

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.

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