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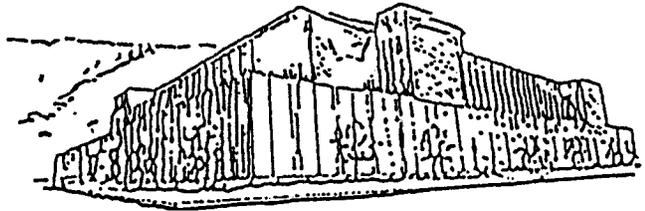
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CAMPHORWEED

by

James Jay

B.A. Northern Arizona University, 1993

M.A. Northern Arizona University, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

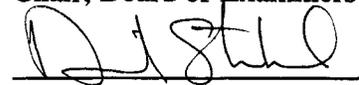
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I would like to thank my teachers and fellow students for continual advice and inspiration.

I would also like to thank my wife, Doris. Without her these poems would not exist.

Under the Shade of the Small Question

A field of prickly pear cacti sticks
the dropping hillside to a dark green.
I pick my way through like a cat
already needed cautious.

Where prickly pear root to the sandstone
ledges they grey and drop like vines
in a garden. On the sandstone are pictographs
in burnt black, chiseled back to brown —
 bear paws, antelope, elk, snakes, time
 worn humans, circles, shapes of shapes.

Hands pressed hard to the cold,
shaded stone and boots scuffing
friction, I drop
into the plane of the pictograph,

fulcrum off my arm in a stone
pocket, and pivot my face
into the black,
into the brown.

Upon touch shape yields to color,
to texture, and abstraction tilts into the wind.

What I thought made an elk
now makes a faded stone.

I descend, shaking my limbs,
to the damp soil that plays,
sometimes, as stream. At the level of stream
and scrub oak the walls again
bear the weight of shape chiseled stone.

A man, Rabb, years ago pointed me here
and strew about text interpretations
of what shape means, then chuckled
loudly enough to stutter.

So what brought me back
now? The echo of that laugh?
Or something as simple
as what do they mean?

What is the meaning of prickly pear?
What is the meaning of scrub oak?

Not even Rabb knows the answers
to silly questions. On the skin of my arm
scraped by scrub oak, scabbing
in the crisp air of desert winter,

an insect I can't name is
probing its way up.

THE MAYOR

Andy Devine

A tall Hualapai Indian man, big as two men, heaves a basketball
sized stone into the caboose of a permanently parked train.

A man in a bolo tie wraps another man on the shoulder
and flips his eyes toward the Hualapai picking up
the stone for another toss.

The crowd of picnic people begins to catch on and a concern twists
the faces to the caboose; the concern torques the image of the Indian
at the caboose into a barrage of tales to follow.

The bolo tie man and his pal charge in tight-hipped steps, clicking heel toe
into the scene.

Several more men, younger, in their twenties, follow in an uncertain trot
past folding chairs and table cloths.

The Hualapai heaves the stone from the ground like a granny shot,
thudding off the side of the caboose, rattling the windows above.

The stone hits the new sidewalk and rolls a few yards.

The men hit the Hualapai as he bends over for the stone.

With a stiff arm topped by a fist, bolo tie man chops down first from behind.

They topple. His pal swarms onto the mess of arms and legs.

The younger arrive and throw in tentative, picky punches at the pile,
winding up, choosing their shots like baseball pitches.

A wave of men in buttoned up, pressed shirts close in.

I can barely see now. The teacher who brought us kids here
for the train dedication blocks my way with her hips,

but I'm circling. The crowd is closing and I'm working
 past red and blue banners, working towards the buttoned up shirts flapping
 in the fray, working my way along the dead end rails of memory merged
 with history that springs from arms, shirts, jeans at pavement level —
 history, pockmarked and scarred from its chin to its flying black hair;
 scars run over its nose and left cheek mainly;
 its mouth open wide, but no noise comes out;
 its eyes are hidden under hard shut eyelids.

History beaten and broken while men pile on punching and shoving
 each other's backs
 until the bolo tie man shoots out the top of it.

His hair swept high, his right hand as red as the dirt beyond the park grass,
 and he hollers

“He aint no Andy Devine. He aint no Andy Devine.”

And what is my memory to do with such a history under siege?

My memory stumbles past legs and hips. It's got kid fingers
 wound into kid fists and mean teeth, sharp canines, and it's tough
 enough and up to the task, and it's going to rip that bolo tie
 clean off, put an end to it all. That's my memory, although so steeped
 in an old story, it's hard to know for certain which parts of it are mine,
 and my memory was never so tenacious then when the Hāulapai man, the real man
 that I want to get back to but never can, was beaten into the pavement.

But I saw the face, the round, scarred, pockmarked face, somehow attractive,
 magnetic, drawing me forward by its tired scars.

Twenty years later it still draws me back to Andy Devine Park, named
 for the only celebrity of Kingman, Arizona's Route 66 glory days,
 Andy Devine the swell sidekick of the black and white Westerns, probably
 a swell fellow, although I certainly didn't know him.

The caboose and dedication train faded in the sun and only used for the shelter
 of high school kids smoking cigarettes at lunch,
 a face so round and scarred runs amuck in my head when I return
 and walk through the wet smell of grass.

