

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.

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 mercy.

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.

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.

Ave Ceasar

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

