Jeffers Studies

A Double Issue

A Publication of
The Robinson Jeffers Association

Jeffers Studies

2014 Double Issue

Jeffers Studies

Volume 18 Numbers 1 & 2 Spring & Fall 2014

Contents

Book Reviews

Obituaries

Contributors

Cover print, *"Pt. Lobos Winter Storm"* c. 2004 by Tom Killion from *California's Wild Edge: The Coast in Poetry, Prints and History, p. 117.*

See Rob Kafka's review of this book, p.

Editor's Note

This issue of *Jeffers Studies* features a new essay on Jeffers' philosophy by Robert Zaller. He finds support for Jeffers' idea that the physical world has a form of consciousness and has been striving in that direction since the beginning. Professor Zaller capped a career of critical work on the poet with the Lawrence Clark Powell Prize for outstanding contributions to Jeffers scholarship, presented to him at the 2018 meeting of the Robinson Jeffers Association. Previous honorees are Robert Brophy, Tim Hunt, James Karman and Norris Pope.

Steven Reese's essay, "Jeffers in Context: The Presence of Shelley," demonstrates that the earlier Romantic poet was an important influence on Jeffers, particularly the younger Jeffers. Although the poets' views on world politics are quite different, Reece points out that several of Shelley's subjects and techniques excited Jeffers before he developed his mature style and viewpoint and remained with him throughout his career.

The last issue of *Jeffers Studies* was wholly devoted to William Everson's revision of a chapter of one of his books on Jeffers. To counterbalance this attention to Everson's critical commentary, we now publish Mick McAllister's critique of Everson's view of the poet's family life, particularly his relationship with Una, which argues that Everson's evaluation of Jeffers' personality is sometimes factually flawed; furthermore, the mistakes lead to questionable judgments about Jeffers' work which have appeared in the assessments of other critics. McAllister's work is grounded in detailed research into Carmel and Big Sur history.

With this issue of *Jeffers Studies*, Rob Kafka, who has been Associate Editor of the journal since its first issue, becomes Co-Editor, which title more accurately describes his contributions. In addition to the usual editorial functions of reviewing manuscripts for publication, checking the accuracy of those essays accepted, conferring with authors about manuscript changes which require their approval, and proofreading

copy ready for publication, he has travelled extensively to run down information, shepherded the final copy through the press, and supervised the mailing of each issue. Rob has served the Jeffers community in several other ways, as Treasurer of the Robinson Jeffers Association, member of the advisory board of the Association, member of the Tor House Foundation board, and recently, as President of the RJA, a post which seals the centrality of his contributions to the organization. Rob has performed beyond his job description and beyond what anyone could reasonably expect of any one person, primarily because of his love for Jeffers' work and his passion for presenting new ideas about the poet to others who care and want to learn. To bring all of his usual energy to bear on his new job, Rob nominally retires from his work on *Jeffers Studies* now, but it is hard not to believe that if we ever need him, he will be eager to help.

Such help has already arrived with the addition of Whitney Hoth, longtime Jeffers scholar and Robinson Jeffers Association member, who begins his work as Associate Editor with this issue. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan, where he studied with Jeffers scholars Radcliffe Squires and Steven Tonsor. He has taught at several colleges in the United States and Canada during a forty-year career. For several years, he was the chair of the School of Language and Liberal Studies at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. He is also a professional editor with skills that qualify him for his new job. He and his wife live in Byron, Ontario in a home close to nature. We welcome him to *Jeffers Studies*.

Robert Zaller

Jeffers, Cosmos, and Mind

"You are far / From Dante's feet," Jeffers apostrophizes himself in "Be Angry at the Sun" (*CP* 3: 24), a remark that suggests, even self-deprecatingly, the scope of his ambition. Milton, although not saluted in the verse, was another magisterial influence (*CL* 2: 141), and, with Lucretius, made for Jeffers a triad of poets who had attempted a poetic cosmology. Dante and Milton had employed the epic, a form in decline after *Paradise Lost,* and in ruins by the time of Mallarme and Eliot. Jeffers had nonetheless experimented with it in "The Alpine Christ," a poem that used the Great War as its starting point as Milton had used the Puritan Revolution. But Jeffers could not ground this early effort in the theological garb of his predecessors; indeed, it was precisely the supersession of Christian Providence by the coldly impersonal dictum of what he called Fate that constituted the subject of the poem. We do not know why he set it aside; perhaps he came to feel that it lay too much in the shadow of Hardy and other Romantic precursors. His aspiration nonetheless lay in the direction of epic, even as he realized that the poetic episteme of his own time lay almost wholly in the direction of division and fragmentation. Jeffers noted this pointedly in his Introduction to the 1935 edition of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (*CP* 4: 384-6) in which he recalled his youthful aversion to the experiments of Symbolism and Modernism and his sense that he "was doomed to go on imitating dead men," (386) that is, the mock-epic work of a Shelley or the personalized one of a Wordsworth.

We know that Jeffers found his way, and if he did not revive the form of the epic it may be said that his full body of work constitutes one—that is, a unified poetic vision whose tensions both reflected and sought to overcome those of his age.[1] It would take a full study to trace the process by which he developed it, but a few markers may be indicated. Jeffers found the verse of his contemporaries self-referential and sensed in this a trap. Accordingly, he turned outward in the most immediate sense—toward the natural environment around him that he engaged directly in the building of Tor House, his permanent home. The lyric poems that resulted were his first mature work. They refocused his style and concen-

trated his attention, but they were also a gateway to the wider cosmos soon depicted in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" and "Roan Stallion."

The pole that grounded this emerging vision was Jeffers' sense, derived both from his own training and his lyric experiments, that no poetry worthy of the name could fail to grapple with the implications of modern science. These implications were wholly material and severely monist. They harkened back philosophically to Lucretius, in whom Jeffers found an important guide. Although the science of his time was itself in a process of fragmentation, Jeffers took from it a critical stance that he would later call Inhumanism, whose essential attitude was outwardly directed, "a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man" (*CP* 4: 428). At the same time, Jeffers' project remained rooted in the terms of Romanticism, which is to say in the attempt to resituate man in the cosmic order. Removing him from the center of his own attention, while avoiding any facile identification of him with a covertly anthropomorphized Nature, was the first step in this project.

Jeffers' own early verse, including "The Alpine Christ" and the poems in his first commercially published volume, *Californians,* contained especially egregious examples of pathetic fallacy.[2] His first task was thus to deontologize Nature, to see it as a plenum prior to and independent of man. Kantian philosophy, Darwinian biology, and the concept of the nebular universe all contributed to this effort, each in its own terms suggesting a self-begetting cosmos in which man was an accidental by-product. Taken on its own, such a picture implied that any search for meaning outside physical laws was otiose; as Steven Pinker, a present-day exponent of this view, puts it: "The facts of science [expose] the absence of purpose in the laws governing the universe," and, consequently, "the belief systems of the world's traditional religions and cultures—their theories of the origins of life, humans and societies—are factually mistaken."[3]

For Jeffers, however, the notion of the universe as mere physical process, while a necessary reductive step, was a first and not final description. Again, "The Alpine Christ" is suggestive. The vision of the cosmos suggested in the poem by the death of God is one of purely impersonal praxis, a morally intolerable conclusion to which the only appropriate response is resistance, however futile. Jeffers would have to embrace this impersonality as value before he could get beyond the stance of despair variously embodied in Tennyson, Arnold, Mallarme, and Eliot. Both the corrections of modern science and his own aesthetic response to the central California coast were part of this process. Science offered a negative template in the form of the mathematized description of a sheer magnitude—an archetype of the sublime—while the aesthetic impulse represented an antiphonal voice that affirmed rather than opposed it.

The mediating term was beauty, "the human mind's translation of the transhuman / Intrinsic glory" as Jeffers put it in "De Rerum Virtute" (*CP* 3: 403). Jeffers called this "glory" God. It was so universal a conception that the reality to which it referred could not be doubted, although no possible language could encompass it. The great metaphors to which it gave rise were the world's religions, all of which both concretized and obscured it but also formed the basis of all civilization. Modern science was thus not the antithesis of the religious quest, but the platform from which its journey began.

The appeal of science for Jeffers lay partly in the discipline of its method and partly in the ambition of its project. The former warded off the radical subjectivity that in his view had vitiated modern poetry; the latter, in offering a broad description of the universe on its macro- and microscopic levels, seemed to him an undertaking as comprehensive as any theological system, with the advantage of presenting a picture in which man played a small role where he played one at all. This was salutary: "There is nothing like astronomy to pull the stuff out of man," Jeffers wrote in "Star-Swirls" (*BE* 18).[4] The same was true of evolutionary biology; hence the heroes he saluted were Copernicus and Darwin (*CP* 3: 274).

At the same time, Jeffers found only bemusement in the facile positivism exemplified for us by Pinker. "Science and mathematics / Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it, / They never touch it," he wrote in "The Silent Shepherds." The quest for truth was the highest human calling, but its object was never to be grasped except indirectly, for, he as continued in the same poem, "consider what an explosion / Would rock the bones of men into little white fragments and unsky the world / If any mind should for a moment touch truth" (*BE* 48; cf. *CP* 3: 260; 4: 536). Man was thus the paradoxical creature who sought that which, if attained, would annihilate him.

The scientific approach to truth was a patient, collective enterprise which had as its goal the comprehensive description of natural process and the reduction of phenomena to physical laws. By defining the object of its study in strictly material terms, it hoped to create a closed system within which truth could be expressed as a series of equations. That, at any rate, was the science of Jeffers' youth. He respected it on its merits, but, as we have seen, he never believed it capable of transcending its own terms, and truth, for him, implied transcendence. Those who sought truth directly—those very few—were ecstatic visionaries who might be consumed by what they found.

The prototype of such truth-seekers in Jeffers was the Reverend Arthur Barclay, the protagonist of *The Women at Point Sur*, who framed his quest in strictly human terms but found through a process of metaphoric

winnowing something like the God that Jeffers himself intuited as immanent in and constitutive of the material cosmos. The price of this vision, attained through transgressive violence, was personal destruction, and in response to criticism Jeffers would describe *The Women at Point Sur* as a cautionary tale.[5] But a decade later, in "Theory of Truth," he would set Barclay beside the great religious seekers as a man, too, who "touched his answers" (*CP* 2: 608-10).

Barclay's error was to conflate God with himself, but for Jeffers, the Jesus of the Gospels made a similar identification, and from this fruitful delusion a great religion sprang together with the civilization it supported. All civilization, Jeffers thought, had its basis in such appropriative action, and waxed and waned with the vision of its founder. The question was why this should be so, and, more precisely, what if anything this peculiar human quest answered to in the cosmos itself.

We return to Pinker, and his confident remark about the "absence of purpose" in the universe as revealed by science. In "De Rerum Virtute," Jeffers directly contests such an assumption:

> I believe the first living cell
> Had echoes of the future in it, and felt
> Direction and the great animals, the deep green forest
> And whale's-track sea; I believe this globed earth
> Not all by chance and fortune brings forth her broods,
> But feels and chooses. And the Galaxy, the fire wheel
> On which we are pinned . . .
> . . . . . .
> Is not blind force, but fulfils its life and intends its courses.
> (*CP* 3: 401-2)

This is a poetic version of what is now popularly known as Creationism, the notion that the universe is essentially purposive. Unlike some adherents of this view, Jeffers does not presume to suggest what that purpose might be, although in the speech of the epiphanic Hanged God in "At the Birth of an Age" he suggests, as have others, a divine self-reflexivity ("I torture myself / To discover myself" [*CP* 2: 482]). But certainly, his dismissal of the idea of the cosmos as "blind force" indicates his rejection of scientific positivism, and his sense of it as a living entity places him far beyond it.

Jeffers' vitalism, which has various philosophical antecedents from Heraclitus to Henri Bergson, derives from his sense of the cosmos as a self-projection of the Godhood.[6] The distinction between organic and inorganic matter is for him one of degree, not of kind: sentience, he asserts, is found at all levels of being. In its most developed—or exacerbated—form, it achieves consciousness in man, who "brings the

world to focus in a feeling brain, / In a net of nerves catches the splendor of things, / Breaks the somnambulism of nature . . ." (*CP* 2: 160). Human consciousness is a dubious gift, for it leads to vanity, tragedy, and madness, and in a sardonic moment Jeffers imagines the newly-discovered spectroscopic red shift as the stars' flight from its "contagion." The final reckoning, however, is unclear, and even if humanity is only a brief moment in the stellar progress, Jeffers opines that "It is likely the enormous / Beauty of the world requires for completion our ghostly increment, / It has to dream, and dream badly, a moment of its night" (*CP* 2: 167).

Jeffers appears here to be doing his best to avoid the suggestion that man is the ultimate product of evolution, or that consciousness as it is found in the generality of men is praiseworthy as such. Nonetheless, its quality of reflexivity aligns it with the infinitely greater divine project, and suggests, however dimly, a kinship with something we may call divine mind. The grandeur and absurdity of Barclay lies in his willful effort to appropriate divine power and mind, and Jeffers' Jesus does something of the same thing in "Dear Judas." On one level this is, as Jeffers calls it, "insanity"; on another, however, it is an unwitting *Imitatio Dei,* the "tragic music" of man's questing spirit ("Going to Horse Flats," *CP* 2: 543).

Does anything in nature, one may ask, answer to man's quixotic aspiration toward the source of his creation? One must recall that, in Jeffers' immanentism, "All things are the God," as his Heraclitus puts it in "De Rerum Virtute," and that man therefore—with all else—participates in divinity.[7] This does not, itself, privilege him above a rock or a worm or a bird (all things that, at various times, he declares superior to humanity). But "De Rerum Virtute" suggests that mind is operative in Nature as it "feels and chooses" its way. This second-order intentionality proceeds slowly, unfolding the splendor (and agony) of the cosmos across aeons of time; man is one of its experiments. The concept of the universe as the product of a demiurge is an old Manichaean conceit, but Darwin—in whose evolutionary conception a strong teleological element remains—put it in terms of natural selection. It is this idea, with its own roots in ancient Greek cosmology, that Jeffers adapts.[8]

The limited purposiveness of Nature serves as a link between the larger divine intention and the phenomena it subtends. It also provides a connection between the human and the divine that Jeffers had sketched out a quarter century earlier in the concluding lines of "Apology for Bad Dreams:"

> I have seen these ways of God: I know of no reason
> For fire and change and torture and the old returnings,
> He being sufficient might be still. I think they admit no reason; they

> are the ways of my love.
> Unmeasured power, incredible passion, enormous craft: no thought apparent but burns darkly
> Smothered with its own smoke in the human brain-vault: no thought outside: a certain measure in phenomena:
> The fountains of the boiling stars, the flowers on the foreland, the ever-returning roses of Dawn. (*CP* 1: 211)

Jeffers suggests that human thought and action correspond in some way to divine purpose, however feebly or inadequately perceived, and that the intuition of this—call it the religious impulse—is man's distinguishing aspect. The would-be savior, a Barclay or a Jesus, attempts to bridge the ineffable distance to the divine by a radical act of appropriation. On one level, there is no more absurd a presumption; but on another, no more supreme an effort at transcendence. It is an effort that must of necessity collapse upon itself, and yet a kind of truth is only accessible through it. Jeffers' Inhumanist asks directly in "The Double Axe" what the poet had obliquely suggested in "Apology for Bad Dreams," namely, whether specifically human consciousness does not in some sense partake of its divine archetype: "A conscious God? —The question has no importance. But I am conscious: where else / Did this consciousness come from? Nobody that I know of ever poured grain from an empty sack" (*CP* 3: 257).

This passage suggests something more than the obvious point that an immanent God is present in all phenomena, and vice versa. It suggests that human consciousness reflects, on its highest level, an awareness of separation from the universal creative power, and an aspiration to bridge that gap. This is the ultimate meaning of the famous passage in "Roan Stallion" that "Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire, / The atom to be split" (*CP* 1: 189). But it implies a kind of solicitation as well, a shared project or at least experiment. It means that mind, in a non-reductive sense, is a part of the cosmos.

This position has received recent support in Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos*. Nagel questions whether the presence of life on earth and its evolution to date can be adequately explained through the operation of physical processes alone, including "such features of our world as consciousness, intentionality, meaning, purpose, thought, and value . . ." (13). These latter cannot be considered mere epiphenomena; they have substantial weight, and their existence proves for Nagel that Nature is such as to give rise to conscious beings with minds; and it is such as to be comprehensible to such beings. Ultimately, therefore, such beings should be comprehensible to themselves. And these are fundamental features of the universe, not byproducts of contingent developments whose true

explanation is given to us in terms that do not make reference to mind (17).

This is true for Nagel even if, as Jeffers says in "De Rerum Virtute," we are in physical terms merely a minute particle in "the whirlwind of stars in which our sun is one dust-grain" (*CP* 3: 402). The *actuality* of human consciousness, of an organism capable of seeking ego-independent knowledge of the world including ethical maxims and concepts of value, argues that the *possibility* of it was "inherent" in the universe, and that such a realization "was not vanishingly improbable but a significant likelihood" given its nature and composition (32). Jeffers makes a similar argument in "The Beginning and the End":

> But why would life maintain itself,
> Being nothing but a dirty scum on the sea
> Dropped from foul air? Could it perhaps perceive
> Glories to come? Could it foresee that cellular life
> Would make the mountain forest and the eagle dawning,
> Monstrously beautiful, wings, eyes and claws, dawning
> Over the rock-ridge? And the passionate human intelligence
> Straining its limits, striving to understand itself and the universe to
> the last galaxy — . . . (*BE* 6; *CP* 3: 431)

"Life" here is conceived, as in "De Rerum Virtute," not merely as a physical event but a teleological propensity to develop toward certain ends; for Jeffers, this in turn is perceived as part of a wider cosmic order. Nagel sees it as critical to that order, since, although life has been observed nowhere else to date but on our planet, "no natural fact is cosmologically more significant" (32). Through mind—specifically, the human mind, which transcends the faculties of perception and instinct we share with other animal creatures—the universe posits its own self-understanding. This is so extraordinary a development that it cannot be seen as a chance outcome of natural process; rather, it is a consummation toward which the cosmic order has tended from the beginning, the fulfillment by which matter is illuminated by awareness.

Nagel does not regard understanding as the sole function of mind. In the last chapter of *Mind and Cosmos* he takes up the question of value, which he defines as ethical consciousness—our ability to conceive and embrace the good and to reject the false. Understanding as such is critical to adaptation, but value-conception often requires us to act against our own interests, a point made in the nineteenth century by Darwin's first great disciple, Thomas Henry Huxley. This means it cannot be reducible to what Nagel calls evolutionary realism, for which survival (of the species if not necessarily the individual) is the supreme law. Jeffers, as I have argued elsewhere, sees value as the property of

the cosmos as a whole, but likewise as transcending individual interest.[9] Nagel's approach is primarily moral rather than aesthetic—the Jeffersian perception of value through the sense of beauty—but for him as well, value must be a property of the natural order, for, as he says, "An adequate conception of the cosmos must contain the resources to account for how it could have given rise to beings capable of thinking successfully about good and bad, right and wrong, and discovering moral and evaluative truths that do not depend on their own beliefs" (106). As with rational cognition, the quest for objective value necessarily answers to something beyond the individual.

