

Ode to Dirt

Sharon Olds

Dear dirt, I am sorry I slighted you,
I thought that you were only the background
for the leading characters—the plants
and animals and human animals.
It's as if I had loved only the stars
and not the sky which gave them space
in which to shine. Subtle, various,
sensitive, you are the skin of our terrain,
you're our democracy. When I understood
I had never honored you as a living
equal, I was ashamed of myself,
as if I had not recognized
a character who looked so different from me,
but now I can see us all, made of the
same basic materials—
cousins of that first exploding from nothing—
in our intricate equation together. O dirt,
help us find ways to serve your life,
you who have brought us forth, and fed us,
and who at the end will take us in
and rotate with us, and wobble, and orbit.

Ode to the Onion

Pablo Neruda

Onion,
luminous flask,
your beauty formed
petal by petal,
crystal scales expanded you
and in the secrecy of the dark earth
your belly grew round with dew.
Under the earth
the miracle
happened
and when your clumsy
green stem appeared,
and your leaves were born
like swords
in the garden,
the earth heaped up her power
showing your naked transparency,
and as the remote sea
in lifting the breasts of Aphrodite
duplicating the magnolia,
so did the earth
make you,
onion
clear as a planet
and destined
to shine,
constant constellation,
round rose of water,
upon
the table
of the poor.

You make us cry without hurting us.
I have praised everything that exists,
but to me, onion, you are
more beautiful than a bird
of dazzling feathers,
heavenly globe, platinum goblet,

unmoving dance
of the snowy anemone

and the fragrance of the earth lives
in your crystalline nature.

Ode to the Hotel Near the Children's Hospital

Kevin Young

Praise the restless beds
Praise the beds that do not adjust
 that won't lift the head to feed
 or lower for shots
 or blood
 or raise to watch the tinny TV
Praise the hotel TV that won't quit
 its murmur & holler
Praise the room service
 that doesn't exist
 just the slow delivery to the front desk
 of cooling pizzas
 & brown bags leaky
 greasy & clear
Praise the vending machines
Praise the change
Praise the hot water
& the heat
 or the loud cool
 that helps the helpless sleep.

Praise the front desk
 who knows to wake
 Rm 120 when the hospital rings
Praise the silent phone
Praise the dark drawn
 by thick daytime curtains
 after long nights of waiting,
 awake.

Praise the waiting & then praise the nothing
 that's better than bad news
Praise the wakeup call
 at 6 am
Praise the sleeping in
Praise the card hung on the door
 like a whisper
 lips pressed silent
Praise the stranger's hands
 that change the sweat of sheets
Praise the checking out

Praise the going home
 to beds unmade
 for days

Beds that won't resurrect
or rise
that lie there like a child should
sleeping, tubeless

Praise this mess
that can be left