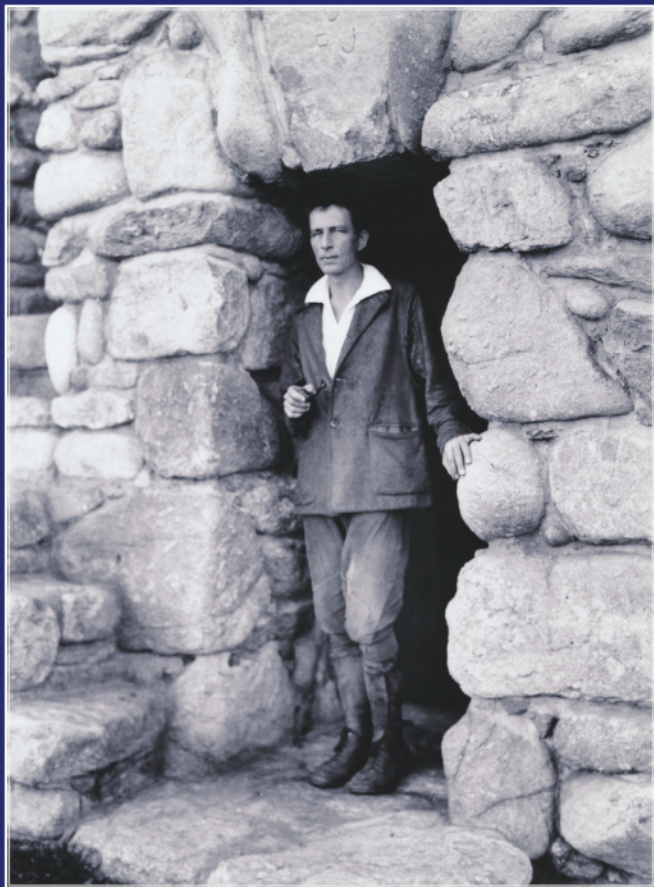


# JEFFERS STUDIES



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# JEFFERS STUDIES

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A DOUBLE ISSUE

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COVER PHOTO: ROBINSON JEFFERS IN THE DOORWAY OF HAWK TOWER,  
c. 1925, BY LEWIS JOSSELYN.

FROM A COPY IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION.  
FOR A DISCUSSION OF THIS IMAGE, SEE PAGE 25 IN THIS ISSUE.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Readers of the works of Robinson Jeffers are familiar with the energy-based explanation of existence coupled with a monistic philosophy that the poet presented from the 1920's onward. From Jeffers's viewpoint, all existence, even that of inanimate forms, is driven by an ancient and vast energy transformation system which, on our planet, has resulted in life, and ultimately in the life of human beings. All parts of the system are connected, and none is more important than any other. Furthermore, all of it is destined to cease to exist, not just the living beings, but the universe itself. All of this is divine, all of it God, including ourselves, shards of divinity. Jeffers adds as a further explanation of our human role: we can recognize and honor our share of this immense universe, but only if we shed the human concern with personal self-centeredness, which results in frustration, heartbreak, greed, and war. This forecast is hard to understand intellectually, and even more difficult to embrace emotionally, even for Jeffers himself; one may think of his entire work as an attempt to fully engage and cope with the implications of this worldview. The four essays which appear in this issue of *Jeffers Studies* approach the problems noted above from different perspectives, and each helps us to deepen our understanding of Jeffers's great vision.

I begin with the shortest essay and move to the longer ones because each article approaches the philosophy differently, beginning with the problems of one Jeffersian main character. In "Mara: The Poem of Foreboding," Robert Zaller analyzes one of the short narratives which has had little attention from other critics. This poem deals in one sense with a problem which plagues all monistic systems: if all is part of one vast whole in which no part is more important than any other, how can one choose a course of action which is informed by anything more than personal self-seeking? Zaller includes Bruce Ferguson, the main character of "Mara," as one of those he has identified in his earlier critical works as Jeffers's "heroes of endurance." Such characters recognize the truth of the philosophy described above, and each reacts to this knowledge differently. Ferguson, emotionally shattered by his wife's infidelity, can

find no moral reason to condemn or avenge this act which is finally just the instinctive behavior of another animal. Zaller details how Ferguson is trapped between his personal rage and sorrow and his inability to fully accept the indifference of nature.

Deborah Fleming has contributed to this journal before with essays concerning her two favorite poets, W. B. Yeats and Jeffers. Her "Robinson Jeffers, W.B. Yeats, and Ecoprophecy" continues this line of investigation by examining the links between these artists in terms of not only stylistic and symbolic similarities but also their fondness for towers. From these symbolic structures, which rise above and separate them from the rest of human society, but also, through that withdrawal, allow for continued healing meditation. This ability to reflect allows both to rise above the charnel house of the twentieth century to a bond with nature which is permanent and rewarding in contrast to a human adventure fated for tragedy. Professor Fleming's essay is a slightly different version of a chapter from her forthcoming book, *Towers of Myth and Stone: Yeats' Influence on Robinson Jeffers*, which will be published by the University of South Carolina Press in 2015.

Steven Chapman investigates Jeffers's philosophy from the standpoint of physics in his "The Cosmological Dimension of Jeffers's Poetry." Including a thorough review of the scientific discoveries of the 1920s through the 1950s, he explains how the poet's awareness of the debates over the origin of the universe and its essence in terms of space and time informed and reinforced the poet's view of all existence as a consequence of the immense energy from which it sprang and which still drives it. Chapman also points out that Jeffers was selective in his use of such theories; the poet knew that science can help us understand truth, but it is finally a description which, because of its evolving nature and its limitation to the investigation of physical reality, cannot give us all that we need to cope with the conditions it reveals.

Steven Herrmann shows how Jeffers used tools other than science and superficial observation of nature to expand his worldview in order to help us do that coping in "The Shamanistic Archetype in Robinson Jeffers's Poetry." In view of Jeffers's often stated antipathy to heroism, messianic purpose, and other themes which would endow him with a leadership role which he not only did not covet but which did not fit his philosophy, it is surprising to think of Jeffers as a shaman—a spiritual leader—but Herrmann's analysis of Jeffers's poetry shows that many of the themes and devices that Jeffers employs have been used by shamans for thousands of years to achieve the kind of spiritual breakthrough from the mere physical existence of the universe to a transcendent understanding not formed from logic. In addition, Herrmann touches on the works of Carl Jung and D. H. Lawrence, and uses the work of some of the same

scientists whom Steven Chapman discusses in describing Jeffers's work on the shamanistic plane.

In addition, this issue also contains reviews of three recent books about Jeffers. Robert Zaller reviews Audry Lynch's *Garth Jeffers Recalls His Father, Robinson Jeffers*, the product of her interviews with Jeffers's son. James Karman takes time out from his editing of the final volume of Robinson and Una Jeffers's letters to evaluate Robert Zaller's comprehensive *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*. Finally, Greg Williams reviews *Inventing the Language to Tell It: Robinson Jeffers and the Biology of Consciousness* by George Hart, a previous editor of *Jeffers Studies*. Greg is the longtime typesetter of this journal and also an independent scholar of Jeffers's work. He has decided to end his typesetting duties, but this review is first appearance here as a critic, and we hope it will not be the last.



STEVEN B. HERRMANN

## THE SHAMANIC ARCHETYPE IN ROBINSON JEFFERS'S POETRY

### I

#### THE CALL FROM WITHOUT

It was in an essay called "Psychology and Literature" that C. G. Jung postulated two kinds of artistic creation, the *psychological* and the *visionary*. In Jung's view, which Robinson Jeffers was well aware of (Herrmann, *Visionary Artist*), it is the non-psychological type of literary creation that paradoxically offers the richest opportunities for psychological elucidation, and he cites *Moby-Dick* as the greatest American novel (CW 15: 137). One of Jung's students, the Jungian analyst Joseph L. Henderson, who had many links to Big Sur, went further than Jung had done to introduce a Pacific Coast sensibility into archetypal literary theory by asserting that shamanism is historically the root for the prototype of the "seer-poet" (or the "prophet-poet-sage"), and that all true philosophic attitudes arise from the archetype of the shaman (89-91). This is an idea that was picked up and developed by my former Jungian analyst, Donald F. Sandner, in the field of analytical psychology (Herrmann, "Sandner"). But it was my late friend and mentor, William Everson, who first enabled me to see its crucial importance for the evolution of American poetry (Herrmann, *Conversation*; *Shaman's Call*). My comments here are an attempt at homage for his totemic presence in my own development as a literary historian.

I think of shamanism as a symbolic process of transformation that takes place at an emotional and an instinctive level, and as a method of ecstasy it forms itself into an image that is archetypal. This archetype, which in 2002 (following the leads of Everson and Sandner) I called the *shamanic archetype*, takes on concrete form through ritual enactments of dreams, spirit visitations, and inner visions that are performed through ritual drama or poetry. As a spiritual practice shamanism is based on



a pattern of behavior, an inborn form of perceiving the inner and outer Cosmos, that forms the inner idea informing an instinct for activity that leads to artistic representation and operates in close relation to an effort to heal personal, social, and environmental imbalances. The shamanic impulse may emerge spontaneously through a calling by an animal or ancestral shaman. A shaman needs such teachers or informants as he or she becomes a spokesperson for the unity of all. Through connection with such spirit-tutors, the specific practices of shamanism may be awakened, and what emerges is patterned by instinctual and emotional images that are at least 40,000 years old. (Indeed, the archeological evidence we currently have points to the probability that the shamanistic impulse may extend to 70,000 BC). The shamanic archetype makes itself evident in aesthetic and healing practices that the shaman makes use of to preserve an individual's healthy participation in the organic wholeness of the community, which requires a proper alignment with the spirit and nature. The technical procedures shamans developed for achieving this are at the foundation of human culture. The drum, for instance, is a musical instrument used throughout all cultures of the world, across all races, all nations, and it was used (and still is today) by the shaman and his or her peoples to induce trance, the entry into states of mind that moves the spirit to migrate beyond the confines of an individual body and reconnect with the energies of others and of the Cosmos (as anyone who has participated in shamanic drumming, a common practice in Northern California today, will know). The musical impulse is at the heart of all ecstatic and epic poetry, and it is from this instinctual heart beat that the pulse of vision can proceed, enabling a poetic image to channel aesthetic and curative energies that seem to emanate from the Cosmos.<sup>1</sup> It is to this remarkable archaic structure in the unconscious of all of us—the *shamanic archetype*—that I turn in this paper, in order to examine some of the root metaphors, themes, and instinctual structures that are so indelibly imprinted in Robinson Jeffers's poetry.

I should first make clear that this is not a tendentious way of Jungianizing Jeffers. There is a historical point of intersection, a shared place of visioning in the lives of C. G. Jung and Jeffers, where the destinies of these two twentieth century giants crossed at pivotal periods of their lives, and where the same archetype of the shaman was strongly evoked in both of them. This was a place of seeing, Taos, New Mexico, a *locus classicus* on the North American continent that was catalytic for both men.

Jung visited the Taos Pueblo in the winter of 1925. What Jung realized then was the subjective value of living in a *myth*. This was the sense of significance one may experience when one lives one's own

individual hypothesis of individuation and discovers that one has found a connection not only to oneself but to a larger community of individuals who have discovered and are living by the same myth. This discovery is a difficult task, and it is fraught with hidden dangers. It requires one to accept a *symbolic life* (a time consuming-process of living in two worlds, even as one goes about the usual tasks of earning a living, maintaining a home, meeting the demands of a profession or vocation, paying careful attention to one's dreams, fantasies, active imaginations, and performing certain kinds of daily rituals). Jung believed one can only fulfill one's hypothesis of individuation if one accepts this duality: "That gives the only meaning to human life; everything else is banal and you can dismiss it. A career, producing of children, are all *maya* compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful... That is modern psychology, and that is the future. That is the true future, that is the future of which I know" (CW 18: 630, 639). Like Jung, Jeffers, a dramatic poet, lived a particular hypothesis; he penetrated to the archetype, the root core of psychic energy at the center of psychic life.<sup>2</sup> As is often true with the shaman-poet, it came to him by way of a calling, a summons, first from within and then from without. It was from Taos that the call came to him from without.

In June of 1930, Mabel Dodge Luhan invited Jeffers to come to Taos with Una and their two children.<sup>3</sup> Jeffers was called to Taos in all seven times: in 1930, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938 (Karman 129). It is worth adding that in shamanic practice the world over *seven* is the most common number for initiation. Yet out of the seven trips Jeffers took to Taos, he only wrote one poem related to Taos, "New Mexican Mountain." It is, however, central to his understanding of what he was called to do in his poetic life as a whole.

I watch the Indians dancing to help the young corn at Taos pueblo. The  
old men squat in a ring  
And make the song, the young women with fat bare arms, and a few  
shame-faced young men, shuffle the dance.  
The lean-muscl'd young men are naked to the narrow loins, their breasts  
and backs daubed with white clay,  
Two eagle-feathers plume the black heads. They dance with reluctance,  
they are growing civilized; the old men persuade them.  
Only the drum is confident, it thinks the world has not changed; the  
beating heart, the simplest of rhythms,  
It thinks the world has not changed at all; it is only a dreamer, a brainless  
heart, the drum has no eyes.

.....

Apparently only myself and the strong  
 Tribal drum, and the rock-head of Taos mountain, remember that  
 civilization is a transient sickness. (CP 2: 158)

I think the shamanic understanding that such a sickness is amenable to healing is central to what Jeffers wanted his poetry to do. Let me cross-reference this idea with the similar discovery in Taos by Jung, that his psychology was intended not just to heal individuals who had fallen ill, but also the cultural illness that had predisposed them to do so. Although some aspects of Jung's experience in Taos are still not published—we only have part of the original manuscript of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in which he refers to what he learned in Taos—I think we know enough to say that Jung assimilated the influences of shamanism there as never before. I think it was possible because of Jung's receptivity to the land: the *spirit of place*. It was partially through this regional factor that the archetypal *numen* embedded in the New Mexican land spoke so clearly to Jung. It is not often enough remarked that for American poets regional factors have played such a critical role in releasing a feeling for the archetypal. This was true as well for at least one English poet, D. H. Lawrence, who visited Taos in 1922. In his essay "New Mexico" Lawrence wrote:

I think New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world that I have ever had. It certainly changed me forever. Curious as it may sound, it was New Mexico that liberated me from the present era of civilization . . . shattered the essential Christianity upon which my character was established . . . [G]o to Taos pueblo on some . . . snowy morning . . . and you will feel the old, old root of human consciousness still reaching down to depths we know nothing of . . . [T]here is a tribal integrity and a living tradition going back far beyond the birth of Christ, beyond the pyramids, beyond Moses. A vast old religion that once swayed the earth lingers in unbroken practice there in New Mexico. (*Phoenix* 142-45)

It struck me after reading this passage that what moved Lawrence and (three years later) Jung so profoundly about New Mexico is its ability to evoke the "old, old root of human consciousness." This, both Lawrence and Jung recognized, is the origin of all religion, art, ritual, and civilization. This, as Lawrence put it, was religion "*without an intermediary or mediator*" (147). For Lawrence this was the true meaning of religion in America: direct contact without mediation from any external religious symbols. One finds a similar view in Whitman, in Melville, and in Jeffers. Readers of *Jeffers Studies* know that Jeffers was wary of anyone who called himself or herself a leader of humanity,

resistant to adopting such a role himself, and pessimistic about the possibility of change for the better. He would have been horrified to find himself linked with Whitman in any way, yet, like Whitman, Jeffers *was* a shaman and acted upon that identity whether he knew it or accepted that stance or not. For Lawrence, emerging from the experience of World War I, in which European idealism and Judeo-Christian cultural values, built up for generations, were “shattered,” it was a healing experience to find in Taos that he had become “undauntedly religious.” Jung had already experienced his own private religious healing of spirit in the visionary experiences of 1913-1916 recorded in his *Red Book* that was finally published in 2009, but he nevertheless experienced a further transformation of outlook in a more extraverted direction on his trip to Taos, as well as on his trip to Kenya in East Africa, in autumn of the same year, that confirmed he had found both the root of, and the route to, a common humanity with potential to heal the too individual-ego-driven world.

Jung's experience in Taos led him to the realization of something that he had been seeking to articulate early on in his career, the presence of an unconscious impetus to spirit which he was able to define in psychological terms with his theory of archetypes. As would Jeffers, Jung did not believe the “next step” in religion would occur by stripping indigenous peoples of their religious beliefs and/or practices. On the contrary, Jung *knew* that the Judeo-Christian myth is dependent upon man for its continuing evolution and that when the daily practice of “symbolic life” ceases—in Taos, this was a daily prayer that enabled the sun to rise—the soul of the people would perish. The problem as Jung saw it, from a Western spiritual standpoint, is the split between indigenous and the civilized layers of the mind, its division into a Christian and an Antichristian half expressed through the figures of Christ and Antichrist.

Only five years after Jung traveled to Taos, Jeffers wrote the lines I quoted earlier from “New Mexican Mountain,” which offer a tragic, ominous perspective on the situation at the Pueblo when Jeffers visited it in 1930. He knew that culture was quickly dying. In Jeffers's identification of himself as a poet with the strong tribal drum, and even with Taos Mountain as the enduring symbol of everything that supports such an instrument of communication in a cosmological sense, as a natural connection between upper and lower realms, and across peaks of understanding of what binds us all, we can see something however which hasn't died: *the spirit of shamanism*. (I always feel it when I visit New Mexico today, where one immediately bears witness to a resonating universe with a near three hundred sixty degree bowl of heaven pierced by immense mountain peaks.) Jeffers's perceptive assessment about the

effects of civilization on indigenous peoples shows where the source of the problem was when he wrote the poem in 1930. When the old men were forced to keep their boys and girls at school rather than initiating them into their religious rites and rituals (see D. H. Lawrence quotation below), something essential was lost in the imagination of indigenous peoples, something that only recently has regained momentum through the emergence of the Native American Renaissance. Yet regardless of America's attempts to enforce educative requirements on Native American youth, the most direct and enduring value of initiation was preserved in the primal rhythms of the drum as a source of religious power, and it was this connection to the ancestral past that spoke most powerfully to Jeffers when he heard it sing to him at Taos pueblo, not the dance or chanting per se, but the drum; somehow the dance failed to convey what he heard and felt in the drum: its ability to connect him to his vision of the "beauty of things," a living link with everything that is.

If we take the words of Jeffers to heart, we might reinterpret his alignment with the "strong / Tribal drum" to mean that if we lose our connection to this "simplest of rhythms," we may lose our connection to our feeling of cosmic unity; we may lose our connection to Spiritual Democracy (Herrmann, *Whitman* 1-31).<sup>4</sup> If we cannot learn the importance of rites and rituals in our daily lives, if we denigrate them, and if we fail to listen to the warnings of native peoples about the coming social and environmental dangers, we may fall into a state of unconsciousness, which appears to be happening in our culture today. Rather than turning our children into young adults through rites of separation, transition and incorporation (Van Gennep vii) we are keeping them in a state of emotional dependency, immaturity, and fear. Jeffers's solution to the problem he describes so forcefully in "New Mexican Mountain" is to carve out his version of a new American myth, and like Jung his answer to the problem of civilization is a religious one.

To search for a new myth has been the main task of visionary poets writing in America since the time of Emerson, for whom the Christian myth was no longer the central cultural value, and this task was also calling to Europeans. Around the time Jung made his historic trip to Taos (1925), for instance, D.H. Lawrence wrote a poem called "O Americans!" where he expressed concern about the future of America. In this poem, Lawrence warned that Americans have an "obligation" to permit indigenous people to practice their religious ceremonies, and that America should not interfere.

On Good Friday the big white men of the Indian Bureau and  
big white men from Washington drove out to the pueblo,  
summoned the old Indian men, and held a meeting behind  
closed doors.

Then the big men of the White Americans told the old  
 American aborigines that it would be well if these old fathers  
 abandoned their foolish, heathen dances and ceremonies,  
 and tilled their land better, instead of wasting time:  
 That the boys must stay at school, not be kept away at seasons  
 to prepare themselves and to partake in these useless  
 practices of ceremonial[.]

.....

It is your test, Americans.  
 Can you leave the remnants of the old race on their own ground,  
 To live their own life, fulfill their own ends in their own way?  
 (CP 776-79)

No less than Lawrence, whose wife Frieda had fifteen years earlier introduced Jung to the possibilities of a creative community in Ascona, Switzerland, when she was partner to Jung's patient, Otto Gross, Jung *knew* that the continuation of a spirituality that could find new meanings in natural beauty, and especially the use of beautiful settings as a ground for a new development of soul, is what the body needs for its nourishment and joy. In his seminar talk "The Symbolic Life" given on April 5 1939 to the Guild for Pastoral Psychology in London, Jung recalled the words of Ochwiay Biano (or Mountain Lake), a Taos Pueblo holy man whom he met in January of 1925.<sup>5</sup> "Yes," said Mountain Lake, "we are a small tribe and these Americans, they want to interfere with our religion. They should not do it because we are the sons of the Father, the Sun. He who goes there (pointing to the sun)—that is our Father. We must help him daily to rise over the horizon and to walk over Heaven. And we don't do it for ourselves only: we do it for America, we do it for the whole world. And if these Americans interfere with our religion through their missions, they will see something. In ten years Father Sun won't rise anymore, because we can't help him anymore. . . . Now look at these Americans: they are always seeking something. They are always full of unrest, always looking for something" (CW 18: 629, 630). In our banal everyday existence, Jung says that people do not lead a "symbolic existence," such as the true Pueblo who helps his Father rise and set over the horizon. This lack of apparent meaning in our lives is what causes illness and neurotic suffering. People become neurotic when they do not live the symbolic life, when they do not feel they are actors in the divine drama of life. In his old age Jung said emphatically:

I feel sure that the Pueblos as an individual community will continue to  
 exist as long as their mysteries are not desecrated.

.....

[The Pueblo Indian] above all others has the Divinity's ear, and his ritual act will reach the distant sun soonest of all. The holiness of mountains, the revelation of Yahweh upon Sinai, the inspiration that Nietzsche was vouchsafed in Engadine—all speak the same language. The idea, absurd to us, that a ritual act can magically affect the sun is, upon closer examination, no less irrational to us than might at first be assumed. Our Christian religion—like every other, incidentally—is permeated by the idea that special acts or a special kind of action can influence God—for example, through certain rites or by prayer, or by a morality pleasing to the Divinity. (*Memories* 250, 253)

We can see American youths turning to violence, drugs, and gangs, etc., every time we pick up a modern newspaper. In shamanic cultures that remain throughout North America, however, what has stayed the same are the healing powers of the drum and the quest for vision on a lonely mountaintop. Both mountain and drum can be taken as *symbols* in American poetry for a transcendent vista of experience that is eternal, something I think Jeffers was aware of to a marked degree when he wrote “New Mexican Mountain,” and which he did not fail to register in his observations of the people. As an astute observer of the effects of civilization on American society as a whole, Jeffers saw that “the young women” and “young men” shuffling the long repetitive dance to the sun were dancing with reluctance because they were “growing civilized.” Jeffers’s answer to this problem is found in his position of equality with the old men who beat the drum, for in their mutual love for natural music, he *feels* an affinity with them that is essential in his life: an affinity of human consciousness in close harmony and direct contact with Nature. Eight years earlier D. H. Lawrence had felt the same basic connection to the drum and its power to transport his mind into states of shamanistic ecstasy:

Never shall I forget the utter absorption of the dance, so quiet, so steadily, tirelessly rhythmic, and silent, with the ceaseless down-tread, always to the earth's centre, the very reverse of the up flow of Dionysian or Christian ecstasy. Never shall I forget the deep singing of the men at the drum, swelling and sinking, the deepest sound I have ever heard in all my life, deeper than thunder, deeper than the sound of the Pacific Ocean, deeper than the roar of a deep waterfall: the wonderful deep sound of men calling to the unspeakable depths. (*Phoenix* 145)



In the language of shamanism the drum is spoken of as a "horse" because it is a robust enough instrument to carry the shaman and his/her people from the world of ordinary reality to a plane of experience that transcends the opposites. Similarly, the "mountain" in Jeffers's poem can be seen as a symbol for the "place of dreams": the lonely place where a person goes to find one's *vision*. As a poet-shaman, Jeffers used his aesthetics in "New Mexican Mountain," like an Old Testament religious prophet, to shock the race into an attitude of reverence for the God of Nature. The word "transient" denotes something impermanent; "sickness" denotes illness, something needing to be cured or healed. This "sickness," our disseverance from the earth, is precisely what American poet-shamans, such as Jeffers, have always sought to heal through their spiritual aesthetics. What Jeffers experienced while listening to the shaman's drum was a religious intuition that the human race was surely heading for self-destruction if it could not find a way to live in proper relationship to God as the whole Cosmos. He is a precursor of a New Age religion that has yet to realize its potential and is far from having died out with the 1960's.

As one emerges from the canyon south of Taos and sees the wide plain to the west with the gorge of the Rio Grande River and the great mountain range to the east with Taos at its base, one realizes that something dramatic must happen in this place, which calls visitors to respond to its beauty. The same sense comes to the person who approaches the town from the east through the Sangre de Christo peaks and sees the flat plain, the river, and the serene mountains to the west. This is the same sense of recognition that struck Jeffers when he first came to Carmel and Big Sur and realized the importance of the land and sea in the behavior of those who live there.

Of primary importance to this vision is Jeffers's incisive perception that the problem of civilization is at root a spiritual one. He portrays this problem of man's disseverance from Nature in the "hundred" white American tourists that watch the dance with "hungry eyes," and in the "reluctant" young Pueblo women and men who shuffle the dance, and his spiritual task as poet is to *heal* the disconnection from Nature coming to the tribe from without. This disconnection from the experience of cosmic unity is the sickness he feels he is called to heal in Taos. Jeffers's assertion in the same poem that there "was never religion enough," nor "beauty," nor "poetry here [in Taos] . . . [Jeffers's ellipsis] to fill Americans" (CP 2: 158) supports Jung's observations in the same region, that the world is in need of new myths. Jeffers writes in "The Answer": "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" (CP 2: 536). This beauty is *felt* deeply in the rhythms of the drum, and he uses its powerful rhythms to intone one of his strongest poems, which is "New Mexican Mountain." By his spiritual alignment with the drum he sounds his beat to the human community from whom he does not wish to be disconnected.

Jeffers's recovery of the Cosmos-uniting properties of the drum supports Jung's view that archetypal ideas "can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence" (CW 9.1: 153). But we have to qualify that statement. There is an "outside" influence we always feel "inside" the natural environment: the scale of the American earth that gives shape to our national poetry. This is something we must experience for ourselves if we are to understand what this mysterious something is, and we must feel it for ourselves by going into the American landscape, as one can't help doing on a visit to New Mexico.

Whatever the indigenous forces are that have shaped American poetry (whatever these "soil" influences are that affect any era's patterns of speech, dreams, appearance, sexuality and spirituality), Jung and the people he met in the Pueblo were intensely aware of them. Jung, when asked what a religious counselor, or psychotherapist should do if a person cannot find meaning in life, responded: "Then there is trouble; then he has to go on the *Quest*; then he has to find out what his soul says; then he has to go through the solitude of the land that is not created" (CW 18: 673). It is not enough remarked that Jung meant a retreat into Nature that has been forced to yield to civilized life, but can still be appreciated by people actually trying to civilize themselves. Just as Jeffers shows readers how one might make use of poetry to enter solitude while listening to the sound of the drum in the shadow of a holy mountain, Jung found a way to converse intelligibly with Mountain Lake, the chief holy man of the people he met in the Pueblo. Mountain Lake had seen something in the attitude of the government and the missionaries that was sick. "Why," Mountain Lake had asked Jung, "do the Americans not let us alone? Why do they want to forbid our dances? Why do they make difficulties when we want to take our young people from school in order to lead them to the *kiva* (site of the rituals), and instruct them in our religion?" (*Memories* 251). Jung spoke to that when he wrote that "the ritual acts of man are an answer and reaction to the action of God upon man" (*Memories* 253). Jeffers's answer to the holy man was to view the illness as a consequence of Christian history, which had become a bird of prey where other cultures' spiritualities were concerned. It was through this alignment with the victims of such spiritual chauvinism that Jeffers felt entitled to say his most un-Christian things.

Similarly, Jung made the observation that in order to understand the peculiarities of any nation we need to regard it from a point of view outside (i.e., from the eyes of another nation). Jung also made use of the symbol of the bird of prey to deliver a harsh message about the dark side of Christian history from Taos. He did not fail to recognize his own shadow as a white man. Mountain Lake had enabled Jung to see through Christian attempts to "civilize" indigenous peoples and strip them of their religious beliefs. From Taos pueblo he saw clearly that Americans had been operating not out of the spirit of "brotherly love" that Jesus had taught, but out of a "predatory" instinct that was motivated by greed, envy, and a lust for power (*Memories* 247). Reflecting on the crimes of the Romans and Europeans on their long journey westward, he says he realized "with a secret stab the hollowness of that old romanticism about the Crusades. Then followed Columbus, Cortez, and the other conquistadors who with fire, sword, torture, and Christianity came down even upon these remote pueblos dreaming peacefully in the Sun, their Father. . . . What we from our point of view call colonization, missions to the heathen, spread of civilization, etc., has another face—the face of a bird of prey seeking with cruel intentness for distant quarry" (*Memories* 248).

The collective shadow of European civilization looms large in the imagination of indigenous Americans. The Pueblos saw their rites and rituals as corrective to this—instrumental, even, in helping the sun to rise for Americans. Jeffers experienced the same revivifying power in the drum beat he heard in New Mexico. He had long been searching for such an instrument. In "A Redeemer" he wrote, for instance: "Oh as a rich man eats a forest for profit and a field for vanity, so you came west and raped / The continent and brushed its people to death" (CP 1: 407). Energy to challenge the economic marvels of democracy appears to have come to him when he moved to the not yet developed Carmel-by-the-Sea, where Jeffers put his roots down in 1919 on a sacred spot where Ohlone Indians had cooked their abalone for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. As he recalls in old age in "The Last Conservative": "And there's a kind of shell-mound. I used to see ghosts of Indians / Squatting beside the stones in their firelight" (CP 3: 418). It was from such visions of an earlier way of living with Nature, and not at its expense, that a shamanic vocation entered his poetic soul.

