

Geraldine C. Little

THE SPEECH OF SOIL: HOMAGE TO WALT WHITMAN

"Underfoot the divine soil, overhead the sun"

—Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok"

Ordinary. You barely notice me under your foot.
Only my absence would shiver your careless stride.
In me rock, mineral particles all
sizes mix with living things, their remains.
I am colorblind: in Georgia maroon as a perfect
claret, in North Dakota intricate nuances
of black. On the beach, holding reflections of birds
and you roaming its reaches for driftwood or renewal
of soul, or stretched on a blanket with lover or child,
I am white, easing silently towards the sea.

At once, I am womb and tomb. This is the message:
they are one. Out of me as I speak
the daisy, complex beyond saying, tilts tendrils
towards light, its roots flesh of your dear dead,
hallowed substance which will receive once more
elements they took (too casually?) on skins you knew —
impulses of moon, stars, sun, wind
with its celebration of the globe's dialects, elegant
fabrics of snow, rain. I hold your tears,
transform them, again and again, into eye's vision.

On me rests what you share world with, weighty
step of a water buffalo in China, graceful
gait of a gazelle approaching a pool in Africa,
singular imprint of a heron adroit on one leg,
ponderous shuffle of a giant tortoise on an island
remote, rare, tremor of the spider's eight toes,
fragile, immense, reverberations still
of creatures held in the memory bank I am
that have spun in the sun their day and passed like the passenger
pigeon. I am their enrichment, an offering to you.

I can distinguish, I tell you I can, the tentative
touch of Eve's naked foot from the sanded meditation
of Sophocles' step, or the throbbing, merry

movement of Shakespeare's quickening me. I hold as treasure
trudge of a coolie in China, the chained inching
of a black in early America. No footfall is lost;
each is sacred, a pitch in the universe. Listen.
This is the dream and the reality of
a man in love with all there is that we know,
whose passage over me, vibrating hugely, stays.



Alison Townsend

MUD POEM

It was the coolness
that drew me,
one hot summer evening
when, aged seven
and a half, I
knelt down
under the uplifted
arms of the maple
and dug a bowl
in the earth
with a spoon
from the kitchen.

It was the heat
that pushed me down,
like a young animal
searching for solace,
and a fascination
with texture, water
from the green
hose spurring
into the soup
of mud.