My body responds to my nose; I square up the caboose and give it my best technique
 front kick, an adolescent response perhaps, and the metal thuds,
 the windows rattle.

The teenage kids scuttling their smokes under the veil
 of hedges leave and a silence echoes from train to me and back.

The moon is full of grey clouds. The sidewalks are attended to by dirt,
 and I know of more to do, but what do you make
 out of a mob of images, a desire to bust it all up?

What do you make of those holes in history loaded with your silence?

The windows of the train are smeared like an abstraction,
 and I know you've got plenty you wish you could do, could have done,
 will do. Here's one: I wish Leonard Peltier
 was freed when these words hit the page running.

But this won't spring him. But why not bring him up?

Why not since I can't help to do so? Cant' help that at City Lights
 in San Francisco I saw

Peltier's face in black plastic pressed onto a red T-shirt with blocky words
 that screamed "FREE HIM." I can't help that the shirts were nailed high

to the ceiling above the stairs that dropped into the basement of books.
Can't help that the webs and dust strung over those shirts hanged heavily
in the sunlight through the window.

Now I see red T-shirts buried by dust when I think of my memory (I hesitate
to even say mine) when I try to recall the Hualapai man I saw, whose name I
didn't know and never have any hope of knowing.

And was there ever a face?

I can't imagine hero or heroine without victim and doing
nothing may be worse than a cheap shot or the bolo tie man.

Excuses are for children. Then, what I wanted to do to those men beating
the Hualapai
was what those men were doing to the Hualapai.

The Hualapai man had a name, the bolo tie man had one, (and that's
what I'm forgetting)
names spoken over suppers or whispered to them at night by lovers.

In the sun faded metal of America who can see more than instances?

The whole mob at one time must have been a group of ones, but my mind
is loaded with boots and suits and blood.

Andy Devine forgive me for being born after you died.

Andy Devine forgive me for confusing you with a song.

Andy Devine forgive me for being small and not knowing what to do with this body
within the body of history that I call my past.

Andy Devine forgive me for confusing the mind of the bolo tie man with mine
because the bolo tie man wasn't always the bolo tie man until I made him
that way.

Andy Devine I want the simple smile you wore in Westerns.

Andy Devine forgive me for that too.

The Mayor of Kingman

His skin is like loose leather
or an oversized raincoat.
Shirtless, he walks it around in the sun
along the drifting dirt roads.

Children scuttle behind worn trailers
or flee for the cover of boulders in the wash.
They run up monster stories from the sand
and float them one on top of the next.

In waves, the heat climbs
from the only blacktop road around.
The sun bakes the tires on the roofs
finger press soft.

The mountain to the west looks
like a great feathered chief asleep on his back,
but beneath the brown, cracked rocks of the eyes
there are only cracked rocks.

A stray boy fashions the man,
into a lost grandfather who walks
to him with a secret
he almost forgot to give,

or a wooden ship
pushing through endless blue, a ship he's seen
only in books, a ship now cursed into the skin
of this man who presses on in dirt.

Remains of a Copper Mine

A dull reflection of red, the side of the mountain
that Duvall Mining claimed wears a jagged space,
drawing up images of the spot on Jupiter,
like a place about to be named after a god,
then blankly abandoned.

The Industrial Park on a flat run
of desert to the east has stolen its name,
forgotten its god, borrowed a god, and become
fragments, fragments of associates that wear shifting
names like Tucker Housewares, Bayline, Ace, Home Co,
names that crawl across warehouses and truck trailers.

On Highway 66, men and women file over
to do the work of boats, plastics, barrels, glass.
The pennies in their pockets show only faint traces
of copper, and even the old timers stammering
out of their Fords are hard pressed
to tell you how they got here.

At Tucker Plastics Factory

Go see Ireo Castaneda. He's your boss for today, but he'll still call you
the little *jefe*.

So go see Ireo Castaneda because that's better than working in regrind and the itchy
heat of wrestling defective trash cans, hangars, baskets, and crates into the
chomping end of a machine.

Go see Ireo because that's better than top-loading barrels or walking
the rotting boxes in warehouse 3.

Go see Ireo Castaneda. He's the one with the maroon shirt that reads "Parump."

Go see Ireo. He's the one with the forearms that are nearly as wide as they are long.
He'll tip you off. Warn you not to drink ice cold water. Show you how to
whack nails (not your house nails, but the heavy-ass duty kind) into truck
trailer floors, secure molds, crank banding wire. And he knows money to
boot. He'll slip you in on the number 52; 52 being the number of hours after
which you lose money for OT work - *taxes and all*.

So see Ireo. You're clocked in. The sweats already rolling off your tired skin.

Go see Ireo. He'll shove a shoulder between you and the blistering metal
of a slipping mold.

Go see Ireo Castaneda. At lunch he'll show you wallet pictures of his six daughters,
and say, smiling, cheeks thick as muscled arms, *the oldest one is at college
in Tucson*.

Go see Ireo Castaneda. He's the one who doesn't speak in a dozen 721s, off-load
38s, high and tight 46s, or 702s. Instead, he'll sing a tune that's not in any
English you know, but not in any Spanish you know either.