## II

### THE CALL FROM WITHIN

Jeffers's call to shamanic poetic practice came in the same year Jung published his ground-breaking book *Transformations and Symbols of the*

*Libido*, when a psychoanalyst first attempted to describe some of the features of the American psyche. One of these attempts was provided to Jung by Longfellow's 1855 poem "Hiawatha," which he discusses at length in *Transformation*. Jeffers wrote in his first book *Flagons and Apples*, also published in 1912: "The westward sea and the warm west wind— It was these, not I, that wrought my rhyme" (CP 4: 51). By 1916, something had changed in him, however, when the rhyme-tassels began to be shorn from his verse-method, and the "surf-beat's ancient rhythm" was traced by him to the "older fountain," the "tides of fire" (CP 1: 17) that ignited the dangerous images he is so well known for today.<sup>6</sup> In *The Alpine Christ*, written two years after his move to Carmel, he celebrated the emergence of a rhyme-shattering symbol, the winged-stone "flung toward heaven," which came from his own psychic depths:

I have dreamed a dream  
Most beautiful, most great, and worthy of God  
Willing to make life free. You are that stone,  
Which I have made and mortared and built high  
In the universal wall: a sudden bird  
Shall yet in the end outsoar you, a free falcon,  
Humanity above the temple-roof  
Flying. . . . (66)

The "free falcon" flying high above the "temple roof" is a theme known in shamanism as "magic flight," and this flight forms a cornerstone of his personal myth. In the life of a poet-shaman, there are typically one or more ecstatic moments that seem to stand out from all others as apotheosis points for all that is to follow—experiences of instinctual and mystical rapture, when the power of the totem (typically an animal, an insect, or a bird of some kind) may lead one to a *feeling* of cosmic unity. Such experiences may be found throughout Jeffers's poetry, and in 1916 he describes this as a feeling for the "beauty of the spirit of man," and he celebrates, in man, the "Dear beauty of his desire toward righteousness" (11). As Jeffers says, via the voice of the "Aquiline Person" during this narrator's flight, high above the "alien stars," in *The Alpine Christ*:

I have overwinged the low blue-crystal roof  
Of human things, miseries and infamies,  
Triumphs, and the lamentations of the dead.  
.....  
I go up  
Solitary among the alien stars  
To find out wisdom. (89)

It was at this time, when Jeffers saw visions of Indian ghosts crouching by the sea-rocks, at about the same time when Albert Einstein published his original general theory of relativity, that the poet's vision of cosmic unity had its inception. The experience of Spiritual Democracy that came to him through the natural beauty of California replaced all previous God-images. It was solely a *living* God that he would allow in his poetry through symbols of the freedom of the democratic will, for instance: a free falcon flying independently high above the temple-roofs of the world's great religions in a solitary way. Such a bird could soar and over-wing humanity with a new vision of spiritual renewal. It is a splendid symbol of the Spiritual Democracy which Whitman had prophesied and which Dickinson and Melville practiced, but Jeffers would add to their visions vistas of space that would so enlarge our conception of the new science of religion as to render God as a humanistic notion superfluous. "I never knelt before thee," Jeffers's Aquiline Person says to Christ: "I loved thee but I yielded not . . . [n]othing can be saved; man least of all" (*Alpine Christ* 90-91). Man cannot be saved because, so long as he lives close to the water of his own experience, he has not fallen into the inhuman depths.

The Aquiline Person may have been an anticipation of the New Age, symbolized by Aquarius, the water-bearer. Pushing up from the "ooze-bed of deep sea" this Aquiline figure takes "wing" as a personified *numen*: re-joining stars, wisdom, and the light of the eternal (91). In his shamanic flight into an experienceable Cosmos (Humboldt), the Aquiline Person was shedding off the person-bound nature of Jesus and becoming, one might say, trans-human, a kind of sacred animal, a soul-companion (a "free falcon") that could cross realms and thus unite them in his own being. This vision of cosmic unity is apprehended by the figure of Manuel, who tells a sacred Rock: "Have you never guessed that the stones also live, and the stars, and everything? When you lay in the mountain pasture in the evening did you not feel that the great mountain was no less alive than the skipping heifers, but more greatly? ... Rock, we shall neither fail in strength nor do we feel any shrinking from our destinies. It may be that I must be crucified a second time; nevertheless we shall prevail" (157).

Jeffers had, by 1924, six years before he was called to Taos, transformed the Cross into a new religious symbol for what each person in the Age of Aquarius must go through if we are to survive as a species: symbolic annihilation. This kind of psychological experience, where we each must undergo a symbolic death is what his majestic Hawk Tower represents. 1924 is also when Jeffers was beginning to write *The Women at Point Sur*. So the transformation I am referring to happened to him in 1924. It is symbolized by the crucified hawk in the "Prologue" to *Point Sur*.

The hawk symbolizes the environment. Thus, Jeffers had ingeniously replaced the symbol of Christ for a crucified hawk as an Animal Power. Destroy the hawk and we destroy ourselves, as we are doing now. This is his basic meaning: we must become a symbolic annihilation in our own lives, to save the environment. The shift from humanism to inhumanism had occurred. Ten years later, he describes even more beautifully in "Rock and Hawk" what might have been Hawk Tower as an "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" (CP 2: 416).

Hawk Tower stands solitary today over the lone shore of Carmel Point for all to see; it stands as symbol for a new kind of religious attitude Jeffers embodied: a consciousness that is connected to the unity of the Cosmos, first formulated for Western consciousness by the old world's New World explorer, Alexander von Humboldt, whose great book *Cosmos*, read by Emerson, Whitman, and Muir, anticipated by more than a century the "Gaia hypothesis" that has fired the spirit of the ecological movement to compete against global warming, caused at least in part by capitalized progress and a democracy gone awry. Jeffers shares this view:

The unformed volcanic earth, a female thing,  
Furiously following with the other planets  
Their lord the sun: her body is molten metal pressed rigid  
By its own mass; her beautiful skin, basalt and granite and the lighter  
elements,  
Swam to the top. (CP 3: 430)

Yet Jeffers goes further:

The polar ice-caps are melting, the mountain glaciers  
Drip into rivers; all feed the ocean;  
Tides ebb and flow, but every year a little bit higher.  
They will drown New York, they will drown London.

And his beloved Hawk Tower "will hold against the sea's buffeting, it will become / Geological, fossil and permanent" (CP 3: 476).

When Jeffers suggests in "Rock and Hawk," therefore, that the stone, and by extension the tower, replaced for him the cross of Christianity, he means he found a personal myth and had the necessary strength and the courage to stand by it. Jeffers discovered "behind the screen of sea-rock and sky" a "symbol" for "Life with calm death; the falcon's / Realist eyes and act / Married to the massive / Mysticism of stone" (CP 2: 416). This monolith was not to be hidden from public view. Nor was it meant to be worshiped by anyone. Rather, its place on the Carmel Coast was meant to inspire a love for the whole that it faces. "I have found my rock,"

Jeffers wrote in "Meditation on Saviors," now "let them find theirs" (CP 1: 398).

It is important that we trace the origins of this sacred rock to an earlier poem, "The Torch-Bearer's Race," for it is here that we can see how central an indigenous vision was to his arrival at a new religious symbol. He says "I am building a thick stone pillar upon this shore, the very turn of the world," and this massive pillar of sea-rock is built where "[d]ead tribes move, remembering the scent of their hills, the hunters / Our fathers hunted" (CP 1: 99).

Earlier still, the discovery of this rock was memorialized by Jeffers in a 1918 poem that holds a key to understanding him as a religious figure on the West Coast, a prophet of Spiritual Democracy. Today, we can see that his vision of cosmic unity is more primal than perhaps any other American poet, and more consciously shamanistic too. His penetration into the dark side of the shamanic imago still has the power to strike terror, reverence, and religious awe: a respect for the holy.<sup>7</sup> And while his willingness to speak awful truths led him to forsake some of the values of American democracy that limited themselves to a narrow, insistently secular humanism, his drum took him not into a new fundamentalist dogma; its beating did do justice finally to the tribal ancestors at the center of American Democracy. This was not the equality of all religions that Whitman had predicted; rather, it is the primal realization of the centrality of the discovery of one's own personal *symbol*, one's own "Rock," as an answer and reaction to the actions of God upon man. Stone had a way of grounding him in his own spiritual life and destiny. Jeffers's own chants in the shamanistic tradition are more violently directed against the political and economic fantasies that had obscured the continued need for a cosmic definition of democracy than anything that came before it, or after it.<sup>8</sup>

Jeffers felt called, eventually, to build Tor House in Carmel in 1919 on the same location where a band of Ohlone Indians had cooked their abalone by a sacred rock overlooking the ocean. From his promontory on the Pacific, Jeffers wrote in "To the Rock That Will Be a Cornerstone of the House":

Old garden of grayish and ochre lichen,  
How long a time since the brown people who have vanished from here  
Built fires beside you and nestled by you  
Out of the raging sea-wind? A hundred years, two hundred,  
You have been dissevered from humanity.

.....

no one

Touched you with love, the gray hawk and the red hawk touched you  
Where now my hand lies. So I have brought you

Wine and white milk and honey for the hundred years of famine  
 And the hundred cold ages of sea-wind.  
 .....

Wing-prints of ancient weathers long at peace, and the older  
 Scars of primal fire, and the stone  
 Endurance that is waiting millions of years to carry  
 A corner of the house, this also is destined.  
 Lend me the stone strength of the past and I will lend you  
 The wings of the future, for I have them.  
 How dear you will be to me when I too grow old, old comrade.  
 (CP 1: 11)

We must not fail to hear the accent Jeffers places on Whitman's most beloved word "comrade," although it assumes an inhuman form as an object of trembling religious reverence, awe, and beauty. The rock "scarred with primal fire" is a remnant of humanity's consciousness in harmony with Nature, yet Jeffers adds to the moral beauty of the Cosmos by loving the stone more than man, going so far as to call it his "comrade." Jeffers is not exactly repudiating Christianity by pointing our attention away from Christ, who in *The Alpine Christ* Jeffers said he loved, and who, in Renaissance alchemy had been so frequently associated with the *lapis*, the philosopher's stone, so much as he is directing us to love the natural, rather than supernatural, presentation of God even more, reminding us that God is present in all creatures, including animals, stones, and crystals. No poem drives this message home as awesomely as does "Passenger Pigeons," where he reduces the white man's decimation of the bison to a speck of cosmological time in which the then-living three billion humans are reduced in his cosmic imagination to rubble of white bones: "And the American bison: their hordes / Would hide a prairie from horizon to horizon, great heads and storm-cloud shoulders, a torrent of life— / How many are left? For a time, for a few years, their bones / Turned the dark prairies white. / . . . Three billion people: our bones, ours too, would make / Wide prairies white, a beautiful snow of unburied bones: / Bones that have twitched and quivered in the nights of love" (CP 3: 435).

Jeffers directs his love towards the rock that will be his cornerstone for such a vision of Spiritual Democracy that will surpass Whitman's ability to define it completely so as to secure his connection to the earth and night. He speaks to the stone as if it were a lover. Jeffers holds conversations with the "stone," offers it "wine" and "white milk"—in a ritual fashion—and asks it to lend him the "stone strength of the past." He elevates it to religious status, makes it an equal. This rock is "destined" to become a symbol for divinity, for it teaches us how one may contribute to make one's environment beautiful by preserving our



link to the lifeways of indigenous people, amongst whom the shaman or medicine man has been and continues to be a central agent and link to cosmic relatedness. By aligning himself with the universal deity in the form of a winged stone or hawk (both shamanistic symbols), Jeffers becomes a spokesperson for the new shamanism of the west, in which every person may contribute to environmental preservation and beautification by maintaining a living link to the ancestral inheritance of the past.

Jeffers's is a form of religious consciousness, calling all of us to assume a stewardship over the earth. The Carmel poet uses images from his native region to force humanity—or at least those who will listen to him—into an awareness of the “beauty of things,” as they exist simply and exquisitely in Nature. He attempts to enforce a condition of reverence for stones, oceans, rivers, trees, mountains, hawks, seeing them all as our sisters and brothers. Through the falcon and stone symbols, he attempts to open readers' eyes to a vision of God-consciousness, so that we might contribute to the beauty of the universe.

In “An Artist” the stone sculptures seem to be leading to “some unbearable / Consummation of the ecstasy” (CP 1: 391), by which Jeffers means the figures were attempting to break free towards democratic freedom. During such moments of ecstasy, the sculptor sees: “The man-destroying beauty of the dawns . . . the enormous beauty of things.” Yet what the sculptor “attempts” is “nothing to that” beauty, he says. (CP 1: 392) This equalizing of human consciousness with the consciousness of everything is seen as a necessary stage towards human enlightenment if one is to gain a vision of the “transhuman magnificence,” which according to Jeffers, is an “inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity” and “is not a slight matter, but an essential condition of freedom, and of moral and vital sanity” (CP 4: 420).

Jeffers's vision of the whole as being infinitely superior to human consciousness leads him to say that his ego is “finished,” wiped out by waves of ecstasy so torturous they lead to annihilation, shamanic dismemberment, the second crucifixion. “O beauty of things go on, go on, O torture / Of intense joy I have lasted out my time, I have thanked God and finished” (CP 1: 91). He describes this kind of “other beauty” as a return from “the beauty of things to the beauty of nothing”: to the wandering of “sea-hawks,” “alone in a nihilist simplicity”: “O shining of night, O eloquence of silence, the mother of the stars, the beauty beyond beauty” (CP 1: 93).

Here the shamanistic experience of dismemberment has emerged from behind the patient “screen of sea-rock and sky” (CP 2: 131) and what arises in the mind is made to seem like a preparation into a *primitive* cabana for an ocean swim enabling the dive from the rock of faith into a



new, more fluid vision of democracy.<sup>9</sup> Jeffers's persona has been destroyed in a Buddhistic negation of its attachments, so that his essential self can enter a vital void of awakened space and time. The wholeness into which the poet's will is thus released transcends any of his earlier aesthetic achievements. The hawk and stone symbols hold him in their grip, and they will not let him go until he creates out of them a new religious emblem that he can hang in the sky at the world's end where Indian ghosts move. It will force him to sacrifice everything: a successful career, love of the masses, fame; love of collective humanity. All previous religious symbols were becoming discarded as he strove forward towards a new language that will become his vehicle for a vision of cosmic Democracy that cancels out the need for any human intermediaries. "I have spoken on sea-forelands with the lords of life," he says in "Point Pinos and Point Lobos" and "the men wisdom made Gods had nothing / So wise to tell me nor so sweet as the alternation of white sunlight and brown night, / The beautiful succession of the breeding springs, the enormous rhythm of the stars' deaths / And fierce renewals" (CP 1: 97). This is an ultimate realization of our oneness with the environment.

It is also, paradoxically, a scientific vision, if we can say so, a new geology. Science gave Jeffers a vision to behold the world religions from a vista that places Nature in a position of superiority over all previous spiritual revelations. To "express greatly" the immense beauty of things, he felt, is the "sole business of poetry" (CP 3: 369), and he took it upon himself to put forth his version of a new myth for our times in the form of a scientific realization that he believes the world needs in its transit into Aquarius. Look "directly / At the mountains and the sea," he asks us each to consider. "Are they not beautiful"? (CP 3: 403). Again and again he directs our consciousness outward, away from civilization, towards the mountains, the sea and Cosmos. In Jungian psychology, such a dive into the self holds the danger of the loss of the human anima, or personal soul, that adheres us to attachments to significant others and our personal lives.

It is hard for twenty-first century Americans to imagine how close an American poet could once get to pure archetypal experience, and thus to a shamanic initiation, without the knowing-frame of a media-driven culture challenging the archetypes involved in ever more ironic ways, thus diluting the force of the primal energies involved. In Jeffers's life, early trauma could still be unmediated by psychological sophistication and thus he could be wounded, and through poetic practice healed, by raw archetypal material at the level of the Greek tragedies that alone in his reading could speak to his experiences. So let us take you off stage to the personal issues that released such archetypal intuitions. For instance, in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," Electra and Orestes are likened to two

"hawks" who "have hung . . . under a storm from the beginning" (CP 1: 162). Through matricide, Orestes enters "the great life of the ancient peaks" (CP 1: 177), becoming one with the mountains, and then Orestes says to Electra: "You were in my vision to-night in the forest, Electra, I thought I embraced you / More than brotherwise . . . possessed, you call it . . . [Jeffers's ellipsis] entered the fountain—" (CP 1: 169). By fountain, Jeffers is referring to the "tides of fire" latent in the Cosmos: the roaring fire of the star-swirls (galaxies). Shamans are masters of fire; it is often through fire that their "celestial destiny" of immortality is accomplished. "The idea that fire ensures a celestial destiny after death," writes Eliade, is "confirmed by the belief that those who are struck by lightning fly up to the sky. 'Fire,' of whatever kind, transforms man into 'spirit'; this is why shamans are held to be 'masters over fire' and become insensitive to the touch of hot coals. 'Mastery over fire' or being burned are in a manner equivalent to an initiation" (206).

All this is to say that through imagery and mythic analogues of incest, matricide, and symbolic annihilation, Jeffers knew that his persona had been symbolically burned to release a new spiritual identity founded in archaic, rather than contemporary inspiration: a man "who had climbed the tower beyond time, consciously, and cast humanity, entered the earlier fountain" (CP 1: 178). The earlier fountain is a vision born of geological history from the explosion of a star too big for astrophysicists to envision; yet, its traces can still be observed in the fiery magma spewing forth from the earth and pictures from the Hubble spacecraft that boggle the mind.<sup>10</sup> This earlier fountain is the place of our cosmic origins as a species, and its vastness is what enables Jeffers's "not to play games with words," but to "awake dangerous images" (CP 2: 309), and call his hawks, his tutelary animals. In fact Jeffers's poetry reveals not just that it was through a connection to a Native American sensibility that he was able to have visions of former cultural traumas, such as the genocide of the Native peoples, but of a *coming* environmental disaster. Jeffers's aim, like Whitman's, was to attempt through his vocation to do whatever he could to help protect the psychic integrity of the world during the upheavals of its inevitable ecological crisis. As I have been suggesting in this essay, he saw poetry as a way to summon nature imagery in a healing way, and knew it could work to the degree that it had already helped him heal himself. This, of course, is the view of a shaman.

In "Hands," for instance, prior to his trip to Taos, Jeffers presents us with a real shaman's vision, where he speaks for a quality of human consciousness left on inscriptions of the brown-skinned people who left traces of their religious attitude in a cave near what today is known as Tassajara, where there is now a famous Zen center.

Inside a cave in a narrow canyon near Tassajara  
 The vault of rock is painted with hands,  
 A multitude of hands in the twilight, a cloud of men's palms, no more,  
 No other picture. There's no one to say  
 Whether the brown shy people who are dead intended  
 Religion or magic, or made their tracings  
 In the idleness of art; but over the division of years these careful  
 Signs-manual are now like a sealed message  
 Saying: "Look: we also were human; we had hands, not paws. All hail  
 You people with the cleverer hands, our supplanters  
 In the beautiful country; enjoy her a season, her beauty, and come down  
 And be supplanted; for you also are human." (CP 2: 4)

What Jeffers is saying is that humanity once dis severed from its organic wholeness, which once required us to take care of the natural environment, is like a tree that has been uprooted, just as Native Americans were uprooted from their beautiful homes in and near the cave; and just as the "brown shy people," who had become "Indians," were displaced or decimated, so too does he induce us to see that our own hands are a reflection of our humanness and our humility before God. This vision of humility that sees properly that we are human and not God (the Cosmos) restores our connection to a vision of equality that is indigenously sourced. Jeffers sees how all attempts at prophecy and wisdom fall short of the divinely superfluous beauty of Nature, and the beating drum of eternal time. It is always the whole that surpasses any of man's attempts to embody divinity, in any of its vast forms, that satisfies Jeffers's observations that God is the entire Cosmos, which is conscious and present in all things:

I think the rocks  
 And the earth and the other planets, and the stars and galaxies  
 Have their various consciousness, all things are conscious;  
 But the nerves of an animal, the nerves and brain  
 Bring it to focus; the nerves and the brain are like a burning-glass  
 To concentrate the heat and make it catch fire. (CP 3: 432)

There are two central principles that must be kept in mind while evaluating Jeffers's poetry from a literary and psychological standpoint. These are: 1) the principle of awe through which Jeffers attempts to reduce the reader's self-importance into insignificance, thereby effecting a radical increase in self-knowledge of one's necessary humility in the Cosmos, and 2) the principle of symbolic *death*, whereby the personal destiny of each individual must be cancelled out by a vision of cosmic

integrity to which every reader may only contribute, but never presume to embody as a whole.

As he was constructing his Hawk Tower, for instance, Jeffers began to have prophetic visions of a coming Ice Age that will cover the earth. Later, he added to this prophecy a prediction of global warming, which as we now know is the paradoxical geophysical basis for such a rapid entry into the next Ice Age. "The frost, the old frost," says Cassandra in "The Tower beyond Tragedy," "Like a cat with a broken-winged bird it will play with you, / It will nip and let go; you will say it is gone, but the next / Season it increases" until it is "drawn down / From the poles to the girdle" (CP 1: 149).

Such warnings of a coming frost, followed by his later predictions (at the time he made them, a seeming contradiction) of the melting of the polar ice-caps, are ushered forth from a geological dimension of the psyche that transcends and subsumes the collective unconscious. This vision appears to have come to him during "The time" he "was gazing in the black crystal" (CP 1: 212), a symbol for the dark energy that pervades the universe and can become manifest in earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and storms. The vision of a coming storm had originally come to him while gazing into a black crystal. One of his first mentions of it can be found in his poem "Ocean." Whenever this time was (whether 1916 or 1918) it led him to awaken readers' minds to a picture of cosmic history that is more magnificent than anything before it expressed in poetry<sup>11</sup>. To be sure, the immensity of the Universe was becoming imminent in his verse. In "Ocean," written in 1925, he tells us that he belted the "house and the tower and courtyard with stone" and "planted the naked foreland with future forest," for the ocean told him to be tolerant of "muttering prophets" and that "[i]t is needful to have night in one's body" (CP 1: 212). And in another, later poem also called "Ocean" he says furthermore: "The gray whales are going south: I see their fountains" and "from the flukes to the blowhole the whole giant / Flames like a star" (CP 3: 404).

Experiences of increasing environmental pollution were excruciating for Jeffers. The humanism of a Jesus-centered religious attitude no longer made sense to him, but if the symbol of Jesus could embody a love, in Jeffers's mind, for the whole Cosmos, wherein God may be found in animals, minerals, stones, stars, and man, Jeffers was satisfied. Since, for Jeffers, God is in everything, and whatever man does to the integrity of the sea, the earth, and the air we breathe, he does to himself, he sought a new experience of religion, in a philosophy he called "Inhumanism." This vision forms a much needed complement to Whitman's humanism.<sup>12</sup>

Professor Robert Zaller has drawn a distinction in his magisterial book *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime* between a "democratic

sublime” in Whitman’s verse and a “cosmological sublime” in Jeffers’s, yet, while his understanding of Jeffers’s oeuvre is laudatory, he misses the cosmic and universal extent of Whitman’s democracy. Zaller suggests in the chapter “Configuring the California Sublime” that “we are equally confident our poet of the egotistical sublime, Walt Whitman, will never meet a cosmos he is unequal to” (*Sublime* 153). But Whitman uses the Greek word *kosmos* to describe himself at times always with a small *k*. Whitman does not say he is equal to the Kosmos; he says rather, that the poet mediates democracy to the modern, interpreting God and idols, and “the real I myself” (Walt) is merely “An image, an idolon” (*Leaves* 170). To be an idolon of the Cosmos is to be one idolon amongst many, or as Whitman chants: “All space, all time, / (The stars, the terrible perturbations of the suns, / Swelling, collapsing, ending, serving their longer, shorter use,) / Fill’d with idols only” (*Leaves* 169). Zaller’s contention, therefore, that “It would be difficult to imagine a vision more at odds with that of Robinson Jeffers” (*Sublime* 277) is questionable. However, Jeffers’s intuition of dark matter and dark energy enables him to go far beyond anything Whitman ever dreamt of with regards to the extent that Spiritual Democracy spreads itself throughout the universe, and here Zaller is right.

The black crystal helped Jeffers to see the traces of the Big Bang in all things and it is Jeffers’s ultimate symbol for annihilation. “The beauty of modern / Man” he says in “Rearmament” about a war that would be ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, “is not in the persons but in the / Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and mobile masses, the dance of the / Dream-led masses down the dark mountain” (*CP* 2: 515). Jeffers wrote this poem in 1938, prior to the outbreak of World War II, and today, remembering the loss of millions of lives, it still sends shudders up one’s spine. He articulates this vision of cosmic destruction most superbly in “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 the honesty and confidence from nations and men,  
 She is hunting the lonely heron of liberty . . .  
 Nothing will escape her at last, flying nor running.  
 This is the hawk that picks out the stars’ eyes.  
 This is the only hunter that will 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. (*CP* 2: 605)

Here, the broken-winged bird that symbolized America in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" is no longer just a winged (i.e., version of a) frosty cat, pawing America playfully; rather, it is a dangerous image of a cosmic bird, a hawk that picks out the stars' eyes to produce an eternal night.<sup>13</sup> The significance of Jeffers's use of his favorite animal as an emblem of terminal destruction lies in its transformative power to pluck out human hubris, and for Jeffers this means humility, through the endurance of suffering engendered through cosmic violence. Jeffers also foresees a storm that will cover Alaska with snow, water, and ice so thick that it will be erased from North America. The "sickness" of humanity, corrupting the whole nation, will be cleansed by a coming storm off Alaska. For Jeffers's aesthetic as well as religious vision, "beautiful places" are viewed as sacred. The whiteness of snow will freeze civilization as "the enemy of man," a "spreading fungus," a "moment's accident" of "The race that plagued us [stars]" (CP 1: 374-75) if we do not protect the integrity that has been lost in "The Broken Balance." A new ice age so vast it will eventually blot the human race from existence, is Jeffers's warning, his ultimate image of man's disavowance from the Cosmos. In "Solstice," Jeffers wrote ominously:

I think that a fierce unsubdued core  
Lives in the high rock in the heart of the continent, affronting  
the bounties of civilization and Christ,  
Troublesome, contemptuous, archaic, with thunder-storm hair  
and snowline eyes, *waiting*,  
Where the tall Rockies pasture with their heads down, white-spotted  
and streaked like piebald horses, sharp withers  
And thunder-scarred shoulders against the sky, standing with their  
heads down, the snow-manes blow in the wind;  
But they will lift their heads and whinny when the riders come, they will  
stamp with their hooves and shake down the glaciers. (CP 2: 512)

Next to his beloved hawk, the black crystal is perhaps the most shamanic of all Jeffers's symbols. Crystal gazing, at least into quartz, was a Native American shamanic practice. The crystal was for the shaman an indestructible body, the counter-pole to the native healer's initiate experience of dismemberment, death, and transformation of the human body. In accounts of such initiations, the shamanic novice is actually cut open—whether literally or metaphorically—by an old master shaman, and his body filled with crystals. The aim was to help the novice to become transparent, and able to "see through" the bodies of others as well, to get to the source of any illness troubling a member of the tribe. Holger Kalweit tells us that "crystals have an eminent function in healing in practically all cultures." Amongst the various

uses he mentions are “gazing” into the patient’s body to the source of an illness, “magnification” to enhance the shaman’s “power of vision,” “clairvoyance,” and “bloodletting” (222). For Jeffers, crystal-gazing became a way for him to peer into the subtle body of the world. It enabled him to see as well the illness infecting humanity as a whole, the disconnection of the vision of night. As a poet-shaman, addressing the threat to Cosmos itself, Jeffers gazed in the World Soul using a *black crystal*, and saw a deep darkness there. Jeffers thus reverses the typical shamanic identification with quartz crystals as prisms of clarity, translucence, and light, and insists that it is needful for us to realize *Night* in our bodies. The “black crystal”—a positive image of the *dark energy* that pervades over seventy percent of the entire Cosmos.

For Jeffers, the black crystal is a symbol for something that was on the verge of being born in modern science.<sup>14</sup> Dark energy is a hypothetical form of energy that permeates all of the Cosmos and, as astrophysicists are now postulating, it tends to accelerate the expansion of the universe.<sup>15</sup> Jeffers had intuitions of this in “Margrave,” where he writes: “You would be wise, you far stars, / To flee with the speed of light this infection” (CP 2: 166).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the black crystal was a necessary symbol which enabled him to perceive the evil side of civilized process.

It was a hard vision, personally, for him to sustain. Jeffers says that it is all the “poisons of desire, love, hatred, joy, partial peace, partial vision” that kept him from quenching his thirst in the “black crystal.” The black crystal is a religious symbol which stands opposite to the Hebrew-Christian notion of immortality. In *The Women at Point Sur* he writes: “Annihilation, the beautiful / Word, the black crystal structure, prisms of black crystal / Arranged the one behind the other in the word / To catch a ray not of this world” (CP 1: 257). Jeffers does not enter the “black crystal,” however, as we never enter or see the dark energy that makes up roughly seventy percent of the universe; he refrains from “burning” his thirst in the “crystal-black / Water of an end” (CP 2: 482). Rather, he gazes into the crystal, rather than dissolving completely into it. And it is from this gazing into crystalline blackness that he appears to have arrived at his vision of the beauty of things. This vision, which emerged in 1918, at the end of World War I, would give him his answer to the problem of living in a dis severed state separate from the Cosmos. His poem “The Answer” grew organically from his own inner experiences; they were not transmitted to him by any outside source, other than from dreams and visions and from “roots of endurance” within his own body and psyche. According to Ira Progoff “the psyche of each person has its own individuality,” which may grow “only in terms of its own integrity. . . . [W]e can maintain the integrity of the process only when we work with



images and symbols that are actually our own in the sense that they have happened within our own inner experience" (33).

Such an achievement, according to Progoff, can *only* occur when an individual gets beyond individual psychological states to deeper, what Jung called "psychoid," dimensions of reality. This view of the unexplored collective unconscious, corresponding to the new dimensions physicists are now postulating beyond the present four dimensions on which our usual reality-picture is based, is embodied in the "dark power" of Hawk Tower.

Hawk Tower represents this new religious symbol as a self-constructed shrine for his life and work: a place of worship where the concept of *dark energy*, contained in light and dark matter could be meditated upon before we even had a concept for it. As an energy-symbol, Hawk Tower is made up by only part of what we can see. The other part, dark energy, is the unseen part that is an emblem for the darkness that makes up seventy percent of the universe. There is a photo of Jeffers taken in 1925 by Lewis Josselyn, illuminating this idea by way of a stupendous image. Jeffers is seen standing in the entranceway to Hawk Tower dressed mostly in black, which captures this thought beautifully, I believe: the poet's left hand is resting on the middle stone of five granite sea-boulders that make up the vertical column to his awesome parapet, and behind the ten stones and the supporting granite rocks above the door, is pure darkness: night. The light we can see reflected on the rock, Jeffers' open-necked white shirt, and light playing off his face, is shadowed forth by the backward darkness in the interior, lower part of his Tower. Science was on the verge of discovery of the concept of dark energy and dark matter at this time. What stands out most in the picture is the known poet, foreshadowed by the unknown darkness of hidden space behind him. This would form the knowable and unknowable sides of the shamanic archetype that Jeffers stood for, as a nature poet of the ordered Cosmos. In Jung's late formulations on the nature of the psyche, he noted that the psychoid is a potential area or space where psyche and matter touch. Jeffers touches this potential space when he describes the black crystal, flakes of which are embedded materially in his majestic sea-granite. Hence, Jeffers was well in advance of the scientists when he gazed into his black crystal. He captured the notion of the redshift in a brilliant way in poetry.

Another remarkable hypothesis, advanced by Jeffers half a century before it was confirmed by science, is the notion of dark *matter*, which makes up twenty-five percent of the Universe. (The other five percent of matter is galaxies, nebulae, stars and planets that can be studied through astronomy.) Jeffers speaks about the "the stars — / Short-lived as grass the stars quicken in the nebula and dry in their summer, they



spiral / Blind up space, scattered black seeds of a future" (CP 1: 102). The "scattered black seeds" appear to be Jeffers' metaphor for dark matter. His gazing into the black crystal in 1918 helped him arrive at this view. A parallel notion with the black crystal is the diamond, which, in Chinese Yoga is known to crystallize into the Diamond Body. Jeffers offers an alternate form of extravert-meditation in the West to complement introvert-meditation in the East, as a way to find harmony and peace beyond passion and human tragedy. In "The Flight of Swans," for instance, he writes: "One who sees giant Orion, the torches of winter midnight . . . has found peace and adored the God." Jeffers then turns to the reader and adds: "surely it is time for you / To learn to touch the diamond within to the diamond outside, / Thinning your humanity a little between the invulnerable diamonds. . . ." (CP 2: 419). The concept of dark energy for which the black crystal is a symbol was an astronomical observation that was not made possible until the 1990's, after the Hungarian astronomer György Paál and his collaborators made the first suggestion of it in 1992. It was not until 1998, however, that the term *dark energy* was coined, and this was only confirmed objectively by pictures provided by the Hubble spacecraft. As I've suggested, Jeffers's symbol of the black crystal anticipated this by eighty years. By gazing into the black crystal, Jeffers gave birth finally to a new religious symbol, pregnant with meaning: a God of endless violence, Shiva, as the cosmic destroyer of the Universe, symbolized by a hawk. With this religious symbol, Jeffers turned Whitman's visions of Spiritual Democracy in on themselves.

