

*Right. There is one way that needs  
No money, no physician and no witch.  
Pack your bag, go back to the land  
and there begin to dig and ditch.  
Keep the narrow round in mind,  
live on forage of the simplest kind,  
a beast among the beasts, and don't forget  
to plant your food in your own shit.*

*--Mephistopheles, Faust, Part I*



*It used to be a lake  
surrounded by hickories  
mammoths and naked people.  
On a clear day walking  
with blue mountains rimming  
a wide horizon, it is still  
like being underwater,  
catclaw and ocotillo  
surreal seaweeds, ravens  
and V-winged marsh hawks  
swimming in limpid air.*



In time the rains slowed down  
the elephants died out  
the lake dried to its center  
leaving an alkali sink  
populated by saltbush,  
sage and sundry reptiles.  
Up on the mesas where springs  
ran all year, and along  
the disappearing river,  
people who from the Ice Age  
to the age of Christ  
worked only fiber and stone,  
wood and bone, who lived  
in caves and grass shacks,  
now began to fashion clay  
into beads and pots and houses.  
The earliest bowls were molded  
in baskets, the weave baked in

when the fiber burned away.  
For centuries they were fired  
with those designs in mind,  
ceramic techniques like glaze  
appearing only millennia  
after the Basketmakers  
and hickory trees were gone.

Likewise their houses:  
after the basket-like  
brush huts came shallow pits  
enclosed by upright poles  
lashed, thatched and daubed  
like watertight baskets.  
Then they went deeper,  
stacking the mud into walls,  
binding it with grass  
and seepweed, hauling timber  
down from the mountains for roofs.

When the long rains  
became a memory  
old men told stories about,  
they followed the dwindling rivers  
a later tongue called holy:  
down the San Pedro, San  
Simon, Santa Cruz  
north toward the Gila  
building communal farms  
irrigating their crops  
with miles of hand-dug canals  
and clay tile pipe fired  
on centuryplant stems  
laid end to end from springs  
still alive in the foothills and mountains—  
tepany, maize and chile  
tobacco, squash and melons  
replacing the wild fields  
of wetter years with seed  
deliberately sown, watered,  
weeded, picked and dried.  
People of earth, of clay:  
pack it on skin it cleans  
the pores; pack it on hair  
it traps lice and fleas;

put it in soup, it's food.  
By the time the rain  
was strictly bi-seasonal  
the pueblos were already old:  
*Mogollon Sinagua Hohokam*  
bean people corn people  
workers in clay  
nations of peace.



When the Spaniards got here  
this valley had been lived in  
upwards of 10,000 years  
the land and people changing.  
East from over the mountains  
came hunters: *Manso*  
*Jano Suma Jocomé.*  
Upriver from the south  
came farmers: *Concho*  
*Opata Jova Yaqui.*  
From the west the cactus-  
gathering tribes: *Pima*  
*Sobaipuri O'odham.*  
From the north *Ute*  
*Navajo* and *Apache*  
at first on foot at last  
on blooded Spanish horses  
to raid the *rancherías.*

Each in their season.  
None claiming to own  
the land, all leaving it  
alive with birds and fish  
beaver turkey and deer  
a green and golden steppe  
at the northern tip  
of the Sierra Madre  
where two deserts join.  
Between the 16th  
and 20th century  
the record is clear:  
*whiteman equals destruction.*



Enroute to mines and missions  
*padres y conquistadores*  
*mineros y caballeros*  
drove tens of thousands of head  
through fields where grains grew tall  
as a stallion's belly.  
Perennial streams and springs  
watered mesquite bosques  
whose trees were high as a house,  
thick as a bull: walnut,  
ash cottonwood oak;  
useful shrubs: *mescal*  
*yucca sotol canutillo*;  
and vast parks of flowers  
where sandal-footed people  
gathered roots and seeds.

By the time the gringos took over  
the best grass was long gone  
to abandoned cattle herds  
from Rancho San Bernardino  
to Rancho Babocomari.  
By the time the Mormon  
Battalion came through  
mesquite mesquit and snakeweed  
had overrun the bottoms.  
By the time Cochise was dead,  
the bedrock of the valley  
torn by the earthquake,  
the hardwood had been cut  
for fences fires and mines:  
the beaver were extinct.  
By the time Geronimo gave up  
and Massai had left his last  
footprints in the Chiricahuas  
arroyo cutting had begun  
to drain the lush cienegas.

By the time the politicians  
had us made a State,  
lotebush, tarbush and creosote  
had taken over the terraces.  
By the time Douglas  
had broken labor's back,

packing red-baited  
strikers into boxcars  
like so much beef,  
dumping them in mid-July  
in the New Mexico desert  
with the blessings of sheriffs,  
marshalls, city fathers,  
legislators, governors,  
all the very best people  
all the way up the line  
to Wilson in Washington,  
re-proving the Golden Rule.



