

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

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.