Go see Ireno Castaneda. He'll sing you a tune like this:

lo dee da dee da dee da momo momo,

la dee da dee da dee da mó mó mó mó mó mó.

Ground

I start the morning hunched on a concrete chair,
feet planted in wet grass. I wait for my name

to be called, the tag passed out:
grounds worker for the state of Arizona.

I wait for the day
to get on, so it can get over.

Four ravens scuttle about
on the nearest roof.
Four ravens begin to pull me from a slouch.

The names gather into groups,
and I'm not certain what grounds
worker means, but I pick up
people's garbage, plant tight rows
of trees, shovel, clean out
buildings, haul furniture.

The title makes me
think of groundwater, which is really more intriguing than grounds
worker, since even at six a.m. I can tell it's going to be hot,
tell that there's not enough shade.

I imagine happy men slouched
against adobe, covered with giant sombreros, so I push
my yellow hat down on my matted hair a little tighter
and think of groundwater, although I can't.

I can't imagine ground water the way I read it in newspapers,
can't picture millions of years compiled
then drained in a few decades. Can't see it pumped to exotic
crops in the desert. Can't see golf courses
in Phoenix soaking in it.
Something so big should be easy,
but I can't imagine anything but marble fountains
when I see the print in the columns on the page.

I can't understand why a name
can summon me forth from concrete,
summon forth the day, as I move from grass to the back of a truck.
Can't imagine anything, but the smell
of diesel, no hopes of grasping what goes on
underground, and underground
is being turned
into big business by someone, somewhere, I think ... possibly.

But I don't know.
I'm in the business of progress, and progress needs patches,
and progress hasn't been around long and has to hold
what it has,

and so here I am with shovel,
heading towards an elevator shaft, a white mask
rubber-banded to my face.

Working for a little more than minimum,
I ride on painted black metal, hauled
with others who look tired and dumb,
dumb as me, maybe more tired, maybe not ... no one able to stare
through the horizon. No one able to look through rock,
a task easy enough ... I think.

Easy enough, if someone would step up and focus
on the rock instead of giving up on the sky
as we bump around in the back of a flatbed.

I file out
and crowd into the elevator
with ground workers. The rest of the truck
hauls the others to their jobs.

The worst detail I get, and it doesn't matter because now I know
I can't grasp groundwater, can't count to ten
thousand without goofing
it up, much less find an in on a million, a billion.

Four walls
of cracked concrete, stand covered in fur like particles.

Peering at the dull
light cracking off their edges,

I figure: the inertia of one small non-event
consisting of no mass somehow exerts itself into other non-events, the momentum
immeasurable, and this isn't what physics should be like, yet I'm certain
that it is; or it was in a magazine
with colored charts and diagrams.

I shovel.

Try to toss the physics of magazines and get by on the thought
that today's shit work means
an easy tomorrow, although it's never been that way
as the same guys roll on
to short jobs with long breaks.

This crew looks familiar, somehow to me,
but without the name tags
I'd be hard pressed to know who they are
because groundwater can't be grasped,
not by me, and my job is to patch
as progress tries to hold
its waning ground, as pink particles of insulation tumble
down a shaft
from some guy with a shovel above ...maybe.

Where he's getting it; who knows?

Pink flops in sheets and rests
in the elevator like the stuffing for a beat teddy bear,
and this somehow makes me feel better
about what I'm doing. I lean
on my shovel, wait for my cue and pass the pink into a blue can.

But now I'm wondering,
wondering if anyone is
tossing the old insulation down, as I lean
a little more and squint the sweat out of my eyes.

I'm wondering if anyone placed that insulation,
as a constant buzz of a small engine rides through the walls;
I conclude insulation
has always been there or else they wouldn't take it out.

I fill my blue can, roll it out into the sun, wrestle
it upside the others, hole up my logic for one more run
at the rest of the day, and take a look at the dozen
blue cans getting hot in the now afternoon sun.

Toiling In the Morning

On the green carpet of the trailer's porch
a girl does pushups on knuckles.
Beyond the yard the arroyo secures her strength
under the rocks that a raven is walking upon.
There are the stories of Tripitaka and monkeying
that makes the Buddha spit up nimble rays.
There's the one about the sun rising across the face
of the black dog of day, both woken in a startle,
the light broken up by fur, the quick parting of grey.
There are the footprints of the moon's dances at dawn.
Here, there's a girl on green.
She is shoving through sweat and red, thin calluses.
She is working up rain.

Two Win on the Night Janitor

In the dull light of moon through glass
the kid half steps on his toes
stirring dust from the office carpet,
leading with a jab, then another, then the right
knocking the dickens out of the air,
then back to the broom, then back
to the air, a tangle of cleaning
and some solid shadow boxing that whacks
the night away until the suits arrive early
with the sun, and his head down he slides
the last of his cart and supplies into a closet,
a faint drip of sweat on brow threatening
to rat him out, if someone were to look,
but no one is to look or ever look
as he rides down to the street to deal
with the pavement of the day,
his title an office suite high, plopped
in a plastic bucket that hangs
on the curved crescent of the moon.

