

DRIVING

Paul Meacham

After Bernardo Luini's *The Christ Child Asleep*

There is the steel and black vinyl of the dashboard,
its tachometer, the orange needle waves above, now
below the constancy of my velocity, the miles click
past and roll over in tenths, and , always, there
is the image, pale and sad, the sleeping face
of the child beneath her chin.

I am an observer
in that circle, the innocent over her shoulder
offering and roll of brown parchment tied
with twine,

or in the foreground, cherubic,
with white linen in my hands.

I am the one who looks out
from the painting's

shadow, who presses
the clutch, cuts the engine
after the thousandth mile and coasts to a stop
at the side of the highway, to stretch
his legs beside a roadsign that says
soft shoulder, to gaze into the star-saturated sky,
the silent dark of the desert emptied.