers, the inmates, the friends and lovers at the bus-stop waiting for the bus, the snow falling, going home all.

How in their sleep he might visit, touch their lips and try to keep them warm with feelings no one, not even the poets of then or now, know the name of.

Outside his house in the white snow, on the drifts rising like waves frozen, a vast stone ship of state is lit up, its hold filled to the limit, and about to sink.