High Imperialism

The forearm long dolls being fobbed off as Kachinas wear RW on the heel of the right foot. RW, Roy Wertowski, Junior High Social Studies teacher, retired, Bobcats football coach, retired, a big round man who tools with scraps of wood and canvas and sells the results in county fairs. But he's not in on this scam. Or is he? You tell me. Here's how it goes. A small Navajo man, (who won't even whisper his own name anymore), his hands broken into hooks over the years, picks the dolls up at the fairs and sells them by his series of hand-painted highway signs that read "Don't Miss the Chief," then "Here's the Chief," then "Stop You've Missed Us," then "Friendly Indians Behind You. Turn Back." From the side of the road and surrounded by these signs, he takes in bills and coins and peels back the change one paper at a time, one coin at a time, saying nothing, and folks pull over to use his outhouse, stretch their legs, let their dogs run, or eye the tables of trinkets and rugs. Looking for sparks, colors, textures to imitate in his garage, Wertowski one day stops in and spots the RW dolls. He picks one up, rolls it over his big fingers and palm. He likes it. Something about the light out there, perhaps, the red dust over the plywood table, or the rez dogs and coyotes just over the brush eyeing the collared poodles, or maybe he just doesn't want any trouble, so he likes the dolls there, and at the next county fair he simply doubles his prices, they both nod on it, and the man with the hooked hands doubles his prices. So is Roy Wertowski in on it? What about the man with the hooked hands? Well, I don't know. I can tell you this. I stopped by his place on the side of the road for a stretch, got out, walked, saw the shitting poodles, the folks in line for the outhouse, a handful of people combing the blankets and necklaces, saw the dolls, swore the last *official* sign I saw read "Navajo Nation," and I closed in on what looked like shards of a Barbie wardrobe over balsa, pine, and ironwood stuck

together under a veil of tan, white, and black paints. Flipping the dolls, tugging the capes, lifting the cloth, I spotted my fingers being watched by the man while his hooks finished slowly making change for the customer in front of him. I extended the doll, began to speak, but on my arm he placed his hand, surprisingly gentle for such a mangled thing, and I could hear a laugh, maybe just a breath, barely audible in the dry air, and he gave me the doll for nothing. Now, I don't know if I'm in on it, but at home I keep the doll on a prominent shelf and from such a height hear stories.

BEDINGFIELD

Bedingfield

The bent frame of an ancient man
leans into the boxcar wall

a few feet from the poker game
on the floor and an eye flip

over a boy's shoulder. Old hobos
and new Depression made bums circle

the cards and money in a world
of practically no money.

Eyes drooped in a dull grey,
the ancient man darts his eyes

over the thin, young shoulder.
He lets a sigh pass his nose,

slightly. The boy folds.
A new hand — dart of eyes.

The man stares out the door, keeps silent for stay;
the sound of nothing gives

the boy confidence to take
another card. The man continues his stare

as if recalling a vibrant youth, the cliché
the men at the table expect. Some know

the story of the moonshine that killed
a whole bar, except for this husk,

that they pass off as used,
bent, leaning, the man

whose bones simply fused to pain
overnight. The ancient man could care

less about his bones, the past.
He counts cards. Plays forlorn.

A few days later the man and the boy
meet and split the money, run

the routine in chance encounters
on the same worked route

of railroad towns that cling like weeds
to the line through the Southwest.

The boy is JW, which doesn't stand

for anything, except JW.

Except for four years
when JW, drafted by the U.S. Army for WWII,

is dubbed John Walker — the Army not taking any crap
about initials for names.

The Battle of the Bulge... John Walker survives and lasts
four years until honorably discharged.

JW at ninety years old (I'm now the boy
at Bedingfield family reunions),

JW is my great uncle Dub, my grandma Lola's brother,
a reclaiming of name by sounds, Dub. His Texas

accent strong in his gentle voice he speaks
to me on a metal picnic table

under a rusted awning
in the Haulapai Mountains, a park

coincidentally made by the CCC
and I posture my body like his,

my small shoulders rolled forward,
elbows rested on knees, fingers

interlocked and bobbing a bit.

I mull his words in my head

as voices of family run circles

in the mountain air. I imagine

nothing works on coincidence then,

and I glimpse his thin frame,

let my left shoulder sink a little

farther, hold the posture and listen —

Miles of Dirt to Cover

(for Ron French)

He tailed us for hours
through the summer heat
of long, straight Texas roads.
And you, who I'd known
only a year, drove
while my mother sat quiet in the front seat
and my brother and I made small
shifts to look behind.
You sped up our car,
slowed us down, even pulled over once,
but the man pulled off behind us
and waited. You pulled back on the road
and sped up. What else was there to do?
The man swerved out after us
and followed so close
that from our back seat I could sneak
glances of his face drenched in sweat,
the straight edges of his cheeks,
the dirty brown layers of coat,
on flannel, on T-shirt,
his large hands gripping the wheel.

You whipped us over again, quicker this time.
The man forced to pull over in front

waited about forty yards ahead.
I don't remember seeing how you got there,
but you were half way to his car
and walked in long strides with your .357
held straight down on your right side.
You closed. I propped my head over
the front seat and squinted out the scene.
The man sat still. You stopped just behind
his door. I could not hear what was said,
but it was just a few seconds, then you let him go.

