

Classic Poetry Series

Robinson Jeffers

- poems -

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Ascent To The Sierras

Beyond the great valley an odd instinctive rising
Begins to possess the ground, the flatness gathers
to little humps and
barrows, low aimless ridges,
A sudden violence of rock crowns them. The crowded
orchards end, they
have come to a stone knife;
The farms are finished; the sudden foot of the
sierra. Hill over hill,
snow-ridge beyond mountain gather
The blue air of their height about them.

Here at the foot of the pass
The fierce clans of the mountain you'd think for
thousands of years,
Men with harsh mouths and eyes like the eagles' hunger,
Have gathered among these rocks at the dead hour
Of the morning star and the stars waning
To raid the plain and at moonrise returning driven
Their scared booty to the highlands, the tossing horns
And glazed eyes in the light of torches. The men have
looked back
Standing above these rock-heads to bark laughter
At the burning granaries and the farms and the town
That sow the dark flat land with terrible rubies...
lighting the dead...

It is not true: from this land
The curse was lifted; the highlands have kept peace
with the valleys; no
blood in the sod; there is no old sword
Keeping grim rust, no primal sorrow. The people are
all one people, their
homes never knew harrying;
The tribes before them were acorn-eaters, harmless
as deer. Oh, fortunate
earth; you must find someone
To make you bitter music; how else will you take bonds
of the future,
against the wolf in men's hearts?

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Ave Caesar

No bitterness: our ancestors did it.
They were only ignorant and hopeful, they wanted freedom but wealth too.
Their children will learn to hope for a Caesar.
Or rather--for we are not aquiline Romans but soft mixed colonists--
Some kindly Sicilian tyrant who'll keep
Poverty and Carthage off until the Romans arrive,
We are easy to manage, a gregarious people,
Full of sentiment, clever at mechanics, and we love our luxuries.

Robinson Jeffers

Be Angry At The Sun

That public men publish falsehoods
Is nothing new. That America must accept
Like the historical republics corruption and empire
Has been known for years.

Be angry at the sun for setting
If these things anger you. Watch the wheel slope and turn,
They are all bound on the wheel, these people, those warriors.
This republic, Europe, Asia.

Observe them gesticulating,
Observe them going down. The gang serves lies, the passionate
Man plays his part; the cold passion for truth
Hunts in no pack.

You are not Catullus, you know,
To lampoon these crude sketches of Caesar. You are far
From Dante's feet, but even farther from his dirty
Political hatreds.

Let boys want pleasure, and men
Struggle for power, and women perhaps for fame,
And the servile to serve a Leader and the dupes to be duped.
Yours is not theirs.

Anonymous submission.

Robinson Jeffers

Birth-Dues

Joy is a trick in the air; pleasure is merely
contemptible, the dangled
Carrot the ass follows to market or precipice;
But liminary pain -- the rock under the tower
and the hewn coping
That takes thunder at the head of the turret-
Terrible and real. Therefore a mindless dervish
carving himself
With knives will seem to have conquered the world.

The world's God is treacherous and full of
unreason; a torturer, but also
The only foundation and the only fountain.
Who fights him eats his own flesh and perishes
of hunger; who hides in the grave
To escape him is dead; who enters the Indian
Recession to escape him is dead; who falls in
love with the God is washed clean
Of death desired and of death dreaded.

He has joy, but Joy is a trick in the air; and
pleasure, but pleasure is contemptible;
And peace; and is based on solidier than pain.
He has broken boundaries a little and that will
estrangle him; he is monstrous, but not
To the measure of the God.... But I having told
you--
However I suppose that few in the world have
energy to hear effectively-
Have paid my birth-dues; am quits with the
people.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Bixby's Landing

They burned lime on the hill and dropped it down
here in an iron car
On a long cable; here the ships warped in
And took their loads from the engine, the water
is deep to the cliff. The car
Hangs half way over in the gape of the gorge,
Stationed like a north star above the peaks of
the redwoods, iron perch
For the little red hawks when they cease from
hovering
When they've struck prey; the spider's fling of a
cable rust-glued to the pulleys.
The laborers are gone, but what a good multitude
Is here in return: the rich-lichened rock, the
rose-tipped stone-crop, the constant
Ocean's voices, the cloud-lighted space.
The kilns are cold on the hill but here in the
rust of the broken boiler
Quick lizards lighten, and a rattle-snake flows
Down the cracked masonry, over the crumbled
fire-brick. In the rotting timbers
And roofless platforms all the free companies
Of windy grasses have root and make seed; wild
buckwheat blooms in the fat
Weather-slacked lime from the bursted barrels.
Two duckhawks darting in the sky of their cliff-hung
nest are the voice of the headland.
Wine-hearted solitude, our mother the wilderness,
Men's failures are often as beautiful as men's
triumphs, but your returnings
Are even more precious than your first presence.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Carmel Point

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses-
How beautiful when we first beheld it,
Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;
No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing,
Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the outcrop rockheads-
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite,
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff.-As for us:
We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

Robinson Jeffers

Contemplation Of The Sword

Reason will not decide at last; the sword will decide.
The sword: an obsolete instrument of bronze or steel,
formerly used to kill men, but here
In the sense of a symbol. The sword: that is: the storms
and counter-storms of general destruction; killing
of men,
Destruction of all goods and materials; massacre, more or
less intentional, of children and women;
Destruction poured down from wings, the air made accomplice,
the innocent air
Perverted into assassin and poisoner.

