

*Ronald Pape*

## **Places the Desert Takes You When It Takes You**

*Early Summer, New Mexico*

Acoma woman  
Sky city woman  
Bone woman  
Yellow mesa woman  
Dust woman  
Mud woman  
Earthy eyed obsidian adobe woman

I see her sit and shuck blue corn  
Under the sun that has always been in this place  
And will always be in this place

Burly armed pig iron grampa  
Chicago German asks  
—How can such a lovely girl  
Throw away her life in this place?—

Acoma woman squats  
Over a blue stone  
Pisses gold  
I taste the sun

*Mid Summer, Nevada*

The ghost dance begins again in the Nevada desert  
 Where Wovoka used to whirl and chant and whisper  
 To the horned toads and tumbleweeds

Now fat Kansas farmers from the Vegas slots  
 Sweat pooling in the ridge between belly and boobs  
 Shuffle and shout in the white dust

Ohio shopkeepers toss of stiff denim shirts  
 Sink raw and jutting knees  
 Between creosote circles  
 They Dance the One Dance One Dance One Dance Dance

White dust rises up  
 Into the burnt eyes of the sky  
 Santa Ana oven air presents the dust

To the soft pink throats of Angelinos  
 As they drift  
 Air conditioned  
 On melting black asphalt

*Late Summer, Archeology of the Mojave River Basin*

This is the place  
 Where washes meet  
 The place of cottonwoods  
 The jasper place  
 The black schist place  
 The place of chalcedony  
 And hard white clay

We dig here by centimeters  
 With garden trowels and paint brushes  
 Bending our backs to the full sun

Pores open to the greasy dirt  
Our faces black with garbage soil  
This is midden  
The toilet sand

Once while picking at caliche  
I glanced into the now dried wash  
To see a purple black raven  
Picking between the dull ribs  
Of a long dead dog

What we find:  
Charcoal, juniper seeds,  
Piles and piles of rock chips,  
Rat bones, deer bones, bear bones,  
But never yet a human bone