



# Robinson Jeffers

## Newsletter

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#### *ON THE COVER:*

*Judith Anderson, star of Jeffers's Medea and Clytemnestra in his  
The Tower Beyond Tragedy. Photo courtesy of California  
State University Long Beach Library Archives.*

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# *NEWS & NOTES*

■ The Elden Street Players of Herndon, Virginia, presented Robinson Jeffers's *Medea* in October and November of last year. Its playbill's introduction notes read: "Since 431 BC, the universality of this Greek Tragedy has impelled twenty playwrights and uncounted translators to indite repeatedly this protest against woman's status in a man's world. The legend has been treated in six languages as drama, opera, poetry, even as a domestic burlesque." In sending the playbill, Alan Mears writes: "The stage was small and roped off on the sides like a boxing ring. Not a bad touch. Medea was dressed in a strange looking suit that seemed a combination of business attire but with the long line of oriental clothes. Creon and Aegeus were in tuxedos, as befit kings, and Jason was dressed as a navy captain. The chorus were in green cocktail dresses and the one soldier was in army camouflage fatigues. The nurse was dressed as the character is usually portrayed, in a nondescript long outfit and wrapped in a shawl. The nurse however was played by a man. And he did a good job! In all, we did enjoy the show, even though the play is too intense for the audience to be right next to the stage, as we usually are in little theatre."

■ Noted: A clothbound acting version of *Medea* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, 1982). Full cast of both 1947 and 1982 Kennedy Center productions listed. Four photos at book-center: Judith Anderson as nurse, Zoe Caldwell and Judith twice, Zoe & Mitchell Ryan (Jason)-same photo on dust jacket. Introduction of three paragraphs gives background of the play, of Jason and Medea. i-vi, 1-18 pp. 5.75 x 8.5 inches.

■ The Fall 1994 Jeffers Festival will feature a retrospective view of the work of early Jeffers biographer, Melba Berry Bennett, author of *Robinson Jeffers and the Sea* (Ritchie 1936) and *The Stone Mason of Tor House: The Life and Works of Robinson Jeffers* (Ritchie 1966). Tyrus Harmsen, former Occidental College librarian and archivist, will speak of his acquaintance with Mrs. Bennett, her organizing of the Robinson Jeffers Committee in 1962, the year after Jeffers's death, her founding of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* and Mrs. Bennett's efforts on the part of Occidental's Mary Norton Clark Library. Michael Sutherland, Special Collections Librarian at Occidental, will organize an exhibition including Melba's archival contributions to Occidental - this in cooperation with the Local History Room at the Harrison Memorial Library, Park Branch, Carmel. Festival dates are Friday, Saturday and Sunday, October 7, 8 and 9.

■ Following the Jeffers Festival, on Sunday & Monday, October 9 & 10, the Robinson Jeffers Association (RJA), a sub-group of the American Literature Association (ALA), which broke from the Modern Language Association in 1990, will hold a literary conference at Carpenter Hall in the Sunset Center. The public is invited to attend. Papers will center on the theme of Jeffers and the Environment. For those wishing formally to participate, a proposal abstract of one page should be sent to: Professor Terry Beers, Department of English, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053, e-mail: [tbeers@scuacc.scu.edu](mailto:tbeers@scuacc.scu.edu).

■ On February 25, poet Sherod Santos, former Carmel resident who recently toured for the Academy of American Poets, gave a reading of his poetry in the Jeffers Room of Sunset Center, speaking of the influence of Jeffers and Tor House as part of his literary heritage.

■ On March 13, The Tor House Foundation presented the American poet, Robert Bly, who read from Robinson Jeffers's World War II poems suppressed for their anti-war tenor, commenting on the intense chauvinism of the period and on Jeffers's keen insight and courage. Actor and activist Robert Redford attended the lecture-reading. A tape of his extended lecture is \$18 from Oral Traditions, 1104 Lincoln, Pacific Grove CA 93950, (408)373-1110.

