

Myth and History: Two Poems

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West, mythic time

ROCKS¹

THE FIRST people moved west with the setting sun
and gradually turned to stone.

[He na, he na na na]

Coyote was already there.

[He na]

Then came antelope, horned owl, singing bee and peccary, badger,
rabbit and hare, raven and jay, hummingbird, snake and wren,
eagle and hawk, running fox and deer.

[He na na na]

Tortoise, turtle, gopher, lizard, buzzard, grey squirrel, striped monk,
blackhead goose, roadrunner, chuckwalla, horned toad, hopping rat,
mouse and ant, frog and moth came too.

[He na]

So did raccoon, crayfish, trout fish, catfish, black spider, hairy spider,
brown spider, squawking duck, mocking bird, whistling quail,
grasshopper, centipede, heron bird, scorpion and fly.

[He na na na]

So did skunk and cat, bighorn sheep, dove and bat,
brown-eared bear and lion.

[He na]

They signed the wind and scatted the land
and strayed high in the sky at night.

[He na na na]

THE NEXT people were trees. Mesquite was already there.

[He na, he na na na]

They were juniper, acacia, ironwood, palo verde, piñon pine,
willow green, smoke tree, joshua, cedar and torote.

[He na]

They sang softly with saguaro, organ pipe, century plant, tobosa grass,
mistletoe, leather plant, greasewood, inkwood, glasswort,
ghost flower, wormwood and wishbone bush

[He na na na]

Jumping cholla, barrel thorn, prickly pear, dandelion, lavender,
paintbrush, fishhook, creosote, buckwheat, primrose
and three-tooth sage were all completely mute.

[He na]

Crucifixion thorn was already there but said nothing
that anyone could hear.

[He na na na]

Silent, too, were locoweed, grey bean, peppergrass, shiny gourd,
hyacinth, darning needle, ground cherry, wild maize,
poppy, yucca, flax and mint.

[He na]

The land was red in the light of day and blue in the moon at night.
Water pools and birds they knew rested on sways in rocks
and no journey was ever too long.

[He na na na]

THEN the human people came. Like snakes they shed their skins
and learned the secrets sleeping in the land.

[He na, he na na na]

In the rocks that cracked they saw the tracks of bison, horse,
and mammoth. They saw camel backs and lion claws
and shells from the ancient sea.

[He na]

They drew dreams and wings from jimson springs and magic prints
of the deer. They serpent danced and multiplied
and communed with the spirit heirs.

[He na na na]

They were Hohollonasazi, People of the Cracking Rocks.
They joined as one with the Earth and Sun,
with Water, Wind, and Fire.

[He na]

Life was round and moved up and down
and the land and the moon were full.

[He na na na]

And Coyote watched.

[He na, he na na na, he na na na, na!]

1. (a) Deserts are seldom flat and never empty. Only the culturally blind fail to see how full they are. (b) Every myth is saturated with history, and every telling enters itself in the affairs of the living as a kind of history.

Flagstaff, AZ, November 21, 2013

BREAKDOWN¹
[An old man remembers]²

Radio K-ROK!
Wipeout, drums!
Used to play that song.

He was so cool,
That day in the sun,
Tapping on the dash,
Checking out the mirror,
November 21, 1963.

'53 Chevy!
Loved that car,
Believed it loved him,
Especially with chicks in it,
Tooling around.
Won't you stay
Just a little bit longer?

Anybody wanna beer?
Anybody wanna get naked?
They hit him in pantomime,
Airy gestures,
Hey! This is the Wolfman speakin' . . .
Love taps on his head.

Stole his cap.
Whoa! New York Yankees
Don't let chicks play FOR them!
Only WITH them! Ha ha ha!
Driver wants his hat back!
Thanks, flea face!
You DO make a nice couple!

Beer? He said, beer? Mo beer, please!
Come along and be my party doll
And I'll make love to you, to you . . .
Pop that for me, willya, peach pants?

So where we goin' now?
Left on First, left on Elm,
Left on Second, left on Oak.
Hey, dorkman! Wanna ride?
I think NOT! See ya!

I wanna sleep with you
In the desert tonight . . .
[Wasn't that the 70s?]
Let's go to Winslow.
Whaddya mean no?
Martha has to pee?
With a million stars all around. . .
Big deal. Here's a Texaco.

They got drunk on beer and wine,
Spent the night in the desert,
Slept on the car seats,
Shared jackets as blankets.

They got cold, felt bad, puked,
Mumbled to each other all night.
Nobody wanted sex with Mr. Chevy,
Though not for his lack of trying.
He gave up at 5 a.m.

Sunrise sliced his eyes open,
Knifed into a humungus hangover.

Somebody shot JFK later that same day.

1. (a) Talk is the animator of histories and myth and as Greg Dening has said, a kind of history in itself insofar as it is always archived some way in the continuities of the living. (b) Every notable event is a conjunction of histories structured semiotically at least in part by myth.

2. This text is *not* autobiographical, but I think it is a fair measure of the times. The libidinous youth at hand learned his gender sensitivities primarily from rock and roll and bad dates in the 1950s.

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Research (edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2001), The Qualitative Inquiry Reader (edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2002), the Neuroanthropology Network Newsletter, Anthropology and Humanism (Quarterly), drunken boat: online journal of the arts, Pendulum, Cultural Studies \Leftrightarrow Critical Methodologies, and Qualitative Inquiry. His new book, *The Time at Darwin's Reef: Poetic Explorations in Anthropology and History*, has just been published by AltaMira Press.