

Thomas Lisk

LOGO TRAUBEL

(The speaker is Horace Traubel, author of *With Walt Whitman in Camden*)

You've seen it was a dingy place outside,  
But full of sunlight strewn like papers,  
Like his own papers on the bedroom floor.  
There was a mannish smell in that old lair,  
With now and then a stain of smoke; the stove  
Would leak its heat, its stink, along the walls  
And demonstrate an easy presence there.  
Have you seen a photo of the Camden rooms?  
The house itself was half the story—well,  
Story may not be the word I want.  
Lots of them expressed surprise to see him  
Settled in with all the noise and dinginess  
Of that grey eden that I made him smile at once  
By calling *Nouveau Jersey*. He had no French,  
Or not enough to carry on a conversation,  
Though he used French too, if the right word came.  
Yes, well, the papers . . . yes, they made such fortune  
As I have with literary culture.  
"Take this along," he'd say and smiling hand  
Me scraps of correspondence for my files.  
"It'll be better off with you than in my mess.  
Mrs. Davis hopes I'll give it all away  
To save her cleaning up the rubble when I'm gone;  
And I don't blame her, bless her. It is  
A woeful pile of words, a woeful mess."  
Of course, he said it sweetly, for she cared,  
Though I'll not lie to you; I doubt she loved  
Him with the same ferocious adoration  
As we did who merely visited. I guess  
Few women fret about the universe.  
Well, yes, I paid the nurse, but leave that out—  
Though yes, perhaps I should admit...  
Remember all. Then I went on as if  
To organize the room, but never dared

To touch a single thing, unless he said...  
You think I didn't organize those books,  
But there's a deal of scholarship in there.  
I filled five volumes, took it down with care,  
Including notes and manuscripts he handed me.  
For all my work, the books were his not mine,  
And there were manuscripts I never used.  
We didn't think of it as taking, really.  
Though some have said I wanted to be Boswell,  
It seems I thought of him as Socrates,  
A greater man than Johnson ever was.  
You see that knapsack on the wall, beside  
The bookcase there—it's not my jacket, no.  
He carried that all through the war, our war.  
He gave the soldiers cash and candy, smokes.  
He gave the bag to me in eighty-eight.  
As thin as he might spread himself, he loved,  
He loved to be there helping out, for life,  
And death, that "strong deliveress," a female  
Presence moving in the tents and rooms—  
Like Annie here, my dear. His jacket worn but clean,  
His spirit whole, despondent times as well  
As loving ones, but nothing less than all  
For him! Nothing less than all!

You want to take  
A manuscript? Say it blunt, as he would say.  
The mob of seekers after autographs  
Would try his patience in his dying years.  
One woman, having got the name from him,  
Begged for what was called a "sentiment,"  
But he just told her, "That is all." She left;  
And if I give the impression he was blunt,  
I mean to show, though kind, he was no fool.  
It's true I've made "concessions" to the mob.  
I love democracy. Here in Canada. . .  
You think that Bucke resembled him? He did,  
But he was rougher, balder, was the Doc.  
And me? At least my hair went white as young.  
Bucke made him out to be a hoary posy,  
And yet the house for certain smelled of life.  
That's the ticket! Blunt, and don't let down



To please your betters. No, he didn't cut her  
 Because he hated women for their sex,  
 Be sure you take that down for publication.  
 He wrote to Symonds—well, you know, you've read  
 The books, my books. Do I believe it, children  
 Mistresses and all? The spirit of it's true;  
 That's all I have to say about his kids.  
 I see that room sometimes as clear as this.  
 His cosmos narrowed after every stroke.  
 The great grey voyager was safe at home  
 To travel as he wished. You're right, his mind  
 Was pent up in a clearing at the last,  
 Only the tongue, the gate was closed.

"Horace,

Endure: you know me better than the rest."  
 What! Don't scholars nowadays approve  
 Of tears? Some might be shocked to hear the news  
 I kissed him warmly every time I left.  
 Each age protects its premises, its games.  
 What do you want? Look around before you choose.  
 Not a single thing of note in that old room  
 Was in its proper place. Books and papers lay  
 In disarrangement everywhere. We—you bookish types  
 Are left to fix it in a proper scheme.  
 There were two doors in that dishevelled room  
 As there's a pair of arms upon this chair.  
 The wisdom that he taught, and lived by, was  
 At last a thing his own, a power, strength.  
 It's hard to live by emulation, damn!  
 I didn't try to copy him at all in fact;  
 He was so old and, roombound, dull as light.  
 "You're like a son to me," the words of love  
 That made my father's singing presence dumb  
 And made me waver like a sapling stript  
 By stronger hands than either fathers' were.  
 My father's love and talent was his voice.  
 My work is not respected as he'd wished—  
 Oh, I should quit. I'm honored that you've come.  
 The world is wide for all of us. Be good  
 And you may work your way to fame. The field  
 Is narrow and the way is rough, I know,

But persevere and you'll survive the years  
 It takes to grow to fill your perfect niche.  
 Enough advice, the best's been said for us;  
 I open doors for those that follow me,  
 Don't make the universe a *cul-de-sac*.



### Rosemari Mealy

#### THE HANDS WHICH SPOKE — FOR THE EYES THAT COULD NOT HEAR

With the same hands with which she use to caress me come  
 evening—  
 I had to rub those same hands that for a day's work/were in such  
 pain

Such beautiful hands  
 now, tough as the hide of those old  
 brown boots she wore/because of her swollen feet  
 they had been cut at the toe

Those same hands with which she use to caress me  
 were stained by the juices of leaves/  
 the red dirt of the land  
 and the excrement of the worm

With those same hands I had watched her gesture to the workers  
 one day  
 calling them from the fields without  
 even a word—  
 saw the long-handle hoes—imprinted with time  
 used by the tobacco workers—symbol of their craft  
 as the pen is of mine—  
 the hoes slid from under each beautiful hand—  
 remembering that at the end of last season  
 their voices were not heard  
 and she had called a stoppage for this—and many other reasons