

The Voice of Objectivity

In Memory of Charles Coulston Gillispie

by Michael B. Decker

Outside, late leaves try on Fauvist
paints, the geese turn restless

and honk like the traffic passing
by, playing the music of noise, while

the quiet here, your absence, Charles,
changes into presence, your voice

remains with us, remembered as
that voice of certainty, yes, yet

certainly open-minded, entirely
free and there's this joyousness

that carries slightly higher –ah-
as if some sixth sense hits, some

epiphany is on the way. "Professore"
I imagine Galileo at your welcome

party "what's this thing Relativity? What
have they done with my universe,

my rectangles?" then your spirited
repartee, those end-stopped sentences

let fly, sharply fencing thought
with thought; as you battle, the mystery

of science deepens: the more we know
the more mysterious the questions

grow, "glimpses of great order and
altogether inhuman high beauty"

(I'm quoting you) flicker like heavenly
auroras many low clouds quickly

refuse, resuming their disguise
as so much overcast. We overhear

your bow-tied bons mots, the knowing
aside on Montgolfier's trial balloons

above Paris, or Sadi Carnot fitting
energetics to a T, even voicing reason

to Patton, up in his jeep, arms akimbo,
shouting madly for more artillery.

And what is the sound of your
higher judgment being quietly

withheld when you sensed more
promise gained for us, scholars,

ephebes, by silence? Silence,
thus, becomes a form of love.

"Professore" – Imagine a sound
like applause, murmurings; the Host

invisible, waiting; the receiving line
extends all the way to Pythagorus

who just has to ask you about
the square root of two – so Charles

we must let you go – let your
bright angel, memory, light

within us now; and make us all,
all carriers of your voice.