

STEPHEN CUSHMAN

*Some Harmless Heresy*

It's all very well for Paul  
to say he's finished the race,  
exhorting us duffers to run  
so we may obtain the prize,

but only a man who never  
ran a race in his life  
could think this a useful figure  
for coaching somebody's stride,

since running a winning race  
depends on keeping a pace,  
and keeping a pace depends  
on where the race will end

and knowing it well in advance,  
so one doesn't try to sprint,  
let's say, the whole round trip  
to Marathon and back,

a heart attack inevitable  
and guaranteed to come  
with terminal force far short  
of any finish line,

the whereabouts of which  
only a suicide knows,  
leaving the rest to guess  
whether it stretches remote

in a distant, demented decade  
or is the tape to break  
this second amidst cicadas  
and final, fricative crickets.

## *Home Maintenance*

It could be so much worse,  
of course. A little paint,  
some warped boards replaced,

and suddenly this little house  
doesn't stand a chance  
of inscription on the list

of World Heritage ruins,  
even with no new roof.  
Wadis in the driveway,

after a recent deluge,  
don't make a Machu Picchu,  
nor does rot in the frame

around the kitchen door  
spell Masada, Pompeii,  
or Kilwa Kisiwani.

Look, the tiny rooms  
remain intact right here,  
which is more than one can say

for Baroña, León Viejo,  
the Walled City of Baku,  
or the Temple at Jerusalem;

yet, to be fair, at least  
at Delphi there was breeze  
providing background noise,

whereas the square feet taxed  
at this address, Lonesome  
Mountain Road, have seen

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everybody leave  
things silenter than they  
could be at moonless Stonehenge

after tourists go.

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Stephen Cushman's most recent book of poems is *Heart Island* (2006). He is serving as general editor of a new edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, now in progress. He teaches at the University of Virginia.