Nagel entertains but rejects theism, the argument that the world is the product of divine intention, even an intention that works itself out with probabilistic rather than determinate laws and provides for beings with free will (24). For him, this makes the universe a play of mind. Jeffers addresses this question by positing a fully material cosmos in which divinity is nonetheless immanent and purposive. He calls this divinity "God," but denies that its purposes can be read. This is not so far from Nagel's suggestion that the universe is teleologically grounded, even though we may never decode its ultimate basis: "It is perfectly possible," he says, "that the truth is beyond our reach, in virtue of our intrinsic cognitive limitations, and not merely beyond our grasp in humanity's present stage of intellectual development" (128). We cannot, however, forsake our quest for it, for it is in some way built into us.

For Nagel, then, the human project is to search for the echo of mind in the cosmos—of that which answers to man's own most distinctive endowment. Without a locus in theism of some sort, this risk being an exercise in infinite regression. The unseen hand that Jeffers descries in evolutionary biology is an instrument, not a source; it requires only observation, not explanation. At the same time, divine intentionality suffuses the cosmos as such, for the immanent God is present in all things: "They make," he says, "one being, one consciousness, one life, one God" ("The Beginning and the End," *BE* 8; *CP* 3: 432). There is nothing that is not, in Schopenhauerian terms, both will and representation, phenomenal appearance and divine essence. God's will is manifest in all that exists, all that occurs; creation is a perpetual and immediate disclosure of purpose; cause and effect are inseparably one.

Put another way, Nagel begins with the fact of the human mind and works outward to find its cosmic source, whereas Jeffers begins with the cosmos as a divine instantiation and treats man as a local and specialized case. For Nagel, the human mind is so striking a phenomenon as to call any description of the universe that does not treat it centrally into question; for Jeffers, human consciousness is an exacerbated form of the quality that inheres in all matter as divine organism itself:

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 brain are like a burning-glass
To concentrate the heat and make it catch fire:
It seems to us martyrs hotter than the blazing hearth
From which it came.
("The Beginning and the End," *BE* 7-8; *CP* 3: 432)

The "blazing hearth" is presumably a figure for natural process, with its incessant creative dynamism; experienced through the highest creaturely consciousness, it is a suffering that makes "martyrs" of those who bear it. This suffering in turn suggests the self-torturing, self-hanged God of "At the Birth of an Age," whose travail it unwittingly emulates. Only those supremely tortured—the great religious figures catalogued in "Theory of Truth," and most especially the figure of Jesus—identify their plight with a divine source and aspire directly toward it. They are consumed by their passion, even as their sacrifice, suitably tempered by their disciples and successors, becomes the basis of civilization itself.

Ordinary human consciousness, played on by pain and joy, hope and jealousy, can be deeply ignoble, as Jeffers frequently suggests; it can also, as in the narratives that begin with "Cawdor," be ratcheted up to an incandescent suffering that in its way also mimics the divine agon. Jeffers' vision is thus relentlessly tragic, whether exhibited through aspiration or endurance. It is not intellect, as for Nagel, that is in Jeffers the decisive element of human consciousness, but the capacity to suffer, and thereby obscurely to suggest the character of the cosmos itself. But both men reach a similar conclusion by different means: that humanity reflects a critical, not to say an essential aspect of cosmic order.

At the same time, Jeffers assigns man an eccentric, oppositional position in that order. In "The Alpine Christ," Jeffers' Christ-figure, Manuel Ruegg, sets a gospel of love "[t]hat saints and saves the earth" against the indifference of the cosmos:

This is the light,
Which, lacking, all were darkness; this the beauty
Touch of whose flowery and starry wand transforms
The lump of its own likeness:—so divine
And so required is love" (*AC* 185).

The mature Jeffers would reverse the terms of this equation, seeing in human love possessiveness, power-seeking, and narcissism, while valorizing the beauty and self-sufficiency of natural process. By the 1930s,

although sexual trauma and incestuous desire still drive the narratives, the trope of "love" is replaced by the more encompassing notion of consciousness, conceived not as redemptive but as a kind of cosmic taint:

> You would be wise, you far stars,
> To flee with the speed of light this infection.
> For here the good sane invulnerable material
> And nature of things more and more grows alive and cries.
> The rock and water grow human, the bitter weed
> Of consciousness catches the sun, it clings to the near stars,
> Even the nearer portion of the universal God
> Seems to become conscious, yearns and rejoices
> And suffers: 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?" and resume
> The old soulless triumph, and the iron and stone earth
> With confident inorganic glory obliterate
> Her ruins and fossils . . . ("Margrave," *CP* 2: 166)[10]

The oppositional element between man and cosmos remains, except that man is now the spoiler, not to say the despoiler of the "soulless" glory of the material world. Since all things are finally resolved for Jeffers in the divine unity, this opposition is not constitutive but rather an aspect of divine self-withholding. The God who tortures himself to discover himself in "At the Birth of an Age" does so partly through the irritant called man. Man, in turn, experiences reflexive consciousness as an alienation from nature whose result is either a quest for a divine source or an attempt to instate the human perspective as a final value. It is this latter phenomenon, inseparable for Jeffers from self-regard, that he calls "incest." The initial impulse of any civilization, in his view, is a religious one, typically proceeding from a visionary founder. Codified, it undergirds civilized institutions; decayed, it leads to inversion and decline. At the stage where, as Jeffers' Orestes says in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," "[A]ll that we did or dreamed of / Regarded each other, the man pursued the woman, the woman clung to the man, warriors and kings / Strained at each other in the darkness, all loved or fought inward" (*CP* 1:176), decline was terminal, and men were cut off from nature and the divinity inherent in it. They could then only await fresh vision or follow the false or deluded prophets of whom Barclay was a paradigm.

As we have seen, Barclay is a complex case, in whom partial vision is obscured by the appropriative ego. Jeffers' Jesus, who also identifies himself with divinity, is removed from Barclay not in kind but only degree, and if his vision proves efficacious it too bears the taint of its origin in personal torment. The question then is whether the quest for

truth can ever be separate from the seeker, and whether anything more than "stained fragments" can result (*CP* 2: 610).

Jeffers' answer, in "Sign-Post," "The Answer," "Theory of Truth," and many other poems is that, as the last poem puts it, such truth is possible only when "the mind has turned its love from itself and men, from parts to the whole" (*CP* 2: 610). This is a difficult and solitary path. The prophet's word falls on deaf ears; the savior both corrupts and is corrupted by his disciples; the mystic is susceptible to delusion. Such men are driven by passion, and only by mastering it can the truth-seeker proceed:

> Make your veins cold, look at the silent stars, let your eyes
> Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.
> Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;
> Things are the God, you will love God, and not in vain,
> For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature.
> ("Sign-Post," *CP* 2: 418)

On one level, this injunction seems unproblematic, even didactic; on another, it suggests further complication. Men share the divine nature in the same sense as all other material phenomena, as an embodiment of divine essence. At the same time, however, their participation is an alienated one, for whereas the other elements of being are a common voice of praise ("Natural Music," *CP* 1: 6), the human voice alone is discordant ("Going to Horse Flats," *CP* 2: 541). Man thus cannot aspire to join the universal chorus, but rather he must form a relationship in which identity and difference subsist in dynamic tension. Even the most enraptured identification—the Inhumanist's sense of the unmediated divine presence in the second part of "The Double Axe," for example (*CP* 3: 288-289)—must be translated back into the differential, metaphoric terms of language. The task of "loving" God (and doubting or even hating him, as the Christ-figure of the Young Man does in "At the Birth of an Age" [*CP* 2: 474]) is thus forever provisional and incomplete. From this arises, as much as from any "private impurity" (*CP* 2: 609), the desire to appropriate divinity as such, to capture cosmos by mind. The Jeffersian truth-seeker, if he is to tell the truth to himself, must acknowledge that the savior's temptation is also his own: "For power living I would never do it; [the people] are not delightful to touch, one wants to be separate. For power/ After the nerves are put away underground, to lighten the abstract unborn children toward peace . . . / A man might have paid anguish indeed" ("Meditation on Saviors," *CP* 1: 400; cf. *CP* 3: 298).

The antidote to such temptation is to turn from its object, to "turn outward" or "[fall] in love outward" with the beauty and excellence of

the natural world, bracketing its human element until it can be placed in its proper context: as "Sign-post" has it, "At length / You will look back along the stars' rays and see that even / The poor doll humanity has its place under heaven." This is a counsel of religious discipline, and like much such counsel it involves a purgative rebirth. The pilgrim who follows it will, as the poem's closing lines suggest, gain the freedom "even to become human, / But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman" (*CP* 2: 418).

Like Nagel, Jeffers acknowledges the role of science in mapping the material dimensions of the cosmos, in dethroning man from his notionally privileged place in it, and in establishing the independence of its physical laws from human concern or signification. Moreover, as an open-ended, self-correcting process, the scientific method itself provided a paradigm of truth much more compatible with what Jeffers conceived as the experiential religious quest. Nonetheless, he remained skeptical of it as an enterprise. This was not only because, as for Nagel, science did not address critical questions or treated them reductively, but because, as the product of an increasingly decadent culture, it could not but share its defects:

> Man, introverted man, having crossed
> In passage and but a little with the nature of things this latter century
> Has begotten giants; but being taken up
> Like a maniac with self-love and inward conflicts cannot manage his hybrids.
> Being used to deal with edgeless dreams,
> Now he's bred knives on nature turns them inward: they have thirsty points though.
> ("Science," *CP* 1: 113; cf. "Triad," *CP* 2: 309)

Man's condition was introversion, and thus his approach to the natural world was instrumental and exploitive. Science, for all its affected disinterestedness, was a tool of this process, and fed finally not knowledge but conceit. No communal undertaking could escape the undertow of narcissism, and the free individual alone might hope to break the spell for himself: "But while he lives let each man make his health in his mind, to love the coast opposite humanity/ And so be freed of love, laying it like bread on the waters; it is worst turned inward, it is best shot farthest" ("Meditation on Saviors," *CP* 1: 401).

As in "Sign-Post," love is an offering whose return is its own transcendence, and the impulse that turns it toward an end that cannot be appropriated or even properly conceived before it is experienced—the perception of the universe as value—is the only route to the fully cognizant mind whose condition Jeffers calls "sanity." He understood

this to be a counsel of perfection that would likely be adopted by few. But there was a further difficulty. To love "outward" without object—or, rather, to cast one's mind into the multitude of particulars that both embodied and attested the universal God—was to wade shorelessly into that which was nowhere and everywhere at once. What gave coherence and direction to such a quest was, firstly, Jeffers' vitalism. The universe was "one energy, / One existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God: star-fire and rock-strength, the sea's cold flow / And man's dark soul" (*CP* 3: 256-257). "God" was the name for this ceaseless energy and exchange, the only word that could summarily denote it. At the same time, however, if it added nothing more to the idea of natural process, it was only a grandiloquent tautology.

The term that complicated Jeffers' usage was consciousness: as he amended himself in "The Beginning and the End," the cosmos was "one being, *one consciousness,* one life, one God" (*BE* 8; *CP* 3: 433: emphasis added). Being alive, all things were also aware, and this awareness, although differentially distributed among phenomena, was the unifying element in all. The more developed it was, the more vulnerable was the entity that manifested it, and in the self-reflexive consciousness of humans it escaped local sensitivity to essay a conception of the cosmic whole. This capacity, not a state of philosophic calm but a kind of panic, formed in the "shock and agony" of the struggle for existence (*BE* 9; *CP* 3: 433), engendered its reactive opposite, narcissism, so that man oscillated between both a truth and a falsehood peculiar to him alone. From this perspective, the injunction to love outward was intended as a corrective to narcissistic self-absorption, a discipline by which the capacity for truth might be tempered and strengthened.[11]

The capacity both for truth and error thus defined human consciousness, and these categories themselves arose only in terms of it. They were not themselves basic elements, however, but secondary developments that grew from an emotive response to trauma:

> . . . a wound was made in the brain
> When life became too hard, and has never healed.
> It is there that [men] learned trembling religion and blood-sacrifice,
> It is there that they learned to butcher beasts and slaughter men,
> And hate the world: the great religions of love and kindness
> May conceal that, not change it. They are not primary but reactions
> Against the hate: as the eye after feeding on a red sunfall
> Will see green suns. (*BE* 9; *CP* 3: 433)

Terror was thus for Jeffers the first experience of the human mind, and hatred its first response to it. This dyad was the origin of reflexivity, and reflexivity was the basis of mind itself—the form of consciousness that,

arising distinctively among men, alone deserved the title. When the mind began to reflect upon itself and its presence in others, the question arose as to whether it existed among the other elements of nature—animism—and, finally, whether it was an attribute of the cosmos as such.

As we have seen, Jeffers considered consciousness in general as an aspect of divine self-extension, and mind, with its root in biological experience, was part of the same continuum. The human mind was of recent provenance, and Jeffers speculated that "Throughout the universe much greater nerve-endings / Enrich the consciousness of the one being / Who is all that exists" (*BE* 10; *CP* 3: 434). This suggested that divine consciousness itself was dynamic and worked itself out through natural process. Jeffers had depicted such a condition in the contingent, self-experimental God of "At the Birth of an Age," who is manifest at a further remove in "De Rerum Virtute" in the animating intelligence of evolutionary design.

Consciousness thus works itself both downward (as intention) and upward (as aspiration) along the entire scale of creation. Since God is omnipresent throughout, value is constant; there is no "higher" or "lower," and no particular privilege in complexity. The rock exhibits for us a time-tested durability and the falcon perched on it a concentrated intensity that is, in each, a model of its kind ("Rock and Hawk," *CP* 2: 416); the "fugitive human race" ("Flight of Swans," *CP* 2: 419), in contrast, lacks stability and integrity, and from that standpoint is a migration downwards:

> For often I have heard the hard rocks I handled
> Groan, because lichen and time and water dissolve them,
> And they have to travel down the strange falling scale
> Of soil and plants and the flesh of beasts to become
> The bodies of men; they murmur at their fate
> In the hollows of windless nights, they'd rather be anything
> Than human flesh played on by pain and joy,
> They pray for annihilation sooner, but annihilation's
> Not in the book yet. ("Margrave," *CP* 2: 161)

Jeffers thus checks the teleological impulse we might otherwise discern in his depiction of the cosmos. Man is from one perspective a summit, but from another a cul-de-sac, "a botched experiment" and "civil war on two legs" (*CP* 3: 206, 282). Nevertheless, the achievement of mind in him is deeply significant. The aspiration toward divine consciousness he exhibits represents, in however flawed and partial a way, an attempt to recuperate that consciousness as it is dispersed throughout the cosmos. The question that remains is whether such a final, comprehensive consciousness exists. In "The Double Axe," the Inhumanist considers

the phenomenon of recurrence in the cosmos, and asks, "Why does God hunt in circles? Has he lost something? Is it possible—himself?" (*CP* 3: 256). The question is deferred, but Jeffers takes it up in a later section of the poem: "While he considered the matter, staring upward, and the night's noises / Hushed, there came down from heaven a great virile cry, a voice hoarser than thunder, heavily reverberated / Among the star-whorls and cliffs of darkness: 'I am caught, I am in the net.' And then, intolerably patient: / 'I see my doom'" (CP 3: 270).

The Inhumanist wonders whether "It is possible that man's passion is only a reflex of / Much greater torment: and what was shouted among the stars comes dwindling and tottering down / Into human jaws and a king's bursting heart—or a lynched black's," and concludes that it is "very likely," for "the great voice was in earnest" (*CP* 3:270). This in turn reflects the assertion of Jesus in "Dear Judas": "I tell you feelingly, it is the honor of all men living to be dupes of God / And serve not their own ends and understandings but His" (*CP* 2: 30). The relationship is not merely one of condescension or analogy, however. In "The Beginning and the End," Jeffers describes humanity as "one of God's sense-organs, / Immoderately alerted to feel good and evil / And pain and pleasure" (*BE* 9-10; *CP* 3: 434). What man suffers, God suffers, albeit on a vastly different plane. This is the logical consequence of Jeffers' two fundamental postulates, immanentism and vitalism: that God is coextensive with and materially inseparable from the universe, and that the universe is in him organically whole and alive.

It is not man alone who suffers existence, of course; as the Self-Hanged God declares in "At the Birth of an Age," creation is, from the divine point of view, a voluntary act of suffering as such. But man's portion is distinctive. His tragic agon reflects, however fitfully, the divine agon itself, and his self-reflexive consciousness enables him to engage suffering as moral choice. "Pain and pleasure" are experiences common to sentient creatures, as pressure and release are to "inorganic" matter; but "good and evil" pertain only to mind and the faculty engendered by them, will. The lines that follow the above-quoted ones in "The Beginning and the End" suggest the transition between animal and human consciousness, and the apposition of human to divine experience:

> This is man's mission:
> To find and feel, all animal experience
> Is a part of God's life. He would be balanced and neutral
> As a rock on the shore, but the red sunset- waves
> Of life's passions fling over him. He endures them,
> We endure ours. (*BE* 10; *CP* 3: 434)

The syntactic ambiguity of "He" in this passage is resolved only in the final clause, which identifies the pronominal reference as God. All things "endure," from the quick ecstasy of flame in "Animals" (*CP* 3: 364) to the perdurable stone in "Rock and Hawk," but the discriminatory experience of the passions is possible only to higher consciousness. The disproportion between the divine and the human mind may be insuperably great, but they are not, as Jeffers conceives them, strictly incomparable. The self-torturing God of "At the Birth of an Age" answers on the mythic level to a Prometheus and on a human one to the biblical Jesus, while the "virile cry" that pierces the cosmic silence in "The Double Axe" suggests one at least partially lost in the toils of his own creation. These are of course personifications of an ineffable divine whole that includes and surpasses the cosmos, but which are nonetheless "real" in terms of the poet's own fabulation. We can intuit the existence of a divine mind only with the resources of our own, including the sensory and moral apparatus that enable us to apprehend the world as beauty and value.

Such a notion, Jeffers argued, unfolded slowly, with the development of biological consciousness itself. Humans had to proceed through primitive animism to an "anthropoid God" who projected their own needs and desires (*CP* 3: 257) before arriving at a mature conception of the divine, and such a conception, of course, could never be final or complete. This applied equally to Jeffers himself: "The poet also / Has his mythology," he noted wryly ("The Great Wound," *BE* 11; *CP* 3: 459). But the path toward divinity lay outward, for, as he asserted repeatedly, "to see the human figure in all things is man's disease; / To see the inhuman God is our health" ("See the Human Figure," *BE* 66; *CP* 3: 479). That God, of course, as immanent in all things, comprehended the human as well; he was only not to be sought there by men themselves. This was never entirely avoidable, for the human mind naturally sought its own completion in the divine one, an effort that courted excess, confusion, and, as in the case of Barclay, self-immolation. Such aspiration was tragic, and tragedy was thus the most radical expression of human experience.

