

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 spurting
into the soup
of mud.

Mixing and kneading,
I felt the earth
rise and move
beneath my fingers,
slippery and elastic
as a loaf of black
bread in the making.
It was the first time
I think I saw
it was a live thing.
A creature like myself
which breathed,
foaming and bubbling
at my wrists until
to simply stir the darkness
was not enough.

It was then that I plunged,
dipping my arms in
past the elbow and humming,
coating my skin
with a sheen of brown
that cooled the fever
of play, reflecting
me back to myself
so that I threw off my clothes
and began painting
my body, every
inch of me covered
in the guise
of the forest —
my head lathered,
my limbs dripping,
my torso plastered
and unrecognizable
with a cast
of fragrant mud.

With twigs in my hair
and a cape of vines

swirling behind me,
I danced
on the bare ground
under the maple.
I sang over my brew
till my head swam
and my blood tingled
and, dizzyed, I lay
down, my cheek
pillowed by that
which clothed me.

And when my mother
saw me and cried out,
alarmed by my passion,
I washed it off.
I acquiesed, obedient
beneath the hose she held,
watching while the brown
rivulets turned to silver
before disappearing
in the ground.

I submitted to soap
and the scent
of fresh powder.
But that night,
as I slept, my
wet braids
tucked like tails
in the wings of my shoulders,
it was mud I remembered
and the pleasure of black earth.
That moment of pure light
when I was the land,
feeling its skin
as a part of my body,
loving it,
knowing my home.