The sword: that is: treachery and cowardice, incredible
baseness, incredible courage, loyalties, insanities.
The sword: weeping and despair, mass-enslavement,
mass-torture, frustration of all hopes
That starred man's forehead. Tyranny for freedom, horror for
happiness, famine for bread, carrion for children.
Reason will not decide at last, the sword will decide.

Dear God, who are the whole splendor of things and the sacred
stars, but also the cruelty and greed, the treacheries
And vileness, insanities and filth and anguish: now that this
thing comes near us again I am finding it hard
To praise you with a whole heart.
I know what pain is, but pain can shine. I know what death is,
I have sometimes
Longed for it. But cruelty and slavery and degradation,
pestilence, filth, the pitifulness
Of men like hurt little birds and animals . . . if you were
only
Waves beating rock, the wind and the iron-cored earth,
With what a heart I could praise your beauty.
You will not repent, nor cancel life, nor free man from anguish
For many ages to come. You are the one that tortures himself to
discover himself: I am
One that watches you and discovers you, and praises you in little
parables, idyl or tragedy, beautiful
Intolerable God.

The sword: that is:
I have two sons whom I love. They are twins, they were born
in nineteen sixteen, which seemed to us a dark year
Of a great war, and they are now of the age
That war prefers. The first-born is like his mother, he is so
beautiful
That persons I hardly know have stopped me on the street to
speak of the grave beauty of the boy's face.
The second-born has strength for his beauty; when he strips
for swimming the hero shoulders and wrestler loins
Make him seem clothed. The sword: that is: loathsome disfigurements,
blindness, mutilation, locked lips of boys
Too proud to scream.

Reason will not decide at last: the sword will decide.

Robinson Jeffers

Contrast

The world has many seas, Mediterranean, Atlantic, but
here is the shore of the one ocean.
And here the heavy future hangs like a cloud; the
enormous scene; the enormous games preparing
Weigh on the water and strain the rock; the stage is
here, the play is conceived; the players are
not found.

I saw on the Sierras, up the Kaweah valley above the
Moro rock, the mountain redwoods
Like red towers on the slopes of snow; about their
bases grew a bushery of Christmas green,
Firs and pines to be monuments for pilgrimage
In Europe; I remembered the Swiss forests, the dark
robes of Pilatus, no trunk like these there;
But these are underwood; they are only a shrubbery
about the boles of the trees.

Our people are clever and masterful;
They have powers in the mass, they accomplish marvels.
It is possible Time will make them before it
annuls them, but at present
There is not one memorable person, there is not one
mind to stand with the trees, one life with
the mountains.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Fawn's Foster-Mother

The old woman sits on a bench before the door and quarrels
With her meagre pale demoralized daughter.
Once when I passed I found her alone, laughing in the sun
And saying that when she was first married
She lived in the old farmhouse up Garapatas Canyon.
(It is empty now, the roof has fallen
But the log walls hang on the stone foundation; the redwoods
Have all been cut down, the oaks are standing;
The place is now more solitary than ever before.)
"When I was nursing my second baby
My husband found a day-old fawn hid in a fern-brake
And brought it; I put its mouth to the breast
Rather than let it starve, I had milk enough for three babies.
Hey how it sucked, the little nuzzler,
Digging its little hoofs like quills into my stomach.
I had more joy from that than from the others."
Her face is deformed with age, furrowed like a bad road
With market-wagons, mean cares and decay.
She is thrown up to the surface of things, a cell of dry skin
Soon to be shed from the earth's old eye-brows,
I see that once in her spring she lived in the streaming arteries,
The stir of the world, the music of the mountain.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Fire On The Hills

The deer were bounding like blown leaves
Under the smoke in front the roaring wave of the brush-fire;
I thought of the smaller lives that were caught.
Beauty is not always lovely; the fire was beautiful, the terror
Of the deer was beautiful; and when I returned
Down the back slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle
Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,
Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his shoulders
He had come from far off for the good hunting
With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was merciless
Blue, and the hills merciless black,
The sombre-feathered great bird sleepily merciless between them.
I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,
The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better than men.

Robinson Jeffers

Hurt Hawks

I

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,

No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.

He stands under the oak-bush and waits
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom
And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.

He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
The curs of the day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,

The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.

You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him;
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying, remember him.

II

I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk;
but the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that trailed under his talons when
he moved.

We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance.

I gave him the lead gift in the twilight.
What fell was relaxed, Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

Robinson Jeffers

July Fourth By The Ocean

The continent's a tamed ox, with all its mountains,
Powerful and servile; here is for plowland, here is
for park and playground, this helpless
Cataract for power; it lies behind us at heel
All docile between this ocean and the other. If
flood troubles the lowlands, or earthquake
Cracks walls, it is only a slave's blunder or the
natural
Shudder of a new made slave. Therefore we happy
masters about the solstice
Light bonfires on the shore and celebrate our power.
The bay's necklaced with fire, the bombs make crystal
fountains in the air, the rockets
Shower swan's-neck over the night water.... I
imagined
The stars drew apart a little as if from troublesome
children, coldly compassionate;
But the ocean neither seemed astonished nor in awe:
If this had been the little sea that Xerxes whipped,
how it would have feared us.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Let Them Alone

If God has been good enough to give you a poet
Then listen to him. But for God's sake let him alone until he is dead;
no prizes, no ceremony,
They kill the man. A poet is one who listens
To nature and his own heart; and if the noise of the world grows up
around him, and if he is tough enough,
He can shake off his enemies, but not his friends.
That is what withered Wordsworth and muffled Tennyson, and would have
killed Keats; that is what makes
Hemingway play the fool and Faulkner forget his art.

