**Surprises**

Gene Twaronite

The soft fresh tips

of an ocotillo

have not yet learned

how to be fierce

like the barbed hooks

of a cholla that

cling to your flesh

with singular desire.

The black coachwhip

slashes across the trail

like an underground

crack opening

beneath your feet.

The delphinium

blossoms against

the granite

stab your eyes

with hyper blue

needles.

The agave spine

pierces your skin

and burns as if

dipped in acid.

The mottled patches

of light and shadow

beneath the mesquite

suddenly become

a watching rattlesnake

tasting the wind

as you walk past it,

savoring all that

can hurt you in this

fierce bright land

where there’s

nothing to fear

but the failure

to see the pain

of all things.