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# Argument against Our Temporal Agoraphobia

Marjorie Stelmach

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MARJORIE STELMACH

*Argument Against Our Temporal Agoraphobia*

For Virgil, history's slope was not a given, as for us who  
drearily assume  
a singular, closed past, matched to a future careeningly wide  
open. We dream

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infinities of choice, beginning now and spreading out into our  
own remaining spans  
as easily as we might (and have, for better or for worse), set off  
for lands

uncharted (proposing only *out of here*), worlds woven of the  
possible and im-  
(cloven humans, heads beneath their shoulders; unicorns; lizards  
born of mud). For him,

a man deferring philosophy for the long years after art, and dying  
at the seam  
where the two might profitably have met, both Past and Future  
posed their open

questions. The argument came to this: either memory and  
history (i.e., the chartered  
past) can equally ignore the banks, slip the borders, and spread,  
flood-smear

over a vast, featureless landscape, all its familiar landmarks  
hidden  
by the waves of our multi-directional wakes, or the future, too,  
is fixed and bidden

by gods. Which? Logic's a thing you can't have both ways:  
symmetry requires  
the single fulcrum and the stance—which, we're told, is all a  
man can claim as his

and all he needs. Two worlds to move in the here-and-now: time  
to abandon  
60 as Dante did, even a half-life's certainty. Ascending our  
treacherous mountain

peering only up, how can we claim a knowledge—declare a  
single, reliable fact—  
concerning our craven, encumbered selves or the cloven  
historians at our backs.