L.J. Sysko

Middle age has a branding problem.

Two words that make it sound medieval—
an era of blight & torture, feudal parcels
of flab & phlegm cut into
cellulitic pock & osteoporotic rock.

My whole life's been
a comedic Canterbury pilgrimage to this site,
what a rite
to stand blinking up
at the monolith &
ask: how
do I know if this The Middle
be? Today may serve
as a synonym for Exercise
in Optimism.

I used to tell my students,
We're all dying, just not at the same rate.
And we'd laugh. One June
after everyone had fled to summer,
I found on my desk:
a gift handmade in woodshop.
A clock with two faces—
one labeled Living, the other Dying—
set to the same time.