

Arcady**Michael South***Inspired by Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Ballade of Broken Flutes"*

He'd told me of a hallowed land
 Through old words on an ancient page.
 I traveled there, and it was grand,
 Although the landscape reeked of age.
 The once-blue sky, now tainted beige,
 Was scattered far as I could see,
 And on the ground, laid there by rage,
 Was one old flute from Arcady.

I stooped down, brushed away the dust
 And found the flute split clean in two.
 The wood had rot, the metal, rust,
 And dirt and pebbles filled the tube.
 I thought of nothing else to do
 And took the flute along with me,
 Walked onwards towards the sky once-
 blue,
 Walked onwards towards old Arcady.

And as I walked, the images
 Of desolation and decay
 Told stories of what pillage is
 When nature comes into the fray.
 And though the silence day by day
 Relieved my mind to some degree,
 The lifelessness in every way
 Could not spell peace for Arcady.

Then after all my strength was spent
 And Arcady still far away,
 I questioned why I ever went
 And what could come of that foray.
 Nearby the road, a cold and gray
 Old tree stump offered sympathy
 For my worn feet. What would I pay
 To catch a glimpse of Arcady?

And for what seemed a century,
 I sat there fingering the flute,
 But as I thought, eventually
 An idea started taking root:

If gold is gold, though stained by soot,
 Then surely such the case may be,
 That though it looked dead, underfoot
 There flourished mighty Arcady!

My strength renewed, my vision cleared,
 I persevered at steady pace;
 My labored trudging disappeared
 And airy footsteps took its place,
 For one hope looked me in the face
 And whispered with unbridled glee,
 "Press on, for he who runs the race
 Will find it all in Arcady!"

At long last, I stepped on the grounds,
 The land where once lived mighty folk
 In kingdoms bold and homes so sound
 That just the thought of them evoke
 The scent of freshly lacquered oak
 Inside the house of Medici...
 Alas! But that was long ago,
 An old, forgotten Arcady.

That day, the ground on which I stood
 Was battered far beyond belief:
 Where houses were, now splintered wood
 Served to remind me of the grief
 That took the land. A withered leaf
 Brushed by me in the solemn breeze,
 And I thought, "This can't be the chief
 End of a place like Arcady!"

I traveled home with no more loot
 Than what was in that sorry tomb,
 And on my mantle lies the flute
 That no more carries on a tune.
 I took to writing, not too soon—
 For every sonnet that I sing
 Brings one dead flower back to bloom
 In Arcady, my Arcady.