Robinson Jeffers

Love The Wild Swan

"I hate my verses, every line, every word.
Oh pale and brittle pencils ever to try
One grass-blade's curve, or the throat of one bird
That clings to twig, ruffled against white sky.
Oh cracked and twilight mirrors ever to catch
One color, one glinting
Hash, of the splendor of things.
Unlucky hunter, Oh bullets of wax,
The lion beauty, the wild-swan wings, the storm of the wings."
--This wild swan of a world is no hunter's game.
Better bullets than yours would miss the white breast
Better mirrors than yours would crack in the flame.
Does it matter whether you hate your . . . self?
At least Love your eyes that can see, your mind that can
Hear the music, the thunder of the wings. Love the wild swan.

Robinson Jeffers

Meditation On Saviors

I
When I considered it too closely, when I wore it like an element
and smelt it like water,
Life is become less lovely, the net nearer than the skin, a
little troublesome, a little terrible.

I pledged myself awhile ago not to seek refuge, neither in death
nor in a walled garden,
In lies nor gated loyalties, nor in the gates of contempt, that
easily lock the world out of doors.

Here on the rock it is great and beautiful, here on the foam-wet
granite sea-fang it is easy to praise
Life and water and the shining stones: but whose cattle are the
herds of the people that one should love them?

If they were yours, then you might take a cattle-breeder's
delight in the herds of the future. Not yours.
Where the power ends let love, before it sours to jealousy.
Leave the joys of government to Caesar.

Who is born when the world wanes, when the brave soul of the
world falls on decay in the flesh increasing
Comes one with a great level mind, sufficient vision, sufficient
blindness, and clemency for love.

This is the breath of rottenness I smelt; from the world
waiting, stalled between storms, decaying a little,
Bitterly afraid to be hurt, but knowing it cannot draw the
savior Caesar but out of the blood-bath.

The apes of Christ lift up their hands to praise love: but
wisdom without love is the present savior,
Power without hatred, mind like a many-bladed machine subduing
the world with deep indifference.

The apes of Christ itch for a sickness they have never known;
words and the little envies will hardly
Measure against that blinding fire behind the tragic eyes they
have never dared to confront.

II
Point Lobos lies over the hollowed water like a humped whale
swimming to shoal; Point Lobos
Was wounded with that fire; the hills at Point Sur endured it;
the palace at Thebes; the hill Calvary.

Out of incestuous love power and then ruin. A man forcing the
imaginings of men,
Possessing with love and power the people: a man defiling his
own household with impious desire.

King Oedipus reeling blinded from the palace doorway, red tears
pouring from the torn pits
Under the forehead; and the young Jew writhing on the domed hill
in the earthquake, against the eclipse

Frightfully uplifted for having turned inward to love the
people: -that root was so sweet O dreadful agonist? -
I saw the same pierced feet, that walked in the same crime to
its expiation; I heard the same cry.

A bad mountain to build your world on. Am I another keeper of
the people, that on my own shore,
On the gray rock, by the grooved mass of the ocean, the
sicknesses I left behind me concern me?

Here where the surf has come incredible ways out of the splendid
west, over the deeps
Light nor life sounds forever; here where enormous sundowns
flower and burn through color to quietness;

Then the ecstasy of the stars is present? As for the people, I
have found my rock, let them find theirs.
Let them lie down at Caesar's feet and be saved; and he in his
time reap their daggers of gratitude.

III

Yet I am the one made pledges against the refuge contempt, that
easily locks the world out of doors.
This people as much as the sea-granite is part of the God from
whom I desire not to be fugitive.

I see them: they are always crying. The shored Pacific makes
perpetual music, and the stone mountains
Their music of silence, the stars blow long pipings of light:
the people are always crying in their hearts.

One need not pity; certainly one must not love. But who has seen
peace, if he should tell them where peace
Lives in the world...they would be powerless to understand; and
he is not willing to be reinvolved.

IV

How should one caught in the stone of his own person dare tell
the people anything but relative to that?
But if a man could hold in his mind all the conditions at once,
of man and woman, of civilized

And barbarous, of sick and well, of happy and under torture, of
living and dead, of human and not
Human, and dimly all the human future: -what should persuade him
to speak? And what could his words change?

The mountain ahead of the world is not forming but fixed. But
the man's words would be fixed also,
Part of that mountain, under equal compulsion; under the same
present compulsion in the iron consistency.

And nobody sees good or evil but out of a brain a hundred
centuries quieted, some desert
Prophet's, a man humped like a camel, gone mad between the mud-
walled village and the mountain sepulchres.

V

Broad wagons before sunrise bring food into the city from the
open farms, and the people are fed.
They import and they consume reality. Before sunrise a hawk in
the desert made them their thoughts.

VI

Here is an anxious people, rank with suppressed
bloodthirstiness. Among the mild and unwarlike
Gautama needed but live greatly and be heard, Confucius needed
but live greatly and be heard:

This people has not outgrown blood-sacrifice, one must writhe on
the high cross to catch at their memories;
The price is known. I have quieted love; for love of the people
I would not do it. For power I would do it.

--But that stands against reason: what is power to a dead man,
dead under torture? --What is power to a man
Living, after the flesh is content? Reason is never a root,
neither of act nor desire.

For power living I would never do it; they're not delightful to
touch, one wants to be separate. For power
After the nerves are put away underground, to lighten the
abstract unborn children toward peace...

