

The Road to Ethete¹

Hank Herrera

One

The road to Ethete
leaves Lander runs north meanders and
soon crosses the Popo Agie²
where the reservation begins

a vast plain, grass and sage, soft green in the sunlight
cattle and horses graze among
stands of cottonwoods and Russian olive trees—
invasive like so much in the history of native lands

for long stretches there are no cars
so my eyes can wander in all directions
my heart and soul absorb the wonder of this place,
feel awe, and tears stream down as I drive to the sacred camp

Two

To the west the plain gently slopes up to foothills, dark green,
folded up, raising higher and behind them
the jagged snow covered peaks of the Wind Rivers
forty of them all higher than 13,000 feet

in the north the Absaroka Mountains and
in the east the Owl Creek range
these mountains, a ring of infinite pillars
hold up the perfect dome of brilliant blue sky,

so vast, horizons so distant, mountains so high
earth and sky in infinite majesty, untouchable yet
soon enough, watching, feeling—I know this vast space
holds me close and safe.

Three

The road to Ethete leaves San Jose running east
through decades of confusion
between Mexican and American but not really—
yo soy Enrique, perdido en un mundo de confusión, so Corky tried to tell me³

¹ *Ethete* is pronounced “EEE thu tee”.

² Popo Agie is pronounced “po PO sia” with the last syllable sounding like the last syllable of *ambrosia*.

³ Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez (1928-2005), leader in the Chicano movement, author of the epic poem, *Yo soy Joaquín*.

even then I could not understand the path
 everywhere white men paid by the government
 killed my ancestors, legal genocide, vowing—
 kill them all! kill them all! kill them all!

Mexican to survive yet native in secret
 we never learned the origin of our Mexican forebears—
 there were none; we are native
 my father kept the secret until one early morning it killed him.

at dusk in the sacred camp at the sacred dance
 I looked at all the men all the women all the children and there
 among them I saw my father my aunties my uncles, all of the ancestors,
 and he came to me, my father did, and said it is OK son. It is OK.

Four

The road to Ethete leaves Sand Creek and runs northwest to the sacred camp
 the road where the survivor warriors walked a trail of blood and tears
 to escape the massacre
 a trail of blood and tears, blood and tears, blood and tears

Drunk white soldiers shot, stabbed, scalped, bashed out babies' brains
 committed unspeakable atrocities at Sand Creek
 returned to Denver in false triumph with their abhorrent spoils.
 The Army condemned the massacre but held no one accountable.

Five

The road to Ethete runs through my heart and my soul to that sacred place
 that sacred camp where all of these roads converge
 where I saw my father and where on the day my mother died an eagle
 high over the camp carried her spirit for our final farewell.

The road to Ethete leads to that good place
 where my Arapaho family lives
 where the earth and sky hold me, comfort me
 where I am home.