

MIKE BERNICCHI

Paper Dunes

I. In Gaps

As the copper mist fell
from the pale sky I
sat cross-legged
with a carbine on
a desert berm dried
river beds that run
along my jaw and
empty into pitted
hands
 trace the day's events
as rivets on Orion's
mystic belt might The
wind was violent and
constant yet
 lapsed long
enough in certain
 eloquent pauses
to let me know it was
there via negativa

I spat dryly the
grit that had made its
way inside my cheek
my crossed legs
extended
out one
jagged
and
mechanical
kink
at a time as
my palms
eased back to embrace
the shifting ground coral
in hue and resonant

The shapes forge shadows
the dunes imposing
epochs of an
ancient
lore Agile riders
race across as specks
each dune like crumbled
paper leap-frogging
the other as tired
origami waves on a
tired shore Huddled in
a mass of remembrance
a eulogy to
the sea / The salt a
reminder of what
was left behind
There is no god in the desert
I began to know
things by their
absence

II. Grace and the Nature of Fate

The sky electric
in the distance
a veiny armature
fractured
and still
as if carved into
the dusk by a child
highlights the horizon
as roadmaps for
the lost
a skeletal highway
for naked dissidents

The men
course through
this wasted land
of a
forgotten promise
in the sense
that
forgotten ladies
make
forgotten mothers
Forget that I
lay ageless
in an aging scape

What do they know
of grace
What do they know of
faceless beasts
in the sand
courting after them to
take their place
along the epochs

See the men
and their
thin smiles
worn like a dusty
jacket Watch them
dance for rain
and watch them
die

I could walk to a
thousand white roads
 I could climb
the dangling
silk
strands
that wince
and hide
among the clouds
in a
seizing glimpse
I could walk
 I could walk
 I could walk

III. On Stains

The sun leers
 It hangs
as a white
flash
of an exhausted
revolver
 Look at the ground
shadows that lay
as
 stained

black portraits
presenting themselves
as a lost opus

I walk through this
tragedy as
a mystic vagrant
tracing
the bent shadows as
caricatures
of life Look
how they die
so still / so
young
We are not our
fathers

MIKE BERNICCHI is an American poet, curator, and teacher living and working between Southwest Florida and Brooklyn, NY. His poems have most recently appeared in *ELKE* and *BOOOOOOOM*, with forthcoming publication in *Alternating Current*.