

Matthew Tuckner

Considering Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*

It is 2048, and I am standing at the nadir
of the collapsed canyon system Aureum Chaos,
one kilometer below the Mars surface, roughly
4.4 degrees south and 27 degrees east of the equator,
slightly west of Margaritifer Terra. It is 1877,
and the Earth is in opposition to Mars, perfectly

aligned across the celestial sphere where Schiaparelli
can just make out a system of canali through the broad
lens of the Merz equatorial refracting telescope
that is being invented as we speak in the deconsecrated monastery
the Bichl Glassworks call home; a pair of canali
through which I walk in 2048, a distance that is identical

to the distance required to traverse Alabama, through which
I walk in 2014, making my way along the caves
of Dismal Canyon, home to a species of glow worm
referred to colloquially as the Dismalite. It is 2014,
and I am pushing hosts of the bugs off my forearms
and knees. Covered in their light I am no longer

aware of my light. It is 2048 and Mars dust attempts to enter
my eyes, but slowly, slow enough that I can swipe
it away in the two seconds I have before it lands
on my face. Without gravity, the wind is manageable. Although
it is 2048 now, it is 2007 now, and my heels are making
a riot of the marble paths separating the groves that border

the Galleria Borghese, and it is 1664 now
and John Evelyn is pressing ink to parchment
memorializing the museum's extensive vivarium advertising
peacocks with trains drenched by indigo irises and a *divers* collection
of other strange beasts. In 2007, in a tucked away
corner, I am looking at a painting of a full-lipped boy

with a basket of grapes blocking the view of his chest. At first
it is the grapes I can't stop looking at, four clusters total:
two purple that are almost black due to a pinch of deliberate

Kestrel

tenebrism, a red sprig, and one green bunch that appears white
as if they weren't quite ripe when painted. Not to mention
the pomegranate with seeds as blush-red as the boy's

cheeks, or, all the grape leaves, half-murdered by the banded
leafroller moths, and the various mottled peaches
that one week later, in the summer of 1593, will die for good,
as Ranuccio Tomassoni, possibly a pimp, dies for good,
in 1606, when Caravaggio, putting down his tennis racket, picks up
a knife and moves to castrate the gentleman to defend his honor,

but misses, severing Tomassoni's femoral artery, spilling blood
all over the indoor tennis court. Concurrently, the lawn mower is
invented across the pond in Thrupp in 1830 and most tennis
matches are moved outside to the sporting ovals, and now, in 1531,
Henry VIII shouts *hold* and slaps a ball of cork against a wall.
It is 2019 and I am concerned about the climate, so I start

boycotting straws and investing in my future, adding a strand
of Elvis hair to my Ebay cart. I meditate on the penguins
and the paradox of the phrase solid ground when living on
thin ice. I smell my fingers and I am smelling my mother's
fingers: envelope adhesive and rosewater, but I cannot
hear her voice. Likewise, in 1536, Jane Seymour can't hear

a thing from behind the walls of the new quarters Henry has placed
her in while he takes care of what he takes care of at Tower Green,
and contemporaneously, the gold he has fastened around her neck
is synthesized in a supernova somewhere temporally exempt,
just east of the Andromeda Galaxy. Nonetheless, in 2007, I am
mistaking a pair of medlars for a pair of apples, aware

of the fact that in 2048 there are neither apples nor medlars on Mars,
or Earth, so I thumb a smiley face into one of the canyon walls
and the space dust lifts and falls back into place, a smiley face
that a giant dust devil the size of the Empire State Building will
wash away as it tumbles across the Chaos, leaving a path
some astronomers might mistake for a river in a day or two, when
Mars

stands in perfect opposition to Earth as if it were disapproving.

Disapproving of what, I could never be sure, because speculation
is just another timeworn method used to kill time. As the men
building the Empire State Building in 1930 sprinkle tobacco from
an unfastened, unfinished beam to kill their own form of time,
watching

it zigzag away and disintegrate to a scale, where if one is paying

attention, the atoms can be seen to swirl and lift into something
like a cloud, colliding with a window of the Chrysler Building.

And then everything changes. And the atoms become the layer
of dust coating the window. But I digress into speculation. The same
way

I digress into a playground in the middle of a cemetery in Huntsville,
Alabama during my long walk of 2014. Huntsville, Alabama

where the townspeople refer to the landmark as Dead Children's
Playground. There's the grave with the epitaph that reads *I would
rather*

be reading this. And there's the swing set moved with more force
than the dust of Mars is. In 2004, some of the Dead Children
of Dead Children's Playground are alive and well, sliding down
the slide, letting gravity have its way along the firepole,

as it follows in 340 B.C., when Rhodes falls to Persian forces, and
simultaneously,

the hand of the Colossus is separated from its body plummeting
100 feet into the Aegean, and simultaneously, Aristotle inscribes
the words *death is the most fearful thing* upon the papyrus. It is 2049,
and Earth is severely lacking in peacocks. Aristotle also calls
the peacocks *jealous and fond of ornament*, but Aristotle

has no idea what he's talking about.

