

Jeffers Studies
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Jeffers Studies

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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

RJA CONFERENCE

The Ninth Annual RJA Conference, April 26–27, 2003, met at the Radisson Woodlands Hotel, Flagstaff, sponsored by The Center for Culture and Environment, Northern Arizona University. The theme was “Directions in Environmentalism: Jeffers and Others.” The “Call for Papers” quoted from Max Oelschlaeger’s proposal that “an alternative idea of wild nature as a source of human existence is gaining public hearing,” reminding us that nature must be seen as a continuum, “where it is, at one end, little more than a romantic anachronism, and, on the other, a category intrinsically bound up with the emergence of an evolutionary viewpoint on cosmological process.” The call for papers concluded: “Environmentalism and the study of environmental literature seem to vacillate around Oelschlaeger’s three points of concern: nature as a source for human existence, nature as a romantic anachronism, and nature as a cosmological process.” Saturday morning’s keynote address, by Max Oelschlaeger, author of *The Idea of Wilderness* and *Caring for Creation*, and Frances B. McAllister, Chair of Community, Culture, and Environment at Northern Arizona University, was titled “Jeffers’s Theophanic Spiral: A Strong Poet’s Love of God.” The 9:30 panel, “Who Speaks (for) the Environment,” featured Jeff Fouquet’s “Writing to Victory: Jeffers, Freire, and Mustering Soldiers for the Ongoing Struggle for Environmental Awareness”; Catherine Owen’s “Roots of Language: Robinson Jeffers’s Ecological Meta-Poesis”; and Terry Beers’s “Robinson Jeffers and Sally Carrighar: Exploring the Inner Life of Animals.” The 11:00 panel, “Responses to Time and Place,” heard Robert Brophy’s “Environment Inducing Mad-

ness: Big Sur and Jeffers’s ‘insanities of desire’”; Patrick Dooley’s “The Inhuman Philosophies of Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey: ‘to travel down the strange falling scale’”; and George Hart’s “From the Two to the One: Jeffers and Rexroth, Sacramental Wholeness, and the Age of Ecology.” The 2:00 panel, titled “Rock the House: What’s Geology Got to Do with It?” ventured ShaunAnne Tangney’s “Writing the Rock: Robinson Jeffers and Apocalyptic Geology”; Aaron Yoshinobu’s “The Geologic Consciousness of Robinson Jeffers: Mapping the Influence of Geology at Tor House and in Verse”; and Peter Quigley’s “The Role of Houses in the Life and Writing of Environmental Writers.” The late afternoon meeting was a “Special Presentation on Falconry” in which Alan Malnar discussed “Hawks of Jeffers Country: A Biological, Ethological, and Morphological Presentation,” using his own perched hawk illustratively. The evening’s banquet was introduced with awards and tributes and by Frances McAllister as speaker. Sunday’s program began with a plenary address by Gary Nabhan, author of *The Desert Smells Like Rain* and *Cultures of Habitat*, both Director of NAU’s Center for Sustainable Environments and NAU Professor of Biology. His subject was “The Whole Human Race Spends Too Much Emotion on Itself” (words from Robinson Jeffers). A 9:30 panel, “Intersections of Art and Environment,” featured David Rothman’s “Ecotopia and Art in the Twentieth Century”; Robert Zaller’s “Landscape as Divination: Reading ‘Apology for Bad Dreams’”; and Rebecca Raglon’s “Robinson Jeffers and the Implications of an Environmental Aesthetic.” This was followed by a panel, “Presentation on the Importance of the Arts in the Study of the Environment,” discussed by Diane Thiel and Constantine Hadjilambrinos. The concluding afternoon panel, “Final Considerations,” heard Jim Baird’s “Jeffers and Hardy: Closet Ecologists” and Alex Vardamis’s “Medea and the Imagery of War.”

“SHIVA” SET TO MUSIC

“Shiva,” a lyric poem by Robinson Jeffers set to music by graduate student Mark Peterson, was performed on Saturday, May 18, at 3:00 p.m. at the Daniel Recital Hall on the CSULB campus. The composition is scored for chorus, percussion, woodwinds, piano, and string bass, and was conducted by the composer. Peterson, who holds degrees in both English and Music, has long admired the poetry of Jeffers. When he was a teenager, he visited the Jeffers home in Carmel. Even then he shared his view that poetry should be a blending of fire and earth. Peterson chose the “Shiva” text for its powerful imagery and relevance for today’s post-9/11 world. Woodwinds declaim the hawk motif at unpredictable times, while the peaceful motif of the tubular bells is systematically displaced. The chorus, which begins with a meditative incantation of Shiva, gradually builds in intensity with the help of the percussion, which drives the music to a climactic dissonance. The composition ends with a final chorus that returns to the lush and tranquil sound of a capella chorus and ends with full orchestral accompaniment. A CD recording of the “Shiva” music will be available shortly. Please send queries to the distributor through the *Jeffers Studies* editor at <brophy@csulb.edu>.

DANA GIOIA: NEA CHAIR

Internationally acclaimed poet, critic, and translator Dana Gioia, after being nominated by President George W. Bush as ninth Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate on January 29, 2003. A native Californian, he earned graduate degrees from both Stanford and Harvard Universities. He has published three poetry collections, the latest of

which, *Interrogations at Noon*, won the 2002 American Book Award. As a provocative critic, he is best known for his 1991 book of essays *Can Poetry Matter* and for “Fallen Western Star: The Decline of San Francisco as a Literary Region,” (*Hungry Mind Review*, Winter 1999–2000), which precipitated a collection of pro and con essays edited by Jack Foley in 2001. Gioia’s translations include Italian Nobel Prize-winner Eugenio Montale’s *Mottetti* (1990), two anthologies of Italian poetry, and Seneca’s Latin *The Madness of Hercules* (1995), performed by Verse Theater Manhattan. With X. J. Kennedy he has edited the very popular college textbook *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. For the last six years he has been classical music critic for *San Francisco* magazine, and he has written the libretto for *Nosferatu*, an opera, with Alva Henderson as composer. His poetry has been featured in a dance theater production, *Counting the Children*. He has taught at prestigious universities and is Vice President of the Poetry Society of America. Dana will be recalled as the featured speaker at both RJA and THF festivals, championing Robinson Jeffers as a major American poet. His 1988 review essay “Strong Counsel” in *Nation* magazine stands as a classic celebration of Jeffers’s stature.

NEW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jeffers Studies, volume seven, will introduce a new editor-in-chief, George Hart, who has been co-editor starting with volume six. His interest in contemporary American literature, with special emphasis on poetry, along with other talents and accomplishments, has been addressed in the first issue of volume six. As outgoing editor, I welcome George’s advent as a personal boon. He assumes the burdens and exciting opportunities that I have carried since the untimely death of Melba Berry

Bennett back in 1968, when the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* was struggling to establish its mission as the publication of record for all things relative to the poet. In the intervening years *RJN* grew from an occasional two-page strictly newsletter to a seventy-page quarterly gathering not only news and notes, but also abstracts, memoirs, reviews, biographical notes, manifests of library collections, checklists, maps, photos, obituaries, explications, Jeffers's uncollected letters and poems, the Una Jeffers Correspondent series, bibliographies, directories, and of course articles short and long. In 1991, the quarterly's publication was moved from Tyrus Harmsen's library office at Occidental College, Jeffers's alma mater, to California State University, Long Beach, first under the CSULB University Press and then on its own with Greg Williams (in Kentucky) as copy editor/typesetter and Eric Strauss as CSULB printer. *Jeffers Studies* replaced *RJN* in 1997 upon the latter's one hundredth issue and index, with Bob Brophy and Terry Beers as co-editors, Rob Kafka and Peter Quigley as managing and Web editors. Over the years, subscribers will have noted the number of double issues and twin posted issues. It has been decided to regularize that phenomenon and lessen somewhat the editorial burden by making *Jeffers Studies* issues larger and their publication semi-annual. I intend to stay on as a willing and still enthusiastic contributing editor. In closing I wish to express my gratitude to all who have along the way made the burdens easier and the way brighter, to the presidents and early select faculty of Occidental for their support, to the late Larry Powell and Ward Ritchie for their early guidance, to Tyrus Harmsen for his work as copy editor over the years, for his service in *RJN's* publication and distribution, and for his many suggestions and interventions, to CSULB president Robert Maxson for his very timely and generous subvention, and to the various departments at my university that have made transitions, innovations, and quarter-to-quarter processing of

publication so genuinely painless. To the subscribers I offer special thanks for their loyalty, many still being with us from the publication's 1962 inception. Finally, my thanks to the Jeffers family for their generous support, their unique contribution of news and notes, and their constant encouragement and frequent hospitality.

R. B.

ERRATUM

After the text of *Jeffers Studies* 6.2 was out of the hands of our typesetter and copy editor, Greg Williams, and in its final printing stage, the text was inadvertently misaligned, moving it ahead one line on each page and leaving unsightly "orphans" at the top of many of the pages. The editorial staff regrets the error.

Publications

THE WILD GOD OF THE WORLD

Stanford University Press has released a two-hundred-page selected poetry of Jeffers titled *The Wild God of the World: An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Albert Gelpi with both a Preface and a nineteen-page Introduction titled "Robinson Jeffers and the Sublime." See reviews by Zaller and Brophy in this issue.

DARK GOD OF EROS

In a joint California Legacy publication with Santa Clara University, Heyday Books, Berkeley, has

released *Dark God of Eros: A William Everson Reader*, which, among other things, explores the great influence of Jeffers on Everson's writing and life.

DISSERTATIONS

John Cusatis writes, "The title of my dissertation is 'The Life I Could Write: The Integrity of Robinson Jeffers' (the title borrows the final line from Jeffers's poem 'Epilogue' appearing in *Flagns and Apples*)." John defended his work in Spring of 2003 at the University of South Carolina. He presented a paper on Jeffers and Cather at the 2001 RJA Conference in Taos.

Note also the comparative study by Eunseong Kim, "The Politics of Nature in the Works of Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder," Indiana University of Pennsylvania. *Dissertation Abstracts International* (2002). Sec. A. 63.2. 589. DA 304 3339.

Contributors

Robert Brophy, editor of *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* (1968–1996) and *Jeffers Studies* (1997–2002), has authored *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems* (Case Western Reserve UP, 1973) and edited *Robinson Jeffers: Dimensions of a Poet* (Fordham UP, 1995).

Steven Chapman has published on Gary Snyder and on ecological literary theory. He is currently the director of the Foundation for Ecology and Culture, a San Francisco-based non-profit working to promote new cultural paradigms for a sustainable future.

George Hart, editor elect of *Jeffers Studies*, is currently involved in the research project "Inventing the Language to Tell It: The Sacramental Nature Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, Kenneth Rexroth, and William Everson."

Tim Hunt, English chair at Illinois State University, Normal, is editor of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Stanford UP, vols. 1–5, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2000, 2001) and *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Stanford UP, 2001).

Robert Kafka, managing editor of *Jeffers Studies* since its inception, is editor of *Where Shall I Take You To: The Love Letters of Robinson and Una Jeffers* (Yolla Bolly, 1987).

Lin Moore is a photographer making his home in Bend, Oregon; his research has focused on Jeffers's breakthrough use of science for a "Fourth Culture."

Peter Quigley, Web editor of *Jeffers Studies*, is editor of *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words* (U of Utah P, 1998).

Robert Zaller, a poet and historian with a specialty in British and early modern European history, is author of *The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers* (Cambridge UP, 1983) and editor of *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers* (Associated UP, 1991).

Play Review: Medea at Carmel

Robert Kafka

Medea by Robinson Jeffers (adapted from Euripides), February 22–March 9, 2003, Pacific Repertory Theater, Theater of the Golden Bough, Carmel, CA.

Any actress who attempts Jeffers's *Medea* faces a double challenge. Not only must she command the extremes of emotion—injured queenly pride, boundless rage, steely hatred, spitting contempt, groveling flattery, wistful tenderness, icy self-control, loathing self-horror among them—but she must convince the audience of the psychological validity of these extremes as she is whipsawed from one to another in Jeffers's fast-paced adaptation. The second challenge is much the greater, and Julia Brothers is one of few Medeas in recent years, in this reviewer's experience, who is equal to it.

The Pacific Repertory Theater is fortunate in being able to provide solid talent in other roles to face the extremes portrayed by Brothers. Stephen Moorer (the founder and executive artistic director of the company, who spoke about the production at the Tor House Festival in October 2002) plays an admirable Jason, not only with ringing self-justifications, but with modulations of—seemingly?—genuine pity, and brief moments of what might pass for regret.

John Rousseau's Creon enters with a pomposity and rigidity that reveal, with rich irony, his fear of Medea and his sense of vulnerability, even impotence, before her—he the supreme ruler of Corinth, and she an adventurer's discarded foreign wife, without any legal standing. If there is a weakness here, it is that Rousseau's Creon, in finally relenting to Medea's importunities for half a day's delay before her exile is enforced—"an inch of time . . . Oh Creon, what is half a day in all the rich years of Corinth?"—makes the concession with the same rigidity with which he denied it only moments before. We expect to see that she has conquered him.

Ron Evans's Aegeus is masterful. Has Aegeus ever been played as a comic character? Yet this is what Evans manages to do. He enters with controlling confidence and reacts with indignation on hearing of Creon's sentence of exile for Medea. But as Medea wheedles him for refuge in Athens, he is caught between his obligation to her as a friend and his political interest as a friend of Corinth. He portrays the exquisite agony of his predicament by drawing out his stunted concessions to Medea with comically lengthened syllabic duration, in a

high-pitched, modulated voice, while his torso writhes in agony as he recollects the benefits he receives as an ally to Creon. It is Aegeus roasted live on a spit.

Other players—among them, Mary Ann Schaupp-Rousseau as Medea’s nurse, and Mindy Stock, Thersea Del Piero, and Julie Hughett as the three women of Corinth—provide nuanced support.

But the play, after all, is Medea’s, and Julia Brothers claims it throughout. She does not pace the stage, but glides over it, when alone except for the nurse and chorus, with a peculiar bearing—her fingers splayed and curled as if claws, the hands uplifted at the wrists, the wrists held down at the waist or one raised beneath the breast—as if she were a female beast waiting to strike. Yet justice—not mere vengeance—is her grail, and she displays a remarkable capacity for tenderness, even once for Jason. In the first scene between the two, replete with vituperation, she still finds a brief moment to reminisce fondly, when she reminds him of the circumstances of their escape from Colchis:

... [T]here are some things

That ought to be remembered by you and me. That blue day when we drove through the Hellespont
Into Greek sea, and the great-shouldered heroes were singing at the oars, and those birds flying
Through the blown foam . . .

Most actresses deliver this with ironic bitterness, as the bracketing lines seem to demand (“I loved you once: / And I am ashamed of it,” and “[T]hat day was too fine, I suppose, for Creon’s daughter’s man to remember”). But Brothers briefly dissolves the bitterness—in one of those rapid changes of emotional extremes—and delivers the interlude straight, laying her head on Jason’s breast. He embraces her, and plants a kiss on her forehead. Is the kiss genuine? Have they both been transported back in time, for a moment? The reverie passes, and her scorn resumes. But the small interpretive adjustment makes a huge difference in our understanding of this Medea. She is not a juggernaut.

Joseph Chaikin, the director, is the recipient of six Obie awards, including the first ever for Lifetime Achievement in Theater. The set is austere, in conformity with Jeffers’s minimal stage directions.

PRT performs in the Theater of the Golden Bough—a venue rich in Jeffersian association. The first Golden Bough was established by Teddie Kuster, Una Jeffers’s first husband, on Ocean Avenue in Carmel in 1923, where the Jeffers family saw numerous productions. It burned down during a production of “By Candlelight” in 1935, and was rebuilt on the same site, only to burn down again on May 21, 1949, during—amazingly—a revival of “By Candlelight.” Kuster again rebuilt the theater in 1952, this time on its current site on Monte Verde, between 8th and 9th. The theater seats 318 and has excellent acoustics. It is now owned by PRT outright.

Two Reviews: Stones of the Sur

Lin Moore and George Hart

Stones of the Sur. Poems by Robinson Jeffers, photographs by Morley Baer. Selected and introduced by James Karman. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001. Cloth \$60.00.

It is often tempting to put the work of poets and photographers together. With Robinson Jeffers the temptation becomes irresistible. There is just something about Jeffers that calls out to photographers. There is something special in what Jeffers has to say and in the way that Jeffers says it that makes his work, well, “photographic.” Explanations for why Jeffers and photography are so “simpatico” (as the photographer Edward Weston might have said) run the gamut from the sense of place, and the place itself, that Jeffers shared with so many of the great photographers of his time to the speculation that Jeffers was the first poet to see the world as the camera sees it. Jeffers’s vision of things does share with photography a highly concentrated, finely detailed, at times “scientific” look at what is in the end the dispersed, amorphous goings on of the Earth and of the highly “poetic” behavior of its denizens.

Among the photographers who expressed an affinity for Jeffers, Morley Baer is probably the least well known and certainly the least published. Compared to Weston and to Ansel Adams, Baer’s work has been seen by almost no one outside of the small circle of fine art photography, the Jeffers community, and the regional affections born of the Big Sur coast of California. Yet Baer, of all those photographers who can be directly connected to Jeffers, is the one who most magnificently visualizes the Jeffers look and feel of the world. Weston is precise and Adams is sweeping, but it is Baer who entangles the ocean and the land with the life force within it, just as Jeffers stirs nature and humanity into an unbreakable contract of desire and definition.

It is with this accomplishment of Morley Baer in mind that we must now turn our praise to the accomplishment of James Karman, who provides the setting for an irresistible and magnificent explication of the work of Robinson Jeffers and Morley Baer with his new book *Stones of the Sur*. I have been looking at and collecting books like this for over thirty years, but never have I seen a book like this, so perfect in its presentation and its scholarship. Dr. Karman’s essay, selections, and juxtapositions clearly connect the passions of two great artists and offer a look at how the sense of one artist expresses the sense of another.

Quite often the intent to illuminate the work of disparate media by combining them within the same format falls far short as one overpowers the other or as each cancels out the subtlety that uniqueness requires for its expression. Not so with *Stones of the Sur*. It is a celebration of the confluence of greatness.

Perfectly printed on a paper stock that manages to convey the sensuousness of the art it supports, credit must also be given to Stanford University Press for their excellent production values and their uncompromising quality in making this book into a work of art in itself.

James Karman has done great justice to two extraordinary artists and to their life's work and has as well elaborately presented the power of poetry and photography to gather together in an unequalled expression of the nature of our world.

