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Spolia

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Spolia

Nations have headwaters. So, too,
love, do we grow from our own
vanquished pasts. Consider the way
I touched you, just now—
replica of ____ who took my hand
and showed how he
had learned he liked it. ____
who I told, minutes before my flight,
not to follow me. Another
wanted me to lie completely still
on top of him, covering his entire
body as he fell asleep. Sweet, now,
____ in memory. Sweet reuse.
The men who built the arch
after Constantine's triumph knew
to preserve older reliefs
of victory. Yes, the golden times
remembered, the past's good rulers still
in their chariots, but also the head
of an earlier emperor
replaced by Constantine's soft face.
May we, too, name old cities
after ourselves, become sole rulers
of a map corner, a coast.
When I say your name it will be
with the same language, the same mouth
used with all others. After death,
a triumphant emperor
was represented at his own funeral
by an actor. If he, the actor,
mourned, he did so in silence,
his stillness rehearsed.