Choosing to Empathize (1991)†

Mary C. Dunlap

Moving men.
What a job!
But when
Assemblyman George Michaels
stood racked with tears
stood up in the New York legislature
on April 9th of 1970
and changed his vote from “No” to “Yes”
to repeal the criminal abortion laws
That had killed and maimed as many women
as a small undeclared war
When Mr. Michaels recalled his wife’s reply
in the argument they’d had earlier that day
before he voted, remembered
“In the meantime
thousands of women
will be butchered
in underworld abortion”
let in his son’s emphatic words
of the suffering from
no abortion = violent abortion
in the summer Cincinnati ghetto
his son had learned and lived in
when he George Michaels moved
reversed his course to vote
determinedly for repeal
and kissed his political ass good-bye
knowingly and bravely

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with more pain before he stood up to change,  
says he today,  
than in three years of mortar fire at him  
Marine Pacific World War II  
When this happens  
When someone not possibly directly  
in the line of fire, on the hook  
of the coat hanger  
of the abortion-by-drunk-auto-mechanic  
of the abortion-by-jumping-off-the-garage-roof-age-18-and  
dying  
When someone gets it who isn't s'posed to  
Then, say:  
Hallelujah!  
Let's hear it  
For moving men,  
and, yes, for moving women.