L. M.

Stanford University Press has served Robinson Jeffers admirably of late: Tim Hunt's monumental five-volume *Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* is finally complete, and his expanded and definitive *Selected Poetry* will be readers' point of entry into Jeffers's oeuvre for decades to come. Also, a more affordable and condensed selection, *The Wild God of the World*, edited by Albert Gelpi, has been recently published, and a revised and expanded *Collected Letters* is forthcoming. And this book, *Stones of the Sur*, which pairs the photographs of Morley Baer with Jeffers's poems, beautifully showcases the work of these two Californian artists. James Karman's Introduction gracefully acquaints us with the details of Baer's life and work, describing his growth as a photographer, his experience in the military, his career as a commercial photographer of architecture, and his encounters with the poet. The Introduction provides the details of the affinity between the two men, revealing Jeffers's influence on Baer as well as the development of Baer's vision in its own right. Karman quotes Baer as saying: "Jeffers helped me see and sense the coast of California as a place of great tensions, great natural tensions that are part of life and not to be subdued and eradicated" (5). Karman also makes extensive comments on what he calls Jeffers's "phenomenology of stone" (25), linking Jeffers's maturation as an artist with his initial handling of the sea boulders as he helped build Tor House, and offering a wealth of detail on the stones of Tor House as well as the mythological and archetypal meanings of rock that certainly informed Jeffers's imagination.

Karman writes that his intention "is to allow word and image to complement, illuminate, and complete each other in order to create one coherent pattern" (25–26). What is just as interesting is that the pairings often reveal the difference between word and image, between poetical, rhetorical statement and graphic, visual "statement," in ways that enhance our appreciation for the abil-

ities of both artists. For example, Karman pairs “Continent’s End” with a photograph from 1972 titled “Gathering Storm, Little Sur” (38–39). The poem evokes the subject of the photograph as it describes “the earth . . . veiled in a late rain,” and the speaker “gaz[es] at the boundaries of granite and spray” as he stands at the edge of the continent. The photographer, and thus the viewer, also stands with the continent behind him, looking across the inlet that the Little Sur River empties into, and, a bit off center, but nearly at the middle of the frame, a boulder on the other side of the inlet sends up an explosion of spray. The water in the bay in the foreground ripples under the wind, giving the scene its kinetic feel even as the headlands and boulders stolidly resist the wind, clouds, and waves. The scene embodies that tension of the place that Baer said he learned from Jeffers. Yet, reading further, the distinction between photo and poem emerges. After the description of the first two couplets, the speaker turns from the objective scene and apostrophizes the sea, a typical rhetorical move for Jeffers. The poem thus moralizes the scene, and one either accepts or rejects the statement. The photograph itself, of course, remains silent, and here is a productive tension between the two media. The storm in the photo is a fact, recorded more or less objectively, and the photographer’s “statement” is in the selection of subject, exposure, lighting, and printing. Of course, as Karman has explained, Baer was influenced by Jeffers, and so the pairing of word and image is not a forced yoking; on external evidence, we know that Baer subscribed to a similar view of nature. But, by itself, the poem’s brief description has to imply the whole scene because it has discursive business to attend to; and the photo, by itself, implies the value the artist places on wild nature, but it stands much more as fact than value.

This exchange between objectivity and subjectivity is one way that photo and poem complement each other, as Karman says, but it also reveals how “unpictorial” Jeffers’s poems are in a sense. (This claim, I realize, sounds as if it contradicts Lin Moore’s sense of Jeffers as “photographic,” but I think the distinction is more about our personal biases—literary critic and photographer—than about a disagreement regarding Jeffers’s work vis-à-vis photography.) Undoubtedly, Jeffers was a master at description, and he used all his resources to evoke the coast he loved—diction, rhythm, imagery, figurative language—but he also neither writes simply “descriptive” poetry, nor even ever an “objectively” descriptive poem. Combining a rhetorical poetry with photography makes a true complementary relationship, I think, rather than a purely descriptive poem paired with an image that restates, or supplements, the imagery of the poem. In that sense, I’m not sure how poem and photo would “complete” each other, neither seems incomplete, but it certainly shows that the best pairings bring together two complete “statements” to form a third, complete in itself.

In some of the pairings, however, there is a sense that the words are supplemental to the image, or vice versa. When Karman excerpts lines rather than presenting a whole poem the effect can feel like a gloss on the photo. This is not always an undesirable effect. For example, these lines from “A Little Scraping” appear with “Two Roads, Big Sur Ranchland, 1969” (48–49):

This mountain sea-coast is real,
For it reaches out far into past and future;
It is part of the great and timeless excellence of things. A few
Lean cows drift high up the bronze hill;
The heavy-necked plow-team furrows the foreland, gulls tread the furrows;
Time ebbs and flows but the rock remains.

Clearly, the connection between quotation and photograph, at least at first glance, is the presence of cattle. In fact, the photograph seems to have little to do with the theme of rock—the whole view, from above the ranchland, is filled with groups of trees, the roads, the ranch, and the cow pastures. Baer’s image evokes the flow of time, but in a way unrelated to the statement of the poem. In the lower half of the photo, a curved line of cattle, blurred because of the camera’s slow exposure, echoes the curve of the dirt road, on which a horse and rider travel, and it extends the line of the paved road in the top half of the picture. Each one of these elements—dirt road and rider, paved road with power lines, line of cattle—creates a sense of flow in the landscape, and though there is no visible rock in the picture, the feeling of a combined transience and permanence comes through as in the last line of the excerpt.

Interesting connections and contrasts such as these occur throughout the book, and so reading and looking at it does in fact become a “complete” experience, distinct from looking at a book of photos or reading a selection of Jeffers’s poems. Each section is also a distinct and coherent selection of photos and poems. The section “Oh Lovely Rock” presents mostly close-up photos of rockfaces, boulders, and beaches. The influence of Edward Weston is very present here, and many of the photos verge on abstraction, an effect one wouldn’t think would complement Jeffers’s work, the least abstract of modern poetry. Yet, for all their seemingly modernist shapes and “nonreferential” forms, the photos also suggest a real intimacy, a humanness to the rock not inimical to Jeffers. The female, hourglass shape of “Rock Torso, Point Lobos, 1947,” is a visual play on the closing lines of “Sign-Post,” its companion poem: “but now you are free, even to become human, / But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman” (90–91). This section contains some delightful photographs, and it brings a lightness to the otherwise consistently somber and austere tone familiar to Jeffers’s verse and the Big Sur landscape.

And that somber tone is the dominant factor in the “traditional” landscape photos that make up the majority of the book. Throughout the “Continent’s End” section, and to a lesser extent throughout the “Credo” section, one can see the particular character of the Big Sur coast define itself within the rectilinear frame of Baer’s photos. Landscape, and seascape for that matter, is typically horizontally oriented. For example, in “Afternoon Light, Open Sea at Point Lobos, 1962” (58), even the ceaseless motion of the waves is contained and compressed by the strata of open sky and clouds at the very top of the frame. However, in order to capture Big Sur’s drama, other photos in “Continent’s End” (e.g., “Santa Lucia Range, Nacimiento Road, 1962” [52], and “Owings Beach, 1982” [56]) engage a vertiginous perspective looking down from headlands into canyons and the sea, and in “Credo” the perspective is sometimes reversed, the camera and viewer looking up at towering or massive rocks (“Gold Rock, Garrapata Creek, 1976” [122]), or monumental boulders (“Field Rock with Fence, Old Coast Road, 1987” [120]). Such compositions disrupt the horizontal with diagonals, curved lines, and acute angles. I’m not familiar with Baer’s architectural photography, but pictures of buildings would most likely be dominantly vertical, and so perhaps these compositional elements reveal the landscape’s emancipatory effect on Baer’s perspective.

Indeed, it’s almost a shock to return to Tor House at the end of the book: “Hawk Tower, 1968” (150) contains the first straight vertical line since the opening “Tor House” section. The book’s first photo, “Tor House and Hawk Tower, 1964” (31), is “landscape-oriented,” requiring more horizontal scope to include both structures in the frame. The lightning rod on top of Hawk Tower pierces the top of the frame in both pictures, like a needle, or a lance. In the earlier photo, the downward counter thrust of the rod’s upward movement is interrupted by the garden wall and patch of lawn extending across the foreground. In the later picture, which is of the tower alone so it is vertically oriented, the viewer is inside the garden, and the line of the lightning rod extends down the tower’s third-story edge to the second-story landing, and then down the inside edge of the door frame, and then to the garden path which finally disrupts the straight line by curving to the right. Yet, the path also extends the line further, making it wind its way to the bottom right corner of the frame, almost to the position of the viewer/photographer. There is a horizontal line, of course, the garden wall and hedge behind the tower, but it is nearly completely dominated by the almost perfect bisection of the photo by the lightning rod’s line. To pick up on Karman’s archetypal reading in the Introduction, what we sense here is an *axis mundi*—a break in the horizontal plane of existence (the diachronic line of history), in which the synchronic line of divinity makes the world sacred. The natural diagonals, curves, angles, and lines of the other photos never achieve this effect for all their majesty and power. I’m not aware that Jeffers ever mentioned a strike on his tower’s lightning rod, but the association of lightning and

divine power is implied. Perhaps Jeffers wanted to avoid the hubris of assuming he *made* an *axis mundi* (in a wonderful short poem, “The Summit Redwood,” he tells the story of his coast’s true *axis mundi* as revealed by a lightning strike).

Karman’s last selection, another “Tor House and Hawk Tower, 1964” (156), expresses a more properly “Inhumanist” perspective. The view is from the road below the property, and it emphasizes the structures’ integration into the landscape. Only the upper part of the house is visible, the roof well below the trees behind it. Hawk Tower is nearly covered in ivy, its lightning rod breaking the line of the trees but stopping impotently well before the top of the frame, almost invisible against the flat gray of the sky. And, charmingly, the top of the grandchildren’s slide peeks out above the hedge. The accompanying poem is “Post Mortem,” and it closes the volume magnificently as the complement to this photo. Here, there are many echoes back and forth between word and image: the trees in the photo, and the trees the speaker remembers planting; the child’s slide, and the generations the speaker foresees overpopulating his coast; the house and tower apparently sinking into the land, and the speaker’s anticipation of his beloved house and tower being buried by suburban tracts only to be uncovered as “the granite of the prime” when the human tide ebbs. And the concluding phrase of the poem, as the speaker admits he’ll haunt this place rather than the pages of his books, expresses elegantly the achievement of the “marriage” of poem and photograph in this book: “a spirit for the stone.”

G. H.

Two Reviews: The Wild God of the World

Robert Zaller and Robert Brophy

The Wild God of the World: An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers. Selected and introduced by Albert Gelpi. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003. 204 pp.

For a generation after his death, the only American poet compared nonfrivolously to Shakespeare, Homer, and Sophocles by reputable critics¹ had a single paperback of 114 pages to represent the span of his career.² It seems hard to imagine Jeffers's neglect in what we may justly now call the Stanford Era, but for those of us who by luck or accident discovered him in the dark days, the disproportion between the mountain of the verse and the molehill of the monument was a never-ending wonderment. Only William Everson walked the critical desert, a prophet trawling for disciples one by one—Brophy, Hunt, Zaller. It's a time that should be remembered, like the oblivion of Melville and Dickinson; and perhaps it will be.

The watershed year was 1988, when the first volume of *The Collected Poetry* appeared.³ Since then, seven more Jeffers volumes have been issued by Stanford: the four more that round out *The Collected; Stones of the Sur*, with photographs by Morley Baer and selections from Jeffers;⁴ a new *Selected Poetry*;⁵ and, now, an anthology, *The Wild God of the World*, edited by Albert Gelpi, the William Robertson Coe Emeritus Professor of American Literature at Stanford. These volumes, in sum, comprise 4,431 pages. After the long drought, it has been a veritable torrent.⁶ Nor has it yet run its course: James Karman's definitive edition of the letters of both Robinson and Una Jeffers is forthcoming. In an age of scholarly retrenchment, the Stanford Jeffers project has been one of the most remarkable sagas in recent American publishing. Among the many who have played their part, most conspicuously Tim Hunt and the late George L. White, there is one name that may not be omitted: Helen Tartar, the Stanford editor whose vision and constancy guided the project for twenty years. Once asked whether his fondness for the name Helen had a personal antecedent, Jeffers demurred; but it has a new and permanent attachment to his work now.

The Collected and *Selected Poetry*, respectively scholarly and trade editions, have clearly defined audiences: in the first case, libraries, students of Jeffers,

and the devoted core of his lay readers; in the second, the larger literary public. This new *Selected*, designed as a successor to the 1938 *Selected Poetry* that was Jeffers's chief calling card for four decades, at once services the general reader and the college classroom. These volumes would seem to span the field; why then, one may ask, the need for the further redaction of the Gelpi Jeffers, which at 204 pages is little more than a quarter the size of the Hunt *Selected*?

One answer might be the niche market that, new to Jeffers, might shrink from the heft of the *Selected* but be willing to take a flyer on a more modestly scaled volume. Another might be the possibility of getting in some of the work omitted from the *Selected*, and thus complementing it for readers wanting more Jeffers but unable to afford the \$75 volumes of the *Collected*. These are plausible conjectures, but do not stand up on examination. Hunt commendably privileges the narratives, but is unable to find space for "Thurso's Landing" and most of "The Women at Point Sur." The latter, in its entirety, would have taken up almost all of Gelpi's space, but "Thurso's Landing" would have been a good fit. Instead, however, he chose "Cawdor," a narrative omitted by Jeffers from his own *Selected Poetry* but printed by Hunt (and still available in William Everson's New Directions edition as well). In fact, there are only three poems ("Point Pinos and Point Lobos"; "Granite and Cypress"; "Granddaughter") in Gelpi's volume not included in Hunt's, and even the prose pieces printed by both mostly overlap. Clearly, then, *The Wild God of the World* is not a supplement to *The Selected Poetry*, but a different project, using the same materials to another end.

If one may define the difference briefly, Hunt's volume aims to be a representative selection, suitable for teaching Jeffers from a variety of perspectives and offering the general reader a substantial introduction, while Gelpi has a case to make. The case is very much that of William Everson, whose *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure* is tellingly quoted at several places in Gelpi's Introduction. Gelpi sees two primary strains in Jeffers's poetry, a general pantheism that extends Whitman and Emerson in the light of modern cosmology, and the personal perspective that Jeffers called Inhumanism and which he saw as entailed by modern scientific revelation and post-Kantian philosophy. Both of these were sourced in Jeffers's Calvinism, which for him meant two central propositions: that God was All, and therefore omnipresent; and that God was infinitely distant, imperceptible except through the second-order experience of the phenomenal world, and incomprehensible except through praise and awe. Jeffers's poetry thus existed under the aspect of the sublime, and, as Gelpi states flatly but I believe correctly, "He is the poet of the sublime without peer in American letters" (14).

The difference, the grit, as one might say in Jeffers's concept of the sublime, is the residual Calvinism. Kantian sublimity is notionally agnostic: the noumenal world is there, but unsayable; and, as Wittgenstein remarked in *The*

Tractatus in trying to put paid to the whole idea, “Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent.” There is only so much mooning one can do over mountains, cataracts, and sunsets once the original Romantic impulse has been spent, as it was spent in Wordsworth after *The Prelude*. Whitman proposed a democratic, human-centered sublime, but that did not, as Jeffers observed in “Shine, Perishing Republic,” survive the betrayals of empire. The content Jeffers tried to put back into the sublime was God. This was a radical move. T. S. Eliot made it cannily, going back not to Calvin but to the Anglican orthodoxy of Herbert and Laud, which still had an institutional constituency. Jeffers, with the blood of Jonathan Edwards in his veins, would have none of that. His God was as bleakly distant yet judgmentally close as Calvin’s, but figured through the bewildering spaces and potencies of modern science. In short, he was the hardest possible God to imagine, and the hardest possible one to love. Theology could not describe him, nor worship acclaim him. Only a poetry appropriately scaled to so great a task would serve.

Everson called Jeffers a religious *figure* rather than a religious poet, because he believed his project to be the recovery of God for the modern world (and for himself), and verse to be only his chosen medium. I doubt that Jeffers would have accepted such a characterization of his ends, or such a distinction between his ends and his means. Prose oversimplifies, even prose as poetically charged as Everson’s; but his point is not less well made for that, and Gelpi, in following it, seeks to offer us a Jeffers engaged in what we may (I hope not too grandly) call a divine reconstruction. It won’t be everyone’s Jeffers (why should there be only one?), but precisely because it is, to coin a phrase, the hardest possible Jeffers to accept, it is the one we most need to attend to.

Gelpi identifies other important themes in Jeffers too: his choice of place and sense of home, and the centrality of his relationship with Una, part muse, part model, and part Jungian *anima*. The choice of poems reflects these, as well as the larger religious context. So, crucially, does the structure of the book, which takes the form of an arch, with “Cawdor” as the vault connecting the early lyrical and meditative poems to the later ones. This self-consciously replicates the general structure of Jeffers’s own volumes, typically consisting of a large central narrative and a smaller, satellite one, surrounded by shorter poems. There’s no second narrative in *The Wild God of the World*—“Cawdor” is too large for that, and stands grandly alone—but it gives the rough general effect of a book designed by Jeffers himself: less a selection of the verse than an epitome of it. Gelpi calls *The Wild God of the World*—the phrase is Jeffers’s own, of course, from “Hurt Hawks”—an anthology, which, my Oxford tells me, is a “choice collection” or gathering. This it is, but something more, too: a provocation that urges us to read these mostly familiar poems in their most expansive and visionary context.

Gelpi's most important recovery, perhaps, is the long meditative poem "Point Pinos and Point Lobos," which Jeffers published in *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems* but chose to omit from his *Selected Poetry*, as did Hunt from his *Selected*. Jeffers may well have felt in retrospect that the poem was too transitional in thought and feeling, and perhaps too personally revealing as well, but, placed as it is in Gelpi, directly following "Continent's End" and "Point Joe" and hard by "Apology for Bad Dreams," it not only compels our attention but makes these poems read differently.⁷ Jeffers's own identification with the figure of Jesus is explicit here in a way he would no longer permit by the time he got to "Meditation on Saviors" and "Dear Judas," as is the post-Nietzschean despair at the idea of eternal recurrence that he would labor so hard to embrace: "Unhappy brother / That high imagination mating mine / Has gazed deeper than graves: is it unendurable / To know that the huge season and wheel of things / Turns on itself forever . . ." Jeffers would henceforth be more guarded, but the high style and argument of his maturity cannot be properly understood without the sense of struggle and even confusion from which it emerged.

We may wish, too, to consider why Gelpi chose "Cawdor" as the centerpiece of his volume—it makes a very Romanesque arch, taking up well over half the space allotted to the poetry as a whole. It is not an explicitly religious poem, and its hero is resolutely agnostic to the end ("We know nothing of God"). "Roan Stallion" would certainly have been a more economical choice, and "The Women at Point Sur" a more obvious one in terms of subject matter, though it would have required a volume half again as large to keep the same proportion between the longer and the shorter poems. The virtues of the poem are obvious, of course: a simple but powerful plot, derived from Euripides's *Hippolytus*; forceful and varied characterization; brilliant set-pieces; and, in the episode of the caged eagle's death dream, Jeffers's most rhetorically sustained encounter with the sublime. What makes "Cawdor" critical in the long span of Jeffers's narratives, however, is that it marks the point of transition between those whose quest-heroes attempt to storm the sublime—Tamar, California, Arthur Barclay—and those whose heroes endure rather than strive. Jesus himself is pivotal in this regard, because his legend uniquely embodies both aspects of the tragic agon: the man who, as Jeffers put it in "Point Pinos and Point Lobos," "wrestled for us against God," yet is ultimately signified by the image of the cross. In "Cawdor," Jeffers found in suffering rather than redemption the human task and the divine mystery. It was a vision he would hold to, to borrow a figure from his description of Cawdor, "like a man folding / A live coal in his hand."