In classical tragedy, the protagonist suffered the consequences of hubris that the chorus might observe, and the audience be instructed; his death or destruction was a sacrificial gift to the collective. In a similar way, Jeffers' tragic heroes were exemplary, but their fate was a part of the greater cosmic economy. Humanity as such was not meant merely to live its given nature but, at least in certain figures, to exceed it, and in the voluntary assumption of suffering to enact the ritual of being itself. The great mythic archetypes had attested this; so had the biblical Jesus. Now it was the function of the tragic poet to supply these models, which "reveal to their audience / Extremes of pain and passion they will

never find / In their own lives but [which] through the poems as sense-organs" they might experience (*BE* 10; *CP* 3: 434). The connection of such figures to the divine agon is suggested in the Inhumanist's reaction to the "virile cry" that pierces the heavens: "My God: have they got Oedipus / or Lear up there?" (*CP* 3: 270). Similarly, Jeffers comments in "The World's Wonders" on "The use of tragedy: Lear becomes as tall as the storm he crawls in; and a tortured Jew became God" (*CP* 3: 371).

That Jesus "becomes" God is, Jeffers notes, mythology; but it is part of a relation that links not only man and deity but encompasses the organic connection of the immanent Creator with his creation: "This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places: and like the passionate spirit of humanity / Pain for its bread" ("Apology for Bad Dreams," *CP* 1: 209). "Tragedy" here is the mediating trope between world and God, and man, in whom the tragic alone is realized, is the means by which universal yearning becomes articulate.

The place Jeffers gives humanity is thus central, but not permanent. The cosmos long precedes man and will long survive him. The tragic nobility he exhibits is balanced—and for Jeffers often more than balanced—by pettiness, cruelty, and vice. When Jeffers says in "Margrave" that in man the world "has to dream, and dream badly, a moment of its night," he identifies the human with the cosmic mind, but as a brief episode rather than an essential predicate. The God who experiments on himself, Jeffers suggests, has other views in mind.

Endnotes

1. Cf. Terry Beers' argument for "Thurso's Landing" as exhibiting elements of the epic tradition in modern dress (Beers, "Telling the Past," especially pp. 59-60 and 61-62 n6). Radcliffe Squires suggests that Jeffers is closer to the saga (Squires, 30), a point backed up by Jeffers himself (*CP* 4: 392, 395).

2. Jeffers' mature use of pathetic fallacy was far more sophisticated and integrated into a world-view in which not only human thought but emotion found reflection in natural circumstance. See Hart, 30-32, and 146 n41.

3. Quoted in *The New York Times,* December 27, 2013.

4. Jeffers did not assemble the final manuscript of *The Beginning and the End*, which was edited by his secretary and biographer, Melba Berry Bennett, with the assistance of Donnan Jeffers. This sometimes involved the conflation of disparate manuscripts and the bestowing of titles drawn from key phrases in the texts. Tim Hunt transcribed and published the unedited manuscripts themselves; for his discussion of them, see *CP* 3: xvii-xviii; 5: 1085-1087. To what extent Jeffers participated in the editing process is unclear. The original editors had the benefit of whatever comments, responses, and instructions he may have been able to give, as well as their personal knowledge of his intentions and practices. The result must be judged on its merits. I have taken it as the most authentic expression of the book

Jeffers intended to publish that we can have and as consonant with the Jeffers we know. The reception of the book was largely favorable (Vardamis, 123-130), and no critic questioned its provenance although the publisher's fly-leaf acknowledged that it was "Collected from hand-written manuscripts," i.e., not in the final typescript versions that Jeffers customarily submitted.

5. Letter to Mark Van Doren and James Rorty, August 5, 1927, *CL* 1: 688-691.

For the immediate antecedents of vitalist thought in Romantic literature, science, and philosophy, see Mitchell, *Vitalism;* for the controversy in Jeffers' own day, Burwick and Douglass, eds., *The Crisis in Modernism.* The general literature on the subject is extensive.

6. Spinoza would have been a likely source for Jeffers' materialist Immanentism (*CL* 2: 33-34). For Enlightenment and Romantic antecedents, see Kerslake and Gibson, and for a discussion of its contemporary status in philosophy, Haynes.

See the fuller discussion of this poem in Zaller, *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime,* 332-341 and passim. Cf. Hart, 110 ff., and Chapman.

7. Zaller, "Land and Value"; "A Sketch for an Aesthetic"; *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime,* Chapter 4.

8. Cf. the sonnet triptych entitled "Consciousness" (*CP* 1: 7-8), which dates from the early 1920s and which Jeffers considered including in the volume that contained"Margrave" (*CP* 5: 498). He did not do so, nor did he include it in the 1935 edition of *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems or* in the 1938 *Selected Poetry*; its only appearance during his lifetime was in a local publication, *The Carmel Cymbal* (1926). The sequence is discussed in Hart, 44-46, and Zaller, *The Cliffs of Solitude,* 84.

9. See also the discussion of this text ("The unformed volcanic earth" in Hunt, CP 3: 430-434) in Hart, 114 ff.

Works Cited

Beers, Terry. "Telling the Past and Living the Present: 'Thurso's Landing' and the Epic Tradition." Robert Brophy, ed. *Robinson Jeffers: Dimensions of a Poet.* New York: Fordham UP (1995): 48-63.

Burwick, Frederick, and Douglass, Paul, eds. *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1992.

Chapman, Steve. "'De Rerum Virtute': A Critical Anatomy." *Jeffers Studies* 6, 4 (2002): 22-35.

Gibson, Matthew. *Yeats, Coleridge, and the Romantic Sage.* New York: St. Martin's P, 2000.

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

Haynes, Patrice. *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy.* London and New York: Bloomsbury P, 2012.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Alpine Christ and Other Poems,* ed. William Everson. Cayucos, CA: Cayucos P, 1974.

_____*The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, 5 vols.* Ed. Tim Hunt. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988-2001.

_____*The Beginning and the End and Other Poems,* ed. Melba Berry Bennett. New York: Random House, 1963.
_____*The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers, Vol. 2.* Ed. James Karman. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2011.
Kerslake, Christian. *Immanence and the Philosophy of Vertigo: From Kant to Deleuze.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009.
Mitchell, Robert. *Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013.
Nagel, Thomas. *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False.* Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2012.
Squires, Radcliffe. *The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press. 1956.
Vardamis, Alex A. *The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers: A Bibliographical Study.* Hamden, CT: Shoe String P, 1972.
Zaller. Robert. *The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
_____"Land and Value: The Ecology of Robinson Jeffers." *Western American Literature,* 26, 1 (1991): 9-20.
_____*Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime.* Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012.
_____"A Sketch for an Aesthetic: Process, Value, and Moral Beauty in Jeffers." *Jeffers Studies,* 1, 2 (1997): 18-28.

Steven Reese

Jeffers in Context: The Presence of Shelley

Writing in March of 1937 to Benjamin Miller, Robinson Jeffers criticizes one of the poems Miller has sent him by saying that it "suffers intellectually from the bright Shelleyan vagueness of its concept of revolution" (*CL* 2: 672). Jeffers meant that Shelley's imagined revolutions and the utopias he believed, with his characteristic idealism ("bright"), they would produce were always rather cloudy, indistinct affairs without any basis in history. Jeffers concludes his point by saying that history, in its general outlines if not in its details, always repeats itself, "and Utopia was never included in it. That is what Shelley came at last to recognize, in the final chorus of his Hellas" (*CL* 2: 672). But Jeffers is, strictly speaking, mistaken here. It is not in the final chorus of his dramatic poem *Hellas* that Shelley conveys this recognition, but in his prose *note* to that chorus, where he says that while poets may prophecy the onset of wars with reasonable confidence, "to anticipate, however darkly, a period of regeneration and happiness is a more hazardous exercise of the faculty which bards possess or feign" (57). There may be a number of reasons why Jeffers is not quite accurate with this detail, but the most likely one is that he is recalling, inexactly, information provided to him some time before by his wife, Una, who considered Shelley "*my* subject!" (*CL* 1: 672) and who, in two separate letters,[1] anticipates by just over a year precisely the point Jeffers is making about him—except that Una shows herself in complete command of the details, quoting Shelley's "dark & disillusioned" note at length (*CL* 2: 530).

If the purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate the profound influence Percy Shelley had upon Robinson Jeffers, then the letter to Miller seems not to offer much in the way of support, suggesting as it does Jeffers's reservations about a significant element of Shelley's idealistic poetry and thought; but I begin with it because it suggests a pattern of transmission—Shelley to Jeffers, via Una—established in the days when Jeffers and Una first met and began their relationship. The pattern was evidently significant enough for both Jeffers and Una to refer to it in their separate responses to a 1928 questionnaire asking, among other things, about significant influences on Jeffers: "Wordsworth and Shelley," Jeffers

wrote as one of his answers, "through Una" (*CL* 1: 777). And Una: "Arthur Symons essays and Wordsworth and Shelley (through Una)" (*CL* 1: 768). How does recognizing this pattern contribute to our understanding of Shelley's importance for Jeffers? For one thing, its sheds light on what has come to be seen as a central passage in Jeffers's oeuvre, the moment in "Roan Stallion" when he interrupts the narrative progress to articulate a position that underlies much of his work: "Humanity is the start of the race," it famously begins; "I say Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire, / The atom to be split" (*CP* 1: 189). As Robert Hass has pointed out, the passage "seems to borrow . . . directly" (134) from Una's 1910 Master's thesis, "The Enduring Element of Mysticism in Man," which speaks of men in the nineteenth century "tentatively trying in a thousand different ways to break through the crust of the material, which encompasses them…" (Kuster 69), that crust being chiefly Enlightenment rationalism. But in fact, what we are seeing in "Roan Stallion" and its possible quoting of Una is another example of the pattern of transmission mentioned above, since the "breaking through the crust" phrase—used as Una and Robinson are using it to mean overcoming a set of limiting human conventions—comes from Shelley. "It was my object to break through the crust of those outworn opinions on which established institutions depend," Shelley wrote in the "Preface" to his long narrative poem *Laon and Cythna* (247). Una alluded to the phrase in the final chapter of her thesis, "The Mystical Awakening in the Nineteenth Century," to say that the romantics had indeed begun to break through the crust; when Jeffers uses it in "Roan Stallion," we can see that he is adopting and expanding Shelley's project—for Jeffers, there is still a crust to break through: humanity itself. But Shelley was one of those who had pointed the way, as Una seems already to have recognized.

Keeping this pattern of transmission before us yields another benefit as well. It reminds us that when we speak of Shelley's presence in Jeffers's thought and work, we are not speaking merely of literary influence and allusion; we are speaking of a passion of Una's that she wanted Jeffers to share, and he did, in a way that would profoundly influence his thought and his art. Shelley became a part of their mutual lives during the highly charged years when they were falling in love, and he remained an enduring presence. When they were married and had first moved to Carmel, Una reports, they "devoted nearly a year" (*CL* 3: 65) to the study of Shelley and his circle. Why did Shelley have such a strong impact on Una and, through her, Robinson? Both admired his lyric power and passion, for one thing. But more importantly, Shelley represented the ideal of breaking through the crust, rebelling against social convention and custom—an ideal that appealed very strongly to two lovers whose

relationship caused a scandal in conventional society. Shelley was a sustaining presence. Jeffers himself made this connection between his and Una's lives and the example of Shelley, and the evidence for that is in the poem from his 1916 collection *Californians* called "The Three Avilas."

By way of taking up that poem, we must go back to the line of Shelley's already quoted, about breaking through the crust of received opinion and established institutions. The remark appears in the last paragraph of his "Preface" to *Laon and Cythna*, whose titular characters are not only tragic champions of liberty, but lovers as well. They are also brother and sister. Shelley in that paragraph is defending his use of incest in the poem, saying that it was "intended to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life" (247). Furthermore, he goes on to say, it was meant to elicit our broader human sympathies with those who are different from us: "The circumstance of which I speak was introduced…to accustom men to that charity and tolerance which the exhibition of a practice widely differing from their own has a tendency to promote" (247).[2] Una and Robinson both knew *Laon and Cythna* and would later refer to it, among other works, in citing precursors to Jeffers's own use of incest as a motif. But it is important to note that Jeffers saw something in Shelley's poem that distinguished it from those other precursors—Byron's *Manfred,* for example, or even Shelley's own dramatic poem *The Cenci*.[3] In a letter to Lawrence Powell, Jeffers writes: "In 'Manfred' and 'The Cenci' [incest] is only a sin, but elsewhere in Shelley's poetry it seems to be a more or less conscious symbol of human love, reckless and comprehensive, (as in 'Laon and Cythna')" (*CL* 2: 33). So if what is being claimed here about the impact of Shelley on Jeffers and Una is true, that his breaking of taboos and conventions was akin to their own "reckless and comprehensive" love, that they alluded to his "breaking through the crust" in his work, it would help the cause if there were a Jeffers poem that (a) bore the unmistakable stamp of Shelley's influence, (b) as part of that influence, treated incest sympathetically as a symbol of human love the way Jeffers saw it treated in *Laon and Cythna,* and (c) made an explicit connection between the Shelleyan incestuous lovers and Jeffers and Una. That poem is "The Three Avilas."

At least in the beginning, the most apparent nod to Shelley in "The Three Avilas" is to his "Ode to the West Wind." "The west wind striking from the booming bows," Jeffers's poem begins, "What tones the supreme harp-maker designs" (*CP* 4: 148). A west wind playing upon nature as harp or lyre will remind readers immediately of Shelley's famous ode. And in both poems the effect of the wind on nature is to rouse and awaken the speakers; in Shelley that effect is potential, sought after, while in Jeffers it has in fact happened. Shelley appeals to the

wind for revitalization: "A heavy weight of hours," he says, "has chained and bowed / One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud" (55-56). Jeffers borrows Shelley's word "tameless" in describing nature's effect on him: "All the brave rustle and gleam of the world; the tameless/Pulse of music, rapture of light, have shaken / Me certainly from dreams and doubts and flameless/Sloth" (*CP* 4: 148). The metaphor of flame or fire is common to both: Shelley's words are like sparks from an "unextinguished hearth" (66) to be scattered through the world and rouse it from its winter drowse; in Jeffers the sparks have already turned to flame: "Visions and words long wandering lost and aimless/ …now they flame / As were the very wind and sun in them!" (*CP* 4: 148). Both poems, that is, are to some degree about writing and inspiration and regeneration from nature.

But Jeffers's poem is ultimately a love poem to Una—a "bridal song" is how the poem describes itself (*CP* 4: 165)—and in this regard its larger, thematic link with Shelley is to "Laon and Cythna" and the use of incest as an image of human love in a world bound by the chains of custom. Like *Laon and Cythna,* "The Three Avilas" begins not with the narrative proper but an address to the beloved—Mary, in Shelley's case, Una in Jeffers's.[4] Shelley's dedication "To Mary — —" refers to himself and Mary as gazing "Like lamps into the world's tempestuous night,—Two tranquil stars…" (255.123-124); Jeffers says Avila and his sister "lived like two stars burning in one blue…." (*CP* 4: 157). "Sweet friend," Shelley calls Mary (255.122); "my one friend," Jeffers addresses Una in the "The Three Avilas" (*CP* 4:166). Jeffers also calls her his "sister," emphasizing the connection between their love and the incestuous love depicted in the poem, a connection to which the poem alludes repeatedly and finally makes explicit in the twenty-eighth stanza, where the poem turns to address Una:

> O, do you see in hardly alien fate [i.e., the fate of the incestuous lovers]
> Our imaged own? We also are come from burning
> The world behind us:—be it desolate,
> Nor lurk back there to greet us unreturning!
> My deep heart's dear one sister and lone mate,
> Yes we would weep—but would we long go mourning—
> Were it not also joy—if us like them
> One tree had borne, twin-blossoms of one stem? (*CP* 4: 157)

This closing image recalls another from Shelley, not from *Laon and Cythna*, but from the fragment "Fiordispina":[5] "And so they grew together like two flowers / Upon one stem" (15-16), Shelley writes of Fiordispina and her lover Cosimo (in the fragment "Fiordispina"), whose

relationship is another instance of Shelley's broaching the incest theme as what Jeffers called a "symbol of human love." "They were two cousins," Shelley says, "almost like two twins, / Except that from the catalogue of sins / Nature had raised their love…" (11-13). This material, much changed, ended up in Shelley's "Epipsychidion," his poem to Emilia Viviani, whom he addresses as "Spouse! Sister! Angel!" (130) and to whom he exclaims, "Would we two had been twins of the same mother!" (45). We will return to "Epipsychidion" in the discussion of *Mara*, below.

What we are seeing in "The Three Avilas" is Jeffers using the incest theme as he saw it used at times in Shelley's work, as "a more or less conscious symbol of human love," employed to break through the crust of custom and convention as he and Una had done in their own lives, "burning / The world behind [them]," as the poem puts it. When Jeffers describes the love between the Avilas as "unoppressed / By custom" (*CP* 4: 159), he is by association—an association the poem elsewhere makes explicit—describing his love with Una. The third Avila, the other brother, is the poem's representative of everything Shelley despised, and Jeffers after him: someone acting solely on the basis of an inherited, conventional moral code, which in this case leads him to kill his brother and sister: "his blood's disgrace / Cried out for blood," Jeffers writes, and then adds: "or so he thought…." In other words, this is not a matter of the blood at all, but of the head, which in the third Avila's case contains the directives his culture has taught him: "both family pride / And Christian faith commanded fratricide," Jeffers writes (*CP* 4: 159). We have grown used to reading the incest motif in Jeffers according to his later defense of it, as a symbol of racial introversion, of humankind overly involved with itself; but "The Three Avilas" expresses an admiration for the transgressive heroes (to use a phrase from Robert Zaller's *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*), just as Shelley had done in *Laon and Cythna*, and associates Jeffers and Una with the transgression, with a love "unoppressed by custom" (*CP* 4:159).

We may get a further glimpse into this transgressive side of Jeffers and its relation to Shelley by pausing a moment over the difference between Una's and her husband's questionnaire responses about influence—not just Shelley and Wordsworth, Una had written, but "Arthur Symons essays" as well. James Karman reports that Una had shared Symons's work on Shelley and Wordsworth with Jeffers early in their relationship, and that "the two spent long hours together discussing this and other essays, books, and poems" (19). Una was reading Symons in connection with her thesis, in which she twice cites Symons's *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, published the year before she completed her work. In his essay on Shelley, one of Symons's most striking observations concerns Shelley's fascination with evil, "which draws him to contemplate it with

a child's enquiring wonder of horror. No poet ever handled foulness and horror with such clean hands or so continually" (271)—until Jeffers, one is tempted to add. There follows a list of Shelley's works that display this interest in depraved or violent acts—an extensive list, but not as long as a similar list of Jeffers's works would be. Symons attributes this aspect of Shelley's themes to a boundless curiosity about prohibitions observed out of cultural habit, or "custom," as Shelley would say. Symons continues: "That a law or tradition existed was enough for him to question it. He does so in the name of abstract liberty, but curiosity was part of his impulse. A new Adam in Eden, the serpent would have tempted him before Eve" (272).

