

Jeffers Studies

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Jeffers Studies

Volume 4 Number 1 Winter 2000

*Jointly Sponsored by
Occidental College
California State University Long Beach
Robinson Jeffers Association*



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*The End of Prophecy:
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Jeffers Studies (ISSN 1096-5076) is published quarterly by California State University Long Beach, co-sponsoring with Occidental College and the Robinson Jeffers Association. Triquarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer) issues follow a format similar to that of the preceding *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, including news and notes, memoirs, reviews, abstracts, short refereed articles, bibliography, and the Una Jeffers Correspondent series. The final issue each year, a perfect-bound annual, includes up to six longer scholarly articles, each exploring in depth some aspect of Jeffers's life, work, or times. After acceptance for publication, these articles will be available in electronic format through *Jeffers Studies Online* at <www.jeffers.org>, the Internet complement to the print journal.

Editorial Board: Robert Brophy, Senior Editor; Terry Beers, Co-Editor; Robert Kafka, Managing Editor; Peter Quigley, World Wide Web Editor. Copy-editing and typesetting: Greg Williams.

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Subscriptions: For individuals, \$15 annually; for institutions, \$25. *Jeffers Studies* is included with Robinson Jeffers Association membership. Annual dues are currently \$25 (Regular), \$50 (Sustaining), \$100 (Patron), \$500 (Lifetime). The RJA is a tax-exempt corporation under Section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS tax code; dues, except for that portion (\$15) attributable to the subscription to *Jeffers Studies*, are tax-deductible. RJA membership dues should be sent to Robert Kafka, RJA Treasurer, at the address given below. Back issues of *Jeffers Studies* are \$5 each for regular issues, \$10 each for annual and special issues. Back issues of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* are \$4 each. Issues 1–79 are \$175; issues 80–100 are \$80.

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Jeffers Studies is indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

Shorter manuscripts, suitable for numbers 1, 2, and 3 of each volume, in two double-spaced copies, should typically range up to 4,000 words. Longer essays should be between 5,000 and 9,000 words. Both should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped postcard for prompt acknowledgment. The author's name should appear on the initial page only. All copies are non-returnable. Citation of Jeffers's poetry should be from the *Stanford Collected Poetry*, abbreviated *CP*. Until the *Collected Letters* (Stanford) is available, citation of Robinson and Una Jeffers letters should be from Ann Ridgeway's *Selected Letters (SL)* (Johns Hopkins) or from the Una Jeffers Correspondent series in issues of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* (see *RJN* index, issue 100, Fall 1996). Formatting should follow the *MLA Handbook*, fourth edition, with parenthetical citations, endnotes, and works cited. A final revision of an accepted article should be submitted in hard copy and as an IBM-formatted Word file on a 3.5" floppy disk.

News and Notes

POET LAUREATE ROBERT HASS READS JEFFERS'S POEM "VULTURE" AT WHITE HOUSE

On April 22, 1998, Poet Laureate Robert Hass read Jeffers's poem "Vulture" at a White House poetry reading as part of the Millennium Lecture Series in the East Room. First Lady Hillary Clinton presided at the program, which also featured former Poets Laureate Robert Pinsky and Rita Dove.

WORLD PANTHEIST CONFERENCE, ROME

Robinson Jeffers was presented in Rome at the Memorial Anniversary Celebration for Pantheist Giordano Bruno by John Courtney, Vice President of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation and RJA member, who made a presentation on the life, work, and thought of Robinson Jeffers in Rome, Italy, at the First International Congress of the World Pantheist Movement on February 16, 2000. The Congress commemorated the 400th anniversary of the death of Bruno, a former Dominican monk, who outwardly professed belief in the theories of Copernicus, and, like Jeffers, had studied Lucretius and acknowledged a Pantheist belief in which his essential religious experience was derived through a personal relationship with the Earth, nature, and the universe.

John writes, "Subsequently Bruno was burned at the stake as an 'impenitent heretic' by the Catholic Church on February 17, 1600. Jeffers by comparison was merely labeled a pagan and had his books banned by the Church. . . . Carol [John's

wife] and I met the international group beneath storm-filled skies and the dominating statue of Giordano Bruno, which looms over the Campo dei Fiori, the site where he was martyred 400 years ago. By 11:00 the plaza was filled with freethinkers, anticlerical factions, Pantheists, and others. The local police were on alert with a police van parked nearby. A theater on the plaza featured the film *Giordano Bruno* by Mario Moretti."

Courtney delivered his paper to a small group the next evening. Few of those present had been aware of Jeffers. The Jeffers portion of the video *Don't Pave Main Street* was also shown in an effort to portray the beauty which inspired the poet. Courtney was asked by one of the organizers of the event to contribute information on Jeffers to an award-winning Pantheist web site that was featured in *Time* magazine in 1999. To view this interesting site, and John's contribution, direct your browser to: <<http://www.members.aol.com/Heraklit1/>>.

JEFFERS'S *MEDEA* PERFORMED AT STRATFORD, ONTARIO, SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

A production of Jeffers's *Medea*, directed by Peter Hartwell, was staged at the Stratford, Ontario, Shakespeare Festival as part of the 2000 program. Seana McKenna was cast in the title role, with Scott Wentworth as Jason, Rita Howell as the Nurse, and Robert Benson as Creon.

John Coulbourn, writing in the *London (Ontario) Free Press* on June 29, 2000, gave the production four out of five stars, writing: "[I]n the end, the show rises or falls on the strength of McKenna's performance, and her work is impressive. . . . Her *Medea* is regal, passionate, courageous, demented, unbending and even wounded—in short, all the things *Medea* should be."

TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION FALL FESTIVAL

The Year 2000 Robinson Jeffers Festival began this October with a Jeffers Country Bus Tour on Friday, October 13, which visited selected sites of Jeffers poems along the Carmel-Big Sur coast, in its final stage traversing the Old Coast Road and having as commentators-readers John Courtney, Jean Grace, Jeff Norman, and Robert Brophy. Lunch at Big Sur River Inn closed the program. Saturday speakers for the George White Memorial Seminars, "Architecture and a Sense of Place," dedicated to the memory of Lee Jeffers, were Robert Judson Clark, art historian of Princeton University, who spoke on early Carmel architecture; Bruce Smith of Arts and Crafts Press, Berkeley, who gave an illuminating slide presentation on the similarities between Jeffers and architect Charles Greene, who late in life moved to the Carmel area and created a lasting stone presence there; Hugh Howard, author and preservationist, who described the construction of his own home, and the influences upon it; and Pope Coleman, member of Carmel's Planning Commission, who shared insights into the history, politics, and urgency of land use policy in Carmel. Saturday evening's Annual Jeffers Banquet was held in the Poseidon Room, La Playa Hotel, with featured speaker James Robertson of Yolla Bolly Press, publisher of a succession of fine-print Jeffers editions: Louis Adamic's *Robinson Jeffers: A Portrait* (1983, 260 copies), *Cawdor* (part of the *Writers of the Land* Series, 1985, 240 copies), *Where Shall I Take You To: The Love Letters of Una and Robinson Jeffers* (1987, 250 copies), *Roan Stallion* (1990, 144 copies), and *The House That Jeffers Built*, a two-volume edition of *The Building of Tor House* by Donnan Jeffers and *Memories of Tor House* by Garth Jeffers (1993, 175 copies).

ALA CONFERENCE, CANCUN

An American Literature Symposium titled "Modernist Crossings: Lyric Strategies in Narrative and Narrative Strategies in Lyric" was held at Cancun, December 6–10, 2000. Papers linking formal strategies to political or ethical consequences were highlighted.

ALA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

American Literature Association's Annual Conference will be held May 24–27, 2001 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Cambridge, Massachusetts, across from Boston. Representatives of the various societies that make up ALA will organize much of the program. An early draft of the program will appear in mid-February; copies of the printed program will be mailed in April to all who pre-register (all program participants must pre-register). E-mail: <mkarafi@calstatela.edu>. For more information see <www.americanliterature.org>.

OTHER CONFERENCE EVENTS

Terry Beers gave two recent talks. At the 20th Annual Steinbeck Festival in August 2000, which was held at the new National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California, he joined a panel chaired by Kevin Hearle which also featured Dana Gioia, speaking on Steinbeck and poetry. Beers's talk focused on the influence of Jeffers on Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*.