Jeffers explains his preoccupation with the hawk-symbol in an essay:

[I]t occurred to me that those birds of prey fly so often through my verses that hawk and falcon might be called a characteristic theme in them. This is partly because there are so many in our mountains, and of so many kinds—marshhawk and redtail, Cooper's hawk and sparrowhawk and duckhawk—that is the American peregrine falcon—but I won't continue the list. And partly also because the hawk has symbolic values that are all the better for being diverse and multiform. And partly, because I nursed a broken-winged hawk once; and its savage individualism caught my fancy. (CP 4: 414-15)

Thus, the environmental traumata he describes so well (the nursing of the "broken-winged hawk") that taught him to value its "savage individualism" as the very *meaning* of American democracy, is what led him to transform what his personal traumatic complex, with all of its potential for individual psychopathology (pride, or as an analyst might say, paranoid-schizoid withdrawal from the world of friends) had done to him into a *shaman's wound*, making himself a wounded healer eligible to

treat the World Soul. We find another painful image in "Hurt Hawks," where Jeffers says he kept an injured hawk for a period of six weeks, before he gave it the "lead gift" to end its life (CP 1: 378). Such "affect-symbols" are part of his pantheist vocation as a shaman-poet to awaken us to the fact that God is in all things. Another image of a wounded bird of prey appears in "Cawdor," where an eagle is shot and kept in a cage for six weeks before it is finally killed. After it is shot, the bird's spirit soars into the air, whereupon it sees, far into the world's future, "the eagles destroyed, / . . . / It saw men learn to outfly the hawk's brood and forget it again; it saw men cover the earth and again / Devour each other and hide in caverns, be scarce as wolves" (CP 1: 512). This passage displays Jeffers's remarkable ability to reflect on the meaning of his private visions for the future of the human race.

In letters, Jeffers explained that the "emotional atmosphere" in "Cawdor" came "more than half . . . from the earth full of sea-shells and chips of flint, left by the Indians on this hillock by the sea where we live, and on the coast southward" (CL 1: 781). He speaks of having been "irritated into extravagance by the excessive value that people seem to attribute to human consciousness" (CL 2: 81). In contrast, Jeffers's love for hawks was so deep that he said he would "sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk" (CP 1: 377).

Another passage in "Cawdor" allows us to gain a deeper appreciation for Jeffers's sensitivity to the need for a shamanistic vision of the Cosmos when he writes: "Dark aboriginal eyes, / The Indian's and the coast-range eagle's, like eyes / Of this dark earth watching our alien blood / Pass and perform its vanities" (CP 1: 461). "The Christian faith is becoming extinct as an influence" (CP 2: 420), Jeffers added in his introductory note to his epic poem "At the Birth of an Age," for "[w]e have learned within the past century or so that humanity is only a temporary and infinitesimal phenomenon in a large universe. The knowledge involves a readjustment of values that can only be managed by looking at humanity objectively, from the outside" (CL 1: 883). "We are not important to him [God]," he says further "but he [God = the entire Universe] to us" (CL 2: 365).

To understand what Jeffers was trying to get across to his readers in summoning his hawks to warn them, we need to recognize that the ruthlessness of his vision of healing is closer to Shiva than to Christian Armageddon. This ruthlessness enabled Jeffers to go further than Whitman could do in his sometimes sentimental visions of Spiritual Democracy. No doubt wounding at the hands of a violent father, who insisted on separating Jeffers from his friends and forcing him with slaps to learn Greek and Latin in near seclusion from other human contact, certainly helped to shape his advanced vision of healing for a sickness

in humanity dissevered from its humble origins in the animal world.<sup>17</sup> He did eventually choose to settle for the “savage individualism” of the hawk.

We cannot leave out the importance of the feminine element in Jeffers’s later self-imposed introversion (in company of course with his wife Una and his twin sons), which was a far cry from the separation from childhood friends imposed by his martinet minister father in Protestant Switzerland. He writes in *The Women at Point Sur*:

I drew solitude over me, on the lone shore,  
 By the hawk-perch stones; the hawks and the gulls are never breakers of  
 solitude.  
 When the animals Christ is rumored to have died for drew in,  
 The land thickening, drew in about me, I planted trees eastward, and  
 the  
 ocean  
 Secured the west with the quietness of thunder. I was quiet.  
 Imagination, the traitor of the mind, has taken my solitude and slain it.  
 No peace but many companions; the hateful-eyed  
 And human-bodied are all about me: you that love multitude may have  
 them. (CP 1: 240)

This powerful poem was written two years after Hawk Tower was completed.

His most Shiva-like poem, informed by his fierce hawk spirit, is “The Great Explosion.” Yet while his strategy is a continuation of Whitman’s effort in “As I Heard the Learned Astronomer,” to open the reader’s mind to a humbled-ego’s vision of the Cosmos, it nevertheless takes Whitman’s visions of Spiritual Democracy to a further stage of shamanic visioning. The scientific closeness to the Cosmos made possible by astrophysicists and the powerful two hundred inch (5.1 m) reflecting telescope at Mt. Palomar, in San Diego County, California, had enlarged everyone’s vision of what the Universe of which we are but an “infinitesimal” part consists. In Robinson Jeffers’s mind, the immensity of the new vision of the Universe eclipsed any possibility of a humanistic vision of God. In “De Rerum Virtute” he writes: “And the Galaxy, the firewheel / On which we are pinned, the whirlwind of stars in which our sun is one dust-grain, one electron, this giant atom of the universe / Is not blind force, but fulfils its life and intends its courses” (CP 3: 402).

And yet, behind the righteous rage of his Shiva self, Jeffers retains a personal, even heart-felt tone, because his poems are a lament for the fate of all humans. When we hear him humble humanity with his

vision of the “beauty of things,” it is hard to believe he really was as violent towards humanity as his poems might at times seem to suggest. Rather, we can feel that he cared deeply about our human fates and our fragile place—as a species spinning on a planet in infinite space.

## ENDNOTES

1. In "Explosion" Jeffers writes that "the whole universe beats like a heart"; "The great heart beating, pumping into our arteries his terrible life" (CP 3: 413).

2. Jung's concept of the mana, a primitive forerunner of his modern concept of psychic energy, may be applied to Jeffers's evolution as a poet-shaman. *Mana* is a Melanesian term for soul-force that may be projected onto any object. Jung notes that mana has parallels with the Native American Indian notion of *wakan* in the Siouxan language, *wakonda* among the Dakota Indians, *oki* among the Iroquois, and *manitu* among the Algonquins (CW 8: 115-129). The shaman sometimes becomes identified with this energy-source. Psychic energy is produced in Jeffers's art through his primitive relationship with a number of object-images carrying soul-force (i.e., stones, falcons, hawks, sea, wind, black crystal, night, mountain, fire, stars, galaxies, snakes, etc.)

3. Jeffers and Una were married in the summer of 1913, and they moved to the picturesque region of Carmel-by-the-Sea. "My adored and I have wandered from the flock," he writes; "We have taken up our love in our four hands/ And carried it beyond the shadow of time" (CP 4: 218)

4. Spiritual Democracy places the Cosmic Self at the center of our world-view, as in Jeffers's poem "Shiva." It is a vocation to preserve the psychic integrity of the community with the harmony of Nature. Spiritual Democracy is a global consciousness that sees, feels, and experiences the unity of the Cosmos in all forms of life, organic and inorganic. In "De Rerum Virtute" for instance, Jeffers says clearly enough: "I believe that man too is beautiful." And in "Carmel Point" he adds "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" (CP 3: 399). Jeffers was writing in the same tradition, therefore, that gave birth to Whitman's vision of Spiritual Democracy. Jeffers, as is well known, was not interested in Whitman. In Jeffers's poem "America" he wrote: "But the free-versers and rhymesters / Are not to be called poets, it is a sacred name. / By God I would rather be a good plowman" (CP 4: 546).

5. The Taos Indians are descendants of the "Anasazi" culture – a Navaho term meaning "the ancient ones." The center of their religious rituals was located at Pueblo Bonito's eight prehistoric towns, located at the great ceremonial complex in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. This remarkable site is now widely recognized as an ancient place of astronomical observation.

6. In "Continent's End," Jeffers wrote: "The tides are in our veins, we still mirror the stars, . . . / Mother, though my song's measure is like your surf-beat's ancient rhythm I never learned it of you. / Before there was any water there were tides of fire, both our tones flow from the older fountain" (CP 1: 16, 17).

7. In "Fire," Jeffers repeats the words from Isaiah: "'Holy, holy, holy,' / Sing the angels of the sun, pouring out power / On the lands and the planets," and then he adds, speaking of a nebula as "a mist-fleck at midnight / In the infinite sky; a swirl of a million million suns, dragging their satellites" (CP 3: 367) to intensify the sense of religious awe.

8. In Whitman's 1871 essay "Democratic Vistas" he postulated three levels of American democracy: 1) the political, 2) the economic, and 3) the religious or the spiritual (Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*). Jeffers takes the third level to new vistas of spiritual seeing. "And you, America," he says, "... you were born to love freedom, / You did not say 'en masse,' you said 'independence'" (CP 2: 417).

9. In his 1922 Preface, probably to a planned but unpublished volume titled *Continent's End*, Jeffers says: "Poetry is more primitive than prose. It existed before prose and will exist afterward, it is not domesticate, it is wilder and more natural. It belongs out-doors, it has tides as nature has.... The brain can make prose; the whole man, brain and nerves, muscles and entrails, organs of sense and generation, makes poetry and responds to poetry" (CP 4: 375).

10. The symbol of the shaman is present in every human soul as an innate potential to remember our evolution, from the earliest traces of life to the furthest depths of psyche and space. Jeffers relied upon the energy of the archetype to formulate a picture of our origins in the "The Great Explosion" and he appears to have had intimations of this vision decades before the scientific community accepted the Big Bang theory. "The universe expands and contracts like a great heart," he writes and "all that exists / Roars into flame," and it is "[n]o wonder we are so fascinated with fire-works / And our huge bombs: it is a kind of homesickness perhaps for the howling fire-blast that we were born from" (CP 3: 471).

11. Una describes the events that transformed Jeffers's consciousness in 1918 in the following way: "As he helped the masons shift and place the wind-and wave-worn granite I think he realized some kinship with it, and became aware of strengths in himself unknown before. Thus, at the age of thirty-one there came to him a kind of awakening such as adolescents and religious converts are said to experience" (CL 2: 310).

12. In his 1865 poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" Whitman pictured himself in a large lecture room, seated and listening silently to a *learned astronomer* speak to an audience with many charts, diagrams, demonstrations and proofs; facts and figures of exact science are presented, as if nineteenth century astronomy could limit the Cosmos to what is known. This poem's teacher adds, divides, and measures the Cosmos into a static system, where the sense of interconnected cosmic unity, the vast *similitude* interlocking all, is not conveyed, and where the unknown, unnamed depths of infinite space are blotted out by the light of reason. The astronomer's lecture evokes loud applause and upon hearing such adulation, Whitman, as poet-seer of Spiritual Democracy, gets up from his seat, leaves the lecture room and becomes unexplainably "tired and sick."

How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Looked up in perfect silence at the stars. (LG 410)

13. Star-gazing is one of the ways Whitman sought healing. A link here is from vocalizing to silent listening. The implied meaning is that he *hears* the stars when he himself is silent. This silent form of meditation is made further explicit in *Specimen Days*, where he says, about the sky and stars, that although they "speak no word, nothing to the intellect," they are "so eloquent, so communicative to the soul" (*Poetry and Prose* 833). In 1865, Whitman wrote further in his elegy to

President Lincoln: "*Prais'd be the fathomless universe*" (LG 464). In 1881, he added in "Song of the Answerer," about the function of the poet-seer-as-shaman: "Whom they [the poets and kosmos] take they take into space to behold the birth of stars, to learn one of the meanings, / To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through the ceaseless rings and never be quiet again" (LG 318). This appears to be a key to his Spiritual Democracy: the expansion of consciousness from "lower" to "higher" modes of experience is made transparent in a unitary state of spiritual equality with everything in the Cosmos. But whereas for Whitman human consciousness is the ultimate aim of evolution, for Jeffers, beholding (seeing and *feeling*) the beauty of things and finding and living in humility, in accordance to one's personal myth (one's "rock" as "cornerstone"), is sufficient. In "Night" Jeffers writes:

[Y]ou Night will resume  
 The stars in your time.  
 O passionately at peace when will that tide draw shoreward?  
 Truly the spouting fountains of light, Antares, Arcturus,  
 Tire of their flow, they sing one song but they think silence.  
 The striding winter giant Orion shines, and dreams darkness (CP 1: 115).

14. I would like to thank Jungian analyst Jean Kirsch for her insights into the meaning of this symbol. This primal energy of the Universe is what I hypothesize to be a pregnant symbol of an objective reality in a Cosmos that is more unknown than known.

15. In "Margrave," written shortly after his return from Taos in 1930, Jeffers defines himself against Whitman's humanism:

Consciousness? The learned astronomer  
 Analyzing the light of most remote star-swirls  
 Has found them—or a trick of distance deludes his prism—  
 All at incredible speeds fleeing outward from ours.  
 I thought, no doubt they are fleeing the contagion  
 Of consciousness that infects this corner of space. (CP 2: 161)  
 .....  
 On the little stone-girdled platform  
 Over the earth and the ocean  
 I seem to have stood a long time and watched the stars pass.  
 They also shall perish I believe.  
 Here to-day, gone to-morrow, desperate wee galaxies  
 Scattering themselves and shining their substance away  
 Like a passionate thought. It is very well ordered. (CP 2: 171)

16. The reference to the "learned astronomer" is an incisive criticism of Whitman's humanism.

17. Jeffers's trip to Taos and his affective, *feelingful* attunement with the powerful rhythms of the shaman's drum could not have come at a more synchronistic time in the history of science, for it was in 1929, shortly before Jeffers's first trip to Taos, that Edwin Hubble (who visited Jeffers at Tor House in the 1920's) announced that the distances to more distant galaxies were generally proportional to their

"redshifts." Hubble's observations of *redshifts* led to the mind-boggling realization that the distant galaxies and their clusters have a theoretical velocity directly away from our own vantage points: the more distant star-swirls move with ever-higher velocities. This notion had been earlier suggested by the Belgian Roman Catholic priest, Georges Lemaître, who in 1927 advanced the "hypothesis of the primeval atom." In "Explosion" Jeffers says: the whole "sum of the energies / That made and contained the giant atom survives / . . . / He is beautiful beyond belief" (CP 3: 413).

18. While Jeffers was being schooled in Switzerland, his father "abhorred the sight or sound of neighborhood children. He planted a hedge to keep them from his yard and then, when his home was invaded by Robinson's friends, he took more drastic action. He moved his family to the country, where his peace and quiet, and Robinson's seclusion, could be assured" (Karman, 10).

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STEVEN CHAPMAN

## THE COSMOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF JEFFERS'S POETRY

In the following, I explore the cosmological dimension of Jeffers's poetry and thought, and specifically his engagement with observational astronomy and scientific cosmology. The approach is dialogical, with a primary focus on the dialogue between Jeffers's poetry and contemporary advances in astronomy, astrophysics, and various cosmological hypotheses concerning the large scale structure of the universe. Rather than a simple two-way exchange, I will argue that Jeffers's encounter with science is informed by a multidimensional array of influences and associations; philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, and even theological considerations all merge together to form an extremely rich and multifaceted worldview.

The essay is divided into three parts. In the first, I turn to "Margrave" and discuss Jeffers's engagement with early twentieth century astronomy. A major theme is how the modern picture of the cosmos revealed by the giant telescopes makes evident the insignificance of humanity in the larger scheme of things, thereby providing a degree of scientific corroboration for Jeffers's own program of radical anti-humanism. Another major reference is to Edwin Hubble's discovery of galactic recession, which serves in the poem as an allegory for the general shift in perspective away from human-oriented consciousness towards what may be called "cosmic consciousness." Working through the problem of consciousness, the poem reveals an idealist strain in Jeffers's overall worldview at odds with the strict scientific materialism it otherwise professes. And while the poem adopts the basic model of an expanding universe from modern science, it also presents a number of ideas about the cosmos which hail from an older, classical tradition, including the notion that consciousness may be a property of the universe at large.

In the second part I turn to Jeffers's later forays into the realm of cosmogony, that is, the theory of the origin or "beginning" of the universe. Remarkably, Jeffers anticipated what is now known as the Big Bang model of cosmic evolution as early as 1954. He called this event the "Great Explosion." I will discuss some of the scientific sources behind Jeffers's treatment, including what was known as the primeval atom hypothesis, as well as models deriving from early relativistic

cosmology corresponding to his preferred option of a cyclical universe. I will also suggest that his preference for a cyclical model owes less to contemporary scientific accounts than to older, nonscientific influences, including the pre-Socratic *physikoi*, later classical thinkers, and his own intuitive understanding of the universe conceived as God (or as God/Nature).

In the third part, I discuss Jeffers's surprisingly modern view of the limitations of all scientific models and theories, and his corresponding insight that reality itself—God, the universe as a whole—is unamenable to any final determination, and thus qualitatively infinite. For Jeffers, all our theories are, in the end, just ways of looking at things, sets of myths and metaphors. Those theories can never contain or fully comprehend reality as such, which lies beyond the grasp of any finite set of physical laws or equations.

## I. "MARGRAVE."

### I.1 THE IMMENSITY OF SPACE.

In comments to an unknown correspondent in 1928 or 1929, describing the major influences behind Jeffers's worldview, Una writes: "One invariable habit he has. He never goes to bed without going outdoors about midnight and walking around the place—watching the stars in their courses, marking the rising or setting of the constellations" (CL 1:772). She adds that he "reads scientific reviews with great interest," and "has a large share of *cosmic consciousness*" (773), which she defines as a kind of consciousness which "transcends" ordinary human consciousness.

Jeffers had the good fortune not only to be able to stargaze in the relatively dark skies of Carmel from his tower/observatory by the sea, but also found himself literally at the crossroads of important new developments in observational astronomy. The period of his emergence as an important poetic voice was also the "heroic age" of American observational astronomy, and specifically west coast astronomy, with the data coming in from the big telescopes serving to enlarge our knowledge of the universe by many orders of magnitude. Among the major centers were the Lowell Observatory in Arizona, the Lick Observatory outside San Jose (where Jeffers's brother Hamilton held a position), and the Mt. Wilson Observatory above Pasadena, where since the early Twenties Edwin Hubble had come into prominence by measuring stellar objects found within the "spiral nebulae" (what we now recognize as galaxies).

In a felicitous convergence of his own poetic and philosophical trajectory with contemporary scientific advances, Jeffers was able to adapt the world-picture offered by modern astronomy and cosmology to undergird his own program of overcoming humanism. An important locus of this interaction is the proem to "Margrave" (1931), where cosmological themes are introduced with specific reference to recent astronomical discoveries and their significance for modern humanity's self-understanding:

The earth was the world and man was its measure, but our minds have  
looked  
Through the little mock-dome of heaven the telescope-slotted  
observatory eye-ball, there space and multitude came in  
And the earth is a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun, lost in a nameless  
cove of the shores of a continent.  
Galaxy on galaxy, innumerable swirls of innumerable stars, endured as it  
were forever and humanity  
Came into being, its two or three million years are a moment, in a  
moment it will certainly cease out from being  
And galaxy on galaxy endure after that as it were forever. (CP 2: 160)

The main burden of these lines is the contrast between the "closed" geocentric universe of pre-modern times, where the earth was the center of the world and man was the measure of the cosmos (as in Protagoras' famous motto) and the "open" de-centered universe of modern cosmology, where the earth is reduced to an insignificant speck, and where humans can no longer lay claim to any privileged position. The observational data made available through the giant telescopes shattered forever the comforting concordance between the *microcosm* and the *macrocosm*, and modern humanity finds itself adrift in a "nameless cove" within a vast and indifferent cosmic ocean.

Jeffers foregrounds the role played by the giant eighty and one hundred inch telescopes, comparing the observatory dome to a giant "eye-ball" gazing out into space, while noting that it is "our minds" which are tasked with trying to make sense of the newfound immensity. Just as Galileo's telescope helped to confirm the world-picture of Copernicus, the giant telescopes provided empirical evidence for the modern picture of a universe of incomprehensible vastness.

The revelation of the true magnitude of the universe helped to further the revolution in cosmology begun by Copernicus. The first Copernican revolution, which removed the earth from its privileged position and made the sun the center of the cosmos, was but the first of a series of displacements. A second displacement involved the realization that even the sun can no longer be viewed as central, but is merely a single

star—and a common one at that—amid innumerable other stars in our Milky Way galaxy. This was the view expounded by the great Harvard cosmographer Harlow Shapley, who was able to discredit the then prevailing view of Galactocentrism (the notion that the sun lies at the center of “our” galaxy), and mapped out a cosmos of vastly expanded dimensions with our solar system located in a decidedly off-center position. Measuring Cepheid variables and other “standard candles” (stars with predictable characteristics), he was able to demonstrate that the center of the Milky Way actually lies thousands of light years distant from the sun. A third and even more significant displacement—the one Jeffers celebrates here—came about directly as a result of the new more powerful measuring instruments: the realization that even our own Milky Way galaxy—our cosmic home for thousands of years—was only one of millions of such galaxies scattered throughout the immensity of space.<sup>1</sup> In the new picture of galaxies upon galaxies extending millions of light years in all directions, the earth is reduced to mere parochial status, “a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun.”

Building on his own philosophy of radical anti-humanism and buttressed by the findings of modern astronomy, Jeffers arrives at one of the most important principles of modern cosmology: the “Copernican Principle”—the principle that the earth and its human observers do not occupy any privileged position in the universe, closely related to what is called the “Cosmological Principle,” the principle that the universe is homogeneous and isotropic (evenly distributed in all directions). In an interesting parallelism between Jeffers’s philosophical anti-humanism and currents in contemporary scientific thought, many leading astronomers of the day, generalizing from the Copernican Principle, entertained similar attitudes about humanity’s off-centered place in the cosmos. Here, for instance, is James Jeans from *The Stars in their Courses*: “One thing seems certain—our human lives fade into utter insignificance when measured against astronomical time” (46). And here is Harlow Shapley:

Galaxies, a few decades ago, were hazy patches of light concerning which we had only hazy notions, or no thoughtful interpretation at all. Now they are recognized as stupendous accumulations of stars, one of which we conceitedly call “our” galaxy. Man, the so-called crowning glory of Creation, is revealed to be peripheral, off-center, in one galaxy among uncounted millions. (18)<sup>2</sup>

And here is Jeffers philosophizing similarly in a late lyric: “There is nothing like astronomy to pull the stuff out of man, / His stupid dreams and red-rooster importance: let him count the star-swirls” (CP 3: 476).

## 1.2 GALACTIC RECESSION AND THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE.

The major scientific event referenced in "Margrave," introduced in the proem and then recurring as a *leitmotiv* throughout the narrative, is Edwin Hubble's discovery of universal galactic recession. Hubble was able to establish, more clearly than before, that the farther galaxies lie away from us, the faster they are moving away. This new data would ultimately lead to one of the most important scientific revolutions of the twentieth century: the discovery of the expanding universe. From the Greeks to Einstein, the general assumption was that the universe was static. What the new data suggested instead was an open, dynamic universe expanding outward in all directions.

Jeffers introduces the theme with a tribute to Hubble:

The learned astronomer  
Analyzing the light of most remote star-swirls  
Has found them—or a trick of distance deludes his prism—  
All at incredible speeds fleeing outward from ours. (CP 2: 161)

The "learned astronomer" epithet, recalling the title of Whitman's poem "When I heard the Learned Astronomer," serves here as a subtle poke at the famously pretentious mannerisms of the pipe-smoking Oxford-educated professor. The identification is made explicit by the job description, as Hubble had made it his profession to analyze objects within the most remote "star-swirls," or what he called "extragalactic nebulae." Building on previous data and the meticulous observations of his colleague at Mt. Wilson, Milton Humanson, Hubble was able to use the period-luminosity relation of Cepheid variables to establish that velocity is linearly proportional to distance. This is what is still known as Hubble's Law.

What is remarkable is that in these short lines Jeffers hit upon the major theoretical problem surrounding the observational data, namely, the nature of the redshift (the shifting of wave-lengths towards the red end of the spectrum). Should the observed redshifts be interpreted in terms of the Doppler effect, that is, in terms of real velocities and expanding wavelengths, in which case the galaxies (nebulae) really are moving away from us? Or should they be understood as merely "a trick of distance" in a universe of curved space-time? As late as 1929 it was still unclear which interpretation was correct. More than a decade earlier, Vesto Slipher, using the twenty-four-inch telescope at Lowell, was able to measure the redshift of numerous spiral nebulae, and had adduced a redshift-distance correlation and thus the notion of a metric expansion

of space, albeit along strictly Newtonian (non-relativistic) lines. Hubble, who tended to be conservative, spoke only of “apparent velocities” in his 1929 and 1931 papers, leaving the theoretical work to others. In these lines, however, Jeffers clearly favors an interpretation in terms of actual velocities, and infers from Hubble’s work an expanding universe in which the stars really are “fleeing outward” in all directions.

The poetic presentation parallels the scientific “paradigm shift” from a static to an expanding universe in a way which is very similar to Thomas Kuhn’s theory of how scientific revolutions work, detailing how new observational data leads to a period of uncertainty—the possibility of “tricks” and “delusions”—and thence to a new hypothesis. When Einstein first proposed his theory of General Relativity he assumed, like Newton before him, that the universe was static. But he was able to present a static model only with the help of the now-notorious “cosmological constant” (a sort of “fudge factor” added into the equations). Almost immediately, the Dutch astronomer Willem de Sitter, whose major area of research was the relation between relativity theory and observational astronomy, suggested dynamic models which could account for observational evidence of redshift and what was then known as a “k factor” governing the distance-velocity relations among distant bodies. In his view, the redshift resulted from the curvature of space in a dynamically expanding universe rather than from the Doppler effect. This interpretation was referred to by Hubble and others at the time as the “de Sitter effect.” Further pioneering work by Alexander Friedmann in 1922-24 presented solutions to the relativity equations corresponding to a series of different cosmological models, both static and non-static, and extrapolated variously depending upon the curvature signature, whether positive (a “closed” universe), negative (an “open” universe), or flat (a universe poised exactly at the critical value between expansive force and gravity—the option preferred by most cosmologists today).

The first to embrace the notion that the universe really was expanding as a whole was the Belgian priest and physicist George Lemaître. Even before Hubble’s definitive 1929 publication, Lemaître was able in a 1927 paper to relate the observational data of galactic recession with dynamic solutions to the relativity equations. Lemaître’s path-breaking work was largely ignored until about 1930, when Eddington, de Sitter and others began exploring non-static models. Around 1930, Lemaître sent Eddington a copy of his earlier paper, who quickly forwarded it to de Sitter. Convinced of the essential truth of Lemaître’s hypothesis, both the leading Dutch astronomer and the leading English physicist fully embraced the concept of an expanding universe outlined in the article, and helped to get an English version published (1931). Around the same

time, Jeans, Eddington, and other important public academic figures popularized the notion of an expanding universe in a series of articles, monographs, and radio broadcasts.<sup>3</sup>

An important milestone leading towards a more general acceptance of the idea of an expanding universe was Einstein's pilgrimage to Mt. Wilson in 1930, where after looking through the "observatory eye-ball" he was forced to concede that the universe was indeed expanding, abandoning his earlier commitment to a static universe (and with it the "cosmological constant"). After briefly considering the model of a periodic or oscillating universe ("Cosmological Problem" 1931), he eventually settled on a monotonically expanding universe (sometimes called the Einstein-de Sitter universe ["On the Relation" 1932]). Whereas at the time of Hubble's 1929 paper the general consensus was that the universe was static, by 1931 the general consensus was in favor of a dynamically expanding universe. Incredibly, Jeffers was able to capture with almost epigrammatic precision the transition from a static to an expanding universe at precisely the same time (c. 1930-31) as these important shifts were taking place.

### 1.3 "COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS."

In an important popularizing work, *The Expanding Universe*, Eddington writes: "The unanimity with which the galaxies are running away looks almost as though they had a pointed aversion to us. We wonder why we should be shunned as though our system were a plague spot in the universe" (12). While Eddington cautions against such a hasty inference—since we are not so important—Jeffers seizes on it, using the expanding universe as an allegory of the movement away from human-centered consciousness towards a non-human or "cosmic" perspective: "I thought, no doubt they are fleeing the contagion / Of consciousness that infects this corner of space" (CP 2: 161). And later: "The sane uninfected far-outer universes/ Flee it in a panic of escape, as men flee the plague/ Taking a city" (161). And further down, after pointing to the sobering example of the suffering of the condemned man, the young Walter Margrave: "You would be wise, you far stars, / To flee with the speed of light this infection" (166).

Much of the narrative can be viewed as a "thought experiment" aiming to work through the nature and role of consciousness. There is, on the one hand, a cold materialism and nostalgia for a world without consciousness. On the other hand, working against these sentiments, there is the idea that consciousness may be an intrinsic property of the universe. The narrator confesses to having "humanized" the outer world, and to having attributed consciousness to his "inhuman god". He



even speculates that the self-expression of the universe may require our “ghostly increment” (167). Philosophical relief comes with the assurance that the pangs of human consciousness will eventually pass away in the larger scheme of things: “I believe this hurt will be healed / Some age of time after mankind has died, / Then the sun will say ‘What ailed me a moment?’” (CP 2: 166). Actual relief comes with the snap of the neck of the condemned prisoner, extinguishing the pangs of localized consciousness of the young Margrave, while leaving the older Margrave to suffer on.

At the end of the poem, the narrator reappears in the guise of an amateur stargazer and philosopher-sage, imagining himself on the gibbet gazing at the stars, and anticipating an end of time where the whole universe will eventually wind down to a cold nothingness:

On the little stone-girdled platform  
Over the earth and the ocean  
I seem to have stood a long time and watched the stars pass.  
They also shall perish I believe.  
Here to-day, gone to-morrow, desperate wee galaxies  
Scattering themselves and shining their substance away  
Like a passionate thought. It is very well ordered. (171)

The assertion that the stars will perish, burning their substance away, is the natural conclusion of an “open” or even of a “flat” Friedmann-type universe with negative curvature expanding into an infinite future. The description of the stars “scattering themselves and shining their substance away” reflects a clear thermodynamic understanding of cosmic processes, much in the manner of Eddington and Jeans. Here is Jeans in a similar vein commenting on the ephemeral nature of the universe as whole: “We have seen how the stars are continually melting away into radiation, as surely and as continuously as an iceberg melts in a warm sea. . . . As the other stars are melting away in the same manner, the universe as a whole is less substantial than it was last month” (*Stars* 152). While such an eschatology will ultimately prove unsatisfactory for Jeffers as he pursues his own cosmological investigations, it does correspond to the conventional wisdom of the day concerning the cold inviolability of the second law of thermodynamics.

There are, however, a number of indications in these concluding reflections which point to the larger multidimensional nature of Jeffers’s worldview. First, it is curious, and even somewhat contradictory, that after presenting the poetic argument that galactic recession represents a movement away from consciousness, the narrator would now compare the physical processes of the universe to the movement of “a passionate thought”—suggesting a clear analogy between cosmic processes and

mental processes, and even implying that "consciousness" may be a property of the universe as a whole. The reference to the orderliness of the universe ("It is very well ordered") reads like a deliberate play on the original meaning of *cosmos* as "cosmic order," a common conception in Classical cosmology. Another curious aspect is the close connection between cosmological themes and a certain type of philosophical disposition, an attitude which brings cosmology together with an ethical view of the world much in the manner of the Stoics and Spinoza. So while Jeffers remained committed to the modern picture of an open and dynamically expanding universe (as opposed to the closed, static universe of the ancients), his own way of thinking about the cosmos still reflects much of the earlier Classical tradition, as well as his own intuitive understanding of the universe conceived of as God. While these tensions remain unresolved in "Margrave," they do point to a larger rift between a "materialist" strain and an "idealist" strain in Jeffers's later thinking in which he endeavors repeatedly—and not always successfully—to combine the modern scientific view of the universe with his own conception of the cosmos as a living being imbued with such attributes as consciousness and intentionality.

