

## ÉCHANTILLON DE POÈMES DE ROBINSON JEFFERS

### NATURAL MUSIC

(1924)

The old voice of the ocean, the bird-chatter of little rivers,  
    (Winter has given them gold for silver  
To stain their water and bladed green for brown to line their banks)  
    From different throats intone one language.

So I believe if we were strong enough to listen without  
    Divisions of desire and terror  
To the storm of the sick nations, the rage of the hunger-smitten cities,  
    Those voices also would be found  
Clean as a child's; or like some girl's breathing who dances alone  
    By the ocean-shore, dreaming of lovers.

### DIVINELY SUPERFLUOUS BEAUTY

(1924)

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,  
    Over and under the ocean . . .  
    Divinely superfluous beauty  
Rules the games, presides over destinies, makes trees grow  
    And hills tower, waves fall.  
    The incredible beauty of joy  
Stars with fire the joining of lips, O let our loves too  
    Be joined, there is not a maiden  
    Burns and thirsts for love  
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals while the wings  
    Weave like a web in the air  
    Divinely superfluous beauty.

### TO THE STONE-CUTTERS

(1924)

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.

TO THE HOUSE  
(1924)

I am heaping the bones of the old mother  
To build us a hold against the host of the air;  
Granite the blood-heat of her youth  
Held molten in hot darkness against the heart  
Hardened to temper under the feet  
Of the ocean cavalry that are maned with snow  
And march from the remotest west.

This is the primitive rock, here in the wet  
Quarry under the shadow of waves  
Whose hollows mouthed the dawn; little house each stone  
Baptized from that abysmal font  
The sea and the secret earth gave bonds to affirm you.

BIRDS  
(1925)

The fierce musical cries of a couple of sparrowhawks hunting on the headland,  
Hovering and darting, their heads northwestward,  
Prick like silver arrows shot through a curtain the noise of the ocean  
Trampling its granite; their red backs gleam  
Under my window around the stone corners; nothing gracefuller, nothing  
Nimble in the wind. Westward the wave-gleaners,  
The old gray sea-going gulls are gathered together, the north-west wind wakening  
Their wings to the wild spirals of the wind-dance.  
Fresh as the air, salt as the foam, play birds in the bright wind, fly falcons  
Forgetting the oak and the pinewood, come gulls  
From the Carmel sands and the sands at the river-mouth, from Lobos and out of the  
limitless  
Power of the mass of the sea, for a poem  
Needs multitude, multitudes of thoughts, all fierce, all flesh-eaters, musically clamorous  
Bright hawks that hover and dart headlong, and ungainly  
Gray hungers fledged with desire of transgression, salt slimed beaks, from the sharp  
Rock-shores of the world and the secret waters.

SUMMER HOLIDAY  
(1925)

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 towered-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...

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC  
(1925)

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 decadence; and home  
to the mother.

You making haste haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is good, be it stubbornly 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 thickening 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.

BOATS IN A FOG  
(1925)

Sports and gallantries, the stage, the arts, the antics of dancers,  
The exuberant voices of music,  
Have charm for children but lack nobility; it is bitter earnestness  
That makes beauty; the mind  
Knows, grown adult. A sudden fog-drift muffled the ocean,  
A throbbing of engines moved in it,  
At length, a stone's throw out, between the rocks and the vapor,  
One by one moved shadows  
Out of the mystery, shadows, fishing-boats, trailing each other  
Following the cliff for guidance,  
Holding a difficult path between the peril of the sea-fog  
And the foam on the shore granite.  
One by one, trailing their leader, six crept by me,  
Out of the vapor and into it,  
The throb of their engines subdued by the fog, patient and cautious,  
Coasting all round the peninsula  
Back to the buoys in Monterey harbor. A flight of pelicans  
Is nothing lovelier to look at;  
The flight of the planets is nothing nobler; all the arts lose virtue  
Against the essential reality  
Of creatures going about their business among the equally  
Earnest elements of nature.

TOR HOUSE  
(1928)

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.

THE PLACE FOR NO STORY  
(1932)

The coast hills at Sovranes Creek:  
No trees, but dark scant pasture drawn thin  
Over rock shaped like flame;  
The old ocean at the land's foot, the vast  
Gray extension beyond the long white violence;  
A herd of cows and the bull  
Far distant, hardly apparent up the dark slope;  
And the gray air haunted with hawks:  
This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen.

No imaginable  
Human presence here could do anything  
But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion.

FIRE ON THE HILLS  
(1932)

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.

RETURN  
(1935)

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.

LOVE THE WILD SWAN  
(1935)

"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.