A man might have paid anguish indeed. Except he had found the
standing sea-rock that even this last
Temptation breaks on; quieter than death but lovelier; peace
that quiets the desire even of praising it.

VII

Yet look: are they not pitiable? No: if they lived forever they
would be pitiable:
But a huge gift reserved quite overwhelms them at the end; they
are able then to be still and not cry.

And having touched a little of the beauty and seen a little of
the beauty of things, magically grow
Across the funeral fire or the hidden stench of burial
themselves into the beauty they admired,

Themselves into the God, themselves into the sacred steep
unconsciousness they used to mimic
Asleep between lamp's death and dawn, while the last drunkard
stumbled homeward down the dark street.

They are not to be pitied but very fortunate; they need no
savior, salvation comes and takes them by force,
It gathers them into the great kingdoms of dust and stone, the
blown storms, the stream's-end ocean.

With this advantage over their granite grave-marks, of having
realized the petulant human consciousness
Before, and then the greatness, the peace: drunk from both
pitchers: these to be pitied? These not fortunate

But while he lives let each man make his health in his mind, to
love the coast opposite humanity
And so be freed of love, laying it like bread on the waters; it
is worst turned inward, it is best shot farthest.

Love, the mad wine of good and evil, the saint's and murderer's,
the mote in the eye that makes its object
Shine the sun black; the trap in which it is better to catch the
inhuman God than the hunter's own image.

Anonymous submission.

Robinson Jeffers

On Building With Stone

To be an ape in little of the mountain-making mother
Like swarthy Cheops, but my own hands
For only slaves, is a far sweeter toil than to cut
Passions in verse for a sick people.
I'd liefer bed one boulder in the house-wall than be the time's
Archilochus: we name not Homer: who now
Can even imagine the fabulous dawn when bay-leaves (to a blind
Beggar) were not bitter in the teeth?

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Promise Of Peace

The heads of strong old age are beautiful
Beyond all grace of youth. They have strange quiet,
Integrity, health, soundness, to the full
They've dealt with life and been tempered by it.
A young man must not sleep; his years are war,
Civil and foreign but the former's worse;
But the old can breathe in safety now that they are
Forgetting what youth meant, the being perverse,
Running the fool's gauntlet and being cut
By the whips of the five senses. As for me,
If I should wish to live long it were but
To trade those fevers for tranquillity,
Thinking though that's entire and sweet in the grave
How shall the dead taste the deep treasure they have?

Robinson Jeffers

Return

A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again,
It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies,
Let the rich life run to the roots again.
I will go to the lovely Sur Rivers
And dip my arms in them up to the shoulders.
I will find my accounting where the alder leaf quivers
In the ocean wind over the river boulders.
I will touch things and things and no more thoughts,
That breed like mouthless May-flies darkening the sky,
The insect clouds that blind our passionate hawks
So that they cannot strike, hardly can fly.
Things are the hawk's food and noble is the mountain, Oh noble
Pico Blanco, steep sea-wave of marble.

Robinson Jeffers

Rock And Hawk

Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts
Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall
On the headland, where the seawind
Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signatored
By ages of storms: on its peak
A falcon has perched.

I think here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness;

Life with calm death; the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud.

Robinson Jeffers

Shine, Perishing Republic

While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening
to empire
And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the
mass hardens,
I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots
to make earth.
Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness and deca-
dence; and home to the mother.

You making haste haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is good, be it stub-
bornly long or suddenly
A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains:
shine, perishing republic.
But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thick-
ening center; corruption
Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there
are left the mountains.
And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant,
insufferable master.
There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught--they say--
God, when he walked on earth.

Robinson Jeffers

Shiva

There is a hawk that is picking the birds out of our sky,
She killed the pigeons of peace and security,
She has taken honesty and confidence from nations and men,
She is hunting the lonely heron of liberty.
She loads the arts with nonsense, she is very cunning
Science with dreams and the state with powers to catch them at last.
Nothing will escape her at last, flying nor running.
This is the hawk that picks out the star's eyes.
This is the only hunter that will ever catch the wild swan;
The prey she will take last is the wild white swan of the beauty of things.
Then she will be alone, pure destruction, achieved and supreme,
Empty darkness under the death-tent wings.
She will build a nest of the swan's bones and hatch a new brood,
Hang new heavens with new birds, all be renewed.

Robinson Jeffers

Sign-Post

Civilized, crying: how to be human again; this will tell you how.
Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity,
Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,
Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity
Make your veins cold; look at the silent stars, let your eyes
Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.
Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;
Things are the God; you will love God and not in vain,
For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature. At length
You will look back along the star's rays and see that even
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.
Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of strength
And sickness; but now you are free, even to be human,
But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

So Many Blood-Lakes

We have now won two world-wars, neither of which concerned us, we were slipped in. We have levelled the powers Of Europe, that were the powers of the world, into rubble and dependence. We have won two wars and a third is comming.

This one--will not be so easy. We were at ease while the powers of the world were split into factions: we've changed that. We have enjoyed fine dreams; we have dreamed of unifying the world; we are unifying it--against us.

Two wars, and they breed a third. Now gaurd the beaches, watch the north, trust not the dawns. Probe every cloud. Build power. Fortress America may yet for a long time stand, between the east and the west, like Byzantium.

--As for me: laugh at me. I agree with you. It is a foolish business to see the future and screech at it. One should watch and not speak. And patriotism has run the world through so many blood-lakes: and we always fall in.