## 2. "EXPLOSION," "THE GREAT EXPLOSION."

### 2.1 THE EVOLUTIONARY DRIVE.

A major development in modern cosmology, beginning in the early thirties, was the growing acceptance of the paradigm of an "evolutionary universe," the idea that planets, stars, and even galaxies evolve over time. Eddington's work on stellar evolution was a critical step in this direction. His compatriot, James Jeans, would extend this notion to galaxies and to the universe as a whole: "[W]e believe that the universe is not a permanent structure. It is living its life, and travelling the road from birth to death, just as we all are" (*Stars* 99). In *Beyond the Observatory*, Harlow Shapley notes the importance of the "evolutionary drive" informing all fields of modern science including cosmology: "[N]othing seems to be more important philosophically than the revelation that the evolutionary drive, which has in recent years swept over the whole field of biology, also included in its sweep the evolution of galaxies, and stars, and comets, and atoms, and indeed all things material" (15-16).

Jeffers's later poetic forays into large-scale cosmology, and specifically his speculations on cosmogony—the theory of the "beginning" or "origin" of the universe—were motivated by a similar "evolutionary

drive.” From the extant fragments and manuscript notes it is clear that his final ambition was to create a vast epic poem embracing a scientific account of the origin of the universe and the evolution of “all things material.” A segment called “Explosion” would lead off the set, followed by an account of the formation of the moon, the evolution of complex forms of life on earth, and finally human evolution. He talks affectionately of the project as “my Lucretius” or the “great poem,” or the “*De Natura* one.” In manuscript jottings he makes clear the full scope of his epic ambitions: “No doubt I have undertaken a greater theme / Than ~~man or spirit~~ any mind can accomplish . . . the history of the earth and the glory of God” (CP 5: 906). While Jeffers would never complete the great poem, the fragments give some sense of the overall design. It is in this context that Jeffers returned again, in the early 1950’s, to scientific cosmology for inspiration, and specifically to the idea that the universe began with the explosion of a primordial Ur-atom at the beginning of time, precursor to today’s Big Bang model of cosmic evolution.

## 2.2 THE PRIMEVAL ATOM HYPOTHESIS.

The idea that the universe originated in some sort of great primordial explosion follows deductively from Hubble’s discovery of galactic recession. While the empirical evidence shows a universe in a current state of expansion, it is also possible from the data to reconstruct the trajectories of the galaxies backward in time to a hypothetical t-0 (what is sometimes called “Hubble Time,” essentially the age of the universe). George Gamow, in a section of his popular *The Creation of the Universe* (1952) called “The Great Expansion,” notes how the evidence of the expanding universe provides important hints as to its original state:

The discovery that our universe is expanding provided a master key to the treasure chest of cosmological riddles. If the universe is now expanding, it must have been once upon a time in a state of high compression. The matter which is now scattered through the vast empty space of the universe in tiny portions which are individual stars must at one time been squeezed into a uniform mass of very high density. (27-28)<sup>4</sup>

In a similar fashion, earlier proponents of what was known as the primeval atom hypothesis surmised that the birth of the universe occurred as the result of an explosion of an extremely dense singular quantum or “atom” at the beginning of time.

Jeffers’s tribute to such explosive theories of cosmic origins can be found in two closely related fragments.<sup>5</sup> The first version, which Hunt

dates to 1954 (CP: 5: 122), opens with a precise account of the primeval atom hypothesis and associated "fireworks theory" of cosmic evolution:

There are astronomers, mathematicians, men of science, who believe  
 That the whole stellar universe, the earth and the other planets, the sun  
     and his galaxy, and the innumerable  
 Firefly millions of the other star-swirls, and the unseen dark stars, dust-  
     clouds and coal-sacks—were once  
 One giant atom, which under its own exaggeration of heat and pressure  
 Exploded: the farthest galaxies that the telescope sees, according their  
     light analyzed, fly at incredible  
 Speeds outward through space, flung from that fury. (CP 3: 413)

Jeffers begins his account with an explicit reference to the beliefs of the "men of science," stating its theme that recent scientific discoveries in astronomy and physics are a fit subject for poetry, but also suggesting that the views he is about to present are not necessarily his own. In his presentation, he adopts the basic model provided by the "men of science" and transforms it to create a unique form of science-inspired poetry, using such literary devices as an irregular but rhythmic meter and strategic line breaks to express the dynamics of the cosmological model. The expansive catalogue of objects in the universe, including our own Milky Way galaxy and the innumerable other galaxies, the mysterious dark stars, dust clouds and coal sacks (dark nebulae), is echoed in the expansive cadences of his long line. The concluding enjambment, expressing how all these things "were once / One giant atom," captures a sense of mystery and awe at the idea that the entire universe could be conceived in such a super-crunched state. The extreme conditions prevailing in such a state are reflected in the mounting tensions of his highly inflected phraseology, which moves from a thermodynamic description of the giant atom's "exaggerations of heat and pressure" towards both a release of that pressure and a resolution of the contorted syntax when, following another strategic line-break, the atom is finally "exploded." The reference to human observers and their measuring instruments, and specifically to Hubble's analysis, returns the discourse to the realm of the observable and the empirical, while the concluding "flung from that fury" adds another nice literary touch with the alliterative *f*'s serving to dramatize the centrifugal ferocity of that explosion.

Who were these "men of science" who taught the lore of the great explosion and fiery beginnings? The primary reference is to George Lemaître, whose importance for the discovery of the expanding universe has already been noted (section 1.2), and whose ideas were transmitted to the larger scientific community by de Sitter, Eddington, Jeans, and—later—George Gamow. Lemaître was ahead of his time in many

ways. He was the first to recognize that the Einstein model of a static universe was inherently unstable, and that a description of the real world would require dynamic solutions. He was the first to tie together the models of general relativity with the observed recessional velocities of the galaxies. He was the first to apply the principles of quantum mechanics to cosmological questions. Most importantly, he was the first to hypothesize a rapid “fireworks theory” of the origin of the universe, precursor of today’s Big Bang or standard model.

The idea of a rapid expansion of the universe at the beginning of time seems to have come to him around 1930-1931. In a 1930 note in *Nature*, he argues that a “fast theory” of the evolution of the early universe would be required (as opposed to the “slow” model of cosmic expansion favored by de Sitter and Eddington). In an important 1931 paper, he lays out in some detail what he calls the “fireworks theory” of evolution: “A complete revision of our cosmological hypothesis is necessary, the primary condition being the test of rapidity. We want a fireworks theory of evolution. The last two thousand million years are slow evolution: they are ashes and smoke of bright but very rapid fireworks”<sup>6</sup> (*Primeval* 83).

### 2.3 THE PHOENIX UNIVERSE.

A key question for Lemaître and other workers in early relativistic cosmology was the determination of the force of the initial explosion in relation to the total mass of the universe. Was it great enough (more than the “escape velocity”) to overcome the universal gravitational field, in which case the universe would expand forever? Or was it below the critical threshold, in which case the gravitational pull of the collective mass of the universe would eventually overcome the centrifugal forces of the explosion, and the universe would begin to contract in what is sometimes called the Big Crunch? Lemaître gave considerable attention to this problem, especially after he became familiar with Friedmann’s pioneering work from 1922-1924. While the universe is currently in a state of expansion, he notes that the ultimate fate of the universe hinges upon the critical density, or what he calls “cosmic density”<sup>7</sup> (*Primeval* 149). While his own preferred solution would be for an open universe expanding into an infinite future, he notes that “the present expansion might not be capable of making us exceed the equilibrium radius” (79-80). If such is the case, the universe will cease to expand, and will eventually begin to contract and finally arrive at another singular state of zero radius. He goes on, in characteristically colorful fashion, to speculate about a “final fireworks” or a second explosion of the end of time: “After having continued their movement of expansion for several

billion years, the nebulae would stop, then fall back toward one another, and finally collide with one another, putting an end to the history of the world, with final fireworks, after which the radius of space would again be reduced to zero" (80).

One of the various cosmological models explored by Friedmann ("Über die Möglichkeit" 1924) as being consistent with the equations of General Relativity was the model of the "periodic" or "cyclical" universe. In this model, the initial Big Bang at would be followed by a Big Crunch and then explode again in unending cycles of expansion and contraction. Lemaître called this the "Phoenix Universe" in his later writings. Adopting the Friedmann model of a "closed" cyclical universe, he notes in a paper written in the early 1950's: "In the collapsing type of motion, the radius starts from zero and comes back to zero. . . . This would give a kind of periodical universe which will pass over and over through the same periods of expansion and contraction" (Lemaître's manuscript, rptd. in Heller, 27). And later: "We call such a universe a 'phoenix' universe as like the bird of the legend the universe would be completely turned into one compact extremely hot star and a completely new universe expand from it" (29-30).

The model of the "cyclical" or "phoenix" universe obviously appealed to Jeffers. In the first version, after the presentation of the standard model of an expanding universe originating in a great cosmic explosion, he posits a continuation of that model within the context of a periodic universe, comparing the contractions and expansions of the universe to the beatings of a great heart: "But the whole sum of the energies / That made and contained the giant atom survives. It will gather again and pile up, the power and the glory— / And no doubt it will burst again: systole and diastole: the whole universe beats like a heart" (CP 3: 413). A few preliminary comments can be made here. First, while his adherence to the principle of the first law of thermodynamics (conservation of energy, or "mass-energy" after Einstein) is clear, his fealty to the second law (concerning entropy) is less certain; the implication is that all the usable energy of the universe will survive forever. Second, the comparison of the expanding and contracting universe with the pulsations of a "great heart" suggests immediately the idea of a living universe, an identification which is not particularly scientific but which is central to Jeffers's organismic ontology—as if he were trying to reconcile the findings of modern science with his own deeply held view of the cosmos as a living being. A third point is how easily Jeffers mingles cosmological speculation with a kind of "rhetoric of religion." Here, the phrase "the power and the glory" is an allusion to the doxology added at the end of the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, (and) the power, and the glory, now and forever." As will be developed below (section 2.6), Jeffers

uses theological and physical terms almost interchangeably because his notion of the Universe-as-a-whole is inseparable from his notion of God (or God/Nature), introducing a theological dimension to his cosmology which is decidedly “unscientific.”

In his second treatment of the theme, “The Great Explosion,” which Hunt dates to 1957 or 1958 (*CP* 5: 135), Jeffers begins not with the primeval atom hypothesis *per se*, but with a “full cycle” presentation of the periodic model from the present time to a point in the future when the universe will reach its maximum state of expansion and begin to contract, to a point even farther in the future when the contraction will be complete and the whole cycle will begin again:

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. (*CP* 3: 471)

The assertion that the currently observable universe is expanding, that the stars are rushing into empty space, is again grounded on Hubble’s discovery of galactic recession, here taken as fact. The equally assured statement “It will contract,” while not grounded on empirical evidence, is presented as such for the purposes of poetic elaboration. As in his earlier treatment, Jeffers’s uses a dynamic poetics to capture the dynamics of the cosmological model. The beatings of the universal heart are reflected in a highly reactive concatenation of contrasting images, and in the oscillating rhythms of his expanding and contracting free verse line. The account of how the forces of gravity “recall” the stars into “one lump” only to “explode it” captures that sense of a back and forth along with a sense of awe and wonder at the vast cycles of deep time. The “heroic” aspect of the model is manifest in the martial metaphors, as in the description of the “navies of stars and galaxies” sallying forth into empty space, or the comparison of far-off nebulae to “charging spearmen” engaged in a great cosmic battle between the forces of being and nothingness.<sup>8</sup>



The metaphor of the universal heart, which appeared in the first version almost as an afterthought, is here placed in the foreground, with the emphasis less on the one-time event (the "beginning" of the universe) and more on the eternal recurrence of cosmic processes. The chronology suggests that after having embraced the general idea of a "Great Explosion" at the beginning of time insofar as it fits nicely into a linear narrative of an evolutionary universe, at a deeper level Jeffers had become uneasy with the notion of an absolute "beginning" or of an absolute "end," and by 1957 or so had fully opted for the cyclical model as a way out of the impasse.

## 2.4 NON-SCIENTIFIC SOURCES FOR JEFFERS'S CYCLICAL MODEL OF THE UNIVERSE.

While the cyclical model of the universe was thoroughly explored by Friedmann, Lemaître, and others, and even held briefly by Einstein ("Cosmological Problem" 1931) after he was forced to give up on his earlier commitment to a static universe, it was a model which ran up against serious conceptual difficulties, particularly with respect to the prohibitions of the second law of thermodynamics.<sup>9</sup> Eddington, the "high priest" of the second law, sums up the general feeling among most early twentieth century cosmologists that cosmic processes are irreversible, and that the expanding universe will eventually reach a state of maximum entropy and disorganization, from which no rebirth is possible: "It is true that the extrapolation foretells that the material universe will some day arrive at a state of dead sameness and so virtually come to an end; to my mind that is a rather happy avoidance of a nightmare of eternal repetition" (*Universe* 125).

Given the rejection of the cyclical model by contemporary physicists, why did Jeffers so clearly favor it? And if he didn't adopt the model from contemporary scientific literature, where did he get it from? Here it will be useful to delve into the larger set of sources which inform Jeffers's sense of the cosmos.

Jeffers was predisposed toward the concept of a cyclical universe partly because it accords so well with a cyclical (rather than linear) view of time which Robert Brophy has established as fundamental to his overall worldview. It also coincides nicely with his historical philosophy, inspired by Vico and Spengler, in which empires rise and fall in giant historical cycles. Other influences include Schopenhauer, whose Vedic-inspired cosmology involved a similar sense of infinitively repeating cycles, and Nietzsche's philosophy of Eternal Recurrence. So it is only natural that when he came to fundamental questions concerning the large-scale



structure of the universe that his preferred option would be based on the same archetypal cyclical pattern.

Another major source behind his overall thinking derives from his deeply held identification of the universe with God, along with an axiomatic commitment to the idea that the universe (or God/Nature) must be infinite. This attitude follows naturally from the monistic premises of his belief system and his Spinozistic identification of the Universe (or nature) with God. If God is all things, there is nothing outside of himself and he contains all regions of space and time in his singular existence. Here is Jeffers in a 1934 missive outlining the basic premises of his belief system: "I believe that the universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. (*This is physics, I believe, as well as religion.*)" (CL 2: 365; italics mine). As the one being who is all that exists, God remains immortal and infinite. As the old man puts it in "The Inhumanist:" "I see that all things have souls./ But only God's is immortal" (CP 3: 258).

Closely related to his belief in an infinite God is what might be termed his "revolt" against the second law of thermodynamics and its implied "end" of the universe in a "heat death" (really a "cold death" as the universe approaches absolute zero temperature). Just as there can never be any "death of God" (here Jeffers breaks with Nietzsche), so it follows that there can never be anything like the "end of the universe." And since God reserves to himself an infinite capacity for creativity, the universe can never actually reach a state of dead equilibrium. It is precisely on this question where the old man in "The Inhumanist" differs decisively from his friend, the renegade nuclear physicist. While he shows great sympathy towards the scientist, he rejects the notion that the universe will arrive at a state of maximum entropy ("the final desert" [CP 3: 293]). Reacting violently against the notion, the axe sings a vision of the universe bouncing back and forth between being and non-being in "endless succession." Such a view is compatible with the oscillatory model of the universe, but not with the "thermodynamically correct" scenarios favored by scientists of the day.

In addition to certain deeply held intuitive assumptions, Jeffers's sense of the cosmos is informed by a broad Classical tradition. While the materialist thrust and the overall architecture of the proposed "great poem" are clearly Lucretian in inspiration, and conform to a linear account of a "beginning" and of an "end," his thinking is also informed by an even older current in Classical thought in which the basic paradigm is non-linear or cyclical, as in the teachings of Heraclitus and the Stoics. The Heraclitian parallels are particularly prominent in the late poetry.

In the very opening chapter of "The Inhumanist" we are presented with an image of God "hunting in circles" and embracing opposites: "winter and Summer," the old man says, "Rain and the drought;/ Peace creeps out of war, war out of peace;" (CP 3: 256). Here is Heraclitus (DK67):<sup>10</sup> "God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger" (Kirk 184).<sup>11</sup> For Heraclitus, the ultimate reality is found in a continuous stream of becoming, of an endless flowing movement of the whole. Jeffers intones similarly: "The thing is like a river . . . one flowing life" ("Monument" CP 3: 419). The question of whether Heraclitus himself believed in the notion of a cyclical universe is somewhat disputed (Kirk 335-38), though fragments referring to the the cosmos as "an ever-living fire" (*pyr aeizoon*) which kindles and goes out in measures (DK30), and phrases such as "fire's turnings" (*pyr tropai*) (DK31) certainly suggest such an interpretation, and at any rate the consensus in Jeffers's day was that it was indeed Heraclitus who first taught the lore of the cyclical universe.

The model of a cyclical or periodic universe was first propounded in systematic manner by the early Stoics, including Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. They adopted the principle of Heraclitian fire, which they defined as a "mighty and continuous fire" (SVF 2.1045; Lapidge, 164).<sup>12</sup> According to another source, "the fiery and hot substance is the command center of the universe, and that god is corporeal and is the creative force itself, (being) none other than the energy of fire" (SVF 2.1032; Lapidge, 164). In addition to holding the doctrine of world-ordering (*diakosmesis*) through the creative power of fire (*pyr technikon*), the Stoics held that there would also be final dissolution of the universe in fire or *ekpyrosis*, at which point the whole universe would begin exactly as before.

The affinity between Jeffers's worldview and that of the Stoics is striking. Like them, Jeffers was a consistent monist who believed God to be coextensive with the cosmos. Like them, he saw the cosmos informed by a principle of intelligence—what he would define as "a limited but superhuman intelligence" (CP 3: 401)—which pervades and guides all things. Like them, he believed that the universe is a single living being (*zoon*) whose parts relate to each other and to the whole as the parts of a living organism. It is thus true to form that he would adopt the basic Stoic picture of an oscillatory universe.

I have dwelt at some length on possible motivations and sources behind Jeffers's rich and multidimensional worldview to make the case that his engagement with scientific cosmology was never a simple appropriation, but a complex process of assimilation and reconciliation, supplemented by a wide array of contributing ideas and cross-currents. He adopts and makes his own many of the findings of modern science, but he also relies on the strength of his own convictions and his allegiance to a rich tradition of thinking about the cosmos going back to the ancients. His

Spinozistic identification of God and Nature, his commitment to the idea of living universe, and his basic adherence to the cyclical paradigm of cosmic order are in many ways as deeply-rooted as his commitment to science. If certain scientific ideas run into conflict with these deeply-held beliefs, as we have seen with respect to the second law of thermodynamics, too bad for science!

## 2.5 THE NEW HERACLITIAN FIRE: THE NUCLEAR HORIZON.

Another theme common to both versions of the fragment under consideration (see endnote 5)—and an added dimension to Jeffers's dialogue with science—is the association of the “great explosion” with what he calls our “awful interest” in nuclear weaponry. In the first version, after the presentation of the primeval atom hypothesis, the narrator again distances himself from the views of the “men of science” while conceding that if the hypothesis is true it may help explain “our awful/ Interest in atom-splitting and nuclear bombs” (CP 3:413). The same idea is taken up again in the later version, where it serves as a pithy conclusion: “No wonder we are so fascinated with fire-works / And our huge bombs: it is a kind of homesickness perhaps for the howling fire-blast that we were born from” (CP 3: 471).

Jeffers himself was certainly fascinated by the developments of atomic theory and the emerging science of nuclear physics. Already in the mid-twenties he employed the metaphor of “splitting the atom” to signify the “breaking through” from a human-oriented perspective to a larger “cosmic” perspective: “Humanity is the start of the race . . . [t]he atom to be split” (CP 1: 189). At the time these lines were written (c. 1925), the idea of splitting the atom was still largely the stuff of science fiction. Yet a few years later, Ernest Lawrence, newly arrived at Berkeley, would create an advanced particle accelerator, the cyclotron, the first practical atom-smasher. That piece of technology then led to the idea that atoms could actually be split, leading to experiments in induced fission reactions by Fermi and others, and eventually to confirmation of decay of uranium into barium, correctly interpreted by Hahn and Meitner in 1938 as evidence of nuclear fission.

Nothing, however, could have prepared Jeffers (or anyone else) for the actual demonstration of the massive energies released by the nuclear chain reactions of the first fission bombs, a watershed event which impelled him to reformulate his larger worldview for a post-Hiroshima era (in what he calls his “philosophical attitude” of Inhumanism), and which resonates in powerful shockwaves throughout the late poetry.

The connection between the "great explosion" and the developments of nuclear physics can be understood on a number of levels. In terms of imagery, the explosions of "our little blasts" provide the closest terrestrial analogies to indicate the tremendous energies involved in the physical processes governing the universe. In a poem from the *Hungerfield* volume (1953) called "Fire," Jeffers speaks of nuclear energy as a new kind of Heraclitian fire underlying the cosmos: "More primitive, more powerful, more universal, power's peak" (CP 3: 367). Similarly, in draft workings, he speaks of "One energy—Hiroshima," and hypothesizes that the sun and stars are but the various modulations of the "one primal power" (CP 5: 844).

Besides the implicit critique of the cold war "cult" of nuclear weapons, the idea that we were born of a great "howling blast" and suffer from an innate "homesickness" suggests again the larger evolutionary context of the Big Bang model: that through our shared history we partake of a common destiny not only with related forms of earthly life, but with the entire extended universe. "Hydrogen," runs an old Cambridge quip, "is an inert gas which over time turns into human beings." Gamow was a leading proponent in the forties and fifties of both the "hot" Big Bang model and the evolutionary paradigm in cosmology in general. A primary concern in these early stages was to account for the relative distributions of the elements through the reactions of primordial nucleosynthesis. While these efforts failed to account for the origin of the heavier elements—which we now know are created in the extreme conditions of supernovae—an interesting result of these investigations was the prediction by Alpher and Herman in 1948 of residual radiation from that original explosion—a prediction spectacularly confirmed with the discovery of cosmic background radiation by Penzias and Wilson in 1965. These discoveries would in turn convince the majority of cosmologists of the basic correctness of the Big Bang model.

## 2.6 THE PHYSICS OF GOD/NATURE: THE BIG BANG AS HIEROPHANY.

Part of the difficulty of the Big Bang model is the conceptual leap required to conceive of the entire universe as beginning with such an initial "singularity"—one reason why many cosmologists from Einstein to Stephen Hawking to Roger Penrose have been unable to accept it. Even if it were possible through scientific modeling to reconstruct the processes of cosmic evolution backward in time, one comes to a point—in quantum physics this is expressed as Planck time—where the methods and descriptions of science fail. Beyond that limit, there is simply not

a lot one can say about the initial conditions of the universe, and one leaves the realm of physics and enters into an area of almost religious speculation.

Rather than recoil from the “mystical” implications of the Big Bang model, as do many physicists, Jeffers embraced the paradoxes implied by the model’s limits of intelligibility. As in the earlier poem “Nova” (1938-9) where the nova event served as a metaphor for the unpredictable novelty of God/Nature, here the idea of a great explosion serves as a shorthand invocation of the tremendous creative energies of the fierce God of the universe and “his terrible life” (CP 3: 413).

As previously pointed out (section 2.4), the close connection between Jeffers’s concept of physical reality and his concept of a God implies that any discussion of his overall worldview is inseparable from his religious beliefs. The corollary is also true, that any understanding of what Jeffers means by “God” is informed by science. It is not just—as we have seen—that Jeffers uses religious terminology to describe cosmic processes; rather, for Jeffers, those processes themselves reveal the workings of a divine being, properly called God.

This identification helps to explain why the concluding paragraph of the first version of the fragment (c. 1954), corresponding to the final paragraph of the published version in *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*, moves from a scientifically-inspired discourse on cosmic origins to a lengthy elaboration of his conception of God. The metaphor of the “great heart” (CP 3: 471), derived from the idea of an oscillating universe, is generalized into a full-blown organismic cosmology, much in the manner of the Stoics. Jeffers’s God, the “wild God of the world” (CP 1: 377), is co-extensive with the universe, manifesting himself in an unending maelstrom of becoming. Such a God is no “anthropoid” God, but a God who is fundamentally “beyond good and evil.” His essential attributes are indifference and infinitude: “this is the God who does not care and will never cease” (CP 3: 414).

At the end of the poem (first version), Jeffers asserts that even the great explosion is “only a “metaphor” of the “faceless violence” of the universe, which is also “the root of things.” The phrase “faceless violence” recalls again the central the role of conflict in all cosmic processes. In *Themes in my Poems*, Jeffers affirms a similar view of the world governed by primordial violence: “This divine outer universe is after all not at peace with itself, but full of violent strains and conflicts. The physical world is ruled by opposing tensions” (CP 4: 413). While the belief that the physical world is ruled by opposing tensions is solidly grounded in modern physics (as in the interplay between positively charged protons and negatively charged electrons), it also recalls Heraclitus’ notion that “strife” (*eris*) is the ultimate cause of things. Most of all, the idea of

"faceless violence" suggests a universe throbbing with incessant creative energy, in which things emerge and disappear out of a vast cosmic flux, and where creation and destruction are part of the ongoing revelation of the "power and glory" of the one God who is all that exists.

## 2.7 JEFFERS'S LEGACY IN LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MODERN COSMOLOGY.

To return to the primary thread of Jeffers's dialogue with scientific cosmology, and with the added hindsight of a half century of further developments, two points of convergence stand out. First, Jeffers's poetic elaboration of the theme of a "great explosion" precisely anticipates what would later become known as the Big Bang model, and which has remained, with some variations (e.g. the inflationary hypothesis), the standard model to this day. No other modern American poet achieved anything similar. This concordance is all the more remarkable in that at the time Jeffers wrote these poems the model was generally out of favor. Even though Lemaître's ideas were widely publicized, the notion that such a "fireworks theory" could explain the origin of the universe met with heavy skepticism. Einstein in particular was always resistant.

The most popular cosmological model during the late forties and fifties was something called the "Steady State Universe," popularized by Thomas Gold, Hermann Bondi, and Fred Hoyle. This was a universe which neither expands nor contracts, and which has neither a beginning nor an end but which is sustained by "continuous creation." The term "big bang" was originally a pejorative coined by Hoyle to express his disbelief that the universe could have started from such a violent explosion. As already noted, it was only after discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation by Penzias and Wilson in 1965 that the idea gradually became accepted among mainstream academic cosmologists—three years after Jeffers's death. Further evidence in support of the model would come in the perfect spectrum of black body radiation imaged by the COBE satellite, confirming the isotropic and homogeneous nature of the universe as a whole ("The Cosmological Principle"), and strongly indicating that the entire universe has a common origin related to that explosion. One can only imagine the poetic conceits Jeffers might have fashioned from the discovery that the whole cosmos is echoing in perfect pitch the cry of its original birth pangs.

Another significant point of contact is that Jeffers's preferred option of a cyclical universe, while generally rejected in his day, has lately been receiving increasing attention from workers in the field. Fred Hoyle and his colleagues have recently modified the Steady State Theory based

on a closed Friedmann-type periodic model to form what they call the Quasi-Steady State Model. They argue that the model overcomes the limitations of the second law because energy appears in the universe in compensating positive and negative forms (227).

In a similar manner, Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok argue that the added dimensions of String Theory allow for a cyclical, unending universe very different from the ever-expanding model of standard theory. They present a cosmological picture remarkably similar to that of Jeffers:

The cyclic tale pictures a universe in which galaxies, stars, and life have been formed over and over again long before the most recent big bang, and will be remade cycle after cycle far into the future. Cosmic evolution consists of a series of transformations, from hot to cold, from dense to dilute, and from uniform to lumpy and back again at regular intervals spanning up to a trillion years or more. (61)

Unlike the standard model, the cyclical model avoids having to confront the dreaded singularity: “[C]osmic evolution is endlessly repeating with no beginning or end” (67). They call this model the “ekpyrotic universe,” after the Stoics.

Another advocate of the cyclical model is Sir Roger Penrose, who argues in the tradition of Einstein and Hawking that the singularities intrinsic to the standard model are unjustifiable, and proposes instead what he calls “Conformal Cyclic Cosmology” as a scientifically sounder alternative. By treating the notions of time-zero and time-end as “phase transitions” at the points of (near-) zero and maximum radius within an ongoing process of cosmic expansion and contraction, Penrose’s model avoids both the uncomfortable notion of an initial singularity as well as the notion of a “heat death” at the end of time. According to this picture, our current universe beginning with the Big Bang and stretching out into a (near) infinite future is merely the present *aeon*. “I am suggesting that the universe as a whole is to be seen as an extended conformal manifold consisting of a (possibly infinite) succession of aeons, each appearing to be an entire expanding universe history” (147). Here again, it is remarkable how accurately this description resembles Jeffers’s presentation of the phoenix universe hypothesis in the second version of the poem.

If what these scientists are saying is true, we would have to revise our cosmological world-picture in a radical manner, amounting to the biggest revolution or “paradigm shift” in cosmology since the discovery of the expanding universe almost a century ago. All the textbooks would have to be rewritten. It would be nice to conclude this discussion of Jeffers’s dialogue with scientific cosmology with the claim that his predilection for the cyclical model turned out to be the “correct” choice after all.



Alas, the evidence in favor of the cyclical model is scant indeed, and unless new data becomes available it is unlikely to supplant the standard model anytime soon.

### 3. THE INFINITE BEYOND.

#### 3.1 ON THE LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE.

For Jeffers, debates about which cosmological model is “true” serve mainly to bring out the essential incompleteness of all cosmological theories, and the problematic nature of their truth claims. While Jeffers praised modern science for its passion for “discovery” and ability to bring the world into focus, he was also sensitive to its limitations, and to the theoretical impossibility of being able to explain or pin down in any satisfactory way the inexhaustible reality of the universe. In “The Inhumanist”, we read how mathematics is a “human invention” that “parallels but never touches reality” (CP 3: 260). Just as in any sign system a signifier can only refer to another signifier, mathematics can only suggest through indirect approximation the reality it would represent. Its principal virtue is that it “gives the astronomer / Metaphors through which he may comprehend / The powers and the flow of things” (CP 3: 260). This non-identity between reality and our descriptions of reality is not merely an extension of Kantian formalism to the domain of cosmology; it suggests rather a fundamental discontinuity between reality itself—“the powers and flow of things”—and our scientific models, which can not be bridged by simple critical reflection.

