

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-wresting 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 hallo 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.