

# Dirt Tracks

Joe Napora

## Reference Points:

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ELLIS / JACK CLARKE / CHARLES OLSON /  
VINCENT FERRINI / BARBARA MOR /  
MERIDEL LE SUEUR / JOHN CLARE /  
ROBERT GRAVES

She's goin to the bottom  
And she's goin down the drain  
Said she wasn't  
big enough to carry it

—Tom Waits, “Get Behind the Mule”



But the woman took off the great lid of the jar  
with her hands and scattered all these and her  
thought caused sorrow and mischief to men.

—Hesiod, *Works and Days*

It's not as if they didn't deserve it  
They could cook up the goddess  
in a meal and  
sit you down and serve it

She gave me a record  
an old 45 it was Monk  
with Coltraine, Blakey, and Ware  
For a moment it was us  
and we were just  
there when the music stopped  
and we were left with only hope

The cruelest joke  
She with no buckets, no yoke

A jar instead of an iron box  
with a handle made of feathers  
And we left now with wings  
and cannot fly

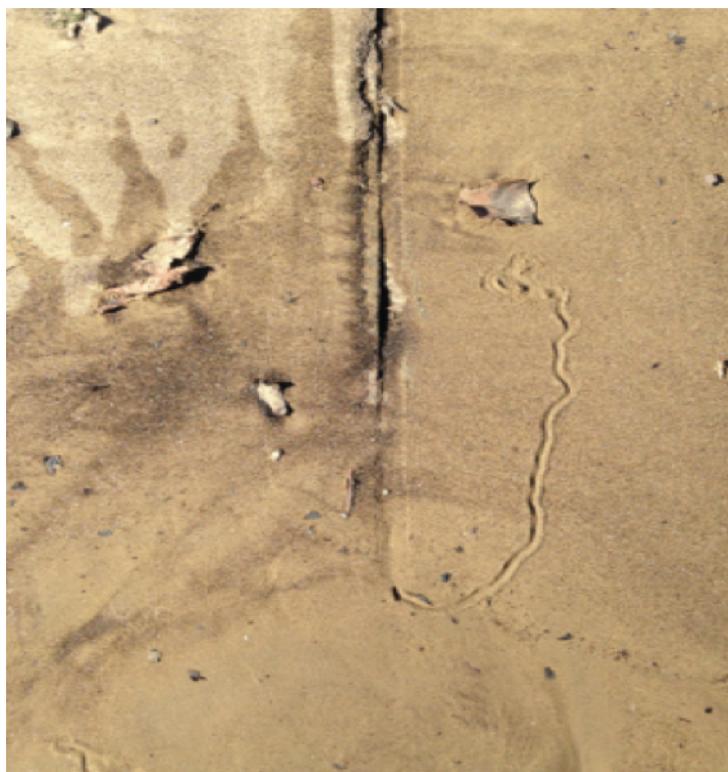


Wind writing a sand path  
Pebbles on the move  
worn in and out  
Eternity in a grain  
of the hand that  
feeds us

We bite it  
and learn to speak

Imitation pain  
Stimulation  
Simulation  
as pure as words  
carved in a tombstone

Water in and water out  
Piss and sweat  
We are the universe  
One poem  
Count on it  
One  
Two  
All



All along the river  
the wind winds  
the stones into words

Passages through and through  
from dust to dust  
to dirt to dirt  
to water to mud  
to wind

Birth gives pause to time  
a wave against the shore line

A tug boat pushing coal  
A mountain of ash on the horizon

Paper scissors rock  
as black on white  
paper cuts



Every year every month every day  
every time the wind blows  
the rain falls to earth  
it is new it is news

*Ever ear eve mo eve a*  
It is the absence  
The nothing

What after all  
is gone

gone go  
We with it



Everything flows  
comes and goes  
The dried leaves fly by  
in flight in the sand  
then gone to water a man

a man in a wheelchair catches  
a fish he will not eat

Tom Waits singing  
and he can't hear it  
could not bear it  
to dance in his chair

She gave me a statue of Aphrodite  
made from cement  
I said thanks for the gift but  
it's not what I meant

The upstream chemical  
plant is rooted  
in convenience and need  
in pervasive want  
in greed this  
not some poet's inferno

The runoff from the hills  
carves canyons  
valleys mountains  
that run to ruin



He knew nothing and everyone  
thought he knew it all  
but there was a man he beat down  
who knew something  
with his head in his hands  
gathering fishes  
for his friends  
who spoke that  
we could see him  
who wrote that  
we could hear

He was not a piece  
Of someone whole

And he rose up  
from bended knee  
and offered the bigger man  
a larger fishing pole



The message is all  
ways upstream  
Flood and drought  
The boaters play or stay  
home and drink  
watch television

Either wade  
through the mud  
or walk upon  
the water

Either one  
or both  
miracles  
start there



Well yes, sure, certainly,  
of course there is some  
green thing growing  
islands of promise

that may  
someday  
sacrifice themselves  
to glyphosate



Cracked in the head  
waters first rain  
then nothing  
Space opening to light  
brown, black, white  
noise

Insects play  
Worms die and dry  
A river of mud sweeps all  
before it

You look down at your feet  
Look up  
The muck is also falling



Geese make tracks in the mud  
and a world arises  
a book closes  
teeth chatter  
as the wind forces eyes to close  
the heart races or it breaks

At the Gate he read  
Abandon all hope  
ye who enter here where  
he could hear the screams  
of the uncommitted

Down the river drift  
goes that desolate Death Ship  
ripped from Traven's story  
ripped from the poet's grasp  
of the obvious  
"trespassers on the beyond"

one thing: hope lies  
at the bottom  
in a box  
forever locked

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