The theme is taken up again in another late fragment, where Jeffers points to the contingency of all scientific theories:

The mathematicians and physics men  
Have their mythology; they work alongside the truth,  
Never touching it; their equations are false  
But the things *work*. Or, when gross error appears,  
They invent new ones; they drop the theory of waves  
In universal ether and imagine curved space. (CP 3: 459)

The notion that science is an evolving system of models and metaphors, rather than a representation of reality, is entirely modern, and converges with a line of critical thinking about the scientific truth claims and their *falsifiability* from Nietzsche to Karl Popper. The scenario of “scientific progress” sketched here again recalls Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific “paradigm shifts” whereby older explanatory models are replaced by



newer ones as they lose their credibility through the appearance of “gross error.” Thus the geocentric Ptolemaic universe was succeeded by the heliocentric Copernican universe, which was succeeded in turn by the expanding universe of modern cosmology (see section 1.2). Similarly, relativity (“curved space”) and quantum theory replaced older ideas such as “waves in universal ether.”<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, a critical difference between Jeffers’s view and most accounts of “scientific progress.” For Jeffers, scientific theories are not “true” because they have not been proven false; they are false from the onset because they don’t provide a full and adequate description of reality, and stray farther from the truth the more they presume to represent the truth. Similarly, “scientific progress,” in his view, does not imply that science is continually approaching nearer to the truth and may one day grasp its object.<sup>14</sup> He was especially critical of the notion that any single mathematical model or formula could explain the totality of reality, as in any “Theory of Everything” or “Grand Unified Theory.”<sup>15</sup>

The theme is taken up again in a late poem entitled “The Silent Shepherds,” where Jeffers contrasts the reticent wisdom of his future shepherd-philosophers with the “vast hungry spirit of the time.” What makes the modern spirit so hungry—and guarantees that it will remain insatiate—is the conceit that it is possible to “look truth in the eyes,” thus revealing its essentially tragic character. “Truth” is so far beyond our human approximations, and our conceptions of reality so mediated and distorted by the limited scope of our vision, that the very idea of “touching” truth becomes an absurdity:

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 rack the bones of men into little white fragments and unsky  
the world  
If any mind should for a moment touch truth. (CP 3: 425)

“Truth” here is not only *beyond* human comprehension, ungraspable and undetermined, but *so far beyond* that actually touching the truth would be fatal. Just as Yahweh in the Old Testament can only be seen through a veil and never “face to face,” there is such an order of difference between our human equations and reality itself, that touching truth would overwhelm us. The Ezekiel-like vision of dry bones rocked into fragments along with an “unskying” of the world serves to dramatize that distance with suitable apocalyptic imagery.

Jeffers’s critique of the scientific conceit to grasp “truth” involves a subtle dialectic pointing in two complementary directions: first, most

obviously, to the limitations and potential falseness of all our human notions about the world; second, more subtly, to the idea that reality or "truth" is itself infinitely vaster than our models can possibly comprehend. Even as he participates in the passion of the scientist's "will to truth" he recognized that our apprehension of reality through scientific models, however refined, can never fully encompass reality. Reflection on these limits leads, in an inverse corollary, to consideration of the infinite and freely creative nature of the whole.

### 3.2 THE ABSOLUTE INFINITE.

A principle difference between Jeffers and mainstream scientific cosmology, as already noted, was his axiomatic commitment to the notion that the universe must be infinite. In this, Jeffers challenged head-on one of the most basic assumptions of modern cosmology, namely, that the universe can be described in finite terms. Einstein, for instance, felt he had no choice but to abolish the notion of an infinite universe as meaningless, opting instead for a universe which is finite (though "unbounded"), and where real values can be ascribed to represent its properties. Eddington concurs: "That queer quantity 'infinity' is the very mischief, and no rational physics should have anything to do with it. Perhaps that is why mathematicians represent it by a sign like a love-knot" (*New Pathways* 217).

Jeffers saw the concept of infinity quite differently. He believed, following Spinoza, that God/Nature is necessarily infinite, free and undetermined by any system or set of constraints. In this view, any finite determination would be a limitation and thus a curtailment of God's being and freedom (since every determination is a setting of limits, and thus a negation—*omnes determinatio est negatio*). As the *Summum Genus*, the substance that contains and enfolds all other substances, the fierce God of the universe is absolutely *causi sui*—self-causing and self-creating, revealing his infinite and freely creative nature in the continuous production of cosmic and evolutionary novelty.

The contrast between Jeffers's way of thinking and the standard approach of science is brought out dramatically in the extended confrontation between the old man and the renegade German nuclear physicist in "The Inhumanist." In the course of that exchange, not only does the old man reject the notion of a final ending or "heat death" of the universe (since that would mean, in effect, "the death of God"—see section 2.4), he also rejects emphatically the scientist's contention that it is theoretically possible to explain the entire universe in a single formula or equation. As the axe screams in defiance, the old man proclaims that there is always "something beyond" which exceeds the narrow limits of

our knowledge: "Skin beyond skin, there is always something beyond: it comes in and stirs them. I think that poor fellow / Should have let in the mad old serpent infinity, the double zero that confounds reckoning, / In his equation" (CP 3: 293).

The paradox here is that any equation which purports to contain all variables must admit infinite values if it is achieve a complete representation of reality, yet once non-finite values are admitted, they "confound reckoning," undermining the very notion that any such complete equation is possible. There is no *adaquatio rei et intellectus* in Jeffers's system, no principle of sufficient reason. Rather, in his view, there will always be "hidden variables," chance fluctuations and other unexpected factors which undermine the completeness of any grand "equation" or field theory of the universe.

The "old serpent infinity" here is both the mathematical symbol of infinity and the archetypal tail-eating ouroboros, the alchemical symbol of the infinite "beyond" (which may well lie at the origin of the mathematical symbol). In Jeffers's double-edged dialectic, the qualitative infinity of God/Nature guarantees that any finite system or set of equations will remain incomplete, while the recognition of that incompleteness helps to bring into focus His absolute freedom and otherness. As Jeffers puts it in another late fragment: "There is no god but God; he is all that exists, / And being alone does strangely" (CP 3: 454).

## ENDNOTES

1. A crucial question for astronomers and cosmographers in the early 1920s was the nature of the "nebulae," and particularly of the spiral nebulae. Were they just gaseous conglomerations at the edge of our own galaxy? Or were they galaxies just like the Milky Way galaxy, as in the "island universe" hypothesis? This was the subject of the famous "Great Debate" in 1920 between Shapley and Herbert Curtis, in which Shapley held that the galaxy, though vastly greater than previously conceived, was still "all there was;" Curtis argued for the "island universe theory," the notion, first hypothesized by Emmanuel Kant in the eighteenth century, that our galaxy may be just one of many. The debate itself was inconclusive, but mounting evidence from the big telescopes and improved measuring techniques led to an ever increasing estimate of the size of the universe, and during the course of the 1920s there was a gradual realization that our galaxy was but one of millions of such galaxies. An important milestone was Hubble's discovery of Cepheid variables in the Andromeda Nebula (M31), which allowed him to apply period-luminosity relations to measure the distances, which were found to be much greater than anything in the confines of our own Milky Way, proving that the universe is far greater in extent than Shapley's estimates. Thus *The New York Times* was able to report on 23 Nov, 1924: "Confirmation of the view that spiral nebulae, which

appear in the heavens as whirling clouds, are in reality distant stellar systems, or 'island universes', has been obtained by Dr. Edwin Hubbell [sic] of the Carnegie Institution's Mount Wilson Observatory, through investigations carried out with the observatory's powerful telescopes" (cited in Sharov and Novikov 34).

2. In a way which recalls Jeffers's later philosophy of Inhumanism, Shapley relates cosmic evolution to the demise of anthropocentrism: "In this essay cosmic evolution is our central theme; anthropocentrism is our trouble. If we could accept the former, and forever get way from the latter, our religions and philosophies would be richer and more honest. By anthropocentrism I mean the state of being blinded by our presumption of man's cosmic importance—our presumption that we exist in a universe centered on the terrestrial genus *Homo*. Once we are free from the man-centered illusion, our minds can roam over a universe that in size and power puts our inherited vanities to shame" (100).

3. An important intermediary figure in the translation from observational evidence to a new theory of the universe was Caltech professor Richard Tolman, who in 1929, even before Hubble's groundbreaking paper the same year, published a paper entitled "On the astronomical implication of the de Sitter line element for the Universe" which explicitly related the "de Sitter world" with galactic redshift.

4. Eric Chaisson, a modern advocate of the evolutionary paradigm in cosmology, gives a similar account of the reasoning behind the theory: "Visualizing the past by mentally reversing the outward flow of galaxies, we reason that all such galaxies were once members of a smaller, denser, and hotter Universe. Accordingly, we surmise that an explosion of cosmic proportions—popularly termed by some the "big bang" and by others "creation"—probably occurred at some time in the remote past. The galaxies, including our own Milky Way, share in the expansive aftermath of this cosmic bomb, for they delineate, at one and the same time, both the underlying fabric of the Universe and the scattered debris of that primeval explosion" (82).

5. The textual situation surrounding these two fragments is complex. According to Hunt, the familiar version of the poem (1963) is actually a composite creation, the result of heavy-handed editing on the part of Melba Berry Bennett in which she combined the first paragraph of a later c. 1957-1958 fragment with the conclusion of an earlier fragment from 1954. As Hunt reports, the "Explosion" manuscript is on a March 5, 1954 mailing. He notes, correctly, that it was conceived as the beginning of a long poem (CP 5: 122). He groups "The Great Explosion" together with other very late poems (including "The Silent Shepherds") to 1957 or 1958, perhaps even as late as 1959 (CP 5: 135). Commenting on the version of "The Great Explosion" published in *The Beginning and End and Other Poems*, Hunt writes: "... 'The Great Explosion' combines parts of 'Explosion' and 'The Great Explosion,' poems similar in subject and imagery but written three or four years apart" (CP 5: 857). In the *Collected Poems*, these fragments are presented as two separate poems. There are, however, enough thematic and structural similarities between the two versions to warrant the idea that they are actually two versions of the same poem.

6. The same idea is colorfully portrayed in a 1931 article, "Expansion of Space": "The evolution of the world can be compared to a display of fireworks that has just ended: some few red wisps, ashes and smoke. Standing on a well-chilled cinder, we see the slow fading of the suns, and we try to recall the vanished brilliance of the

origin of the worlds" (*Primeval* 78). And here is Eddington from *The Expanding Universe* commenting on the difference between the Einstein-de Sitter universe and Lemaître's hypothesis: "Lemaître does not share my idea of an evolution of the universe from the Einstein state. His theory of the beginning is a *fireworks theory*—to use his own description of it" (60).

7. The term "cosmic density" comes from a lecture in 1945 entitled "The Primeval Atom," where Lemaître details how the primeval atom hypothesis fits into a relativistic Friedmann-type model of universe poised in a state of tension between the forces of cosmic repulsion and gravitational attraction: "Therefore, a certain density exists, which we shall call the density of equilibrium or the *cosmic density*, for which the two forces will be in equilibrium" (*Primeval* 149).

8. Compare this with the description of the cosmic battle in the "Epic Stars," where the stars are likened to doomed heroes engaged in a heroic raid on the "heart of darkness" (CP 3: 466).

9. After considering the early models of the oscillating universe proposed by Friedmann ("Über die Möglichkeit" 1924) and Einstein ("Cosmological Problem" 1931), Tolman concludes in his influential textbook *Relativity, Thermodynamics and Cosmology*: "a continued succession of irreversible expansions and contractions . . . would seem very strange from the point of view of classical thermodynamics, which would predict an ultimate state of maximum entropy and rest as the result of continued irreversible process in an isolated system" (439-40).

10. (DK notation): Kirk's quotations of the fragments of Heraclitus are from Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed.

11. Jeffers repeats the reference almost verbatim in "De Rerum Virtute" ("Winter and summer, day and night, war and peace are God" (CP 3: 402), suggesting that the fragment had particular significance for him.

12. (SFV notation): Lapidge's quotations from the Stoics are from *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Armin. Rpt. Stuttgart, 1964.

13. As Jeans put it in *Physics and Philosophy*: "The theory of relativity washed away the ether" (134).

14. The idea that scientific theories are just insights or ways of looking at reality rather than descriptions of the way things really are bears comparison with David Bohm's notion that all scientific theories have only a relative and limited domain of application. Towards the beginning of *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, for instance, Bohm writes: "Instead of supposing that older theories are falsified at a certain point in time, we merely say that man is continually developing new forms of insight, which are clear up to a point and then tend to become unclear. In this activity there is evidently no reason to suppose that there is or will be a final form of insight (corresponding to absolute truth) or even a steady series of approximations to this. Rather, in the nature of the case, one may expect the unending development of new forms of insight (which will, however, assimilate certain key features of the older forms as simplifications, in the way that relativity theory does with Newtonian theory). As pointed out earlier, however, this means that our theories are to be regarded primarily as ways of looking the world as a whole (i.e. world views) rather than as 'absolutely true knowledge of how things are'. . ." (5).

15. Grant Hier makes the same point with admirable precision: "For Jeffers there is no absolute, no singular definable 'truth' to be discovered or assembled by man, not even a God as 'Truth.' The only 'truth' Jeffers might concede is the general 'truth' that the universe's unfolding and evolving is a divine process—is God's act of self-discovery" (41). My thanks to Jim Baird for pointing out the reference.

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DEBORAH FLEMING

## ROBINSON JEFFERS, W. B. YEATS, AND ECOPROPHECY

Robinson Jeffers's place in American literature continues to elude comparison. His work does not belong to the tradition of Jackson's eminent domain, Crevecoeur's New Eden, Turner's frontier, or Emerson's moral philosophy. His landscapes are not those of preservationists like Muir. Wilson O. Clough states that Jeffers, removed from the center of American culture, ends the long trajectory to the Pacific in a kind of "geological determinism" (186) that evades category—he is not transcendentalist, romantic, or naturalist. Facing the Pacific in "The Eye," the speaker launches into prophetic spaces without Whitman's backward glance in "Facing West from California's Shores" (211). Jeffers seems to voice Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal and isolationism, but far more imminent in his poetry is the doctrine of wilderness perhaps best articulated by Max Oelschlaeger as that set of beliefs derived from Paleolithic nature worship and augmented by Darwinian evolutionary theories (245, 255). George Hart in *Inventing the Language to Tell It: Robinson Jeffers and the Biology of Consciousness* explains that Jeffers's "development of a sacramental poetics that expresses a holistic vision of a divine cosmos" and "expression of a nonanthropocentric environmental ethic" sets him apart from other poets of his age (2-3). He is the first major poet to articulate the idea of nature as supreme and human beings as part of rather than master and rightful owner of the biosphere.

Described by Helen Vendler as occupying a place in the tradition of oratory rather than poetry ("Huge Pits," 58), Jeffers famously distrusted the trend of modern poetry toward private symbolism and art for its own sake, "renouncing intelligibility in order to concentrate on the music of poetry."<sup>1</sup> He articulated his poetic practice in "Point Joe" that "Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally/Of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present" (CP 1: 90) and in his essay "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" (1948) that "Permanent things, or things forever renewed, like the grass and human passions, are the material for poetry; and whoever speaks across the gap of a thousand years will understand that he has to speak of permanent things. . . . (CP 4: 427). He chose to make his



work entirely different from what he saw as the poetry of arcane illusion; like Whitman he favored direct statement and the long narrative line, although Jeffers himself disavowed any interest in Whitman (*CL* 2: 141). Jeffers's stated opposition to the trends he found in modern poetry forced him for several decades to the margins of critical appraisal until a new generation of scholars found in his work the voice of ecocentrism or deep ecology. He may stand alone as the first voice of what I will call ecoprophecy or he may be seen as a Modernist whose themes and focus expand the idea of what it is to be modern. While not an imitator, he belongs, I believe, in the tradition of his poetic mentor, W. B. Yeats, in whose work Jeffers found sources for his aesthetic and philosophic theories.

W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) and Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) shared a vision of modernity which rejected contemporary values in favor of tradition and created a poetry which sought to change those values. Included among Modernist poets in spite of early Romantic influence and his commitment to formalist verse, Yeats fixed his gaze on the past in order to find his thematic focus, describing his own time as "this filthy modern tide,"<sup>2</sup> in which he and his people must forge their own nation. Both concerned themselves with permanence in times of fragmentation and established poetic traditions based on dramatic landscapes and cultural myth. Robinson Jeffers documented well his interest in and appreciation of Yeats's poetic example. A letter from 1932 includes Yeats's name among those he read and imitated at times (*CL* 2: 141). To Harriet Monroe he wrote that Eliot was the only contemporary English poet he found interesting "since Yeats is Irish" (191). In other correspondence (1938) Jeffers compared himself to Yeats in "Among School Children" (263). Answers to an unpublished questionnaire mention Yeats among Hardy, George Moore, and "a few books of the Old Testament" (*CP* 4: 555) under the heading "ideas." This document also includes Rossetti, one of Yeats's most important stylistic forebears, as an influence (*CP* 4: 552). A fragment dated 1950 and addressed "To Death" declares "You have Yeats and you have Una Jeffers: the voice that I admired and the woman I loved. You will never touch me again" (*CP* 4: 561). That Jeffers compares Yeats whom he never met to his lifelong companion may indicate something about the tenacity of Yeats's influence. Maureen Girard includes thirteen pages of notations written in books by Yeats in her bibliography of the library at Tor House.

While Yeats's work established the poetic terms of decolonization and interconnectedness of culture, place, and nature, Jeffers's voiced those of what we call today ecocentrism—the earth or natural world rather than the human mind is the center of all things. Robinson Jeffers's ecoprophecy stems from what he termed his "attitude" of Inhumanism,

a reaction to the failure and arrogance of humanism to provide human beings with god-consciousness and understanding of their marginal place in the universe. Human beings, propelled by their own violent drives, remain the primary instruments of the recurring cycles of history which will culminate in their termination. Jeffers believed that since the earth and the cosmos made human beings, only they can provide what little happiness human beings can have (ecodeterminism). Ecoprophecy is articulated by the old man in "The Inhumanist" when he utters "There is one God, and the earth is his prophet" (CP 3: 304), meaning that the earth holds the key to all human endeavor, whether it is survival or the creation of culture. The prophet here does not foretell the coming of God but the manifestation of God through the sublimity of natural process. Nature is not benign but majestic, violent, indifferent. Not only is its "intelligence" found in the rock and biomass but also in human consciousness that comprehends it. The cosmos itself stands as evidence that all things including human beings and civilizations will pass away and something else be regenerated. The earth rather than religion should hold foremost place in human consciousness although myth is a way of explaining our place in the world. Ecoprophecy is not the doom-laden result of destruction, for Jeffers believed the earth will endure. Inhumanism expresses his world-view, but ecoprophecy is his message, that the earth and the cosmos determine the future; human beings constitute a very small part of the whole, but their meaning derives from their ability to appreciate natural beauty—not merely landscape but the intricacy of the microcosm and power of cosmic force.

Jeffers's narrative "The Inhumanist," Part II of *The Double Axe* (1948)—containing probably Jeffers's bitterest condemnation of civilization as well as his clearest statement of faith—articulates his belief that God is manifest in the cosmos and that all things that exist are God and therefore divine. Copernicus and Darwin exploded the myth of the human-centered universe, the old man states (CP 3: 274), and, through his encounters with people trekking on the mountain where he lives, unfolds his philosophy that God is manifest in the daily, annual, and millennial cycles of the universe. Max Oelschlaeger terms Jeffers a "psalmist for this pantheistic god" and explains that "the poetry recognizes that the modern person—the humanist of modern culture—has become *Homo oeconomicus*, and the world in which life plays out its course merely profane. The inhumanist, however, is a specimen of *Homo religiosus*, and celebrates an eternal mythical present: a living-God in the world" (249). Oelschlaeger continues that "The psychic allure of Jeffers's ecological vision is that nature and God, rent asunder by the modern mind, are reunited" (253). The concept of ecocentrism has existed for millennia in the religion of nature-worship that most

Paleolithic people engaged in. They worshipped wild nature and took for symbols the Great Hunt and the fertility goddess; myth is the account of origins (10), and re-enacting sacred time makes it possible to re-experience the cosmos at the mythical moment of creation (40). Modern philosophic and scientific language, however, obscures wild nature (243). The old man in Jeffers's poem, a caretaker at an abandoned ranch, asks whether God exists and answers that the evidence lies in the cells of his body that "feel each other and are fitted together" (CP 3: 256); all the atoms in the universe are aware of every other atom. He rejects tribal and anthropoid gods which are mere projections of human fears and desires (CP 3: 257) and embraces the pantheistic God revealed in the wheeling hawk and the dawn. Jeffers rejects notions of an Edenic past or innocence: "Original Sin" (1948, CP 3: 203-204) describes prehistoric people engaged in the brutal killing of a great woolly mammoth. Human beings should behave as much as possible like the natural creatures, as he shows in "Boats in a Fog" (CP 1: 110).

To return to the issue of Jeffers's place in American literature, I suggest that, in spite of his nearly hermetic life and exclusive focus on the landscape of Big Sur, his is the major voice in the twentieth century which articulates the national experience in the larger context of Western civilization, and in so doing he is the true inheritor of Whitman's poetic tradition. It is well to note here that Jeffers is also the major American poet of the long narrative. In order to achieve his vision Jeffers turned to the example of Yeats who dedicated his energy to the creation of a national literature.

Engaging Yeats's work enabled Jeffers to develop a related, though distinct, sense of what themes and subject matter were best suited for poetic endeavor. His connection to Yeats helps to explain the nature of his poetry even as it helps to clarify Yeats's influence on those who followed him. Moreover, Jeffers's interest in Yeats indicates that critics misunderstand Jeffers if they take his rejection of Modernism (as exemplified by Pound, Stevens, and Williams) as a rejection either of contemporary poetry or the processes by which modern poetry came into being. For Jeffers, Yeats was the only ancestor (and contemporary) who articulated what poetry in the twentieth century should be about and the one who led from the past (especially the Romantic tradition) to the present and pointed the way to the future. His interest in Yeats places Jeffers within the Modernist tradition rather than primarily outside it and shows that he cannot be adequately understood as a regionalist, isolationist misanthrope. At the same time, a comparison of the two may reveal more about engenderment of poetic themes that draw extensively from tradition but are necessarily changed in the modern era—Jeffers's and Yeats's uses of landscape, belief in historical

cycles, appropriation of myth, rejection of Enlightenment rationalism, and redefinition of traditionalism.

Scholars and critics have noted thematic and stylistic parallels between Yeats's and Jeffers's work and the unmistakable Yeatsian echoes throughout Jeffers's poetry from "The Coast-Range Christ" (1920, CP 4: 340-364) to "Granddaughter" (1963), and this in spite of Jeffers's having used mostly long, unrhymed, accentually-metered lines and favored the poetry of direct statement while Yeats remained symbolist and formalist. Jeffers's "Birthday" (1941), for example, delves into that traditional Yeatsian theme of old age and desire for youth:

Time to grow old;  
Not to take in sail and be safe and temperate,  
But drive the hull harder, drive the bows under.

Time to grow hard  
And solitary: to a man past fifty the hot-eyed  
Girls are still beautiful, but he is not.

Time to grow passionate.  
Girls that take off their clothes and the naked truth  
Have a quality in common: both are accessible. (CP 3: 19)

Jeffers includes here the Yeatsian obsession with time, the nautical metaphor of "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), the need of old men to be solitary with their memories, and the wish expressed in "Politics" (1939) that the poet could be young again and in the company of beautiful girls. Jeffers employs the Yeatsian phrase "the host of the air" (from "The Host of the Air," 1893) in "To the House" (1924), and it is difficult not to think of Yeats's verse when one reads "The sweet forms dancing on through flame and shade" (CP 1: 7) in Jeffers's "Consciousness" (1926) and the epithets in the first line of "Granite and Cypress" (1925): "White-maned, wide-throated, the heavy-shouldered children of the wind leap at the sea-cliff" (CP 1: 105). Jeffers's "Natural Music" (1924) shares with Yeats's "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" (1912) the image of a child (a girl in Jeffers; Yeats's poem does not make clear the gender but suggests a girl with the lines "tumble out your hair/ That the salt drops have wet" [CW 1: 122]) and the revelation in the following poem titled "Two Years Later" [1914] that the child will "Suffer as your mother suffered" [CW 1: 122] dancing on a shoreline heedless of personal suffering or human folly. In Yeats's poem, however, the threatening sound of the wind becomes "monstrous crying," while in Jeffers's "Natural Music" the voices of ocean and rivers "intone one language" (CP 1: 6), and if listeners could separate themselves from "the storm of the sick nations"

(similar to the “fool’s triumph” and “the best labourer dead” in Yeats’s poem), they would find those natural voices “Clean as a child’s.” In both poems, danger is present and revealed in the image of a storm, innocence by a girl dancing.

In “Granddaughter” (1963) the speaker looks at a portrait painted three years earlier, when the girl was two. After comparing her changed temperament he comments that he hopes she will find the “beauty of transhuman things” but concludes with his wish that “she will find/ Powerful protection and a man like a hawk to cover her” (CP 3: 464). Yeats’s much longer poem for his daughter, dated June 1919, begins with the speaker praying for his infant girl during a storm that provides a metaphor for his own turbulent emotions. Above all the father wishes happiness for the girl which will come through muted beauty, privacy, self-possession, and stability—everything opposite what he found in the fiery, captivating Maud Gonne. The speaker concludes with a wish for his daughter’s marriage to one who will provide “custom” (“the spreading laurel tree”) and “ceremony” (“the rich horn”), suggesting tradition and permanence (CW 1: 190).

The influence of Yeats on Jeffers’s poetry begins well in advance of “The Coast-Range Christ.” In his early work, echoes of Yeats sound more clearly than those of the Pre-Raphaelites who influenced them both. “The Measure” (1903) opens with the dominant theme of Jeffers’s work to the end: the greatness of the universe as compared with the insignificance of human existence. Compare this to the poem published in 1885 with which Yeats has greeted readers since the publication of his collected works in 1933, “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” where the pastoral singer employs archaic diction and inversion to lament the loss of old idealism and romanticism. Yeats’s poem uses “thine,” “guile,” and “sooth” (CW 1: 7-8); Jeffers’s poem employs “Old mother Earth,” “giveth,” and “naught” (CP 4: 3). In both poems the speakers admonish the reader not to trust too implicitly in science (“the starry men” in Yeats, “mighty men” in Jeffers) nor in learning; make reference to astronomy, universal vastness, and fate; and undercut their own message even as they articulate it. Jeffers employs Italian sonnet form, developed during a time of emerging humanism, to question human relevance, while Yeats praises and questions the ability of poetry to reveal truth (“Words alone are certain good”; “Seek . . . no word of theirs”).

Jeffers’s “The Cruelty of Love” (1912) deals with that most Yeatsian of themes, passionate but unrequited love, in language reminiscent of Yeats’s “When You are Old” (1893). The poetic speaker enjoins the beloved when she sits quietly in her chamber to think about his love for her as he wanders—the beach in Jeffers, “pouring my soul on the wind” (CP 4: 18), the mountain in Yeats, where Love “hid his face amid

a crowd of stars" (CW 1: 41). Jeffers's "Her Praises" (1912) shares with Yeats's poem the idea that among the beloved's many moods, the speaker loves and praises her solemn earnestness (CP 4: 14-15). In "When You are Old" it is the woman's "pilgrim soul" and "sorrows of [her] changing face."

"Let Us Go Home to Paradise" (1916) uses the image of "dove-gray seas" (CP 4: 68) as Yeats uses "dove-grey sands" in his 1896 work "A Poet to his Beloved" (CW 1: 63) and "dove-grey faerylands" (CW 1: 66) in "The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his Many Moods" (1895). The poems in Yeats's 1899 volume *The Wind Among the Reeds* with their frequent images of wavy arms, parted lips, dim hair—as well as "dim heavy hair" (CW 1: 66) and "long heavy hair" (62)—and "cloud-pale eyelids" (67) may have inspired the images of "pale eyelids" and "lips and eyelids" in Jeffers's poems "The Longing" (CP 4: 25) and "Her Praises" (CP 4: 14), published in 1912. "The Moon's Girls" employs imagery of "waving arms," "green fairies in the dell," "misty shapes," maids "heavy-haired,/ Slender-formed and misty-pale," "fairy charms," and "midnight hair" (CP 4: 11-12) as well as the theme of searching in vain for a fairy maid as in Yeats's "Song of the Wandering Aengus" (1897). We see the influence of Romantic poetry on Jeffers's early work, but the ways in which he departs from the tradition resemble Yeats's early poems through *The Wind Among the Reeds*. Poems from *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892) may have informed Jeffers's early (mostly 1912) poems "The Cruelty of Love," "Nemesis," "A Philosophy," "The Longing," "To Helen, Whose Remembrance Leaves No Peace," "Salt Sand," "On the Lake," and "Something Remembered," in which the speaker begins "The shadow of an old love yesterday/ Went by me on the street" (CP 4: 16). "To Helen About Her Hair" (1912) uses the image of the beautiful woman combing her hair and "Shaking its splendor out" where his soul is caught (CP 4: 17). "Fauna" (1924) contains the image of the witch who has wound the lover in her bright hair (244) as well as multiple references to dancing on the "dim shore" (234-50).

The dreamy diction in Section VII of the long lyric "Maldrove" (1916) could have been inspired by some of Yeats's early poems:

O dreams, O more innumerable than sand,  
 Or salt flakes of the sea-froth driven and beaten  
 On sands the west wind and the north have smitten,  
 The southeast wind and the east wind from the land  
 Have piled with wilder dunes and fiercelier bitten  
 With seaward gullies—O visions of my dreaming,  
 Numberless as the sea-wrack tossed and streaming! (CP 4: 170)

"To Canidia" (1912) makes use of the image of the witch girl who entraps the lover by "enchantments," song, and "woven charms" (CP 4: 36) like the "woven shade" of Yeats's "Who Goes with Fergus?" published in 1899 (CW 1: 43). "To Canidia" ends in the lover's resolution to free himself of the spell, however, which Yeats's lovers are never able to do. "The Palace" (1914), an unpublished poem, mentions the curlew called in by "fathers of old time" (CP 4: 440-1) to cry in empty rooms and continues "The wind in the weeds/ Is a better harp than a harp." Yeats's poem "He reproves the Curlew," published in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, demands that the bird cry no more or only to the West because its crying brings to the speaker's mind the "Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair" of a lover (CW 1: 62). Jeffers's early poems, somewhat derivative and lacking the depth of the later work, nevertheless reveal a formidable control of meter and rhyme as well as maturing poetic sensibility.<sup>3</sup> The long poem "Storm as Deliverer" (1917-18), written in ottava rima stanzas, presents an interesting psychology of a woman contemplating adultery and concludes with the denunciation of humankind that pervades Jeffers's later work (CP 4: 256-77). "The Songs of the Dead Men to the Three Dancers" (1917-18)—who are Desire, Death, and Victory—are meant to be performed since three figures enter and dance as the poem is read (CP 4: 223-33). Jeffers found this form at the same time Yeats published *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), the first of his *Four Plays for Dancers*, the others being *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919), *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), and *Calvary* (1920). Jeffers's "A Redeemer" (1928) employs the same scarecrow image as Yeats does in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Among School Children" published in 1928 in *The Tower*. Yeats's "aged man" is a "tattered coat upon a stick" in the first poem (CW 1: 193) and a "comfortable kind of old scarecrow" in the second (CW 1: 216). Jeffers's old prophet living in the mountains remarks "God's a scare-crow, no vengeance out of old rags" (CP 1: 407).

Some of Jeffers's mature verse shows evidence of Yeats's influence as well. "Tor House" (1926) shares with Yeats's truncated English sonnet "The Cold Heaven" (1912) the image of ghosts walking on earth after death. While Yeats's poem begins with the image of rooks flying in the heavens which "seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice" (CW 1: 125), Jeffers describes the flight of gulls over the ocean in imagery reminiscent of Yeats: "Come in the morning you will see white gulls/ Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon/ Their dance-companion" (CP 1: 408). Cassandra's utterance in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* (1925) that she has watched "the world cataractlike/ Pour screaming onto steep ruins" (CP 1: 144) may have found its source in Yeats's "The Mountain Tomb" (1914) where "The cataract smokes upon the mountain side" (CW 1: 121). Structural features of "For



Una" (1941) bear a resemblance to Yeats's "Man and the Echo" (1939) including the use of refrain in a meditation that begins by situating the speaker in a specific locale (Hawk Tower in Jeffers, a glen on the side of Sligo's Knocknarea Mountain in Yeats), progresses to the poet's inability to reconcile current events with his life's work, and concludes with the abrupt return to the immediate surroundings.

