Empire Burlesque

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XII

Our Story (So Far) As The Function \( f(x) \)

It is the part of a slippery variable
to stand for something other: a nest of eels,
for instance, or the smell of a man in fever.

If the smell of a man in fever,
and the square root of all the blisters
on all the hands that carry us in this, our sedan,

were stitched together some rain-besotted day,
it would make a rather smallish jib for the furthering,
yet how very like a variable to carry that sail

and the storm itself, and the bitter current
by moonlight, river mist ghosting
along a line’s chop and heave.

And if, as is our wont, we keep falling for it,
for the part where the empathy runs—
some poet kneeling to light candles

to our patron saint of the crescendo—
well, the wily variable can carry that, too,
in a sorry sort of road-house,

rain along the Natches Trace, a summons
to the Capital, Meriwether with a pistol to his head. . . .
Ever the volunteer, he steps

into the unsayable. You wanted some drama, didn’t you?
to be and to get carried away, as they say?
It is in keeping that a pattern should so

ramify & thus bewilder, in keeping that a pattern,
through which we move & are moving, should end,
and that an ending be its forwarding address.