

*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—
tepeary, 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.