

ROBERT FROST

A Brook in the City

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New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes, 1923

Not a nostalgic pastoral poem as its first words might suggest, "A Brook in the City" reverberates with the submerged fury of a farmland brook cemented over by a "new-built city." Although imprisoned for no fault other than, perhaps, failing to submit to the city's imperious advance, the brook is not impotent. Its water, an "immortal force" that man has deemed superfluous, may already be haunting the city, depriving its residents of the equanimity they might have known if living, still, in an old farmhouse in an old meadow. What are its "thoughts [that] may not have risen"?

THE farm house lingers, though averse to square
 With the new city street it has to wear
 A number in. But what about the brook
 That held the house as in an elbow-crook?
 I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength
 And impulse, having dipped a finger length
 And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed
 A flower to try its currents where they crossed.
 The meadow grass could be cemented down
 From growing under pavements of a town;
 The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.
 Is water wood to serve a brook the same?
 How else dispose of an immortal force
 No longer needed? Staunch it at its source
 With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown
 Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone
 In fetid darkness still to live and run —
 And all for nothing it had ever done
 Except forget to go in fear perhaps.
 No one would know except for ancient maps
 That such a brook ran water. But I wonder
 If from its being kept forever under
 The thoughts may not have risen that so keep
 This new-built city from both work and sleep.



HART CRANE TO Brooklyn Bridge

Introductory poem, *The Bridge*, 1930

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
 The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
 Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
 Over the chained bay waters Liberty —

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
 As apparitional as sails that cross
 Some page of figures to be filed away;
 — Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
 With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
 Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
 Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
 As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
 Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
 Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
 A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
 Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,
 A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
 A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
 All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
 Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
 Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
 Of anonymity time cannot raise:
 Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
 (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
 Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
 Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—



In "To Brooklyn Bridge," the introductory "proem" to Hart Crane's epic-length poem *The Bridge*, the poet addresses the engineering marvel that was completed in 1883 and came to symbolize America's technological and continental dominance. For Crane, the bridge anchors America's past while connecting it to the undefinable but promising future. How does the bridge make the harsh city beautiful and sublime? How does it buoy optimism and exuberance (despite the suicide in stanza five)? How does it approach divinity, and offer "reprieve and pardon"? Although a product of man, what does it offer man that he cannot provide himself? (For line annotations, see Hart Crane's *The Bridge*: [A Digital Resource](#).)

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
 Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
 Beading thy path — condense eternity:
 And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
 Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
 The City's fiery parcels all undone,
 Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
 Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
 Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
 And of the curvship lend a myth to God.