This is all very suggestive with regard to Jeffers's body of work in general; but more specifically, and just at the time when Jeffers would have been reading these words of Symons's, he wrote a poem (ultimately unpublished) in which he describes himself as precisely this Adam, falling not because of Eve or the apple but solely because he finds the snake so appealing. Jeffers/Adam admires the "grace" and "rhythmic suppleness" of snakes' bodies; their sexual wisdom, which knows "the old dark's inscrutable affairs" and the night's "Wild wanton unendurable delights;" and their power, which takes pleasure in killing and makes them "handmaidens of death." The poem ends with these lines:

> Had I been Adam, shut in idle Eden,
> I would have fallen, tho' by Eve unbidden,
> Not for the magic apple, but because
> It had foam on it of the serpent's jaws. (*CP* 4: 438)

Here is Jeffers casting himself as the Shelleyan violator of prohibitions and traditional limits, prefiguring so many of his later characters in the narrative poems.[6] Jeffers perhaps also found an appeal in Symons's description of Shelley's lyrical rhythm as "an ample tide," with "a measure and order as of the paces of the boundless and cadenced sea" (284), which looks ahead to Jeffers's description of poetry as having a "tidal recurrence" (*CP* 4: 375), or "the rhythm of the ocean," as he says in his preface to *Tamar* (*CP* 4: 381).

Shelley appears by name in Jeffers's unpublished poem of 1914, "The Palace." Well before Jeffers placed any of the stones for Tor House or Hawk Tower, he depicted in this poem a labor of renovation on literary tradition symbolized by the palace and built by Shakespeare ("the throne-room"), Wordsworth ("the firm foundation"), Milton (who carved "the shafts of the columns"), and Shelley, whose contribution is, appropriately, at the top, connected to ethereal realms: "And golden at the top is the tower Shelley fashioned, and built on, / Spiring its tip to a star" (*CP* 4:440). Perhaps this is the "heaven-illumined tower" (124)

where the soul resides in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo," a poem Jeffers refers to in praising one of George Sterling's poems; or it may allude to "those skyey towers" of the human mind in *Prometheus Unbound*, "the temples high / Of Man's ear and eye, / Roofed over Sculpture and Poesy" (4.111-13). But the image is more likely a generalized emblem of Shelley's poetic tendencies, both because of the spiritual nature of so much of his verse and because of the frequency with which he employs the imagery of towers. The palace is in ruins because "smaller men came" after these great ones, men who were "easily tired" by the challenge of greatness (*CP* 4: 440), and who thus "despoiled their inheritance" (*CP* 4: 441). The poem ends with a call to restore the lost greatness: "Let us stand on the strength of the walls / To make firm the fine shafts of the columns and roof against rain / The large and beautiful halls" (*CP* 4: 441).

Shelley is also named in Una's observation to Sydney Alberts that the unpublished verse drama *The Alpine Christ* (1916) had been "somewhat modeled" on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (quoted by William Everson in his "Introduction" to *The Alpine Christ*, xi). Everson mostly dismisses this connection: "True, the overthrow of God and a certain Promethean stature about Jeffers' hero, Manual [*sic*], are evident; but beyond that the *form* of Jeffers' drama is too radically different from Shelley's to convince of any meaningful derivation" (191). Whether or not it is true that, in *The Alpine Christ*, "Jeffers has no interest in extending Shelley's revolutionary implications" (xv), Manuel, insofar as he represents the values of endurance, love, hope and pity, can be seen as coming from the very thematic core of Shelley's drama. Furthermore, central to the thematic thrust of *Prometheus*—and found repeatedly in Shelley's oeuvre—is the idea that love and pain participate in each other, that "despair / Mingled with love" (1.756-7) are, as Ione puts it in Shelley's play, "Twin nurslings of the all-sustaining air" (1.754). In this regard, Jeffers's Manuel and his message are direct descendants of Shelley:

> Dream not that love is kin to happiness
> Or as mother or sister: love is the soul,
> And happiness and pain are her affections,
> Her colors that she takes chameleonlike,
> And shift of wear. O, for love's origin
> Is higher, beyond words infinitely!—But see, with pain
> She is oftenest appareled, and with grief
> Garbed, and with agony she is glorified. (185)

This is related to Jeffers's esthetics as well, in which pain and beauty are conjoined. As Robert Zaller says, Jeffers's work expresses the realization that "Beauty in its most comprehensive as well as its most typical sense incorporates pain, because pain is knit into the very fiber of experience,

and thus suffuses it" (112). That statement describes Shelley's work as well, and in his "Defence of Poetry" Shelley makes note of this apparent paradox in the nature of esthetic pleasure: "Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of the pleasure which exists in pain" (501). The poet who, in "Apology for Bad Dreams," heard the California coast "crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places" (*CP* 1: 209) no doubt found in Shelley that blending of pain and pleasure that came to be so central to his own project. Jeffers's "Hellenistics" expresses, in the presence of nature's magnificent beauty, this same "painful joy" (*CP* 2: 526), and his drafts show clearly that Shelley was on his mind in writing the poem: it began originally with an epigraph from the final chorus of "Hellas" (the one Jeffers mentioned in the letter to Benjamin Miller with which we began); and, where the poem now reads, "What poet will be born to tell you to hate cruelty and filth?" (*CP* 2: 528), Jeffers originally wrote, "Alas, what savior, what Christ, what Prometheus, can teach you to hate cruelty and filth" (*CP* 5: 585).

Looking back on this early phase of his career in the "Introduction" to the 1935 Modern Library re-issue of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*, Jeffers depicts himself as "imitating Shelley and Milton" (*CP* 4: 385) and conducting a "bitter meditation" on his lack of progress as a poet (*CP* 4: 384). And though Jeffers rejected modernism and associated himself with "old freedoms" of narrative and of "the expression of philosophic and scientific ideas in verse" (*CP* 4: 391), his remarks suggest that Shelley's presence in his work belonged to an apprenticeship "imitating dead men" (*CP* 4: 386), as he puts it, stuck in a language that had lost its currency. But what has been said thus far should be sufficient to show that this was hardly the case, that Shelley was no mere stylistic model from his youth but someone who represented to Jeffers, through his wife, ideas and values that mattered to his life with her and were to become core elements in his own thought. Jeffers's early work evokes the romantic poet repeatedly, not because Jeffers is trapped in an outdated poetic mode, but rather because Shelley is central to Jeffers's seeing his own way forward as a poet and observer of the modern world. (As we have already noticed, Shelley seems to be present in a key section of "Roan Stallion," by which time Jeffers's days of imitating dead men were well behind him).

Another thematic thread that runs from Shelley all the way through Jeffers's mature work concerns freedom and oppression. Freedom is the real keynote of Shelley's entire poetic production—"I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression," he wrote ("To the Editor" 280)—and Jeffers carries that emphasis forward: "Life's

crown jewels," he says at the end of "The Three Avilas," "remain these three— / To have strength, and to love much, and to be free" (*CP* 4: 166). As "The Three Avilas" also shows, one of the forces obstructing freedom is conventional thought, typically embodied in inherited moral systems and reinforced by institutions like law and religion—the entire network of cultural assumptions that Shelley referred to with the term "custom." The "icy chains of custom," Shelley describes it in *Queen Mab* (1.127), which later refers to "'heart-withering custom's cold control'" (9.201). In *Laon and Cythna*, custom is "The Queen of Slaves, / The hood-winked Angel of the blind and dead" (4.209-210) and associated with the oppressive forces of institutionalized power: "Justice and truth with custom's hydra brood / Wage silent war; when priests and kings dissemble/In smiles or frowns their fierce disquietude . . . / the world's foundations tremble" (1.293-297). When Jeffers attacks "custom" in his early work, he is taking up Shelley's standard. Consider the sonnet "When I Behold the Greatest":

> When I behold the greatest and most wise
> Fall out of heaven, wings not by pride struck numb
> Like Satan's, but to gain some humbler crumb
> Of pittance from penurious granaries;
> And when I see under each new disguise
> The same cowardice of custom, the same dumb
> Devil that drove our Wordsworth to become
> Apologist of kings and priests and lies;
> And how a man may find in all he loathes
> Contentment after all, and so endear it
> By cowardly craft it grows his inmost own;—
> Then I renew my faith with further oaths,
> And bind with more tremendous vows a spirit
> That, often fallen, never has lain prone. (*CP* 4: 53)

Certainly, we suspect Shelley's influence in the speaker's implicit identification with the rebellious energies of Satan, vowing to maintain "a spirit / That, often fallen, never has lain prone." But Shelley's presence is unmistakable in the middle of the poem, where Jeffers chastises those great minds that fall to the pursuit of trivial ends for showing "The same cowardice of custom, the same dumb / Devil that drove our Wordsworth to become / Apologist of kings and priests and lies…." This view of Wordsworth is Shelley's, as he expressed it in his sonnet "To Wordsworth" and later in his satire *Peter Bell the Third*. And there is no poet who inveighed against "kings and priests and lies" more emphatically and repeatedly than Shelley (*Queen Mab,* again: "From kings and priests and statesmen war arose" [4.80]); when Robert Zaller says of Jeffers that

he never utters the word "priest" without contempt, he could just as well be speaking of Shelley (Zaller 106). But what is especially significant in Jeffers's poem is the identification of the real "Devil" not with Satan but with "custom;" and just as Jeffers here depicts great minds brought low by custom, Shelley in *Laon and Cythna* says that "custom maketh blind and obdurate / The loftiest hearts…" (4.73-74). One grounding belief that links these two authors is the idea that an authentic and nobly lived life required the breaking of conventions, especially those customs that deprived humankind of liberty by giving dominion to a political structure or a religious belief.

More evidence of Shelley's influence on Jeffers's political thought—especially the importance Jeffers attached to freedom—can be seen in "The Daughter of God in Russia" (1918, originally titled "Liberty Stands in Russia") and that poem's echoing of imagery from Shelley's "Ode to Liberty." Images of liberty as flame or lightning are prominent in both poems, as are images of dawn, flight, and song. In Shelley, freedom's triumph is described as a "Wild Bacchanal of truth's mysterious wine" (200); Jeffers's daughter of God (liberty) "is wild, a bacchanal, her pure quick stream / Of panting breath savors of wine and song" (*CP* 4: 473). Shelley says the conclusion of his song is like "a wild swan…sublimely winging / Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn" (273-274), while in Jeffers the word Freedom is heard to "glide like a wild swan / With white and awful wings up the steep wind / To annul the old day with new unearthly dawn" (*CP* 4: 466). In both poems the villains who suppress freedom are kings, tyrants, emperors, lords, and their slaves; both poems portray freedom as irrepressible and inevitable, throwing off the yoke of all masters.

For Una, this aspect of Shelley's work—its repeated trumpeting on behalf of liberty—seems to have worn a little thin: "it is no longer possible for me to read ALL of Shelley," she says in a 1933 letter to Phoebe Barkan, "— (can you?) I must pick and choose as I do in Shakespeare […] —In Shelley I evade the paeans about *Liberty*!" (*CL* 2: 272). But if anything, liberty became more and more a central theme in her husband's work; his attacks on the enemies of freedom—tyrants, religion, lies, wars, the same enemies Shelley inveighs against—are a greater, more strident presence in the later work.[7] That Jeffers still associated Shelley with his later political views can be seen in the 1935 poem "Shine, Republic" and its attack on another threat to liberty: luxury. The poem is "about the love of freedom," Jeffers told the audience in his 1941 Library of Congress reading called "The Poet in a Democracy" (*CP* 4: 399). Much in the way that Shelley's "Ode to Liberty" offers a survey of the progress of freedom from the dawn of man through Athens and Rome and up to the French Revolution, Jeffers says that freedom "has been the quality

of western man," and in the second stanza it becomes "a stubborn torch that flames from Marathon to Concord, its dangerous beauty binding three ages / Into one time; waves of barbarism and civilization have eclipsed but never quenched it" (*CP* 2: 417). But the dominant theme of the poem's second half is the danger of luxury: addressing America, the poem says, "You were not born to prosperity [Jeffers's original word here was "welfare"], you were born to love freedom / . . . But we cannot have all the luxuries and freedom also" (*CP* 2: 417). The poem's conclusion strikes this note again and suggests that America's decline will be seen in retrospect as resulting from its devotion to luxury: "Be great, carve deep your heel-marks. / The states of the next age will no doubt remember you, and edge their love of freedom with contempt of luxury" (*CP* 2:417). "Ave Caesar" is another poem in which Jeffers portrays luxury as incompatible with freedom; because "our [Americans'] ancestors . . . wanted freedom but wealth too," their descendants will look for "a Caesar," or at least "[s]ome kindly Sicilian tyrant" to rule them: "We are easy to manage, a gregarious people, / Full of sentiment, clever at mechanics, and we love our luxuries" (*CP* 2: 486). In "The Trap," he mocks what some would call "'the new abundance…' / Of what? Toys: motors, music-boxes, / Paper, fine clothes, leisure, diversion" (*CP* 2: 415). And in "Hellenistics," Jeffers imagines men massed "in the great cities / Of the empire" saying "'Freedom? Freedom was a fire. We are well quit of freedom, we have found prosperity'" (*CP* 2: 527).

Shelley was relentless in his attacks on luxury as the friend of tyrants and the enemy of freedom; "luxury," like "priest," is another one of those words that Shelley and Jeffers use only with contempt. *Queen Mab*, for instance, denounces the "hoary-headed hypocrites" (4.203) who have come to power "through a life of luxury and lies" (4.205). And later, "tyrants, by the sale of human life, / Heap luxuries to their sensualism, and fame / To their wide-wasting and insatiate pride . . ." (5.64-66). Later still the poem refers to "the vile joys of tainting luxury" (5.173) and "'all-polluting luxury and wealth…'" (8.180). Other examples abound; in virtually every case, luxury is associated with those in traditional positions of power and oppression, antithetical to freedom. It belongs to his larger critique of the profit motive, in which "wealth," "gold," and "commerce" replace the value of freedom and love, and "The harmony and happiness of man / Yields to the wealth of nations. . . " (5.79-80).

Those "hoary-headed hypocrites" of *Queen Mab* point to another continuity between Shelley and Jeffers's later political stance. In Jeffers's 1941 "Miching Mallecho," those heads are "wagging" as they drum up the war spirit:

> Wagging their hoary heads, glaring through their bright spectacles,
> The old gentlemen shout for war, while youth,

> Amazed, unwilling, submissive, watches them. This is not normal,
> But really ominous. It is good comedy,
> But for a coming time it means mischief. The boys have memories.
> (*CP* 3: 108)

The phrase "miching mallecho" appears in the third act of *Hamlet* during the play that Hamlet has had modified in order to catch the conscience of the King; Hamlet uses the phrase to answer Ophelia's question about what the play means. Jeffers translates it in the body of the poem— "it means mischief"—just as Hamlet does for Ophelia. Robert Ian Scott, in *What Odd Expedients and Other Poems*, makes a rather elaborate case for how Jeffers's brief lyric relates to Shakespeare's play, invoking Marcellus, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius, and another poem of Jeffers's to argue that "Miching Mallecho" treats history as tragic farce in a way that reflects *Hamlet* (Scott 74-78). But we can perhaps connect the title with the contents more simply and directly if we recall that Shelley signed himself "Miching Mallecho" when he wrote his satire "Peter Bell the Third." The immediate object of Shelley's comic assault is Wordsworth and his poem "Peter Bell," but he devotes significant attention to lampooning politicians for their hypocrisy, lies and deceptions to justify war; one of the Devil's guises in the poem is "a statesman spinning crimes" (2.9), including profits made from an "unjust war" (2.48). "The world is full of strange delusion" (2.51), says Shelley in the character of Miching Mallecho; the connection with Jeffers's attack on the politicians and their war rhetoric—a world the poem calls "not normal" but "good comedy"—is plain. Jeffers's "Miching Mallecho" has much more to do with Shelley's comic satire, I have tried to show, than it does with *Hamlet*.

Jeffers evidently revised "Miching Mallecho," changing the title to "The Old Gentlemen" and concluding the poem with two additional lines: "That famous revolution the false / Prophets have been prophesying now becomes possible here" (*CP* 5:688). The possibility of revolution helps to explain what the poem calls "really ominous" in the world it depicts. Jeffers was plainly opposed to such a possibility, as one of his draft lines makes clear: "But revolution would be worse. Patience, patience, patience" (*CP* 5:688). We have heard, in the letter to Benjamin Miller, Jeffers's reservations about Shelley's prophecies of revolution; their utopian dream is worlds away from Jeffers's own thinking. But as Miching Mallecho, Shelley also pokes fun at his own tendency to utopianism and revolution, including among the threatening elements in his topsy-turvy world "great talk of revolution" (2.26) along with "Gin—suicide—and methodism" (2.30), a list which comically deflates the grandeur of revolution as social change. Thus, the two added lines that mock the "famous revolution" in "The Old Gentlemen" again connect it to "Peter

Bell the Third." As to the change in title, Scott suggests that Jeffers changed it to "The Old Gentlemen" because the allusion to *Hamlet* was too obscure; but if the allusion is in fact to Shelley's "Peter Bell," then Scott is even more right than he knows.

As a final example of Shelley's presence—again from the later work—we might look at the narrative poem *Mara,* written mostly in 1940 and included in 1941's *Be Angry at the Sun.* The poem begins with its main character, Bruce Ferguson, encountering his *doppelgänger* as he walks up a slope from the barn to the house. The figure is at first "hatefully familiar / Although unknown" (*CP* 3: 38), but when Ferguson is able to see the figure's face, he sees that "the face was his own" (*CP* 3: 39). Ferguson's double speaks, asking a question: "'How long will you be satisfied?'—or else, 'How long / Will you endure it?'—The words were never exactly / Remembered . . . ." This episode is taken from the last days of Shelley's life, as recounted by Mary Shelley in a long and pained letter of 15 August 1822 to her friend Mrs. [Maria] Gisborne, detailing the circumstances surrounding her husband's death on 8 July. Mary reports that Percy "had seen the figure of himself, which met him as he walked on the terrace and said to him, 'How long do you mean to be content?' no very terrific words, and certainly not prophetic of what has occurred" (Marshall 13). The letter can be found in *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (1889) by Mrs. Julian Marshall, a copy of which was (and is) in the library at Tor House.

That beginning is paired with a conclusion that also makes a nod to Shelley, in this case his "Ode to the West Wind," the imagery of which we had noticed earlier in discussing "The Three Avilas." In that early Jeffers poem, the energies of nature fueled a love considered illegitimate from the perspective of cultural "custom," a love which Jeffers had compared to his and Una's. In *Mara,* the allusion is much darker and contradicts the optimism of Shelley's poem. Shelley's ode is written in a time of "sore need" (52) burdened by the "heavy weight of hours" (55), but its conclusion appeals to the wind for aid in the prophetic transformation and renewal that his work has imagined and which he expects to arrive as naturally as spring: "Be through my lips to unawakened Earth / The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (68-70). *Yes, it can*, says Jeffers in the last line of "Mara:" "Look to it: prepare for the long winter: spring is far off" (*CP* 3: 80). Nature, in this coda (section XII of *Mara*) that follows Bruce Ferguson's suicide, is invoked not to enlist it in man's aid, as in Shelley, but to say how much stronger is its spirit and vitality than humanity's: "The spirit that flickers and hurts in humanity / Shines brighter from better lamps" (*CP* 3: 80), those lamps being mountains, sea, and stars. In fact, Jeffers suggests nature is a force hostile to human concerns when he says of the

mountains that they "crouch like great cats watching / Our comic and mousehole tragedies . . . ." (*CP* 3: 80).