THE DAY IS A POEM  
(September 19, 1939)

This morning Hitler spoke in Danzig, we heard his voice.  
    A man of genius: that is, of amazing  
Ability, courage, devotion, cored on a sick child's soul,  
    Heard clearly through the dog-wrath, a sick child  
Wailing in Danzig; invoking destruction and wailing at it.

    Here, the day was extremely hot; about noon  
A south wind like a blast from hell's mouth spilled a slight rain  
    On the parched land, and at five a light earthquake  
Danced the house, no harm done. To-night I have been amusing myself  
    Watching the blood-red moon droop slowly  
Into black sea through bursts of dry lightning and distant thunder.

    Well: the day is a poem: but too much  
Like one of Jeffers's, crusted with blood and barbaric omens,  
    Painful to excess, inhuman as a hawk's cry.

PRESCRIPTION OF PAINFUL ENDS  
(1939)

Lucretius felt the change of the world in his time, the great republic riding to the height  
Whence every road leads downward ; Plato in his time watched Athens  
Dance the down path.

The future is a misted landscape, no man sees clearly, but at  
cyclic turns

There is a change felt in the rhythm of events, as when an exhausted horse  
falters and recovers, then the rhythm of the running hoofbeats is changed : he will run  
miles yet,

But he must fall : we have felt it again in our own life time, slip, shift and speed-up  
In the gallop of the world ; and now, perceive that, come peace or war, the progress of  
Europe and America

Becomes a long process of deterioration – starred with famous Byzantiums and  
Alexandrias,  
Surely – but downward.

One desires at such times

To gather the insights of the age summit against future loss, against the narrowing mind  
and the tyrants,

The pedants, the mystagogues, the barbarians, one builds poems for treasuries, time-  
conscious poems : Lucretius

Sings his great theory of natural origins and of wise conduct ; Plato smiling carves dreams,  
bright cells

Of incorruptible wax to hive the greek honey.

Our own time, much greater and far less fortunate,

Has acids for honey, and for fine dreams

The immense vulgarities of misapplied science and decaying Christianity : therefore, one  
christens each poem, in dutiful

Hope of burning at least the top layer of the time's uncleanness, from the acid-bottle.

BE ANGRY AT THE SUN  
(1941)

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.

THE SIRENS  
(1941)

Perhaps we desire death: or why is poison so sweet ?  
Why do the little Sirens  
Make kindlier music, for a man caught in the net of the world  
Between news-cast and work-desk,-  
The little chirping Sirens, alcohol, amusement, opiates,  
And carefully sterilized lust,-  
Than the angels of life? Really it is rather strange, for the angels  
Have all the power on their side.  
All the importance:- men turn away from them, preferring their own  
Vulgar inventions, the little  
Trivial Sirens. Here is another sign that the age needs renewal.



THE STARS GO OVER THE LONELY OCEAN  
(1941 ?)

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.

THEIR BEAUTY HAS MORE MEANING  
(1947)

Yesterday morning enormous the moon hung low on the ocean,  
Round and yellow-rose in the glow of dawn ;  
The night-herons flapping home wore dawn on their wings. Today  
Black is the ocean, black and sulphur the sky,  
And white seas leap. I honestly do not know which day is more beautiful.

I know that tomorrow or next year or in twenty years  
I shall not see these things—and it does not matter, it does not hurt ;  
They will be here. And when the whole human race  
Has been like me rubbed out, they will still be here: storms, moon and ocean,  
Dawn and the birds. And I say this: their beauty has more meaning  
Than the whole human race and the race of birds.

CASSANDRA  
(1948)

The mad girl with the staring eyes and long white fingers  
Hooked in the stones of the wall,  
The storm-wrack hair and screeching mouth: does it matter, Cassandra,  
Whether the people believe  
Your bitter fountain? Truly men hate the truth, they'd liefer  
Meet a tiger on the road.

Therefore the poets honey their truth with lying; but religion—  
Vendors and political men  
Pour from the barrel, new lies on the old, and are praised for kind  
Wisdom. Poor bitch be wise.  
No: you'll still mumble in a corner a crust of truth, to men  
And gods disgusting—you and I, Cassandra.

WE ARE THOSE PEOPLE  
(1948)

I have abhorred the wars and despised the liars, laughed at the frightened  
And forecast victory; never one moment's doubt.  
But now not far, over the backs of some crawling years, the next  
Great war's column of dust and fire writhes  
Up the sides of the sky : it becomes clear that we too may suffer  
What others have, the brutal horror of defeat—  
Or if not in the next, then in the next—therefore watch Germany  
And read the future. We wish, of course, that our women  
Would die like biting rats in the cellars, our men like wolves on the mountain :  
It will not be so. Our men will curse, cringe, obey ;  
Our women uncover themselves to the grinning victors for bits of chocolate.

CARMEL POINT  
(1954)

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.

VULTURE  
(1963)

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.