As Gelpi points out, Jeffers shaped his verse forms not to please or gratulate, but to express human extremity, natural sublimity, and a religious vision adequate to his own experience of both. If he and Everson are correct, he

aspired as well to show what he called in “Roan Stallion” “the possible God” to a skeptical and despairing world. *The Wild God of the World* offers us the familiar canon as a poetry of testament, and a view of Jeffers as an iconic figure in more ways than one.

ENDNOTES

¹ Shakespeare: Mark Van Doren (1929, 1968), Babette Deutsch (1932), Rolfe Humphries (1932), John Gould Fletcher (1934); Homer: Babette Deutsch (1925, 1932), Mark Van Doren (1968); Sophocles (Edgar Lee Masters (1927), Louis Untermeyer (1928), Mark Van Doren (1929). Aeschylus, Euripides, Dante, Wordsworth, Whitman, and Hardy were also offered for comparison—and the Prophet Jeremiah. Sources: Alex A. Vardamis, *The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers: A Bibliographical Study* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972); Ann N. Ridgeway, *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, 1897–1962* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1968). Cf. Jeffers’s own comment on Dante: “You are far / From Dante’s feet, / but even farther from his dirty / Political hatreds” (“Be Angry at the Sun”).

² *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1963).

³ Ed. Tim Hunt (and subsequent volumes).

⁴ Ed. James Karman.

⁵ Ed. Tim Hunt.

⁶ To this should be added Everson’s critical study, *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988), with which *The Wild God of the World* is intimately linked.

⁷ Jeffers also placed “Point Pinos and Point Lobos” after “Point Joe” in *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems*.

R. Z.

The spring 2003 release of Albert Gelpi’s *The Wild God of the World* is a gift and blessing indeed, expeditiously ready for consideration in coming fall or spring seminars on 20th-Century or American Poetry and other courses, a sequel to the somewhat ungainly but prized 750-page *Selected Poetry* (Stanford UP, 2001), with text taken from the now-standard five-volume *Collected Poetry* (Stanford UP, 1988–2001). An important purpose of this collection is to make Jeffers readily available to the classrooms of America. The title is a fitting one, Gelpi notes, encompassing Jeffers’s two overriding themes, pantheism and Inhumanism. It is taken from the poet’s most notorious lyric, “Hurt Hawks,” with its memorable “I’d sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a

hawk,” epitomizing Jeffers’s career-long difficulty accepting mankind’s inappropriateness and, indeed, perversity. After a solid and provocative introduction, the collection’s two hundred pages present a galaxy of sixty-four poems along with five prose pieces, in which the latter the poet is allowed successively to expound his religious intent, sense of vocation, quarrel with Modernism, influence from his wife Una and the Carmel-Sur coast, preference for a posthumous reputation, and dedication to the divine “nature of things.”

Gelpi’s nineteen-page Introduction, a necessarily condensed effort to illuminate the poet’s complexity, is divided into four numbered parts: 1) an overview of Jeffers’s critical positioning, career, and reputation, 2) a biographical section admirably presented in terms of influences, 3) a discussion of themes subordinated to his overshadowing convictions of pantheism and Inhumanism, along with a stimulating discourse on the poet’s achievement of the sublime, and finally 4) a discussion of Jeffers’s long line and what is erroneously identified as his free verse.

Here to be found are helpful insights into the poet as he transmutes his father’s Covenanter Calvinism into evolutionary determinism, identifying original sin (also a poem title) as the radical schism within the race’s rebel consciousness—between the human and the divine. Calvin’s “hidden God” emerges as Jeffers’s cosmic god of cycle and discovery, unconcerned with human fates, leaving the race convicted of depravity and deserving doom, a “botched” evolutionary “experiment.” Calvin also explicates Jeffers’s view of human alienation from nature. Yet, though he repeatedly emphasizes this estrangement, Gelpi leaves room for Jeffers’s rare lines suggesting reconciliation. The editor’s discussion of the poet’s achievement in the sublime is a major, well-argued and documented contribution to Jeffers studies, consonant with Everson’s exposition of Jeffers’s poetry through the dimensions and vocabulary of Rudolph Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*.

In his Preface, the editor explains that his selection and juxtaposition of poems is meant to parallel Jeffers’s own custom of composing each volume with at least one sizeable narrative surrounded by short lyric poems that gave it “emotional and philosophical context.” Readers may be disappointed that only one page is given to explicating and justifying the selection of “Cawdor,” the narrative chosen, and no overt attempt to relate the selected poems to it. Given the limitations of the edition, however, this would have been impossible in any substantial way, but worth thinking about here.

“Cawdor” is indeed an excellent selection. Possibly the most symmetrical of Jeffers’s narratives, it makes strong use of the author’s voice in four lyric interludes interspersed amidst the story-telling, similar to the choruses between acts of a Greek play. Though it records three deaths and a bloody self-blinding, it ranks as lesser of the bloody horror stories that Jeffers is concerned about in “Apology for Bad Dreams.” The story’s plot follows the Phaedra-Hippolytus-

Theseus myth. A respected, widowed father of three grown children marries a woman his younger son's age, taking advantage of her penniless and fugitive plight, only to have her futilely attempt to seduce the son and, through her vengefully false accusation of rape, occasion the son's death at the hands of the father. The father's name, "Cawdor," reminds the reader of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with its vanity-of-human-wishes theme dramatized in the Thane of Cawdor whose pursuit of power proves illusory: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage . . . a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (*Macbeth* V, v. 19–28), an allusion already used in the poet's groundbreaking narrative "Tamar" (VI) as the heroine awakes to confront fallout from her deadly game of incest and seduction culminating in her lascivious beach dance for the ghosts of an extinct coastal tribe.

Jeffers's theme of life's instability and the need to accept reality's raw conditions is highlighted in Cawdor's foolishly attempted grasp for control, renewed youth, and security based on the seclusion of his island-like ranch and new marriage to a beautiful but desperate teenage girl. The story's opening action is interrupted by the narrator's apostrophe to a kingfisher's "laughter," directed at Cawdor's folly and the pitfalls of his militating against and not accepting the harsh realities of life's cycle. As the plot unfolds, the impersonal violence of nature's inexorable life-force becomes palpable, adding forest fire, a tidal flood, torrential rain, and tree-splintering winds that variously erode Cawdor's island, and step by step he learns his own vulnerability. Despite possible reader revulsion at Cawdor's slashing out his own eyes with an Indian cutting stone, the story's ending is one of Jeffers's most peaceful. Eyes have led this man to his folly that eventually took his son's life. Paradoxically the blind man now sees and accepts his action's consequences. Cawdor's story is almost unique in Jeffers's canon by having its protagonist await death with acceptance and wisdom, paralleled only by Orestes's return from madness in "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" and the "Inhumanist's" unconditional acceptance of World War III in *The Double Axe*.

Much more needs to be said of this work, for instance the fascination it had for Joseph Campbell, noted in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The caged eagle's death dream (138-41) is the second of three cosmogonies that Jeffers invented to image the reality that all life is tragically condemned to blindness, limitation, and pain, these cosmogonies being successively seen in the cosmic horse of "Roan Stallion," the caged eagle of "Cawdor," and the hanged-god of "At the Birth of an Age." In "Cawdor" Jeffers consciously reflects Jung in identifying the eagle's "archetype body of life" and the Life-Force as "scapegoat of the greater world." He engages Freud in the Oedipal and Electra patterns of his protagonists and has Hood repulse Fera by a self-castrating "Attis gesture" (100). He resonates with Homer in the extended similes that are unique to this

narrative. Mythology haunts the work: the Fisher King, Minos, Ariadne and the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, Orion the blinded hunter, Artemis as moon goddess (67), the conflict between the Old King and the New, and, of course, the Hippolytus/Phaedra story itself. And Biblical images mix with pagan as Fera becomes the Pieta's Madonna in Cawdor's workshop receiving the puma skin from the wall, "a descent from the cross . . . drawing the tyrannous nails from the pierced paws" (95) and then becomes the sacrificial priestess by donning the pelt as a ceremonial vestment. Jeffers's mythological intent is very clear throughout and serves as both vehicle and message for his insight that cycle rules all things despite human illusions.

The sixty-three lyrics that accompany this forty-page narrative, though taken from forty years of Jeffers's writing, do actually function to give "emotional and philosophical context" to the "Cawdor" story—by reflecting themes of vulnerability, cycle, essential violence, fatality, sacrifice, reconciliation of evil, detachment, and acceptance. Included are poems much anthologized and others that have totally eluded such popularity. Each has its justification. Selection is an anthologist's bane—here to be restricted to barely three score out of Jeffers's over five hundred poems in the *Collected Poetry*. Anyone who has spent time with Jeffers, especially teachers, will immediately notice missing favorites. One might protest: Where is that sublime cosmic prayer "Night"? Where are "Birth-Dues" and "Second Best" that tell of Jeffers's self-challenges to his poetic vocation? Where indeed is "Crumbs or the Loaf" claiming Biblical parallels with Jesus in his prophetic role, contrasting hard sayings with subversive parables? Where is "A Redeemer," Jeffers's self-caricature questioning his own saviorism? Where is the much-quoted "The Answer," promising peace only in cosmic perspective? Where is "To His Father," that conflicted, verbally complex tribute to Reverend William Hamilton Jeffers? Each Jeffers aficionado will have a list.

But to remain disappointed is to be hugely ungrateful. This anthology will bring many to Jeffers and thus attract readers to the fuller *Selected Poetry* and perhaps eventually to the five-volume *Collected Poetry*. The slim volume is an ambassador and excellent introduction. Here we find both prophetic anger and mystic quietude. Here is embodied nature's sacrament and Job's peace in the whirlwind. Jeffers has so often been pilloried for negativity, even for nihilism. Yet the nay-sayer is more valuable than one who asks no questions. The pantheist may have something expansive and liberating to tell the narrowly orthodox. It is even possible that the Inhumanist is actually the most human, having scoured the race of its infidelities and put it into its divinely cosmic context.

Note: Serendipitously this same spring of 2003 Albert Gelpi has edited *Dark God of Eros: A William Everson Reader*, a volume in Heyday Books' California Legacy series. As well as providing an introduction to the full range of

William Everson's achievement as a poet, printer, and religious autobiographer, such a publication is of interest to readers of *Jeffer Studies* because of Everson's contributions to Jeffers scholarship and his fierce dedication to the poet he considered his master. The table of contents includes a section titled "Everson and Jeffers," which reproduces four of Everson's statements on his precursor: "Not Without Wisdom" (1962), written when Everson was Brother Antoninus and included in his first critical book on Jeffers, *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury* (Oyez); an excerpt from *Archetype West* (1976) on Jeffers as the apotheosis of the West Coast archetype; "Divinely Superfluous Beauty" (1988), from Everson's second book on Jeffers as a "religious figure," *The Excesses of God* (Stanford UP); and "On Robinson Jeffers" (1990), an interview with Kevin Hearle in which Everson discusses "the power of the negative" in a range of Jeffers's themes. In the selection of poetry, Gelpi includes Everson's moving tribute, "The Poet Is Dead." Also, *Dark God of Eros* features handsome, color reproductions of samples of Everson's fine press printing, and two pages from *Granite and Cypress* (1975) are included: the title page and the poem "Not Our Good Luck." Gelpi (and Stanford UP) deserves thanks enough from Jeffersians for *The Wild God of the World; Dark God of Eros* doubles our debt to him (and Heyday Books) for providing an essential and comprehensive portrait of Jeffers's most important poetic heir.

R. B.

“*De Rerum Virtute*”: *A Critical Anatomy*

Steven Chapman

The evolutionary unity of humans with all other organisms is the cardinal message of Darwin’s revolution for nature’s most arrogant species.

—Stephen Jay Gould

“*De Rerum Virtute*,” published in the *Hungerfield* volume (1954), is one of Jeffers’s most tightly structured and meaning-laden poems, presenting in condensed form his late philosophical-theological-ethical positions on God, Nature, and man. The Latin title recalls most obviously Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, *On the Nature of Things*, but by substituting *Virtute* (valor, strength, manliness, courage, etc.) for *Natura*, the poem announces as its subject the virtue or value of things themselves. Already in the quaintly archaic title Jeffers is asking some bold and surprisingly modern questions concerning the intrinsic value of things (as opposed to their use value for human beings), and the correct ethical rapport between the human and non-human worlds. The need to move from a human-centered frame of reference toward a more holistic or ecocentric view is of course the central tenet of Jeffers’s philosophy of Inhumanism. But even as “*De Rerum Virtute*” deliberately references some of the philosophical positions expressed in *The Inhumanist*, it reveals him moving beyond the negative stance of the earlier work toward a more positive articulation of the value of that more-than-human reality, and of the human capacity to bring that reality into focus. In the late period, if I read him aright, Jeffers seeks to overcome the human/inhuman dichotomy by envisioning a more comprehensive “transhuman” perspective in which nature’s revelation of value and the human mind’s translation of that value are seen as two complementary aspects of a single continuous process or event. “*De Rerum Virtute*” is a kind of epitome of this late perspective, offering in five tightly packed stanzas a concise summary of Jeffers’s mature worldview encompassing ethics, aesthetics, and religion. I offer this reading because I believe that what Jeffers has to say is important, and because the most direct route to unraveling his meaning is by adhering to the text as closely as possible and following the strands of his thought.

The first stanza begins, Hamlet-like, with the narrator holding up a skull and orating on human vanity:

Here is the skull of a man: a man's thoughts and emotions
Have moved under the thin bone vault like clouds
Under the blue one: love and desire and pain,
Thunderclouds of wrath and white gales of fear
Have hung inside here: and sometimes the curious desire of knowing
Values and purpose and the causes of things
Has coasted like a little observer air-plane over the images
That filled this mind: it never discovered much,
And now all's empty, a bone bubble, a blown-out eggshell. (CP 3: 401)

All the stock elements of the graveyard discourse on human *vanitas* are present: the skull serving as a *memento mori*, the grave tone of the narrator, the enumeration of various human follies. Among the usual vanities (passion, fear, etc.) it is noteworthy that Jeffers singles out the “curious desire” of knowing the “values and purpose and causes of things.” Jeffers’s approach to metaphysical inquiry and the human will to knowledge is almost clinical, even as he counts himself among those tormented individuals who seek the truth. While the image of the “little observer air-plane” representing human reflective consciousness would seem to point to the limitations of our epistemological reconnaissance, these lines still suggest a positive valuation of the inquisitive mind’s quest for truth, within the tradition of those first philosophers whose passion it was to investigate the origin and nature of things. The stanza concludes, however, on a negative note with a bleak and almost Schopenhauerian assessment of the limits of human knowledge and the emptiness of all our philosophical conceits, poignantly expressed in the image of the skull as “a blown-out eggshell.”

The second stanza assumes a more positive approach, and contains some of Jeffers’s most audacious cosmological speculations to date concerning the origin and meaning of the universe and of life. Deftly, he takes the skull-as-eggshell metaphor and turns it around by attributing to the egg itself a degree of intelligence and purposefulness:

That's what it's like: for the egg too has a mind,
Doing what our able chemists will never do,
Building the body of a hatchling, choosing among the proteins:
These for the young wing-muscles, these for the great
Crystalline eyes, these for the flighty nerves and brain:
Choosing and forming: a limited but superhuman intelligence,
Prophetic of the future and aware the past:

The hawk's egg will make a hawk, and the serpent's
 A gliding serpent: but each with a little difference
 From its ancestors—and slowly, if it works, the race
 Forms a new race: that also is a part of the plan
 Within the egg. 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 firewheel
 On which we are pinned, the whirlwind of stars in which our sun is one dust-grain, one electron, this giant
 atom of the universe
 Is not blind force, but fulfils its life and intends its courses. "All things are full of God.
 Winter and summer, day and night, war and peace are God." (CP 3: 401-02)

The opening salvo, "That's what it's like," points to the poet's craft as a maker and monger of metaphors, while also showing how Jeffers, as a master of his craft, can twist metaphors around to elicit new meanings. The logic of metaphor works both ways: just as the mind is like an eggshell, so too is the eggshell like a mind. Through this linguistic play, Jeffers prepares the ground for an idea which is both ancient and modern, namely, that the egg, along with the rest of nature, is endowed with the properties of mind and intelligence which is "like" the human mind. In this view, contrasting starkly with Cartesian dualism and mechanical reductionism, nature and mind are seen as two aspects of a single reality, and nature itself is deemed to possess an indwelling creative intelligence somewhat analogous to human intelligence.

Building on his knowledge of the new sciences of molecular biology and genetics, Jeffers points to the significance of the organism "choosing among the proteins" to develop into its particular morphology. It is worth noting that Jeffers wrote these lines at about the same time as the genetic code of the DNA double-helix was first cracked, *prima facie* evidence of the "limited but superhuman intelligence" inhering in nature. This is just one example of the extraordinary synchronicity between Jeffers's cosmological speculations and contemporary advances in physics and biology. While Jeffers followed closely the advances of the natural sciences throughout his mature career, his engagement with quantum physics and evolutionary biology in the late period seems to have opened up for him a whole new poetic universe, enabling him to combine science and poetry together to form a comprehensive worldview reminiscent of the great cosmologists of antiquity.

That Jeffers is not simply throwing around metaphors but is serious about offering an explicitly non-mechanistic perspective on evolution is made clear by the ensuing discourse on comparative morphology. Jeffers shared with

Goethe, Lamarck, and Ernst Haeckel (the founder of modern ecology) a developmental view of evolutionary processes in which each species reproduces itself “with a little difference from its ancestors” in a sequence of morphological transformations. In this view (closer to Erasmus Darwin than to his more famous relation) each species is related to every other species within a succession of life forms which together compose a single coherent narrative extending through time. This is very different from and in fact incompatible with the Darwinian model of random mutation and natural selection.

Where Jeffers really starts transgressing beyond the limits of established Darwinian theory is with his contention that all forms of life are related to each other as part of a single “plan” present from the beginning (“part of the plan / Within the egg”). Jeffers was well aware of the unorthodoxy of these views, which helps explain the shift in tone mid-stanza from one of statement of fact to one of opinion/belief: “I believe the first living cell / Had echoes of the future in it, and felt / Direction.” In Jeffers’s view, life did not simply evolve at random from lesser to greater complexity, but is part of an interconnected process, to be grasped backwards as well as forwards through time. This notion of evolution as somehow influenced from the very beginning by an end-oriented “direction” recalls the basic Artistotelean concept of “entelechy,” that the end of anything (*telos*) is already present or implicit in its beginning. Without maintaining that everything is predetermined, Jeffers did believe that there is a direction and coherence to how the cosmos and life came to be, and that there has to be an overarching relationship or narrative which connects all things across space and time and which has both a beginning and some sort of end-goal or purpose.