Robinson Jeffers

Summer Holiday

When the sun shouts and people abound
One thinks there were the ages of stone and the age of
bronze
And the iron age; iron the unstable metal;
Steel made of iron, unstable as his mother; the tow-
ered-up cities
Will be stains of rust on mounds of plaster.
Roots will not pierce the heaps for a time, kind rains
will cure them,
Then nothing will remain of the iron age
And all these people but a thigh-bone or so, a poem
Stuck in the world's thought, splinters of glass
In the rubbish dumps, a concrete dam far off in the
mountain...

Robinson Jeffers

The Answer

Then what is the answer?- Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know that great civilizations have broken down into violence,
and their tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose
the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted
and not wish for evil; and not be duped
By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will
not be fulfilled.
To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear
the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars
and his history... for contemplation or in fact...
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty
of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
or drown in despair when his days darken.

Robinson Jeffers

The Bird With The Dark Plumes

The bird with the dark plumes in my blood,
That never for one moment however I patched my truces
Consented to make peace with the people,
It is pitiful now to watch her pleasure In a breath of
 tempest
Breaking the sad promise of spring.
Are these that morose hawk's wings, vaulting, a mere
 mad swallow's,
The snow-shed peak, the violent precipice?
Poor outlaw that would not value their praise do you
 prize their blame?
"Their liking" she said "was a long creance,
But let them be kind enough to hate me that opens the
 sky."
It is almost as foolish my poor falcon
To want hatred as to want love; and harder to win.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Broken Balance

I. Reference to a Passage in Plutarch's Life of Sulla

The people buying and selling, consuming pleasures, talking in the archways,
Were all suddenly struck quiet
And ran from under stone to look up at the sky: so shrill and mournful,
So fierce and final, a brazen
Pealing of trumpets high up in the air, in the summer blue over Tuscany.
They marvelled; the soothsayers answered:
"Although the Gods are little troubled toward men, at the end of each period
A sign is declared in heaven
Indicating new times, new customs, a changed people; the Romans
Rule, and Etruria is finished;
A wise mariner will trim the sails to the wind."

I heard yesterday

So shrill and mournful a trumpet-blast,
It was hard to be wise.... You must eat change and endure; not be much troubled
For the people; they will have their happiness.
When the republic grows too heavy to endure, then Caesar will carry It;
When life grows hateful, there's power ...

II. To the Children

Power's good; life is not always good but power's good.
So you must think when abundance
Makes pawns of people and all the loaves are one dough.
The steep singleness of passion
Dies; they will say, "What was that?" but the power triumphs.
Loveliness will live under glass
And beauty will go savage in the secret mountains.
There is beauty in power also.
You children must widen your minds' eyes to take mountains
Instead of faces, and millions
Instead of persons; not to hate life; and massed power
After the lone hawk's dead.

III

That light blood-loving weasel, a tongue of yellow
Fire licking the sides of the gray stones,
Has a more passionate and more pure heart
In the snake-slender flanks than man can imagine;
But he is betrayed by his own courage,
The man who kills him is like a cloud hiding a star.

Then praise the jewel-eyed hawk and the tall blue heron;
The black cormorants that fatten their sea-rock
With shining slime; even that ruiner of anthills
The red-shafted woodpecker flying,
A white star between blood-color wing-clouds,
Across the glades of the wood and the green lakes of shade.

These live their felt natures; they know their norm
And live it to the brim; they understand life.
While men moulding themselves to the anthill have choked
Their natures until the souls the in them;
They have sold themselves for toys and protection:
No, but consider awhile: what else? Men sold for toys.

Uneasy and fractional people, having no center
But in the eyes and mouths that surround them,
Having no function but to serve and support
Civilization, the enemy of man,
No wonder they live insanely, and desire
With their tongues, progress; with their eyes, pleasure; with their hearts, death.

Their ancestors were good hunters, good herdsmen and swordsman,
But now the world is turned upside down;
The good do evil, the hope's in criminals; in vice
That dissolves the cities and war to destroy them.
Through wars and corruptions the house will fall.
Mourn whom it falls on. Be glad: the house is mined, it will fall.

IV

Rain, hail and brutal sun, the plow in the roots,
The pitiless pruning-iron in the branches,
Strengthen the vines, they are all feeding friends
Or powerless foes until the grapes purple.
But when you have ripened your berries it is time to begin to perish.

The world sickens with change, rain becomes poison,
The earth is a pit, it is time to perish.
The vines are fey, the very kindness of nature
Corrupts what her cruelty before strengthened.
When you stand on the peak of time it is time to begin to perish.

Reach down the long morbid roots that forget the plow,
Discover the depths; let the long pale tendrils
Spend all to discover the sky, now nothing is good
But only the steel mirrors of discovery . . .
And the beautiful enormous dawns of time, after we perish.

V

Mourning the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth
Under men's hands and their minds,
The beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city,
The spreading fungus, the slime-threads
And spores; my own coast's obscene future: I remember the farther
Future, and the last man dying
Without succession under the confident eyes of the stars.
It was only a moment's accident,
The race that plagued us; the world resumes the old lonely immortal

Splendor; from here I can even
Perceive that that snuffed candle had something . . . a fantastic virtue,
A faint and unshapely pathos . . .
So death will flatter them at last: what, even the bald ape's by-shot
Was moderately admirable?

