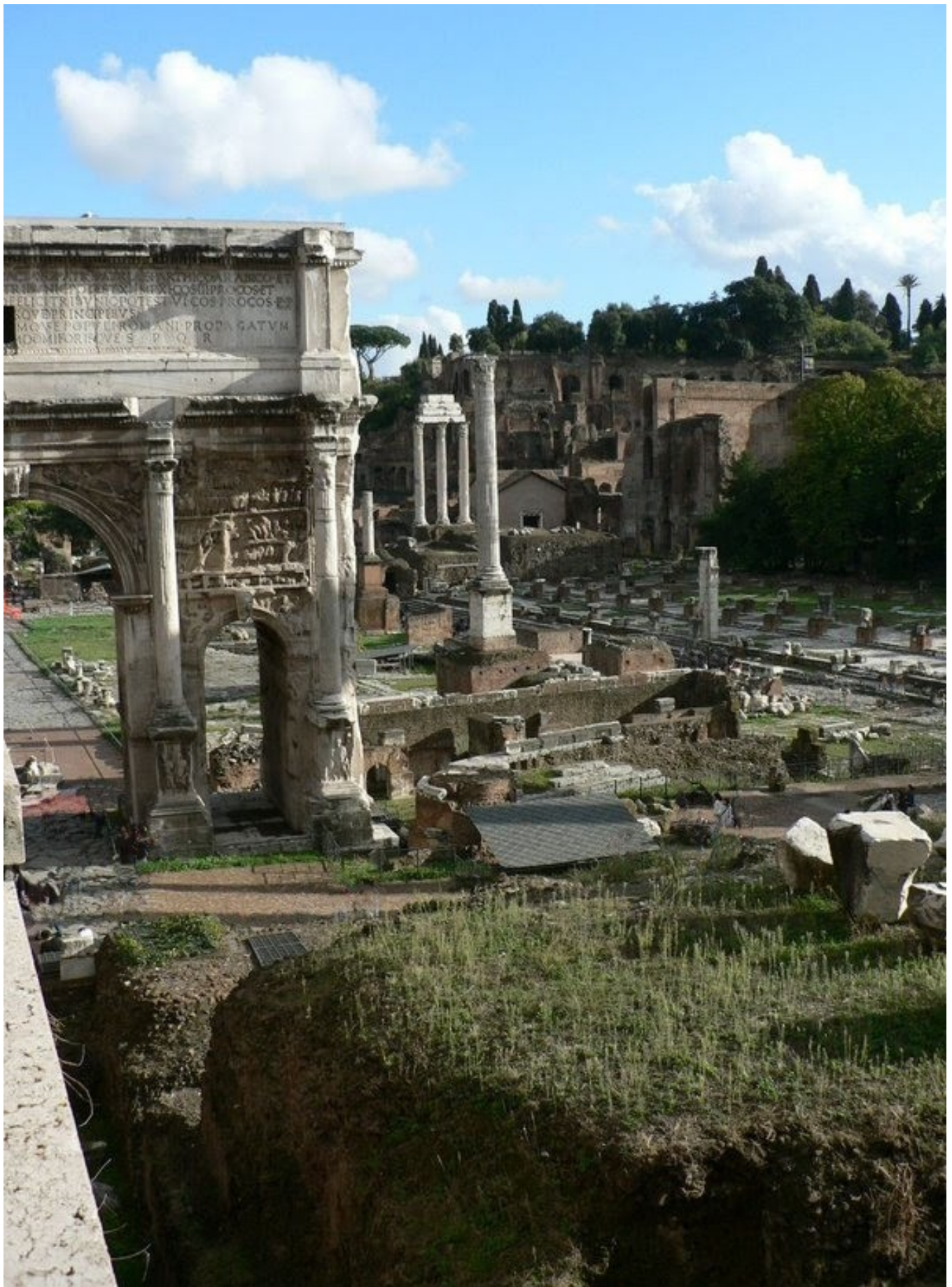




THE CHILDREN RUN OUT TO PLAY

The children run out to play
in the fields along the Appian way,
in the high grass that blankets
the funerary circus
where Maxentius poured out his grief
like autumn wind in the dying trees.
Chariots wheeled furiously in the turns
for a young son of Rome taken too soon.
Rome of the seven hills,
whose conscript fathers extolled the high Latin of Cicero.
Where hammer and chisel sounded
an imperial symphony of aedes and fora.
Where ships of amphora and grain swaggered up the Tiber
and merchants and women with baskets
traded in foreign talk, denarii and aureus.
Rome, the face of empire.
Her ruins betray her faded glory.
And though she has withered under time's relentless sway,
the children still run out to play
in the fields along the Appian way.



THE STAGE OF EMPIRE

The stage of empire is stripped of conceits,
unadorned, the scene of a thousand monstrous crimes,
instigator of ten thousand more.

Shades of titanic glories stand naked,
ashamed to speak of the triumphus;
the gilt chariot, the proud, arrogant quadriga
ascending the sacred way,
the rude, pitiless mob,
the ruined, piteous captives.

