

Dry Spells

More than one old white man watching the rain
bypass his place time and time again has thought
the Chiricahuas must have cursed his spread if not
the whole valley before they left, or else some woman
every bit as justified as the Apaches
getting back at him or one of his predecessors
for all the lying and cheating and plain brute force
Anglo and Mexicano alike used to get
what they liked to think of as their property
until she got fed up and left and the land went dry,
the storm cells splitting just upwind and skirting by,
year after year the trees failing to bear, the grass
failing to grow, the animals and enterprises
to thrive the way they might if there had been rain.

Having said so much to himself or to the wind
he might have been thankful for the drops that did come
now and then or, calloused by the long dry spells,
scornful, knowing however much may come at this
late date will never be enough to quench his thirst
—and likely never would have been, now that he thinks
of it: that boundless ambition, that clarity he had
about what was his to claim and require by right of being
free, white, American, male
Not all that much alone in the face of no rain.

Being out of a job was like that: a bitter
rebuke to pride, hope, reason and faith. Rugged
individualism turned mean: alien nation,
survivalist bullshit or the barrel of a shotgun
against the roof of the mouth. Otherwise it's take
the handout, go on the dole, forget all that crap about being
self-sufficient, able to stand on your own two feet,
what you used to think it took to be a man.
Rain. A job. Someone to share the hardpan with.