VI. Palinode

All summer neither rain nor wave washes the cormorants'
Perch, and their droppings have painted it shining white.
If the excrement of fish-eaters makes the brown rock a snow-mountain
At noon, a rose in the morning, a beacon at moonrise
On the black water: it is barely possible that even men's present
Lives are something; their arts and sciences (by moonlight)
Not wholly ridiculous, nor their cities merely an offense.

VII

Under my windows, between the road and the sea-cliff, bitter wild grass
Stands narrowed between the people and the storm.
The ocean winter after winter gnaws at its earth, the wheels and the feet
Summer after summer encroach and destroy.
Stubborn green life, for the cliff-eater I cannot comfort you, ignorant which color,
Gray-blue or pale-green, will please the late stars;
But laugh at the other, your seed shall enjoy wonderful vengeance and suck
The arteries and walk in triumph on the faces.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Deer Lay Down Their Bones

I followed the narrow cliffside trail half way up the mountain
Above the deep river-canyon. There was a little cataract crossed the path,
flinging itself
Over tree roots and rocks, shaking the jeweled fern-fronds, bright bubbling
water
Pure from the mountain, but a bad smell came up. Wondering at it I clam-
bered down the steep stream
Some forty feet, and found in the midst of bush-oak and laurel,
Hung like a bird's nest on the precipice brink a small hidden clearing,
Grass and a shallow pool. But all about there were bones lying in the grass,
clean bones and stinking bones,
Antlers and bones: I understood that the place was a refuge for wounded
deer; there are so many
Hurt ones escape the hunters and limp away to lie hidden; here they have
water for the awful thirst
And peace to die in; dense green laurel and grim cliff

Make sanctuary, and a sweet wind blows upward from the deep gorge.--I
wish my bones were with theirs.
But that's a foolish thing to confess, and a little cowardly. We know that life
Is on the whole quite equally good and bad, mostly gray neutral, and can
be endured
To the dim end, no matter what magic of grass, water and precipice, and
pain of wounds,
Makes death look dear. We have been given life and have used it--not a
great gift perhaps--but in honesty
Should use it all. Mine's empty since my love died--Empty? The flame-
haired grandchild with great blue eyes
That look like hers?--What can I do for the child? I gaze at her and wonder
what sort of man
In the fall of the world . . . I am growing old, that is the trouble. My chil-
dren and little grandchildren
Will find their way, and why should I wait ten years yet, having lived sixty-
seven, ten years more or less,
Before I crawl out on a ledge of rock and die snapping, like a wolf
Who has lost his mate?--I am bound by my own thirty-year-old decision:
who drinks the wine
Should take the dregs; even in the bitter lees and sediment
New discovery may lie. The deer in that beautiful place lay down their
bones: I must wear mine.

Robinson Jeffers

The Epic Stars

The heroic stars spending themselves,
Coining their very flesh into bullets for the lost battle,
They must burn out at length like used candles;
And Mother Night will weep in her triumph, taking home her heroes.
There is the stuff for an epic poem--
This magnificent raid at the heart of darkness, this lost battle--
We don't know enough, we'll never know.
Oh happy Homer, taking the stars and the Gods for granted.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Excesses Of God

Is it not by his high superfluosness we know
Our God? For to be equal a need
Is natural, animal, mineral: but to fling
Rainbows over the rain
And beauty above the moon, and secret rainbows
On the domes of deep sea-shells,
And make the necessary embrace of breeding
Beautiful also as fire,
Not even the weeds to multiply without blossom
Nor the birds without music:
There is the great humaneness at the heart of things,
The extravagant kindness, the fountain
Humanity can understand, and would flow likewise
If power and desire were perch-mates.

Anonymous submission.

Robinson Jeffers

The Eye

The Atlantic is a stormy moat; and the Mediterranean,
The blue pool in the old garden,
More than five thousand years has drunk sacrifice
Of ships and blood, and shines in the sun; but here the Pacific--
Our ships, planes, wars are perfectly irrelevant.
Neither our present blood-feud with the brave dwarfs
Nor any future world-quarrel of westering
And eastering man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, clash of
faiths--
Is a speck of dust on the great scale-pan.
Here from this mountain shore, headland beyond stormy headland
plunging like dolphins through the blue sea-smoke
Into pale sea--look west at the hill of water: it is half the
planet:
this dome, this half-globe, this bulging
Eyeball of water, arched over to Asia,
Australia and white Antartica: those are the eyelids that never
close;
this is the staring unsleeping
Eye of the earth; and what it watches is not our wars.

Robinson Jeffers

The Great Explosion

The universe expands and contracts like a great heart.
It is expanding, the farthest nebulae
Rush with the speed of light into empty space.
It will contract, the immense navies of stars and galaxies,
dust clouds and nebulae
Are recalled home, they crush against each other in one
harbor, they stick in one lump
And then explode it, nothing can hold them down; there is no
way to express that explosion; all that exists
Roars into flame, the tortured fragments rush away from each
other into all the sky, new universes
Jewel the black breast of night; and far off the outer nebulae
like charging spearmen again
Invade emptiness.

No wonder we are so fascinated with
fireworks
And our huge bombs: it is a kind of homesickness perhaps for
the howling fireblast that we were born from.

But the whole sum of the energies
That made and contain the giant atom survives. It will
gather again and pile up, the power and the glory--
And no doubt it will burst again; diastole and systole: the
whole universe beats like a heart.
Peace in our time was never one of God's promises; but back
and forth, live and die, burn and be damned,
The great heart beating, pumping into our arteries His
terrible life.

