

Once the Stripped Quagga

Look upon my face.
It's like shall soon be gone:
Flotsam of yet another race
Jettisoned, this trace.
While time still is,
I write. Someone may hear
Below the roar of cities
My unstressed Athabaskan
tones.

Hung on my wall, their faces
Framed in silver; I can see
That my twin great-nieces
Resemble me, although
Slant black eyes are subtly
tamed,
Cheekbones flattened.
Their blood carries tiny

banners
To re-instruct the genes.
Like Ihalmiut, Khmer,
Hohokam,
Like the Hanged Man,
suspended –
We pass through mortal
change:
Our features subside,
Bleach, soften, dissolve . . .
Just as when film runs
backward
Almost forgotten landscapes
Thread away to nothing.
Once the striped quagga lived,
and the tender hyrax
Populous as Bengal Tiger,

Princely golden cat whose
destiny
Hangs in the scales with ours:
Trees, beasts,
Other life-things who will
Inescapably surrender.

Sever the flesh from my bones.
Hang them above a fireplace,
Frame the mounted head –
In arctic fur
Or exotic plumage
Such as is seen only in zoos or
Left captive in rapidly dwind-
ling
Rainforests.

Mary Tallmountain