

Robert Cooperman

MARTHA DARBANVILLE ARRIVES IN OREGON, 1854

If I have to cudgel each of their fathers—
more in love with this black earth
than with their children—these boys
and girls will attend my school.
But sometimes I wonder if it's worth
my efforts to drum or coax a little
learning, a tiny bit of civility
into these imps who mean to grow up
exact replicas of their parents—ignorant,
soil fisted, but worse—laughing at my
attempts to add a touch of light
to their lives. Loam and money
their sole interests. No better than oxen
who have to be cut from their ploughs
and cured before wolves or pumas
can come down from the mountains
to savage and soil their carcasses.

They look at the earth and see only
orchards of apples or cherries, never
the beautiful blossoms of April,
the heart breaking splendor of October.
Their children yawn when I read them
Mr. Keats's "To Autumn."
"He won't make his fortune,"
that black-toothed bully, Chester Stark,
laughs, "sleeping while there's cider
to be pressed." "Pa'd tan him good,
then fire him," Sid Cornwallis offers
his wisdom, hearing nothing of the music,
seeing none of the beauty of the poem—

Except for Rosalee McAdams, who sat
as if angels were whispering in her ear,
showing her a world beyond

these fields of oozing black dirt,
these rows upon rows of crops as far
as the eye can bear to strain,
these people who live like snorting bears:
forgetting, as each day passes, the language
that raises us above the beasts,
and draws us, on wings of glory
up to the spheres where God listens
to the harmony Rosalee begins to hear.



Dan Murray

ANOTHER LESSON

“A waste of time,” decreed the suburban
lawmaker preening himself with bourbon
& loyal echoes from his deputy,
who whined then lines of Whitman’s poetry,
lispig spider, the sick, oxen manure.
Pride is a silk tie & a sinecure.

Nothing could corrupt my silent rage.
That night I dreamt I was in a cortege
dancing to an American fanfare.
Whitman shaped horsedung into boutonnières,
& pointing the way to the town hall bell,
said, “Brown flower for proud man’s lapel.”