Beers was also part of a panel on "Unorthodox Communities: Mapping the Real California" at the 12th annual Envisioning California Conference,

sponsored by the Center for California Studies, Sacramento, September 2000. He traced the Inhumanist motif in imaginative California literature.

Publications

MASTER'S THESIS ON UNA JEFFERS

The James S. Copley Library at the University of San Diego holds a shelf copy of an 89-page master's thesis entitled *Mysticism in Woman: The Life of Una Jeffers*, submitted to the Department of History by Courtney Dyan Bass (1996; available through inter-library loan). Bass is the first to deal with the entirety of Una Jeffers's life as a primary subject. The thesis draws together material from various sources—Bennett, Greenan, Powell, Rudnick, Luhan, Karman, and others, as well as passages from Una's letters at Occidental College—into a coherent narrative. This is apprentice work—little new factual material is presented (most of the letters quoted had appeared in the *RJN*), the point of view is one of uncritical admiration, and a number of the conclusions drawn are suspect—but the author has for the most part succeeded in selecting and organizing her material to present the story of a life. The title will mislead potential readers; mention of mysticism is limited to Una's 1910 MA thesis, and Una is not advanced as a mystic "type." R. K.

NEW ANTHOLOGY OF CALIFORNIA LITERATURE

Just published by Santa Clara University and Heyday Books: *Unfolding Beauty: Celebrating Cali-*

fornia's Landscapes, an anthology of California landscape writing which includes four Jeffers poems and Una's foreword to *Jeffers Country*. This is the first volume in the California legacy series, a joint project of Heyday Books and Santa Clara University, and will be reviewed in a future issue of *Jeffers Studies*.

ARTICLES

Pierre Lagayette, University of Paris, Nantes, has two publications: "Modulations of Torment: Robinson Jeffers' Poetry of War" in *Rivista di Studi Anglo-Americani*, Roma 9.11 (1998): 388–402, and "'And we must rise, act.' Postwar Poetry and the Aesthetics of Power," published in *The Mechanics of the Mirage: Postwar American Poetry*, Liège: University of Liège, 2000, 21–35.

"The Purse-Seine," an explication by Joseph Hinton, appears in *Masterplots II: Poetry Series Supplement*, New York: Salem Press, 1998. Mr. Hinton also has had accepted for publication an extended entry on Jeffers for the *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century American Literature* at Marshall Cavendish. Besides the usual biography and literary and philosophical overview, the article includes detailed analyses of "Tamar," "Roan Stallion," and "Hungerfield," and shorter descriptions of "Night," "Boats in a Fog," "Love the White Swan," and *Medea*.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Note the recent entry to the Modern American Poetry site at <<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps>>. Its Jeffers section, compiled and prepared by Cary

Nelson, records a chronology (adapted from the *JS* website with credits) and lists eight poems (“Shine, Perishing Republic,” “Hurt Hawks,” “November Surf,” “The Purse-Seine,” “Fantasy,” “Cassandra,” “Culture,” “Birds and Fishes,” each typically accompanied by two explications or passages from Carpenter, G. Allen, Hunt, Coffin, Zaller, Shebl, Gelpi, A. Basher, or David Perkins. The site is billed as “a multimedia companion” to the *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2000), edited by Cary Nelson, and is copyrighted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (visited 111,000 times since January 2000). The site offers syllabi and links to other significant publishers.

You are also invited to visit The Academy of American Poets <<http://www.poets.org/>>, with a menu of poet links, awards, conferences, indexes, journals, libraries and catalogs, exhibits, publishers, and text databases. Additionally the site offers find-a-poet, find-a-poem, listening booth, discussion forums, events calendars, and literary links.

The University of Toronto’s Index of Poets <www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/intro.html> offers no reference to Jeffers, but the site is well worth visiting.

<www.britannica.com> (the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*) is disappointing in its very dated and misinformational Jeffers entry.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

A seemingly impressive new entry in the field of library handbooks is *Encyclopedia of American Literature*, edited by Steven Serafin and Alfred Bendixen (NY: Continuum, 1999. 1305 pages. \$150). In three columns devoted to Jeffers, author Robert L. Ross starts out well but soon gives a factual misreading of “Tamar”; confuses the *Tamar*

and *Roan Stallion* volumes, misplacing “The Tower Beyond Tragedy” among the *Tamar* poems; identifies Jeffers’s god as having “deserted humanity” (was he ever committed?); analyzes the “Roan Stallion” plot as bestiality “said to represent the tragic consequences of seeking the purity inherent in the natural world when the individual has been corrupted by society”; characterizes Jeffers’s verse as simply “free”; and identifies his theology as “near pantheistic.” Ross’s penchant for quoting critics, both negative and positive, sometimes in the same sentence, often confuses through caricature rather than clarifies. He seems to have paid no attention to works later than “Roan Stallion,” names no shorter poems, and has no grasp of the complexities behind the decline of Jeffers’s reputation. After having earlier correctly noted Jeffers’s philosophy of “Inhumanism,” he closes with this prejudicial and confusing sentence: “The admirers—who have published extensively in recent years to shore up the poet’s standing—excuse the excesses, justify the cruel strains, and call him a prophet who in a brilliantly chiseled language foresaw and warned against the ‘inhumanism’ that has dominated the 20th c[entury].” It is rather startling that no one who knew Jeffers was asked to do the essay; the confusion, omission, and misreading here raises suspicions that other of the “1,100 original entries by 300 authors” may be likewise misinformed or otherwise flawed.

FEATURED REVIEW OF THE STANFORD COLLECTED POETRY

“Whatever Happened to Robinson Jeffers?” by David Rains Wallace, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, October 29, 2000, pp. 1, 6–8. Wallace’s essay is deeply ambivalent. While admiring much of Jeffers’s work, Wallace accuses Jeffers of fakery

and a lack of integrity. In the latter, he follows the lead of Helen Vendler, who charged the poet with “moral timidity.” As he seeks to psychoanalyze Jeffers, Wallace becomes increasingly oblivious to *non sequitur*. On Jeffers’s use of incest as a symbol, he remarks, after noting Freudian elements of Jeffers’s childhood and youth, “Jeffers’ obsession manifested a personal introversion, not a racial one.” And noting that Jeffers made contradicting statements about his reading of Thoreau, Wallace says, “His lack of candor was monumental, and for all the poetic genius he brought to his narratives and drama, it contributed to a puppet-like quality in his characters.” Strangely, this putative reassessment never mentions Jeffers’s view of God, his “loved subject,” which the poet, early and late, considered the most worthy of subjects. In conclusion Wallace states, “We will lose something of value if we let Jeffers slip away, for he, above all other poets, expresses California’s peculiar ambiance with unsurpassed vividness.” Yet this reduction of Jeffers’s contribution to the genre of nature-writing trivializes his achievement. R.K.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS ANNOUNCES TWO NEW JEFFERS TITLES

In its Spring 2001 list, Stanford University Press announces the publication of two major Jeffers editions:

The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, ed. Tim Hunt, is an anthology presenting most of Jeffers’s verse in Hunt’s five-volume *Collected Poetry*. This publication is a milestone that has been awaited for many years by Jeffersians and academics, who have long lamented the absence of such a volume for use by students and the general public. It extends Jeffers’s own *Selected Poetry* of 1938 (Random House) by including verse published

after that year, as well as some poems left unpublished by the poet, and several prose pieces in which he reflects on his poetry and poetics. March 2001. 615 pp. Paper, \$24.95; Cloth, \$75.00.

Stones of the Sur: Poetry by Robinson Jeffers, Photographs by Morley Baer, selected and introduced by James Karman. Shortly before his death in 1995, Baer had enlisted Karman’s aid in selecting from among his photographs of the Big Sur coast, and pairing them with appropriate verse by Jeffers. Karman’s organization of the material mirrors the focus and aperture of the photographer’s camera: from Tor House scenes, wheeling outward and south to vistas of Big Sur, narrowing progressively to the texture of rock and pebble surfaces, then outward again to landscape views, and finally returning north to Tor House. Robert Zaller is quoted in the catalog: “. . . There are books that are useful and books that are necessary, in the sense that when they appear we wonder how we could have waited so long for them. In what *Stones of the Sur* reveals about the aesthetic mediation between the natural and cultural history of California, it is such a book.” May 2001. 160 pp. 50 illustrations. \$60.00.

