

The Wasatch

From northern reach to southern stretch the Wasatch
Capture cloud cargoes lifted by Pacific
Winds from spouting whales and fish in flight,
From drying bodies on beaches at Malibu
Or sweating *in labore veneris* on Mexican sands:
All vapors of the deeps and shallows congregating
Around Nebo or Twin Peaks, swirling and churning,
Metamorphose into dropping rain and snow.

The sculpture of the landscape came from winds
Bringing the rains that dredged valleys and crenelated
Crests: sharpening skylines over ages and draining
Detritus from a thousand gouged gullies
Onto Basin plains that sank in silence
As the Wasatch reared skyward on faulted scarps
Beside them: isostatic clash in contrast—
A thousand feet of uncompacted sediment
Westward and Cottonwood granite to the east—
While equalizers work away: granitic
Feldspars decaying to clay, freed quartz
Globules, and mafic minerals washing to plains,
Rains scouring the mountains' stone face.

Crystals are living things, as mountains are,
Conceived in dark recesses of the mother world
To grow in slow gestation from the central heat
And pressure of the womb, in genesis controlled
By blueprint forces sure as DNA.

The Wasatch Mountains live, and living nurture
Other lives—forests and fields—an equal
Footing afforded weeds and flowers. Each patch
Of land, aspiring to its climax, starts with weeds
And builds superior forms to ultimate goals.
Old fir trees topple or fires fell them, and life
Blossoms at bottom again in lichens—fungus
And alga bound siblings—and growing once more
Toward trees with all forms fighting to survive
By schemes devious and intricate: hybridizing,
Flying, or playing dead for generations,

Tolerating salt or tasting sweet
Or bitter—whichever advances dumb needs,
Perceived without brain but purposeful as humans
Seeking their ends: winged maple seeds in flight,
Exploding pods of spores hurled windward,
Seeds riding free in bellies of birds or in burrs
On matted hides.

From lily to columbine,
Ergot to evergreen, Wasatch is home ground:
Background too, feeding and breeding other lives—
Animal: miniature to mastodon whose bones, grounded
Now, is extinct as the lake whose shores it lumbered by.

A working arrangement, mostly good, plants
With animals—never sure though: think
Of the ergot growing by Provo River and remember
Rye fields in France and fingers of peasants
Rotting off—(a caution: slipped symbiotic disc).

The Wasatch, alive still, living and giving life,
Wind breaker and cloud catcher, predestining
Utah's scene: cities in unique configuration
On a Front, a condensation promising ballets
And symphonies, plays and players in a world
Not possible from sprawling towns scattered
At random, mass lacking and centerless. Saddle
An atlas and go see. But be back at sunset's
Red westering, valleys shadowed but Timp's
Top glowing from snow; and listen to sun-
Sizzle drift into darkness and moondrone
While star chants rise silent over the Front:
Sustaining and shielding man—the last animal.

—Edward L. Hart