

ALICE NOTLEY, *White Phosphorus*

[on the author] [on teaching this poem]

"Whose heart" "might be lost?" "Whose mask is this?" "Who has a mask,
& a heart?" "Has your money" "been published, been shown?" "Who can &
can't breathe?" "Who went" "to Vietnam?" ("We know who died *there*")
"This was then" "Is now." "Whose heart?" "All our heart" "the national
heart" "Whose mask?" "has its own heart?" "A mother's" "mask"
"Whose money" "do we mean?" "A woman's money" "Woman's money" "Who

went" "to Vietnam" "& just died of it?" "A son" "Evolved"
"a man" "evolved" "a woman" "into America" "into the" "just before now"
"It was just before now..." "When men made the forms" "& women made the
Air" ("& now no one does that, & who can breathe now?") "Who cares, in the
Air?" ("All our poems, women's were there," "there, too invisible" "and
now" "become male" "acceptable") "Accepted." "And they're welcoming us"

"among" "their forms" "among their forms only" ("what forms might we
have made?" "which ones did" "we make?") "Whose heart is lost?" "oh not
mine, & not my darling's" "Or only our whole heart?" "not mine, & not my
warrior's" ("has your money" "been accepted?") "And this is what happened,"
"he went to a war" "old style, he went" "to that war" "No one cared"
"that he went there" "as no one cared" "what was lost" "with our air"

"no magnanimity" "to an enemy" "no feeling for what" "is invisible" "for
magnanimity" "for what's lost" "to air, in air" "As if nothing
replaced chivalry, not something" "invisible" "but nothing." "No one
cared" "what was lost" "with our air" ("All the forms were already"
"men") ("politics, a man" "philosophy, a man; a building a" "painting a
poem, a man" "science, a man") ("Now, we can all" "be men") "This

is what happened." "She is a mother." "This is what happened."
"or she could be a lover" "or a sister" "This happened" "Find green air
green breath" "Later, he tries to become" ("did he become") "air,
air, as again" "This is what happened. And she's trying" "to breathe"
("the mother") "And she's trying to wash" "to wash off" "America"
"from herself" "but what" "is a mother" "now?" "In America,

everyone is else" ("else" "aside" "aside from their" "whole heart
has crumbled") ("take your own small heart, own heart & go")
("& breathe" "try to breathe") "Who is she? and who" "is he?"
"Whose mask is this?" "Whose heart might be lost to the" "bigger heart"
("not his nor hers but") "whole country of heart" "might be lost"
"to the bigger heart" "biggest heart" "heart of the universe" "heart that

might not give it back" ("we maimed" "another, a native land, we"
"helped maim another") "Please" "give it back" "Give us our heart,
whose" "heart might be lost."