A few hours down the road we stopped
at a two story motel, and I laid awake
in bed beside my brother;
our bodies still small enough
to fit in a single. Under thin sheets I wished
you had shot the man.
I imagined the car headlights peering
through the dark, you tracking him
all night, catching up to him
at day break in a truck stop diner.
I could see your arm raised
and your revolver pointing
as straight as the horizon
shining into his numb face.
I wanted to know that man's head
had been leveled, clean from his shoulders,
blown apart and the pieces a mess

of nothing. I didn't want it to be
like a movie where the good guy
lets the bad guy go
with a warning, until the bad guy blows it
again, and the white hat has to be put
back on and miles of dirt covered
before the last showdown.

I wanted to fast forward to the scene
where the boy, who fetches water and ropes
and other small but useful things,
thanks the hero,
comes up with the right line or two to say,
the well-timed tear,
the sun light pin-pointing the grass,
the magic that glues it all together,
but this was no film where we stew
and spin above miranda days.

I had no words, right ones or wrong,
but you stayed anyway
and knew what to level
and what not to level
and I say thank you, late.

Brothers' Pantoum

Your life now in California and mine deserts away,
neither of us near the dirt and the weeds.

We played in stickers and dry air
that we ran over in worn-through shoes.

Neither of us near the dirt and the weeds
that we fought in, tears in our shirts and prides
that we ran over in worn through shoes.

Those wounds, worlds away from the desert

that we fought in, tears in our shirts and prides.

I should have thought those thoughts,
those wounds, worlds away from the desert,
this confusion and these fragments.

I should have thought those thoughts,
but I don't always hear as I should,
this confusion and these fragments,
and I love you in slow, out of step ways.

But I don't always hear as I should,
I don't always speak the way I wish to,
and I love you in slow, out of step ways
that I never spoke of in the vacant lots of our childhood.

I don't always speak the way I wish to.
We played in stickers and dry air
that I never spoke of in the vacant lots of our childhood.
Your life now in California and mine deserts away.

Someone Must Have Quit

Highway 89:

Bible

in the road,

thin pages

waving

up

a storm

of thunderhat

clouds.

Sunset Satori

(for Allen Ginsberg)

I sat on the cold, cracked, cement wall
with a bowl of clam chowder in my hand.
Mark Garland, compadre, brother, with feet too beat
to go on sat beside me and stared west.
The cold air blew off the bay and over my bare
face and I saw the sun's fading light

drop below the horizon as if not light
enough to stay afloat; the rays under a wall
of water. We had traveled far to bear
witness to this scene, hoping to get a handle
on our young selves. Both of us running west
knowing if we stopped, we'd march to the beat

that was off step, off key. So here amongst the Beats
we thought we'd take a breath, find a rhythm. A bit lightly
clothed for December, my gray jacket southwest
desert thin, Mark's jeans with holes, but we'd wall
up here, no plans, no maps. We'd just hand
ourselves over to that old notion of chance like the bear

wrestling mountain men. The real man versus bear
tales, not always true, but all the odds to beat,
irresistible images, only a buck knife in hand.

Snyder must have known the tales and over the light
of campfire told Kerouac the stories with a wall
of Satori shielding from the north, south, east, west

And when did we forget that west
wasn't the only direction, leaving our backs bare
and exposed to clinging winds? Stuck in walls
that I thought we could leap over and beat
it out of Dodge before the morning light,
no time for high noon, caught by my own hand.

Thinking of family, alcohol, career, fear, I raised my hand
and said this to the setting sun. The west
will end at the ocean and the brightest of lights
will not bend or break, but vanish with its bare
particles under waves. These odds you can't beat,
so sink. Don't think of wins or losses. Know the wall.

I dropped my hand. Mark looked over in the dim light,
our features barely visible. These were the winds of the West
and all cities have resting walls built to beat being beaten.

Even at Midnight It's 100 Degrees

She believes in Gila Monster Angels that clamp
their jaws so tightly to love
you'd have to cut their heads off
to make them leave.

She calls Russian Thistle Russian Thistle.
The desert at midnight. Its wings mottled
orange and black:
sluggish skin, a slow
glisten, a pause of light
on each bump of flesh.

The swing shift ends, meaning
that between the iron door
of the warehouse and the asphalt
parking lot she stops in the dirt.

The night clear.
The moon full,
 a sun
 warming the wind.

It blows light over
her outstretched hands to her sides.

The moon watches her hands
roll their thumbs
across their index fingers,
and fills her chest with air in a long, drawn inhalation.

She exhales as if to weep,
but merely continuing to drip sweat
walks to her car,
dented and leaking oil.

Nestled in dirt and tumbleweeds
Gila Monster Angels fill the desert
with the washed reflection of reflected light,
and she is the woman I dream that I am

as I stare daily into machines,
machines black-red and swollen, itching
from the smell of clumped grease
and the longing for fire that yields ash.

