On Mesa Verde

John Gould Fletcher

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq

Recommended Citation

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Quarterly by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.
On Mesa Verde
(To I. S. C.)
By JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

I.

Is there a spot on earth,
Where time is not?
Naught but the weathering of the sun
Across the rocks?
And the winds going
Like far-off echoes of an ocean storm
Through the old piñon branches
Dense as dark jade against these yellow cliffs?

Here is the place
Where canyons fill with heat;
And the blue waste
Smoulders like turquoise under a sun-washed sky;
Intense and deep,
Holding earth still in its flight,
Winter on winter, month on month the same,
Till centuries pass,
Monotonous beads suspended in one clear pool of flame.

II.

The wind, like old remote
Moanings of far-off seas,
Blows through the trees by day;
One does not see the wind:—
One only hears its cry,
And after, endless silence
Surges back to tell
The wind that it must die.
Amid the jade-green jungle
Monotonously rocking, moaning to and fro,
The dead tree stands; its jagged frozen antlers
Thrust out, bone-white, unheedful of the trees
Swaying their fronded tops
Luxuriously before the wind.
The eerie, whimpering cry
That the live trees make
Breathes round but does not penetrate the dead tree's
paralyzed heart;
Dry coral in a sea of undulating tone.

III.

The quarter-centuries drop,
Grains from a full ear of corn;
The world is made younger,
Man has more things to say:
There was one who once came here,
Not knowing how to hold his future,
He is long gone now,
The world would not walk his way.

Speeding, the age has pierced
Even his ultimate silence;
But the pines and the junipers keep
Their bodiless drifts of low tone,
That he heard as the dirge of a Viking,
A violin-sweep from the heart of the world;
Could he sing it? There was none there to listen;
Now he comes, but to claim back his own.
IV.

The purple Durango summits to the east,
The purple bulk of Ute Peak west by south;
Between these two
The feathery carpet of green is still outspread.

Slashed at its southern edge
With wandering soundless canyons, sandstone-rimmed;
Like rivers licking up
The table-land of silence.

Where the heart, free and high,
Looks out to south and sees in ashen wastes,
In a great ocean of mirages, grey, remote,
A ship that beats against the far blue ledge

Of the table-land; a ghostly ship of stone
Blown through the ocean of desert, cruising far;
I think its freightage must have been men’s hopes
When life burned hotly here, in centuries forgot.

V.

The sunset’s hour has passed,
Scrawling its fading colour words across a turquoise sky;
The moon keeps state
Above the Mesa Verde.

The crickets drone
Across the moon their long-held fiddle notes;
The news of night
Breathes in the balsam scent of thick, unalterable trees.
Under the cliff
The city stands, upbuilt once, now lost;
And ages pass,
The flapping of a bat's wings through blue space.

Moon, long ago
You moulded men like metal in your hands;
Copper and bronze,
Builder on cliff and coiler of the bowl;

All is run out
Like snake-trails over the rock;
I think you cheat men, moon.
Death is the only peace.

Moon like grey ash
And coyote yapping in the night;
We are hot coppery sparks
Blown out across blue space;

As the moon keeps
Above the Mesa Verde its solemn state,
Circle or bow,
Where the ghost-canyons into darkness go.