

The Death of the Craneman
Alfred Hayes

Happened like this: it was hot as hell
That afternoon, sand, stone dust, the sun,
We were in the mountains.
Drinking water was by the gasoline drum
We were all drinking like fish that day.
He must have come down from the crane
For a drink I guess, a cigarette
Might have done it, blew it bang up, that drum,
Like dynamite been dropped in it.
We came running down from the mountains.
The blacksmith got to him first: gasoline
Had made a bonfire of him, and we shouted
Craneman! Craneman! With the wops talking
Their language, and nobody knowing his name.
Standing there you could see him, a flame
Lighter and yellower than the sunlight,
And burning, hands and feet, his hair on fire,
Getting up from the ground, standing there,
Yelling out of the fire, flame shooting white
In the sunlight: Lemme alone! Lemme alone!
I'm all right!

Well, we get him here and here he dies,
That's where we buried him out there,
In the goldenrod beyond them pines.
It's a Potter's Field and nobody'd care,
We dug the grave with our drills and hands,
You got to bury a guy somewhere.

Funny I thought as I looked at him
Blackened, with a pair of holes for eyes,
You bury a stiff and there he lies,
And Christ only knows where he come from
And whether there's kids somewhere or a dame,
We buried him like he came in this world,
A stiff, naked, without a name.