On Sixth Street

The ravens perch on the limbs of the elms in the park outside my window. I sip warm coffee, slowly, and a man in chain mail armor, who wears a long, dirt-red cape that dangles from his back and crumples into the grass, sits straight on a weathered park bench. His right arm props up a grey shield. A broad sword dangles from his hand; its metal weight rests against his left leg. He looks at the traffic moving in puffs up Sixth Street on this February afternoon. I sip my coffee, turn my attention to the grey sky hovered over the elms, hovered over the ravens. All summer and fall in the park, men dressed like knights arrived on Sundays. I watched through the dirty glass of my window. Today, this one looks to be the only show. I finish the rest of my coffee, fiddle with the newspaper in front of me, thumb through "Sports," thumb through "World Events" quickly. The ravens still perch, the sky still lingers over the elms, the knight still sits straight. I consider putting on my heavy jacket and joining him. I regard him like a man who owes debts. With no knight gear to speak of, I can offer him only an ordinary wrestling match in the brown grass, something to keep the ravens happy. I jostle through the paper, past the "classifieds" and set it on the table. I consider the ravens and the traffic and the sky. I stand and turn to the kitchen with my mug in hand and wait for the leaves to sprout from the limbs of the elms.

Pro-Wrestler Andre the Giant Haiku

Andre steps over
the ring ropes into the square —
the ground gives a sigh.

Andre the Giant
body slams Bruiser — a towel
drops from the rafters.

Wrestling boots unlaced —
Andre runs a blow dryer
through his hair — real clean.

Andre's skivvies flap
on the line — sunny day. A
raven doesn't care.

With pen in fingers
Andre writes the universe —
fingers size of hands.

Andre helps a little
old lady across heavy
traffic — the road yields.

Andre bends far down
to palm water from the stream.
The stream stretches up!

Andre wraps his hands
 around his foot — massages.
 The cheering fans gone.

Bruiser shoves the clerk
 at the hotel. Vulgar... Watch
 out! Here comes Andre.

Andre snaps fortune
 cookies and reads. The chef takes
 the rest the day off.

The ground is lonely.
 It needs convincing to hold
 down rocks. Where's Andre?

Andre skips. BLAM! BLAM!
 of heels until the sun shines.
 The children go play —

Hard pin! Andre breaks
 two ribs, they're Bruiser's — even
 giants need money.

A mugger threatens
 Andre at knife point. Andre hands
 him an autograph.

Andre rides the bus
 two seats at a time — snoozing
 to the next match up.

Abra-kadabra!

But Andre's still big — lonely
curse... fallen brow.

Andre wades into
the sea. The waves carry him
like driftwood — free feet!

A Slow Train to Midmorning

The sign outside the train window reads “Yago Café” in bold, block, red letters pressed into a yellow painted, plywood placard as big as a car. From your seat, your eyes whittle away the traffic, and the train continues to stay. The French bread in hand remains stale.

The sign outside the train window reads “Yago Café.” The dust collects slowly on your jeans, on the shoulders of your shirt, on the top of your head. The Yago Café lingers on a wall on Main Street in the center of America, which is the center of the world, which is the center

of the universe. Of course, you know that and you don’t even need to ride to the Yago Café to know. You don’t even need to read or write or paint or scrawl. You don’t even need your crayons to know the Yago Café sign is the center. It’s obvious with simple math and straight reasoning.

It’s as obvious as the fact that the bell hop won’t be by or the conductor’s not coming to check your forged ticket. You know it the way you know the bread isn’t fresh. The Yago Café - you recognize the red, you recognize the yellow, you recognize the monstrous plywood. You know the train isn’t going

to start rolling again because there’s no place to go other than the center.

And so your reason concludes there won’t be lunch, logical, not even a left-over daily soup; you’ve missed breakfast and nobody in America eats brunch anymore, and that’s hard to take seriously, at least from your seat, so don’t.

The sign outside the train window reads “Yago Café” in bold, block, red letters pressed into a yellow painted, plywood placard as big as a car.

The sign inside

the window reads “Yago Café,” and the window has “Yago Café” scribbled all over it in the small splattered guts of flies and bugs and dirt streaked by no rains.

Out of the Smokehouse Bar

On a 70s Harley he fires
onto the road in a wide sweep, weaves,

slides back into the dirt
in front of me. I work

my car's wheel and brakes to miss the whirl
in the dust and hurtle to a halt

in a tumbleweed wall
splintered and pitched wild

by the hood. I'm out the door; instinct
pushing into the smell of oil, dust

blurred pungent to my nose
and hanging visible

in the moonlight. The biker and bike
on their sides, almost at rest, stuck

to the earth by surprise, stupor.

A voice, muffled, mutters

“my fucking leg” and “help”
slurred by either the biker or me.

When I grip the bent bike handles
to lift the machine from his leg I slip

in the blood from his head
and baffled by the bike’s weight.

My chest, face, arms bloody and black
as his, but whose voice is wrecked mute, dark

and sorry for itself,
its self that dully left

its body in fumes? I spot my hands
and lift them to my forehead,

then lightly move the fingers
down, feel the nose smashed three

fingers to the right, lower the lips
swollen and split foreign to the skin

of the fingers probing
for certainty, probing

for a voice in the mouth that confirms

the possibility of breath, my breath,

my claim of life on life.

A touch to the tongue lifts

the fingers back to self on the thick

taste of iron, and his face flickers

in degrees of red, black:

a death now his to retake.