He is beautiful beyond belief.
And we, God's apes--or tragic children--share in the beauty.
We see it above our torment, that's what life's for.
He is no God of love, no justice of a little city like Dante's
Florence, no anthropoid God
Making commandments,: this is the God who does not care
and will never cease. Look at the seas there
Flashing against this rock in the darkness--look at the
tide-stream stars--and the fall of nations--and dawn
Wandering with wet white feet down the Caramel Valley to
meet the sea. These are real and we see their beauty.
The great explosion is probably only a metaphor--I know not
--of faceless violence, the root of all things.

Robinson Jeffers

The Machine

The little biplane that has the river-meadow for landing-field
And carries passengers brief rides,
Buzzed overhead on the tender blue above the orange of sundown.
Below it five troubled night-herons
Turned short over the shore from its course, four east, one northward.
 Beyond them
Swam the new moon in amber.
I don't know why, but lately the forms of things appear to me with time
One of their visible dimensions.
The thread brightness of the bent moon appeared enormous, unnumbered
Ages of years; the night-herons
Their natural size, they have croaked over the shore in the hush at sundown
Much longer than human language
Has fumbled with the air: but the plane having no past but a certain future,
Insect in size as in form,
Was also accepted, all these forms of power placed without preference
In the grave arrangement of the evening.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Maid's Thought

Why listen, even the water is sobbing for something.
The west wind is dead, the waves
Forget to hate the cliff, in the upland canyons
Whole hillsides burst aglow
With golden broom. Dear how it rained last month,
And every pool was rimmed
With sulphury pollen dust of the wakening pines.
Now tall and slender suddenly
The stalks of purple iris blaze by the brooks,
The pencilled ones on the hill;
This deerweed shivers with gold, the white globe-tulips
Blow out their silky bubbles,
But in the next glen bronze-bells nod, the does
Scalded by some hot longing
Can hardly set their pointed hoofs to expect
Love but they crush a flower;
Shells pair on the rock, birds mate, the moths fly double.
O it Is time for us now
Mouth kindling mouth to entangle our maiden bodies
To make that burning flower.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Purse-Seine

Our sardine fishermen work at night in the dark
of the moon; daylight or moonlight
They could not tell where to spread the net,
unable to see the phosphorescence of the
shoals of fish.
They work northward from Monterey, coasting
Santa Cruz; off New Year's Point or off
Pigeon Point
The look-out man will see some lakes of milk-color
light on the sea's night-purple; he points,
and the helmsman
Turns the dark prow, the motorboat circles the
gleaming shoal and drifts out her seine-net.
They close the circle
And purse the bottom of the net, then with great
labor haul it in.

I cannot tell you
How beautiful the scene is, and a little terrible,
then, when the crowded fish
Know they are caught, and wildly beat from one wall
to the other of their closing destiny the
phosphorescent
Water to a pool of flame, each beautiful slender body
sheeted with flame, like a live rocket
A comet's tail wake of clear yellow flame; while outside
the narrowing
Floats and cordage of the net great sea-lions come up
to watch, sighing in the dark; the vast walls
of night
Stand erect to the stars.

Lately I was looking from a night mountain-top
On a wide city, the colored splendor, galaxies of light:
how could I help but recall the seine-net
Gathering the luminous fish? I cannot tell you how
beautiful the city appeared, and a little terrible.
I thought, We have geared the machines and locked all together
into inter-dependence; we have built the great cities; now
There is no escape. We have gathered vast populations incapable
of free survival, insulated
From the strong earth, each person in himself helpless, on all
dependent. The circle is closed, and the net
Is being hauled in. They hardly feel the cords drawing, yet
they shine already. The inevitable mass-disasters
Will not come in our time nor in our children's, but we
and our children
Must watch the net draw narrower, government take all
powers--or revolution, and the new government
Take more than all, add to kept bodies kept souls--or anarchy,
the mass-disasters.

These things are Progress;

Do you marvel our verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps
its reason? Or it lets go, lets the mood flow
In the manner of the recent young men into mere hysteria,
splintered gleams, crackled laughter. But they are
quite wrong.
There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew
that cultures decay, and life's end is death.

Robinson Jeffers

The Silent Shepherds

What's the best life for a man?
--Never to have been born, sings the chorus, and the next best
Is to die young. I saw the Sybil at Cumae
Hung in her cage over the public street--
What do you want, Sybil? I want to die.
Apothanein Thelo. Apothanein Thelo. Apothanein Thelo.
You have got your wish. But I meant life, not death.
What's the best life for a man? To ride in the wind. To ride
horses and herd cattle
In solitary places above the ocean on the beautiful mountain,
and come home hungry in the evening
And eat and sleep. He will live in the wild wind and quick rain,
he will not ruin his eyes with reading,
Nor think too much.

However, we must have philosophers.

I will have shepherds for my philosophers,
Tall dreary men lying on the hills all night
Watching the stars, let their dogs watch the sheep. And I'll have
lunatics
For my poets, strolling from farm to farm, wild liars distorting
The country news into supernaturalism--
For all men to such minds are devils or gods--and that increases
Man's dignity, man's importance, necessary lies
Best told by fools.

I will have no lawyers nor constables
Each man guard his own goods: there will be manslaughter,
But no more wars, no more mass-sacrifice. Nor I'll have no doctors,
Except old women gathering herbs on the mountain,
Let each have her sack of opium to ease the death-pains.

That would be a good world, free and out-doors.
But the vast hungry spirit of the time
Cries to his chosen that there is nothing good
Except discovery, experiment and experience and discovery: To look
truth in the eyes,
To strip truth naked, let our dogs do our living for us
But man discover.