In the sepulchral silence on moonless nights,
brooding Jove shuffles down from the Capitoline shadows
to wander among the chastened, moldering stones,
listening, searching,
but in vain
for the solemnities of the Vestals
and the rekindling of the sacred fire.



THE BLACK-JAWED WOLF

A loud rain lashes the black-jawed wolf
huddled against a cragged brick mound,
once the glorious temple of radiant Apollo,
an oblation of the piety of Augustus.
Here the carved acanthus, the graceful curl,
neither alive or dead.

Here the regal symmetry of fluted marble,
now a naked heap, fractured,
scattered on the low, damp ground.

The sounds of empire have failed.

No hurried steps echo in the gilded, Flavian halls.
No praetorian watchword secures the gleaming bronze gates.
The wolf shivers as the thunder rumbles over the mountains.
The fierce anguish of fallen Rome has bled out every tear,
a torrent of grief carried on the current of Lethe,
the river of oblivion.



RESTLESS HADRIAN

He built in dream-like vividness,
in poetic inspiration
a gorgeous ornament to the ease of empire.
Now the fall moon conjures only shadows
of his commingled thoughts and desires,
the vigor of his thinking and feeling.

The Apennine wind invades
the defenseless, hollow rooms,
ill-used, stripped of every splendor.
Silent now the songs in the Doric hall,
the musings of flute and lyre.

Silent now the vain whispers of reclining courtiers
while maidens poured Falernian wine from chased silver
urns,
their eyes fixed downward.

Restless Hadrian lays aside his chaplet of roses and myrtle
and steps alone into the night.

He takes a quiet breath
and surveys his moonlit, marble grove.

Not deluded by Pan or Bacchus,
he stands sober and still.

He feels the chill wind on his face.

Dry oak leaves swirl at his feet.
His heart races to the footfalls of time.



THE THRESHOLD OF HEAVEN

Almost beyond mortal men,
an ethereal dream yet awake.

The laughing Etruscan hills mingle
with the smiling sky.

Twittering, playful, noisy birds, darting among the
towers of Assisi, Cortona, Siena, Firenze,
patrol the truths of patient, venerable vineyards.

O Joyful Tuscany!

Baptized by gentle storms,
immortalized, cultivated by genius,
a verdant, rapturous, lyrical land,
the threshold of heaven!



THE VENOM OF HADES

Ripening melons swung wildly along the garden wall.

A young mother,
startled,

turned toward her baby's cry
as fruit and flowers tumbled from the table.

"Run!, Run!, were screams barely heard
over the deranged chorus of
rattling carts and baying dogs.

Down the splintering streets
toward the vaulted brickwork that faced the sea
she ran, clutching her child,
sick with fear.

"O gods that may be!",
she pleaded through her tears,
"Save us!"

The marble maidens and men, who held her heart,
stood in cold silence.

They, too, tottering, impotent, were laid waste,
drenched in the black rain.

The angry mountain grumbled.

The ashen giant rose up then fell,
sweeping through Pompeii's lamenting streets
throwing fire into the houses
like an avenging army.

The venom of Hades silenced her,
and her baby's cry.



SO FAIR A PLACE

A high, silvery stream tumbles
to meet the welcoming lake.

There rests his villa, his feasting table
freshly laden with fish and bread
and olives and boar and spiced wine.

There the portico,
lined with friends and happy flowers,
escorts him to the Lares and the jovial hearth.

Luxuriant vines embrace shadowy glades
where the soothing sighs of gentle brooks
loosen the grip of pitiless Rome.

Comum is careless with faults, generous with her guests.

Immortal powers lean from the snowy peaks,
smiling at the crystalline waters and the warm winds
that bore kind Pliny on so fair a day,
to so fair a place.



VENICE LOOKED EASTWARD

Venice looked eastward,
unburdened by ancient Latium.
Gilded, tesserated Byzantium
mirrored in the grey lagoon.

Today she sleeps, indifferent to the masses
to whom Titian and Tintoretto, Durer and Bellini
and Polo's sojourn in the court of the Khan mean nothing.
She always appealed more to the emotions than the mind.
Her pastel waters invite but do not command.

Steal silently, reverently at dawn or twilight
into the misty canals.

Come as on a holy day,
as on Easter morn,
in the gliding gondola.

Only then, in the transient light, does she stir with a sigh.

In that breathless moment
you may catch her passing gaze
before she gathers around her the luxuriant folds
of a faded but serene greatness
and settles back into her dreams.



GLORIOUS HALL

Providence, whose iron hand
sweeps away the proud,
passed lightly over a majestic emblem.
The pillared portico stands humbled,
a devout acolyte
attending the glorious hall.
The rising sun awakens the ocular portal,
and illumines with lucent splendor
the spreading dome,
the lustrous, autumnal marbles.
Once incensed with pious prayers
to a pagan pantheon,
now to the Christ devoted,
this sublime ornament alone remains to bless,
midst Rome's solemn wilderness
of scattered stones.

DEDICATION

*To Linda, Erik, Kristin, Geoff and Jenn,
fellow sojourners in this symphonic land.*

