

## THREE POEMS



*Philip Salom*

### INDIAN HOLY SOIL

When he was in India he loved the soil  
saw it spill between his fingers  
like wind-drifts across the floor of heaven.  
Could not believe the way the old men spoke of it.  
Cow shit, they said, good sir, but very refined.  
He looked at them then was sure they meant the soil.  
He brought some back but lost it in customs.  
This soil, he answered, has a thousand years  
and thousands before that, of holiness in it.  
All the same, they burnt it:  
they said: I think you'll find, sir, it's cowshit.  
He meant to keep it in the house, tight  
as a poem, in a hand-made wooden box.  
He kept the box instead, empty.  
At night, half-aware, he'd hear it  
on creaking hooves, walking through the house.

### PIGS

*based on the 61st hexagram of the I Ching: Chung Fu—inner truth*

Pigs are the “least intelligent” on animals?  
Tell that to the farmer who has watched  
his ego from out there and inside  
squirm as the boar eyeballs him  
(he can almost feel the cross-hairs)  
at the cross way in the race—then feign  
left, turn right and accelerate off.  
They rip up, charge down pig-paths  
on the mud-map of pig free will,  
if something's wrong they get hysterical  
on trotters like Bette Midler on full

shriek. They are hot, immediate,  
 fall down among them and you're  
 fair flesh: long pig. They're sashimi  
 eaters, not prosciutto, ham,  
 a little balsamic pig urine...  
 They wallow in lakes of uk all their  
 mud-wrestling in bristle-nude  
 time, they love slop but will step  
 like a prude past food and find slats  
 to pee through, prim as a great aunt  
 when great aunts were all like that.  
 I've seen pigs shimmy and spit, happy  
 as a pig in wit, laughing like lucerne,  
 but just try to kill one: the skin fevers  
 with stink, the air's a welter, the ramp  
 fury and shit, they scream high C  
 ear-split no encore the clappers on  
 like a recording session, or ECT  
 brain-cut, but no Verdi—heavy metal,  
 shit as they die all kick dissonance  
 slip and blade like pre-CD the needle  
 pig-stuck and blood-stuck no grave  
 blood gurgling out so fiercely  
 in drains glug where flies float,  
 so pig-easy, so pig-headed, the head  
 sliced right off... On the rack, so  
 intelligent, comic, its ears hairy.

#### VISITOR

I'm in the house alone at night, with the kitchen glow  
 behind me. I wash the limestone water filter and contemplate  
 opening a bottle of wine. I have finished work but some words  
 leave my head, enter the body, like loneliness, endurance.  
 Time is another muscle in me, taut when I am waiting.  
 I feel the memory of her flexing like a poem. But I have written  
 all I can.

Then the air outside is knifed like a pig.  
 The cry is as white as the face after blood.  
 Nothing sounds like this, not even pigs, lightning  
 struck into a man's face before he saw it coming

and he's out there and he wants to kill someone.  
And I am standing bathed in light.

I bang off the lights  
rush to the back door and there's the scream again,  
hairs shooting up my back. I hold the axe but  
then, nothing human sounds like this. Nor is it  
escaped from me. I have not talked myself into  
the other side of the mirror.

Then it slams against the window,  
swarms with white. I jump back from the scream but the eye  
sees wings. And will not scare with the screaming. Outside  
a cockatoo caught upside down in the clothes line, like an angel  
of a white bat gone berserk.

I see it is a speaking bird, a pet,  
it grumbles upwards, addressing its feet, the halo holding  
one note like a nut, then some growling thing about cats,  
kill and TV gyrates on the knobble tongue as if this bird  
learnt to speak from a washing machine.

Later, when I go out,  
it's still there. Later, it has gone. I search the trees by torchlight  
the beam like a white filter passing in the dark.