I kneel in the repose of pain and claim

both voices, his and mine. I remain.

CAMPHORWEED

Flower

*...and you there standing before me in the sunset, all your glory in your form!
A perfect beauty of a sunflower!*

--Allen Ginsberg --

Camphorweed, brown, dry
on a dead road is still in
the sunflower family.

August winds blowing
its stalk arid and stiff, frail
green evaporating —

yellow flower, small,
withering, darker, darker,
closer to topple —

it still insists sunflower:
the sunflower that first drives
thin roots, an inverted crown,

to the source of the soul
that lives in dead roads.

Bracken Brush

A flat run of sand, former rock,
 trickles hot through my fingers. Miles,
 long-time wanderer and tooler around,
 tells me stories of the past two years:
 two years teaching here on the Rez.
 The sand lightly holds the bracken brush,

and cliffs of ever falling dust brush
 the horizon's peripheral view. The rock
 holds its own for now, and the Navajo Rez
 seems only a name as the sands for miles
 hold no other humans, no counted years,
 nothing shagged with truth, nothing around

a shadow's shadow, nor any words that spin rounded.
 Voices stew and twine with brush,
 sands, and cliffs. Senses, the heat of years,
 top the edges of speech while today tilts and rocks
 the ebbs and flows of reason. Sitting, Miles
 rants with arms, and wind, reservations

withheld, chimes in. The debate: teaching on the Rez,
 a job... no Romance left... rounded
 off views of a writer making a year's

wage... a way to live, groups brushed
together and chiseled into categories, rocks
pounded into names and dates, places, years

summed into smooth abstractions, years
of education ignored by a name like Reservation,
a name and I don't catch on. Bedrock
rolls on drifting magma and around
floats land, mountains run, yet brushes
with these are rare, and under miles

of land the senses need respite. Miles
of evidence wilts in an opaque hue:
the past, the future billowing clear, brushed
on by, by now. Miles and me on Rez
in places owned by government's straight-lined
borders, so with a heave in the sand I flop, pitch a rock

at the rocks and watch the years of abstraction
jostle around into nothing and something. Miles
brushes against the sky, the Rez a thought.

Tarantula Dreams

I scuff my boots through dry, red mud and ask
the man in low orbit over the Mogollon Rim
“what’s scrub oak?” and the man in low orbit
replies, “it’ll take seven to ten days to get your message.
You see I’m in low orbit. Sometimes it’s longer,
then I must be in high orbit.” From the rim
I reply “ah, hah, ah” when Dostoevsky
would have said “what... what... what” or Kerouac
“who ... skoo di dee skoo di doo di dee doo ... who.”
So from low orbit the man says to wait, so I do
from down here on a rutted road of brown that meanders
over the rim and into the space of the high desert
below. But what’s scrub oak? I ask the man
in low orbit again, but not loud enough to stretch
it out to him, and I crack dry twigs and flame
them up for a little extra heat in the early Spring.
The ponderosas root it out in the dry ground.
The cliffs jostle their way into space.
The man in low orbit will speak, but now
I’m sitting flat in front of the fire and wrestling with night
bugs and sounds of birds too hurried to grapple. I wait
and from low orbit hear “you’re scrub oak,”
and from the ground up bones in dead dirt I know.

Constellation, Arizona Song

A mine, long dry, draws in sport utility tourists:
a mess of flashy metal and off-road tires.

You don't want them. Neither do I.

Push past their camps.

Don't even bother to stumble.

Disheveled roads make sense when jammed
with scrub grasses, prickly pear cacti, camphorweed.

There's a man under the cover of ocotillo and jojoba
along the high saddles near the Constellation mine.

I don't remember which road.

He circles rocks and burns dead mesquite.

Simple enough.

He dares trouble like a bad idea and wrenches roads,
but he'll be happy to see you
 on foot.

He'd give you his last canteen, if you needed it.

He's not afraid of the sun.

He'll talk away the afternoon too, so move past him politely, but quickly.

Sleep in the road like you were another rut left by the rain, a washboard staking a claim for the dirt with the dirt.

Cactus Mike Among the Eagles

Turning and turning, the sun widens
the day. A man, brown tarp propped
above his furry head, hunkers into
a bush. A scope on tripod peeks
from dry scrub. Dust blows across
the orange rock and into the canyon.

The river winds up fish and mated eagles
for the feeding of the eaglet. The man hunkers
down in dirt and looks at circles
in the sky, looks at eaglet feeding, perched
in a twenty years old, orange cliff nest
built solid on the firm faith of debris.

Seen like a boulder, he sees the eagles
like a cliff or a mountain, something solid enough
to fly ... fly as gracefully as sand and weeds
strewn onto running rocks.

Daydreams for Jaba

I hunch on my haunches at sunset
and listen to the hard ring of the sun
bouncing off the lake and know
it's sunset. Mosquitoes scuttle
raindrops onto the surface
water. Below, rocks
rock, mud muds, fishes
fish, Buddhas Buddha,
I know all I have
to do [as I hear voice of
beer drinker and fisher
woman and plops of casts].
See that one jump out
of the water - and I know
a man who talks with water
and it's been a while
since me and water
struck it out, so I zip
it down gallons and gallons
coming into one odd sound
second of sun ringing
off the shadows cast by
mosquito's wake.

