



DISCUSSION GUIDE

I. IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

In a number of the poems in this section, one has the sense of someone pausing in a doorway, startled into seeing anew. In some ways that positioning is echoed by us as readers, pausing to turn the page, to enter into yet another sensibility, pivotal, aware of the power of our gaze. Sometimes we need to return again to beginner's mind in order to see straight and fresh. There is so much talk about medicine, about sickness, about health, with or without the care. But what gets us is the real stuff—the loopy paeon we want to sing to our anesthesiologist as we go under, the combination of the ordinary and the mysterious in a technician's dance that shocks us out of our tragic stance, the unapologetically bared breasts of a dying woman and the faint citrus mist we add to the situation.

- 1) What particular images in these selections catch in your imagination? Are there images from your own experiences, bed or bedside, that keep coming back to you and asking to be explored?
- 2) The narrator in "Clay" finds the bared breasts of Grace, her dying patient, disorienting. She seems to be searching for a distance that is both empathic and professionally detached and that allows her to meet Grace exactly where she is. Who do you see as the wiser of the two? What is the most valuable thing that each woman offers to the other?
- 3) Molly O'Dell's poems combine a poet's eye and a physician's distance. As a reader, do you have a desire to know more, come closer or do these vivid snapshots feel complete to you? Why?
- 4) Why do you think the therapist in Sylvie Terespolski's story finds his patient so challenging? Who feels more reality-based to you?