Volume 5 of the Tim Hunt edition of *The Collected Poetry* is now expected in September of this year. Stanford will also be offering at that time the complete five-volume set for a special price of \$300.

Robinson Jeffers Association Bulletin

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

As we all know, milestones in the history of Jeffers publications include the appearance of *Roan Stal-*

lion, *Tamar and Other Poems* in 1925, *The Selected Poetry* in 1938, and *The Beginning and the End* in 1963.

Another such landmark promises to be this present year.

At long last the final volume of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* and a new *Selected Poetry* will appear. A splendid new volume connecting Jeffers's poetry to his landscape through a great photographer's art joins the grand tradition of *Not Man Apart* and *Jeffers Country*. And two major anthologies of California writing, in which Jeffers figures large, have been published.

Stanford University Press's unwavering commitment to Jeffers is responsible for three of these publications. Volume 5 of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* completes Tim Hunt's monumental labor. For the first time, all of Jeffers's work will be available to interested readers. The *San Francisco Chronicle* praises its clarification of the Jeffers canon, "establishing for times to come the verse legacy of a poet who looked on all things with the eyes of eternity," and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* numbers Jeffers as one of the major poets of a generation that includes Frost, Stevens, Williams, Pound, Moore, and Eliot.

For the reader unready to invest in the five-volume set, there is now a one-volume *Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, also edited by Tim Hunt. Available both in cloth and paperback, it will make Jeffers accessible to a wide audience.

Stanford is also responsible for the appearance of *Stones of the Sur, Poetry by Robinson Jeffers, Photographs by Morley Baer*, selected and introduced by James Karman. Illustrating and complementing the poetry will be more than fifty Baer photographs of the central California coast.

Unfolding Beauty: Celebrating California's Landscapes, edited by Terry Beers and published by Berkeley's Heyday Books in conjunction with Santa Clara University, an anthology of major California writers, includes, prominently, not only a sampling

of Jeffers's short poems, but also excerpts from Una's foreword to *Jeffers Country*. Beers's book was highly recommended in a first-page Sunday review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

As if these offerings were not largesse enough, another anthology, the 870-page *Literature of California, Volume I, Native American Beginnings to 1945*, edited by Jack Hicks and others and published by the University of California Press, also features Jeffers, in the words of a reviewer of the *Los Angeles Times*, as a poet whose "brooding misanthropy was nothing more than his bright idea, his hope, that the Earth would soon dance its havoc and return what had been despoiled to its natural splendor."

Because of all these publications, Jeffers is becoming a familiar name on the pages of popular book reviews. A portent of things to come was the generally favorable evaluation of the poet's oeuvre in an October 29, 2000 *Los Angeles Times Book Review* cover story. *The Collected Poetry* was also included in that newspaper's year-end "Best Fiction [and Poetry] of 2000" list because, as the critic states, "It is hard to see how anyone can read Robinson Jeffers and not perceive greatness. His narrative verse rivals Wordsworth's or Byron's."

How long has it been since Robinson Jeffers was described in those terms in mainstream publications?

What a cause for celebration.

And the year has barely begun.

Alex Vardamis

Review:

American Poetry: The Twentieth Century. Volume One: Henry Adams to Dorothy Parker

Robert Zaller

New York: The Library of America, 2000. 986 pp.

General literary anthologies serve the same melancholy function as salvage operations: they save the few and inter the many. Most of the good poetry of a generation, not to say a century, is destined to be mulch. The worthiest of it may nourish the few master spirits who will represent the age; the rest will recede into an ambient hum, and at last become inaudible. Critics, reconstructing this lost background, will call it the *Zeitgeist*, but the individual voices will no longer be heard, and that is their second and usually final death.

Anthologies serve another, less heraldic function as well. They are market quotations on reputation, raising the bid on some and lowering it on others, admitting some into the canon and casting others out. The politics of these choices are often very pugnacious; in a more sublimated form they are called fashion and taste. Serious readers may scoff at anthologies, but only specialists can reclaim a terrain once it has been plowed under, plucking a Dickinson or a Melville from obscurity. At least that is the case today, when readers of truly independent and catholic tastes—say, an Edmund Wilson—are all but extinct. We may not like anthologies; we may regard them as middle-brow or even Philistine, stating the obvious or promoting the banal; but we cannot easily escape them.

American Poetry: The Twentieth Century is the successor to Louis Untermeyer's long-lived *Twentieth Century American Poetry*. As Conrad Aiken noted in the 1963 edition, Untermeyer's anthology was originally intended for the English reading public, "in the pious hope of enlightening that country, then singularly uninformed about American literature, as to the state of contemporary American poetry" (xxi). The English have learned a little bit about us since, but Americans themselves have forgotten a good deal more, and the present anthology—offered *sans* editor under the monolithic auspices of the Library of America—is meant to enlighten the native MTV generation instead.

The first volume of the anthology begins (after a few ballads by Anonymous) with Henry Adams (b. 1838) and ends with Dorothy Parker (b. 1893), both of

whom are remembered for their prose, although Adams's "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres" is a worthwhile find. Virtually all of the choices are contained in the generation that began with Edgar Lee Masters and Edwin Arlington Robinson and ended with Archibald MacLeish and Edna St. Vincent Millay. This generation—if not these particular names—includes our principal poets, excepting only Whitman, Dickinson, and perhaps Melville before, and a plausible few after. The great names, for Aiken in 1963 as well as the editors of the present volume, are Frost, Stevens, Williams, Pound, H. D., Moore, and Eliot. These are ranged, as the jacket informs us (there is no introduction, in keeping with the series' general air of marmoreal authority), alongside "such gifted contemporaries as Witter Bynner, Elinor Wylie, and Anna Hampstead Branch." In the third tier, under the category of "neglected pleasures" and along with Adelaide Crapsey, Ma Rainey, Vachel Lindsay, Cole Porter, and Mina Loy, we find Robinson Jeffers.

It is not actually as bad as that. Jeffers does get twenty-two poems, all lyrics, on nineteen close-printed pages. They include some you would expect to see, among them "Shine, Perishing Republic," "Apology for Bad Dreams," "Love the Wild Swan," and "Rock and Hawk," though not some that would have given a more adequate sense of Jeffers's scope, such as "Night," "Continent's End," "Meditation on Saviors," and "The Broken Balance." There is no indication, except in the biographical notes at the end of the volume (where Jeffers's entry is exactly as long as Cole Porter's), that Jeffers wrote narrative poetry, and no sample from it. That Jeffers gets as much space as he does (a bit less than Mina Loy; about half that of Gertrude Stein, another poet by courtesy; a third of Frost, Williams, and Eliot; a quarter of Stevens and Pound) is probably due to the presence of Robert Hass on the editorial advisory board; the choices reflect those Hass made for his Jeffers anthology, *Rock and Hawk*, as well. By comparison, Jeffers gets four poems ("Continent's End," "Birds," "Love the Wild Swan," "Apology for Bad Dreams") and five pages in the 1963 Untermeyer (both anthologies contain eighty-one poets, but the Library of America edition is nearly twice as long).

The good news, then, is that the novice reader paging through *American Poetry* can stumble on a reasonably substantial quantity of Jeffers. The bad news is that Jeffers has not only failed to gain ground on his acknowledged major contemporaries, but that the author of "Tamar" and "The Women at Point Sur" has been bracketed, doubtless by some brainless copywriter, with the author of "I Get a Kick out of You" and "Just One of Those Things."

As for the rest of the volume, most of the surprises center around more marginal figures. Edgar Lee Masters, dropped entirely from Untermeyer, makes a strong comeback with twenty-four selections from *The Spoon River Anthology*; on the other hand, Trumbull Stickney, represented with twelve poems in Untermeyer (more space than Marianne Moore or H. D.), disappears from the

twentieth-century anthology. Political correctness—meaning ethnic and gender imperatives, radical politics, prosy (not prose) poems, and the obligatory nod to popular culture—lies heavily on it. Marsden Hartley, a poet in the same sense that Henry Miller was a watercolorist, fails to profit from his airing, as does the pseudocerebral experimentation of Walter Conrad Arensburg. On the other hand, it is good to see the neglected Haniel Long resurrected in poems such as “In the Dark World.”