Shelley's *doppelgänger* vision was by no means his only one during his last days—Mary reports his telling her "that he had had many visions lately" (Marshall 13)—and Jeffers in *Mara* seems to be drawing on the atmosphere of visions and nightmares which at that time pervaded the Villa Magni in San Terenzo, Italy, where the Shelleys had moved (with Edward and Jane Williams) in April of 1822. Bruce Ferguson has a number of visionary moments in the poem—that of Mara herself, and the elk that rises out of Monterey Bay being the chief. No elk in Shelley, but he did see—in the company of Edward Williams—a child rise out of the sea: the recently deceased daughter of Claire Clairmont and Byron, named Allegra (Italian for "joy," the name of Bruce's and Fawn's daughter). And two of Bruce's dreams are especially Shelleyean. Shelley dreamt that, having been warned by Edward and Jane Williams that the sea was flooding the house, he "got up, he thought, and went to his window that looked on the terrace and the sea, and thought he saw the sea rushing in" (Marshall 13). This sight is quickly followed by an image of him harming his wife: "Suddenly his vision changed, and he saw the figure of himself strangling me. . . " (Marshall 13). Ferguson, sleeping on the mattress where his father has recently died, has a dream that begins with feeling "the stench and decay of corpses everywhere" (*CP* 3: 72). When Jane and Edward Williams come to warn Shelley in his dream, their bones are sticking out of their flesh and they are blood-soaked. Holding his breath, Ferguson sees "the blade and tumor of a wave" coming, which turns out to be a wave of blood, not water; he wakes, struggling for breath. When he goes back to sleep, he dreams of having harmed his wife; he sees Fawn "with her throat cut like a cake," presumably by his hand, since this subconscious image becomes articulated consciously just before his suicide, when he sees "Two images in his mind: the one of Fawn dead / With a sliced throat, the other of himself self-hanged. . ." (*CP* 3: 78).[8]

It remains to ask: what is Shelley doing in *Mara*? The answer, I believe, brings us full circle, back to the Shelley who breaks through the crust of custom—the custom in this case being monogamy. "I never was attached to that great sect," says Shelley in "Epipsychidion," written in the year before his death,

> Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
> Of modern morals . . . . (149-153)

The poem is addressed to Teresa Viviani (called "Emilia" in the poem), a young woman confined to a convent until her marriage, with

whom Mary and Percy Shelley and their long-time companion Claire Clairmont became sympathetic friends. Shelley's poem—after elaborate praises, professions of love, and a condensed history of Shelley's turbulent emotional life in which Mary figures unflatteringly as the "cold chaste Moon" (281)—urges Emilia to run away with him to his "pleasure house" (491), where he and she and Mary and Claire will live in multi-partnered bliss. Mary's reaction to this piece can be glimpsed in her "failure to write a note on this alone among Shelley's major poems" (Reiman 372).

For his part, Bruce Ferguson gets far enough along this line of thought to think of his wife's "adultery" as part of "the code of modern morals," a cultural construct and thus relative":

"A Tibetan woman / Will marry a whole flight of brothers and be honorable / In fact and reputation, the esteemed wife / Of four at once, it's all in the country custom, / Nothing in nature" (*CP* 3: 71). Jeffers is far from dreaming up an arrangement like Shelley's in "Epipsychidion," of course, but he gives Ferguson the Shelley-vision in all likelihood because the most immediate source of their discontent is a troubled married life, increasingly so for Ferguson as *Mara* progresses. In response to this discontent, Shelley would fly in the face of custom, of the code; for him, a heart that adheres to that code by loving only one person has its "home among the dead" (156) and "builds thereby / A sepulcher for its eternity" (172-173). In Ferguson's case, not only has the code that would condemn adultery vanished—"there are no standards" (*CP* 3: 45)—but, even when it was adhered to it was only "[t]radition" that sanctioned it, "old people: people more ignorant than we, / Away back to the howling tribesmen, the jealous / God and his witch-doctors" (*CP* 3: 45).

It is hard to avoid the conclusion—based on the poems of 1940, the year during which most if not all of *Mara* was written—that Jeffers shared something of the same discontent and chafed against custom. "A little infidelity / would have kept our souls free" (*CP* 5: 649), reads one of his notes during that year, and the unpublished poem that grew from it, "Phoenix and Turtle," describes a dire situation:

> Perpetual faithfulness wears
> The very heavens to tears.
>
> _____
> A little infidelity
> Lights the stars in the sky.
>
> _____
> Great love you'd not suffer that.
> Now we walk, sleep and eat,
>
> _____
> We live, but have you guessed where?
> Deep, deep in hell my dear. . . (*CP* 5: 650)

The notion of infidelity generating cosmic light—surely a singular one—is found in Shelley's "Epipsychidion." Developing the idea that, in the case of Love, "to divide is not to take away,"[9] Shelley compares shared love to "thy light, / Imagination!" (163-164) which "fills / The Universe with glorious beams . . . ." (166-167). Partly because he will "not suffer" infidelity, Ferguson winds up in the same place as the lovers in "Phoenix and Turtle," driving home before he kills himself: "This is hell, / I'm driving through it . . . ." (*CP* 3: 77). The other poem in *Be Angry at the Sun* that seems to depict the "home among the dead" (Shelley) built by "perpetual faithfulness" (Jeffers) is the dialogue "My Dear Love," in which the speakers are underground. The stars lit up by infidelity in "Phoenix and Turtle" are here "'Dark stars under green sky,'" i.e. grass (*CP* 3: 27), and are in fact worms, while the lovers, though together, are separate, "'Each on his own back-bone'" (*CP* 3: 27), never touching.

One other aspect of Shelley and *Mara* is worth considering. After Ferguson has what is essentially Shelley's *doppelgänger* experience in the poem's first section, he comes down from the hill: "One of his own dogs growled at him and ran yelping / Into the darkness" (*CP* 3: 39). The dog's reaction is plainly meant to suggest that something in Bruce has changed—is *not* Bruce—and the dog, sensing this strange new element, runs off as if it had encountered a stranger. I submit that the *doppelganger* scene is not merely an allusion, and Shelley not merely a textual and philosophical presence contributing to the moral issue of fidelity and adultery and the role of custom in Jeffers's poem; I believe something of his spirit becomes a part of Ferguson. If this were so, it would not only help explain the direction Bruce's thoughts begin to take regarding the poem's central moral issue—that multiple, simultaneous loves are forbidden only by "the country custom," as he puts it—but it would also help to explain two details in the poem that are so strange Jeffers has the characters themselves observe their inexplicability. Both appear during the dance scene (section VII). The first occurs early, as the storm outside begins to build (and the human storm builds inside), and we encounter images of water and boat: Fawn's suggestion to Bruce that they go outside is drowned out by "the chopped waves of guitar-music" (*CP* 3: 54); Mary Monahan writhes in the arms of a man named Flood; and Bruce's face looks "blind / and high like a ship's prow. . ." (*CP* 3: 55)—ominous language, if we have Shelley's tragic death in our minds. In the very midst of this, Bruce looks with some disgust on the people present, but then says, "'you know I feel as if / They were my brothers and sisters'" (*CP* 3: 54-55). Fawn reacts "in amazement" (*CP* 3: 55). This is *not* Bruce: "Bruce professing brotherhood with people?" (*CP* 3: 55), she says to herself, incredulous. But if there is an echo of Shelley in Bruce

that speaks here, then the sentiment is entirely what we might expect from the poet whose hero in *Laon and Cythna* preaches forgiveness for all since "'We are all brethren . . . .'" (5.93).

The second detail occurs after the fight (which Ferguson enters and exits "like a sleepwalker" (*CP* 3: 60-61), a longstanding affliction in Shelley that returned during the last days at Villa Magni), when Bruce gives Fawn two candles and says, "'hold them high, Madonna.' He couldn't imagine / Why the Italian word came to his tongue: 'Madonna you're beautiful enough to pray to. / And so young'" (*CP* 3: 60). Again, the detail, inexplicable to Ferguson himself, is easy enough to explain under my hypothesis; Shelley was not only living in Italy in the last years of his life, but drafting poems and writing letters in Italian, including letters to Teresa Viviani. Furthermore, Shelley's other poem to her (besides "Epipsychidion") begins, "Madonna, wherefore hast thou sent to me / Sweet-basil and mignonette" ("To Emilia Viviani" 1-2), the only use of "Madonna" in Shelley's poetry. Fawn's youth is also relevant; until the dance and her birthday, she is nineteen, Viviani's age when Shelley met her. There is, in all of this, heavy irony: Bruce addresses Fawn with a word Shelley used to address the chaste, convent-confined Viviani, whom he wanted to woo into an adulterous relationship; meanwhile Fawn *is* in an adulterous relationship, and Bruce calls her "pure as crystal" (*CP* 3:71) and "Madonna," Shelley's name for the chaste Viviani.[10]

This discussion might pursue a number of other, more suggestive stylistic and thematic connections between Shelley and Jeffers. For instance, both conceived of the universe as a single entity, a harmonious unity. Both felt that humankind violated that harmony; "Man is contemptible," says ("Hellenistics" *CP* 2: 527), and Shelley's *Queen Mab* says that "The universe, / In Nature's silent eloquence, declares / That all fulfil the works of love and joy, / —All but the outcast, Man" (3.196-199). Both found in nature a Power that was indifferent to human concerns. Shelley's habit of adopting a cosmic perspective from which humans appear as "an ant-hill's denizens" (*Queen Mab* 2.101) is echoed in Jeffers's humans "shrunk to insect size" in "Apology for Bad Dreams" (*CP* 1: 208) and "little dark specks" in "Thurso's Landing" (*CP* 2: 175). In nature—and in human nature—both admired a "tameless" quality; indicative of this, between the two of them Shelley and Jeffers in their poetic works deploy the word "wild" in excess of five hundred times. Shelley's apology in his "Preface" to *Hellas* for the poem's being tied so directly to historical events of the day—what he calls "newspaper erudition" (8)—finds a counterpart in Jeffers's apology for "the obsession with contemporary history that pins many of these pieces to the calendar" in his "Note" to "Be Angry at the Sun" (*CP* 4: 417). Jeffers, in "Apology for Bad Dreams," remembering the "ghosts of the tribe" that

"paid something for the future / Luck of the country," and saying that "to forget evils calls down sudden reminders from the cloud" (*CP* 1: 210), no doubt felt a kinship with Shelley's sentiments in "The Past": "Forget the dead, the past? Oh, yet / There are ghosts that may take revenge for it" (7-8). Any one of these connections might generate its own essay, extending the discussion of Shelley's presence in Jeffers.

Una, as we have said, considered Shelley her subject; through her, he became Jeffers's subject as well. So when Edith Greenan reports, in a draft passage from her memoir of Una and the Jeffers household, that when it came to reading aloud in the evenings "the preference was for Shelley" (Greenan 90), we can assume that preference was not only Robinson's but Una's as well. But it was the poet's response to saying Shelley's words that Greenan records: "when Robin would turn pages in his reading he would glance up during the pause, looking deeply as if to say such beauties could touch a heart as his" (90). It is plain that Shelley touched Jeffers's heart, and his mind, in many and profound ways.

Endnotes

1. See her letters to Ella Winter and Sara Bard Field, *CL* 2: 528-32. The context for Una's observations involves her response to Field's review of Jeffers's *Solstice and Other Poems*. For this context, see Una's letter to Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood, and James Karman's notes to that letter (*CL* 2: 512-17).

2. The charity and tolerance Shelley looked for in his fellowmen unfortunately proved to be in short supply, and he very soon found himself publishing a revised version of the poem with the suggestions of incest removed (titled "The Revolt of Islam"). It is worth noting that Robinson and Una always referred to the poem as *Laon and Cythna*, the version in which Shelley says he tried to "break through the crust," never as *The Revolt of Islam*.

3. In his "Foreword" to his *Selected Poems* of 1938, Jeffers mentions that "a reminiscence of Shelley's 'Cenci'" as one source for "Tamar" (*CP* 4:393). For a discussion of connections between Shelley's verse drama and Jeffers's poem, see Robert Brophy, "Tamar, 'The Cenci,' and Incest," *American Literature* XLII (May 1970), 241-44.

4. We could also say, however strange it sounds at first, that Shelley is addressing Una—not Jeffers's Una, but Spenser's. Robinson and Una no doubt took pleasure in Shelley's opening figure (in the dedicatory poem "To Mary — —") of himself as "some victor Knight of Faëry" (3; "Elfin Knight" was one of Mary's nicknames for Shelley) returning from his "summer-task" (1; i.e., writing *Laon and Cythna*) to his "Queen" (3), having earned "bright spoils for her enchanted dome" (4). Shelley wrote the poem using the stanza of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; here he casts himself as Red Crosse Knight returning to his beloved, who in Spenser's poem is, of course, Una. Thus, Mary=Una. Una (Jeffers) got her name "by way of Spenser's *Una* (Yew-na) in 'Fairie [*sic*] Queen.' I was named after my father's first wife, a lovely

creature who died young. Her name was Una Lamb. Her father was an old & scholarly doctor—English—who loved to read Spenser" (*CL* 2: 513).

5. I am indebted to Barbara Gelpi for pointing this out to me.

6. It is easy to imagine Una encouraging this identification between her poet/lover and Shelley; however that may be, we can at least say that later, during their married lives, she went some way toward dressing him for the part: she herself made all of his plain white shirts with the rolling collars—"like Shelley's!" she exclaimed to Sydney Alberts (*CL* 2: 432).

7. See, for instance, the charge that America will tame freedom and "perch it on the wrist of Caesar" (*CP* 2: 417); the "little Caesars" of "Hellenistics," creating a future in which "freedom has died" (*CP* 2: 527), a future that will need the poet-prophet who "will warn you/ When the witch-doctors begin dancing, or if any man says 'I am a priest,' to kill them with spears" (*CP* 2: 528); the "religion- / Venders and political men" of "Cassandra," who Pour from the barrel, new lies on old" (*CP* 3: 121); Hoult Gore's bitter attack on "the dirty lies, / War-peddlers' lies" in "The Love and the Hate" (*CP* 3: 217) and his claim that "War's freedom's killer" (*CP* 3: 233). Many such examples can be found.

8. If we are looking rigidly for parallels here, we might be disappointed by the fact that Ferguson doesn't drown himself (his mother tries), since Shelley drowned when his boat (the *Ariel*) was caught in a storm. Still we have the description (twice) of Bruce—his face, at least—as being "like a ship's prow" (*CP* 3: 43, 55), and the description of Fawn—her hair, at least—as a "tawny storm" (*CP* 3: 42), so that we can say—figuratively, at least—that Bruce's life founders in the storm of his wife's infidelity. If we look less rigidly, we will find drowning and foundering widespread. The poem's tenth section begins with Fawn's watching "a red half-moon like a burning ship/Founder on the sea-rim" and a description of the Fergusons' attic room as "Dark under the ship's-keel roof" (*CP* 3: 69), which would make it an overturned boat (that this inverted imagery is intended is obvious from the shape of a roof, but also confirmed later by the roof's being called "an inverted valley" [*CP* 3: 71]). Literal drownings include "ships and men / Drowning in death-cold darkness in the North Sea" (*CP* 3:70) during the war, and perhaps some crew members of the dirigible that crashes early in the poem. Figurative drownings include the prostitute at the Monterey bar, to whom Ferguson says, "Bloated; bloated. What a pity. / You were beautiful before you drowned" (*CP* 3: 74), as well as the issue of Bruce asking forgiveness before Fawn and Allen; when Fawn asks what he means, he says, "You fool / Let that corpse float. It's deadly and it stinks" (*CP* 3: 68).

More generally, we could say that the whole of the western world is at the sea's mercy, if we use Ferguson's figure of speech when explaining Spengler's historical cycles to his wife as "separate waves of civilization / Up and down like the sea's…" (*CP* 3: 70). Jeffers was certainly of Ferguson's opinion that "At present / We're on the down-rip" (*CP* 3: 70) and that "the whole western world's on the skids" (*CP* 3: 71). Mara herself may be seen as the very embodiment of this historical truth and its "wave" pattern; her name suggests *mare*, Italian for "sea" (See the discussion above of Bruce's use of the Italian "Madonna") and she speaks to Ferguson "in a slurred voice / Not more syllabic than the ocean's…" (*CP* 3: 63). She is plainly associated with "the truth about things" (*CP* 3: 63) and appears immediately after Ferguson first employs the rise-and-fall wave image in wondering about the state

of the world: "You young dark mountains are going up in the world, we the people going down. Why?" (*CP* 3: 63). At that point Mara is at last able to enter what had been the "locked doors"of his mind (*CP* 3: 63; the phrase is hers.) because he is onto something; his mind is opening to truth, and that truth is Mara. (On Mara's name, see Robert Zaller, "'Mara': The Poem of Foreboding," in *Jeffers Studies* 16.1 & 2 [2012]: 97 (footnote 5).

9. Jeffers quotes this line in a 1942 letter to Una. The shared love in that case is for Una, Donnan and his wife, and Garth. Immediately after the quote, he writes: "I've been writing verses all morning and I guess it's infected me—but none like that one—theme or rhyme!" (*CL* 3: 233). "Epipsychidion" is plainly part of their shared Shelley-knowledge, since Jeffers does not indicate—does not need to—the source of the line.

10. A third detail—about the apparition's voice when it speaks to Ferguson—might also be explained if the apparition is in part Shelley's presence. In his draft of the poem, Jeffers had originally reinforced the voice's "hollow-chested" (*CP* 3: 38) quality with a reference to the sound of a wave receding over the small stones on a shoreline. Having taken the *doppelgänger* episodefrom Mary Shelley's letter about the circumstances of her husband's death, it is not plausible that Jeffers could introduce the shore imagery without conjuring the thought of Shelley's body washing up and being cremated there. The cremation's most well known and startling detail is the removal of Shelley's heart by his friend Edward Trelawney at some point during the proceedings—thus the Shelley/Ferguson figure's hollow chest.

Works Cited

Greenan, Edith. *Of Una Jeffers*. Ed. James Karman. Ashland, OR: Story Line, 1998.

Hass, Robert. "The Fury of Robinson Jeffers." *What Light Can Do*. N.Y.: Ecco, 2012. 129-
149.

Ingpen, Roger and Walter E. Peck, eds. *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 10 vols.
1926-1930. London: Benn; N.Y.: Gordian, 1965.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Alpine Christ and Other Poems*. Ed. William Everson. N.P. Cayucos Books, 1974.

————. *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. James Karman. 3 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009-2015.

————. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. 5 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988-2001.

Karman, James. *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*. Rev. ed. Ashland, OR: Story Line, 2001.

Kuster, Una Call. "The Enduring Element of Mysticism in Man." MA thesis. University of
Southern California, 1910. USC Digital Library. Web. 17 June 2015.

Marshall, Mrs. Julian. *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*. Vol. 2. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889.