It is a fine ambition,
But the wrong tools. Science and mathematics
Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it,
They never touch it: consider what an explosion
Would rock the bones of men into little white fragments and unsky
the world
If any mind for a moment touch truth.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Stars Go Over The Lonely Ocean

Unhappy about some far off things
That are not my affair, wandering
Along the coast and up the lean ridges,
I saw in the evening
The stars go over the lonely ocean,
And a black-maned wild boar
Plowing with his snout on Mal Paso Mountain.

The old monster snuffled, "Here are sweet roots,
Fat grubs, slick beetles and sprouted acorns.
The best nation in Europe has fallen,
And that is Finland,
But the stars go over the lonely ocean,"
The old black-bristled boar,
Tearing the sod on Mal Paso Mountain.

"The world's in a bad way, my man,
And bound to be worse before it mends;
Better lie up in the mountain here
Four or five centuries,
While the stars go over the lonely ocean,"
Said the old father of wild pigs,
Plowing the fallow on Mal Paso Mountain.

"Keep clear of the dupes that talk democracy
And the dogs that talk revolution,
Drunk with talk, liars and believers.
I believe in my tusks.
Long live freedom and damn the ideologies,"
Said the gamey black-maned boar
Tusking the turf on Mal Paso Mountain.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

The Summit Redwood

Only stand high a long enough time your lightning
will come; that is what blunts the peaks of
redwoods;
But this old tower of life on the hilltop has taken
it more than twice a century, this knows in
every
Cell the salty and the burning taste, the shudder
and the voice.

 The fire from heaven; it has
felt the earth's too
Roaring up hill in autumn, thorned oak-leaves tossing
their bright ruin to the bitter laurel-leaves,
and all
Its under-forest has died and died, and lives to be
burnt; the redwood has lived. Though the fire
entered,
It cored the trunk while the sapwood increased. The
trunk is a tower, the bole of the trunk is a
black cavern,
The mast of the trunk with its green boughs the
mountain stars are strained through
Is like the helmet-spike on the highest head of an
army; black on lit blue or hidden in cloud
It is like the hill's finger in heaven. And when the
cloud hides it, though in barren summer, the
boughs
Make their own rain.

 Old Escobar had a cunning trick
when he stole beef. He and his grandsons
Would drive the cow up here to a starlight death and
hoist the carcass into the tree's hollow,
Then let them search his cabin he could smile for
pleasure, to think of his meat hanging secure
Exalted over the earth and the ocean, a theft like a
star, secret against the supreme sky.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Time Of Disturbance

The best is, in war or faction or ordinary vindictive
life, not to take sides.
Leave it for children, and the emotional rabble of the
streets, to back their horse or support a brawler.

But if you are forced into it: remember that good and
evil are as common as air, and like air shared
By the panting belligerents; the moral indignation that
hoarsens orators is mostly a fool.

Hold your nose and compromise; keep a cold mind. Fight,
if needs must; hate no one. Do as God does,
Or the tragic poets: they crush their man without hating
him, their Lear or Hitler, and often save without
love.

As for these quarrels, they are like the moon, recurrent
and fantastic. They have their beauty but night's
is better.

It is better to be silent than make a noise. It is better
to strike dead than strike often. It is better not
to strike.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

To A Young Artist

It is good for strength not to be merciful
To its own weakness, good for the deep urn to run
over, good to explore
The peaks and the deeps, who can endure it,
Good to be hurt, who can be healed afterward: but
you that have whetted consciousness
Too bitter an edge, too keenly daring,
So that the color of a leaf can make you tremble
and your own thoughts like harriers
Tear the live mind: were your bones mountains,
Your blood rivers to endure it? and all that labor
of discipline labors to death.
Delight is exquisite, pain is more present;
You have sold the armor, you have bought shining
with burning, one should be stronger than
strength
To fight baresark in the stabbing field
In the rage of the stars: I tell you unconsciousness
is the treasure, the tower, the fortress;
Referred to that one may live anything;
The temple and the tower: poor dancer on the flints
and shards in the temple porches, turn home.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

To The Stone-Cutters

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems.

Robinson Jeffers

Tor House

If you should look for this place after a handful
of lifetimes:
Perhaps of my planted forest a few
May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast
cypress, haggard
With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils.
Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers
had the art
To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant.
But if you should look in your idleness after ten
thousand years:
It is the granite knoll on the granite
And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth
of the Carmel
River-valley, these four will remain
In the change of names. You will know it by the wild
sea-fragrance of wind
Though the ocean may have climbed or retired a little;
You will know it by the valley inland that our sun
and our moon were born from
Before the poles changed; and Orion in December
Evenings was strung in the throat of the valley like
a lamp-lighted bridge.
Come in the morning you will see white gulls
Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon
Their dance-companion, a ghost walking
By daylight, but wider and whiter than any bird in
the world.
My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably
Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not
dancing on wind
With the mad wings and the day moon.

Submitted by Holt

Robinson Jeffers

Vulture

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling
 high up in heaven,
And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit
 narrowing,
 I understood then
That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the flight-
 feathers
Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer.
I could see the naked red head between the great wings
Bear downward staring. I said, "My dear bird, we are wasting time
 here.
These old bones will still work; they are not for you." But how
 beautiful
 he looked, gliding down
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in the
 sea-light
 over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that beak
 and
 become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes--
What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a life
 after death.

Robinson Jeffers