

The Valley of Literary Ashes

Burke Donnelly

Walking upon a valley,
I see the monuments of our wordsmiths fallen;
I buckle in the embrace of their mountainous hue.
I am no giant as were they,

The Rough Whit,
The Solemn Dickinson,
The Tanyard Twain,
The Disjointed Modernist's
Frost,
Hemingway,
The Glitz of Fitzgerald.

Who am I to venture on,
"Do I Dare?"
As J. Alfred Prufrock would lament on,
To speak, or even to breathe in the presence of such greats?
I shall in the very least, I suppose, try to inscribe my place and
define the ghostly faces I see here...

The Rough

*The enormous presence of this first monument, it is of its own material
yet intertwined with all that below and above; the great omnipotence!*

This American,
One of the Rough,

See!

Fleshy Soul...
Unabashed Body...

Sensual- Eating, Drinking, Breeding.

There he's singing of one's self,
"Of All Selves!" He exclaimed
A tremendous exorcism,
He wanted to be in and spoke out of my mouth.

Omnipotent Equality both Man and Female!

For sure this life teeming in front of me,
Is one of life immense in passion, pulse and power,
Walter Lee beat your chest to the bone!
A chorus behind,
All dead and alive,
I hear America Sing too!

The carpenter and the tools, clanging;
The boatman sending off and sailing;
The mother tending to the child;
The bride arranging;
The chauffeur tending to... "BOY" the exclamer.

I see now, this Rough amongst the dead is deathless.
Alive in the fibers of the earth,
His body is shed and life embraced.
He pleasures himself here between heaven and hell,
Naked as a giant stallion, fresh and responsive,
Now afoot with eternal vision.

He resides in the leaves of grass,
On the mountains, through the wind, of the skies and below.
West, East, North, and South,
The Rough Whit,
The American Spirit,
A Rugged Individual,

Under the Soles and Stars of this Earth.

O Solemn Emily

The second grave, seemingly lying in the shadow. So small, as if, just a light in some small window far away.

What seems left,
Just a letter
And the sender left blank.

Bobolinks perch themselves,
Surrounding the grave.
A choir singing,
Bringing a light,
As if I could kneel and be healed.

And on the outside, in this nature
It seems right and in place.
Though moving closer,
Dividing the grass as with a comb,
The dark of night begins to fall.
Wild Nights and here,
Pain has an Element of blank.

I am numb and in looking deep,
I see pearls and weeds
Below in the sea of Emily

And with that,
I felt a cleavage in my brain.

Now I am at her gates,
Will her society accept me?
Will her quiet, porcelain soul let me in?

I like this look of agony,

As I agree, I feel it's true.
The pain of being one who rose to requirement,
Dropping the playthings of her life.

She must feel as nobody,
And much madness would be in its divinest sense seeing this
Though Demur,
You're straightaway dangerous,
And handled with a chain.

So, to the solemn, and the forgotten,
I claim, I am nobody too!
I shall leave a letter here
With the sender too,
Left blank.
And take a swig
Of a liquor never brewed.

The Tanyard Twain

The third was found upon a flowing river and the truth that I saw is the truth, mainly.

A boy, rough around the edges stands here and says,
"Witches don' lay in this place,
A five-cent piece lay on a hanging branch to keep them away.
It ain't no lie, it be difficult to be here.
The uncivilized nature of that man sleeping wit dos hogs
Causes the tankard to stink up a mighty heap.
Guess it be that or the drink that gets him riled and angry,
He is the devil, not me!

And I see some people over the river,
The civilized folk,
I see them paying to their god

Or praying.
I don't know witch,
When I see the gold exchanged,
Wrist to Wrist.

I think on it a minute,
Must it take them to heaven?
A reason for doing it?
But that ain't no place for me,
Like that man, my place is with dogs.
I ain't need neither, those civilized or my pa,
I got my big friend Jim and raft."

The ghostly boy went to the bank,
And before him the frats of life will befall him.
Come-By-Nights who swoop in the day,
Ancient and unknown family quarrels,
Fighting to fight because that's been what they done,
Ignorant adolescent boys playing.
All for him to see life on the river,
Ain't no picnic.

I hope in the end, but I know the joke's on me,
This free-spirited boy will grow and be free on the river.

Lo, that ain't no life for he,
So his place will stay in the tanyard,
With the river pushing him in the wrong direction.

Des Jo in Ted Defines the Modernists

The scattered plots D O T D O T ... (DOT) the field of these bearers of broken claims, their lots left to pick up the pieces dropped and shattered.

A land of waste before me,

The graves as apparitions of their faces crowded.

Petals on a wet, black bough.

Insecurity begets me entering here,
What will those around me (even the dead) think of my
passage?

I shall so so so,
Tight Tip of the Toe as I go about this place.

I must be more than humble,
Eunuched, I should be!
As I am no attending lord nor anything more than being able
to ask...

“may I go?”

I would say, I have learned
Amongst the dust of my kicked-up heels,
That one must have a mind of winter,
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow.

That in this place,
Death and Destruction = Birth and Reincarnation
To say that I, myself,
Am nothing and I may behold as the listener this:
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

I am a mere being,
With a mind to find a place.
Where one may say,
A palm rests at the end of this.

