

The Sonoran Strange: Sky Islands

And it is here that the great spine of the continent goes underground.
No Rockies, no Sierra Madre Occidental, but instead only isolated mountains of pine
rising thousands of feet above the desert floor; sky islands floating in a sea of desert,
surrounded by coral of cacti.

Millennial migratory route for thousands of bird species
and millions of humans, this is the far northern range
of the ghost-like Mexican jaguar and the parrot-like Elegant Trogon,
moving between islands of prehistoric tropics.

This is where Aldo Leopold coined the term *conservation*.
This is where hundreds of people are left to die every year,
lost at sea, an ocean of desert, *nauífragos*.

From these peaks Anglos conquered the valleys, sending military
Morse code in the reflection of heliograph mirrors.
From these peaks Anglos reach towards the sky, trying
to untangle the stars in observatories.

In these wide valleys shipping lines were mapped.
This is the crossroads that gave the railroad tycoons
a flat route for the transcontinental railroad;
east to west, west to east, cattle and tourism.

This is the crossroads that gave aboriginal cultures
a direct route for their transcontinental commerce;
south to north, north to south, turquoise and jade.

This is la tierra that gave Mexico its largest copper mine,
the earth that give the United States its largest copper mine,
the wealth of empires.

This was where the Mexican Revolution began and Manifest Destiny ended,

washing back from California.

Anglo bandits escaped here after raiding in Mexico.

Apache bandits escaped here after raiding in Mexico.

Mexican narcos stage here before smuggling into Arizona.

Phoenicians escape here in summer, to second homes.

Tucsonans slide here in winter, on Sonoran ski slopes.

Homeland of the Chiricahua people, homeland of the Huachuca agave.

Where the O'odham were born, where the thunder is born; psychogeographic landscape of myth.

Hollow with limestone caverns, punctured by prospectors. Lost treasure and endangered species.

Extinct zip codes and boomtowns and the holiest of places.

Baboquivari and Ramsey. Timber and perennial springs. Suppression and crown fires.

Santa Rita and Catalina. Pinaleños and Peloncillos. Tumacacori and El Tigre.

Sky islands float like blue mirage, under black thunderheads

and above waves of irradiant desert summer.