

“I Will Talk To This Mesa”

By
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I

Today I walked where stone
is a December dawn, scoured
by a sage-brush wind. A red
Paiute face, chipped with the chisel-
strokes of an ancient adze, shining
with the sweat-stains of Time, chest-
-smeared with ochre war-paint.

As drip by drip, Time
percolates through a thousand summers
of stone with every rim-rock
raindrop that ends
where waters foam.

II

I would talk with this minaret, have a word
with this mesa, bar-coded with Time

an edged face ending in red ruin, bound
for the talus-heap that Time forgot.
What have you seen, that I have not?

And so, I lean an ear and hear
a whisper in the leaning grass . . . in the wind
-sifting needles of a bristlecone, in the bough
-soughs of the cottonwood, in the loose
stone shifting to an old season
or a lifting hoof.

What do you know that I would know
were I to stand as long as you, shoulders
huddled in a thousand snowdrifts,
rim-rock ghosting in winter mist, were
I as grey as sun-polished wood, wearing
a wrap-around scar from Time? What
strange tidings made of rain and rock
might you tell, had I but ears
to hear your ancient rhyme?

III

And so I walk into your silence,
ear cocked to rim-rock . . . and listen . . . and listen
for all are listening, listening

the grass and cloud, the wall
and waterfall, hoping for a word
to give shape to what you are,
as the measure of a prairie is taken
by a red-wing bird singing
from afar.

IV

And so I stop and thank a pear cactus,
for the loud impudence of its purple bloom
recants the red austerity of desert stone
as a candle recants the darkness in a room,
feeds my tortoise hunger, which mouths succulence
amidst a thousand thorns, and the glooey ooze
of a yucca that is aloe to a desert wound.

V

A red wall dusted with a rim-rock of snow
where it meets the sky, as if stone had turned to fleece
where condor feathers lie. My life, a red clay
in the pottery hands of a watery Fate
swirled and whirled into a vase . . .
that holds the form of a hidden hand,

a basket woven of autumn and spring
brimful with the acorns of yesteryear,

clay in the shape-shifting hands
of an arroyo flashflood, stone
flowing like water in the slot-canyons
of Time, like ebbing sands
through red-cupped hands, blown
into nothingness from the palm
of a high plateau in a mesa-swallowing sea
of forever-nevermore sands.

Water-loud where resisted,
deepest in stillness,
a restive captive. Leaving rune-like initials
that sign its solitude in stone
to eagle-feather skies. Loud
with the white rush of a bygone day
when Time stood still as a noon shadow,
the parent of a child at play
Whose laughter softened the night
with the light of a moon-silvered stream.

VI

Ah, the grasses . . . yes, the grasses,
the deadfall-hiding thistles, tickling
the bellies of wild roan, manes streaming,
herd-like, sheaths silvered where bending

wherever the herd turns, ridden by the bare-legged,
grass-mounting wind, riding herd
across Arapaho grasses, shouldering its way
through prairie meadows, signal-mirrors flashing
wherever it turns. Oat sheathes shaking
as it passes, gauntlet-like
in its pollen-sewing breath, blowing
life into our souls with All
That is Not Us. The waters

of my soul rise when the hand
of desert silence dips into its basin
of stone. It sings, as a coyote cries
to the stars after sucking marrow
from a cracked bone.