Anthologies are what they are, necessary evils; they represent in the end little beyond the reigning consensus. Jeffers will not get much more attention except from wayward critics like Milosz and Everson who can think outside the box until a substantial body of work is developed that relates him to the wider tradition of Anglo-American poetry and culture. In the meantime, I can’t help but reflect that he would very nicely fill a Library of America volume such as those devoted to Robert Frost (1995) and Wallace Stevens (1997). A portable collected Jeffers—why not? If Sarah Orne Jewett and Zora Neale Hurston and Dashiell Hammett, why not Robinson Jeffers?

Anybody listening?

Robert Zaller, Professor of History and Politics at Drexel University, Philadelphia, and President of the Robinson Jeffers Association from 1997 to 2000, is author of Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers (1983), and editor of Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers (1991) and The Tribute of His Peers: Elegies for Robinson Jeffers (1989).

Unnoted Collegiate Articles *by Robinson Jeffers and Una Kuster*

Robert Kafka

In the November 1904 and January 1905 issues of *The Occidental*, the student publication of Occidental College, there appeared one-page commentaries on current events titled “Happenings,” which did not survive to a third issue. The November column is signed “R. J.”—Robinson Jeffers was literary editor at the time, in his senior year. The January column is unsigned, but similarities of content, sentence structure, and diction leave little doubt that Jeffers also authored it.

About half of the material concerns the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, which was at that time “the biggest, most stunning war the world had ever known . . . The land actions were bloody and vast also, vaster in terms of the number of men involved than Gettysburg, Waterloo, or Borodino. . . . At Mukden, the Russians committed [almost 330,000 men], the greatest force that any army had ever assembled. Slightly more than 200,000 Japanese took the offensive against it” (Denis and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905*, New York: Charterhouse, 1974). The carnage was incomprehensible, and portended the futile mass battles of the First World War and its murderous trench-warfare. Jeffers’s columns, appearing at the climax of the conflict (Port Arthur fell at the end of December, 1904), are of course filler material, but they at least illustrate his interest in following the tactics of the campaigns. His silence about the horrific human toll reflects the success of both principals in concealing the truth of their losses.

While it is not surprising that Jeffers’s youthful commentary does not adumbrate his later strident anti-war position, its discontinuity with Jeffers’s mature thought does suggest that we seek a later *terminus a quo* than 1905 for a critical stage in his intellectual development. At the end of his “Foreword” to Powell’s book *Robinson Jeffers: The Man and His Work*, Jeffers had written in 1933:

. . . [T]here was a time in my youth when physical violence appeared more or less anachronistic. It was hoped that this old “ballad-material” belonged to the past, all tragic feeling would soon be only of the mind and spirit. Unhappily that time was not normal but a rootless exception, and died 19 years ago.

Jeffers likely was referring to the phenomenon that attended the international success of Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*, first published in England in 1910. Barbara Tuchman writes:

By impressive examples and incontrovertible arguments Angell showed that in the present financial and economic interdependence of nations, the victor would suffer equally with the vanquished; therefore war had become unprofitable; therefore no nation would be so foolish as to start one. Already translated into eleven languages, *The Great Illusion* had become a cult. At the universities, in Manchester, Glasgow, and other industrial cities, more than forty study groups of true believers had formed, devoted to propagating its dogma. (*The Guns of August*, 1962, New York: Ballantine, 1990, 10)

Tuchman further describes the activities of "Angell's most earnest disciple," Viscount Esher, chairman of the War Committee, and coincidentally father of Jeffers's Taos acquaintance twenty years later, Dorothy Brett. Lord Esher, a friend and advisor to both Edward VII and George V, lectured on Angell's theories at Cambridge and the Sorbonne, and even promoted them with the Kaiser and his advisors.

Although Tuchman concentrates on Angell's financial and economic arguments, an extract from Angell's concluding chapter reveals the socio-historical dimension of his thesis. The connection to the statement above by Jeffers is apparent:

The warlike nations do not inherit the earth; they represent the decaying human element . . . Are we, in blind obedience to primitive instincts and old prejudices, enslaved by the old catchwords and that curious indolence which makes the revision of old ideas unpleasant, to duplicate indefinitely on the political and economic side a condition from which we have liberated ourselves on the religious side? Are we to continue to struggle, as so many good men struggled in the first dozen centuries of Christendom—spilling oceans of blood, wasting mountains of treasure—to achieve what is at bottom a logical absurdity, to accomplish something which, when accomplished, can avail us nothing, and which, if it could avail us anything, would condemn the nations of the world to never-ending bloodshed and the constant defeat of all those aims which men, in their sober hours, know to be alone worthy of sustained endeavor? (*The Great Illusion*, New York and London: Putnams, 1910, 391–392)

A curiosity in this material is Jeffers's racial stereotyping of the Japanese and South Americans, a staple of the journalism of the day. We can only imagine his self-derision during the war in the Pacific forty years later, if he were remind-

ed that he had written that Japan possessed “none too much of the dogged tenacity which characterizes the nations of the north.”

Una Kuster’s initialed contribution to the USC student newspaper, the *University Courier*, is her earliest-known published work, written as a sophomore just before she met Jeffers.

Typesetters’ errors have been silently corrected. Jeffers’s first column contains a variant transliteration of “Kuropatkin,” which has been regularized.

Happenings

(*The Occidental* 11.2, November 1904)

Despite the urgency of the Czar, and the vehement rhetoric of General Kuropatkin, the Russian cause seems only to have progressed in a backward direction. It is true that the Japanese advance has been partially checked, but this we may refer rather to the unfavorable weather, to the blinding fog, and the mud which covers the roads knee-deep, than to any prowess of the Czar’s soldiery. Port Arthur is still gallantly defended, but its garrison must at last realize the extremity of their condition, surrounded on every side by a threatening enemy, and cheated of almost their last hope of relief from without by the untimely end of General Kuropatkin’s advance.¹ Indeed, the Russian cause, from whatever side we consider it, cannot well be described as prosperous, or as giving any great promise of success. We must remember, however, that the Russians are a persevering race, noted for that persistence which has already more than once drawn victory for them from the jaws of defeat, and that their enemy, though enthusiastic and hardy and intelligent, possesses none too much of that dogged tenacity which characterizes the nations of the north, the Slavs and Teutons. The advantage derived by Russia from her superior resources is very evenly counterbalanced by the distance between the scene of hostilities and the base from which all Russian troops and supplies must be transported.

The relations between Russia and Great Britain, never over friendly, and already strained by the Malacca affair² and other occurrences of the same nature, have received a fresh shock from the mistaken action of that ill-starred Baltic fleet, which seems to be of little use except to make trouble for Russia with foreign governments. It appears that the Czar’s warships have fired upon a fleet of inoffensive English boats in the North Sea, sinking at least one of them, and doing serious damage to several.³ Reports are as yet very confused, and are regarded as entirely incredible by some. The offenders steamed off without stopping to inquire as to what damage they had done, and the fishers could not be sure even that they were Russians. Of course the matter will be investigated and there will be important developments within the next few days.

The Germans have been engaged for some time past in a struggle with the Hereros, a tribe of Southwest Africa, who are hostile to the European colonists there. Germany has suffered several small reverses at the hands of the savages, but claims to have almost subdued them.

The British government has refused to allow the Germans to use Walfish Bay—which is an English possession, and the only good harbor available—for landing troops and supplies wherewith to subdue the Hereros. Indeed, relations are none too amicable between England and Germany, especially since it is suspected that there is a secret understanding between the Kaiser and England's old rival and enemy, the Czar.

The political situation in our own country is interesting, but there have been few developments of importance. The Republicans claim to have proved the untruth of Judge Parker's accusations with regard to misgovernment in the Philippine Islands.⁴

The inhabitants of Panama have already given evidence of that fickleness which is to be expected of South Americans, and suspicions are being aroused in that country with regard to the actions of the United States.⁵ Secretary of War Taft, with a commission of his own choosing, has been appointed to go to the Isthmus and adjust these difficulties.

