

The Dao of Mohs

You seem surprised you skinned your knee, but soon
the word itself "peradam," we were warned,
just may mean that which diamonds cannot scratch
but scratches back: "The hardest thing there is,"
as Wittgenstein described his logic once.
It can't be seen by ordinary folks
they say. Instead you have to find a way,
by giving up on everything mundane,
to fix your gaze past the horizon, where
"to anyone who seeks" sincerely, it
"reveals itself by" this: "its sudden sparkle."

I don't believe in it one whit, nor do
your scrapes so much incentivize its search
as caution grounded men against such games.
Another name for focal points far-flung:
"mirage." And you've been taken in by one.
Instead I've waited for the opposite.
I've heard it said of zen, "When they are gone
the nothing that was there ... appears" to those
who hung around, who didn't search, who sat
instead. And yet, I worry that this thing
you cannot get by trying is all wet.

Applying the same logic as Daumal,
how insubstantial must it be, this stuff,
this anti-peradam! At least with talc,
if you so choose to powder up your nose
or polish rice, you have a use. But talc
will pulverize the zen, and then, what then?
I fear the more I might involve myself with it,
the further sunk and stranded I'll wind up,
and just as there's not on Mount Analogue,
there won't down there be friction quite enough
to get a grip or straighten out the ship.

But calcite? feldspar? topaz? gypsum? quartz?
We've long thought each of these inadequate,
their qualities too crude, determined by
contingent features of a brittle world.
With hardness off the scale we thought we could
provide the frame that lends the whole scheme sense.
Can we content ourselves with happenstance,
and make our way with nothing permanent?
In fact we should. Eternity, for you,
and emptiness its negative, for me,
are what fell flat upon analysis.