A similar *credo* is repeated a little further down: “I believe this globed earth / Not all by chance and fortune brings forth her broods, / But feels and chooses.” Even as Jeffers believed science to be an indispensable component of any unified worldview, he rejected the mechanistic picture of the universe presented then as now by mainstream academic science. According to the mechanistic view, the origin and variety of species can be explained by random biochemical and environmental encounters (“by chance and fortune”). Jeffers proposes instead the seemingly unscientific alternative view that the planet, considered as a whole, “feels and chooses” its way forward through time, and that the diversity of species and their dynamic interactions can be explained by the working through of the “superhuman intelligence” informing evolutionary processes.

In attributing to nature sentience and intentionality (and by implication, consciousness), Jeffers is aware that he is crossing over to a mythic and very ancient understanding of the world, which helps to explain the following deliberately archaic image of the earth as a mother “bring[ing] forth” her “broods.” Through this oblique tribute to old Mother Nature, Jeffers seems to be suggesting that the ancient understanding of the earth as a nurturing goddess (as

in Lucretius's *alma Venus*) is closer to the truth than the modern picture of the universe as the product of pure contingency. In another example of how Jeffers's cosmological musings point ahead to ideas and concepts worked out by later theorists, his use here of the goddess metaphor to explain the properties of self-organization and intelligence inherent in nature bears an uncanny resemblance to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which holds that the globed earth can be understood as a single super-organism endowed with complex circuits of intelligence gathering, feedback, and creative adaptation. Today, many scientists believe that life could not have come about by pure chance, and that intelligence and purposefulness are intrinsic to the way the world is organized. In short, trends in modern physics and in the life sciences are bringing nature back to life in a way Jeffers seems to have anticipated.

The following almost dizzying analogy between very small and very large bodies, in which the sun is portrayed as but one "electron" in the "giant atom" of the universe (as in Niels Bohr's popular image of the atom composed of electrons swirling around the nucleus), serves to emphasize the interconnection and embeddedness of the various layers which make up the whole. In Jeffers's holistic cosmology, everything is connected to everything else in a series of nested dynamic relationships extending from the smallest particles to the largest stars. The universe as a whole can be conceived of as an autonomous self-organizing and self-creative structure or system which is both alive and inherently purposeful, pursuing its course not through the random vicissitudes of chance and fortune, but as the fulfillment of its destiny and being.

The final verse of the stanza, set off in quotation marks—"All things are full of God. / Winter and summer, day and night, war and peace are God."—is both an echo of the famous fragment of Thales of Miletus that all things are full of gods (*panta plere theon*) and a deliberate reference to Jeffers's own Faust-like interrogations at the beginning of "The Inhumanist" (compare the opening lines of Chapter I: "Winter and summer . . . rain and the drought; / Peace creeps out of war, war out of peace" [CP 3: 256]). Even as Jeffers was scornful of the "anthropoid God" of Judeo-Christian tradition, he was by no means an atheist, but more like what Lessing labeled Spinoza: "a man drunk with God"; or perhaps more correctly: "a man tormented by God." What Jeffers means by God is the whole, which encompasses and transcends the parts. Just as the total relation of cells in the body make up the organism, so in Jeffers's organic cosmology every part of the universe is connected to every other part, and it is the totality of those interrelationships which may properly be called God. This notion of God as the abiding singularity of the universe, conscious and alive, is worked out in some detail in "The Inhumanist," and his short-hand referencing of these ideas here suggests that the question of God is still paramount in his mind.

The third stanza interrupts these lofty speculations with a brief aside on the limits of human knowledge and an appreciation of the epistemological consequences not only of human mortality, but of the mortality of the sun and stars as well:

Thus the thing stands; the labor and the games go on—
What for? What for?—Am I a God that I should know?
Men live in peace and happiness; men live in horror
And die howling. Do you think the blithe sun
Is ignorant that black waste and beggarly blindness trail him like hounds,
And will have him at last? He will be strangled
Among his dead satellites, remembering magnificence. (*CP* 3: 402)

The repeated cry “What for? What for?” gets to the very heart of the tragic dimension of the human search for meaning within a seemingly indifferent universe. The rhetorical question—“Am I a God that I should know?” recalls the opening study scene of Goethe’s *Faust* where Doktor Faustus, in amazed reaction at the sign of the *Makrokosmos*, exclaims: “Bin ich ein Gott? Mir wird so licht!”—“Am I a God? Let the light shine!” Like Goethe, Jeffers was concerned with testing the limits of the human understanding of the world and, again like Goethe, believed the knowledge gained through observation of nature’s inner workings to be a kind of knowledge of God and thus, within the limited realm of human consciousness, a reflex of the greater self-consciousness of God. Such speculations are here pre-empted by the obvious implied answer that, no, he is not a God, but the point remains that Jeffers doesn’t use the name of God in vain.

The dominant tone of this stanza is of tragic pessimism, bordering on nihilism. It is as if, having in his time sufficiently contemplated the course of men’s fouled lives and more miserable deaths, Jeffers arrives at a state of passive resignation like the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, accepting without further metaphysical ado that the sun rises and sets over the just and the wicked alike, and that it makes little sense to fret about the evils in the world. But Jeffers goes beyond such canonical interpretations of the tragic view of life by noting how even the sun, source of all energy in the solar system, is finite and will burn itself out in the end. This is basic thermodynamics, of course, but raises an important question regarding the conditions of all human knowing. Entropy, and the fact that the earth and everything in the solar system face eventual but certain annihilation, would seem to prescribe certain limits as to how far our claims of knowledge can pass beyond the circumscribing factors of our present human condition—a condition which is itself determined by our relative position in space and time.

The following depiction of the sun's future as "black waste" and "beggarly blindness" would seem to point to the modern hypothesis of stars turning into "black holes" in which collapsed supernovas along with their "dead satellites" are sucked into highly compacted vortices, creating blind spots in the cosmic picture about which we know very little at all. At the same time, the elegiac and almost Keatsian image of the sun "remembering" his previous magnificence raises again the question of the role of consciousness within the larger time scales of the cosmos. Is it really possible that all thinking will be snuffed out? Or will there be some kind of remnant consciousness or remembering of earlier stages of existence even after life on earth is over? Without answering directly, Jeffers seems to suggest that if consciousness was part of the plan from the beginning there must be a role for consciousness throughout the entire unfolding of the cosmological drama until the end, although what future forms consciousness may assume is not worked out in any definitive eschatology.

The fourth stanza turns from the abstract to the particular, and to Jeffers's own position as an observing subject who no longer takes the stars for granted. This stanza also moves to address the central question of the poem, already implicit in the opening stanza, concerning the correct relationship between human beings and the larger community of life:

I stand on the cliff at Sovranes creek-mouth.
Westward beyond the raging water and the bent shoulder of the world
The bitter futile war in Korea proceeds, like an idiot
Prophesying. It is too hot in mind
For anyone, except God perhaps, to see beauty in it. Indeed it is hard to see beauty
In any of the acts of man: but that means the acts of a sick microbe
On a satellite of a dust-grain twirled in a whirlwind
In the world of stars. . . .
Something perhaps may come of him; in any event
He can't last long.—Well: I am short of patience
Since my wife died . . . and this era of spite and hate-filled half-worlds
Gets to the bone. I believe that man too is beautiful,
But it is hard to see, and wrapped up in falsehoods. Michael Angelo and the Greek sculptors—
How they flattered the race! Homer and Shakespeare—
How they flattered the race! (*CP* 3: 402-03)

Jeffers begins his discourse by situating himself at a specific place and time, here the mouth of Sovranes (Soberanes) Creek south of Carmel, gazing figuratively over the ocean at the violence raging in Korea "prophesying" "like an idiot." Or is it Jeffers himself prophesying like an idiot? As in "The Inhumanist," Jeffers only reluctantly and with irony assumes the mantle of the modern soothsayer whose role it is to point out, Cassandra-like, the horrible truth. War

and prophecy have been connected since the fall of Troy, and Jeffers believed it was part of his calling to point out the prophetic significance of the ongoing outbursts of violence in the world, even if, as here, he distances himself from the official role of prophet (justified or not). Whether it is the Korean War or Jeffers who is prophesying, the message is the same, namely, that modern technological civilization is founded on violence and pointed toward more massive violence (for earlier statements to this effect, see “The Purse-Seine” and “Self-Criticism in February”), and that the conflict in Korea can be seen as a prophetic foretaste of the inevitable mass disasters to follow.

In the first stanza, Jeffers developed the idea of a parallelism between human intelligence and the intelligence inherent in evolutionary processes. In this stanza, he explores the actual current dysfunctional relationship between human beings and the rest of planetary life, as well as the larger evolutionary implications of modern humanity’s ongoing destruction of the biosphere. That modern civilization is engaged in a perpetual war against nature is a staple of Jeffers’s outlook from the beginning. In the late period, jolted by the massive military technologies unleashed during World War II, and especially by the quantum leap in destructive capacities brought into play by thermonuclear warfare, Jeffers began to realize that humanity was becoming a macrophase power, capable of destroying the basic life-sustaining systems of the planet. From an evolutionary perspective this is quite an anomaly, an unheard-of aberration of the ecological order whereby one out-of-control species severely impacts the entire life-community of the planet. By identifying the acts of man with “the acts of a sick microbe” Jeffers highlights this pathological aspect of the human experiment, which in its uncontrolled proliferation and parasitism of other forms of life can be seen as a kind of epidemic—a planetary scourge. This diagnosis of the human condition, ecologically considered, echoes earlier statements to similar effect, such as can be found in “Orca” (published in *The Double Axe*): “the breed of man / Has been queer from the start. It looks like a botched experiment that has run wild and ought to be stopped” [CP 3: 206]. In spite of such reflexive outbursts (cf. Chapter L of “The Inhumanist”: “Lord God: Exterminate / The race of man” [CP 3: 308]), Jeffers was prophetically aware that the destinies of human evolution and of the evolution of life on earth are henceforward tethered together, for better or for worse, and that both human beings and the larger biotic community are entering into a new and unprecedented chapter in the unfolding history of life.

In this poem, consistent with the more optimistic outlook of the postwar period, Jeffers leaves the door open for a more positive, alternative future for humanity when he says that “something perhaps may come of him” after all. I take this to mean that Jeffers held out hope that human beings may yet evolve in a fashion adequate to the evolutionary challenges ahead. This is about as cheery as Jeffers gets about the prospects for the race, and his doubts on the

subject are made clear in the following proviso that “in any event / He can’t last long.” And yet, immediately following, he affirms as a matter of faith: “I believe that man too is beautiful.” And then again, as if inviting the reader to bear witness to his inner struggles and contradictions, this positive assessment is tempered by a critique of the arrogant, anthropocentric humanism of the Classical and Renaissance traditions: “Homer and Shakespeare— / How they flattered the race!”

The question remains: What indeed may come of man? And in what sense can man be called “beautiful”? The answer(s), which Jeffers seems to be edging his way toward, is that human beings need to break out of their anthropocentric autism and reinvent themselves at the species level as part of the larger biotic community. What I believe Jeffers is intimating, behind all the negations and provisos, is the possibility of an “ecological humanism,” a definition of humanity as part of, rather than separate from, the rest of nature. There are both critical and utopian dimensions to Jeffers’s anthropology, and while the emphasis in much of the poetry up to and including “The Inhumanist” is on the negative consequences of humanity’s historical illusions, here he seems to suggest the possibility of a more positive ordering of the relationship between the human and non-human worlds, even a kind of “self-overcoming” of humanity from its currently destructive and unsustainable modes of existence toward a new mode in which human beings co-evolve with the rest of life in a mutually beneficial manner and end in honor. How exactly this can be achieved is not worked out in detail, but it is a testament to the hopeful side of Jeffers’s character that he leaves the door open for such felicitous alternative scenarios.

The fifth and final stanza, like the final movement of a great symphony, recapitulates the main themes of the poem in a virtuoso presentation of Jeffers’s mature eco-theological worldview, involving the affirmation of the value and the beauty of the natural world (“things”) as well as a decidedly positive valuation of the human ability to capture and reflect that beauty:

One light is left us: the beauty of things, not men;
The immense beauty of the world, not the human world.
Look—and without imagination, desire nor dream—directly
At the mountains and sea. Are they not beautiful?
These plunging promontories and flame-shaped peaks
Stopping the sombre stupendous glory, the storm-fed ocean? Look at the Lobos Rocks off the shore,
With foam flying at their flanks, and the long sea-lions
Couching on them. Look at the gulls on the cliff-wind,
And the soaring hawk under the cloud-stream—
But in the sage-brush desert, all one sun-stricken
Color of dust, or in the reeking tropical rain-forest,

Or in the intolerant north and high thrones of ice—is the earth not beautiful?
Nor the great skies over the earth?
The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.
It is in the beholder’s eye, not the world? Certainly.
It is the human mind’s translation of the transhuman
Intrinsic glory. It means that the world is sound,
Whatever the sick microbe does. But he too is part of it. (*CP* 3: 403)

The use of the light metaphor (“One light is left us”) to suggest a kind of spiritual teaching points again to the religious dimension of this poem. But whereas in the Judeo-Christian tradition “light” is something from outside the world which comes into the world to illuminate the darkness (cf. John 1.5, “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”), for Jeffers the light is the self-revelatory structure of God/Nature radiantly manifest to human perception. There is also discernable in these lines a sense of the spiritual neediness of the modern condition, that the traditional religious answers to the big questions are no longer sufficient, and that new sources of illumination (“light”) are needed to inspire the race at this critical juncture.

The emphatic directive to turn to the beauty of things, *not men*, to the beauty of the world, *not the human world*, reiterates the basic thrust of Jeffers’s Inhumanist philosophy that human beings need to break free from their human-centered ways of looking at things and embrace a larger view in which the non-human world assumes primary importance, expressed consistently from such early articulations as “Roan Stallion” (“Humanity is the mould to break away from”), to “Sign-Post” (“Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity”), to “Carmel Point” in the *Hungerfield* volume (“We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we were made from”). Typically for Jeffers, this shift in perspective is cast explicitly in terms of a conversion experience, a *metanoia*, or mind-change involving real transformation of consciousness, analogous to the Christian idea of spiritual rebirth. In Jeffers’s view, the natural world is the true source of all meaning and value, and human beings need first of all to listen to and adhere to that reality, be born again as part of that reality. This is the “light” or teaching that Jeffers proclaims here and elsewhere with all the passion of a proselytizing preacher.

The following exhortation to “look . . . directly” at the natural world suggests a relationship between the observing subject and the objects of perception which is direct and participatory rather than analytical and detached. To see nature properly, Jeffers believed, we must cast off as far as possible our human prejudices and distortions and focus on things themselves. This is, once again, a very Goethean perspective, namely, that by dwelling in the phenomenon we can learn directly from the creative intelligence inhering in nature.

Goethe called this way of looking at things *Intellektuelle Anschauung*, usually translated as intuition, or intuitive knowledge (as opposed to discursive or analytical knowledge). Like Goethe, Jeffers believed that there exists an innate sympathy between nature's creativity and the divinatory powers of the poetic imagination, and that the natural beauty so revealed, far from being a secondary or inessential quality, is in fact an intimation of the inherent truth and goodness of nature which presents itself freely to our powers of perception, whether or not we accept the teaching.

As if to prove the point, the poetry in the following lines is some of Jeffers's finest to date, and belies the assumption that he suffered from any diminishment of his creative faculties in the late period. The resonances and alliterations in such phrases as *plunging promontories*, the *sombre stupendous glory* of the ocean, the *foam flying* at the *flanks* of rocks captures a sense of the palpable presence of nature in strong virile verse. His ear for language and literary tradition enables him to roll off Homeric- and Old Saxon-sounding epithets to superb effect, from the "storm-fed" ocean, to the gulls flying on the "cliff-wind," to the hawks soaring under the "cloud-stream." The rhapsodic evocation of natural forms in these lines makes the poetry itself seem an almost transparent medium for the self-expression of nature's beauty—no doubt the stylistic intent. For Jeffers, there is no question that art copies nature, and that the job of poetry is to reflect the beauty inherent in the natural world. As he put it in "The Beauty of Things" (also in the *Hungerfield* volume): "to feel / Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the natural / Beauty, is the sole business of poetry" (*CP* 3: 369).

This intensely lyrical and exuberant display of word-craft modulates back into the dominant religious tonality of the stanza with a rhetorical question which sounds very much like a catechism: "is the earth not beautiful? / Nor the great skies over the earth?" Jeffers's use, here and elsewhere, of a deliberately archaic literary-religious language, resounding in the sonorities of the King James Bible, raises some prickly questions as to how seriously we should take this aspect of his poetry. Is he being simply ironic and mocking, or does he really see himself, in some sense, as a religious teacher? And how do we, as readers and critics of Jeffers, approach this dimension of his work? Without belaboring the point, I would argue that we will understand this and other of Jeffers's poems better if we grasp that what he is offering is in many ways like a religious teaching, involving a coherent spiritual and ethical framework which speaks of ultimate values, truth, beauty, and God.

The proclamation of a new post-humanist philosophy and religion is of course the principal burden of "The Inhumanist." In fact, much of what Jeffers is up to here can be clarified by cross-referencing the earlier poem. In Chapter IX, for instance, the "old man" (Jeffers's cantankerous alter-ego) clarifies how our sense of earthly beauty points to the integrity and divinity of things them-

selves. Just as mathematics and physics provide the astronomer with metaphors to understand the universe, “so the human sense / Of beauty is our metaphor of their excellence, their divine nature” (CP 3: 260). And then in a key passage in Chapter XLV the old man assumes explicitly the role of teacher and prophet addressing “future children” who will come after him: “There is one God, and the earth is his prophet. / The beauty of things is the face of God: worship it” (CP 3: 304). That the earth and not Moses or Mohammed is considered God’s “prophet” is another way of saying that God reveals himself to us through the order and beauty of the natural world rather than through scriptural tradition. Human awareness and recognition of that beauty is thus a kind of worship, an adoration, a natural piety.

In this poem, with its focus on ethics, the revelation of the beauty of things is linked explicitly to the revelation of their intrinsic value: “The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.” Here, by a circuitous route, we have the answer to the riddle of the Latin title, namely, that the value of things is confirmed and made visible to us through the manifestation of their beauty. The logic here might seem a bit muddled, but it is important to keep in mind that for Jeffers aesthetics, ethics, and religion are not separate stages or modes of apprehension (as they are, say, for Kierkegaard), but outward aspects or “fields” of a single deeper matrix reality. Like the Neoplatonists, Jeffers believed in the fundamental unity of the good, the beautiful, and the true, so that the revelation of the beauty of things is also, in equal measure, the revelation of their truth and of their virtue and value (*virtus*).

