

Yorick

Javen Tanner

A cold spell
for my desecration
slipped upward from your grave.

Some ceremony attended you:
pinyon bead, arrowhead,
broken pottery and bone—

only your empty sockets
saw that this was all vanity.
Your epitaph faded

on the wall above you:
a fleeing antelope,
meaning hunger, flesh, struggle;

a weeping god,
meaning wisdom, purity, loneliness;
three handprints, open and empty,

meaning gone, gone, gone.
My civility was lost
in the subtle shock of history.

Wild again, I felt mortality
in everything: the scratch
of sagebrush, the desolation

of cattle fences, the low swoop
of the red-tailed hawk.
I grabbed your skull

and asked, "Is it fast?
Is it too fast?
Did anyone notice

you had lived?"
"Shhh," you answered,
as sand fell through your teeth.