R. J.

Happenings

(The Occidental 11.4, January 1905)

The Great War

Port Arthur has fallen. This fact is of only incidental interest, inasmuch as it has been a foregone conclusion for some time past that the capitulation of the Russian stronghold was only a matter of time. But at this time it is of interest to note what progress has been made in the great war in the Far East during the past year. General Kuropatkin has been able to save his army and no more. The fleet at Port Arthur has been practically destroyed and the fleet at Vladivostok kept harmless. Japan is in possession of Korea and all the important part of Manchuria. But the principal advantage Japan has gained is the sympathy of public sentiment. She has proven herself worthy of a place among the great powers of the world. Whatever the outcome of the war may be, she has established this fact conclusively.

Statehood

Now that Congress is again in session the old question of statehood comes up again. The four territories which are clamoring for admission are Arizona, New

Mexico, Oklahoma and Indian Territory. The objections to admission are concerning the sparseness of the population and the un-American character of a considerable portion of the inhabitants of two of the states. For instance, Arizona has a population of only 3000 more than that of a New York assembly district, and New Mexico has a population of 50,000 less than that of the city of Newark, New Jersey. Those who favor admission propose that Arizona and New Mexico be merged into the state of Arizona, and that Oklahoma and Indian Territory be admitted as the state of Oklahoma. Local pride, which objects to this loss of identity, is an obstacle to this plan. The fact that these states with their meagre population would, if admitted, have equal senatorial representation with the great states of New York and Pennsylvania, is the most potent objection to the admission.

Canadian Reciprocity

The sentiment favoring reciprocity between the United States and Canada is growing rapidly on both sides of the border, and, in many instances, influenced the recent elections. The election of Sir Wilfred Laurier as Premier of Canada, and of Governors Douglass and Johnston of Massachusetts and Minnesota is an evidence of this. The mutual advantage to be derived from a freer and more unrestricted commercial intercourse between the two countries are very obvious, and the farming and lumbering classes are beginning to realize the fact. The only ones who oppose the idea are the Canadian manufacturers, comparatively small in number, who naturally do not want to see the Canadian wheat and lumber exchanged for American manufactures unhampered by tariff.

“Frenzied Finance”

Thomas W. Lawson, in the course of his articles in “Everybody’s Magazine,” under the caption, “Frenzied Finance,” has exploded several bomb shells.⁶ If the sweeping accusations in these articles directed against the Standard Oil are false, they could be easily proven so, and would subject the writer to libel suits of no mean magnitude. Yet aside from the injunction served upon the publishers of “Everybody’s” by Attorney Rogers, of the Standard Oil, which amounted to nothing more than enormous advertising for the publishers, nothing has been done to disprove the charges. The articles do not show Lawson himself up in any too admirable a light, but the charges against the great corporation are of such a nature as would be advisable for the company to disprove, if possible. It is one of those cases where silence is condemnation.

Tintern Abbey and its Association with English Poets

(The University Courier, October 24, 1905, 1)

The ruined Cistercian Monastery known as Tintern Abbey lies on the right bank of the Wye in Monmouthshire, about seventeen miles northwest of Bristol. It was built by Walter de Claire in 1131. Its architecture, representing the transition period from Early English, contains some fine decorations. With the exception of the tower, the building is well-preserved. It is chiefly known for having inspired several of Tennyson's poems, and, together with the country around, the beautiful "Lines Written above Tintern Abbey" of Wordsworth. The place was dear to Tennyson because he had visited it in 1830 with Arthur Hallam, when they were staying with the latter's grandfather at Clevedon, preparatory to touring in the Pyrenees. Later it was rendered doubly dear by being near the last resting place of Hallam, who was buried in the chapel at Clevedon. The nineteenth section of "In Memoriam" describes the bringing of Hallam's body up the Severn to Clevedon. The Wye entered the Severn just opposite this estate.

"Tears, Idle Tears" and "Home they brought her warrior dead," both songs in "The Princess," were written at the Abbey. The former, Tennyson tells us, he wrote late one autumn afternoon as he watched, through the broken casements, the sun streaming over the yellowing woods. It is written in lyrical blank verse which more easily than rhyme conveys deep thought and feeling. It is especially melodious and each word is completely fitting and satisfying. The words "no more" which occur several times were favorites of Byron, Poe and Shelley in poems expressing similar feeling. The sadness of the poem is not alone for the loss of his friend, but a "vague passion of the past which he had felt even in his boyhood." Tennyson tells us that, "It is the distance in the landscape that charms me, the past, and not today. . . ." The delicate and potent charm of this lyric makes it one of his most beautiful.

Wordsworth wrote his "Lines" one afternoon at Bristol upon his return from the country of the Wye which he and his sister had most happily explored. It was one of his favorite poems and was more universally approved of than any other. It represents his ideal poem as described in his "Prefaces"—genuine and natural, expressing in pure and unmetaphorical English the beauty of nature and its relation to men. He believed that God created man and nature for one another, and to develop each other; in short, to completely harmonize. At every time of life, nature should soothe and inspire man. These "Lines" illustrate his doctrine of life and poetry.

U. K.

ENDNOTES

¹ General Alexei Kuropatkin had advanced with the initial Russian land forces over the newly completed and utterly inefficient Trans-Siberian railroad, but in March had halted at Liaoyang, 200 miles north of Port Arthur, determined not to launch an offensive until reinforcements arrived. The Japanese meanwhile advanced through the Korean peninsula with a bifurcated attack, one army to the south to besiege Port Arthur, and the other to the north to confront Kuropatkin. By the fall of 1904, the Russian forces, ill-equipped, ill-commanded, and ill-prepared psychologically for the conflict, had suffered a series of defeats.

² On July 13, 1904, the Russian Volunteer Fleet had seized the British passenger ship *Malacca* in the Red Sea, and steamed it north under the Russian flag through the Suez Canal to Port Said. The Russians had suspected the ship of transporting munitions and supplies to aid the Japanese.

³ The Russian Pacific Fleet, having been grievously wounded and confined to Port Arthur by a superior Japanese navy, was to be liberated by the Baltic fleet. This unprecedented rescue effort required a poorly trained and recently impressed naval force to steam halfway across the world. The Baltic Fleet was edgy from the outset, having heard rumors that Japanese submarines (which had not yet been proven to exist, much less be present so far from their home ports) were prowling the Baltic and North Sea. On the Dogger Bank in the dark of the early morning of October 18, 1904, the Russians in panic opened fire on an English fishing fleet, sinking one boat, damaging others, and killing several aboard. Finally realizing their mistake after a bombardment of twenty minutes, the Russians fled in terror and confusion, without attempting to assist their victims.

⁴ Judge Alton B. Parker, the conservative Democratic candidate for president in 1904, had declared on October 15 that the Filipino people were oppressed, and that the US should hasten their relief by granting independence. Parker denounced the Republican policy of imperialism as a peril to the nation.

⁵ Panamanians were alarmed at the establishment of a government in the Canal Zone, though it was provided for by treaty. They feared a competing and independent community that would be a detriment to their commerce, revenue, and regional prestige.

⁶ Lawson was a self-made financier whose articles in *Everybody's* exposed the deceit and manipulation surrounding the rise and collapse of the stock of the Amalgamated Copper Company, and Standard Oil's resulting windfall. Lawson's remedy for these abuses was spelled out in a book in 1912, and was realized by the creation of the SEC in 1933.

Jeffers, Vonnegut, and Pynchon: Their Philosophies and Fates

James Baird

Many beginning university students find honest works of art depressing because they have not yet had enough experience of either life or art to know, as Pauline Kael said of Ingmar Bergman's "depressing" but beautifully realized *Shame*, "[A] work of art is a true sign of life" (Kael 221). In addition to exposing such students to "depressing" material, I try to continue the interest of such students in a possibly better future by pointing out hopeful events such as the fall of the Berlin wall or the collapse of the Soviet Union. But they often remind me that the malaise cannot be ended by a few political changes. They recognize that the threat of nuclear annihilation has not ended, but merely shifted ground; that the response to injustices real or imagined is often not reasoned solution but angry violence dispensed by alienated loners or coldly calculating terrorists; that our technology-based society is causing those who understand it to work faster and faster to keep up with the changes it generates and those who do not understand it to fall further behind as the gap between the digitally enfranchised and the ordinary person widens; and that our mindless greed for more and more everything is destroying both human institutions and the planet itself. In spite of any hopeful signs, many young people still believe that their lives are out of their control and headed for a bad end. But they also recognize, honor, and read artists whose view is as deep and unflinching as their own.

