“February”

Winter. Time to eat fat

and watch hockey. In the pewter mornings, the cat,

a black fur sausage with yellow

Houdini eyes, jumps up on the bed and tries

to get onto my head. It’s his

*5* way of telling whether or not I’m dead.

If I’m not, he wants to be scratched; if I am

He’ll think of something. He settles

on my chest, breathing his breath

of burped-up meat and musty sofas,

*10* purring like a washboard. Some other tomcat,

not yet a capon, has been spraying our front door,

declaring war. It’s all about sex and territory,

which are what will finish us off

in the long run. Some cat owners around here

*15* should snip a few testicles. If we wise

hominids were sensible, we’d do that too,

or eat our young, like sharks.

But it’s love that does us in. Over and over

again, He shoots, he scores! and famine

*20* crouches in the bedsheets, ambushing the pulsing

eiderdown, and the windchill factor hits

thirty below, and pollution pours

out of our chimneys to keep us warm.

February, month of despair,

*25* with a skewered heart in the centre.

I think dire thoughts, and lust for French fries

with a splash of vinegar.

Cat, enough of your greedy whining

and your small pink bumhole.

*30* Off my face! You’re the life principle,

more or less, so get going

on a little optimism around here.

Get rid of death. Celebrate increase. Make it be spring.

Margaret Atwood: “February” from *Morning in the Burned House*, 1995.