Once again, as in the previous stanza, Jeffers seems bothered by epistemological doubts, an uneasiness apparent in the ensuing question/assertion “It is in the beholder’s eye, not the world?” This is of course the old Kantian query concerning the relationship between things-in-themselves (*Dinge an sich*) and our mental representations (*Vorstellungen*) of those things. The answer, which Jeffers now offers in self-confident and explicitly post-Kantian terms, is that beauty is *both* in the beholder’s eye *and* in the world. The following verse clarifies this relationship in a particularly felicitous construction: “It is the human mind’s translation of the transhuman / Intrinsic glory.” Once again, we are referred back to the conceptual world of “The Inhumanist,” as this is an almost verbatim quote from Chapter VIII of that poem: “The beauty of things— / Is in the beholder’s brain—the human mind’s translation of their transhuman / Intrinsic value.” Here, by substituting “glory” for “value” Jeffers not only avoids repetition, but intones once again the religious dimension (beauty as the manifestation of glory or *doxa*), and his homage to the “transhuman intrinsic glory” reads very much like a pantheistic doxology, a literal *gloria mundi*.

The term “transhuman” here seems particularly apt, and is perhaps a better description of what Jeffers means by ultimate reality than his more common

term “Inhuman.” The word derives from the opening canto of Dante’s *Paradiso* where it is used to signify a conversion experience and spiritual rebirth (“Transumanar significar per verba / non si poria”; “words cannot signify what it means to go beyond the human”). While Jeffers shares with Dante a poetics geared towards conversion, his understanding of what it means to go beyond humanity is closer to Nietzsche’s idea of the Superman (*Übermensch*) than to Dante’s embrace of the ineffable and inarticulate. “Transhuman” would seem preferable to “Inhuman” as well because it escapes the human/inhuman dichotomy and points to that reality which is beyond the human, rather than merely opposed to the human. For Jeffers, the human is not something to be simply negated in favor of the non-human (the “naïve” interpretation of Inhumanism), but to be overcome through a kind of self-transcendence or evolutionary leap, leading to the reintegration of a transfigured humanity as a co-evolutionary partner and participant in the greater transhuman reality.

“Trans-” also means “through,” and a possible complementary meaning of the term “transhuman” involves the sense that ultimate reality only appears via or through the human. Just as modern physicists have pointed out the significance of the mutual implication of the observing subject and the observed facts, so Jeffers was aware of the paradox that, in spite of the ontological priority of things themselves, it is only through the human that the transhuman reality comes into focus in all its glory. By suggesting that the revelation of the transhuman glory cannot be separated from the human translation of the same, Jeffers is pointing to a much more exalted definition of humanity than is found in the earlier poems. While this line of inquiry is not pursued here directly, it may be inferred that the more positive assessment of humanity’s future intuited in the previous stanza (“something perhaps may come of him”) is connected to the human ability to bring into conscious awareness the splendor of the transhuman world. This implies not only that human beings are part of the larger plan present from the beginning of evolution (“the plan within the egg”), but that the human sense for beauty is in fact one of the fulfillments, intentions, and purposes of the world. And since in Jeffers’s aesthetically charged eco-theology God/Nature wants the same sense of beauty that man wants, the human recognition of that beauty is one of the ways God comes to know himself.

If this interpretation of Jeffers’s creative evolution during the final period is correct, “De Rerum Virtute” can be viewed as a pivotal poem, marking a transition from the Inhumanist phase (roughly 1938–1947) with its mainly negative assessment of the human condition toward a later cosmological or Transhumanist phase (roughly 1948–1962) marked by a less critical and even positive valuation of the role of humanity within the unfolding cosmic drama. Thus while the poem explicitly references “The Inhumanist,” it also points ahead to ideas and concepts which come to the fore in the very late poetry,

especially in the grandiose vision of the evolving universe presented in the posthumously published *The Beginning and the End*. Many of the issues touched upon here—such as the purposeful organizational structure inherent in evolutionary processes, the idea that the entire universe can be understood as a single living organism, the awareness of the depth-dimension of human consciousness as one of the “sense organs of God”—all receive fuller treatment in the longer poem. These points of contact, along with the further elaboration of a “neo-Lucretian” style combining myth and science, suggest that the direction of his poetic ambition during the final period was to fashion an explicitly cosmological poetic discourse which would take as its subject the universe story itself, how the cosmos and life and human beings came to be. That Jeffers was never able to complete the larger poem only makes “De Rerum Virtute” that much more significant, both as a kind of précis of his mature worldview, and as a portal into the rich conceptual universe of his late cosmological imaginings.

The Work of the Edition: Some Possible Lessons and Directions

Tim Hunt

Editors' note: The following is a slightly modified text of the Keynote Lecture given at the opening of the Robinson Jeffers Conference at Stanford University, 25 May 2002.

Before I try to address the topic I've been given, I'd like to call your attention to something else that I think is important. A conference like this one is not only an occasion to share ideas and debate the implications of our different perspectives, it is also a reminder that we are a community of readers, and that this community has persevered and grown richer over time through the belief and work of several generations of scholars. The earliest generation—Powell, Bennett, Klein, and others—we now know only through their work and our memory, but those of us here today represent all the succeeding generations. So I think of this conference as a kind of family reunion. As a community, we are still young enough to recognize that and still small enough to value it. In the coming years as this organization grows and as our discussions of Jeffers broaden, deepen, and draw in additional voices and perspectives, it will be, I'd suggest, our privilege and our responsibility to maintain the sense of community we share today.

Last summer Brad Leithauser reviewed the new Stanford *Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* for *The New York Times*. I'm guessing that many of you read the piece. Like Yvor Winters and Kenneth Rexroth before him, Leithauser casts Jeffers as a minor figure—one who appeals to naïve readers who overlook his failings as a poet in their zeal for his overly sentimental ideas about nature, history, and God. Jeffers, he suggests, is too much a regionalist, had too little awareness of (and less regard for) modern developments in poetry, and paid too little attention to the poetic tradition and how the work of earlier poets might enrich his own. And he sees Jeffers (I think this is the central issue for him) as a poor craftsman. According to Leithauser, Jeffers “belie[ved] that it's sufficient merely to speak of beautiful things, without necessarily putting a beautiful finish upon them” and that this is why “Jeffers so often settled for inflated but limp expressions of praise and wonderment.” Jeffers, it seems,

couldn't or wouldn't turn his coastal material on the lathe of poetic craft and offers merely the driftwood that might have been turned into beautiful aesthetic objects had Jeffers had the skill, discipline, and commitment to craft to do so. Jeffers apparently failed to recognize that basic precept of all current poetry writing courses that poetry should show instead of tell.

This may seem an odd way to start a consideration of how the Stanford edition of the *Collected Poetry* might contribute to new directions in our individual and collective work with Jeffers, but I want to suggest that one possible lesson that the material in the edition offers is that Jeffers was quite aware throughout his career of both the poetry of past generations and his own time; that he thought of his work and career partly in terms of how he was extending, modifying, or countering the projects of other major poets; and that he was actually carefully crafting his lines and poems to realize his aesthetic goals. The fifth volume of the *Collected Poetry* offers various examples that I think support these claims, but my guess is that they wouldn't convince Leithauser, because I think the root of the problem is that Leithauser neither recognizes nor acknowledges the kind of poetry Jeffers was writing. If so, this means our challenge is a double one: It is partly to establish the literariness of Jeffers, and it is partly to work out the particular nature of that literariness and why it is a legitimate alternative to the kinds of poetry that Leithauser and others do understand and acknowledge.

Contemporary poetry might seem far removed from the High Modernism that Pound, Eliot, and others championed in the early decades of the first half of twentieth century, but in poetry writing classes these days we insist that poems must show, not tell, and this belief has its roots in the modernist revolt against nineteenth-century rhetoric. Pound insisted that beautiful sentiments bathed in sonorous generalizations could not be considered poetry. Poetry, he preached, should avoid rhetoric; it should avoid abstraction. While we need to acknowledge the value of the modernist campaign against rhetoric and the stylistic possibilities the modernists pioneered, we also need to recognize that modernist experiment, the tactics for minimizing or even eliminating rhetoric, can lead to an atrophied sense of discourse and an atrophied sense of the poem as an actual exchange with the reader. Jeffers, I think, sensed this quite early, and it is one of the reasons he chose to write against the modernist grain. For Jeffers the challenge was to fashion a sufficiently modern rhetoric for poetry so that it could address modern readers. For Pound and those who followed his lead, the task was to free poetry from its rhetorical roots so that the poem could stand as a fully realized modern object. For Pound and the modernists the page became at root a space to inscribe writing, a place to show. For Jeffers, the page became, instead, a space to enact speech and remained a place where one might tell as well as show.

For Leithauser Jeffers's willingness to "tell" is the basis of an array of aesthetic sins. I would like to suggest, instead, that this willingness is actually a key aspect of Jeffers's craft and an important feature of his achievement. I want to suggest, that is, that recognizing the nature of Jeffers's rhetoric and its role in his poems can help us appreciate the way that they are more than (as Leithauser puts it) "inflated but limp expressions of praise and wonderment."

"The Ocean's Tribute," a late poem, suggests that Jeffers was quite aware of his willingness to tell, that this meant he was at odds with critical fashion, and that he wrote this way as a matter of aesthetic principle:

Yesterday's sundown was very beautiful—I know it is out of fashion to say so, I think we are fools
To turn from the superhuman beauty of the world and dredge our own minds—it built itself up with ceremony
From the ocean horizon, smoked amber and tender green, pink and purple and vermilion, great ranks
Of purple cloud, and the pink rose-petals over all and through all; but the ocean itself, cold slate-color,
Refused the glory. Then I saw a pink fountain come up from it,
A whale-spout; there were ten or twelve whales quite near the deep shore, playing together, nuzzling each other,
Plunging and rising, lifting luminous pink pillars from the flat ocean to the flaming sky. (*CP* 3:439)

Jeffers here "speak[s] of beautiful things"; but he is less interested in making the poem a world unto itself than in pointing to a world and qualities that he claims are outside the poem, and he seems unconcerned with giving his piece "a beautiful finish." The poem exemplifies what Leithauser finds problematic about Jeffers. It opens with a flat, even abstract statement. It tells rather than shows. It moralizes. The metaphor of "ceremony" is an instance of the pathetic fallacy. What the piece apparently needs is Ezra Pound's red pencil to slash away the underbrush of "I knows" and "I saws" and reveal the imagist lyric hidden within.

But "The Ocean's Tribute" is more than a digest of Jeffers's apparent flaws. The speaker "know[s]" that it is "out of fashion to say" what he is saying and that he is saying it in an unfashionable way. Jeffers seems to recognize, that is, that his work is discursive and overtly rhetorical, and he knows that this is what makes it "unfashionable." More, he makes this writing against the grain of the time a gesture within the poem, even though writing unfashionably has no direct connection to the sunset and could be dropped without changing the scene. That Jeffers knows his manner "is out of fashion" but emphasizes this within the poem points to his willingness to challenge the poetic fashion that he rejects, and it implies that he willingly risks having his work misunderstood and devalued. But even more it suggests that this poem is as much about aesthetics—*aesthetic purpose and aesthetic value*—as about the sunset. It proposes a particular way of seeing and relating to natural beauty (one where the poem is less an object that embodies a beauty derived or transformed from the

world and instead more a process of reflecting on beauty). Also, the poem models a particular way of addressing the reader (as a potential listener to the speaker's dramatized speaking), and it critiques (at least implicitly) current poetic and critical fashion. And perhaps most fundamentally the poem reflects Jeffers's sense that poetic language and the poem can never compete with or contain nature but that the poem instead stands as a witness to the world beyond it. For Jeffers, poetry leads us out of the poem (beyond the routines and conventions of culture) to a recognition of the beauty of objects, modes of being, and transformations in nature that are always and necessarily beyond the poem.

While "The Ocean's Tribute" can be seen (on the surface) as the work of someone content "merely to speak of beautiful things, without necessarily putting a beautiful finish upon them," the poem is not (as Leithauser might conclude) merely a lesser attempt at "In a Station of the Metro" with an outdoor setting. We are not dealing with a poet who fails to write a properly modern lyric, but to see this we must attend not just to the finish of the phrases but to how Jeffers situates the poem rhetorically and how it unfolds as an observation of a beautiful moment. The poem does not crystalize a moment of heightened perception nor has it been crafted to be an object that becomes the equivalence of such a moment and its possible replacement. Instead, "The Ocean's Tribute" enacts a dramatized speaker, then unfolds the speaker's process of both perception and reflection. The poem moves from a kind of rhetorical self-consciousness that compromises the speaker's ability to enter fully into the experience of the perceptual moment and the simple beauty it offers (a beauty so simple and common we have deadened it into a cliché and declared it poetically out of fashion) on to imaginative dramatizations of the landscape (the imputation that the sunset is to itself a ceremony), then pivots on the phrase "Refused the glory" (actually the fanciful and inadequate glory that the speaker has projected for it), and concludes with what the speaker then sees because the scene "Refuse[s]" the poet's illusory "glory." Jeffers has crafted a poem that trades (willingly, it seems) the pleasure of rendering the intensity of moments of heightened perception for a different set of pleasures. It isn't simply that the poem reflects on our possible relationship to moments of simple natural beauty and (implicitly) considers how language can stand between us and such moments or draw us into them, it is also the way the poem turns on the drama it enacts—the intersection of the natural scene, the speaker's changing relationship to it, and the way the poem both draws us into its process yet pushes us to focus on the world beyond the poem. For Jeffers, the poem is dramatic process and engagement, not artful, constructed object, and the degree of poetic finish in his work, the relative skill or clumsiness at the stylistic level, needs to be treated in this context—a context which reveals, for instance, the dramatic and conceptual precision (i.e., the craft) of the verb "saw" in "The

Ocean's Tribute" (line 5). In another poem, another kind of poem, this word could be ordinary, flat, and clumsy, but here it has a dramatic—and aesthetic—rightness that a more elaborate or colorful word would lack.

Whatever his mix of strengths and weaknesses and place in the tradition, Jeffers is not the figure that Leithauser describes. For one thing, "The Ocean's Tribute" suggests that he used the language with purpose, logic, and control. The poem also shows that he was aware enough of other poets of the time and the canons of taste supporting their work to know that his approach was "unfashionable" and to deliberately cast his work in opposition to these poetic norms. If this opposition were a rejection of the category of poetry itself, it would be a sign that Jeffers thought he could write as if other poets and the tradition were simply irrelevant to his own work. This seems Leithauser's sense of the matter: "There are strikingly few references in Jeffers's work to the writers of the past, and those that do appear tend to belong to the classical Greek rather than the grand English tradition. . . . Jeffers was by temperament a solitary. He was eager to expunge other voices from his verse." But Jeffers's willingness to write against the modernist grain in "The Ocean's Tribute" is not necessarily an indication that he was naïvely fantasizing that he could naïvely turn away from the poetic tradition and write as if he were some sort of Adamic first poet. The speaker's act of declaring what he says as "unfashionable" does not set the poem (or its poetics) in opposition to the poetic tradition or the category of poetry. Rather, it links the poem and poet to the tradition, writes the figure of the tradition into the poem as a context, and gives the poem the task of recuperating what has been lost (thematically, rhetorically, stylistically, but above all experientially). When Jeffers labels his poem and its "say[ing]" as "unfashionable," he is, then, implicitly defining the other side of the equation as merely fashionable and opening the possibility that the "fashionable" is in a less authentic or more problematic relationship to the tradition than his own work. The issue for the speaker of "The Ocean's Tribute," then, is not so much whether to engage or ignore the tradition but the need to renew and extend the tradition in spite of current critical norms, which by the mid-1950s had pretty much declared high modernism as the only legitimate modern poetic game. This is not to suggest that "The Ocean's Tribute" is primarily a coded argument about the poetic tradition and literary politics. Rather, it is (as it says) about looking at sunsets with these other contexts implicitly positioning it in opposition to the then New Critical fashion that validated certain projects (Eliot's for one) at the expense of others (Jeffers, Millay, even to some extent Frost if we consider how we usually focus on a few of the lyrics at the expense of the early narratives that are equally crucial to his achievement). The speaker's sense of his marginalized position (of what he rejects and affirms in part because of it) becomes an element in the poem's rhetoric and factors into the speaker's process of reaching

—through language and the dialectic of perception and imagination it enables—
a moment of heightened participation and awareness.

While “The Ocean’s Tribute” suggests that Jeffers saw himself as engaging and extending the literary tradition, not dismissing it, it does not do much to define the specifics of the tradition that he saw himself as validating or how or why his view of the tradition required a different approach to being a modern poet than the approaches of his critically more fashionable contemporaries. A second late poem, “Granddaughter” (written in the late 1950s), helps clarify these specifics and Jeffers’s view of them:

And here’s a portrait of my granddaughter Una
When she was two years old: a remarkable painter,
A perfect likeness; nothing tricky nor modernist,
Nothing of the artist fudging his art into the picture,
But simple and true. She stands in a glade of trees with a still inlet
Of blue ocean behind her. Thus exactly she looked then,
A forgotten flower in her hand, those great blue eyes
Asking and wondering.

Now she is five years old
And found herself; she does not ask any more but commands,
Sweet and fierce-tempered; that light red hair of hers
Is the fuse for explosions. When she is eighteen
I’ll not be here. I hope she will find her natural elements,
Laughter and violence; and in her quiet times
The beauty of things—the beauty of transhuman things,
Without which we are all lost. I hope she will find
Powerful protection and a man like a hawk to cover her. (*CP* 3:464)

As with “The Ocean’s Tribute,” this poem can seem artless and talky—nothing more than a grandfather doting on a “command[ing]” five-year-old, but here too the simplicity of the surface is not the whole of the poem. For one thing, the claim that there is “nothing tricky nor modernist, / Nothing of the artist fudging his art into the picture” implicitly validates the speaker’s own direct speaking; the painting is “simple and true” and so is the voice that comments on the granddaughter and how naturally she inhabits the natural scene. The rightness of the painting (both in its approach and result) also brings the issue of representation into play as a thematic element. Although the poem is evoking the granddaughter, the one feature it offers directly is her temperament; beyond that the speaker’s declaration that the painting captures a “perfect likeness” of the child substitutes for an actual description of her. The speaker (with-

in the imaginative frame of the poem) points to the painting, which in turn points to the granddaughter.

If we focus on the figure of the granddaughter, the poem can be seen as an instance of the “trickiness” Jeffers claims to reject. The speaker validates the painting, the painter’s approach, and his own mode as alternatives to modernist “fudging,” yet the poem withholds or defers the representation of the granddaughter that it seems to promise. However, the doubled figure of the actual granddaughter and the painting of her are more the poem’s occasion than its subject. The poem is not a verbal portrait of the granddaughter, even less a verbal portrait of her painted portrait. What the poem offers is the speaker’s encounter with the painting and the awareness it triggers—that the granddaughter is not, at five, as she was at two, and that she will be yet different at eighteen. The poem portrays how this awareness leads to the speaker’s sense that nature is both on-going (inescapable) change and beauty. As the poem unfolds it becomes less a poem about the granddaughter and more a poem about consciousness of and in nature. The apprehension of time and change that the granddaughter drives becomes the speaker’s recognition of his mortality (a mortality that is no longer safely distant in some vague future). But this apprehension becomes (also) a moment of recognizing the “transhuman” nature and how its “beauty” is both incarnated in the inevitable change of material existence and transcendent. The poem, that is, enacts—through the figure of the granddaughter, the artifact of the painting, and the figures of the landscape—the speaker’s deepening awareness of the granddaughter’s life unfolding in time, that her life unfolds in a time that will soon not include him, and that this is what one must not only accept but affirm as the condition of knowing “transhuman beauty.”