Jeffers expressed admiration of Yeats most remarkably in building Hawk Tower in imitation of Yeats's restored Norman castle Thoor Ballylee. The most comprehensive study of Yeats's and Jeffers's use of their towers as poetic tropes is Theodore Ziolkowski's *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image* (1998) in which he explains the Antimodernist stance of the tower as the place the poet retreats to in order to separate himself from the everyday, yet also to meditate and imagine. Such isolation enables the poet to contemplate in order to maintain a universal world view. Yeats and Jeffers employed the tower as a central image for their resistance to much of the modern world they disliked; as a manifestation of cultural conservatism opposed to the spiritual, intellectual, and political upheavals of the early twentieth century; and as emblem in opposition to the modern, urban technological world. The literary image assumes an immediacy, Ziolkowski maintains: writers actualized their resistance to modern society by taking up residence in towers that embodied the past (xi-xv).

Yeats's move to Thoor Ballylee represents his retreat from modern cities and what he perceived as mob rule and his turn toward the ancient countryside (Ziolkowski, 45-46). The tower linked him with the Irish past, with the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and (for him) its history and intellectual pride, and with the estate of his friend Lady Gregory whose shared interest in Irish subjects led to the founding of the Irish National Theatre. The tower had originally been situated on her estate when Yeats first visited it; he purchased it in 1917 from the Congested Districts Board which had acquired it during the break-up of some of the larger estates (Ziolkowski, 47). He uses the emblem in "Ego Dominus Tuus," written in 1915, where he sets the scene on "the grey sand beside the shallow stream/ Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still/ A lamp burns on beside the open book . . ." (CW 1: 160). The images of tower, lamp, and book also figure in "The Phases of the Moon," written after he had acquired the tower but not yet moved in. Earlier he articulates the meaning of the symbolic tower in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900) which contains the explanation of the tower as "man's far-seeing mind" (CW 4: 66) and the mind looking outward from a spiritual and intellectual height:

The tower, important in Maeterlinck, as in Shelley, is, like the sea,  
and rivers, and caves with fountains, a very ancient symbol, and would



perhaps, as years went by, have grown more important in his poetry. The contrast between it and the cave in *Laon and Cythna* suggests a contrast between the mind looking outward upon men and things and the mind looking inward upon itself . . . . It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings beside the one or two the writer lays an emphasis upon, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement, into the abundance and depth of Nature. (CW 4: 66)

In "A Tower on the Apennines," a section from "Discoveries" (1906), Yeats describes a vision of a medieval tower which he caught a glimpse of at sunset as he crossed the mountains near Urbino on foot "alone amid a visionary, fantastic, impossible scenery" (CW 4: 211). He saw, "in the mind's eye an old man, erect and a little gaunt, standing in the door of the tower," a poet who had "come to share in the dignity of the saint" (211). Urbino represented for him the educated class whose wealth and influence lifted the common people into appreciation of their own art and culture. This view he makes clear in "To a Wealthy Man who promised a second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures" (1913) where he tells the wealthy man to imitate Duke Ercole, Guidobaldo of Urbino, and Cosimo, who did not rely on the will of the common people but gave their wealth to uplift the culture as a whole. The poet advises the man to be generous and disregard public opinion:

Look up in the sun's eye and give  
What the exultant heart calls good  
That some new day may breed the best  
Because you gave, not what they would,  
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest! (CW 1: 108)

The tower, its tradition going back to Homer, gave Yeats the "numberless meanings" to create his subjective art that could transcend the "barrenness" of the modern.

While similar images inform the poems in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, as Ziolkowski shows, the symbol of the tower undergoes many changes. While in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917) the poet is not yet ready to enter the tower of introspection, in "The Phases of the Moon" he projects himself into the tower while his own creations—Owen Aherne and Michael Robartes—jeer at him for his struggle to find "mysterious wisdom won by toil" (CW 1: 163). The poet succeeds, however, in finding wisdom and puts the candle out. *The Wild Swans at Coole* includes "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" (1918), a reminiscence of someone who cannot visit him in the tower (Gregory died in the Great War),

and "A Prayer on going into my House" (1918), in which he adopts the point of view of one who has not yet entered. The last poem of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921) celebrates his entry into the house but ironically focuses on its eventual ruin: the tower represents for him beginning and ending as well as cyclic history. While he inhabits Thoor Ballylee, however, he will be in touch with traditional values although he knows they will eventually be lost.

The tower was more than habitation: it was first a symbol of poetic ancestors Milton and Shelley, then a haven of traditional Anglo-Irish values (Ziolkowski, 54-55). Ziolkowski describes the evolution of Yeats's symbol of the tower, concluding

In the course of some forty years, then, Yeats's image of the tower developed from a conventional romantic topos (tower, lamp, book) first to an icon for the retreat of the poet and his immediate family, then to an emblem for Ireland, next to a symbol of human consciousness, maturing in the winding gyres of its stairway, and finally, on its ramparts, to a springboard into the cosmos. The turning point from conventional topos to a larger image came almost precisely at the moment when Yeats purchased and moved into Thoor Ballylee: the stages of its development correspond with great precision to the periods of extended stay at Ballylee (1919, 1922, 1926, and 1927). As long as he stood outside, the tower remained the lonely tower of the romantic poet stooped over his Plato. Once he entered its premises, the spiraling ascent to the top and the view from the battlements over time and space afforded the perspectives from which the tower could become its own "monument of unaging intellect." (68)

The poet's private symbol emerging from a traditional one, the tower as both habitation and emblem enables him to bring his life at least temporarily closer to art. It was haunted like all human history but especially Irish history (Smith, 66) and was a repository of the Great Memory.

While Yeats renovated an old tower that had both private and public significance, Robinson Jeffers constructed his own. His wife Una also admired Yeats and wanted Robin to build the tower, so he worked alongside the masons who built Tor House in order to learn their craft. He chose to live in the Carmel Valley because he loved the coast and its people whose way of life seemed timeless:

. . . for the first time in my life I could see people living—amid magnificent unspoiled scenery—essentially as they did in the Idyls or the Sagas, or in Homer's Ithaca. Here was life purged of its ephemeral accretions. Men were riding after cattle, or plowing the headland,

hovered by white sea-gulls, as they have done for thousands of years, and will for thousands of years to come. Here was contemporary life that was also permanent life. . . . (Foreword to *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, CP 4: 392).

In this passage Jeffers echoes Yeats's sentiments on Irish nationality:

Wherever men have tried to imagine a perfect life, they have imagined a place where men plow and sow and reap, not a place where there are great wheels turning and great chimneys vomiting smoke. Ireland will always be a country where men plow and sow and reap. (qtd. in Ellmann, 113)

The tower represented for Jeffers nature and isolation: the stones which had rolled in the sea for thousands of years would endure longer than the poet, the society and nation he lived in, or even the human species. At the same time Tor House and Hawk Tower allowed him to withdraw from that society in order to avoid its corrupting influences—greed, narcissism, desire for power, love of luxury. Considerably smaller than Thoor Ballylee, Hawk Tower's square shape suggests it: "The image of the tower as it emerged in his poetry during the twenties marked a radicalization of the romantic image of the lonely tower of introspection" (Ziolkowski, 81). Yeats's renovation of Ballylee clearly follows from his desire to steep all this work in ancestral and national history. Hawk Tower contained no such ancestral or national significance but was instead Jeffers's emblem of his own personal and poetic isolation. Jeffers may ultimately have spent more time in his tower, since the Yeats family occupied Ballylee only during summers between 1919 and 1927, while Jeffers lived in Carmel most of his life.

Jeffers's major work invoking the imagery of the tower is *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* (1925), his translation and adaptation of *The Oresteia*, which concerns the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and of Clytemnestra by Orestes. To these Greek sources Jeffers adds an attempt by Electra to persuade Orestes to seize power and finally his abjuration of power by leaving the city and entering the natural world. Orestes climbs "the tower beyond time" (CP 1: 178) and enters "the earlier fountain," his isolation: "The work ends with this invocation of 'the tower beyond time'—that is, the mythical ideal of a timeless state of detachment that may be achieved by those who have endured tragedy and thus passed beyond it" (Ziolkowski, 90). Jeffers explained that his idea in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* was to present dramatically "that liberation which the witness is supposed to feel—to let one of the agonists be freed, as the audience is expected to be, from passion and other birth-marks of humanity. Therefore, *beyond* tragedy—tragedy and what results" (CL 1: 486). In other works Jeffers uses the image of the tower to evoke

feelings of isolation, strength, or pride. California in *Roan Stallion* (1925) is described as “erect and strong as a new tower” (CP 1: 179). Jesus in *Dear Judas* (1929) declares that his soul “is all towers” (CP 2: 15). The poet’s message in “To a Young Artist” (1928) is that unconsciousness is the “treasure, the tower, the fortress” (CP 1: 395). Ziolkowski concludes

For Jeffers, then, the tower that he built for his wife in imitation of Yeats’s tower at Ballylee provided the real and symbolic refuge from which, with Horatian irony and the Lucretian detachment that he called Inhumanism, he contemplated what he regarded as the inevitable disintegration of civilization and the reassuring timelessness of the natural world. (95)

Jeffers’s work shares more with Yeats’s than use of imagery and language. Like Yeats, Jeffers created mythologies, rooted his work in a deep sense of place imbued with folklore, embraced the notion of cyclical theory of history, and incorporated elements of the ghostly and supernatural. In the essay “Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years” (1948), in which Jeffers praises Yeats as the great poet who speaks beyond his time, he remarks that “great poetry appeals to the most primitive instincts” (CP 4: 425). Yeats makes much the same observation when in “The Celtic Element in Literature” (1897) he explains the Celtic “natural magic” as “the ancient religion of the world, the ancient worship of nature” (CW 4: 130); the great tragic figures of literature, he asserts, have come “out of legends and are indeed but the images of the primitive imagination” (CW 4: 134). Ireland inspired Yeats in a way no other terrain could have done, as natural features provide memorable images which bring the landscape into focus: animals, plants, and village life dependent upon them make national art what it is. Yeats shares with Jeffers belief in the importance of the natural world, stating in the “Introductory Verses to *The Shadowy Waters* that “*all we know comes from you*” (CW 1: 405). Both poets lived during times of dramatic historical change, rejected Christianity while retaining its symbolism and their belief in God, informed their ideas of eternal recurrence through the philosophy of Nietzsche, and lamented the passing of traditions they valued, although for Yeats those traditions were founded upon older civilizations while Jeffers considered all civilization inherently corrupt and embraced solitude and ideas about the centrality of nature we have come to refer to as “deep ecology.” They saw ugliness and chaos in the new technology they distrusted.

To Yeats the Victorians and Wordsworth adulterated poetry with their ethical and “improving” stand (Watson, 40). The business of poetry, Yeats makes clear in section three of “Art and Ideas” (*The Cutting of an Agate*, 1924), was to reveal timeless truths, exemplified by “those wanderers who still stitch into their carpets among the Mongolian plains religious symbols so old they have not even a meaning” (CW 4: 253).

Like many moderns, he distrusted notions of progress, empiricism, and rationalism, embracing instead myth, tradition, folklore, and rootedness wherein lay those poetic verities. In his note to *The Resurrection* (1931) Yeats asserts that when he was a boy “everyone talked about progress, and rebellion against my elders took the form of aversion to that myth. I took satisfaction in certain public disasters, felt a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin. . . .” (CW 2: 722). In “The Symbolism of Poetry” (*Ideas of Good and Evil*, 1900) Yeats refers to “the slow dying of men’s hearts that we call the progress of the world” (CW 4: 120). F. A. C. Wilson argues that the final couplet of “The Black Tower” drives home Yeats’s aversion to the Victorian belief in progress and counters with Heraclitus’s (and we may include Blake’s) belief that not only could the tension of opposites not be resolved, it also created the source for art (225). When Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus (251) claims that he wants to find the beauty that has not yet come into the world, he rejects the sentiments of Yeats’s Robartes who seeks the beauty that has gone out of the world (“He remembers forgotten Beauty,” 1896). Harold Bloom terms Yeats a romantic, while Hazard Adams refers to him as “an anomaly—a modern romantic poet” (*The Book of Yeats’s Vision* 161).

Jeffers also distrusted Enlightenment empiricism and denied that freedom meant material abundance, saying in “Shine, Republic” (1935) that “Freedom is poor and laborious; that torch is not safe but hungry, and often requires blood for its fuel” (CP 2: 417). Like Yeats he seems to celebrate the apocalypse, believing as Yeats did that it would signal the commencement of a new age and that cultures resembled nature in their cycles of death, transformation, and rebirth. According to Tim Hunt, he shares with many modernists their belief that science, economics, society, and increasing violence threatened the continuity of the culture which nevertheless required aesthetic renewal (246). For Jeffers, that renewal stemmed from the beauty and permanence of nature.

Standing in opposition to what Yeats referred to as “this filthy modern tide”—mob rule, loss of aristocratic values, democratization of culture, destruction of the land—he, and Jeffers later, posed their values of folk (and in Yeats’s case, aristocratic) tradition, the value of landscape and place, the Great Memory of the earth which contained all times at once, myth and symbol, and the centrality of poetry. Their philosophy may be said to resemble in some ways Martin Heidegger’s, who, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), opposed the notion of rationality and the universalizing machine—which David Harvey claims is represented by the Bauhaus and the architecture of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe—and proposed rootedness and environmentally-bound traditions as foundations for social and political action (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, 35). At the same time, Yeats and Jeffers nevertheless

belonged to the Modernist tradition, believing in and even celebrating the disintegration of the present culture and the coming of the next great historical era. Through the paradigm of poetry they formulated their Nietzschean theories of eternal recurrence and creation of myth.

Does Yeats's and Jeffers's rebellion against the modern world and its values make them Antimodernists, or even Romantics, since they began their careers before the Modernist period? George Bornstein describes Yeats's artistic choice as a "thoroughly historicized modernism both re-rooted and re-routed in the earth" (*Material Modernism*, 81). Daniel Albright posits the beginning of Modernism with Charles Baudelaire who in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1864) writes that "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" (qtd. in Albright, 65). He goes on to assert that if Modernism is defined as the art of urban junk, "Yeats is the least Modernist of poets" (65); while most of those writers we label Modernists—for example, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Woolf—were at home in the cities, Yeats's attitude toward them—in spite of the fact that he lived much of his life in London or Dublin—implies contempt: "When I stand upon O'Connell bridge [Dublin] in the half-light and notice the discordant architecture, all those electric signs, where modern heterogeneity has taken physical form, a vague hatred comes up out of my own dark" ("A General Introduction for my Work," *Essays & Introductions*, 526). Albright further describes Modernism—referring to a passage from *A Vision* (1925) in which Yeats laments the vast separation of myth from everyday fact in the work of Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Pirandello—as "a heap of urban garbage weirdly juxtaposed with antique glamor" (66). Yet while Yeats drew his symbols from tradition rather than from modern urban life and claimed that terms like "steam roller" were dead and unpoetic—no word being fit for poetry unless thirty centuries had sanctified it—still, technology makes its dramatic appearance in his work, from the "brazen hawks" of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" whose "innumerable clanging wings . . . have put out the moon" (CW 1: 206) to the "Aeroplane and Zeppelin" of "Lapis Lazuli" (67-68). Albright concludes by claiming Yeats as essentially Modernist: "Yeats fights Modernism as hard as he can, only to find himself acknowledging that he is Modernist to the marrow of his bones" (75).

Helen Vendler asks the same question of whether Yeats is the last Romantic as he claimed in "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" or the first Modernist, stating that for some critics his writing formalist verse excludes him from the Modernist label ("The Later Poetry," 79). Her answer is that his originality, insouciance, and sometimes blasphemy in his use of forms and traditional symbols (for example, his Madonna is

a “common woman,” his whore—Crazy Jane—a lover in the Romantic tradition as well as a philosopher and theologian) remove him from Romantic and Victorian modes and place him firmly as an iconoclastic Modernist (79). “Like all the best Modernists,” she writes in *Our Secret Discipline*, “he disturbed forms without entirely abandoning them” (181). She also defines the term as “individual,” “wayward,” and “secular” (“The Later Poetry,” 84), all of which define both Yeats and Jeffers. To return then to the question asked earlier about Yeats’s distaste for the modern world and Jeffers’s rejection of Modernist tendencies in poetry, I answer that they are not Antimodernists in Albright’s sense but rather anti-modern Modernists in Vendler’s sense, distrustful of technology but fully capable of facing the world as they found it and making meaning through their poetry while transcending the material urban world of pavements, neon signs, and machines. Yeats’s early poetry and Jeffers’s solitude notwithstanding, their poetry is anything but escapist.

Jeffers, like Yeats, rejected the modern trope of the impersonality of the artist exemplified in the work of Wallace Stevens and T. S. Eliot; instead, he transformed himself through identification with place and creation of personae. Winfield Townley Scott, in speaking of Jeffers, claims that Yeats was the only other modern poet who could “so powerfully make himself his own protagonist” (173). In *Estrangement* (1909) Yeats calls this “the tradition of myself” (CW 3: 342), created only through the act of writing. William Nolte asserts that Jeffers admired Yeats most of all moderns, that both have been called fascists, but that what appeared to be fascism was their unwillingness to subscribe to political or religious dogma, both being more concerned with the values that direct human beings (216-18). R. P. Blackmur claims that Yeats searched for a mode of expression, not a dogma to express (64-79); we could definitely say the same of Jeffers. They adopted the stance of someone outside their own time, looking at events not from the microcosm of the present but the macrocosm of the recurring cycles of history. John Felstiner, in *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems*, identifies Yeats as Jeffers’s inspiration for his oracular poems (175).

The business of poetry, both Yeats and Jeffers concluded, involved notions of history, nationhood, and landscape. When Jeffers in “Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years” puts forth his philosophy of poetry and what the great poet should aspire to, he discusses Yeats’s example at length, indicating that Jeffers’s philosophy is not so far removed in temperament from that of the major poet of the twentieth century:

To return now to the great poet whom we have imagined arising among us at this time. He would certainly avoid the specialists, the Gongorist groups, and he would hardly expect response from the average, the average educated person: then whom should he speak to?



For poetry is not a monologue in a vacuum: it is written in solitude, but it needs to have some sort of audience in mind. Well: there has been a great poet in our time—must I say comparatively great?—an Irishman named Yeats, and he met this problem, but his luck solved it for him. The first half of his life belonged mostly to the specialists, the Celtic Twilight people, the Decadents, even the Gongorists; he was the best among them but not a great poet, and he resented it. He had will and ambition, while Dowson and the others dropped by the wayside. Yeats went home to Ireland and sought in the theater his liberation from mediocrity; and he might possibly have found it there, if he had been as good a playwright as he was a poet. For the theater—unless it is a very little one—cannot belong wholly to a group; it has to be filled if possible; and it does not inevitably belong to the average. When many people together see and hear the thing—if it is fierce enough, and the actors and author can make it beautiful—it cuts deep. It cuts through many layers. The average person may even forget his education and delight in it, though it is poetry.

But Yeats found in another way his immortality. He was not a first-rate playwright but he had an insuperable will; and when his Ireland changed, he was ready. Suddenly, in that magic time when a country becomes a nation, it was Ireland's good fortune that there was a great poet in Ireland. Her unique need, and his will, had produced him. (CP 4: 425-26)

Thus Jeffers identified Yeats as a national poet created in part by the culture itself. The great poet spoke about a place to its people, Jeffers believed. Yeats also confirmed his conviction that the poetry of a nation could not be separated from the land; he writes in "The Trembling of the Veil" (1922), "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" (CW 3: 167). Yeats's great mentor John O'Leary taught him that "there is no fine nationality without literature. . . no fine literature without nationality" (qtd. in Bornstein, 19). "Does not the greatest poetry always require a people to listen to it?" Yeats writes in "The Galway Plains" (1903); "The poet must always prefer the community where the perfected minds express the people, to a community that is vainly seeking to copy the perfected minds." (CW 4: 158). In "Ireland and the Arts" (1901), he states his conviction that he would have "Ireland recreate the ancient arts . . . as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in a leisured class . . ." (CW 4: 152).

Finding inspiration in Yeats's example, Jeffers identified himself with the dramatic western coast of his country inhabited by people who lived in traditional ways; many of them also believed the hills and valleys to be



haunted as did the people of Yeats's Sligo and Galway. Yeats and Jeffers associated myth with place and sought to recreate their own localities through the poetry and make them visible to people who might have overlooked their significance. While Jeffers based his poetic philosophy on the centrality of nature, Yeats wrote in a letter to Sturge Moore (21 September 1927), "As you know, all my art theories depend upon just this—rooting of mythology in the earth" (qtd. in Ziolkowski, *The View from the Tower*, 62). Thinking of either poet involves necessarily thinking of their localities. As James Baird says of Jeffers in "Robinson Jeffers and the Wilderness God of the Old Testament," it is impossible to think of Jeffers without thinking of Carmel (10). It is similarly difficult when one reads Yeats not to think of the Sligo coast, Galway countryside, or historic Dublin. Yeats's poems set in the landscape of Ben Bulbin, Glencar, Coole Park, and Ballylee become a poetic map of places in Sligo and Galway; similarly, Jeffers names Point Joe, Soveranes Creek, and Carmel itself again and again—even titling one poem "Point Pinos and Point Lobos" as Yeats names "Coole and Ballylee, 1931." In the poems, these localities achieve the status first of artistic and then of mythic landscape. Jeffers seems to invite association between his own locality and Irish myth when in "Ossian's Grave" (1928-29) he compares the coasts of Antrim and Carmel. Looking at the prehistoric monument near Cushendall in Antrim, Jeffers writes

I also make a remembered name;  
And I shall return home to the granite stones  
On my cliff over the greatest ocean. . . (CP 2: 108)

In "Apology for Bad Dreams" (1926) he describes the coast "crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places" (CP 1: 209). I do not, however, suggest that Jeffers is derivative: for the California poet, as not for Yeats, landscape is far greater than tragedy. In "An Irish Headland" (1932), Jeffers describes the beauty of the earth as "too great to weep for" (CP 2: 172).

Inseparable from landscape, animals and especially birds figure prominently in Jeffers's poetry as they do in Yeats's. In Jeffers's sonnet "Love the Wild Swan" (1935) the presence of wild creatures shows the speaker the uselessness of despair but also of art; as in Yeats's "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917) the real birds outlast the romantic image. In Jeffers's "Birds" (1925)—a paean to those of the coast—sparrowhawks, seagulls, and falcons fly, "Their wings to the wild spirals of the wind-dance . . . out of the limitless/ Power of the mass of the sea . . . musically clamorous" (CP 1: 108), reminiscent of the "bell-beat" of "clamorous wings" in Yeats's poem as he watches the swans "wheeling in great broken rings" (CW 1: 131). Swans occupy a place in Jeffers's work as

important as they do in Yeats's: a late lyric describes a lake with swans where the poet heard "the fierce rush of wings/ When they flew upward, beating the water to foam,/ Climbing with visible triumph up the wild sky" (CP 3: 446). In "After Lake Leman" he recalls the swans on that Swiss lake "Rising together, beating the dawn-blue water with webs and wings flying up and flying high . . . their beating wings high in heaven" (CP 3: 461). As in Yeats, Jeffers's image of wild swans suggests not only imaginative flight but also the image of timeless beauty, which even their tumultuous era could not change.

Imaginative and actual communities and characters appear in multiple works such as Yeats's Red Hanrahan, Mary Hines, and Raftery and Jeffers's Tamar and Reverend Barclay. "Drunken Charlie" (1941) is a lyric written in the voice of a character who appeared first in the long narrative *Give Your Heart to the Hawks* (1933). Jeffers's mystic Onorio Vasquez appears in several poems, most notably *The Loving Shepherdess* (1926), as Yeats's Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne appear in "The Phases of the Moon" but also in "He bids his Beloved be at Peace," "He remembers Forgotten Beauty,"<sup>4</sup> "The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his Many Moods," "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes, "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," and "Owen Aherne and his Dancers." Robert Zaller writes that Jeffers, like Yeats, had a lifelong fascination with occult phenomena and that he "peoples his narratives with religious primitives, seers who traffic in a world of portents and voices, spirits and doppelgängers." At the apex are mad visionaries who talk to God like Cassandra in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* (Cliffs, 109).

Edna Lou Walton (95) and Robert Zaller have also identified the obsession with time that characterized both Yeats and Jeffers. Like Nietzsche, who conveyed the personal through archetypal passions incarnated by individuals and the historic through the ebb and flow of great civilizations (Zaller, "Spherical Eternity," 260), they viewed time as cyclical recurrence and assimilated historic and cosmic process by describing their recurring pattern. Having embraced theories of historical cycles, and thus liberated their poetry from the confines of the modern, Yeats and Jeffers adopted the personae of prophets. Yeats's famous prose work *A Vision* (1925, 1937) and such poems as "The Phases of the Moon" (1918) combine imaginative and personal experience with history as defined in cycles or phases. In "Meditation on Saviors" (1928) and "Theory of Truth" Jeffers comments on great religious figures and their cultures which rose to dominance before disappearing, and, in a series of meditative and didactic poems from "The Broken Balance" (1928) to "Prescription of Painful Ends" (1941), on the cyclical nature of historic experience and impending decline of the West. Robert Zaller

writes that Jeffers linked personal to historical time, historical cycles to cosmic process ("Spheral Eternity," 254-60).

Both Jeffers and Yeats were carvers of stone and of language that they might create permanence though they knew all structures to be temporal: stone and mortar provided images and symbols that enabled them to create the poetry of myth and timelessness. David Young argues in *Troubled Mirror: A Study of Yeats's "The Tower"* that Thoor Ballylee represented not only loftiness but also solitude, loneliness, isolation, intellect, point of view, and meaning both immediate and personal (37). Both make their houses emblems of themselves and history and imagine what will happen to their towers when they die (Yeats, "To be carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee"; Jeffers, "Tor House"). They chose places where they could create a new, modern literary tradition made universal from folk traditions and myth but also where they could create new myths. Yeats restores that he might find "Befitting emblems of adversity" for his "bodily heirs" ("My House," 1923, CW 1: 202). Jeffers builds that he might create emblems of tradition ("To the Stone-Cutters," 1924; "To the Rock That Will Be a Cornerstone of the House," 1924; "Tor House," 1928). Their towers were not retreats but places to start from in the quest to form bodies of work that resisted the modern world.

## ENDNOTES

1. "Introduction," *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*, in *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, Volume 4, edited by Tim Hunt (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991), p. 385. *The Collected Poetry* will be hereinafter referred to as "CP."

2. "The Statues." *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume I, The Poems*, edited by Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 337. *The Collected Works* will be hereinafter referred to as "CW."

3. I do not include "The Coast-Range Christ" in this assessment as that long poem is marred by forced rhyme and awkward diction.

4. These two originally appeared as "Michael Robartes bids his Beloved be at Peace" and "Michael Robartes remembers Forgotten Beauty."

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ROBERT ZALLER

## MARA: THE POEM OF FOREBODING

In the poem “For Una,” Robinson Jeffers described the compositional process for the narrative poem, “Mara,” that would appear as the major narrative work of his forthcoming volume, *Be Angry at the Sun*:

To-morrow I will take up that heavy poem again  
 About Ferguson, deceived and jealous man  
 Who bawled for the truth, the truth, and failed to endure  
 Its first least gleam. That poem bores me, and I hope will bore  
 Any sweet soul that reads it, being some ways  
 My very self but mostly my antipodes;  
 But having waved the heavy artillery to fire  
 I must hammer on to an end. (CP 3: 34-35)

This was hardly a recommendation, and “Mara” has been almost entirely neglected by critics. Most commentary when *Be Angry at the Sun* appeared in 1941 was focused on “The Bowl of Blood,” the masque that described an imaginary visit by Adolf Hitler to a seeress, which won the praise of Stanley Kunitz as perhaps the greatest work in the form since Milton’s “Comus.” With the exception of Louis Untermeyer, such attention as “Mara” attracted was mostly negative (Vardamis 102-105). A common theme was that it broke no new ground among Jeffers’s narratives, but merely restated the themes of earlier and better work. Nonetheless—and despite Jeffers’s own disparagement—“Mara” was the headpiece of *Be Angry at the Sun*, his first collection since the publication of the *Selected Poetry* had staked his claim to a career achievement. Although not as long as some of the earlier narratives that had made his name—“Tamar,” *The Women at Point Sur*, “Cawdor,” “Thurso’s Landing,” and “Give Your Heart to the Hawks”—it comprised more than forty per cent of the new volume. It was also the last narrative in the series that depicted what I have called Jeffers’s hero of endurance, albeit as a failed example of the type.<sup>1</sup> Cawdor, Reave Thurso, and Lance Fraser had all been men defined by their capacity to bear tragic suffering. In “Mara,” Bruce Ferguson proves a man unable to do so. He thus marks a crisis in Jeffers’s vision of tragedy, for his defining characteristic is, as Jeffers notes succinctly in “For Una,” his inability to “endure.”

The plot of "Mara" revises that of "Give Your Heart to the Hawks." In the earlier poem, Lance Fraser discovers his wife Fayne making love to his brother Michael and, in a flash of anger, kills him. The remainder of the poem describes his slow descent into madness as he tries to bear the guilt of his crime, a process that yields however a grandly agnostic vision of the world as a site of unredeemed suffering. A similar triangle exists in "Mara" with Bruce Ferguson, his young wife Fawn, and his younger brother Allen, but, although Bruce is warned of Fawn's infidelity, he refuses to believe it. Jealousy gnaws at him, though, and as it builds, so does his rage, until he is left only with a choice of a violence directed either at his wife and brother, or at himself.

We can easily imagine Lance Fraser in Ferguson's place, were he not to have discovered Fayne and Michael *in flagrante delicto* and acted on impulse, for they are very much the same man. Both are physically imposing and powerful, and both fear the latent violence within them. Both are also, as the world goes, honorable, and reluctant to believe dishonor of others, least of all immediate kin. Ferguson, however, suffers an additional complication. As we discover in the poem's first scene, his suspicions have already been aroused, but a more abstract sense of unease with the world inhibits him. All should be well with him, yet it is not:

For he lived the best  
Of possible lives for a man of his race, a cattle-driving  
And horseback life on his own place, on the free mountains;  
And intelligent enough to know it the best;  
And married to a beautiful girl, all wants fulfilled: not his own life chiefly  
But life in general looked dirty, senseless and destitute  
In his dark times: "Christ! What more do I want?  
Nothing." (CP 3: 38-39)

The sense of life's meaninglessness that comes to Fraser after internalized guilt and suffering is present from the beginning for Ferguson. Without a sustaining moral order, satisfaction is hollow and judgment without basis:

"How can we say *This is bad, this is good*,  
When we know nothing about it, having no standards  
Nor faith to judge by? Like flies in a vacuum.  
And who will prove that chastity is better than commonness,  
And for what reason?  
.....  
Either we are animals, . . . clever in some ways,  
Degenerate in others and follow instinct,

Or else we are something else and ought to do otherwise.  
There's something false in it." (CP 3: 45-46)

Jealousy is already at work in Ferguson, as the query about "chastity" and "commonness" indicates, but his right to his own—to a faithful wife—is undermined by the absence of a compass that gives him any better claim to fidelity than simple possession or ego-assertion. This will not do. That the thought of adultery between his brother and his wife is agonizing to him does not prove it wrong, nor show why their pleasure should not outweigh his pain. Fawn reflects of the brothers that Bruce was "the better of the two, stronger and decenter and more a man / Except in one way" (CP 3: 71), but that "one way" has led her to Allen's bed, and it is not a decision she regrets: in her private calculus, pleasure is its own justification. Allen is more conflicted, but he is indeed the weaker man, and it is clear that Fawn is the instigator of the affair. Guilt, even regret, is no substitute for virtue, and if virtue has no basis, then the sentiment is merely the vestigial impulse of a spent morality. There is no return to an ethic based on Christianity; as Jeffers remarks late in the poem, "Christ unopposed would corrupt all" (CP 3: 79). But neither is there an ethic without it, because two thousand years of Western history cannot be rewritten, nor the Gospels be replaced by a bloodless Kantian imperative. Ferguson is left with the ungrounded intuition that certain conduct is right and certain conduct wrong, but without a credible principle to discriminate them by. In a truly ungrounded world, as he says, men might be content to act according to animal instinct; in such a world, sexual coupling would be a matter of casual desire, and, although male dominance might assert itself, principled fidelity would not.

