



**EDWIN  
ARLINGTON  
ROBINSON**

***THE THREE  
TAVERNS:  
A BOOK  
OF POEMS***

## **Edwin Arlington Robinson**

# The Three Taverns: A Book of Poems

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# **The Valley of the Shadow**

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There were faces to remember in the Valley of the Shadow,  
There were faces unregarded, there were faces to forget;  
There were fires of grief and fear that are a few forgotten  
ashes,  
There were sparks of recognition that are not forgotten yet.  
For at first, with an amazed and overwhelming indignation  
At a measureless malfeasance that obscurely willed it thus,  
They were lost and unacquainted—till they found  
themselves in others,  
Who had groped as they were groping where dim ways  
were perilous.

There were lives that were as dark as are the fears and  
intuitions  
Of a child who knows himself and is alone with what he  
knows;  
There were pensioners of dreams and there were debtors  
of illusions,  
All to fail before the triumph of a weed that only grows.  
There were thirsting heirs of golden sieves that held not  
wine or water,  
And had no names in traffic or more value there than toys:  
There were blighted sons of wonder in the Valley of the  
Shadow,  
Where they suffered and still wondered why their wonder  
made no noise.

There were slaves who dragged the shackles of a precedent  
unbroken,  
Demonstrating the fulfilment of unalterable schemes,

Which had been, before the cradle, Time's inexorable tenants

Of what were now the dusty ruins of their father's dreams.

There were these, and there were many who had stumbled up to manhood,

Where they saw too late the road they should have taken long ago:

There were thwarted clerks and fiddlers in the Valley of the Shadow,

The commemorative wreckage of what others did not know.

And there were daughters older than the mothers who had borne them,

Being older in their wisdom, which is older than the earth;

And they were going forward only farther into darkness,

Unrelieved as were the blasting obligations of their birth;

And among them, giving always what was not for their possession,

There were maidens, very quiet, with no quiet in their eyes:

There were daughters of the silence in the Valley of the Shadow,

Each an isolated item in the family sacrifice.

There were creepers among catacombs where dull regrets were torches,

Giving light enough to show them what was there upon the shelves—

Where there was more for them to see than pleasure would remember

Of something that had been alive and once had been themselves.

There were some who stirred the ruins with a solid imprecation,

While as many fled repentance for the promise of despair:

There were drinkers of wrong waters in the Valley of the Shadow,

And all the sparkling ways were dust that once had led them there.

There were some who knew the steps of Age incredibly beside them,  
And his fingers upon shoulders that had never felt the wheel;  
And their last of empty trophies was a gilded cup of nothing,  
Which a contemplating vagabond would not have come to steal.  
Long and often had they figured for a larger valuation,  
But the size of their addition was the balance of a doubt:  
There were gentlemen of leisure in the Valley of the Shadow,  
Not allured by retrospection, disenchanted, and played out.

And among the dark endurances of unavowed reprisals  
There were silent eyes of envy that saw little but saw well;  
And over beauty's aftermath of hazardous ambitions  
There were tears for what had vanished as they vanished where they fell.  
Not assured of what was theirs, and always hungry for the nameless,  
There were some whose only passion was for Time who made them cold:  
There were numerous fair women in the Valley of the Shadow,  
Dreaming rather less of heaven than of hell when they were old.

Now and then, as if to scorn the common touch of common sorrow,  
There were some who gave a few the distant pity of a smile;  
And another cloaked a soul as with an ash of human



embers,  
Having covered thus a treasure that would last him for a while.

There were many by the presence of the many disaffected,  
Whose exemption was included in the weight that others bore:

There were seekers after darkness in the Valley of the Shadow,

And they alone were there to find what they were looking for.

So they were, and so they are; and as they came are coming others,

And among them are the fearless and the meek and the unborn;

And a question that has held us heretofore without an answer

May abide without an answer until all have ceased to mourn.

For the children of the dark are more to name than are the wretched,

Or the broken, or the weary, or the baffled, or the shamed:

There are builders of new mansions in the Valley of the Shadow,

And among them are the dying and the blinded and the maimed.

## **The Wandering Jew**

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