

DIGGING

Ground baked so hard you can only scrape
and pick at it, occasionally shattering
into sheets and chips around a rocky protrusion.
It is dirt around stone. Prize and quarry.

The trees around the blank space you aim
to plant, say something about Rousseau
as you turn over states of nature,
the inherent goodness of anti-social
behaviors absurd in the heat. Filling gaps.

Digging in dryness with roots of a transplant
seedling singed like hair, though living hairs
and not the dead white hairs of your own head,
sweat-slicked under the hat, a failure to acclimatize,
catch the little moisture that comes with evening.

Digging against the grain of the hill, feet
slipping as you struggle to grip—mountaineer—
to reach finally deeper into the earth
than the length of the seedling's root system.

To breach a tunnel, a vein through which white ants
migrate to their next meal, next tree with a gray
dead heart, to take community lock stock and barrel,
damaged by air and light which you quickly
cover them against, though curious

to know if the queen might move through
that small aperture, or if she transmigrates.
Filling the digging in around the roots, tilted
away from the white ants' conduit, who might

just taste to see if the cellular intrusion
so nearby is living or dead, how the cellulose
might digest, pass through their body
back into the rocky soil. The dirt stays under
my fingernails. There's not enough water
to clean it away.