Reiman, Donald H. and Sharon B. Powers, eds. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. N.Y.: Norton,
1977.
Scott, Robert Ian. *'What Odd Expedients' and Other Poems by Robinson Jeffers*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981.
Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry." Reiman 480-508.
_____. "Epipsychidion." Reiman 373-388.
_____. "Fiordispina." Ingpen 4.71-74.
_____. *Hellas*. Ingpen 3.7-57.
_____. "Julian and Maddalo." Reiman 112-127.
_____. *Laon and Cythna*. Ingpen 1.235-408.
_____. "Ode to Liberty." Reiman 229-236.
_____. "Ode to the West Wind." Reiman 221-223.
_____. "The Past." Ingpen 3.200.
_____. *Peter Bell the Third*. Ingpen 3.251-286.
_____. *Prometheus Unbound*. Reiman 132-210.
_____. *Queen Mab*. Reiman 14-68.
_____. "To the Editor of 'The Examiner.'" Ingpen 10.280-281.
Symons, Arthur. "Percy Bysshe Shelley." *The Romantic Movement in English Literature*.London: Archibald Constable, 1909. 268-286.
Zaller, Robert. *Robinson Jeffers and the American Sublime*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012.

Mick McAllister

Intruding on Jeffers: Some Notes on Biographical Mythography

The early years of Jeffers' career puzzle some Jeffers critics. How did a minor Wordsworthian become a unique American poet? The rhetoric of one critic, William Everson, has transformed his own speculations about the early years through his "intuitive" readings of Jeffers' poetry into "facts."[1] His intention may have been to humanize the poet with invented biography; the effect unfortunately is caricature and slander. Everson doesn't stop at using the poems to create biography; he then uses the conjectured biography to critique the poems, a classic circular exercise. Let's look at some of Everson's conjectured "facts," examining them in the light of real facts and unprejudiced analysis.

Everson's speculations about infidelities, overblown Freudian hang-ups, and blood-soaked séances,[2] and his charges of authorial "prurience"[3] offer drama but more heat than light. An examination of "Mal Paso Bridge" and "Fauna" will challenge the widely accepted Everson "conjecture" that Jeffers committed infidelities early in his marriage, evidence of what Everson calls a "transgressive liberation." Then I will turn to distortions that Freudian readings of "The Alpine Christ," initiated by Everson, have fostered for another of Jeffers' published works, "The Coast-Range Christ." I will conclude with an alternate conjecture that could explain why Jeffers turned away from the abortive "The Alpine Christ" to write "The Coast-Range Christ." We will see how that turning brought him to his life work.

The Mal Paso Misstep

Possibly the strangest myth William Everson created is his "conjecture" that while Una Jeffers was in Los Angeles recovering from the birth of twins, Robin was up in Carmel having an affair with a woman he met at the Mal Paso bridge and a "friend" he called "Fauna." Everson's only evidence for these claims is the "intensity" of the poems about these subjects. That's all: his intuited intensity. As it happens, Jeffers did have friends, and he really did meet a woman at a bridge somewhere south of

Carmel. What Everson makes of these facts is "speculation" — Everson's own characterization of his readings in the introduction to his *Brides of the South Wind*. There isn't much verifiable information about the period in 1916-17 at the time of the birth of the boys, and what there is verifies none of Everson's speculations. We know from Edith Greenan,[4] who was there and wrote a book praising Una, *Of Una Jeffers*, that Jeffers was the predictably loving husband when the twins were born (Greenan 39-40).

Some might argue that most men would not be off chasing women while their beloved wife was recovering from the birth of their children. But Jeffers, as Everson reminds us, was not "most men," and seven lines in a poem proved that to Everson's satisfaction. As Everson would have it, "purely as male," Jeffers was desperate for sex after the celibacy that Everson imagines –- with no evidence[5] –- during the final months of Una's pregnancy.[6] In ten pages of overwrought fantasy, Everson creates the following scenario: In January 1917 Jeffers left Una in Los Angeles (with his mother and Edith Greenan) while he scouted for a home in Carmel. Sometime in the next two months, Jeffers encountered a woman with a child at "Mal Paso Bridge," "fell in love" with her, Everson imagines, "plunging into a fervor of sensuality" (164) and had an affair with her. This leads to "an eruption of the ancient Eros-Thanatos archetype that chimes like a bell" (163). Then in March the family joined him in Carmel. In other words, the time period when Una "let him out of her sight," as Everson puts it (164), is about two months. By summer, Jeffers had written a poem about his infidelity "at Mal Paso bridge" and presumably showed it to Una, as was his habit. The poem was then published in a book dedicated to Una. Everson adds, "All this is pure conjecture" (172). Here are some real facts.

The period in question is covered in a couple of sentences of Bennett's *The Stone Mason of Tor House*, so it's not an illuminated moment in family history. Bennett relied heavily on Una's own recollections to document the period; Mal Paso bridge apparently did not figure in them (83). The *Collected Letters*, however, add some light. There was a woman at a bridge. In fact, Jeffers wrote Una about her.

Jeffers wrote the letter around June 26, 1917, while he was spending a couple of weeks at Pfeiffer Ranch Resort about forty miles south of Carmel. In the letter he describes the two other passengers in the truck he rode to the resort as "a handsome black-eyed young woman and her little girl" (*CL* 1: 411-12). The point of his story is that the woman insisted on getting out to walk across a dangerous bridge north of Notley's Landing. There are a half dozen possible sites for that bridge, according to California Department of Transportation maps. Mal Paso Creek is not one of them. The Mal Paso bridge was built in 1916 by a

local rancher and entrepreneur to provide access to his coal mine in Mal Paso Canyon, thus both brand new and apparently perfectly sturdy.[7]

Here is the opening of "Mal Paso Bridge," the evidence for Everson's Eros-Thanatos archetype "chiming like a bell":

> Under Mal Paso bridge the long-maned sea-waves
> Beat up into the stream, on the other bank
> A woman with a little child was standing,
> Her daughter three years old, the woman's face
> Though it seemed white against the storm was brown
> Her body and her face I thought were beautiful
> Her eyes and hair were stormier than the cloud . . . (*CP* 4: 252)

They are the lady and child Jeffers saw in June 1917, not February or thereabouts. Everson intuits that the poem was written in early 1917, presumably in the heat of transgression. If so, then there must have been two women with children at two bridges; or Everson could be wrong. Jeffers and Una both told S. S. Alberts that the poem was written in 1918 (*CL* 1: 936). Tim Hunt, working from textual evidence rather than intuition, dates it likewise to spring of 1918 (*CP* 5: 250). Everson's date is obviously wrong. If the rest of the edifice built on that error and the missing bridge stands, we must assume that Jeffers seduced the woman at the resort in June of 1917 (somehow disposing of the child), wrote about her to his wife a week later, and then, nearly a year later, wrote a poem about the escapade, showed it to his wife, and she agreed to publish it in a book dedicated to herself.

Why does this matter? Because Everson's "conjecture" has hardened into biographical fact, with no evidence but Everson's fantasies. Have a look at James Karman's *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California*. According to Karman, in early 1917 ". . . it seems that Jeffers had an affair, perhaps several." He goes on, "Though it seems likely that the incidents referred to in 'Fauna' are autobiographical, it is impossible to say so for sure. 'Mal Paso Bridge,' however, seems more openly personal" (81). No, it doesn't, unless you view it through Everson's lurid spectacles. Tim Hunt shows that "Mal Paso Bridge" is actually a patchwork quilt assembled from a half dozen named poems with dubious connections —- surely a rather impersonal process (*CP* 5: 256). Karman doesn't repeat his "seems" in his later biographical introduction to Volume One of the letters. Unfortunately, he also doesn't correct it, but he does not mention it in his later biography, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet*.

By the time Robert Zaller writes his survey of Everson's importance to Jeffers studies ("The Giant Hand" in *Perspectives on William Everson*), the legend of Jeffers' WWI "womanizing" didn't even merit a footnote (350). In 1983, in *The Cliffs of Solitude*, Zaller quotes Jeffers' reference to

"my extravagances of 1917 to '19," and then explains -– with no evidence -– that these included "an affair" (49). It's equally likely that Jeffers is referring to the "extravagance" of writing a handful of poems in support of the Russian Revolution. Jeffers was among the first American intellectuals to distrust Bolshevik Russia, but not before he had written four unpublished poems, "The Murmansk Landing" (*CP* 4: 422), "The Lamp of the World's Night" (*CP* 4: 239-281), "The Dance of the Banner"(*CP* 4: 282-286), and "The Daughter of God in Russia" (*CP* 4: 464-481) that celebrated the victory of "liberty" in Russia and condemned the British/American intervention to suppress the Bolsheviks.

In the textual commentary to the *Collected Poetry,* Tim Hunt reports these speculations without endorsing them (*CP* 5: 34, 3). But he adds to the mix the idea that "Storm as Deliverer," which Everson renamed "A Woman Down the Coast" (*CP* 4: 259), might reflect Jeffers' "extramarital experiments"(CP 5: 39). One hopes not. In "Storm as Deliverer," a woman yearns to have an extramarital affair with a neighbor. The neighbor decides to kill her husband first and hires a vagrant to do the deed. The vagrant rapes the woman on her husband's body. The would-be lover then kills the vagrant when a posse catches him, runs away with the new widow, and they live happily ever after. Aside from the "happily ever after" part, none of this rings any biographical bells.

The "woman at Mal Paso bridge," incidentally, turns out many years later to be Madrone Bothwell, the Medea avatar of "Solstice," and she adds the jarring fact that she committed adultery with Lance Fraser, an interesting intertextual twist to "Give Your Heart to the Hawks."

Identifying Fauna

Like "Mal Paso Bridge," "Fauna" is a deservedly obscure early poem by Robinson Jeffers, published, along with the other two poems I am discussing, in *Tamar and Other Poems* but justly forgotten in the *Selected Poetry* two decades later. The poem has had its fans, including Una Jeffers (*CL* 1: 540) and British poet Robert Nichols, who called Jeffers "the Theocritus of California" on the strength of it (*CL* 1: 487). "Fauna" has had more than its share of press thanks to the "speculation," as William Everson characterizes his opinion, that it represents a confession of an adultery. Everson offers no evidence except the poem, and he had contrary evidence that would have undone his fantasy.

Jeffers repudiated most of the poetry he had written before the breakout publication of *Tamar and Other Poems* and did not anthologize any of it, with one dubious exception, "Fauna," in his own *Selected Poems* of 1938. Undeterred, Everson made a life's project of reviving, reconstructing, and inventing the early poems, on the strength of his self-appointed role as Jeffers' "sole disciple" (*Fragments* 6) (in his words, an "extension) of the

elder poet.[8] His project differs radically from the work that culminated in Volume Four of the *Collected Poetry*, because Everson does not allow evidence to interfere with his "intuitions," intuitions that coincidentally transform Jeffers into the spitting image of his "disciple." The transformation required a bit of playing fast and loose with the facts.

For Everson, "Fauna" is "a blunt document from the poet's personal life" that is "narrating an actual liaison." Here Everson doesn't merely "intuit" the evidence, he manufactures it. Everson's thesis about Jeffers requires a stormy relationship with his wife Una, for which there is very little evidence. Undeterred by this lack of evidence, Everson invents some. He describes an incident from Edith Greenan's *Of Una Jeffers* to demonstrate that "there was talk of divorce in the family" ("Ordeal" 173).

Here's Everson's description in his note referencing Greenan's memoir: "Jeffers stayed up till dawn, crashing into the bedroom to retrieve the jug Una had stashed beside the bed. Apparently, a tussle ensued" ("Ordeal" 184). Here is the Greenan text he is supposedly paraphrasing: "An amusing incident occurred one night when Robin, after hours of work, reached for his glass and found it empty. Since Una had put the demijohn of wine away in the closet of her bedroom, Robin went in to get it. Not wishing to waken Una by lighting a lamp, Robin tiptoed into the dark room. As luck would have it, he bumped into a chair and knocked it over."[9] She also said that Jeffers' housekeeper, Fi, hearing this, said that she would be willing to testify in court that Robin had tried to kill Una, who laughed at this description of the event (49-50, 88-89).[10] I'd like to think the discrepancies are obvious, but let's examine them. First, Jeffers isn't "crashing into the bedroom." Second, the wine isn't "stashed beside the bed" with the implication that Una keeps it handy while she's sleeping. Third, there is no "tussle." Edith does not "describe the incident" the way Everson does at all. In fact, Edith's version — Everson's only evidence — is second-hand. Edith was not present, which means the source of the story is Una. There is no talk of "divorce" in Greenan's account. Everson has no other evidence to go on for his "talk of divorce." He is not paraphrasing to condense, he's paraphrasing to twist the truth. Everson has obviously read Greenan's text and then rewritten it to suit his own "vision" of the Jeffers' marriage.[11] How, though, does this relate to "Fauna"?

Since Everson was familiar with Greenan's memoir, he was certainly aware that Robin, Una, and Edith considered Edith's dancing in the surf (she was a Denishawn trouper) the inspiration for the poem "Fauna," not some anonymous woman Robin met during 1917. Undeterred by facts, Everson spends some pages in the introduction to *Brides of the South Wind* analyzing the transgressive liberation and triumphant libido

demonstrated by the "conjectured" affair with the woman in the surf and another woman in Carmel called "Nais." Here is Greenan:

> "When I played around in the surf I felt like a dancer in the great robe of the elements, with the wind and the waves and the tide. Robin said, "Edith, you skim the water like some beautiful sea bird. I shall never go to the shore again without seeing a bacchante along the edge of the foam." I recalled those moments with great joy when I re-read Robin's lyric, "Fauna." Una said I had helped Robin to the vision of Fauna, dancing ankle-deep, in the lapping waves." (35)

The narrator of "Fauna" is a moonstruck poetaster given to moaning on beaches about his love for Fauna, far away in Los Angeles. A local Carmel girl, Nais, mocks and seduces him, then sends him off, with Aphrodite's blessing, to make merry with Fauna, who miraculously turns up in Carmel just in time to be buried in ripe grapes. What ensues from their meeting is half a poem's worth of sexually charged horticulture.

The Fauna of the poem is the narrator's true love, a woman living south of Carmel, "gold-ringed wife and childless" (*CP* 4:240), whose body "the sun has kissed . . . brown" (*CP* 4: 234). Edith and Teddie Kuster lived in Los Angeles, where Edith danced for Ruth St. Denis. St. Denis once introduced the young, married, and childless Edith to her stage manager brother as "my nut-brown maid" (Greenan 24). On the other hand, the Carmel woman of the poem, Nais, who seduces the speaker in order to free him to seduce Fauna, is pale and, to put it simply, has a mouth on her. To quote Greenan one last time: "And Una's skin! Unbelievably white, translucent, the color of jasmine petals!" (Greenan 12) As for Una's feistiness, check any letter. It never occurs to Everson that Nais and Fauna are modeled on Una and Edith? Oh, it did, actually. In a footnote to the original introduction (a note left out of the reprint in *Centennial Essays*), he concedes that Greenan "claimed" to have inspired "Fauna." Whether Everson likes it or not, both Robin and Una corroborated her "claim."[11]

I can't speak for Everson, but I don't really think Jeffers wrote a poem about having his wife free his libido and send him south to have sex with one of her best friends while she tended the kids. Given Una's notorious jealousy, it's hard to imagine either Edith succumbing to Jeffers or Una not knowing about it. And since Una's friendly relationship with Edith from 1913 to well after 1939 is well-documented and Una frequently expressed her own delight in "Fauna," the likelihood of a liaison is tenuous at best. It is fun to think so, but no. So perhaps we have an indicator that "Fauna" is not a confession, it's just a poem, a "Theocritan idyll," as Jeffers so accurately described it, with "Fauna"

and "Nais" romping symbolically hither and yon before we fall into a superabundant catalog of flowers (Una's specialty) standing in for coitus. Fauna may look like Edith Greenan, but she and Nais are both Una Jeffers and the poem is not a brag, it's a frolic – a frolic that Una praised to her friend Hazel Pinkham (*CL* 1: 540). As for transgressive liberation, perhaps we should look once more at the invented Mal Paso bridge, and take into account the fact that "mal paso" is California Spanish slang for "misstep." Many of the "missteps" in Jeffers' work are set on Mal Paso Creek: for example, Tamar's deflowerment by her brother.

Neither "Fauna" nor "Mal Paso Bridge" is a confession of infidelity, for all Everson's heavy breathing. Nor, for that matter, is "Storm as Deliverer," another 1918 narrative of sexual transgression that features one of the hysterics who reappears in *The Women at Point Sur.* In fact, it's hard to imagine anyone even considering the latter as such an admission, except with the stimulus of Everson's perfervid imagination. But even stranger is the bizarre twist that Everson's interpretation of "The Alpine Christ" has given to readings of "The Coast-Range Christ."

Which Peace Is That?

Jeffers' early poems have been the sandbox of Freudian critics digging for Oedipal dirt. They are classic Freudian lodes "hidden" by non-publication. Examining all the twists and turns of the Oedipal fantasies grounded on a hundred pages of discarded poetry called "The Alpine Christ" is beyond the scope of this essay. In itself, the Freudian reading of "The Alpine Christ," with the Freudian critic's typically cavalier attitude toward facts, could be a trivial footnote in Jeffers scholarship[12]. Unfortunately, the ersatz insights that reading generates echo through the rest of Jeffers' work, turning critical dicta into funhouse mirrors. A telling example is the Freudian reading of "The Coast-Range Christ," a poem Jeffers did not use, as he did "The Alpine Christ," for scrap paper. The poem illustrates the crucial difference between being a patient of Freud and a user of Freud.

In "The Coast-Range Christ," Jeffers is using Freud with a vengeance. Consider that there are two male protagonists, David Carrow and James O'Farrell. Both of them fantasize about crawling into caves to escape the world; O'Farrell has erotic longings for his mother and naughty thoughts about his sister. The real protagonist of the poem, Peace O'Farrell, dreams that her vagina is a church much frequented by men, complete with a little star-shaped window above the "door" (*CP* 4: 344); in case we are not getting it, the doors "suck." David's father appears in the poem for no purpose except to shoot his son. Calling the poem confessional is to lack a sense of humor and to fail to see that the woman is the key in Freudian, patriarchal vagina envy.

Once the reader has presumed that David Carrow and James O'Farrell are sock puppets of the poet's stammering id[13] and Peace merely "Magdalene," as a Biblically challenged critic put it[14], the entire poem tilts off axis. In fact, Peace O'Farrell is a familiar figure from the Jeffers repertory: the young wife, neglected by her husband and desperate to "flame" her life. She is most fully developed as Helen Thurso, the heroine of "Thurso's Landing," but the line begins with Emilia in *Californians* and includes such diverse women as Myrtle Cartwright, Fera Cawdor, Natalie Morhead, Reine Gore, and Hildis Ramsey. Peace's husband explicitly scorns her, preferring to dig for legendary silver, and, in her loneliness, she turns to David. Jeffers makes the irony explicit, comparing Peace to silver and inviting us to consider the folly of digging for buried treasure in the fruitful earth he should be tilling. Peace herself is equated with the earth: "silver and flame, / Female and not veiled" (*CP* 4: 356-57). Rejected by David, who shares her husband's view that she is property, she exacts a fatal revenge on him.[15]

David is "the coast-range Christ," a whining draft dodger[16] who wants Jesus to be his daddy and uses delusions to justify his cowardice. The poem trudges for twenty-five pages of rhymed couplets and then inexplicably breaks into unrhymed stanzas labeled as Choros and Antichoros. Among the many failures of this odd early poem is the choral conclusion, which tosses off its "rhyme-tassels" to praise the first glimmerings of Jeffers' pantheist God – presumably the actual "coast-range Christ" to whom David prays throughout the poem. They are indeed contending; each Choros offers an orthodox vision and each Antichoros contradicts it with a naturalistic alternative (e.g. *CP* 4: 361-62). These stanzas are so convincing a vision of deity that we may fail to note that "David's spirit had made it" (*CP* 4: 344); when he dies the celestial vision dissolves, not too differently from the pleasant dreams that accompany Old Martial's mental dissolution after death in "Cawdor." David's vision of Christ is a fevered hallucination of a dying, deluded mystic.[17] We have been warned early in the poem that David's religious visions are bogus: "David prayed, his own soul crying to him to escape to the hills and hide, / Secretly enthroned his own soul answered the prayer, that God his guide" (*CP* 4: 341).

