

ROBINSON JEFFERS

THE BROADSTONE

near Finvoy, County Antrim

We climbed by the old quarries to the wide highland of heath,
On the slope of a swale a giant dolmen,
Three heavy basalt pillars upholding the enormous slab,
Towers and abides as if time were nothing.
The hard stones are hardly dusted with lichen in nobody knows
What ages of autumns in this high solitude
Since a recordless tribe of an unknown race lifted them up
To be the availing hero's memorial,
And temple of his power. They gathered their slighter dead from the biting
Winds of time in his lee, the wide moor
About him is swollen with barrows and breaks upon many stones,
Lean gray guardians of old urned ashes,
In waves on waves of purple heather and blithe spray of its bells.
Here lies the hero, more than half God,
And nobody knows his name nor his race, in the bee-bright necropolis,
With the stone circle and his tribe around him.
Sometimes perhaps (but who'd confess it?) in soft adolescence
We used to wonder at the world, and have wished
To hear some final harmony resolve the discords of life?
—Here they are all perfectly resolved.

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 motor-boat 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 interdependence; 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.

THE BEAUTY OF THINGS

To feel and speak the astonishing beauty of things—earth, stone and water,
Beast, man and woman, sun, moon and stars—
The blood-shot beauty of human nature, its thoughts, frenzies and passions,
And unhuman nature its towering reality—
For man's half dream; man, you might say, is nature dreaming, but rock
And water and sky are constant—to feel
Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the natural
Beauty, is the sole business of poetry.
The rest's diversion: those holy or noble sentiments, the intricate ideas,
The love, lust, longing; reasons, but not the reason.

DANIEL TOBIN:

DUSK, EMPIRE

A red-tailed hawk in a coat of folded wings
 perches on the peak of my neighbor's roof,
 in its talons the clasped prey, some mammal
 or other—some pest, one should be glad
has met its master, though it's bad form
 to say so, even if this most majestic gauge
 of power clarifies the wider grip of things.

Another neighbor now comes to the fence,
 he appears on reconnaissance for a closer look,
 his black binoculars refracting the late light
 of fall he's seeing through, as if he were
surveying some enemy hidden in desert hills,
 or storming in formation along a newsreel
 from our unlost past. The bird cares nothing

for our curiosity, or is it our wonder as one
 angles his phone to capture that profile's
 utter watchfulness, this strayed herald
 from altogether elsewhere, suddenly gone—
while the cat patrols his usual border,
 and jays commence their bottlerocket screeches,
 and under its eave a pigeon's plaintiff *mur mur*
sounds like someone with a hand over his mouth.

A GREEN ROAD IN CLAIRE

The Burren Way

Homesick for more than home, here, astride the sea's genius,
I long to dissolve in a limestone landscape—
These terraced beds imprinted with grikes, the pillowed clints
Interleaved with hollows where for eons rainwater's
Patient nibs scribed the chronicles of absence into karst,
And still do—lines plumbing sideways underground,
Forming a web of secret caves like halls in a dream house
I dreamed of in my parents' house long ago.
I cannot go there, but follow the tracks' soft laneway out
Past stile and waymarking deeper into *boireann*,
The "Place of Rocks," ocean's crushed shells and skeletons formed
To a horizon risen from the ancient sea.
"Neither tree to hang someone, nor soil enough to bury him,"
Cromwell lamented, having reached this graven edge,
Though had he looked, he'd have seen graves enough: tombs, raths
Recalling playthings in a land of make believe.
Now this lost Famine village still deserted and brooding
Where a surface river tumbles from the shale,
Its roofless walls a thriving quarter of dens and fuchsia.
My green road itself is like a path through loss
Where Famine roads splintered, directionless, to nowhere,
For the hungry their work a Relief without relief,
While underneath me it flows on—water's flawless love
Honing the inner spaces, invisibly constantly,
So along the outer faults the barren world flourishes—
Cinquefoil, silverweed, cranebill, gentian, orchid,
Saxofrage splitting the rocks' dappled stencils of bone.
Rockroses burst beside the ephemeral lakes.
It's not all death, I think, this double cemetery of earth
And thought with its sunken city off the coast,
With its "green hole" by the harbor the locals call Hell
And its cliffs rising from the head of the past
At the spirit's base—"Who is my father in this world?"
Or my mother. Moher, *Mothair*, that silent "T"
My central, empty cross? What was it I meant to find
Here, now, nowhere, raging in the pitch-pipe wind:
An answer, human, out of the sublime? To be whole again?
Song mastering the wake of everything gone.
You are this longing, the iron in the wish for origin.
It sounds you, shapes you, water under stone.

BULK

According to some recent physicists, our four-dimensional space constitutes a "brane" that is merely a part of a higher dimensional reality called "the bulk"

Far off in the unsayable distances
Beyond effect and cause, our own vast
Membrane no bigger than a nanochip
In the still vaster assemblages, the bulk
Hunkers, endless stack, infinite sum,
Barnacle lashed to the whale of itself
Cruising to no home, nowhere near here
Where on the far side of the stockade fence
Between facing yards our neighbor ventures
Outside her house, a screen door slamming shut,
Then smoker's cough on the guttering porch
Glimpsed between weathered gray slats,
Or wondered at through a passing veil of leaves
From the deck above: her hoard, her detritus.
How long since we'd heard her husband died?
For years on weekends his music blared.
Saddened for her, but not alone in being
Glad for the quiet, we worried our respects
Across the gulf of our differing lives,
And kept that quiet when her daughter shouts
Echoed outside the peeling clapboards
To please stop, she was pleading, her drinking.
Years since, the quiet has settled in,
Her presence signaled by her clotted hacks,
Insistent, massing. She moves among them,
The unused tables, haphazard chairs,
Scattered playthings on grassless ground,
The dog-less doghouse, and at the lot's edge,
Wedged in by growth, monumental, moored
To nothing but its own floored gravity,
A delivery truck mottled gray, rust-worn,
No sign of what goods it once had carried,
Windows fogged with grit, the ancient wheel still,
As if, somehow, it has always been here,
Always will be, while the satellite lens
Pulls back, panoptical, into its ken
With the blown weight of every receding thing.