

“Authority”

More circumspect than hunters setting
traps in the tawny Tuscan hills,
clerics plotted their steps:
which witness required torture?
All the while accumulating
evidence for the Inquisitor's file.

Forsaking caution, Galileo
acknowledged each enemy
unnerved him. He grew brash,
contemptuous—the child
he'd been before the world
discovered him. True,
he'd sought preferment. Who
has not? No matter—he
was appalled by authority
unless it favored him . . .

Among faithful supporters
he counted three emissaries
to the Papal Court. Also
a prince. A Minister
of State, no less. And, yes,
the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Behind bejeweled fingers
they grinned, they tittered,
to hear their friend—his cup
filled to spilling—propose
his toast to progress; then
declare the Pope, “A dupe,
a dullard, a simpleton.
A worm. A brass-brained dolt.
A sheep. A braying ass
spooked by its own shadow.”

Clearly he feared no man
now. No-not even
pious Pope Urban
who strangled songbirds
in the Vatican garden
when they disturbed him.