

GOLD, METAPHORICALLY

The streets of San Francisco, 1848: Brannan markets prospect.

Shovels, but scant
grunt digging get him a lode of the great
American River. So cants our bend
to Brannan: Seeking gold, leaning to gleam
like need, we'll sift this grifty sediment
for all that glints, what might or might not be
the element, and catch him striking it
by accident, by God, grinning a creed
of Sutter's curse. The man's crow's-eyed with ken

as *Gold in the American*

River! go sell, notion and trope. Parades
the square, raises his glittering vial to rouse
dazzle and sights, a pulse, fair chance: Proclaims
the proposition ours, smack in the ground,
then dedicates, corners the markets—spades,
pans, sieves—in goods that just might eke us out
our ore. Bright tin devices gamble game
and credo: Go pan out or *be* panned out.

And good goddamn,
as grown men up and take to hawking charms,
balms, stimulants, do we rub up with lust:
From Richmond, Indiana ships a salve
sworn to attract and hold that densest dust
to wherever we see fit to massage
our bones—thicker the better—with the stuff.
Anointed, lathered, we'll gather no dross
as we go tumbling, as tumble we must

despite momentum's slow and sham,
how quickchange Brannan has already pulled
stakes. Strike at something, any fineness sought
of flash, no matter: Most reverts to dull

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old means, rote, literal, one long damn haul
home. Get a load: Lucky Chinese feign null
of theirs, melt nuggets down in cast-iron crocks
and spirit it away sullied with coal
dust, born again as rough skillets and woks.

Our own shine slants
along, neither solid nor fool. Belief
glories the quartzite, hokum, dross, our flush
arise by ringers, any gleamed conceit
that plays. Spin, tilt, and spill: The man sells us
thrown light for these tin dishpan histories,
dumb, brilliant glints. Caught, warm and flickering—just
before broke, glowing with what gold might be
and what might next be gold—we know the stuff.
We are rolling in it.