

Clay and Flame

Nature . . . has mixed us of clay and flame, of brain and mind.

William James

Up from the mineral mud and ore,
from mildew and bacterium
and mold and thallophyte and spore
to fungus, rust and diatom;
from moss and fern and flowering seed
to coral, fluke and sponge, and from
flatworm and snail and centipede
to fish to swamp, until we come
to mouse, to monkey—to the brain
that grew in tandem with the thumb:
To tell exactly how we came
from clay is easy. But explain
the place inside the cranium
where all that clay turns into flame.

—Deborah Warren