

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Roy Bentley: Two Poems

Roy Bentley · Wednesday, April 24th, 2019

A Winter Story

The first *momento mori* is 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 *U* of 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.

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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 state—
in 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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