Ferguson's problem, in short, is the problem of value, of how we come to conceive our preferences not only in instinctual but moral terms, and how we come to place the latter before the former. He is neither a liar nor a cheat, but we find him at the beginning of the poem tempted himself to go off with a local girl, Mary Monahan. Why, after all, should he not? He makes the distinction between Fawn, to whom his attachment is constant because he "loves" her, and diversion with Mary, a momentary event of no consequence. But "love," too, is a preference, and subject to change. What is there in a mere vow that should bind him—or Fawn, either? Ferguson is unable to say, but he is also unable to express why this leads him to doubt life's value as such. There is, as he says, something "false" in the situation: a word itself charged with ungrounded value, since falsity can exist only in relation to truth, and "truth" represents precisely a realm of value that has no foundation in the world as it appears to him.

The opening scene of the poem sets its plot in relation to this larger issue. Ferguson is startled by a nocturnal apparition that refuses to



identify itself but asks—Ferguson himself is not sure of the words—“How long will you be satisfied?”—or else, ‘How long / Will you endure it?’” (CP 3: 38). The apparition vanishes, but then reappears bearing Ferguson’s own face. The device of the *Doppelgänger* was already familiar in Jeffers; here it appears as a thing “hatefully familiar” before it discloses itself.<sup>2</sup> Though Ferguson does not hear clearly, the alternate phrases seem to cover the case: will he be “satisfied,” that is, content or at least content enough not to act, or will he “endure” the unspecified something that, it is plainly implied, he should not?

The apparition could be referring to Ferguson’s domestic situation, demanding that he recognize it; but the scene takes place a year before Fawn and Allen are directly accused to him, and there is no indication of how long their affair has been going on. Ferguson is, however, struck by the sense of what the apparition says, for “it was true / He could hardly endure . . . What?” (CP 3: 38). The “what” remains unresolved, although it will at least come to include his wife’s infidelity if it does not do so already. Ferguson will become more deeply ensnared by jealousy as the poem proceeds, but he will also be led to consider the case of the world in general. This, too, has parallels with the plot of “Give Your Heart to the Hawks,” in which Lance Fraser finds the absence of judgment for his crime of filicide indicative of a lack of moral order in the cosmos as such. In Ferguson’s case, however, it is the concept of judgment itself that is lacking. He could certainly confront the lovers and take his revenge on them, and at one point he bursts into Allen’s bedroom ready to do so; what he cannot do is justify this by any moral standard that would distinguish his animal behavior from theirs.

Where Ferguson’s meditations diverge from Fraser’s is in their focus. Fraser, who has hitherto given little thought to religion except to reject his father’s biblical fundamentalism, sees a world not only lacking in the divine judgment that can alone serve his case, but in meaning as such. In what is perhaps the central passage of “Give Your Heart to the Hawks,” he describes the week-long death agony of a deer caught on barbed wire, an existentially absurd suffering that defies any providential interpretation (CP 2: 351-353). For Ferguson, however, nature occupies a different dimension, whose value has no human significance. Again, the formulation is lapidary: watching the dawn rise above a dark canyon, he observes: “This is so beautiful:/ We are so damned” (CP 3: 45). If men could feed the moral instinct on sunrises, salvation would be easy. But the world’s beauty, for Ferguson, is merely a spectacle; it does not touch, much less instruct us.

Ferguson is Jeffers arguing with himself. Both the author and his protagonist share an aesthetic sensitivity, but whereas for Jeffers this represents the beginning of divine disclosure, for Ferguson it is an

ontological dead end. So, indeed, it might be for Jeffers himself, were he looking for confirmation of a humanly relevant moral order in the cosmos. As he makes clear in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," however, it is man who must rise to a perception of divine order rather than divinity that will descend to the requirements of a human one. The latter, inevitably, lacks closure: as Jeffers puts it in the narrative vignette "Going to Horse Flats," "Man's world is a tragic music and is not played for man's happiness, / Its discords are not resolved but by other discords" (CP 2: 543). One can withdraw from that world, as Orestes does in "The Tower beyond Tragedy," but at cost: solitude, too, is an exacting vocation.

Ferguson sees squalor in the casual dalliances at a local dance hall, a spectacle rendered the more odious by his jealousy of Fawn. He picks a fight with one of the men, only to be shamed by his loss of control. At the same time, the violence he feels building in him is obscurely connected to the new war that has broken out in Europe, whose progress he follows obsessively. The link is made manifest when Ferguson's ailing father accidentally switches on a radio broadcast that brings the voice of Hitler: "a passionate voice / Barking a foreign language beat through the room under the sounding-box / Of the steep roof, bringing no meaning but emotion, / Scorn and dog wrath, cored on the wailing of a lost child, / To this far shore" (CP 3: 48). These lines follow very closely those of "The Day Is a Poem," one of the shorter poems in *Be Angry at the Sun*: "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" (CP 3: 16). The occasion of the latter poem was the "liberation" of Danzig during the conquest of Poland in September 1939, the first triumph of Hitler's war. Jeffers evidently had heard this broadcast himself, and although he would have understood the text, it was the underlying emotion that stirred his response and the new technology that brought the voice of the war itself thousands of miles to the seemingly sheltered Pacific coast.

Like Jeffers, who in "The Sirens," another poem from the same volume, describes himself as "caught in the net of the world / Between news-cast and work-desk" (CP 3: 4), Ferguson follows the progression of the war as it engulfs, successively, China, Poland, Finland, and the North Sea.<sup>3</sup> Like Jeffers, too, he tries to see the destruction it wreaks as a natural phenomenon, morally neutral in the cycles of cosmic activity: "A star gives light," he thinks; "So does a burning city full of dead bodies. Warsaw burning's no worse than Arcturus burning" (CP 3: 71). Again, though, the choice of the critical word—"worse"—betrays Ferguson; he cannot escape the need for moral context and judgment, as the reflection that rounds off his meditation makes clear: "And adultery's

as good as honor” (CP 3: 71). Everything brings Ferguson back to his own situation, for if burning cities and blazing stars are mere examples of conflagration and adultery and fidelity mere aspects of copulation, then jealousy has no basis. He suffers it nonetheless, is indeed consumed by it, and understands the violence burning within him as essentially one with the “indifferent” forces of natural process and the new world war. He knows, too, that it must find outlet, and destroy either the incestuous lovers or himself. Since killing Fawn and Allen will involve his own destruction as well, parsimony suggests that he simply turn violence on himself.

In the context of Jeffers’s narrative series, this means that Ferguson cannot, as his *Doppelgänger* suggests, “endure”; that is, bear a suffering without outlet. Cawdor experiences such suffering when he kills his son Hood, whom he has been wrongly led to suspect of an affair with his wife, in the poem that bears his name; Reave Thurso, physically crippled, bears it as a pain he refuses to dull with opiates in “Thurso’s Landing”; Lance Fraser endures the unassuageable guilt of his brother’s death. In the case of Cawdor and Fraser, the nature of their guilt is clear; in Thurso’s, bearing pain is a matter of existential pride, “the courage in us,” as he says, “not to be beaten” (CP 2: 261). Ferguson, however, has committed no guilty act, but rather suffers from the balked instinct to avenge one committed against him. His only defense is denial: he reasons that he has no direct proof of his wife’s infidelity, and that in any case honor and dishonor, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, are no moral postulates but only “country custom” (CP 3: 71). The loop of his denial brings him back compulsively to his suspicion, but it is a circuit he cannot break, because to face that suspicion—which has now, of course, become to him a certainty—would compel him to act, and shame or vengeance are his only recourses: there are no marriage counselors in Jeffers narratives.

Ferguson’s stalemate must sooner or later be broken, but in the meantime he pursues a dual course: while deferring a reckoning with the truth of his personal situation, he persists in exploring more general ones. The decay in behavior he sees around and in himself seems reflected in world events, and he ponders this in the work of a “German professor / Who thinks this bloody and tortured slave called history / Has regular habits” (CP 3: 70). The “professor,” although unnamed, is Oswald Spengler, whose influence on Jeffers himself through his then-popular *The Decline of the West* is evident in much of the verse of *Be Angry at the Sun*.<sup>4</sup> Ferguson speculates as to whether historical cycles are not in their turn related to natural ones as part of a single universal life. This further dismays him because it seems to take all final choice out of human hands. Ferguson, however, insists on ‘truth,’ “Even if it poisons us

or makes beasts of us” (CP 3: 71). The phrase echoes Jeffers’s comment in the Prelude to “The Women at Point Sur”: “You kept the beast under till the fountain’s poisoned, / He drips with mange and stinks through the oubliette window” (CP 1: 241). Even Fawn, certainly no thinker, has a similar perception that ends in a flash of uncharacteristic insight: “This life is false, dirty, and vicious, and I think / Ends in a horror. / Like their foul war will” (CP 3: 62).

The problem for Ferguson is that truth begins at home, and that is the one truth he cannot face. In the scene that gives the poem its title, he encounters another shadowy figure on the road who identifies herself as Mara—the name adopted by Naomi in the biblical Book of Ruth, and meaning “bitter” in Hebrew.<sup>5</sup> The figure taxes Ferguson with having abandoned his search for truth because he is “lost in passion” (CP 3: 64). When he denies this, she vanishes, although he continues to sense her presence (CP 3: 66-67).

Ferguson takes this second apparition as a sign that his mind is slipping, and he resolves to hold himself more tightly. This only leads him more swiftly toward collapse. As his behavior grows more erratic, Fawn describes him frankly as “insane,” and begs Allen to take her away. Ferguson’s imaginings, too, become violent and apocalyptic; in Monterey, he has a vision of a giant elk emerging from the bay and upending the fishing fleet, and on his way home he finds himself among a herd of steers, also presumably a hallucination.<sup>6</sup> Finally he sees two images, of Fawn or himself dead, and being, as Jeffers remarks laconically, “Naturally a decent person, / He chose the second and hung by a horse-hair hackamore / Under a beam in the barn” (CP 3: 78). This anticlimactic dismissal, especially in contrast with the elaborately staged death scenes of Thurso and Fraser, suggests a perceived failure of tragic closure. Ferguson is as we have noted a failed hero of endurance, and his ignominious fate is the failure of that line in Jeffers’s work. Whereas Helen Thurso follows Reave voluntarily into death and Fayne Fraser is pregnant with Lance’s child at the end of their poem, Fawn Ferguson feels merely released from an ordeal, and free to make her life with Allen.<sup>7</sup>

As Jeffers suggests, however, it is not so much Ferguson’s personal flaws that blunt the possibility of tragedy, but rather the moment he lives in. This is the poem’s real foreboding, for tragedy requires honor, and honor faith in the integrity of the self if nothing else. Ferguson is a good man by the world’s lights, “naturally decent” as Jeffers describes him in a phrase that suggests a basis for right conduct in something other than mere “custom.” But he is unable to ground his honor in belief, and thereby to defend it against the jealousy that assails it. Jeffers’s work notes for the poem suggest that he conceived Ferguson as “horribly jealous by nature,” yet too proud to acknowledge such a weakness in himself (CP 5: 663). If

we pursue this suggestion, then we appear to be dealing with a tragedy of character, whose protagonist unfoundedly projects his personal anguish onto the world. Yet, as we have seen, Ferguson's sense of alienation precedes the action of the story, and his suspicion of Fawn's betrayal only sharpens his sense of the absence of an ontologically grounded moral order. With reference again to the notes, we see that Jeffers also plays with the idea of giving Ferguson access to the cosmic realm that seems to exclude him: "He is beginning to *fall in love outward*" (CP 3: 663.). The italicized phrase, underlined in Jeffers's hand, recalls the phrase Orestes uses to describe his mystical union with nature in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy": "I have fallen in love outward" (CP 1: 178). But this idea, too, is discarded, as if Jeffers had discovered in the course of writing "Mara" that access to the sublime such as Orestes had gained through tragedy was barred to modern man, and that even sensitive individuals were doomed to halt at an aesthetic threshold that separated experience from value: "This is so beautiful. We are so damned" (see above, p. 90).

Ferguson's "decency," therefore—whatever its source in him—will no longer suffice, since if all conduct is morally neutral and to that extent permissible, then no reflection can impose or forbid it. He is helpless before his jealousy because he can find no means to justify it. By the same token, he is also free to act upon it, for if Fawn may betray him without fault he is equally entitled to revenge himself on her, whatever the law may say. Fayne Fraser makes an analogous argument to Lance in "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," when she tries to persuade him that the law cannot properly judge his act of filicide, and that in forgiving one another—he for his crime, she for her sin—they have sailed "past the narrows of common faithfulness" and made a new basis of life for themselves (CP 2: 353). This pseudo-Nietzschean claim does not suffice for Lance, and it is not an option for Ferguson: when faced with the choice between harming Fawn or himself, he chooses suicide. If his act is dramatically abrupt, it is because, in Ferguson's terms, there is nothing of moral significance in it, and hence nothing dramatic to relate: he acts according to his own impulse, as Fawn has acted in accordance with hers. A similar moment of dramatic obliquity occurs in the short narrative "Margrave," where Jeffers leaves his hero Walter Margrave alone as he sits out his final days before execution: "death now appeared so dreadful to him that to speak of his thoughts and the abject / Horror, would be to insult humanity more than it deserves" (CP 2: 170). We may presume that Ferguson is in an agony of his own as he makes his choice: but what could be said of his final days or moments that would not too, in Jeffersian terms, be more of an insult than is deserved?<sup>8</sup> Cawdor, Thurso, and Fraser all confront an agnostic world with no guidance but their own self-judgment; Ferguson not only has no reason to judge himself but

no basis to do so, and so his world is merely absurd. What then, beside the bare relation, can be cogently said about his final act?

Ferguson's agony is connected to Jeffers's sense of the supersession of Christianity and the civilizational order it had sponsored. This had been the overarching theme of *The Women at Point Sur*, and it recurred in many of the shorter poems in *Be Angry at the Sun*. Nietzsche, with whom Jeffers would keep up a lifelong quarrel, had himself predicted an era of "monstrous wars" to come. Jeffers had seen the first harvest of these in World War I, and now a new war had begun which, he believed, would be of even greater extent and consequence. He was deeply anxious at the time of writing "Mara" that the United States be kept out of the war,<sup>9</sup> for, despite the sympathy he had expressed for "England's great fight" ("I Shall Laugh Purely" [CP 3: 29-32]), he believed its political dimensions to be merely the symptoms of a deeper and more fundamental disorder. Yeats had expressed a similar intuition in his famous assertion in "The Second Coming" that "the center cannot hold," and the Yeatsian cast of much of *Be Angry at the Sun* suggests that Jeffers saw himself in part as inheriting the mantle of the older poet. As early as "The Broken Balance," he had written that "the hope's in criminals; in vice / That dissolves the cities and war to destroy them" (CP 1: 374), and the advent of a second world war had only left him the more convinced that there was no return to the vision that had sustained the West for two thousand years, that "Christ unopposed would corrupt all."

This latter formulation was the crux of "Mara," and in a sense of Jeffers's prophetic vision; Christ, should he return, would *need* to be opposed, since the virtues of charity and mercy he espoused were spent, at least in their current form, and what was really "kind" was the violence that, like a cleansing storm, swept their desiccated remnants away ("Prelude," CP 1: 242). The sentiment was obviously Nietzschean, but, like Nietzsche, Jeffers was in no sense bloody-minded; not only did the approaching war appall him, but he was almost preternaturally sensitive to suffering in any form, even as he saw it omnipresent in both the human and natural world.<sup>10</sup> His hero Ferguson turns his violent impulses on himself rather than on another, but not before objectifying them in his vision of the great elk rising out of the bay, an apocalyptic image that clearly reflects the wider violence Ferguson feels gathering around him. The personal and the political can no longer be dissociated; the collapse of each is mirrored in the other.

The cultural crisis Jeffers saw in his time is enacted in "Mara" as the literary crisis of his own work. The "criminals" to whom Jeffers looked in *The Women at Point Sur* as a source of creative destruction may be identified in part with the transgressive heroes of his earlier narratives, notably Tamar and Orestes, but in *The Women at Point Sur*

the Reverend Arthur Barclay is ultimately a negative template. In the subsequent narratives beginning with "Cawdor," Jeffers had reconfigured his vision of tragedy as a task of endurance rather than transgression, but the protagonists of these works themselves, though they adhere to their own stern code, offer only an unredeemed suffering. In Bruce Ferguson, the validity of any code, and thus of moral experience as such, is questioned; but instead of inciting a Nietzschean quest for value as in Tamar and Barclay, Ferguson is led only to a despairing nihilism and a sense of ontological futility. We remember from Jeffers's notes for the poem that Ferguson is a failed, latter-day Orestes, for whom "Living's not good enough without knowing" (CP 3: 64). Orestes, the hero who stands at the beginning of Greek tragedy, embarks on the quest for such knowledge in Jeffers's version of his story, only to report it ineffable. As Jeffers contended in his dramatic verse trilogy, "Dear Judas," "At the Fall of an Age," and "At the Birth of an Age," culturally available knowledge is mediated through sacrificial myth, and, Christianity having run its course as the sustaining myth of the West, no common access to value existed. This meant, as the story of "Mara" indicated, that there was no acceptable model of man himself. The world, as Jeffers would suggest throughout *Be Angry at the Sun* and in subsequent volumes, would have to undergo long agony before new footing could be found. As he put it in the concluding line of "Mara": "Look to it: prepare for the long winter: spring is far off" (CP 3: 80).

## ENDNOTES

1. On the hero of endurance in Jeffers, see my "Hardy, Jeffers, and the Hero of Endurance," and *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*, 136-145; 181ff.

2. See *The Women at Point Sur*, CP 1: 310. Here and in the figure of Mara (below, p. 9), Jeffers suggests the Jungian anima. Apparitions and revenants abound in his work from "The Alpine Christ" on, but, as he cautions, "Without form first no phantom" (CP 1: 335). For further discussion of this subject, see my "The Theme of Resurrection."

3. Other poems in *Be Angry at the Sun* that relate specifically to war news include "Battle" (Dunkirk); "I Shall Laugh Purely" and "For Una" (the Battle of Britain); "Moon and Five Planets" and "The Stars Go Lonely Over the Ocean" (Finland): CP 3: 21, 29-32, 33-35, 20, 26. Cf. "Watch the Lights Fade": "Night comes: come into the house, / Try around the dial for a late news-cast" (CP 3: 10).

4. See especially, "Prescription of Painful Ends" (CP 3: 14). Lawrence Clark Powell notes that Jeffers cites Spengler as among his most important influences (Powell 179). See Squires, Chapter III, for a discussion. James Baird's as yet unpublished paper deals more broadly with Spengler, and John Varady has also commented on his relation to Jeffers.



5. Cf. Jeffers' manuscript comment: "I've read the bible. Mara means bitterness" (CP 5: 666). Unlike the figure of Tamar, however, whose incest parallels the story of its scriptural antecedent, there is no other connection to the biblical source in the Book of Ruth, in which the unhappy Naomi (a name meaning pleasant, delightful) takes the name of "Mara" (bitter). Radcliffe Squires points out that "Mara" is also a pagan Irish goddess of fate and "a possessing spirit" in Nordic and Slavic mythology, as well as the name of the deity who tempts the Buddha to suicide (Squires, 82-83). Squires also speculates about the possible Jungian allusions of the figure.

6. Cf. "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," where a deluded Lance Fraser kills steers he has mistaken, Ajax-like, for men (CP 2: 400-402). In "I Shall Laugh Purely," Jeffers offers an image very similar to that of the great elk in one of centaurs rising from the sea, bent on destruction (CP 3: 31-32).

7. Fawn tells Allen after Ferguson's suicide:

"We mustn't blame ourselves, dear, too much.  
He was insane. If we had not been lovers  
He would have been insane for some other reason.  
I'm sorry for him.  
Well, dear, he has given us freedom and happiness." (CP 3: 79)

Fawn's comment is callous and self-serving, of course, but from her perspective a reasonable interpretation of events. Incapable of love or any depth of feeling (she is willing to abandon her infant daughter Joy when she proposes running off with Allen), she sees only irrationality in Ferguson's jealousy. Nor is her conclusion without foundation in the poem, for Ferguson's dissatisfaction with life predates his suspicion of Fawn's affair, and he is certainly among the most sensitive, and, but for Orestes and Barclay, the most reflective of Jeffers's protagonists. Despite Jeffers's negative comment on Ferguson in "For Una," he accepts him into the pantheon of his heroes in the poem "Drunken Charlie": "Life is short but I have seen / The bitter ends of better men, / I have seen Michael and Lance Fraser / And Bruce Ferguson swim to heaven" (CP 3: 101). As for Fawn Ferguson, it is difficult to imagine a life with the guilt-ridden Allen. Fayne Fraser wins some grudging admiration from us for her final faithfulness to Lance, and Jeffers meditated a sequel to "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" in the 1940s in which she would have been the protagonist. One cannot conceive Fawn as the protagonist of another poem.

8. In a parallel subplot, Ferguson's mother poisons his moribund father in long-delayed revenge for an act of infidelity, and then attempts to drown herself. Rescued by Allen, she defiantly proclaims her guilt, but Bruce, taking charge of the situation, plans a cover-up that will, he knows, satisfy authorities who are not disposed to inquire too deeply in such matters. His swiftness of decision contrasts strikingly with his agonized hesitation to confront Fawn and Allen; nor does he seem to have any difficulty deciding which "truth" will serve the occasion (CP 3: 65-67).

9. See my "Jeffers's Isolationism." Cf. Jeffers's later comment on the Korean War: "The bitter futile war in Korea proceeds, like an idiot / Prophesying. It is too hot



in mind / For anyone, except God perhaps, to see beauty in any of the acts of man" ("De Rerum Virtute," CP 3: 402). This was his only poetic comment on the third largest foreign war in American history.

10. See my "Punishing Horses," and *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*, s.v. "strain." Edward A. Nickerson observes, I think quite acutely, that "Jeffers was a major sufferer" (266).

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## BOOK REVIEWS

George Hart. *Inventing the Language to Tell It: Robinson Jeffers and the Biology of Consciousness*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY GREG WILLIAMS

There is a wealth of commentary that explores the various aspects of the impact of science on Robinson Jeffers' thought and poetry. But this book is unique in providing comprehensive documentation and extended analyses of Jeffers's responses to a *single* scientific theme. That theme is the problem of the nature of human mentality and its origin in—or from—the physical world. Hart contends that this problem is not just a contributor to Jeffers's thought, but *the* primary problem for Jeffers throughout his mature career: “the biology of consciousness is at the core of Jeffers's poetry” (2) and it is “the central motivating force in his work” (3).

Hart begins by quoting from Jeffers' draft reply to a questionnaire in 1928 regarding his personal “ideas”: “Mechanistic anti-spiritual point of view from medical school, running in harness with a mysticism that seems almost instinctive” (CP 4:552). As Hart documents, Jeffers was unable to privilege one “view” over the other, and he *struggled* in his poetry, again and again, to reconcile their coexistence in accord with his commitment to both. In this process, Jeffers expressed his (evolving) interpretations of scientific ideas regarding the biological basis of consciousness in many of both his long and short poems, which Hart analyzes in detail.

Hart locates and interprets Jeffers's writings in the context of what might rather simplistically be called the "mind" vs. "body" problem, but which actually reflects various related traditionally dichotomous problems of philosophy, including "the ideal" vs. "the real," "God" vs. "the world," "value" vs. "fact," and, as Jeffers put it in 1928, "mysticism" vs. "mechan[ism]." Hart ultimately seeks an understanding of how Jeffers's repeated attempts to grapple with this problem (or set of problems), given that he would not abandon either of the opposing terms of the dichotomies, made possible the "sacramental poetics" of nature that characterized—it does not seem an exaggeration to say *defined*—his mature poetry:

The tension between materialism and mysticism, oppositional powers harnessed together to achieve a unitary purpose, is the cardinal indicator of Jeffers's sacramental poetics. The harness itself is the biology of consciousness. . . . [He] is committed to a thoroughly materialist view of reality, which is also at the same time a source of spiritual value . . . (1).

Hart proceeds by referring to scientific data and hypotheses (some available during Jeffers's lifetime and others more recent) on the biological basis of consciousness, in conjunction with close readings of several of Jeffers's poems that incorporate ideas from several types of contemporary literary theory, ranging from ecocriticism to Marxism, and other humanistic studies, such as ritual theory, to examine the origins and development of Jeffers's sacramental poetics, which "harnesses" the physicality of nature to the spirituality of the sacred. *Inventing the Language to Tell It* is noteworthy, in an era of pervasive polarization between the sciences and the humanities, for unapologetically attending to scientific ideas as an aid to interpreting poetics.

In Jeffers's sacramental poems, as Hart amply demonstrates, scientific ideas *stand with* humanistic ideas, overtly avoiding *either* a dualism of incommensurables *or* a monism that melds the dichotomous terms: Jeffers links the traditionally dichotomous categories inseparably, resulting in a driving tension that leads to potentially highly *effective* results, according to Hart. And what counted as "effective" for Jeffers? How was he hoping to *affect* his readers? Hart's analysis, combined with data and theory from neurophysiology, psychology, and nervous system modeling, suggests a way that makes sense for thinking about what Jeffers was trying to accomplish, at root, with his poetry. I offer the following hypothesis to show how I was stimulated by *Inventing the Language to Tell It* to align its insights with my own studies of biology. In brief, I think it is probable that Jeffers wanted his readers to *feel* (by which I mean personally and consciously to experience in a way *combining* both cognition and

emotion) nature as sacred, *as he himself did*, and that he devised his poetics to accomplish that aim. This hypothesis, discussed in more detail below, is an example of the new approaches to Jeffers's poetry that are possible in light of the fecundity of Hart's groundbreaking work.

Hart took his book's title from "Prelude," in which Jeffers muses about effective poetics for his purposes:

Culture's outlived, art's root-cut, discovery's  
The way to walk in. Only remains to invent the language to tell it.  
(CP 1:240)

Apparently, Jeffers is claiming that, given adequate "language," "it" can be told, and that the content of "it" depends crucially upon "discovery." A reading of this excerpt (indebted to Hart's work, but not following him exactly) that seems cogent is the following: Jeffers holds that the telling of what he wants his readers to hear must employ *both* his personal *discovery* of nature and its relationship to humans *and* his personal *invention* of a poetic language to communicate with readers. I believe it is a small step to postulate (whether or not Jeffers himself did so) that the discovery results in *feelings* (with both cognitive and emotional content) in the poet, who is moved to invent language *effective in eliciting similar feelings* in readers. Below, I refer to this as the "poetic emulation" hypothesis.

In "Prelude," Jeffers contends that "culture" and "art" (Hart points more specifically to Modernist poetics) are moribund, but he points to a workaround: in the context of poetic emulation, the poet can instead display, using effective poetics, his *own* feelings. I say "display" rather than "portray" because sacramental poetics of nature is *not* fundamentally didactic; rather, it is *exemplary*, whether displaying human tragedy, nonhuman beauty, philosophical claims, or even scientific ideas (all given sustained attention by Hart). Jeffers's ultimate aim is patently far from simple narration or description: he attempts to "invent the language" capable of evoking feelings in readers similar to his *own* (or, vicariously, attributable to some of his characters) feelings about sacred nature.

Near the end of the book's penultimate chapter, "The Wound in the Brain," Hart summarizes the characteristics of Jeffers's sacramental poetics explicitly in the context of the science-humanism dichotomy:

Jeffers's sacramental poetics requires the materialism of science,  
the bedrock knowledge of the reality "out there." (124)

Experiencing (or modeling—a term currently popular among biologists) the world is a *necessity* for the poet to *discover* personal feelings that are not essentially solipsistic. Hart continues:

However, what makes the relationship to that material reality sacramental is its transmutation into symbol through poetry. The poet makes his discoveries through “symbolic action,” and he in turn tells us the story so that we may realize his discovery. . . . Jeffers distinguishes poetry’s synthesizing mode of discovery from science’s analytic mode and observes that “something new is found out, something that the author himself did not know before he wrote it” (CP 4: 416). (124)

So Jeffers invents a language to “tell” his feelings—but, it seems to me, not to tell *of* them, or *about* them, but rather to *show* them. I am dubious that “symbol” and “story” provide the most useful concepts when what is happening is the showing of feelings and consequent elicitation of similar feelings in readers. Perhaps “sign” or “icon” would be more useful. Jeffers’s claim that poetic invention—the writing process—includes discovery—the finding of “something new” by the poet—vastly expands the investigation of details of effective poetic emulation, as it reminds us that both nonhuman nature *and* human culture can contribute to the discoveries (in my formulation, personal cognitive-emotional feelings), and that a poet’s experiencing of his or her own poems can elicit *novel* feelings in the poet. More from Hart:

. . . [T]he idea of touching the truth, coming into contact with it, is the crux of a sacramental poetics. Science is parallel to the truth, whereas poetry’s discoveries are tangential: it comes at truth indirectly, at an angle, and touches it but does not bisect it. It is a point of contact, not cutting through reality but stopping at it, seeing it for the first time. Science is not sacramental because it has only one horse in its harness—it operates only by reason, which is its liability. Poetry’s liability is that it is truly tangential to reality: it is irrelevant, it really doesn’t matter.

.....  
The test for sacramental poetry’s discovery of the biology of consciousness is not the accuracy with which a poet recounts the scientific evidence but rather the force with which he shows us what it means. (124–25)

I appreciate the metaphor of parallel versus tangential lines, but that metaphor leaves unsolved the puzzles of how “touching the truth” can happen poetically and how sacramental poetry can give “force” to the meaning of (and even, according to Jeffers, add “new” spiritual meaning to) scientific findings. I think poetic emulation points toward solutions to the puzzles. It contends that sacramental poetics is able to elicit in readers emulations of the poet’s own sacramental discoveries. These

discoveries are displayed as belonging to the poet or to characters—not necessarily human—in the poems; in either case, the poet's goal remains for readers personally to feel what the poet wants them to feel.

Eliciting the emulation of feelings seems to me a surer approach to reaching what I take as Jeffers's primary goal for his sacramental poetics (once more: eliciting emulated feelings similar to those of Jeffers himself about sacred nature) than the approach—still effectual but with less “force”—of attempts to justify the sacramentality of nature by cognitive arguments directed to his readers. In other words, with regard to being effective in meeting Jeffers's goal, I postulate a considerable contrast between exemplary and didactic poetics, the former displaying both cognitive and emotional feelings, and the latter portraying, cognitively, a story or a scene. Jeffers, I believe, was able to “touch the truth” with “force” because his poems, whether lyric or narrative, use language that is designed to invite readers to emulate the feelings of the poet (or, at one remove, characters created by the poet). I suspect that many of Jeffers's readers would agree that Jeffers's sacramental poetics is highly effective at eliciting in them feelings that nature is sacred.

There can be no “proof” that any particular instance of poetic emulation is exact or even close, since an author's and a reader's feelings are ultimately private. But the case is at least not one of apples and oranges (as with mental models of physical processes), but of apples and apples, and there is at least a chance for congruence between two instances of the same *sort* of thing, namely feeling. Readers effectively reached by Jeffers's sacramental poetics are not moved to emulate the patterns of neuronal activity of the poet's brain; they are moved to emulate his feelings. And, given the overwhelming evidence for broadscale similarity of nervous system anatomy and physiology for all humans, it is easy to make a leap of faith to the position that highly “accurate” poetic emulation is possible, and that readers can indeed come to feel closely similar to the way Jeffers himself feels. Ultimately, the degree to which a given instance of attempted poetic emulation is effective in supporting an author's goals depends on the author's abilities to discover (and thus *feel*) and to invent (and thus *communicate*).