By the time the war was over,  
the topsoil was running off  
down Whitewater Creek  
past the smelter into Sonora.  
By the time the depression  
let up and the suitcase farmers  
finally left, by the time  
the war began, the creek  
was a storm sewer,  
most farms deserted  
and cattle had grazed the grassland  
out of existence. Today  
dust devils dance  
between the mountain ranges,  
sand blown four deep  
piles up under dwarf mesquite,  
the only forage grasses  
hide behind two-inch spines:  
whitethorn graythorn allthorn  
jimsonweed burroweed  
carelessweed and a host  
of bitter imported greens  
straggle in between.



So much for the meat business  
you'd think. But no, now cats  
knock down the mesquite, dike  
the land into regular plots

to plow and fit for cotton,  
sorghum, alfalfa, wheat  
—not for human food  
but feed: straw and hay—  
diesel pumps growling  
twenty-four hours a day  
a thousand gallons a minute  
a thousand feet down  
under a sinking table,  
tons of insecticides  
herbicides super  
phosphate supernitrate  
for beef enough to feed  
no more people than this  
valley always fed  
before the cattle invasions.

So it's gone for twenty years.  
But what with labor costs  
and Arab fuel and blights  
and ever-changing weather  
even agribusiness  
isn't working out.  
Old boy collecting cans  
at the King's Highway  
dump says the cattle thrown there  
to bloat and burn and be buried  
likely starved since feed  
costs more than they're worth  
on today's inflated markets.  
It doesn't pay to pump  
that way, it doesn't pay  
to rape and poison the land.

So now that the Bisbee Queen  
is digging her last at last,  
closing down her shafts  
after nearly a century  
of blasting and gouging and Wyatt  
Earping and owning the copper  
state; now that Phelps Dodge  
(thanks to cutbacks, lawsuits,  
bomb threats and EPA)  
will finally have to clean up  
its brimstone-farting stacks

in Douglas-Agua Prieta;  
now that the land is changing  
hands again the word is  
*TOUR THE BEAUTIFUL WEST*  
*MOVE YOUR MOBILE INTO THE SUN*  
*RETIRE UNDER THE CHIRICAHUAS*  
*PUT A TRACT IN YOUR HEARTLAND.*

Cattle to copper to climate  
we've seen it all before:  
Phoenix Tucson LA  
Florida Oregon Maine  
*Don't wait to subdivide*  
*Don't die before you buy*  
the same deals same lies  
brought to you by those same  
old neckties, the money people.



Although we knew the land  
cannot be bought or sold,  
while the dollar was dropping  
and silver was going up,  
in need of a place to sit,  
God help us we bought  
for onetwentyfive an acre  
plus the well already in  
(all we had at the time)  
forty acres of overgrazed  
rundown sulfur-befumed  
exgrassland floodplain  
at fortytwo hundred feet  
from a man in flowered  
boots and burgundy pants  
who was handling it  
for a bearded Christian  
who needed money to finish  
his current subdivision.

Jaguar and jaguarundi  
ocelot and antelope  
wolf and longtailed weasel  
used to roam this valley.  
Aplomado falcons,

thick-billed parrots, scarlet  
ibis used to fly here.  
Now that they've gone south  
with the water and topsoil  
it's bobcat coyote and badger  
the killers are out to get.  
We have told the wind  
we will kill none of them  
rat rabbit or rattlesnake  
and we'll fence the cattle out  
so wild food grows again  
on this forty at least,  
and for our own crops  
try to work something out  
with the birds and bugs.



They say that Lewis Grizzle  
worked the old SP  
out past Gleeson for years  
before they tore up the track,  
finally planting his orchard  
at the site of the Kelton stop  
where he knew he'd most often  
miss the valley's infamous  
blossom killing late spring  
freeze. Now summer brings  
people from both sides  
of the border as much as  
a hundred miles away  
to buy peaches from his trees,  
melons from the soil he worked.

When we got here the valley  
was already wired with company  
lines to the new five-acre  
ranchettes and old family  
spreads had covered the best  
spots: not much left  
to choose but open range.  
Both figs froze back this year,  
the worst winter on record.  
Wind took the peach blossoms.  
Rabbits girdled the plums.



Root rot got the cherries.  
Pouring out of their active  
volcanoes, harvester ants  
won the war against  
the lettuce. Like the last  
blast of winter, white-crowned  
sparrows nipped off the peas.

So now we'll transplant  
native elderberry  
and apple, pear and peach  
saplings started from cuttings  
by Mrs. Kennedy  
(whose husband Bill swears  
he was born under a rock  
not far from here)  
and hope they make it through  
the first winter at least;  
and sow the seed of wild  
greens among the trees;  
try to catch the good year  
when it comes; and,  
if our luck holds,  
plan to smoke the blossoms  
with smoldering logs all spring  
to keep away the frost.

We have promised to go slow  
to learn our keep and way;  
to use hand-driven tools  
until we harness the sun;  
to weigh each desire by need  
making this earth come first;  
sounding out the spirit  
of each space we touch  
before we alter even  
this rapid entropy.  
It ain't easy being organic  
vegetarians in cow country.