

Derek Walcott, "Ruins of a Great House" (comp. 1953-1954)

though our longest sun sets at right declensions and  
makes but winter arches,  
it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and  
have our light in ashes. . .

[Browne, \*Urn Burial\*](#)

Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,  
Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candledust,  
Remain to file the lizard's dragonish claws.  
The mouths of those gate cherubs shriek with stain;  
Axle and coach wheel silted under the muck  
Of cattle droppings.

Three crows flap for the trees  
And settle, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.  
A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose  
The leprosy of empire.

'Farewell, green fields,

[Farewell, ye happy groves!](#)

Marble like Greece, like [Faulkner's South](#) in stone,  
Deciduous beauty prospered and is gone,  
But where the lawn breaks in a rash of trees  
A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone  
Of some dead animal or human thing  
Fallen from evil days, from evil times.

It seems that the original crops were limes  
Grown in that silt that clogs the river's skirt;  
The imperious rakes are gone, their bright girls gone,  
The river flows, obliterating hurt.

I climbed a wall with the grille ironwork  
Of exiled craftsmen protecting that great house  
From guilt, perhaps, but not from the worm's rent  
Nor from the padded calvary of the mouse.  
And when a wind shook in the limes I heard  
What [Kipling](#) heard, the death of a great empire, the  
abuse

Of ignorance by Bible and by sword.

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,  
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next  
Of men like [Hawkins](#), [Walter Raleigh](#), [Drake](#),  
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed  
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.  
The world's green age then was rotting lime  
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.  
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.  
But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind  
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,  
My eyes burned from the ashen prose [of Donne](#).

Ablaze with rage I thought,  
Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,  
But still the coal of my compassion fought  
That Albion too was once  
A colony like ours, 'part of the continent, [piece of the  
main](#)',  
Nook-shotten, rook o'erblown, deranged  
By foaming channels and the vain expense  
Of bitter faction.  
All in compassion ends  
So differently from what the heart arranged:  
'[as well as if a manor of thy friend's](#). . . '

Links to the following figures on the [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#) [You will need to use your UGA ID to access this database from off-campus. ]

[Thomas Browne](#), [Rudyard Kipling](#), and [John Donne](#)