The painting and poem, then, are equally direct—but differently so, and this difference is also an element in the poem. The painting can represent the physical dimensions of the moment, “Thus exactly she looked then” against the “still” backdrop of the ocean “inlet.” The single painting cannot simultaneously engage and represent how the ocean has been and will be at different times in the same inlet (it is only “still” for relatively brief moments). Nor can it capture the granddaughter as a changing figure or project her future transformations, though the flower in her hand can point to such change and invite reflection. Conversely, the poem cannot capture or convey an actual scene, but it can enact, record, construct the experiencing of a moment (the speaker’s recognition that the “fierce-tempered” girl of five is both the same and not the same as the painting’s girl of two), and it can explore or project aspects of the experience that move conceptually and chronologically well beyond the moment that the poem inscribes as its catalyst. The poem, then, is a series, a layering, of representations: the painting, the granddaughter at different moments, nature as change, and the speaker’s recognition of mortality, in which the recognition of

natural change is both the threat of mortality that drives the poem and the experience of a potentially redemptive beauty. Where the painting (as figured in the poem) offers the experience of a resonant moment, the poem offers a resonant process. The poem incorporates the image of the painting but in no way functions as a kind of surrogate painting. The poem remains rooted in speech, in speaking, and, like “The Ocean’s Tribute,” is less a representation of a scene or moment than an enactment of engaging, reflecting on, and speaking from a moment—and as such the precise opposite of Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro,” a quintessential imagist lyric that is a kind of verbal painting.

Finally, the way the painting functions in “Granddaughter” implicitly positions the poem in yet another way. The speaker’s comments on the painting of the granddaughter echo the duke’s comments on the painting of the wife he has apparently had murdered in Robert Browning’s most famous dramatic monologue, “My Last Duchess.” Both poems offer a speaker sharing a painter (albeit in Jeffers’s poem with the reader instead of an auditor within the frame of the poem as in Browning’s piece), and both counterpoint sincerity and artifice. For both speakers the paintings represent figures who seem to participate in the natural world with a spontaneity and immediacy that contrasts with the speakers’ own more passive and reflective position. And in both, the paintings reveal and conceal. The contrast between the poems is also suggestive. In Jeffers’s poem the speaker recognizes, acknowledges, and moves to accept change and otherness, even though doing so confronts him with a not-too-distant mortality. In Browning’s poem the speaker blinds himself to these things through his decadent aestheticism (an aestheticism that for Jeffers prefigures “modernist” “trickery”?). But perhaps most interestingly Jeffers’s muted allusion to Browning points toward the contrasting rhetoric of the two poems. In “My Last Duchess” both speaker and auditor are constructed figures contained within the frame of the poem and function dramatically within it (the one overtly, the other implicitly). This casts the reader as an onlooker responding both to the poet’s fashioning of his materials and to the way the poem projects issues and perspectives that the figures within the poem reflect but neither contain nor recognize. In “Granddaughter” the speaker is also a dramatically constructed figure, but in this case a figure of the poet who offers himself (though constructed) as an authentic and sincere speaker addressing the reader, who (though beyond the frame of the poem) is offered the role of participating auditor. The contrast suggests that Jeffers recognized that the position of speaker and auditor/reader in “The Ocean’s Tribute” and “Granddaughter” were constructions, fictions, but it also suggests that he thought these positions could be enacted in ways that could function like real speaking and listening. In this sense it makes perfect sense that the Duke disappears back into the poem and aesthetic solipsism at the end of Browning’s poem, while the speaker in Jeffers’s poem invites us (implicitly) at the end to move with him beyond the poem

to the actual world (the way the poem points to this heightened engagement of the world beyond the poem is clearer in “The Ocean’s Tribute,” the rhetorical logic behind the move is clearer in “Granddaughter”).

These two late Jeffers poems function as what might be termed written acts of speaking that are partly grounded in the figure of the poet (his experience, his insight, his authenticity). And this poetics of personality (as some might see it) is clearly not modernist or even Victorian. But if Jeffers is neither modernist nor Victorian, what is he? One possibility is that he is naïvely unaware—or unconcerned—with these matters (this, I think, is Leithauser’s view). Yet “The Ocean’s Tribute” and “Granddaughter” argue against this: in the one Jeffers not only knows that he is being “unfashionable” but makes a point of it; in the other he seems clearly aware of how his piece plays against Browning’s paradigmatic text. Rather, I’d suggest that Jeffers’s affirmation of the figure of the poet speaking directly through the poem to the reader rather than through various ironic and objectifying frames is at root a Romantic position. This too can, of course, be read negatively—as a regression to an outmoded and discredited mode (and actually this was a key element in Winters’s argument that Jeffers was perniciously decadent), but here, also, the apparent awareness of, and concern with, poetics, poetic traditions, and their implications suggests that Jeffers was not simply reverting to the Romantic position. Instead, he was writing a modern Romanticism that was itself a critique of the Victorian and modernist reactions against Romantic poetics.¹

Leithauser, I’d suggest, misses the richness and subtlety of poems like “The Ocean’s Tribute” and “Granddaughter” because his assumptions about poetry and the kind of poetry he has learned to read and value lead him to *look* for Jeffers’s craft rather than *hear* for it. The momentum of the long lines, the effect of pace and rhythmic modulation, and how these create dramatic and conceptual nuance require that we hear the poems through the voice Jeffers has carefully created and that we attend carefully to the way Jeffers positions the act of speaking (in the lyrics) and narrating (in the long poems). And this, I’d suggest, is another way of saying that we need to acknowledge the poems as deeply, unfashionably rhetorical. If this is so, our challenge critically is to defend and explore that, not the poetry apart from that.

ENDNOTE

¹ Janet Debar, commenting after I read this piece at this year’s conference, raised the possibility that the close of “Granddaughter” may also show Jeffers

echoing William Butler Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter," and I think she is right. If so, this further complicates Jeffers's rhetorical positioning.

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Carrying the Weight: Jeffers's Role in Preparing the Way for Ecocriticism

Peter Quigley

In "Fallen Western Star: The Decline of San Francisco as a Literary Region," Dana Gioia argues that acclaim for poetic accomplishment has depended largely on being from the East Coast. Gioia states that

The effects of California's remoteness from the centers of literary power are obvious. It is more difficult to create and sustain a major literary reputation from the West Coast. Not a single Californian—nor for that matter any Westerner—was appointed as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in its entire fifty-year history. Even after the position was elevated by Congress into the Poet Laureate, only one Westerner, Robert Hass, has served in the sixty-two years of the office. It took fifty-one years for a California poet to receive the Pulitzer Prize—George Oppen in 1969—but the winner at least had the good manners to have been born in New York.

Neither Jeffers nor Winters, Rexroth nor Duncan, Miles nor Everson ever won a Pulitzer. Did these estimable West Coast writers lose to greater talents? An examination of the Pulitzer winners suggests that literary quality mattered less than proximity to the Manhattan-based committee. For example, in the two decades that Jeffers published his best collections—from *The Women at Point Sur* (1927) through *Hungerfield* (1945)—the prize went to New York writers, Leonora Speyer, Audrey Wurdemann, William Rose Benét, Robert P. T. Coffin, Marya Zaturenska, Mark Van Doren, and Leonard Bacon, a New York-born Rhode Islander. (The Maine-born Coffin taught in New York at the time of his award.) (20–21)

Gioia finalizes his comments by asking: "*Is even the best of these poets remotely comparable to Jeffers?*" (21).

Gioia registers a frustration that has dogged the Jeffers scholarly community for years. Jeffers scholars have, for the past few decades, defended Jeffers against vigorous exclusion and marginalization. Gioia's comment also points toward the purpose of this paper: to assess the value of Jeffers for the late 20th century, and, in the process, to reexamine the rationale for the general refusal

to recognize his work. More specifically, it is my wish in this paper to advance an argument I have long believed to be true: that Jeffers provides a significant and essential link to today's ecoliterature and ecocriticism movement. In my reading of the shifts in the poetic and political terrain of literature studies, the recent traction gained and won by scholars wanting to study environmental literature is hard to imagine without Jeffers.

THE EXCLUSIONARY FORCES

On the way toward understanding the full dimension of Jeffers's significance for the field of literary environmentalism, we must try to understand Jeffers's odd placement in the narrative history of American literature. In the first few decades of the 20th century, Jeffers had achieved some level of status. In 1934, Lawrence Clark Powell, assessing Jeffers's work and fame at the time, stated that it seemed inconceivable that Jeffers could be denied "a unique position in contemporary literature. The natural course of events will award him his final place in English letters more inevitably than any man of his time could profess to do" (203). Avid attention, which included the cover of *Time* magazine, characterized this period. However, when Edward Abbey, an ardent admirer of Jeffers, recorded the pilgrimage he made to the master's house, even Abbey put his visit in these illuminating terms: a "literary pilgrimage to the shrine of one of America's best, most reclusive, least known, most unpopular poets" ("A San Francisco Journal" 71). Abbey records what, for many decades following the 30s, became a standard reaction to Jeffers: ambiguous, hesitant, admiring, and, for many, dismissive.

In attempting to account for this reaction, one certainly must cite the well-documented reaction to the publication of *The Double Axe* in 1948. The press savaged this antiwar poem, published at the climax of victory in WWII.¹ In addition, those who work in Jeffers studies have made much of the effect New Criticism had on excluding Jeffers. The combination of these exclusionary elements led an uncharitable reviewer, in 1962, to say, "it took his death to remind us that he had in fact been alive" (in Karman 1–2).

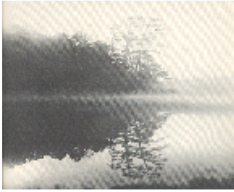
However, I submit that it has been the vision at the core of his work, *a vision that displaces humans from the center of importance while elevating nature*, which is the basis for loyalty to his work on the one hand and the sublimation of his work on the other. One way to understand this response is to think of the religious response to Darwin. Religion reacts so strongly to Darwinian theory and evolution because of the leveling effect it has on our androcentric sense of importance. Such theories point to our fluidity, our temporality, and even our absurd relativity. Most cannot encounter such a perspective and sustain a sense

that they are secure, saved, nourished, whole, and intact. Many who feel drawn to Jeffers are those who see the beauty beyond that which is under the control of humans. Jeffers's work focused on the environment; it focused on nature as possessing a higher value than human beings. Speaking of the things in nature Jeffers says, "their beauty has more meaning / Than the whole human race" (*CP* 3:119). The many reviewers who talk about the disgusting imagery, the unsavory elements, and the misanthropic personality in Jeffers testify, not to the "quality" of the poetry, but to an inability to swallow a tough message. The personal attack is particularly revealing in these cases. David Copland Morris touches on this kind of reaction in a recent article in *Jeffers Studies*:

... Helen Vendler, a central pillar of the critical establishment as poetry editor at *The New Yorker* and holder of an endowed chair at Harvard, has claimed that Jeffers suffers precisely from a lack of authority, that he did not have a courageous or mature mind: "What, then, is it that fails to compel acquiescence to Jeffers' verse? My short answer would be 'his moral timidity'" (91). In Vendler's view, Jeffers resisted the "introspection" required of the major poet, nor did he conduct a proper "investigation into his own private terrors" (94–5). She sees Jeffers's own condemnation of the modern preoccupation with such investigations as cowardly avoidance; she ridicules his criticism of "introversion" (she is the one who puts this word in quotes) as self-serving blindness (95). (15)

With such an intense focus on the beauty and power of the inhuman world, Jeffers's poetry was not going to be 1) easily embraced by self-loving humanity, nor 2) advanced by the tools available to literary critics of the day. By arguing in this way, I don't mean to claim that Jeffers's insight emerged miraculously void of historical or sociopolitical forces. Many other "dangerous" thinkers such as Darwin and Nietzsche had made their mark on Jeffers and the early 20th century. Clearly there had been an avid interest in what Lawrence called the language of the blood; in addition, in the early years of the 20th century, the arts and culture in general had a fascination with romantic primitivism. My claim is that no one writing poetry or literature rearranged the preferred order of the hierarchy of being with the force and precision of Jeffers. In addition, he did it in a way that matched, anticipated, and perhaps helped bring about modern environmental consciousness.

Jeffers established the mid point between Thoreau on the one hand and today's environmentally oriented literature



Thoreau



Jeffer's



Snyder



Many others since

THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER FIELDS ON LITERARY STUDIES

In the 60s and 70s, the environmental movement was fresh, on the move, and inventing itself as it gained energy and direction. Many of us who were in college at the time struggled in vain to find a link between our interests in literature and the movements in the science and politics of environmentalism. Glotfelty: “students interested in environmental approaches to literature felt like misfits” (xvii). Of the available tools for literary analysis—archetypal, biographical, historical, psychological, textual close reading—none could address the incredibly powerful reassessment of humanity’s place in the scheme of nature occurring in other fields. A splendid and luxurious uselessness and an ironic balance of opposing and ambiguous textual elements defined literature (see Reising ch. 4). Thinking back, one might suggest that Leo Marx’s *Machine in the Garden* presents itself as an exception; but this text reduced an apparent interest in nature to a discussion about genre, and it sought a typical New Critical balance of opposites in a “complex pastoralism.” As Russell Reising states, the writers Marx appreciates conceive of an “aesthetic unity without suggesting how the problems posed by technology could be solved” (Reising 143). *Marx makes it quite clear that the problems associated with realizing a pastoral ideal are “not the problems of artists but of society, a problem that belongs not to art but to politics”* (Reising 145, Marx 365). Close reading was the dominant activity of the day and anything else was likely to be labeled

“mere” sociology, reductionistic, or worse. As Glotfelty states, “If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession . . . you would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might not know that there was an earth at all . . . Until very recently there has been no sign that the institution of literary studies has even been aware of the environmental crisis” (xvi). Sometimes a new methodology comes into being because of a generalized theory and then evidence is sought. But at other times, and this is the case with Ecocriticism I think, we have an object of study and interest but no language or formalized method to assess it. In this case we had texts and ideas, and finally we began to construct essays about what we found that was meaningful in the texts.

In the 60s and 70s, nature had counter cultural moral and political energy, and it provided a philosophical reference point by which to pivot away from the demands and the mandates of contemporary authority and persuasion. The broader, more inclusive environmental movement sensed the turn in perspective that the literary culture was unwilling and unprepared to take on. Texts such as the *The Immense Journey* (1959) by Loren Eiseley and *Gaia: A New Look at Life* (1979) by James Lovelock (he first proposed the idea in 1972), although based in science, had enormous cultural impact. Certainly, *The Immense Journey* rose to poetic heights in its prose meditations on time and being. These texts radically reconceived human presence and importance in relation to the environment and natural forces. So many of the really notable examples of culture-changing texts from this period were from history, economics, or biology. Even where literature is involved, it is appropriated at the hands of people from one of these other fields. This is borne out in the following list:

Not Man Apart (1965), Sierra Club, by David Brower. An example of environmental groups appropriating Jeffers.

Wilderness and the American Mind (1967), by Roderick Nash, a historian, refers to several literary figures but mentions Jeffers once in passing. Nevertheless, the text is important for its attempt to connect literature with nature. Nash refers to Muir, Leopold, and Thoreau but the focus is on nonfiction, i.e., items understood to be non “literary” productions. Nash’s book foreshadows intellectual histories to follow from Don Worster and Richard Slotkin.

Desert Solitaire (1968), by Edward Abbey. An exception on this list since this text was somewhat construed as a literary production; but at the time, even Abbey didn’t call this “literature”; Abbey’s work was what we now call creative nonfiction. Abbey’s publication was crucial for pushing the ecocriticism movement forward. Also, it is important to note that Jeffers serves as essential foundation for the work.

Small is Beautiful (1973), by E. F. Schumacher, an economist who caused many to rethink the environment and our responsibilities toward it.

Person/Planet (1979), by Theodore Rozsak, historian. This book was a radical formulation of the relation between the environment and the individual.

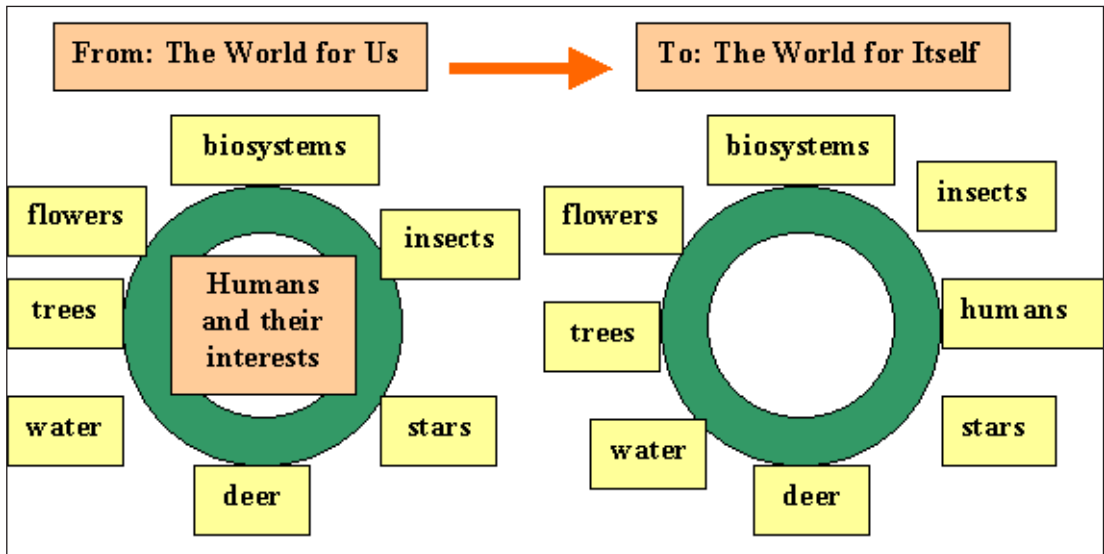
The Population Bomb (1968), by Paul Ehrlich, biologist.

Silent Spring (1962), by Rachael Carson, marine biologist.

Deep Ecology (1985), by George Sessions and Bill Devall. Widely read by the general public but also impacted the Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace, and Earth First! It discussed Edward Abbey, but it was primarily a book of new-age biology and not focused on literature.

All of these texts were busily responding to and shaping events in intellectual culture and praxis while literary study retreated from its self-created demons of science, realism, and positivism into a rich, textual sensuousness of non-utility.

