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Part Of An Answer To Melville's "Bartleby"

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The land was troubled by a wind, a wind of two years' strength, and it had blown with gathering force for at least that long. A small boy Nameless travelled a roadway that seemed to drive the land along with it, that seemed to give reason and expression to the land. The land seemed made only for the roadway."

Cover Page Footnote

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PART OF AN ANSWER TO MELVILLE'S "BARTLEBY"

The land was troubled by a wind, a wind of two years' strength, and it had blown with gathering force for at least that long. A small boy Nameless travelled a roadway that seemed to drive the land along with it, that seemed to give reason and expression to the land. The land seemed made only for the roadway.

The small boy Nameless, who travelled its surface chose one late evening to surmount its great hill, the hill that rose so steep and that took strength and which climbed up from the plain.

In his first upward steps, the boy felt the tremendous force powerfully holding him back, the force of the earth pulling him down to itself. But he continued to climb. Then the wind of the road, had he again questioned whether to turn back, would not let him return. Oh, not that it was that strong. But it was wild--you know how a windy night seems filled with confusion and how it's the wind that's at fault. It took him into itself and breathed into his fancy the force of its excitement, its furious will to move unimpeded, to rise and sail freely. The small lad Nameless was soon struggling, and as he neared the hill's top, the wind seemed to pause. Everything became quiet.

At the arc of the hill a huge, knarled tree stretched its arms to the sky. An old lantern was swinging from one bough lifted over the road, and lantern and tree creaked together in shadows. Fine soot had blackened the small glass panes on the side of his approach. The sight of the lamp stirred the boy Nameless to quicker steps forward.

As he was almost upon the creast, the wind, he noticed, began to blow more forcefully.

Finally, he made the long level stretch, the top of the hill, the end of the climb. Coming up fast to by-pass the tree and to rest in the light that came from the lantern's far side, his gait boldly quickened. Just as he passed underneath the great bough, the night wind tore at the hanging lamp's chord and it swung in its setting to face toward the climb. The clean face of the light now lighted the road that he'd taken in shadows. The way he had yet to go was as dark as the other, perhaps a bit darker.

A strange thing was discovered. The night, long descending, was now quite upon him--but this was not strange, nor was the feeling rough, that he felt on his face; some floating stray silk from a passing night spider had covered his chin. The odd thing was the roadway's abrupt ending just beneath where the lantern was hanging, as the pavement turned into a thick and moist soil, a rich, loamy muck. Now very tired and the night so warmed, he took off his clothing and laid on the earth, pulling his jacket and trousers over his form.

He dreamt that he wakened on this same warming spot; the field that he lay in was of a rich orange soil and by the oak was a small mustard sprout watered by water that flowed from a well located just by it and brimming with crystal. He jumped up naked and stepped over the earth that was so gentle with his unshod feet. He drank with his hands and his breath came short but he drank more still--it was cooling and tingling, his cheeks seemed like they'd been salted. Then he went back and slept and awoke and drank more. The mustard had grown from the sprout to the sky; it rivalled the arch that the great oak shaded as the two of them grew from the warm orange soil. He fell back to sleep, in his dream, with the hope that he'd never wake up.

He awoke the next morning with the sun on his body. He was covered with orange patches of dirt and wished for the well in a laughing way, that he might wash from himself the dirt of the field. After brushing himself, he put on his clothes. Then, going over to where the road had left oil, Nameless turned the lantern the other way round; he set off in line with the course the roadway would have taken, and thought he'd find it far up ahead, somewhere ahead. Ah! Bartleby. . . ah! ,

RICHARD O'CONNOR, C.S.B.