# Cultural Daily 

## Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Roy Bentley: Two Poems

Roy Bentley • Wednesday, April 24th, 2019

## A Winter Story

The first momento moriis memory, this one a corpse air freighted from somewhere in Florida to a hearse ride through Tennessee into Kentucky. He checked, my father. Raised the carton. Looked. The air temperature just then was eight below zero. I recall he flinched at seeing the body of his mother. I looked. Her head was resting in a Uof rough wood.

She was dressed. And sweatered. Was wearing shoes. Seeing that—at the Johnson County Airport—didn't call up Heaven. Even with day's end gilding walls, windows, the rooms the amber of unhived honey. Lettering on the side of the shipping container read Human Remains in black-black. Blazed. Like we were a couple of hillbillies from Neon-

Fleming, a few hours drive over the mountains, and needed reminded what a death can look like. Later, he'd tell me about Eastern State Hospital, how her brother the doctor committed her there to sidestep jail. Just then, my pops was shaken. Said he couldn't associate her with cremation, though what she'd endured for years had been
like tending a fire all night, alone, in the cold. What remained seemed to be someone he knew or knew enough to be sure she would have hated being flown home like this. Never mind the cheap print dress or being off-loaded as the Fed Ex carton. Outside, the hearse and driver-someone's mother needed a ride the rest of the way through the dark.

## Reading Richard Ford on the Jersey Shore

"If I do not meet you in this life, let me feel the lack."
-from The Thin Red Line

Frank Bascombe can't walk the shore near Barnegat Bay because fictional characters can't actually walk. And since he isn't alive and fighting prostate cancer, he can't be the guy at the Wawa on East Bay Avenue and Lighthouse in Barnegat-the attendant at the pumps who is raiding a Richard Ford novel, plagiarizing from The Lay of the Land, saying he's been stared down like a dentist waiting
for a mouth to numb up. Ford says, "The sea closes up, and so does the land." The trophy-gold of the security lights is plagiarized, too. Once, a woman and I had sex on the front seat of a black Cadillac under lights like these. Afterwards, she said she had pain. Displayed the blood. I drove to a hospital. As it happened, the ER doctor-on-call elected not to stitch, instead ordering an antibiotic. He gave us a look and told us not to act like that: like we needed
more than one life. I wasn't settling scores, swear to God. But if she pulled up her skirt, I'd answer, dizzied by the scent of land and sea she was. Maybe it's like this: a lack gets buried under highway signs in another statein Ohio-and comes back in the place Frank Bascombe keeps returning to because it, the Jersey Shore, rips him apart until all he can do is to tag the sweet damage Desire and accept love for what it is besides loss.

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