The effect of the environmental movement on the political movement and intellectual culture cannot be underestimated. In short, the effect was to draw into question the solidity and homogeneity of the human, the “I,” the American, the citizen, the consumer as the center or arbiter of meaning. At the same time, literary discussions focused on the unique subjectivity of an irreducible, idiosyncratic self. This new direction in nonliterary aspects of culture had an enormously destabilizing effect on many accepted and assumed norms. It resulted in the following Copernican reassessment:



From this new perspective in ecological thinking, with the human removed from the center, Jeffers's assertion (referred to above) that "their beauty has more meaning" makes easy sense, and it loses the frightening, lurid, and misanthropic sense that so many felt the need to attach to such a sentiment. Jeffers removed the childish sense that humans are the center of the purpose of the universe. Human beings tend to want to feel as though they are at home, that their values are essential, not accidental, that their experience is uniform, whole, symmetrical, teleological, logocentric, that it all makes sense, adds up, and that the universe is written to them and that it is finally about them. Tell them this is not true, and they act badly. Jeffers's character, the Inhumanist, suggests that "growing up" means being able to acknowledge:

the astonishing beauty of things . . . and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe . . . We know this, of course, but it does not appear that any previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it. An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard. (*CP* 4:418).

There is one more development worth mentioning that restructured the moment and made possible a reconsideration of Jeffers's vision. Throughout the 70s, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, and other post-modern methodologies emerged as vigorously *anti-anthropocentric*. They did so by exposing the human interest in myths, social values, political values, sexual constructs, nature, and other systems of thought that wished to appear "natural." Nietzsche establishes the point of departure for this movement:

While you rapturously pose as deriving your law from nature, you want something quite the reverse of that, you strange actors and self-deceivers. Your pride wants to prescribe your morality, your ideal, to nature, yes to nature itself, and incorporate them in it; you . . . would like to make all existence exist only after your own image. (21)

Here Nietzsche outlines the concern of poststructuralists to follow: humans have created myths, masquerading as objective perception, filled with our own wishes and desires, and then we "discover" them and impose and implement them on nature, women, minorities, workers, immigrants; in short, on difference, on others. Within these structures of thought one can find all kinds of hierarchical assumptions regarding the position of many things in existence, including the environment. In addition, some developments in marxist post-structuralism allowed for a more sociopolitical and materially based criticism.

Although approaching it in different ways, these theories attacked the same area of belief and bias attacked by the new environmentalism: the centrality of the human. These new theories were particularly interested in exposing the way in which interpretive methods carried unexamined assumptions about the supremacy of human consciousness and being, human presence, individual human identity, and other aspects of 20th-century humanism. Recall that the Postmodern and Poststructural theories have targeted the illusion and delusion of logos (presence, meaning, noumena threaded through phenomena), the supposed reconciliation of opposites in some unity (intellectual, spiritual, or social systems), as well as the death of the subject. In short, poststructuralism was determined to expose the human-centered and biased nature of thought structures. It rejected the innocent appeal in language that says “Believe me. Accept me. I have no designs on you.” The main benefit has been to critique our attempts to offset our cosmic insecurities by building comfort zones of solidity in language and thought systems. I am not suggesting a close affinity between Jeffers and the heart of these theories; however, I am suggesting that these theories made considerable headway toward making it possible more easily to come to terms with a Jeffersian vision of the world that, while not a poststructuralist overlay, was intent on critiquing self-serving human delusion. Jeffers demonstrated this interest in many of his poems but one letter is particularly revealing:

power is with the radicals—the destroyers—in thought and literature . . . The memorable names are mostly the names of men who broke down some set of conventions or “ideals”—Voltaire, Rousseau, Byron—Nietzsche etc.—away down to D. H. Lawrence. Conventions of monarchy, warlike patriotism, Christian dogma, purity . . . Much of their power derives from this catalysis; as an animal’s power from breaking down starch and protein. . . . Perhaps this shift of power, from the builders to the destroyers, is another sign that our culture-age has culminated and turned down again, in a creative sense? — That now its “ideals” and ideas need to be broken up and lie fallow awhile, in preparation for a later age? (in Ridgeway 246)

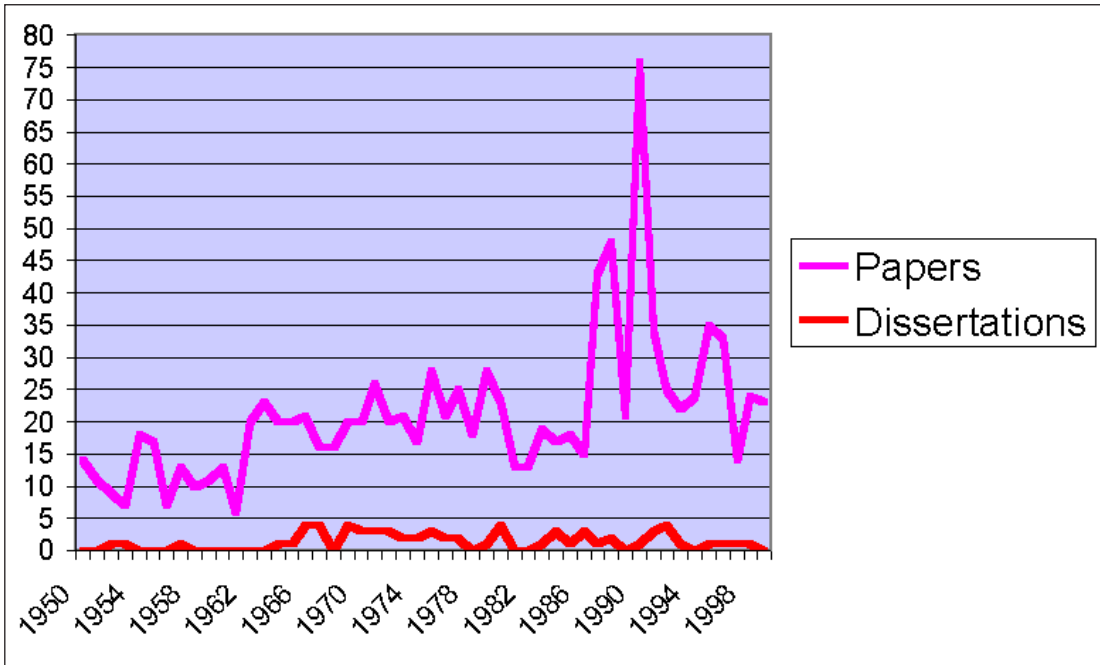
Jeffers continues by noting that when Wordsworth backed off from his critique of culture and converted to Christianity “he repented; and lost his creative power and significance” (in Ridgeway 246). Jeffers aligns himself with the process of preparing the ground. Theodore Roszak, in *Person/Planet* (1978), has called this “creative disintegration”; Jeffers also alludes to a falling apart “in a creative sense.” Jeffers’s favorite image of the hawk is clearly used by Jeffers to suggest that action of digesting the structures of current thinking to allow for a reconsideration of our attitudes toward nature and our daily lives as individuals and citizens. Jeffers accomplishes the same through many images

of nature as fire, fluidity, “the thing is like a river” (*CP* 3:419).² But Jeffers was not just interested in breakdown and intellectual chaos; ultimately he was interested in breakthrough. Beyond the self-interested mythologies and posturings, there was the possibility of a transforming encounter with the size, power, and beauty of nature. Jeffers, in short, was consciously preparing the ground for a paradigm shift (beyond realism and romanticism).

As I wrote a dissertation in 1989, I was asking for and trying to create an ecocritical perspective for literature. Many others were as well. My findings focused on the connection between the critique of anthropocentric thought in critical theory and the corresponding critique that was occurring in the environmental movement. The last chapter of my dissertation (“The Ground of Resistance”) was called “Towards a Poststructural Environmentalism.” It is interesting to think about this intellectual moment. I was not in contact with others as I made these connections. I can only assume that others were intuitively coming to the same conclusions at the same time; in short a kind of zeitgeist was occurring. My work was later formally expressed in “Rethinking Resistance: Poststructuralism, Environmentalism, and Literature,” in the journal *Environmental Ethics*. Critics such as Aaron Gare were interested in this connection and took notice of my attempt to link environmentalism and literary theory in the pages of *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (87, 92, 177, 178). The point here is to document that the work in critical theory was intersecting with environmental and literary thought, particularly concerning the issue of the critique of humanist-based theories and perspectives.

In the 90s, my dissertation advisor (Patrick Murphy) launched the journal *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment)* at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (now housed at University of Nevada, Reno). A related organization, ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment), was formed at University of Nevada Reno, with its first conference in 1995 at Ft. Collins, CO, in 1995. And, finally, in 1996, Cheryl Glotfelty summarized all of these initial gestures by asking in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, “How . . . can we contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature?” (xxi). On April 9, 1996, the cover of *The Chronicle* featured a focus article on the emergence of ecocriticism and the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader*.

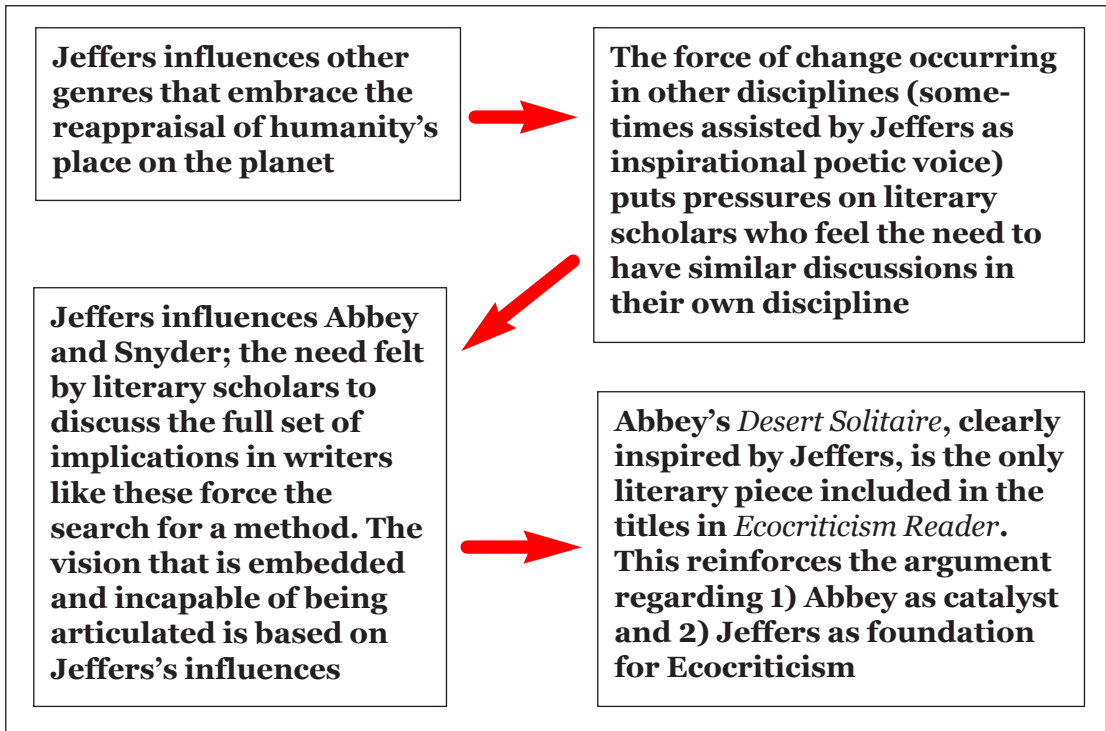
So, the colliding intersection of Critical Theory, a new-age biology (ecology and deep ecology), a determined environmental movement (Greenpeace, et al.), combined with Jeffers’s loyal readership and influence on nature writers and scholars, framed an atmosphere that gave rise to ecocriticism and an atmosphere that made reading Jeffers possible in a more widely accepted manner. In fact, if one examines the activity in Jeffers scholarship, one sees that right at the nexus of these forces Jeffers scholarship explodes:



(See *Jeffers Studies* at <www.jeffers.org> for access to this and other reference tools on Jeffers.)

A NEW OBJECT NEEDS A NEW METHOD

In addition to being the link or pivot that connects 100 years of ecopoetic trajectory from Thoreau (late 19th century) to Abbey to Snyder (late 20th century), I am suggesting that the force and character of Jeffers's vision spawned *the literary/poetic re-evaluation* of our place on the planet. By staking out this area in the intellectual memory of readers of poetry, Jeffers created the possibility for a literature and a literary methodology (ecocriticism) that is at once new and referentially focused on the material world of nature and environmental politics. The following diagram outlines where my argument has been and where it is going:



In 1996 Cheryl Glotfelty, in the *Ecocriticism Reader*, celebrated the new sun that had risen in the literary mind: “we are now considering nature not just as a stage upon which the human story is acted out but as an actor in the drama” (xxi). What brought about such a dramatic rearrangement of foreground and background? And why, comparatively, is the impact felt so late in literature? Certainly, one answer I have given is that decades of environmental thinking had significantly begun to change our culture and had finally articulated itself in the highly resistant, reflexive ideological apparatus of literary criticism. Other intellectual fields, therefore, such as ecology and prose genres such as the nature essay (which was not necessarily defined and limited as “literature”), were more responsive and achieved more cultural currency even as they entertained a vision of a humanity interwoven into nature. “While related humanities disciplines, like history, philosophy, law, sociology, and religion have been ‘greening’ since the 1970s, literary studies have apparently remained untainted by environmental concerns” (Glotfelty xvi).

But where in literature were there models that could have resonated to these mounting external pressures? Where were the models that could force this change from within? There has been only one poetic voice that, by not treating

nature as just a stage, stands out early; there has been only one voice that has marked out poetic/literary space for the world of nature in this manner: Robinson Jeffers. Of course, there have been Thoreau, Burroughs, Muir, Austin, London, Leopold, Carson, and Abbey. These accomplishments, in what we now call creative nonfiction, are important, and today they are gaining in significance for literary scholars. However, at the opening of the 20th century, Jeffers puts into poetry, into what was *then* clearly identified and marked off as solely within the literary field, what other writers would render in prose. What Jeffers put forward was incapable of being addressed by the available literary tools as well as the literary culture in power; but writers who used prose were not subjected to the same limitations. Prose, or the nature essay, could move in and out of fields of study, thereby avoiding the limitations set by literary studies. So two impediments were faced by Jeffers: 1) the clear marking of his work as “literature,” thereby subjecting his work to a limited set of readings by the discourse available to the “professionals” in that field; and 2) the strength of his vision regarding a myopic, self-centered, and deluded humanity that literally couldn’t see the forest due to its anthropocentric obsessions.

Students of literature were faced with working out their environmental interests within the approved list of Romantic poets. Therefore, English and American Romantic poets enjoyed a large amount of attention. Literature students with an environmental agenda embraced Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, and Wordsworth for all that could be gotten from these sources (many still read Jeffers on the sly). There was a great deal of joy, excitement, and subversive pleasure gained from reading the romantics with their critique of industry, commerce, the protestant work ethic, and their celebration of the primitive and the wild. There was also abundant delight found in the idiosyncratic subjectivities of Thoreau, Whitman, and Emerson. Whitman and Emerson in particular produced versions of the poet as God, the human as the creator of all that is seen “out there.” We often imagine that our desire for (or our creation of) beauty, for the nonutilitarian, is a sign of our departure from and strength over primal needs. This perhaps explains the value placed on the aesthetic of uselessness in mid 20th-century literary studies. But while these gestures suggest strength and independence, as they walk away from one set of human-centered values (the alleged arrogance of science and reason), they are finally self-indulgent and self-comforting. As Emerson made clear in “Nature,” nature was there for him to absorb: “Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode” (38).

Jeffers departs from the romantic paradigm; however, in his acceptance of the world “out there,” he did not simply become a naturalist or realist such as Norris or Zola. He combined the stark realizations of the naturalists with a romantic’s yearning for beauty and wonder. It is, therefore, the expression of this vision in a literary genre, the earliness, and the singularity of Jeffers’s voice

that call for us to stop and reconsider his accomplishment. To deal with landscape as one's subject, a landscape that is not simply romantically, spiritually, and comfortably beautiful, means one ignores humans as the centerpiece of narrative (counter intuitive); it means one assumes an impossible task by trying to bring forward an infinitely nuanced, mute, indifferent, devouring, forever remote, inconceivably beautiful, and ultimately unknowable "character." At least in fiction it is possible to say about a human character, "he said," with some determination.

Considering that humans are seemingly incurably focused on narratives that involve the plight of their own "soul," destiny, identity, tribe, race, ethnic group, religious cult, gender, countrymen, or sports team, choosing to focus on the other, nonhuman world, seems bold at best, reckless and doomed for sure. For after all, we are so instinctively about ourselves. If we can be said to possess a nature, an essence, it is that we reshape the world into our own set of interests. Whitman and Emerson were the poets of this process; hence Melville's pause and concern. Our religions, our perceptual habits, our mythologies, our cities, our economies, our words, are all filters and translators. It is our very nature, it seems, to see things "for us"; it is perhaps our best tool, but also it is what deceives us. As Jeffers said, "trust no immortalist," since we derive our ideas and mythologies from fear and safety, not from a passion for objective truth. Our ideas are "dream-clothed, or dirty / With fears and wishes" (CP 3:118). The selfish filtering and converting of the world is what Jeffers called "the insanities of desire" (CP 1:209), and what Melville saw as the butchering of the whale. Here we can see the attraction of Jeffers for the same elements Snyder found in Buddhism: the acknowledgment of a beauty and reality beyond desire, the need to uncenter our minds from ourselves. "We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we were made from" (CP 3:399).

It has always seemed to me that this alien quality, beyond a domesticated familiarity, is what is at the heart of *Moby Dick*, and this is why this book has captured our imagination and repelled many of us for so long. Melville deliberately sailed away from the center, from land and hearth and home, and, instead, drifted, willfully, into the sense of a world of alien transcendence, exposing himself to its self-shattering dissonance, its impossible size and grandeur, its indifference, its bizarre energies, its whiteness, and, from the perspective of human need, its nothingness. Courageous thinking has always seen this frightening immensity not as barbarous or something that must be conquered, feared, beautified, or hated, but as defamiliarizing, powerful, beautiful (in a way that doesn't involve possession), and wondrous.

Therefore, Jeffers didn't fit within the easy and comforting version of the Romantic Movement; his vision went further. He reversed the equation: the beauty, the reality principle, is out there, not inside the human. In addition, Jef-

fers assumed and embraced what Melville could only (in “Bartleby”) approach with stunned gaze: Nature does not care. In “Carmel Point,” speaking of nature’s reaction to the encroachment of homes and civilization, Jeffers states:

Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb . . . (CP 3:399)

Even so, Jeffers was able to still see the beauty, a new and different beauty, while not positing a metaphysical relationship that saves, preserves, privileges, or centers the perceiver. Snyder will refer to this experience as “that other, totally alien, nonhuman: / Humming inside like a taut drum” (*Myths and Texts* 38).