Although Robinson Jeffers's poetry contains a healing message for both individuals and society at large, the poet has only a small popular audience and is given just a nod by most critics and anthologists of American Literature. In a paper which I read at the first meeting of the Robinson Jeffers Association in 1994, I suggested that we might find new readers for Jeffers in the environmental movement, specifically among the Deep Ecologists, who see Jeffers as a bardic figure who both recognizes the dangers facing Twenty First Century Civilization (in such poems as "The Purse-Seine") and also sees a way out of the decline through the adoption of a different mindset ("Signpost"). In this essay I offer another thesis, that we may find sympathetic readers for Jeffers in the young admirers of the prose authors Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon, for all three writers share a common viewpoint about the fate of humanity and a similarly grim opinion about the future of the relationship between humankind

and nature. Nonetheless, each writer also celebrates the miracle of existence in spite of the bleak forecast which the rational element of our natures compels us toward. I will describe the themes of the two novelists while noting complementary ideas and passages from Jeffers to demonstrate their philosophical kinship and the ways in which they may reach an audience of contemporary young people.

Kurt Vonnegut, the most commercially successful of the three, is one of the few writers whose name is instantly recognizable to the average person, not only because of his best-selling works but because he is a celebrity, appearing in magazine ads, motion pictures (as Rodney Dangerfield's tutor in the 1986 film, *Back to School*), hustling Discover cards, and hosting a television anthology series which bears his name (*Kurt Vonnegut's Welcome to the Monkey House*, named after one of his best short stories). If this self-promoting activity is unseemly from an academic perspective—we tend to dislike artists who make a lot of money—it must be remembered that Vonnegut has always made his living primarily through writing. He honed his craft by selling conventional stories to the slick magazines, and, even when working for General Electric, wrote technical manuals. If fame is now a byproduct of his literary work, that is marketable too, and using it is a logical projection of his original strategy.

Vonnegut is a favorite writer of many young people because his view of the future matches theirs. Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), presents a major viewpoint which he shares with Jeffers. Vonnegut describes a future society in which technocrats have taken so much control that the people, driven to a Luddite rage, destroy all the machines. In the final scene, a group of people huddle around a broken Coke machine, trying to tinker it back together again in order to get at its treasured contents. Enter another favorite theme—human beings have intellect sufficient to figure out the physical nature of the universe and with that knowledge make all kinds of amazing devices, but not enough will power or moral sense to control the excesses of the world they have created. Or, for that matter, they lack the acumen needed to recognize value, since the product the people in the novel so frantically desire is just sugar water and caffeine. The flip side of the Coke machine scene, revealing our frustration over our inability to control our technology, occurs in *Galapagos* (1985), in which there is a device the size of a cellular phone called Mandarax which contains all human knowledge and can answer any factual question. Irritated with the instrument's complete but bland and soulless competence, one of the characters hurls it into the sea. So much for human knowledge and our ability to control it. Vonnegut would agree whole-heartedly with the poet who wrote, "A little knowledge, a pebble from the shingle, / A drop from the oceans: who would have dreamed this infinitely little too much?" ("Science," *CP* 1:113).

Although *Player Piano* has conventional style, characterization, and plot, soon Vonnegut found the voice, tone, and organization which has characterized

his work since *The Sirens of Titan* (1959)—brief chapters, sketchy characterization, black humor, an apparently simple style, and very elaborate plots. Some of his later novels, such as *Hocus Pocus* (1990) and *Timequake* (1997), are hardly novels at all but more like statements of a theme and variations, a term borrowed from music, because some critics have referred to Vonnegut as a “jazz improviser” (Brodrick 1558) who improvises on a theme rather than advances a story. In *Deadeye Dick* (1982), for example, the main character is a man whose life was ruined when, as a child, he accidentally fired a rifle whose bullet flew out a window and struck a pregnant woman some distance away. The community regards him as a pariah. The variation on this event is the revelation at the end of the novel that many years before, the local sheriff killed a friend in a hunting accident similar to that of Deadeye Dick, covered up his crime, and became a trusted public official. So much for confession being good for the soul, honesty being the best policy, and other such homiletic claptrap offered not only by politicians and preachers but by poets. “The poets? The poets lie too much” (*CP* 4:391). Vonnegut agrees with Jeffers and Nietzsche, but the poets only echo the sentiments of a society which would rather believe hopeful fantasies than face the truth.

In fact, among Vonnegut’s main targets are human institutions which attempt to make sense out of a chaos which cannot be made sensible and a human society which cannot be controlled. In Vonnegut’s best novel, *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), a writer named John (perhaps a reference to John of Patmos, author of the *Book of Revelation*) sets out to write a book about the development of the atomic bomb called *The Day The World Ended*. He never writes *that* book, but he does write a book about the end of the world. While researching the bomb, John discovers the work of a scientist who had developed water molecules which freeze into ice which melts at 130 degrees—Ice Nine. Obviously if any of this stuff were to get into a free-flowing stream, all the rivers and oceans would freeze, the earth’s climate would go wacky, and that would be the end of us all.¹ That’s exactly what happens, but first John and several other characters travel to the Caribbean island of San Lorenzo, where the society is characterized by the tension between the brutal dictatorship of the president and the gentle religion of Bokononism, which has been outlawed by the government but which every person on the island, including the president, believes in and practices.

This religion gives Vonnegut an opportunity to write his own Bible, excerpts of which, called *The Books of Bokonon*, are scattered throughout *Cat’s Cradle*. This Bible expresses philosophical conclusions and aphorisms with which Jeffers would have undoubtedly concurred, such as:

The Fourteenth Book [of Bokonon] is entitled, “What Can A Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?”

It doesn't take long to read *The Fourteenth Book*. It consists of one word and a period:

“Nothing.” (*Cat's Cradle* 164)

A poem from *The Books of Bokonon* explains both humanity's distinguishing characteristic and its inability to use that feature properly:

Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly,
Man got to sit and wonder, “Why, why, why?”
Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land,
Man got to tell himself he understand. (*Cat's Cradle* 124)

Through this bible Vonnegut also introduces the important distinction between the granfalloon and the karass. Like Jeffers and Pynchon, Vonnegut distrusts human institutions. Because of their social importance, they cause people to think that the institutions are really running the society, when in fact they are no more than convenient life preservers to keep one afloat in the sea of confusion. Jeffers concurs with this view in such passages as this one from “The Broken Balance”:

Uneasy and fractional people, having no center
But in the eyes and mouths that surround them,
Having no function but to serve and support
Civilization, the enemy of man . . . (*CP* 1:374)

Vonnegut's analysis does not mean that there is no pattern or plan, however, because there also exist “karasses,” which John defines as “teams [of people] that do God's will without ever discovering what they are doing” (*Cat's Cradle* 1). Human institutions are *not*, in Vonnegut's view, the way God's will is exerted. A character in the novel discovers that John is a Hoosier (Vonnegut himself is from Indianapolis) and regales him with stories of famous and influential Hoosiers:

Hazel's obsession with Hoosiers around the world was a textbook example of a false *karass*, a seeming team that was meaningless in terms of the ways God gets things done, a textbook example of what Bokonon calls a *granfalloon*. Other examples of *granfalloon*s are the Communist party, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the General Electric Company, the International Order of Odd Fellows—and any nation, anytime, anywhere. As Bokonon invites us to sing along with him:

If you wish to study a *granfalloon*,
Just remove the skin of a toy balloon. (*Cat's Cradle* 67–68)

Vonnegut presents his view of the flawed nature of humanity in evolutionary terms in *Galapagos* (1985). In this novel, a cruise ship returns to the islands which triggered Darwin's understanding of the processes of natural selection and evolution. The narrator, a ghost who, by virtue of his spiritual nature, can see a million years into the future, identifies human beings' major problems as caused by our big brains, which, as noted repeatedly in the rest of Vonnegut's fiction, think up devices and plans that we cannot control, and our hands, which we use to wield weapons and cause other forms of mischief. If it were not for these features, we would be rather nice animals. In *Galapagos*, a world crisis wipes out most of the human race, the cruise ship winds up at the islands, the passengers are stranded, and, isolated like the marine iguanas, giant turtles, and finches which, Darwin noted, had evolved as they did because they had no competition, they devolve into simpler aquatic mammals with smaller brains and flippers instead of hands. Human beings survive by becoming something else, and the earth is saved from our rapine.

