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Humorous Essay
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Directions of the Great Authors

by

Andrew Kass

In the global march of Western civilization we have seen an increasing self-awareness on the part of artists in all the great disciplines. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, indeed, writers began committing their journals and correspondence to memoir before it was clear that anyone beyond their immediate families would be interested.

My own research has taken a more homely direction. For where do we reveal ourselves more completely, more extemporaneously, than in the traveling directions that we give to others?

Having searched through many archives at no small cost in time and toil, I have discovered the following gems, so that we may 'find our way' to the artists as people.

William Wordsworth

When wand'ring lonely in the moors,
Should you, by chance now out of doors,
find yourself devolving hence,
seek ye first the vic'rage fence.

Amidst the snow goose turds then tread
a mile, to where a barn all red
reposes, wrapped in thistle heads,
with cows a-slumber in their beds;

Across the tor, against the wind,
descend upon the Old Boar Inn,
whose the ale is hearty as the board
and I await, drunk as a lord.

Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon the Turnpike dreary
stop in Delaware, and query
the information kiosk majordomo that you find.
Ask him then how now to find me,
as I say just to remind thee
That I dwell in eldritch Baltimore with what's left of my mind.

Into the darkness go then
if your nerve is strong, but know when
ere you last made for my fender that our bender ran a week.
Past the perils, then, of Towson
to the city limits, now then,
join me and the ghostly spirits launched upon a midnight shriek:
That the ages may discover all the horror gone before
in the cobbled streets of Baltimore.

William Butler Yeats

Arise and come, then,
come to Gullen's Lane,

past the village, beyond the ken
of the dawn dustman and the aching brain.

We yet may find some peace here;
but traffic creeping slow
may force resort to the M-412, where
we pass through every way place
we should ever want to know.

T.S. Eliot¹

It is not the going
but the coming that you seek.
Remember the lilac girl in the white pinafore? It was
me. But --
 O - O - O - O How can I miss you
 if you don't go away --

The way forward
is the way back.
Then left
at the escutcheoned loins
of the cathedral.

*Ani lo medaber ivrit.*²

What you see
will be neither the golden arches of Mammon on your left
nor the fiery gates on the right,

¹The provenance of this particular set of directions has been called into question, in part because of some of the references, which would seem to post-date the Poet.

²*I do not speak Hebrew.*

but the mermaid girls of Wendy's drive-thru
and the neon chalice of Dollar Tree.

Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'

Genuflect, and make your visit.

Ezra Pound

Drive to ~~the~~ pinnacle ~~in a~~ pinnacle
of sharp air, boldly ~~driving~~ into the race
of effluent ~~car and bus traffic on the~~ Via Peligrosa.
Espy ~~Salumeria Ruffisi one kilometer on~~ the right, take the trace
~~Called Via del Monte~~ evolving upward to its face
and my ~~home at~~ Torregrossa.

Samuel Beckett

You cannot go on, you go on, turn around, arse backwards into your own gas, ephemeral,
a tree, a trash can, a house, you enter, I'm out, I cannot go on, I go on, turn around, arse
backwards into my own gas, ephemeral, a tree, a trash can, a house, I enter, you're out, you
cannot go on, you go on....

Ernest Hemingway

You rise early. The air is clean and new. You drive hard, as it lies beyond a day's
walk. Lines of the great highway pull you to hills like coiled cats. There is a cleft beyond the
tail. You enter it. Twenty miles of snaking road later, seek the blue mailbox with the bunnies.

Dylan Thomas

Under the drifting tendrils of smoke like Arabian stallions risen from a thousand
chimneys the village slumbers at the tail of the A483 like a cat in a white blanket. At the plinth
of the Town Hall stands the statue of Gryffudd, gesturing to the winds, catcher of a thousand

snowballs. You go left, past the house bedeviled with cats, and follow the scent of pudding and pipesmoke to the red postbox at the corner, and sit in the golden glow from the mullioned windows, feeling the snowflakes sweep by with the last of your youth.

William Carlos Williams

So much depends
upon exiting the Turnpike
at Exit 15W,
its roadway black with dew.

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