

Shelf Life

Under a window in the sun, rattlesnake rattles
adorn the shelf along with a hawk skull,
feathers fossils stones; a bowl a basket
a carved figurine, its hand-rubbed grain
complementing the stained pine shelf
at the end of which where the evening sun
comes in this time of year, a thriftstore item
that recalls an ant farm the ants,

a geological layering of colored sands
where crabs instead of ants might be expected
under hourglass mountains draining from holes
in the liquid sky: two primevally silent
submarine worlds, one above the other,
each simple half-spin of the frame
pivoting on its horizontal axis
turning them into one another.

Behind this fearful little imitation
beyond the window letting daylight in,
the Chiricahuas dominate the horizon,
blocks of granite the size of small cities
rising up from the dry bed of the ancient sea
turn-of-the-century archaeologists,
collapsing history, named Lake Cochise
not that long after his assassination

or the earthquake that shook great slabs off the mountains,
stopped up springs and changed the course of washes:
drying up some, recharging some,
making gullies of some that had been surface flows
— that plus relentless climate warming, changing
what had seemed to be a cattleman's dream
to hundreds of square miles of overgrazed
drought-resistant shrub and brushland.