This thing stands on the edge of space and
Silence surrounds for
The gold-feathered bird here sings,
A song unknown to human meaning or feeling.

It is as much to say,

Watching
Just as simply,
A red wheelbarrow.

The magnanimously forgiving creation,
To bear whatever load.
Its age worn
With rain scars and there just resting by the white chickens.

The chaotic nature of a place
Untamed and left with a broken machine of the yesteryear,
Plows ahead to a new future, formed by the hands of these
apparitions.
To them I join and say,
“Godspeed, Con te partirò a peponi!”

A Dreaded Frost Upon a Bridge

*A bridge connects this barren land with its ancestral heritage and beyond
this, a road split infinitely and indiscriminately forward.*

And so a marriage was had,
With this man.
Not of his love,
For her life along with four of his children
Were given back to the state of nature.

It was one of
The joining of

Rhythmic traditionalism and chaotic,
Reassembled modernism.
The path this creates is seen that,
The only way round is through.

A mirage in the distance,
A mended wall built
Yet decimated.
Man's claim of this earth,
"This is my border not yours!"

Nature smiles back,
And in its most eloquent rays
Destroyed this claim in every way.

But men continue to compile stones
Defiling this truth,
"No nature! Good fences make good neighbors!"

The inevitability of man's departure,
Is as true as saying,
Nothing Gold Can Stay.

Summer, shiny and new,
Melting away.
The dust of snow,
Changing spirits.
Then nature springs anew,
Falling in time are the leaves and
Winter ringing in the gloomy blues.
An indefinite cycle of life's rules.

Oh life, and with that nature,
You seem so true!

The plains wide and open;
The mountains carved, ascending so high;
The oceans are as deep as the mind.
And silence is your answer,
To the co-existive nature,
That seems to elude us.

“Out, out”
I exclaim!
Out of this constructed world,
Deconstructed nature.

Weighing and Defining our worth,
As easy to say,
What is life?
A check in the end?
A hand given,
Doing a man’s work,
Though a child at heart.

I proclaim this is not the only way,
Let us look down the road less traveled.
And let us look at a man’s work,

Digging up the earth, sinking under his fingernails.
We assume no emotion emerges,
The senseless burial of a child or
The man as the boy burying his childhood playthings.

Yet it can be seen,
His worth, in his words:

“Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fences a man can build.”

No manic emotion could ever convey,
Such a silent understanding of
Human and Earth.

**Hill's beyond this pass, shaded in gray, The
Hemingway's**

*It is hard to discern what I see ahead, am I reading a thing definitely,
something that is clear? Strange and ambiguous it seems ahead and
always under the gaze of these Hemingway Mountains.*

Walking I find,
A cafe situated next to a train station,
Somewhere on a coast near Barcelona.

Found under a well-lighted place,
I see a man and woman,
With cervezas and dos Anis del Toro's,
Though it seems only one with a bulging, bloated belly.
Respectively the latter,
Discussing some things.

I hear talk of white elephants,
But this is not the place,
Where those grace our presence.
Nor it seems will they,
For more than just a detour.

A life of antiquity,
Flitting about from here to there,
Luggage cluttered with the stamps of nations here and there.
Life without a care.

Yet something seems amiss,
As the woman is drinking with the belly kicking,
A strain of the mundane.

Like the man in the café,
Old and respected,
While wobbling and correcting.
Looking to spend hours there,
Well past closing.

Though it seemed to only bother one of the waiters,
The one who has someone to go home to.
To love, cherish and hold onto.
The other is fine, letting time slip away,
Like the sinking of the old man's drink.
For he knows, he will want
Another clean, well-lighted place
After they both exit.

**A Shining Star, Great Gatsby! I See Such Beauty in the
glimmering Glitz of Fitzgerald!**

*From atop the Hemingway's, A green light is beckoning me to the end of
the ash heaps behind. I look back once more, the past though is no more;
So, when I see, a jaded feeling overtakes and blinds me to press on.*

A euphoria overtakes me,
Such a dream, being American!
I have climbed so high,
Being high I'm clearly not grounded.
But upon the broken backs and
Bootlegged sacks of money brought in.

The green light in the eye of beauty,
Resting so delicately,
As if balancing some-thing upon a chin.

There is a lightness in the air,
As if an open windows breeze,

May sweep away the cares of life.
“Where sh-shall we go?”
“Let the wind guide.”
American beauty speaks.

A porcelain smile,
For they fear the barbarians at the gates,
Common-folks,
The minorities who make up the majority.
And behind the smile,
Lies a lethal incentive,
For anyone not made up of their substance.
The question-and-answer session is over in seconds.
And this was to anyone who attempted to go from west to
east,
Or even rise as a phoenix from the ash heaps.

No, the American Dream is a fool’s errand,
Living off the backs of others.
For a plunge is taken,
By so many to achieve.
Yet falling from the height of a mountain,
Your body will be left broken and jagged,
Lying face down in a swimming pool.
Getting run down by someone not caring too move.
You will give everything and, in the end,
Just some scraps of greenly lit printed paper.
And this descent is almost inevitable,
If not born privileged,
As if in East-Egg.
Where those few are given,
The green light to defend
And blind the many,
With pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and slothful
tendencies.