No hands raised here.

No lands raised here.

A lonely wash of power
drags on.

Tonight the naked eye
can see Jupiter.
Tonight Jupiter's naked red eye
can see.

Can see you and me slow
and fumbling,
ricka ta zipp zee zipping
through dry grass.

Yes, a minor god is all right tonight.
He's just slow too and dragging
and muttering to himself again.

Like a kid pitching nickels
at a carnival jar,
he's missing and muttering,
and this is all the guidance
you really need.

You, me, you stumbling, huffing,

passing the timberline, scanning
for shadows of shadows. Boots
working over night black
rocks. Eyes asking where to hurl
faith: in dry grass
or in the smell of ozone?

A Refrain on the Colorado Plateau

(for Rick Bass)

Sometime in the July morning, I hear a call from the Yaak,
and although the Yaak is a valley, the voice is a man's.
The call emerges into my world of ponderosa and plateau
through the fresh, wet-smell of morning dew.
Who knew how well the nose can listen?
As my bare feet on the concrete porch take in
the morning's sun, the body knew, and the call becomes
more definite, more distinct, more certain.

The followers of science conclude a human can hear, with ears,
the cry of a wolf at four or so miles. They do not know how far
a wolf can hear a wolf, but they've trailed a lone wolf,
perhaps a lonely wolf, roaming a range of eight hundred miles
and finding a wolf where none was plotted to be.
How far can a human hear a human? What if we're not talking ears
and not measuring voice like it were some horn honking?

The breath moves in slowly and out slowly and slow morning traffic
of cars and high-pitched chirps of birds and occasional scampers
of squirrels don't diffuse the human voice to the body.
The same way the light of the morning sun overtaking the light
of the moon, low in the dark, blue-air doesn't vanquish the moon. They are both
here. The dew seeking the concrete. The ponderosa rooting below the road.

I hear a call from the Yaak, and although the Yaak
is a valley, the voice is a man's, and now the taste of my teeth
cannot be discarded; the tongue of the snake isn't the only tongue
that can smell its way. The ponderosa a few yards past
the growing asphalt-traffic cannot be left behind on the way
to a fishing hole elsewhere or a campsite on some distant washboard road.

The wet-brown of the soil a step away is where feet sink
into a gritty dampness, while the breath moves in slowly and out
slowly, and scientists still talk of *Homo sapiens*
having only five senses, but I hear a call from the Yaak
and I can conclude that humans are composed of one
sense. How else to explain sky, color, light?
How else to deal with gravity, wind, the air
that moves in and out of the body and when that air
moves in slowly and out slowly forms the word?

The moon in the morning is here and the sun
doesn't make the moon doubt itself. Its faith
is firm, as constant as the body receiving
the body, and so the call from the Yaak
is taken in by the body in paces, paces showing tracks
of the invisible by the expansion of the lungs,
and the return call conjured, exhaled, by the pines,
by the porch, by the dirt, by the road, by the sky,
by the wind, by this body thousands of years old
answering with breaths of light and of dark,
building slowly into the word, building slowly into the world,

more definite, more distinct, more certain with each
assertion, more certain with each retraction.

Camphorweed

A harris hawk awaits me on a limb
of juniper at eye level. I walk around
the patches of camphorweed as if their stems
were cairns marking places lives got lucky:
the last canteen was enough, the rattlesnake's
venom was dull and didn't kill, that second
shot to die on terms you claim your own,
perhaps resolved.

Perhaps resolve alone
is fuel enough to raise these seeds to stems
on mining roads abandoned by gold and scattered
with trespass warnings blown face down.
How else to explain why camphorweed
is first in staking out the broken roads?

How else? My boots stumble, and then I'm struck
with stillness. Looking down these last few steps
has moved my body within arm's stretch of the hawk
I'd forgotten on the juniper, my first attraction.
It stares square at my shoulder, head angled
down like a question mark. I look into
the feathers of his barrel chest in awe of chances
running me so close, the luck of playing

a hawk's game of chicken intent enough
on feet to avoid blinking.

What chances brought
this hawk to hold this limb I have no idea.
Where there's one harris hawk there's three,
but who's outflanking who out here? Content
to wait for camphorweed to grow around my bones
I whisper faith over luck more than sense.

The hawk's stare and stillness give a flicker
ray approval, but my feet vanish and crack
into caliche, and what I called my body is desert
air, my eyes a mirage left on rocks:
a water's offering to the sky —

NOTES

“At Tucker Plastics Factory”: In Spanish *jefe* means boss.

“High Imperialism:” I thank Professor Bob Baker for the title of this poem. It is inspired by his lecture on the British Period of High Imperialism. Immediately, the onslaught of Industrial Tourism in the Southwest came to my mind. Read Edward Abbey’s Desert Solitaire for more on Industrial Tourism.

“Bedingfield:” CCC stands for the Civilian Conservation Corps, established in 1933 as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal program. FDR created the CCC partly for conservation of the country’s natural resources and mainly to provide work for unemployed men during the Depression.

“Flower”: The epigram is from Allen Ginsberg’s poem, “Sunflower Sutra,” from Howl and Other Poems.