Jeffers also thinks that the universe would be better off without human consciousness. In "Margrave," he notes that neighbor galaxies seem to be moving away from us, ". . . no doubt they are fleeing the contagion / Of consciousness that infects this corner of space" (*CP* 2:161). The poet imagines total annihilation, saying that ". . . you Night will resume / The stars in your time" ("Night," *CP* 1:115). Vonnegut, like Jeffers, is constantly aware that ". . . man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun / Die blind and blacken to the heart . . ." ("To the Stone-Cutters," *CP* 1:5), but Vonnegut is more likely to attribute the end of the earth to a cataclysmic mistake made by a sentient being rather than a long natural process. In *Cat's Cradle*, a bit of ice-nine falls into the sea and freezes the ocean. This change creates a new kind of weather with a sky full of tornadoes. The earth becomes almost uninhabitable and only a few people survive. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Vonnegut's narrative voice states that at some point in the future a test pilot cadet from the planet Trafalmore presses the wrong button and destroys the universe. Billy Pilgrim, the main character of this novel, can enter a "chrono-synplastic infundibulum" which enables him to experience all time simultaneously and zip to whatever event he wants to observe, but he can do nothing to *change* time, nor can anyone else. A Trafalmorean explains: "[The cadet] has *always* pressed [the button], and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him. The moment is structured that way" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 101).

This fatalistic vision matches that of many of today's Generation Y, who think that they can do nothing to stop or even slow the earth's precipitous decline. Thomas Pynchon, the second prose author whose viewpoint is similar to that

of Jeffers, gives them more evidence for that opinion. Pynchon, like Vonnegut, also makes his living by writing fiction, and, like Vonnegut, he had to work in business writing technical manuals (in Pynchon's case, at the Boeing Corporation) before the financial success of his first novel, *V.* (1963), freed him to devote himself to his writing and also to draw a veil of total secrecy over his life. The fact that Vonnegut and Pynchon worked as technical writers for technologically based organizations brings up another point of similarity between the two novelists and Jeffers; all three are thoroughly aware of science and the scientific viewpoint, examine its impact on contemporary life objectively, and can assume the detachment of the technician. Pynchon moves easily between both worlds; he graduated from Cornell with a double major in the rare combination of English and Engineering.

All of Pynchon's works are based on his application to human society of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the tendency of all of the energy in the universe to equalize so that there is no kinetic force left ("heat death"), a process and condition which Jeffers described metaphorically as our ultimate fate a number of times: e.g., "There is a hawk that is picking the birds out of our sky" ("Shiva," *CP* 2:605). Pynchon thinks that recent human history can be traced to our failure to understand the finality of this condition, to our prideful assumption that the earth's resources, even the universe, are here for us to use (which in practice often means "waste") and discard, producing what Pynchon calls an "addiction" to the use of energy that threatens the survival of the planet. In his masterpiece, *Gravity's Rainbow*, he describes the process this way:

Kekulé² dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World. But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, "The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning," is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that "productivity" and "earnings" keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, vegetable, and mineral, is laid waste in the process. The System may or may not understand that it's only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the world can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide . . . though he's amiable enough, keeps cracking jokes back through the loudspeaker . . . On you roll, across a countryside

whose light is forever changing—castles, heaps of rock, moons of different shapes and colors come and go. There are stops at odd hours of the mornings, for reasons that are not announced: you get out to stretch in lime-lit courtyards where the old men sit around the table under enormous eucalyptus trees you can smell in the night, shuffling the ancient decks oily and worn, throwing down swords and cups and trumps major in the tremor of light while behind them the bus is idling, waiting—*passengers will now reclaim their seats* and much as you'd like to stay, right here, learn the game, find your old age around this quiet table, it's no use: he is waiting beside the door of the bus in his pressed uniform, Lord of the Night he is checking your tickets, your ID and travel papers, and it's the wands of enterprise that dominate tonight . . . as he nods you by, you catch a glimpse of his face, his insane, committed eyes, and you remember then, for a few terrible heartbeats, that of course it will end for you all in blood, in shock, without dignity—but there is meanwhile this trip to be on. . . . No return, no salvation, no Cycle—that's not what They, nor Their brilliant employee Kekulé, have taken the Serpent to mean. (412–413)

This lengthy quotation is necessary to provide a sample of Pynchon's method as well as his favorite theme. After an interpretation of the symbol of the self-devouring serpent which points out that the natural world is based not on a progressive movement forward which we think we can control but a cycle which we violate at our peril, the speaker creates an epic simile which compares our technological rape of the planet to a bus trip through Kekulé's Germany. The travellers wish to stop and get a chance to understand what they are experiencing, but the trip is not in their hands, and although they glimpse the devilish reality behind the mask of the driver, they find that they are not free to get off the bus, so they return to it, as the selection returns to the image of the serpent which began it.

In this digressive, verbally pyrotechnic way Pynchon makes the reader aware that the history of the twentieth century has been, at bottom, a frantic scramble for a dwindling amount of resources. Those caught up in the struggle are concerned with supply and power, and not, as logic would suggest, with conservation and compassion. Those who seem oblivious to the struggle are still affected by it, as they drift along in its backwash without motivation or interest, like the secondary characters in his novels and like young heavy metal fans and Goths who sense the problem but have not thought it through. Their response is blind rebellion, and the name of one of their favorite rock bands describes that revolt: Rage Against the Machine.

Pynchon sets *Gravity's Rainbow* in the midst of the most obviously mad scene of the twentieth century—World War II. But his intent is less obvious than that of most novelists who use this background. From the rationalist's

perspective, all war is a consequence of a breakdown in reason, and World War II—the greatest slaughter in history and the worst case yet of such a collapse—is a warning for future generations. From the moralist’s perspective, World War II may be considered a victory of the forces of light against the forces of darkness, the popular democracies which believe in the dignity and freedom of the individual (with the perplexing exception of the Soviet Union, of course) against a robotic, enslaving fascist nightmare.

To Pynchon, and, of course, to Jeffers, such views of the conflict are sophomoric. Jeffers expressed his opinion in the short lyrics in *The Double_Axe*. World War II is neither a collapse nor a triumph but just the bloodiest episode in the ongoing, centuries-old struggle for resources and power. To defuse the rationalist argument regarding the war, Pynchon creates scientist villains on both sides of the conflict: the Allies specialize in social scientist scoundrels, the Axis in natural scientist fiends—all of whom are concerned with mastery over the earth and its inhabitants, a mastery demonstrated by the power to control and to destroy.

To disarm the moralists, Pynchon begins *Gravity’s Rainbow* near the end of the war when its outcome was no longer in doubt and refers only briefly or not at all to the spectacular events that marked its close—the Normandy invasion, the Battle of the Bulge, the drive for Berlin, and the use of the atomic bomb. This focus deletes from the novel the high drama presaging glorious victory. The machinations and intrigues which, in the first part of the book, seemed associated with the war effort, continue without stint after its close, indicating that the war was only an eruption onto the world military stage of an ongoing contest which existed before the war started and, ominously, continues. Given humankind’s appetite for destruction, as Jeffers says, “the P-38s and the Flying Fortresses are as natural as horse-flies” (“Calm and Full the Ocean,” *CP* 3:124).

