

DANIEL TOBIN

Firmament

“Hunger: we imagine kinds of food, but the hunger itself is real:
we have to fasten onto the hunger...”

Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

“God’s Adamic touch, the Banishment, Michelangelo’s skin—
The haunt of the world entire on this sky’s exploded view,
Magnificent, like the rapt soul’s projection of a firmament.

I lay half on my back as Andre advised, breaking the rule,
And argued sharply with the guard! Dear family, if Paradise
Is like St. Peter’s, the Sistine choir, it is worth going there.”

Three days she strays the capital, Palatine, Forum, Coliseum,
“Dead drunk on Greek statues,” San Anselmo’s “pure jewel,”
Di Vinci’s *St. Jerome* on wood—her rucksack tour of Rome

Through palimpsests of empire, early, late, profane, sacred,
And that ardent Fascist student who had been told of her:
“Very naïve, the poor fellow, I must have left him gasping....

I would prefer starvation in a salt mine to the slim horizon
Of these young people, that cave less stifling than the brute
Adoration of power, or some masked deification of death.”

Though to remember Florence, the Uffizi: “overwhelming,”
Botticellis, though nothing “to equal Giorgione’s *Concerto*,”
Its figure glancing heavenward, fingers ranging the keys—

Beautiful people among beautiful things, beauty of the world,
Is it grace, its superabundance? The mouth of the labyrinth
Where, at the center, God waits to eat those who desire?

Go ask the lutenist’s son, belated Galilean, one scope aimed
Above, the other into depths— vastness bridging vastness
Along the spectrum thin medium of Earth. And still it moves.

The Garden

“These designs attributed to God are cuttings made by us,
Chosen from infinite turns, connections that might be made
By any intelligence, human, non-human, no matter the scale,

Throughout space and time...” Let this cutting be morning
In the Luxembourg Gardens: They have come by streetcar
Across the Seine—son, mother, baby Simone who refuses

To be fed, except by bottle, holes cut in the nipple to let
Solid foods pass. Not yet two. Sickly. *This baby cannot survive.*
Each day they walk the paths so she breathes the fresher air,

This intricate parterre of flowers and lawn, the central basin
With its water jet, these balustrades, the marionette theatre—
Like an unbroken symmetry... And people sitting, passing,

As in a painting by Watteau. Is she looking at the toy boats?
At the play of light in the pool? Among terraces and statuary,
Fountains splash, wind flicks the trees, and four bronze bodies

Hold the world on its axis... Here is the path she will name
For Rousseau, wild, where she will love to walk with friends.
But where is that other, where the stranger reveals himself,

Is she on her way to lycée? “An incident without importance,”
Andre will say; “That business,” she’ll say, “That birthed in me
Revulsion, humiliation at being desired.” And *this* cutting,

This insult to the one life? Does it fix the purity of a glacier,
The extravagance of the mustard seed, a longing to eat light?
Round, round goes the carousel. Bees in the beehouse hum.