A Lecture on Diction

Curtis Whittington Jr.

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The Elemental Diction

It is no lover’s language this, nor any enemy’s, this
that is now the bright wind’s kiss,
tickling the ocotillo’s bones to laughter
(listen! it is a hangman’s laughter, laughing after)
that is now the choked halloo
of the hills, the broken bone-showing
hills, that is now the horizon’s hopeless uplifted echo
or the sky’s, where the big sun, beating
in the bowl of a golden bell,
booms overhead
in a slow funereal knell,
this that is the language of the vast dead land, idiom of death and dark beginnings, inelegant, elemental, stone-severe .

listen!
the tough tongue of the desert talking:
stone in a stone mouth striving, a slow
stone speech you do not, no,
but the deaf death in you hears.

—Theodore Roszak

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When with wings summer clears the morning and with sleep your eyes are shuttered still, I see your hair coil soft in warning across the pillow beside me, like a codicil of night. Brief then, that image, the tableau that hair, memory and morning wove, but in that coil of moment on pillow was birth: a definition of love.

—Curtis Whittington, Jr.