The gravity’s rainbow of the title is the arc of the flight of the V-2 rocket, Hitler’s last potent weapon, against which London had no defense. At the end of the war, the Germans had the ballistic missile and the Americans had the atomic bomb. Marry the two and one has the presumed technology of World War III, the intercontinental missile tipped with a nuclear warhead. Pynchon ends the novel by placing the reader among a helpless crowd in a theater as a rocket descends on their heads. Jeffers uses the same image in the poem “Diagram”: “Look, there are two curves in the air.” One curve represents, he says, “the rise and fall of the Christian culture-complex,” and the other, the technological advances marked by their beginning with humankind’s ability to fly: “the age that began at Kittyhawk.” Jeffers predicts what will happen when the two arcs join—that is, when the powers of technology are placed at the service of some misguided “holy” impulse, “But watch when the two curves cross: you children / Not far away down the hawk’s-nightmare future: you will see mon-

sters" (*CP* 3:120). In "Prescription of Painful Ends," Jeffers describes this union as "[t]he immense vulgarities of misapplied science and decaying Christianity" (*CP* 3:14).

Here Jeffers differs somewhat from Vonnegut and Pynchon. All three writers see little hope for humankind, but Jeffers tends to see our failure as stemming from our self-love: ". . . the blinding / Rays of reflected desire, the man with the woman, the woman with the child, the daughter with the father . . . the web self-woven, the burning and the blistering strands running inward . . ." ("The Torch-Bearers' Race," *CP* 1:100–101). This self-concern is, of course, also the subject of most of his narrative poems. In those poems he reveals ironically that all the sexual coupling, all the insistence on the primacy of the self, is really a product of self-hatred. If we do not fall into that trap, we may try to escape through belief in the ultimate truth of our institutions (e.g., "the Christian culture-complex" noted above), but that belief leads to fanaticism and unreason. Thus it is passion, excessive and misdirected, which brings about the ruin of humankind. "Then search for truth is foredoomed and frustrate? / Only stained fragments? / / Until the mind has turned its love from itself and man, from parts to the whole" ("Theory of Truth," *CP* 2:610).

Our self-absorption and inability to recognize our true place as only a tiny part of the vast universe results in loneliness, in Vonnegut's view. His characters are cut off from each other, craving answers to the question of why their lives, and for that matter, human society, are incomplete. But they are also unhappy with the answers they find, which simply remind them again that people are limited and incapable of mastering even the earth, much less the great universe. Pynchon concentrates on another consequence of our inability to live with ourselves. We try to fill the holes in our lives with things, desire feeding upon desire and creating appetites that cannot be fulfilled. This frantic activity, too, is what Jeffers saw as self-absorption. Vonnegut and Pynchon see the end of human civilization brought on not by the institutions of government and religion, like Jeffers, but by a rampant and unthinking consumerism. One could argue that Jeffers also regarded capitalism, an economic institution, as a source of trouble, but both Vonnegut and Pynchon make it clear that it is appetite, not the delivery system which feeds the addictions, that causes ruin.

If all this sounds as somber as the future that Jeffers often proposes for us, both Vonnegut and Pynchon do offer some hope. In *Slapstick* (1976), Vonnegut notes that most people are starved for human connection and compassion, and that families, which are supposed to be the wellsprings of such conditions, are often instead generators of misery. He proposes that people be assigned a middle name from a list of names at birth, say "Daffodil." Any person with the middle name "Daffodil" would be a member of the Daffodil family and should be excited to meet someone with the same middle name. Thus family ties and closeness could be built up without the tensions resulting from the blood ties

of the family, a condition Jeffers dealt with so often. This hypothesis is a restatement of the “granfalloon-karass” condition presented in *Cat’s Cradle*. Given Vonnegut’s fondness for randomness, he reasons, one is more likely to find a genuine bond with a total stranger than with a family member. The artificial family name just gets the relationship started.

Pynchon is usually bleaker than Vonnegut in his view of the possibility of hope. Two of his other novels, *V.* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), feature main characters who search for the answers to perilous mysteries and find nothing. In *Vineland* (1984), however, the main character, Frenesi Gates, is looking for her mother, and with the assistance of several friends, she actually manages to find her. Unlike the solitary-quest figures in Pynchon’s other novels, Frenesi is able to succeed because she is aided by an extended family of aging hippies and other social outcasts. While Jeffers urges us not to expect much from each other—“And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master” (“Shine, Perishing Republic,” *CP* 1:15), the two prose writers still offer the hope that we can depend on one another. Jeffers tells us repeatedly that one must discover one’s own personal path out of the nightmare: “... there are many salvations—if any” (*Letters* 184). And he also urges us to abandon, or at least minimize, traditional human concerns: “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” (“Roan Stallion,” *CP* 1:189); “I have fallen in love outward” (“The Tower Beyond Tragedy,” *CP* 1:178); “A little too abstract, a little too wise, / It is time for us to kiss the earth again . . . I will touch things and things and no more thoughts” (“Return,” *CP* 2:409).

There is also in all three writers the sense that in spite of all the tragedy and failure, there is still value and fulfillment in the fact of existence, once one sees the rest of nature and recognizes one’s insignificance in terms of the larger world. In such poems as “Oh Lovely Rock” (*CP* 2:546-547), “The Place for No Story” (*CP* 2:157), and “Gray Weather” (*CP* 2:485), Jeffers celebrates the joy and wonder of an existence which is at least able to apprehend the marvels about it. One cannot expect other people to help, though; one must be “born of the rock and the air, not of a woman” (“Sign-Post,” *CP* 2:418). In *Cat’s Cradle*, the Bokononist last rites include this sequence:

“God made mud,” . . .

“God got lonesome.”

“So God said to some of the mud, ‘Sit up!’” . . .

“And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around.” . . .

“Lucky me, lucky mud.” . . .

“Nice going, God!” . . .

“Nobody but you could have done it, God! I certainly couldn’t have.” . . .

“The only way I can feel the least bit important is to think of all the mud that didn’t even get to sit up and look around.” (*Cat’s Cradle* 149)

The same point is made in less compass but more poignantly in Vonnegut’s *The Sirens of Titan*. A young man who has been arrogant, scornful, and disruptive by turns, and who has managed to irritate every other character in the novel, makes his exit from the narrative by saying to his parents, “Thank you, Mother and Father . . . for the gift of life” (312).

The affirmation in Pynchon is more difficult to see, for it is extra-textual. As one reads his cauldron-like paragraphs overflowing with references, allusions, ideas, and images, one says with Miranda, “Oh brave new world, that has such people in it.” Although Pynchon’s logic leads him to a view of a sad fate for the human race, the operation of his own intellect and spirit is exuberant and thrilling. He is like a kid doing a handstand on the handlebars of his bicycle, and we are remarkably privileged to see him perform, just as we are terrified at the content of the Jupiter Symphony, but we are delighted that we live in the world that produced Mozart.

There are many young people today who are confused, depressed, and alienated. They attach themselves spiritually to such figures as the self-destructive Kurt Cobain, they express their anger and rage through the angry mottoes of hip hop or the blasting cacophonies of heavy metal. They can see the purse-seine, but they don’t know its exact nature or how it came to be in their path. Reading Vonnegut and Pynchon becomes something more than a class assignment. When I have them read *Cat’s Cradle* or *The Crying of Lot 49*, several always approach me and say, “I’m so glad that you had me read that book—it really means a lot to me.” Jeffers also receives a positive response when students read his lyrics. There is a ready audience for the work of Robinson Jeffers in the young people of the world. It is our task as teachers, as enablers, to help them overcome their prejudices and fears about poetry so that our favorite author can enter their lives, as he has ours, with his cauterizing but healing spirit.

ENDNOTES

¹ Such a substance is not so fantastic. Scientists have developed waters of different molecular construction which freeze at higher temperatures than normal. One is called “Ice VII”—perhaps the source of Vonnegut’s name for his fictional ecological disaster (Asimov 269).

² Friedrich August Kekulé von Stradonitz (1829–1896), a German chemist, is most noted for the manner in which he discovered the structure of benzene.

Unable to solve the problem of this compound's molecular structure, he had a dream in which he saw the symbol of an ouroboros, a serpent swallowing its own tail. He then realized that the carbon atoms of benzene were arranged in a ring rather than in a linear form, and this discovery opened the door to the development of many other compounds. Pynchon uses this story because it reminds us of the interpenetration of the conscious and non-rational minds through the medium of dreams, and also because the image of the serpent destroying itself is an emblem of our treatment of the environment and the resources we strip from it as if the supplies were unlimited, when in fact we only speed the arrival of the day of our own destruction.

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