

## Last Judgment in Ferrara

“Even in a city as small as Ferrara, you can manage, if you like, to disappear for years and years, one from another, living side by side like the dead.”

(Giorgio Bassani, *The Garden of the Finzi Continis*, trans. William Weaver)

Angels herd seven naked sinners chained  
together by their crimes, and mocked by wings  
of local pigeons this sweltering June  
while God sits impassive on his throne.  
From the marble portico, all gape down  
as devils stir a vat of the damned  
and season it with another soul, there  
on the cathedral’s storybook façade.

From a café below, I return their stare,  
sipping tortellini broth and good Emilia wine  
to mute the restless canticle of flies  
like rumors of misdeeds I am sure  
to pay for – betrayals and jealousies;  
a passion for the palace of horrors  
known as history. A shudder born  
of humid air makes those figures waver  
with all the choices I ought to regret.

Across the street, Savonarola stretches  
bronze arms wide, conjuring a bonfire.  
Over his shoulder, the castle towers  
where Browning’s duchess died and partisans  
and Jews were strung for interrogation.  
Yet when Blackshirts torched the synagogue,  
a passing German rushed inside  
to rescue scrolls he smuggled home and spent  
a lifetime trying to mend. Scholar  
of second chances, he labored unaware  
a damaged Torah must be burned.

What is it in us that craves redemption so?  
Some compulsion surpassing fear as when  
Ferrara cyclists coast downhill, gathering speed  
and torquing every ratchet of their luck.  
It builds in us till we're compelled to look  
into the pit and, seeing, take a breathless  
inventory, a judgment however  
unsound, but, for the moment, ours to take.

Will Wells  
4240 Campus Drive  
Lima, OH 45804