Without the poetic efforts of Jeffers, there would be no vision, no courage, and no imaginative thrust taking us toward nature and beyond the range of human bias, beyond human self-serving delusion. Neither Snyder nor Abbey would have been ready and equipped with an Inhumanist vision at the precise moment when there was an opening for that message. To fully consider Jeffers’s contribution, as well as my purpose in this paper, it is instructive to re-read Glotfelty’s comment in 1996 and compare it with Jeffers’s statement regarding his poetic project:

[W]e are now considering nature not just as a stage upon which the human story is acted out but as an actor in the drama. (Glotfelty xxi)

. . . my love, my loved subject:

Mountain and ocean, rock, water and beasts and trees
Are the protagonists, the human people are only symbolic interpreters— (CP 3:484)³

ABBEY, SNYDER, AND THE RIGHT HISTORICAL MOMENT

Although disregarded by the academy, Jeffers attracted a very loyal and dedicated group of lay and professional readers throughout the 20th century. Such dedication and force of influence must explain the appearance of works like *Not Man Apart* (cited above) that were from fields such as ecology but included Jeffers. But the most important influence Jeffers had for recent events can be seen in the work of Snyder and Abbey. Speaking about Snyder’s formative years as a poet, Patrick Murphy has stated that Snyder looked more to “Ezra Pound on the one hand and D. H. Lawrence and Robinson Jeffers on the other for poetic

guidance” (*Understanding Gary Snyder* 3). In addition, in a very early journal (early 50s), Snyder was clearly thinking about and positioning himself in reference to Jeffers. Snyder wondered how to proceed towards a vision, “[I]f one wished to write poetry of nature”:

(reject the human; but the tension of
human events, brutal and tragic, against
a nonhuman background? Like Jeffers?). (*Earth House Hold* 4)

Further evidence of Snyder’s debt is revealed in a newspaper article in the *L.A. Times*, dated Jan. 14, 1987. Robert Brophy organized a seminar to celebrate the 100th birthday of Jeffers. Snyder, Everson, and Milosz were participants. While Milosz registered a typically ambiguous response regarding Jeffers (“Jeffers is one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century . . . but at the same time my basic reservation [about him] is of a theological nature” (in Moffet 1)), Snyder put forth a hearty defense. Snyder documents that he started reading Jeffers in 1949. He then goes on in this news article to discuss what he took from Jeffers:

In Jeffers’ verse, he found “insights into why science acted with such hubris and destructively” in the August 1945, atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Snyder said. He also felt that Jeffers’ poetry spoke to such issues as the ongoing destruction of the Pacific Northwest forests and waters.

Jeffers’s poetry expresses “a profound respect for the non-human” rather than a contempt for humanity, Snyder said. His philosophy was that of “post-humanism, or trans-humanism, a humanism that goes beyond the human” to embrace the rest of the natural world (in Moffet 1, 5–6).

As he developed his vision and poetry, Snyder carried a small but dedicated tribe of counter-cultural folks with him through the 70s and 80s, keeping an ecopolitical influence alive. Snyder continued to model the idea of a life lived in humble and intense contact with nature. However, Jeffers’s most significant influence on the possibility of an environmental literature was the impact on Abbey. Abbey’s appearance on the scene in the early 70s was catalytic and crucial for making the connection between literature and referential environmental issues. The moment was ripe for his appearance as students of literature were literally casting about for ways to bring the environmental discussion inside the confines of literary study. Abbey paid close attention to flora and fauna using the Latin names for plants and animals, but the book was filled with inspired and poetic contemplations regarding the desert. As David Rothman has noted, *Desert Solitaire* has many references to Jeffers but also is filled with literary references to many other works. The prose of Abbey, although it

carried Jeffers's Inhumanism, gained currency because it was "just prose" and because of the environmental interests of the moment. Also, the essay flirted with hints that it had literary pretensions which made it appealing to those in literary studies: literary scholars had a more legitimate excuse to bring it within the confines of literary study. Embracing Abbey, however, still left one open to the charge of studying a "regional writer" and to mucking around in the vague genre of nonfiction.

Desert Solitaire boldly made a claim for the beauty and importance of nature; the claim was not just made for nature, however, but for a part of that terrain culturally assumed to be good only for dumping and nuclear testing: the desert. In addition, the desert was not only held to be beautiful, but, as with nature in general, the desert was seen as equal to if not more important than the world of humanity. Where did Abbey get such a controversial and subversive notion? Because of work in the environmental studies area (ecology), combined with residual counter-cultural energies still pulsating from anti-Vietnam energies, the notion of humanity's subordination to nature in the hierarchy of importance was "in the air." However, Jeffers is the source and the fountain that would feed Abbey's prose. In sum, Abbey's success is to be understood as due to:

- 1) The tolerance of tough messages delivered in essay form as opposed to pure "literary" productions that could not be managed within literary interpretive methods.
- 2) The clear and powerful influence of Jeffers.
- 3) The impact of ecology, the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and subsequent emergence of Earth First!
- 4) The counter-cultural energies still prevalent as a result of the anti-war era.
- 5) The impact of anti-anthropocentric critical theory.

The appearance of Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* found a large readership and also spawned the radical environmental group Earth First! David Rothman's article, "I'm a Humanist': The Poetic Past in *Desert Solitaire*," has recently (1998) made the case for the degree of Jeffers's influence on Abbey. Rothman documents that there are dozens of direct and indirect quotes from Jeffers in *Desert Solitaire*. And, as Rothman states, David Copland Morris had, in a previous article, suggested that Jeffers was the biggest influence on Abbey: "A case could be made that Jeffers is the strongest influence on *Desert Solitaire*, stronger than even Thoreau" (in Rothman 57).

What was it in Jeffers that inspired Abbey? It was the same difficult and, to many readers, dark vision that made Jeffers an uneasy prospect for previous generations: Inhumanism. Although Snyder is influenced by Jeffers, this aspect of Jeffers was cause for concern for Snyder, who said, "I will not cry in-

human and think that makes us small and nature / great" (*Riprap*, "T2 Tanker Blues"). Abbey, although wishing Jeffers had more of a sense of humor, embraced the full dimension of Jeffers's vision and was not put off by a vision that made humans small and even insignificant. Regarding the inevitable destructive appetites of Western civilization, it was all foreseen, said Abbey, "nearly a half century ago by the most cold-eyed and clear-eyed of our national poets, on California's shore, at the end of the open road" (*Desert Solitaire* 151). My point here is that the astonishing cultural impact made by Abbey couldn't have happened without Jeffers. And it is important to reiterate that phrase: cultural impact. Why? Because Abbey struck a chord at the right moment. He created a space where the environmental movement intersected with literature and thereby forced into sharp relief the fact that literature lacked the tools to discuss the social and political force of *Desert Solitaire*. It is, therefore, significant, and not serendipity, that *Desert Solitaire* is the only piece of writing mentioned by name in the table of contents of the *Ecocriticism Reader*.

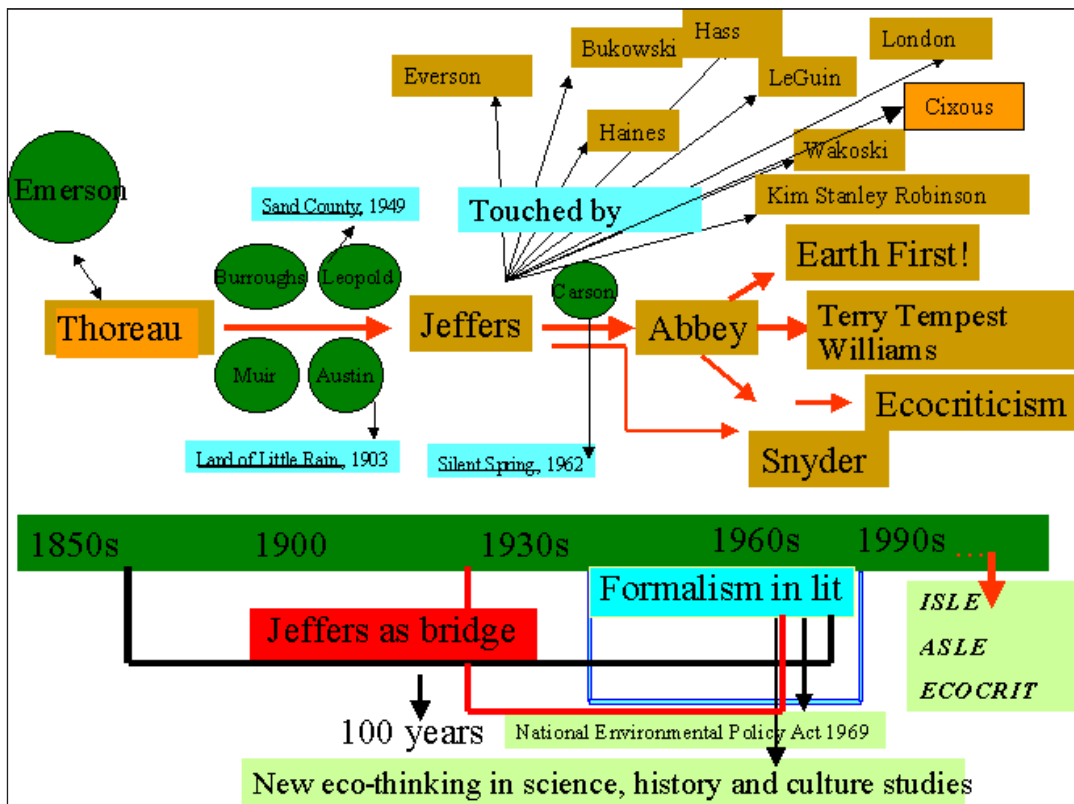
In sum, Jeffers made an astounding claim in the annals of literary proclamations. He claimed that the focus of his poetry was not human beings, not their challenges, fears, nuanced psychologies, nor their fine moments of insight, recovery, or victory. His poetic intention bears repeating:

. . . my love, my loved subject:

Mountain and ocean, rock, water and beasts and trees

Are the protagonists, the human people are only symbolic interpreters— (*CP* 3:484)

In sum, Jeffers was ignored by the discipline by which his writing had to be appraised. Nevertheless, Jeffers was continuously read, and he influenced writers and thinkers in many disciplines. Abbey and Snyder carried his vision forward, and their popularity, combined with the impact of the environmental movement, caused the search for a new method to properly discuss environmental literature.



THE REAPPRAISAL OF JEFFERS

Although scholars in Jeffers studies have long lamented the degree to which his work has been ignored and diminished, trends and fortunes have seemingly changed. After years of editing the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, Tyrus Harmesen handed the position to Robert Brophy. Brophy took over editing *RJN* in 1968, and then he began full publishing responsibilities in 1991. Along with Tim Hunt and others, he spearheaded the evolution of that publication into a full-fledged academic journal, *Jeffers Studies*, in 1996.

In addition to increased scholarship, major texts in literary studies have focused significantly on Jeffers. John Elder's *Imagining the Earth* ([1985], 1996), for example, dedicates considerable space to Jeffers throughout his fine text. A project that examines poetry's ability to heighten attentiveness towards nature, Elder says that Jeffers is "one of the most important precursors of con-

temporary nature poetry, especially in his radical critique of Western civilization” (2). Elder goes on to say that Jeffers’s critique of culture sets up Snyder to imagine a new way to re-inhabit the earth. Elder uses Jeffers in dozens of references to support the argument of his text: we need a heightened attention to nature and a way of living that harmonizes our interests with its rhythms.

Max Oelschlaeger published an important ecoliterature text in 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness* traces the human sense of nature from Paleolithic times to the present day. Oelschlaeger is championing writers who have managed to sustain an intense realization of the power, beauty, and value of nature. He is also interested in the way of life that a particular vision of nature brings about. He, for instance, carries on a fascinating discussion of the relation between the emergence of sky gods (and in particular god the father) and the advent of farming, a way of life that abandons following the seasons.

Oelschlaeger devotes a chapter-length discussion on Jeffers and Snyder. Oelschlaeger begins by acknowledging that although ignored by the poetic establishment, “Jeffers has a thriving group of readers. His poems are well known to lovers and defenders of wild nature” (245). Oelschlaeger identifies Jeffers’s work with Paleolithic elements as opposed to Neolithic. In other words Jeffers was in contact with primal forces before we began to try and manage them within fertility cults, rituals, and religions: “he taps into a primal materialism” (249). Oelschlaeger describes Jeffers’s Inhumanism in detail and makes a strong case for the incredible attack Jeffers levels on the human attempt to ignore the force and flux of nature. As I mentioned earlier, the closer one gets to the central vision of Jeffers, the more difficult it is for self-preserving humanity to read along. Jeffers, Oelschlaeger claims, undermines any hope for permanence, at the individual, sociopolitical, or species level: “the human mind’s products are anchored in the shifting sands of time” (258). This, I think, is a crucial point in Jeffers, and, in another article, I made the central claim that “the main thrust of his work seems to be deconstructive” (“Man-Devouring Stars” 139). Does this refusal of human knowledge serve as a philosophical point of liberation, suspending our habitual action and thought and allowing us to rethink our positions, our assumptions, and our feeble self-serving beliefs? Is it simply a denial of human desire? Or is it a puritan-like castigation of our innate and malicious design? The scholars in the Jeffers studies circle have never agreed. And again: “Jeffers is intensely conscious not only of cultural evanescence but of individual mortality as well” (260). Oelschlaeger wisely states that for Jeffers “change is the central reality” (258). Jeffers, nevertheless, gives humanity a reasonable and graceful phenomenon to hang on to: beauty. “Love your eyes that can see, your mind that can / Hear the music, the thunder of the wings” (*CP* 2:410). Jeffers, according to Oelschlaeger, “recognizes the possibility of a limited knowledge of permanencies within the process” (258).

In sum, Oelschlaeger sees that although rejecting modernism, Jeffers moves beyond the self-serving comforts of romanticism. While abandoning delusion, Jeffers gives us a very real contemporary feel of a modern world we recognize. This world contains dwarfing cosmic size and inevitable disillusion of the illusions of state, individual, and species. In spite of it all, he delivers something higher and more magnificent: the beauty and wonder of an intense although uncertain existence in a strange and wondrous cosmos. By placing Jeffers together with Snyder, he suggests the symmetry in the trajectory of themes running through both writers. In addition, this underlines the case I have been making regarding the link Jeffers provides between the mid- and late 20th century.

Lawrence Buell, in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), states that in “Jeffers, *if anywhere*, the Emersonian dream of nature as humankind’s counterpart seems to have been purged of its theistic residue and to have assumed the status of an environmental ethic.” Buell goes on to characterize the force of Jeffers’s contribution: “At the manifesto level no postromantic assault on homocentrism has been more extreme than the ‘inhuman’ of Jeffers” (162). Here is the assertion of Jeffers’s accomplishment. Here is documentation and validation of what no poet had accomplished before Jeffers. This is the foundation that needed to be built in order for Abbey and Snyder to pivot off in their own trajectories. Strongly and clearly acknowledged by Buell, Jeffers provided the clearing of the ground, the Copernican gift that paved the way for modern environmental poetry and literature. But alas, even while attributing so much to Jeffers, Buell cannot help but dip into the same jaded source of dismissal as his critical predecessors. Typically, instead of continuing to acknowledge Jeffers’s immense contribution, Buell moves away from the previous buildup and levels the charge of Victorian moralism. Because Buell privileges poems to the extent that the “persona’s relinquishment to nature’s anarchic authority seems complete” (165), Jeffers is found lacking because “he does not allow his speaker to engage in the relinquishment of self that he preaches” (163). Although Buell does commend Jeffers for some successful poems along these lines, he goes on to privilege Snyder simply because Snyder leaves out the “I” more often than not (166–67).

My sense is that Buell followed his logic of looking for relinquishment to a fault. By removing the “I” it is true that Snyder achieves a serene and Spartan kind of poetic Buddhism. But one might ask, where is the drama? Even Snyder, (as I mentioned above) when he was first trying to position himself as a nature writer, appreciated the drama proposed by Jeffers. Snyder wondered how to proceed toward a vision, “[I]f one wished to write poetry of nature.” He pondered focusing on the “tension” of the human set against “a nonhuman background? Like Jeffers?” (*Earth House Hold* 4). This early journal entry makes the same point I am asserting here. The tension between a nonhuman world

and self-consumed humans makes for instructive and dramatic poetry, especially if the genre is narrative verse. As I argued above, we are so thoroughly about ourselves, and Jeffers presents this tension between the serene and beautiful environment on the one hand and his troubled, struggling, desire-ridden characters on the other. I assume it is possible for Buell to privilege the aesthetic shape he does, but there is no reason to claim it is higher or ultimately superior to Jeffers. As usual, literary judgment builds into its rhetoric the need to subject writers to some litmus test. Why not acknowledge both achievements: dramatic tension on the one hand; Zen nothingness on the other? It's certainly legitimate to make a note of the difference, but to claim one is better, without acknowledging the provisional, personal, and ultimately unsubstantiated nature of the observation, does an unnecessary disservice to literature (in this case Jeffers) but certainly literary criticism in particular. This kind of aesthetic one-upmanship is something I truly wish our field would resolve itself to abandon.

The essential point, however, is to acknowledge and appreciate the high standing that Buell does deliver to Jeffers. What all of these critics have suggested is that Jeffers's teaching is the rough beauty of Buddhism; a realization that there is no knowledge that dominates, penetrates, and unlocks it all; there is no tidy story that ultimately saves us from the incomprehensible size and indifference of the universe: to be saved is a pompous and self-destructive dream. But there is a beauty that can be had only through the doors of relinquishment.

I have tried to accomplish several goals in this paper. First I wanted to remind readers of the singular poetic voice of Jeffers as he embraced, almost 80 years ago, a vision and a way of life we are only beginning to cherish and understand. Also I wanted to argue that his poetic testimony was the link between Thoreau, Abbey, and Snyder. I also wanted to say that it seems that with the advent of new-age biology, the environmental movement, and new critical theories, it has become easier to fully appreciate Jeffers's radical vision. Finally, I wanted to dare to hope that with all of these developments, the publication of the five volumes of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Tim Hunt, ed.) by Stanford University Press, the launching of *Jeffers Studies*, coupled with the focus on Jeffers in the three major critical texts under examination here, Jeffers might just have arrived, again.

ENDNOTES

¹ See James Shebl, *In This Wild Water: The Suppressed Poems of Robinson Jeffers*.

² Oelschlaeger talks about the interest Jeffers has in change and fluidity all through his chapter on Jeffers in *The Idea of Wilderness*; I also make this claim in “Man-Devouring Stars,” and again in “The Poetics of Cultural Renewal and Collapse.”

³ Some might object at the conflation of a line from poetry and a line from criticism but my response is as follows. Paul de Man and others have clearly shown the intertwined agenda of criticism with the object of its study (see *Semiotics and Rhetoric* (1979): “Literature as well as criticism—the difference between them being delusive” (677)). In addition, it seems odd that while we blur the lines between “literature” and “mere prose” (creative nonfiction), we would still want to draw strict distinctions in this case. And in sum, I offer an example from Russell Reising, who, when discussing the New Critical approach, said, “The New Critical view of poetic language as sensuous verbal texture generated in Ransom and Brooks an erotics of art in which *poetry and criticism respond sensuously and lovingly* to the world, in contrast to ‘science’ or ‘logic’ which prey possessively on a passive victim” (169 my emphasis).

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