VENUS VICTRIX

After Antonio Canova, "Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix"

Because we are American & he's very
bored, we catch a glimpse of the unknown coast
& say *We'll take it all.* So we drive east
from Portugal & find our way by sight:
long days, like languages, entwined —
conjoined by too-short nights — the Continent
more like a series of lunches, rooms
with a view to undress into

If I'm not careful, life unfolds
like a series of chooseable choices.
I can see almost to this one's end —
the map flattens before me
(but what would be the arc of life
if love were the only constituency?)

Later my mother asks me if I feel
bought, being paid for.

She means the travel, the cashmere
coat — but reminds me of my education.

In the Vatican, I do not look for God
though I am seen by many —
So much of all
I am & have I owe to some beholder
(See
how I paint myself into a scene? How I paint
myself into a corner?)
Michelangelo did not
after all, lay flat, but stood, arching
backwards
(Am I not worth that patronage?
I love like the Sistine ceiling)

In Borghese's house
Ms. Bonaparte reclines on a marble couch — her ease
the ease of the moneyed few & the truly free