Trying to draw a coherent meaning from a bad poem is daunting. We can scratch our heads over the fact that David is a pacifist and done in by Peace. We can sigh in exasperation as James O'Farrell abandons his young, lonely wife to pursue his Oedipal delving, nearly gets drowned in a vaginal cave, and then, at the prompting of the muse, hangs himself on a breast-like hill. We needn't look too long to descry in David the lineaments of ungratified desire. After all, he tells Peace "Your love and Christ's are one," whatever that means, frantically makes love to her,

then strikes her and accuses her of corrupting him (*CP* 4: 351). He is a repressed ascetic, as twisted, if not as repulsive, as James O'Farrell. When he strikes Peace for "tempting" him, she shoots him in the thigh, a nice Freudian Attis wound for the critics.

In a word, the Freudian elements are a literary device, however crudely employed, rather than an unwitting confession. Jeffers has nothing in common with David, not even his pacifism; likewise, he is not a James O'Farrell obsessed with rooting through "the mother." As for the Father, he's barely a plot device. There is none of the autobiographical texture that so allured the Freudians to "The Alpine Christ." However, they are not daunted.

"What did Jeffers have to hide?" Freudian critics begin with this begging question. Do we have to examine its presumptuousness? Without rooting in his private places, we can make some conjectures about the fate of "The Alpine Christ" that are not salacious but have the tang of truth. Jeffers abandoned the project of "The Alpine Christ" after writing some two hundred pages of what might have been a six hundred-page poem.[18] Soon afterward, his "Christ" was transformed from a Swiss avatar of the Second Coming presiding over the Apocalypse and Jehovah's demise into a deluded, repressed boy on the Sur coast who mimics rather than represents the very present deity. "The Alpine Christ" is an ambitious and pretentious pastiche of Milton, Shelley, Job, and maybe a dollop of Percy MacKaye, all converging on the Great War. Like "Mal Paso Bridge," it seems cobbled together from a junkbox of ideas, styles, and false starts. Unlike "Fauna" it is not an extended conceit but a botched pile of them, a packrat gathering around a theme neither new nor exceptional. It is not just an unfinished poem; it is an unwritten one. Current events, from the deaths of Rupert Brooke, Kitchener, and Roger Casement to the musings of the queen of Greece and an obscure adultery in Evian, float through it like undigested gulls. The war itself is present only in the broad strokes of an *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry.

There is no question that the poem seemed important to Jeffers; it is almost certainly the "epic poem" that the poet in "Maldrove" (*CP* 4: 167-77) wrote before perishing, like Rupert Brooke, on the Gallipolli expedition. Jeffers was deeply interested in the war, but he had no more credentials to write about it than did the sophomoric poet of *Californians*. Did conversations with his sometime neighbor, war correspondent Jimmy Hopper, bring that home to him? His depiction of Rupert Brooke makes it clear that he was familiar with a great deal more than the jingoism of "Dulce et Decorum;" could his reading of Brooke's work have brought home to him how far this boy slain by a mosquito bite on a ship bound for Gallipoli had surpassed him as poet? Did Robert Graves' "The Dead

Boche" both inspire a stunning passage in "The Alpine Christ" and illustrate the insipidity of second-hand horror? Did Jeffers turn from "The Alpine Christ" to the home ground of Carmel that he had staked out only two years earlier, not so much re-imagining the other poem as replacing it? It's hard to imagine a poet naming two contemporaneous poems "The <adjective> Christ"; surely the creation of the second was a repudiation of the first.

The Freudian project of exposing Jeffers' neuroses depends heavily on the "secret" poems, with the implicit notion (explicit sometimes in Everson) that the unpublished poems were hiding something. It is a project that reeks of disrespect and hubris. It should be viewed with an understanding of two things that critics seldom state baldly: First, Freud hated creative writers. Biographer Lesley Chamberlain dubs it "pen envy" (6). Zaller, in *The Cliffs of Solitude*, refers to "the analyst's couch" as a last refuge of narrative. He fails to note, though, that the narratives of psychoanalysis are those of the analyst, not the patient. My second point, then, is that the Freudian intent is to root the true narrative out of the patient's false narrative. Even Freud's patients smelled that rat.

Perhaps instead of assuming that Jeffers' work is a fabric of lies we must interrogate to find the truth, maybe it is time to touch things again, to look at the actual body of Jeffers' work rather than the debris around the memorial stones. Look at them for what they are, not what we want them to be. Stop inventing biography to humanize greatness. If Jeffers was intimate with Edith Greenan and wrote "Fauna" to celebrate, fine, but show me the evidence, and then tell me how that fact makes his poetry easier to understand. The Freudian critics would have us believe that writing reveals our sordid secrets; perhaps they should hold their own writing, their conjectures, intuitions, and fantasies, up to that light.

There are ways that biography and criticism can converge. We need to consider the odd fact that the Jeffers' social circle was the casual intellectuals of Carmel, and yet none of these people, not one, appears in his poetry.[19] The people of his poems are the timeless, nameless inhabitants of his chosen place: farmers, herders, husbands and sons, mothers and wives, with timeless lives and motivations. It is an unexamined truism. He knew them well enough to describe things as arcane as how to skin a boar or burn a hillside. Well enough to know about the crucified hawks on their fences and how a farmer might kill a rattlesnake or prairie dogs. This is a mystery worth illuminating, and one without patriarchal pretensions.

Endnotes

1. Everson's introductions to his three collections of Jeffers' early poetry were collected themselves, slightly revised, into an essay, "Robinson Jeffers' Ordeal of Emergence," for *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Robert Zaller. Two of the three collections are "conjectural" reconstructions of books and poems that Jeffers never published. Everson sets the tone for his "editing" at the beginning of the first introduction: "intuition" will trump facts. Regarding issues of chronology he writes, "I have tended to trust what the poem is, its intrinsic spirit and mood and its level of precision of technique, more than I have trusted the specific dates assigned by later researchers, even when assisted by Jeffers himself" ("Ordeal" 138). True to his principles, he announces his "intuition" that "Fauna" was written "just before America entered into the war [April 6, 1917]" (168). This claim is made in spite of the fact that Alberts dated it to 1918 (17). As Appendix A of *CP* 5, Tim Hunt reprints the three prospective Tables of Contents for *Brides of the South Wind* — documents Everson cites in "Ordeal." "Fauna" appears on the 1921 and 1922 tables of contents, but not on that of 1918, suggesting that it was written. at earliest, late in 1918. Finally, in a startling about face, Everson concludes, after writing some sixty pages on the importance of reading Jeffers' early and unpublished work and Jeffers' "ordeal of emergence," "[t]he unpublished poetry--does nothing, really, to assist in our intuition of the gathering approach to "Tamar" (183). An Everson fantasy can take an entire page, as witness his conjectural story that culminates with Jeffers obsessed by a copy of Thomas Hardy's The Dynasts that there is no evidence he owned ("Ordeal" 157).

2. Everson's torturous "proof" that Jeffers attended a séance in 1921 where his father's ghost was summoned by the slaughter of a calf takes up four pages of "Ordeal" (132-135) and rests on the claim that "Come Little Birds," published in 1941, constitutes "direct reporting" of the event in 1921.

3. For the "prurience," see "Ordeal," 127-9. The charge is buried in Everson's shock that Jeffers would describe Una as his "sister-love" which is, according to Everson, a crass admission of his Oedipal, incestuous feelings: "Sexual union of brother and sister is symbolically the sexual union of son and mother" (128), don't you know. Everson seems to forget, in his outrage, that the sister-spouse trope occurs repeatedly in that ancient Oedipal work, "The Song of Songs."

4. Born Edith Emmons, Edith Greenan married Una Jeffers' first husband, Teddie Kuster, on the day of the Kusters' divorce. The divorce was amicable, and the Kusters and the Jefferses were close friends for the following years. Edith subsequently divorced Teddie and married James Greenan. Edith remained a lifelong friend of Una's and named her own daughter, born in 1924, Maeve, after the Jeffers' first child who had lived only a day. Edith Greenan wrote a memoir of the friendship, *Of Una Jeffers*, which was published, with the Jeffers family's blessing, in 1939 by Ward Ritchie (reprinted by Story Line Press in 1976; page references are to the reprint). For simplicity's sake, she is referred to here as "Edith Greenan" even though she was, for ten years, Edith Kuster.

5. There is also, according to Everson, "the inevitable distancing between man and woman that parturition entails" — a generalization with no first-hand basis; Everson had no children (163).

6. Even assuming, with no evidence, that Una Jeffers — an enthusiastic reader of Havelock Ellis and jealous of women's "sexual rights" — was unavailable sexually during the last months before the twins were born, the imagined infidelity wasn't during this trying time; it supposedly happened three months later.

7. Thanks to Dan Jensen for calling my attention to a description of the bridge in the December 8, 1915 *Carmel Pine Cone*. It is described in more detail in *Point Lobos* by Monica Hudson and Suzanne Wood, 45-37.

8. In *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury*, 4.

9. Greenan, 49-50. Everson accurately attributes the offer to testify in court to Una's dotty housekeeper, whose reaction to the incident Una reported with some amusement. However, he fails to mention that the story is told to illustrate the housekeeper's eccentricity, not to air dirty laundry. The only "talk of divorce" in the incident is the housekeeper's offer to testify, if Una started divorce proceedings, that Jeffers tried to kill her. Everson discreetly omits the suggestion that Jeffers was trying to kill Una

10. Everson accurately attributes the offer to testify in court to Una's housekeeper, whose reaction to the incident Una reported with some amusement, although he adds inaccurately that Greenan "speaks of Jeffers' morbidity and touchiness" ("Ordeal" 173).

11. Zaller, incidentally, cites Everson's version of the incident, not Greenan's actual text, as evidence of the strains in the household, embellishing the anecdote with the distinct impression that the "friend" who witnessed the incident was Greenan herself, not an elderly housekeeper (*Solitude* 49).

12. Everson's use of "claim" subtly questions the facts. Both Robin and Una supported Edith's "claim" implicitly. *Of Una Jeffers* opens with an endorsing introduction from Robin, and Una provides a praiseful praising letter that concludes the text. Edith's "claim" rests on words she reports Robin and Una saying. It is difficult to believe that Una and Robin would so nonchalantly endorse "evidence" that Edith Greenan, in the guise of "Fauna," had an affair with Robin.

13. Zaller identifies The Young Man Mourning His Father as "the hero" of the poem (*Solitude* 41-44). Imagine my surprise when I learned that he appears in fewer than one hundred lines of the one hundred sixty pages Everson dug up. For comparison, Rupert Brooke, who didn't mourn for his father, appears in fifty. The most notable mythography in the Freudian exhumation of Jeffers' early verse is the subtle calumny on Jeffers' father, often conveyed in uncorroborated adjectives. Zaller refers to him as a "monstrous paragon" (*Solitude* 40); we are told that there was "little intimacy in the marriage"(*Solitude* 37) and that Jeffers was a "disappointment" to his father (*Solitude* 38). For another picture of Jeffers' father, see James Karman's "A Note on William Hamilton Jeffers," *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 5 (August 1975), 9-11. Karman's note was published eight years before *Solitude*.

14. Here is Everson's summing up of the poem, quoted without comment: "[Jeffers] completed the immolation of his youthful idealism on the altar of physical passion — not the idealized desire of the earth poems, but the libido of insensible gratification that for him was symbolized by the war" ("Ordeal" 176). In case we don't get

it, he adds "Jeffers' shattered idealism is clearly delineated in the fate of the youthful conscientious objector." Jeffers was not a conscientious objector; Everson was.

15. Robert Zaller, *Solitude,* 12. Proof would require another essay, but the fact remains, there absolutely no congruence between Magdalene and Peace, even if we accept the idea that David Carrow is "the coast-range Christ." In fact, another Biblical analogue for Peace O'Farrell is much more evocative and appropriate. Jeffers, with his knowledge of Hebrew, probably knew that "Peace" is the English translation of "Salome."

16. When Peace turns the tables and gloats over "owning" David "like a horse," (*CP* 4: 340) Zaller shudders at her brutality (*Solitude,* 6). David's refusal of her favors because "you mustn't rob a man" (*CP* 4: 340) gets a pass, though. Apparently, men can own women, but not women men.

17. In one of the many Faulkner-like cross references in Jeffers' poems, David is described in "Tamar" as having "fanatic eyes" (*CP* 1: 36).

18. In Jeffers' work, visions of deity do not imply any moral endorsement of the seer; God is visible to the just and the unjust, the wise and fools. As he says of Onorio Vasquez (*The Women at Point Sur" CP* 1: 242), for example, he "never sees anything to the point." In "The Loving Shepherdess" Onorio's accurate visions of the pantheist god conclude with him recognizing that it is "the dark / Vision of his own face turned sideways" (*CP* 2: 98). Characters as morally distinct as California, Reverend Barclay, Clare Walker and Madrone Bothwell each have their accurate and misread visions of Jeffers' god.

19. The single exception is George Sterling, eulogized after his unexpected death (CP 5: 374).

Works Cited

Alberts, Sidney S. *A Bibliography of the Works of Robinson Jeffers.* New York: Random House, 1933.

Bennett, Melba Berry. *The Stone Mason of Tor House.* N.p., Ward Ritchie P, 1966.

Chamberlain, Lesley. *The Secret Artist: A Close Reading of Sigmund Freud.* New York: Seven Stories P, 2001.

Everson, William (Brother Antoninous). *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury.* N.p., Oyez P, 1968.

_____. "Robinson Jeffers' Ordeal of Emergence." *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers.* Ed. Robert Zaller. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1991, 123-185.

Greenan, Edith. *Of Una Jeffers.* Ed. James Karman. Ashland, Oregon: Story Line P, 1998. Reprint of edition by Ward Ritchie P, 1939.

Hudson, Monica, and Suzanne Wood. *Point Lobos.* California: Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

Karman, James. "A Note on William Hamilton Jeffers." *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 5 (August 1975), 9-11.

_____. *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015.

_____. *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California.* San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers with Selected Letters of*

Una Jeffers. Ed. James Karman. Three volumes. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009-2015.

_____. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. Five volumes. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988-2001.

Zaller, Robert, ed. *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1991.

_____. *The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.

_____. "The Giant Hand" in *Perspectives on William Everson*. Eds. James B. Hall, Bill Hotchkiss, and Judith Shears. Eugene, Oregon: Castle Peak Editions, 1992.

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

Book Reviews

His Place for Story: Robinson Jeffers: A Descriptive Bibliography by Michael Broomfield. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2015.

Reviewed by James Karman

After Sydney Alberts published his benchmark *Robinson Jeffers: A Bibliography* in 1933, he continued to collect information about the poet's life and work. In 1937, seeking publication details for *Such Counsels You Gave to Me*, Alberts asked Una Jeffers to pass along a request to Bennett Cerf for the typescript, corrected proofs, unbound sheets, and other items related to the book. "Here is what he wants," Una says in a May 11 letter to Cerf, "& if you can manage it, I hope you'll give them to him." "Bibliographers are an insistent tribe," she adds, "but we can say of him he is a remarkably able one." The same can be said for Michael Broomfield. As *His Place for Story: Robinson Jeffers: A Descriptive Bibliography* demonstrates, Broomfield is devoted to research. The result of his work is a first-rate, indispensable compendium of essential data.

His Place for Story opens with an acknowledgments section, followed by a preface by Dana Gioia, in which Gioia identifies Jeffers as "the greatest poet of California, indeed of the American West." In speaking for the "landscape, history, and inhabitants—both human and non-human" of the Carmel coast, Gioia observes, Jeffers inspired others to share "his vision of California's catalytic place in the history of human consciousness." Jeffers' impact on independent printers and fine art photographers—from Ward Ritchie and the Grabhorn brothers to Ansel

Adams and Edward Weston—was especially profound. "The presence of a poet of local identity but international stature in their midst," Gioia contends, "matched their ambitions to operate at the highest levels of creativity." The truth of this observation is subsequently proven in the pages of the bibliography.

Gioia's preface is followed by Broomfield's introduction, which serves as an efficient guide to the contents of the book. The introduction is composed of six sections: "Scope of entries and presentation method," "Description conventions," "Frequently-used terms," "Page count," "Images," and "Appendices." A list of "References" follows the introduction.

The bibliography proper begins with section "A. Separate Jeffers Publications, "which tracks works from *Flagons and Apples* (1912) to *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers, Volume 3* (2015). For each entry, Broomfield provides a complete descriptive account of the item, including publisher or printer, physical details (binding, jacket, number of pages, etc.), contents, publication date, and other distinguishing features. In many instances, he furnishes micro-data that collectors would find particularly interesting. The entry for *Californians*, for example, mentions an unconfirmed alignment issue on two pages of an early version of the text. "Other printing mishaps have been observed," Broomfield adds: "E.g., a thick ink blot extends from the 'f" of 'of' to the 't' of 'the' on the 8th line of p. 131 of some *[2]* copies." While printing errors might seem inconsequential to all but the most resolute of collectors, in some cases they are part of a larger story. When Ward Ritchie was just beginning his career as a master printer, for example, his special edition of "Stars" by Jeffers contained a number of spelling errors. Most of the eighty copies were destroyed, but several survived, and these—because of their connection to both Jeffers and Ritchie—have exceptional value.

Between section "A. Separate Jeffers Publications" and section "B. Selected Publications with Jeffers Contributions" there are seventy pages of illustrations, with grayscale images of all the items listed. The photographs offer readers an opportunity to see how each book or pamphlet looked when published, and thus to note basic stylistic features of the front cover, jacket, and in some instances, the spine. The photographs are especially valuable with regard to single-sheet broadsides and keepsakes, because key components of the item—such as artwork, layout, and typeface—are fully displayed. In some instances, where only a few copies of an item are known to exit, or even just one copy (such as *Hands* printed by Marlan Bielke in 1991), the illustrations give readers a chance to see items otherwise lost to public view. As an added bonus, a CD

containing color images of all the items is enclosed in a plastic envelope tipped into the inside of the back cover.

Section "B. Selected Publications with Jeffers Contributions" is divided into two parts:

"i. Publications with Introductory Contributions" and "ii. Other Noteworthy Publications with Jeffers Contributions." Repeating the format of section A, section B contains detailed descriptive information about a wide variety of items published from 1917 to 2015—including books that feature introductions by Jeffers, such as *Fire and Other Poems* by D. H. Lawrence and *Directions in the Sun* by Eric Barker, and books that contain poems, prose statements, quotations from letters, and other material, such as *Poets at Prayer* by Sister Mary James Power.