Hart covers considerable ground in this book—a *lot* of analysis is packed into fewer than two hundred pages; he even has room for a concluding chapter, titled “The Jeffers Influence and the Middle Generation,” that is an essentially independent examination of Jeffers's influence on William Everson, Kenneth Rexroth, and Gary Snyder. The historical material in the last chapter is germane to appraisals of Jeffers's legacy and ultimate standing within the Modernist canon, but it does not add appreciably to the argument sustained in the rest of the book. Reflecting my own background (more scientific than literary),

I count this chapter as a “bonus” that does not attempt to provide additional insights for understanding Jeffers’ struggle with the biology of consciousness. Readers interested in the history of Jeffers’s relations to other poets, especially in California, will be gratified by the chapter’s scholarship (and also by the attention given in the book’s introduction to contrasts between the sacramental poetics of Jeffers and the poetics of Eliot and other Modernists).

Some of Hart’s argumentation seems obscure. The main difficulty, I think, is that my unfamiliarity with the axioms and vocabulary of contemporary literary theory leaves me unsure at times about intended nuances and definitions of terms. I could contend that there is an inherent ambiguity and even vagueness in some of the analysis that I would find unwelcome in a scientific report. Yet I understand that this is not such a report, and that uncertainty can sometimes aid in the development of further understanding—allowing “something new” to be “found out.” My hope is that scientists will not be put off by any perceived lack of precision and will work together with humanists to extend Hart’s explorations of sacramental poetics. (In this regard, here is some advice from the late neuroscientist and brain modeler Warren McCulloch, in whose laboratory I was privileged to work many years ago: “Don’t bite my finger, look where it is pointing.”)

Finally, I am unable to resist praising the dustjacket front-cover design for *Inventing the Language to Tell It*: a full-color, larger-than-lifeseize photograph showing a hawk staring straight at the reader. I was moved to view that photograph over and over. The jacket designer, Janet Wood, and the photographer, Alain Turgeon, deserve much appreciation for inviting—no, *requiring*—the reader to contemplate the nonhuman gaze (I nearly wrote “inhumanist gaze,” but I believe that would be expecting too much from avian neurophysiology) of a magnificently presented predatory bird.

In summary, I greatly appreciate Hart’s consistent commitment to tie his exploration of the development of Jeffers’s sacramental poetics, first and foremost, to excerpts from Jeffers’s poems rather than (for me) rather far-fetched opining based on one or another genre of criticism. And the words Jeffers wrote that are quoted in *Inventing the Language to Tell It* convincingly underpin Hart’s conclusions.

Hart’s argument and its implications have enormous potential for furthering Jeffers studies. It provides strong cues for scientists, as well as humanists, to get involved. Past studies of poetry have paid too little attention to science, and studies of science have paid too little attention to poetry. More to the point, too many poets have paid too little attention to scientists, and too many scientists have paid too little attention to poets. Hart’s book uniquely demonstrates the seminal importance of

certain scientific ideas as well as humanistic ideas for Jeffers, who was unwilling to dispense with either mentality or physicality. For him, both are indisputably authentic and neither can be shunned in contemplating—*feeling*—the sacramentality of nature. I wish that many more poets, not to mention environmentalists, would emulate Jeffers's refusal to either meld or maintain a strict dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, and cherish them both as coequals *harnessed* together, making possible in humans, via suitably invented language, conscious feelings of nature's sacredness.



Robert Zaller. *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012.

REVIEWED BY JAMES KARMAN

As often happens when reading, ideas expressed in one text exert a magnetic pull on statements found in others, drawing like to like in a way that augments understanding. Among the many items of interest that attracted my attention while I was reading Robert Zaller's brilliant new book, *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*, three are worth noting. The first was in Adam Kirsch's review of three new books by or about William Carlos Williams (*New York Review of Books*, 23 February 2012). "If," Kirsch writes, with Williams' iconic "The Red Wheelbarrow" in mind, "you look at the lingua franca of American poetry today—a colloquial free verse focused on visual description and meaningful anecdote—it seems clear that Williams is the twentieth-century poet who has done most to influence our very conception of what poetry should do, and how much it does not need to do." The second observation was in Stephen Holden's review of *Black Butterflies*, a film about South African poet Ingrid Jonker (*New York Times*, 2 March 2012). In the last paragraph of his review, having discussed the political and psychological complexity of Jonker's work, Holden says, "The movie reminds you of the extent to which poetry has been marginalized as a cultural force since the early 1960s." The third item, an essay by Daniel Shore titled "Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast" (*PMLA*, January 2012), led to a footnote about a book by Philip Hardie titled *Lucretian Receptions: History, The Sublime, Knowledge* and to a note about a series of articles concerning "The Sublime Object" in the Tate Museum's online journal *Tate Papers* (Spring and Autumn 2010).

What poetry does not need to do, from Kirsch's point of view, is what Jeffers did—and that meant using all the major genres of poetic composition (lyric, dramatic, and narrative) to probe the ultimate questions of existence (concerning God, nature, and humanity) within a comprehensive vision of reality that united history, religion, and science. No poet in America after Jeffers, who died in 1962, attempted as much, which might help to explain why, if Holden is correct, poetry steadily declined as a cultural force from the early 1960s on. Readers who once turned to poetry for truth and beauty, even sublimity, found little to sustain them in the colloquial free verse then being written. Put another way, the poetic tradition that preceded Lucretius and progressed through the centuries to Milton and beyond crashed like a wave on the shoals of post-modernism, reducing traditional values to spray. In the aftermath of that wave, "sublime objects," as *Tate Papers* calls them, continued to

wash ashore, only to be exhibited—like Damien Hirst's shark suspended in formaldehyde—as the dead relics of a once vital world.

Truth was one of Jeffers' principal concerns. As he says in "Great Sunset," "To be truth-bound, the neutral / Detested by all the dreaming factions, is my errand here" (CP 2: 535). Beauty, also, was central to his work. His aim, he declares in "The Beauty of Things," was "To feel and speak the astonishing beauty" of the phenomenal world, including "The blood-shot beauty of human nature, its thoughts, frenzies, and passions." (CP 3: 369) Sublimity was rarely mentioned by Jeffers, but that, too, was a distinguishing feature of his verse. As Zaller asserts, quoting Albert Gelpi in the opening line of his book, "Robinson Jeffers . . . 'is the poet of the sublime without peer in American letters.'"

Zaller assumes that his readers are familiar with the history of the sublime in literature and art, so he does not offer an extended explanation of the term. This is a distinction of Zaller's method, however, not a fault. His argument is situated in the tradition that includes such key theoretical works as *On the Sublime* by Longinus, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke, and *Critique of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant, but these and other works (such as the poetry of William Wordsworth and the paintings of Albert Bierstadt) are not used to show how Jeffers fits a predetermined mold. Rather, Zaller presents Jeffers as a twentieth century poet of the sublime *sui generis*—a poet, that is, who experienced and expressed the sublime in an authentic new way, after the precursive mold was broken by Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, Einstein, and other revolutionary thinkers.

Zaller's first chapter, "Heavenly Meditations," examines the connections between Jeffers and the Puritans and their descendants who shaped America, such as Jonathan Edwards, a distant relative on his mother's side. Jeffers's father, a Presbyterian seminary professor, grounded his son in church history and Biblical literature; he also provided him with a European education in private schools, where studies in Greek and Latin were conducted in French and German. Although Jeffers ultimately rejected his father's Calvinist beliefs, deeply engrained patterns of thought stayed with him. As Zaller observes, "The core elements of the Puritan sublime—the praise of God in a redemptive wilderness, the duty of meditation, the metaphorical construction of divinity in terms of the world's beauty—are almost a programmatic description of Robinson Jeffers' verse."

Another core element of the Puritan sublime—an apocalyptic vision of the future—also informed Jeffers' worldview. Like other remnants of early American beliefs, however, this one, too, underwent a thorough reconfiguration. In chapter 2, "Transcendental Etudes," Zaller discusses the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson on Jeffers, and in chapter 3,

"Darwinian Redemptions," he assesses the impact of Charles Darwin. Emerson's monistic view of reality, with a depersonalized God as the embodied spirit of the universe, proved convincing to Jeffers, as did Darwin's description of natural selection and the struggle for survival. Jeffers's synthesis of these two paradigms, Zaller argues, was a major artistic and intellectual achievement, albeit one that appalled some readers. "The wild God of the world," the fierce "body of life" that contains every atom in the universe, Jeffers concluded, has "no righteousness / No mercy, no love"—and no special concern for humanity. In fact, Jeffers rationally supposed, humans will someday cease to exist, either as a result of self-inflicted injury (such as nuclear war) or natural catastrophe. When this occurs, life on earth will continue as if nothing had happened. "Here is reality," Jeffers contends in "Hooded Night," with reference to the ancient, fog enshrouded seacoast near his Carmel, California home; "the other is a spectral episode; after the inquisitive animal's / Amusements are quiet: the dark glory" (CP 2: 3).

Jeffers expresses similar sentiments in other poems. In "The Place for No Story" he gazes from a distance at a timeless scene: a small herd of cows grazing on the Big Sur headlands with hawks soaring overhead. "This is the noblest thing I have ever seen," he proclaims. "No imaginable / Human presence here could do anything / But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion" (CP 2: 157). Zaller examines Jeffers's identification with the seacoast in chapter 4, "Configuring the California Sublime." The "simplest and commonest theme of my verse," Jeffers once explained, is "the landscape of the Monterey Coast range. I should say that this rocky coast is not only the scene of my narrative verse, but also the chief actor in it" (CP 4: 414). Returning to this observation in a late untitled poem, Jeffers identifies "Mountain and ocean, rock, water and beasts and trees" as the protagonists of his poetry, and humans as "symbolic interpreters" (CP 4: 484). The energy of the Big Sur as a whole, Jeffers believed, reveals itself in the passion (or suffering) of the people living there—as surely as the unrelenting wind contorts the branches of the cypress trees. Hearing the "coast crying out for tragedy," Jeffers's task as a poet, as he declares in "Apology for Bad Dreams," was to capture the grave beauty of the landscape along with the "pain and terror, the insanities of desire" of its human inhabitants (CP 1: 209).

"Tamar", for example, is a poem about a young woman who lives in an isolated house on Point Lobos with her dissipated father, shiftless brother, two aunts (one a spirit medium and the other an imbecile), and the ghost of her mother. After seducing her brother, Tamar is defiantly proud of her lawless behavior, even more so when she discovers she is pregnant and seduces a neighbor in order to pass the child off as his. When she learns that incest and deceit are part of her heritage, however,

she questions her autonomy. Rage, loathing, jealousy, and lust eventually lay waste to the family, and everyone dies in a fire that burns Tamar's home to the ground. As lurid as this plot sounds, Jeffers insisted that the psychology of his stories "was observed from life and in this country." Writing to an editor about *The Women at Point Sur*, a narrative about religious fanaticism, rape, and murder, Jeffers says "it is not possible to be quite sane here"; the coast has "a mood that both excites and perverts its people."

Jeffers was not a sensationalist, however, nor was he a simple regionalist. The theme of incest in *Tamar* is used as a symbol for human self-centeredness, a condition that Jeffers explores repeatedly in his work, and Tamar's story echoes those of her namesakes in the Bible: the Tamar of Genesis 38, a frustrated widow who plays the role of a prostitute and seduces her father-in-law, and the Tamar of 2 Samuel 13, the daughter of King David who is raped by her half-brother Amnon. *The Women at Point Sur*, once described by Jeffers as "the *Faust* of this generation," draws on a number of sources, including the stories of Moses and Oedipus in Hebrew and Greek mythology, and the insights of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.

The "heroes of transgression" and the "heroes of endurance," as Zaller calls the main characters in Jeffers' Big Sur epics, suffer their destinies as actors in a timeless, tragic drama. Jeffers explores archetypal figurations of that drama in his adaptations of ancient Greek plays, including "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" (a compressed version of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*), "The Cretan Woman" (an adaptation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*), and *Medea*; in his retelling of Biblical stories, such as "Dear Judas", a bold interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus; and in historical works, such as "At the Birth of an Age", a play inspired by the Volsung Saga set in northern Europe following the fall of Rome. The latter work is especially important, Zaller argues in chapter 5, "The Sacrificial Son," because of the theophany it contains. Given their diverse cultural backgrounds, what different characters in the play see as Prometheus chained to a rock, Odin hanging from a tree, or Jesus nailed to a cross, is actually the nameless Hanged God, as Jeffers conceives him, who suffers the pain of all creation. "Whatever electron or atom or flesh or star or universe cries to me / Or endures it shut silence," the Hanged God says, "it is my cry, my silence."

In chapter 6, "Democratic Vistas," Zaller examines Jeffers's view of American history, particularly in regard to the violence of World Wars I and II. If the Great War had framed Jeffers as a lyric and tragic poet, Zaller contends, "World War II would come to seem an event almost too large for tragedy. Dreading it, experiencing it, and finally attempting to frame it in an historical and ontological context, would be the principal task

of the second part of his poetic career. The tensions and contradictions inherent in such a task would stretch his art to the breaking point, and would compel him to rewrite his vision of America as well." Jeffers was unique among the poets of his generation in his willingness to confront in a sustained and unflinching way the horrors of the war, as he does in *Be Angry at the Sun* (1941) and *The Double Axe* (1948), and to treat world leaders—Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Stalin—as contemptible men deluded by dreams of power. "The intense, small-scaled versions of tragedy that Jeffers offered in his narrative poems, whose protagonists were ranchers and farmers rather than tyrants and kings," Zaller observes, "were an epitome of the larger dramas of the sublime; but they were made of the same stuff. The difference between incest in a canyon and the conflagrations of a world war was merely a matter of scale."

In his final chapter, "The Cosmological Sublime," Zaller considers Jeffers's belief that poets have a responsibility "to engage the world disclosed by science." Anything less dooms poetry to irrelevance. Jeffers's own scientific training (three years in medical school), along with ongoing study and acute observational skills, enabled him to stay abreast of new discoveries in a number of fields, including astronomy, physics, geology, and the various branches of natural history. Such a mindset, Zaller claims, enabled Jeffers to fully appreciate the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions—"the former for having broken the little jewel-box of medieval cosmogony," which "opened the way for a true appreciation for the scale of creation," and "the latter for having both connected man to the world through assimilation to his animal forebears and for having destroyed the illusion that it existed solely as the stage of his own drama." This resulted in a poetic vision anchored in experiential reality, yet open to the immensity of space and time. In a universe composed of "innumerable swirls of innumerable stars," earth is no more than "a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun, lost in the nameless cove of the shores of a continent," says Jeffers in one poem. "It is only a little planet," he says in another, "but how beautiful it is."

Within the broad compass of his book, Zaller pursues a number of ancillary themes, including the influence of Greek tragedy on Jeffers's conception of existence, Oedipal configurations in literature and life, Jeffers's response to Christianity, panentheism, Inhumanism, American politics in the twentieth century, Jeffers' impact on the modern environmental movement, the concept of force (or strain) in physics and psychology, and the phenomenology of death. Zaller also provides close, insightful readings of dozens of poems. His discussions of neglected texts, such as *The Alpine Christ* and "The Coast-Range Christ", are especially compelling, as are his careful explications of familiar works, including

“Apology for Bad Dreams,” “The Broken Balance,” “Meditation on Saviors,” “Cawdor,” “Roan Stallion,” “Thurso’s Landing,” “The Tower Beyond Tragedy,” and *The Women at Point Sur*. The book as a whole is a tour de force; it is easily the best book on Jeffers written in several decades, and ranks among the very best of all time.

Zaller is an eloquent writer. His evidence-based arguments gather strength sentence by sentence and result in conclusions that are persuasive and crystal clear. General readers will be challenged by the book, primarily because of its panoptic erudition, but readers with advanced training will be instructed on every page. The book is indispensable for specialists in Jeffers studies, modern poetry, American literature, the history of ideas, and other fields. Those who are familiar with Zaller’s previous publications—not just on Jeffers, but on an array of other topics—know that he is interested in the underlying currents that have shaped the course of Western Civilization. His most recent academic publication is a monumental study titled *The Discourse of Legitimacy in Early Modern England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007), wherein he examines the structures of authority established and contested in England from the Reformation in 1529 to the wars of the 1640s. It is worth noting, in this regard, that legitimacy—when advanced as an absolute claim to power—invests the state, the monarchy, the church, or the people with divine rights, and thus endows them with an aura of sanctity. Zaller’s reflections on legitimacy, therefore, are related to his study of the sublime, insofar as both phenomena draw upon a numinous dimension of experience in their respective constructions of social and ultimate reality.

Zaller concludes *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime* with a “Post Mortem” (the title of a poem by Jeffers) that identifies, in a summary fashion, some of the streams that fed Jeffers’s vision: “Kantian idealism, its Emersonian variant, and the Nietzschean response to it; the Romantic construction of the sublime, particularly in Wordsworth and Shelley; the models of American identity proposed by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman; the romance of the American West as depicted by several generations of painters, photographers, and explorers, and epitomized in the grand natural formations of the Pacific coast and its ranges.” In addition to these and other streams (such as those coming down from Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome), Jeffers’s worldview was shaped by “the philosophic pessimism of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the challenges posed by Darwinism, entropy, and the cosmological implications of the new physics and astronomy.” All of these influences, and more, “were annealed in the crucible of the Great War, whose devastation added a new and grotesque dimension to the sublime that seemed to mock all received value.” World War II also had a profound effect on Jeffers, as

did the changes in America that led to its transformation into a military and industrial giant. Having carefully examined these influences in previous pages, Zaller closes his study with a reference to Czeslaw Milosz, who claimed that "the genuine vocation of art" is "to reach 'the highest threshold' available to the mind of one's time." Jeffers attained that vantage point and became, as Zaller convincingly demonstrates, "the great witness among us."



Audry Lynch. *Garth Jeffers Recalls His Father, Robinson Jeffers: Recollections of a Poet's Son*. Lewiston, New York; Queenston, Ontario; Lempeter, Wales: Edward L. Mellen P, 2012.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT ZALLER

The twin sons of Robinson and Una Jeffers could not have been more unlike in appearance and temperament. Jeffers himself remarked on this in "Contemplation of the Sword": "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" (CP 2: 545) Donnan Jeffers, the elder, inherited his father's taciturnity, although he was kind enough to respond to a long-ago scholarly query of mine. Garth, an engaging if bemused presence at Jeffers conferences in his later years, had the career in forestry that his father had briefly contemplated. I remember his listening to a panel on "Tamar" at the centennial anniversary conference at Occidental College in 1987. As it broke up, he remarked puckishly, "You fellows sure make that poem sound interesting. I must read it someday."

I assumed that Garth was pulling our legs, but I'm not quite sure after reading Audrey Lynch's account of his recollections of his father, in which he confesses to never having gotten into the longer poems. Perhaps that should be less than surprising. Garth recalls many evenings in which Jeffers read favorite novels and stories to the boys, but never poetry. Presumably this was a deliberate decision. Garth testifies here that the boys were hard put to explain what his father did to neighboring children, although, especially in their early years, the twins had little contact with others—the Jeffers family, like those Jeffers wrote about in his narratives, was very nuclear.

It's partly for this reason that we have so little direct evidence beyond Una Jeffers's letters and diaries about the Jeffers household, particularly in its early years. That makes this short but intriguing book a valuable new resource. Audrey Lynch met Garth in his seventies, and has woven his recollections in with narrative of her own to create the fullest portrait we have had about the milieu in which Jeffers worked, the inner dynamics of the family, and the way it presented itself (when necessary) to the world.

There are no dramatic revelations in the book, but a good deal of new shading. Una was the firm disciplinarian, a reversal of Jeffers's own childhood experience with his father and no doubt a deliberate one. At the same time, it was she who dispensed a continual rough affection.



Jeffers, always gentle and occasionally a refuge from Una's strictures, was occupied mornings with his verse, a mysterious occupation that entailed a good deal of pacing on the second story floorboards, and afternoons with his stonework. There were occasional games—tag, soccer, and later wrestling—and Jeffers, the “outdoor” parent, was assiduous about teaching his sons astronomy and showing them the Carmel countryside. Camping trips were part of this, but an ordeal for Jeffers, who hated sleeping on bare ground.

Jeffers was literally fashioned by Una, who as Garth reveals designed and sewed his characteristic attire—well-worn jackets, wide, open-necked shirts, high boots and jodhpurs. The idea for Tor House and its tower were also hers, and it was she who kept him up to his regimen as a mason. She furnished most of the household's acquaintances, too, beginning with her ex-husband, Teddy Kuster, who as Garth recalls fit in smoothly as an “uncle.” The relationship worked because Jeffers had no trace of jealousy in his makeup, in contrast to the fiercely possessive Una. Those looking for new details of her suicide attempt in 1938 after discovering Jeffers's tryst with Hildegard Donaldson, an attractive ex-concert musician, will be disappointed, although the twins' reaction as recalled by Garth is perhaps instructive: “We were annoyed with Mother.” It was doubtless no mere accident that Bruce Ferguson, the hero of Jeffers's next narrative, “Mara,” would be a man undone of jealousy.

The overall impression Garth gives us is of a life strictly and for the most part successfully ordered by Una, although not without its costs. The cost must have been borne partly by Una herself, who complained of her “three great Buddhas”—the males of the household whose silences must have seemed conspiratorial to her. One can't quarrel with the result that makes the story worth remembering—the art of Robinson Jeffers, for which Jeffers himself gave Una generous credit both while she lived and after—but there were tradeoffs too, some of them difficult.

A theme that runs throughout the book is Jeffers's deep, underlying depression, which tempted him from early youth to heavy drinking. Much of Una's domestic strategy can be seen as a shrewd attempt to cope with this, although it may have exacerbated the problem too over the long run. Obviously, one cannot say what Jeffers might or might not have accomplished under different circumstances; by the standard of what he did achieve, we must be grateful indeed to Una.

Garth attests that Jeffers drank more and worked less after Una's death, and we have the poet's own word for the depth of loss he felt. I cannot agree, however, with the implicit assessment that his later work is of lesser scope or value; rather, it seems to me that the cosmological

outreach of "De Rerum Virtute" and the meditations that succeeded it signified a new chapter in his art that would well repay further study.

Lynch's book could have benefited from more rigorous editing, but it will be of interest to scholars and admirers of Jeffers alike. The text is followed by twenty-six black and white photographs, some of them previously unpublished. Number twenty-two is a particular rarity: it not only shows Jeffers smiling, but with something like pleasure.

## OBITUARIES

### KYUJA YOO KAFKA

Kyuja Yoo Kafka, wife of *Jeffers Studies* Managing Editor Rob Kafka, died on April 14, 2014. Kyuja was Rob's research partner, accompanying him on countless trips to libraries, Jeffers events, and Jeffers-related sites, where she helped record findings and made the necessary social connections easy. She occasionally read Jeffers in Japanese on the poetry walks that are a traditional part of the Tor House Festivals. Kyuja was also a key person at Association conferences, attending to all the details involved in making the meetings run smoothly. After she had made sure that everyone was comfortable, she listened to the presentations and discussions with rapt attention. People looked forward to seeing her, in part because she was so happy to see them. Her welcoming spirit remains with us.

J.L.B.

### HELEN TARTAR

Helen Tartar, probably the most remarkable and intellectually talented figure among a group of leading university-press editors reshaping the boundaries of humanities scholarship, died tragically in early March 2014. She was on her way to a philosophy meeting in Denver when the car in which she was riding was struck by a vehicle that crossed over the center divide of a Colorado highway.

At the time of her death, Helen was the Editorial Director at Fordham University Press. She will perhaps be better known to the readership of this journal, however, for her prior work at Stanford University Press, where she took the lead in acquiring and presiding over the production of Tim Hunt's definitive edition of Robinson Jeffers' poetry. The letters that she exchanged with Tim about the aims and editorial conventions governing this edition would provide an excellent short course on the work and preparation that go into the publication of a major scholarly edition.

Born in 1951, Helen grew up in a small town on the Pacific coast near the Oregon and Washington border, where her father conducted research in marine biology. Her mother was an accountant. Helen did her undergraduate degree at Swarthmore, a college that clearly confirmed and encouraged her intellectual passions and interests. She was then admitted into Yale's highly prestigious doctoral program in English, but

eventually shifted to Chinese language and literature, a field that in part satisfied a personal quest that went beyond purely academic pursuits. She left Yale as an a.b.d.—to enter publishing, to write more poetry, and famously, to continue her hobby of knitting.

Helen was hired as an assistant editor at Stanford University Press in 1981, in an era in which all Stanford editors started out as copy editors, expected to work with unforgiving rigor—a level of editing that has long since become financially unsustainable. Helen, however, was able to shift her initial commitment to vigorous textual editing to intellectual service of a high order. Indeed, in the many tributes to Helen published after her death, no theme echoed more clearly than the strength of her engagement with the substance of authors' work and her willingness to offer genuinely thoughtful suggestions—especially to first-time authors, seeking to navigate the difficult transition from dissertation writer to book author. Her responses to manuscripts and proposals may not always have been models of tact and forbearance, but they were never frivolous or formulaic.

Helen's arrival at Stanford University Press came shortly before a period of administrative transition, which in turn led to important changes in what was expected of press editors—encouraging editors to adopt a much more proactive role in book acquisitions. As a result of these changes, Helen was soon asked to become the press's humanities editor, a highly appropriate role for her at a time in when the press had been encouraged to increase its publishing in the literary humanities. This was a mission that Helen enthusiastically embraced, and it was an endeavor in which she flourished. Helen's interest, however, were far from narrow: she brought on board a remarkably impressive list of books across a broad range of the humanities, including religion and philosophy, even if her most influential acquisitions were predominantly in theoretically inflected and often interdisciplinary areas of literary scholarship. Her energetic acquisition efforts during a period of intellectual upheaval within a number of humanities disciplines enabled Stanford University Press to play a leading role in advancing critical scholarship in those areas. Part of this success came from the caliber of the works that she acquired from individual scholars across the United States—scholars who responded to her remarkable command of the intellectual issues at stake in their work. Another part of the success of Helen's endeavors derived from a group of intellectually provocative and challenging book series that she recruited and helped to shape—notably *Meridian* (edited by Werner Hamacher) and *Cultural Memory in the Present* (edited by Hent de Vries and Mieke Bal). Finally, both within and outside these series, Helen's work was distinguished by a number of widely influential translation projects that she commissioned or acquired from leading

French, German, and Italian authors—including work by Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Pierre Bordieu, Jean Baudrillard, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard, Niklas Luhmann, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Maurice Blanchot, and many others. Unsurprisingly, the books that Helen acquired for Stanford won many awards, including the James Russell Lowell Prize, Christian Gauss Award, Rene Wellek Prize, National Jewish Book Award, Kurt Weill Prize, Salo Baron Book Award, Harry Levin Prize, Perkins Prize, Barricelli Prize, AATSEEL Award, Marraro Prize, Arisawa Memorial Award, and many MLA prizes, including three for the best first book.

Some readers of this journal are aware of her championing of the complete waka poetry of Japan, edited in two volumes with copious notes by Edwin Cranston.

I cannot speak with the same authority about Helen's work at Fordham University Press—although I can certainly say that many books I would have welcomed at Stanford subsequently appeared from Fordham. Her work will thus leave a significant legacy in a number of areas of the humanities and on the careers of a great many academic authors.

Norris Pope

Editor's Note: Norris Pope is Emeritus Director of Scholarly Publishing at Stanford University Press. He was responsible for Helen Tartar's hire at the press.

## ALEX VARDAMIS

Alex Vardamis, who died of Parkinson's Disease in Carmel in July 2014, was one of the key figures in Jeffers scholarship and in the effort to recognize Jeffers's poetry and maintain the value of the poet's work. Born in Maine in 1934, he won appointment to the United States Military Academy and received his commission. He served in a variety of posts around the world, meanwhile pursuing an interest in literature which led to such appointments as Director of European Studies at the Army War College. His doctoral dissertation at Columbia University was published in 1972 as *The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers: A Biographical Study*, a book which has been consulted by almost all Jeffers scholars. Upon his retirement from the United States Army as a Colonel, he became a professor of English at Dickinson State University in North Dakota and later at the University of Vermont. He and his wonderful wife, Fran, moved to Carmel, from which he continued to publish articles on Jeffers and other writers in various journals including *Jeffers Studies*. Always an avid outdoorsman, he added yet another role, creative writer, when he produced novels featuring a talking dog, Dingus, who lived in Carmel.

Alex is the only person to date who has served as president of both the Robinson Jeffers Association and the Tor House Foundation. In this latter capacity, his contributions cannot easily be enumerated, but both organizations benefitted from his managerial and leadership skills, and the members of both have been helped as he shared with them his vast knowledge about the poet and his works. In addition, Alex and Fran entertained visitors from both groups at their home when the organizations met in Carmel. We will continue to enjoy the fruits of Alex's scholarship as well as warm memories of his action-filled live(s).

Memorial donations to honor Professor Vardamis may be made to either the Robinson Jeffers Association or the Tor House Foundation.

J.L.B.

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Steven Chapman* is an independent scholar and conservation activist based in San Francisco. In addition to previous scholarship on Jeffers, he has published articles on environmental literary theory, the “green Goethe” and Gary Snyder.

*Deborah Fleming* has published several essays in *Jeffers Studies* as well as other works on Yeats, Eamon Grennan, and Aldo Leopold. She is Professor of English at Ashland University and editor of the Ashland Poetry Press.

*Steven B. Herrmann* began his vocation in Jeffers studies under the tutelage of William Everson at UC Santa Cruz. He later co-authored a full length book study with Everson that looks at Jeffers as a shaman and has since published over thirty papers and two newer books. His newest book is called *Spiritual Democracy: The Wisdom of Early American Visionaries for the Journey Forward*, published by North Atlantic Books in 2014. He is currently writing a book on Jeffers that positions the Carmel poet as the most seminal poet of Spiritual Democracy in America.

*James Karman* has published several articles and books on Jeffers and is currently at work on Volume Three of his edition of *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers*.

*Greg Williams* has been copy-editor and typesetter for *Jeffers Studies* since its first issue, and earlier for several issues of *The Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*. He lives on a small farm in central Kentucky and recently retired after thirty years as publisher of *HortIdeas*, promoting amateur experimentation. He has engineering degrees from M.I.T., with a master's thesis on the neurophysiology of retinal receptor cells. In the 1980s, he began working with mathematical models of nervous systems based on Perceptual Control Theory; he is Archivist for the Control Systems Group of PCT appreciators.

*Robert Zaller* is Professor of History at Drexel University. His latest of many works on Jeffers is the critical volume *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*.

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## ADDRESSES

Subscriptions and back issues: Robert Kafka, UCLA Extension, Room 114, 10995 Le Conte Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90024, e-mail <rmkafka@gmail.edu>. Submissions and editorial communications: Jim Baird, University of North Texas, Department of English, 1155 Union Circle #311307, Denton, TX 76203-5017, e-mail <jbaird@unt.edu>. RJA membership applications: Charles Rodewald, RJA Treasurer, 5140 Cutty Way, NV 89130, email <charlier10@mac.com>.

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Submit double-spaced, MLA format Word file of critical essays, book reviews, short articles, and news items as email attachments. The author's name should appear on the initial page only. All copies are non-returnable. Citation of Jeffers's poetry should be from the *Stanford Collected Poetry*, abbreviated CP. Until the *Collected Letters* (CL; Stanford) is complete, citation of Robinson and Una Jeffers letters written after 1939 should be from Ann Ridgeway's *Selected Letters* (SL; Johns Hopkins) or from the Una Jeffers Correspondent Series in issues of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* (see RJN index, issue 100, Fall 1996). Formatting should follow the *MLA Handbook*, seventh edition, with parenthetical citations, endnotes, and works cited. Final revisions of accepted articles should be submitted as email attachments.





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