

From **THE MANSIONS**  
Daniel Tobin

From "At the Grave of Teilhard de Chardin"

(His Stone)

Again, this dawn-lit incandescence through the yew trees,  
and down the slope, the river scrolling the length of itself  
in every purl and ripple. When, years ago, they set me

to attest his life among the growing human increase  
under grass, I had long been lifted from the groundmass,  
soft-grained, sun-blached, vaguely crystalline, his name

cut into me plainly with his beginning and his end,  
and the frozen earth unwilling to lay him to his rest  
for this man to sleep the sleep of trust, the sleep of seed

in the winter field. "It is a terrifying thing to be born,  
to find oneself, without having willed it, swept along,"  
still, I hear him say, "on a torrent of fearful energy."

Or maybe I only think I hear him, as if I were his god  
of iron, a childhood's distant dream, infinitely durable,  
not my weathering granite shield against effacement.

What comes at the very end, he said, is the adorable.  
To this pad-locked field behind the shuttered church  
I watch them swing the gate and scan the identical rows

along the tarred path pillowed by decades of moss  
until they find me, each one leaving their gift of stone  
on my crest. And sometimes it is, in that stillness,

as if I am the river moving along with the layers,  
light pouring over me, pouring through me, light  
speeding from so far away it has no past or future.

(Wake)

If, as Plato dreamed, time is just a moving image  
of eternity, am I not then the glittering trailing ripple  
of a world-line through matter passing on ahead?

Or imagine, if you will, my life on this coarser scale,  
the character of a quantum riptide behind the stern,  
bubbling into being through this fluid interference

of currents that become a Gulf, this Sea called Red  
where the scientist, this priest, follows on his exodus  
between Sinai and the Nile, an array of fossil bones

where the holy family made their timorous flight  
into the desert, its shifting rush of saffron, a startle  
of snipes from the tamarinds, spray of mimosa—

then, as now, a sudden heron skimming the shore's  
milky wash, nets of fishermen seizing the moment  
as I would fold everything gathered into my present.

Not far below, hawksbills cruise the underwaves,  
chordata roam the glass-strung cathedrals of reefs  
that are venerable as sacred cities, mineral, animal,

living and dead, releasing a blizzard of softest flesh  
to dwarf the work of Giza above, these architects  
more ancient than any pedaled upstart—but blindly?

Matter, spirit: two aspects of the one stuff, this priest  
supposed—and mind in harness all the way down.  
Still: gunshots like pocked Braille on the Sphinx's face.

(Fault)

I am the scandal inside the rock, the mist in bronze,  
that makes the sculptor turn his hand, amend his eye  
to find in stone's intended flesh the fortunate flaw.

I am the droplet mote of fog that sways and knocks  
the pomegranate's alchemies about, diffusing them  
to randomness, out of which anneals the very fruit.

I am the fabric's warp and woof, double life of loss  
and growth, loss again, the passing names by which  
each furthered world feels its life and knows its death.

I am the thread that webs itself through every maze  
till I become the maze itself, and the walker there,

who mindfully, blindly, solely gropes the iron veil.

I am the stuttered origin, a gene-inflected molecule  
conjuring futures from the acid soup, purposeless,  
until this driven fraught machine divines the word.

I am the soldier's fall in each attack, the fatal block  
that hides the manifold, inevitable, original, here,  
endless, till No Man's suffers into Promised Land.

So, for eschatology, let this man descend the cave,  
the cavern of beginnings below his own Dordogne,  
to run his mind along that frieze of first imaginers,

the prey, the prime extinctions on the boss's fold  
and fault— He thinks: *By means of all created things  
the divine assails us, molds us.* With that assault, I am.