His Place for Story concludes with an afterword by Tim Hunt, two appendices, a list of abbreviations, and an "Index of Titles and First Lines." Appendix I, "An Index to the Poems of Robinson Jeffers, Their First and Other Significant Appearances" and Appendix II, "An Index to the Prose of Robinson Jeffers" were first published by Robert Brophy in the June 1988 and September 1976 issues of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*.

The afterword by Tim Hunt offers an eloquent reflection on how Jeffers' intentions as a poet differed in important respects from those of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and other contemporaries. "For Jeffers," Hunt asserts, "poetry was aesthetic discourse, and he invites us, impels us, to look through the poem to dimensions of being and significance that are beyond it. His poems, then, do not function as ends in themselves but as means to heightened awareness of our complex relationship to time and eternity, the beauty and otherness of the natural world, and the enabling and disabling dance of consciousness through which we know these things." A major strength of Broomfield's bibliography, Hunt claims, is in the way it illustrates how the history of Jeffers' poetry, circulated throughout the world through printed texts, enriches "our awareness of his poetry as living discourse."

Despite the labor involved in supplying Sydney Alberts with the information he needed to complete his 1933 *Bibliography*, Una Jeffers was impressed with the results. "Many people have said your *Bibliography* was the most scholarly & admirable one they had ever seen in America," she told Alberts in a 1946 letter, adding "I think so, too." In letters written to friends, she describes the book as "superb," "grand," "admirable," and "magnificent." In chronicling the history of Jeffers' publications, from the beginning to the end of his career and well beyond, Broomfield provides a panoramic view of Jeffers' achievement, preserved for posterity through the printer's art. Readers will be grateful for, and benefit from, Broomfield's meticulous scholarship for years to come.

California's Wild Edge: The Coast in Poetry, Prints and History. Tom Killion with Gary Snyder. Berkeley: Heyday (2015).

Reviewed by Robert Kafka

Tom Killion, certainly California's foremost woodblock print artist, has co-authored and richly illustrated this large-format book with an ambitious purpose: to tell the story of littoral California through its human history, landscape and poetry. As he puts it in his introduction:

> "This book is about finding the *song* of the California coast. It is a personal quest, pursued through years of sketching and meditating the coastal land-and sea-scape; but it is also a search through the words of others, and the stories they tell." (1)

The dual authorship with Gary Snyder is a little misleading. The text seems to be entirely Killion's. Snyder's contribution is mainly consultative, though excerpts of conversations that Killion had with him appear throughout the book. The two men have worked together on various other publication projects, notably *Tamalpais Walking* (2009) and *The High Sierra of California* (2005). The narrative is also interspersed with anecdotes of Killion's conversations and wanderings with long-time residents and frequenters of the coast.

As the poems included are personal choices, the book avoids the pitfalls of comprehensive anthologies which attempt to sample the range of California poetic literature from the age of exploration to the present. Thus, marginal historical figures like Joaquin Miller (whom Killion labels a "showman," though others might prefer "fraud") and Ina Coolbrith, who are often included in anthologies, are each represented by a single poem—an eight-line extract in the case of Miller.

Because the coast from San Diego to Santa Barbara is now so heavily urbanized, Killion excludes it from what he calls "the Poet's Coast," which allows him to focus on the areas to the north of Point Conception. Specifically, he identifies San Carpoforo Creek as the southern boundary of Big Sur—a location of stark contrast. Traveling north from the southern region, one is impressed immediately by the contrast with the softer landscape one is leaving and the more forbidding mountainous region to the north, headlands plunging directly into the sea, with the meandering creek at their southern edge providing an astonishing boundary between the two. There is no starker juxtaposition of landscape along the entire California coastline, which makes this natural boundary an apposite starting place for the author's exposition.

Though the age of Spanish exploration contains no poetry of California's coast, Killion's handling of this period is among the liveliest and least familiar in the book, at least to this reader. It is centered on trade,

of course, but along the way we discover the origins of place-names, frequently originating in the saint's name-day on the date of discovery.

The literary survey begins with excerpts from Dana's journals in *Two Years before the Mast*. This leads to a discussion of later travelers—Fr. Juan Crespi's *A Description of Distant Roads* and J. Smeaton Chase's *California Coast Trails*, the last of which Una Jeffers read with enthusiasm. There follow more extensive treatments of Jaime de Angulo, George Sterling, and Jeffers, all interspersed with observations on some of their contemporaries. The completion of Highway 1 transformed the coast and attracted a host of new talent to the area—Snyder, Welch, Kerouac, and many more—whom Killion takes up in turn.

But this book is more than a history of poetry, and the poetry of history. It is lavishly illustrated with over sixty woodblock prints by Killion, about half of them in color, and many full-page. The final chapter is an explanation of the process, with illustrations, of the craft. Each color used — fourteen or fifteen, in some cases — requires a new woodblock cut. The printing process can be more or less visualized by studying the several stages illustrated, but this writer confesses that although he has heard Killion describe it in detail on a couple of occasions, it is beyond his power of comprehension. Others with more understanding of the visual arts may be able to follow this explanation more easily.

In any event, the result is luminously and richly evident in this splendid exhibition of the artist's craft. Accompanied by his explication of the California coast's topography, toponymy, and literary and human history, the visual impact is extraordinary.

Two quibbles: the absence of maps requires an attentive reader to supplement the reading experience with other material. Even one who is quite familiar with the coast may occasionally feel adrift in Killion's description of the micro-topography of the area. And though there may be aesthetic reasons for resisting the inclusion of an index, the serious student will lament the lack.

Housing the Environmental Imagination: Politics, Beauty and Refuge in American Nature Writing. Peter Quigley. Cambridge Scholars P. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2012.
Towers of Myth and Stone: Yeats's Influence on Robinson Jeffers. Deborah Fleming. U of South Carolina P. Columbia, SC, 2015.

Reviewed by Jim Baird

Two recent books have examined Jeffers' work considering the impact that the local environment, specifically his dwelling, had upon it. The first of these studies, by Peter Quigley, past President of the Robinson Jeffers Association, is only partially about Jeffers, as it is a survey of several other writers and philosophers who have chosen nature as their primary concern and inspiration. Of course, most of them lived in houses which were close to nature, several building their homes themselves out of local materials, an action which linked them further to the natural world and also offered plenty of time to reflect on and experience natural forces at work. In addition to a section devoted to Jeffers, there are chapters about the houses of Thoreau, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Scott Russell Sanders. One of the pleasing attractions of *Housing the Imagination* is the many photographs of these homes and other structures, many taken by the author, which fill its pages. Other chapters take a quick look at the Cape Cod home of New England writer Henry Beston on Cape Cod, those of one-time Carmelite Mary Austin and Nathaniel Hawthorne, both of whom used tree houses, and deep ecologist Arne Naess' wind-swept mountain retreat, among others. Nonetheless, Jeffers receives the most attention, along with Gary Snyder, who was strongly influenced by Jeffers.

Quigley begins with the chapter "Modernism and Our Discontents," a discussion of literary theories which have dominated critical discussion during the previous century and which have taken expert readers away from authors and into arcane discussions of philosophical, political, or social issues which the authors' works have presumably generated. I won't name all these theories--pick one of your favorites, and Quigley dealt with it in this chapter. I once attended a symposium in which each speaker explained the advantages and drawbacks of a particular critical approach. The meeting lasted two hours; one novel (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)* was mentioned but not discussed. The speakers apparently used a form of literary radar, I suppose, to warn them if they were getting too close to a text. This first chapter is both daunting and delightful for the reader; the main text, in which Quigley juggles with the various viewpoints, is eighty pages long, followed by thirteen pages of forty-eight discursive footnotes in small print. These carry the debate into further critical nooks and crannies, as the questions raised

in the text spill over into byways. This chapter is like a tree which has theories as its roots and further ideas (the notes) as its fruit. This is at first confusing but finally lots of fun as one enjoys running down the various references and checking their connections.

One of the refreshing qualities of Jeffers' work is that it has direct relevance to the life of the reader and the world. This means that his poetry has little attraction for critics whose main interest is to examine the ramifications of a theory. Quigley uses the word "ouroboric," referring to the mythical snake eating its tail, to describe the result of this approach. Quigley pares down the discussion of theory to theories of the impact of dwelling places on human life, for example, noting that suburban sprawl, in spite of its obvious spirit-numbing regularity and negative effect on the environment, yearns to satisfy a real desire for rootedness to the land and weather. Housing or commercial developments are often named after the area or natural life they destroyed, such as Rayzor Ranch in my home town or Coyote Canyons where the big cities of Arizona advance on the native desert habitat.

A human dwelling place is not natural; a basic human need is shelter, so the house must to some degree keep nature out. But human beings came from nature also, so the fact that they need special places in which to live makes their houses things that also are prompted by natural forces. But instead of the usual air tight box, Quigley concentrates on those structures that let the outside in or remind us of what is outside. Even a house in the middle of a city can do this, as Quigley's discussion of the Bloomington, Indiana home of environmental writer Scott Russell Sanders shows. Plants inside the house are an extension of the garden outside, the house is built of local materials, nearby streams lead to local rivers, and even insect invasions remind city citizens that nature is always busy in its role as the great leveler.

The idea that one's home should be a sort of reminder of the natural world outside means little to one caught up in patriarchal bourgeois capitalism. In that system, one buys a house and, once one's family is comfortable, decks it out and shows it off--granite counter tops and all. The people whose houses Quigley studies are all writers and poets. That is, they are genuinely concerned with the improvement of the world, even if, in Jeffers' case, that improvement is the presentation of bitter truths. Quigley reaches the basic conclusion that "the beauty of these houses and the beauty of the writing that results are the productive outcomes of the house being the nexus point between nature and culture."

Deborah Fleming, a frequent presenter at Robinson Jeffers Association meetings and contributor to this journal, concentrates on her two favorite authors, Yeats and Jeffers, in her *Towers of Myth and Stone*. Although Jeffers built Hawk Tower and Yeats only rented his tower at

Thoor Ballylee, these structures loomed large in each writer's legend. Jeffers' tower was a purely symbolic statement. Contrary to what the Carmel tourist thinks, Jeffers did not write his poetry in the tower but upstairs in Tor House. Hawk Tower is a place to visit and from which to reflect, with no more structural importance than the Capitol dome, but, like that architectural adornment, makes a powerful statement through its very existence.

There is no doubt that Jeffers admired and respected the older poet; when asked whom he regarded among those who inspired him, Yeats was always at the top of the list. As in her earlier works on these writers, Fleming establishes similarities in their works through theme, symbol and topic. Both were fascinated with the past, which seemed to Yeats not just an earlier but a better time lived according to more basic values. Jeffers has several poems in which he described the past as always flawed, but possessed of a few virtues, such as individual human freedom, that were worth preserving. They shared many natural creatures or events as symbols of another life from which humanity has strayed, as birds in "Birds" and "The Wild Swans at Coole." Both wrote plays about the death of Jesus ("Dear Judas" and "Calvary") in which Judas and the degree of freedom seen in his betrayal are the main point.

However, Fleming points out, the major targets of both writers were enlightenment rationalism, its handmaiden, science, and their most obvious practical social consequences, including the industrial revolution, which brought poverty to many, political unrest to all, and gave rise in reaction to romanticism. In their first poems Yeats and Jeffers sounded like typical nineteenth century romantics with their embrace of nature and exhultation of personal love as the highest expression of freedom. The original romantics soon found that there were limitations to this approach: "I fall upon the thorns of life; I bleed." Romanticism evolved into modernism, a viewpoint which preserved some of the tenets of the original romantic movement (a preference for nature over the city, respect for the classical past with the recognition of the value of other older civilizations such as those of Africa and Asia, and art as an unacknowledged marketplace for new ideas) but also suggested that the best course for an artist was the creation of art and the enjoyment of the company of like-minded people, for the industrial revolution left us with a society which was lost for the message of the arts.

After the dust of the First World War had settled, Yeats and Jeffers were considered modernists like most other artists then. But since both were great writers, they would not fit neatly into any classification. They retained many of the interests and stylistic devices of both romantics and modernists, but each insisted on a larger view which flew past the limitations of modernism, which was a reaction to the flaws of roman-

ticism, itself a response to the flaws of industrialization. In spite of the darkness of the times, the two poets insisted on addressing their poems to an audience concerned not just with aesthetic values but real human life as it is lived.

So they retreated, as most would say, to their towers. But it may be more correct to say that they *expanded* into their towers. A major source for Fleming is Theodore Ziolkowski's *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image.* (Peter Quigley also addresses the issues raised in this book.) In folklore and literature, the tower is seen as a place of power. Because of its height, the tower bestows control on those who live in or possess it. But Ziolkowski says that a tower gives a different sort of power. Yeats and Jeffers had towers which were themselves a reminder of the past, but looked out on the world of the present, giving the person in the tower a vantage point from which to judge the current society.

Fleming based these towers' effect on the lives of the writers she surveys on a simple point: one can see further from a tower. Both of these poets had lives and outputs that were inspired by literal and philosophical visions. Consider Yeats' "A Vision" and Jeffers' numerous bardic poems such as "Meditation on Saviors" and "Continent's End" in which the whole sweep of western history is discussed in order to establish the themes of a society which might emerge in the future. Yeats sees such a society as based on spiritual values; Jeffers envisions no society at all, an earth ravaged by humans driven by greed, ignorance and personal emotion. Nonetheless, Jeffers does allow for the possibility of personal salvation based on a recognition of long established habits of thought and experience of the natural world.

Yeats was familiar with Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and specifically ridiculed the scientific approach with its limiting influence of what Blake called "the ratio" (i.e. only what was rationally provable). He was proud that his knowledge of the past came not only from histories but from folktales. He regarded the past of Ireland as based on spiritual values which came from the souls and lives of actual people, not calculations and experiments. Thus, his vision of a new Ireland, shed of colonialism, returning to a life of value, informed not only his art but his involvement in the politics of his country.

Jeffers partly agreed with Yeats' vision. His house, his tower, took him to a time before humans. He had only to look at the walls of his house not only to be reminded but to *see* that which would outlast him and the structures he had built on this dramatic place between land and sea. From that perspective, any human society (Jeffers would note that there has never been any civilization.) shrinks into insignificance. The universe was birthed in the big bang, and at some time it will all end. "The ultimate reality is the void." Although no twentieth century poet

is more aware of scientific ideas and makes more use of them in his work, Jeffers is aware of a basic problem: "Science is a description, not the description." In the poem "Science," he notes that applied science lacks the broader view of human need which, if invoked, might have saved us from such developments as the machine gun and the atomic bomb.

Jeffers' rational mind led him not just to science but to an objective view of human history and therefore to a bleak view of the future. But the visionary part of his mind always returned to nature, both beautiful and violent, as a means of recapturing a sense of wonder that can still be a part of humanity's future. In "The Bloody Sire," his mind, teeming with thoughts, endorsed violence as part of nature's toolbox, something which must be accepted. He recognizes, rationally, that Hitler was "a sick child," yet denounced the war which had to be fought to rid the earth of Hitler's shadow, even though its violence, was, in the light of "The Bloody Sire," justified. These inversions must have tied Jeffers' thinking mind in knots, but nature always reinforced his vision: "Love the wild swan . . ." and "Love that, not man apart from that." Perhaps there is no visionary future, but there is a now.

Both these books generate new and rewarding ideas about Jeffers' life and work, and they belong in the library of any reader of *Jeffers Studies*.

Obituaries

Ron Olowin

Ron Olowin, Jeffers scholar and past president of the Robinson Jeffers Association, died in August 2017. A faculty member in Physics at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California, he was one of many scientists who were attracted to Jeffers' poetry. He was also deeply religious, and his view of Jeffers included this perspective. His presentations at Robinson Jeffers Association meetings always examined the intersections between Jeffers and science and were accompanied by excellent graphic displays which captivated his audiences. His love of the poet was evident in all his contributions, and his cheerful demeanor brightened our discussions. J.L.B.

Lila Bita

Lila Bita died in February 2018. She was the wife of Jeffers critic Robert Zaller and a frequent contributor at Jeffers conferences and celebrations. Her understanding of the poet was expressed in the form of dramatic presentations in which she performed Jeffers' works which feature his heroic and tragic women such as Helen of Troy, Cassandra, Clytemnestra, and Medea. Her performances brought to life for her audiences these female characters whose struggles are central to Jeffers' poetry and drama. Greek by birth, she was an author and a pianist as well, and her twenty books of poetry, fiction, translation and memoir won acclaim in both her native country and her adopted one. For those who saw her, it is impossible to read Jeffers without thinking of her. Her passionate spirit remains with us. She was the incarnation of Jeffers' women. J.L.B.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jim Baird has been a Jeffers reader since 1959 and a Jeffers scholar since 1974, when Robert Brophy introduced him to that field. He has published articles on the poet in *Jeffers Studies* and other publications. He is a past president of the Robinson Jeffers Association. His other scholarly interests include The Blues, the music of Bob Dylan, and military history.

Rob Kafka is the President of the Robinson Jeffers Association. He has also served as Treasurer of that organization and as Co-Editor of *Jeffers Studies*. He has made many presentations and published many articles about the poet's life and work, particularly Jeffers' early years and poetry.

James Karman has published or edited many books and essays on Robinson Jeffers. He is best known as the compiler and editor of the three volume *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers* (Stanford UP). He is a recipient of the Lawrence Clark Powell Award for outstanding achievement in the study of Robinson Jeff ers.

Mick McAllister is a retired academic but still a scholar of Jeffers' work, which has been a lifetime interest. He is a member of the Robinson Jeffers Association and has presented papers at its meetings. He writes an electronic journal, dancingbadger.com, which, among many lively literary topics, has a section, "Alma Venus," devoted to Jeffers

Steven Reese is the author of three collections of poetry: *Enough Light to Steer By*, *American Dervish*, and *Excentrica: Notes on the Text*. He is the author as well of two volumes of translation, *Synergos* (poems of Roberto Manzano) and *Womanland* (poems of Diana María Ivizate González). He teaches in the English Department at Youngstown State University in Ohio, and in the Northeast Ohio MFA program in creative writing.

Robert Zaller is Emeritus Professor of History at Drexel University. His latest publication, *The Atom to be Split*, a collection of his essays on Robinson Jeffers, will be published by the Tor House Foundation. He is the most recent recipient of the Lawrence Clark Powell Award for outstanding achievement in the study of Robinson Jeffers.

Jeffers Studies (ISSN 1096-5076) is published annually by the Robinson Jeffers Association.

Editorial Board

Advisory Board

Subscriptions & Memberships

A subscription to *Jeffers Studies* is included with Robinson Jeffers Association membership. Annual dues are currently $35 (Regular), $60 (Sustaining), $125 (Patron), $1000 (Lifetime). Institutional subscriptions are $50. The RJA is a tax-exempt corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS tax code. Dues are tax-deductible.

Addresses

Subscriptions and back issues: Robert Kafka, 2420 33rd St., Santa Monica, CA 90405, 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>.

Guidelines for Submissions

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*. Citation of his and his wife's letters should be to the Stanford *Collected Letters*, if the letter was published there, and abbreviated *CL*. 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.

Jeffers Studies

Volume 18 Numbers 1 & 2
Spring & Fall 2014

2014 Double Issue