■ On Monday, April 25, at Harrison Library, The Henry Mead Williams Local History Room sponsored a talk by Jeff Norman of Big

Sur: "Local Legend: Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Historian," this being part of an annual series of library programs featuring aspects of Carmel and Peninsula history.

■ The annual Tor House Garden Party took place Sunday, May 1, 1:30-4:30. For Jeffers and his garden, see RJN 80.

# ***DISSERTATION ABSTRACT***

■ **Michael J. McDowell.** *Finding Tongues in Trees: Dialogical and Ecological Landscape in Henry David Thoreau, Robinson Jeffers, and Leslie Marmon Silko.* University of Oregon, 1992. 274 pp.

From Thoreau onward, American literature's strong minority tradition of nature writing has countered the values of progress, development, and improvement celebrated by dominant literary tradition. With the work of M. M. Bakhtin providing a theoretical base, I examine three diverse but representative writers in this minority tradition and how they have typically presented the interaction of humans with the natural landscape. I argue that these representative writers—Henry David Thoreau, Robinson Jeffers, and Leslie Marmon Silko—offer ecologically structured views of the landscape by incorporating into their works a dialogical interplay of voices and values in contradiction to each other.

In *Walden*, Thoreau sets for himself the task of engaging in dialogue with the “society” composed of the elements of the familiar natural landscape around Walden pond. In *The Maine Woods*, away from familiar terrain, Thoreau expands the range of “voices” to include those of humans who intimately know the landscape, particularly Indians, and creates a narrative structure modeled on ecological systems.

Because of Jeffers's obviously monologic preaching in much of his lyric poetry, the dialogism in his writing often goes unnoticed, particularly in such narrative poems as “Roan Stallion,” “Cawdor,” and “The Inhumanist.” Perhaps due to his scientific training, Jeffers often actually avoids direct statement or incorporates contradictory direct

statements into his poetry. He constructs in his writing a dynamic landscape of many disparate but interacting components and he achieves, as a consequence, a more complete, whole landscape than most writers do.

In *Ceremony* and *Storyteller* Silko corrects and extends the tradition of American nature writing. She incorporates elements of the Bakhtinian carnival in her use of cyclical time, inclusiveness, and the physical body and in her avoidance of hierarchies; in the process, she provides a healthier, more balanced, more life-affirming, and less self-righteous view of humans in the landscape than we find in conventionally heroic narratives. The geographical landscape so influences point of view, structures, theme, plot and motivation that in effect it becomes not only a character but also an author of the text.

# ***CHARLES BUKOWSKI :***

## ***AN UNLIKELY JEFFERS TRIBUTE***

■ On 9 March 1994, Los Angeles poet laureate, prolific writer, rough-hewn autobiographical poet, short story writer, novelist, center figure of the feature film, "Barfly," died of leukemia at San Pedro Peninsula Hospital. "If I die," he is supposed to have said, "I hope to go with my head on that typewriter. It's my battlefield."

He was a poet who catalogued and chronicled his "battlefield" of modern, marginal humankind. His metre was the tough, masculine "Meat School" poetry of sex, violence, alcohol, and day-to-day survival.

A disciplined and prolific writer, he published over one thousand poems, thirty-two books of poetry, five books of short stories, and at least six novels. Two million copies are in print, many in French, German, even Greek and Portuguese. Dying for over a year, he kept at his typewriter.

Early Bukowski lived on the edge of poverty, pursuing odd jobs as dishwasher, security guard, gas-pump attendant, truck driver, parking lot attendant, elevator operator, shipping clerk, worker in dog-biscuit and cookie factories, and mail-sorter at Terminal Annex, L.A.

In 1969 John Martin, who is said to have founded Black Sparrow Press in order to publish him, offered Bukowski a monthly stipend to write full-time. His experience with the U.S. Mail produced *Post Office*, a first novel, published in 1971, with 75,000 copies sold here, half a million abroad.

It would be difficult to find two poets more separated in subject matter, technique and world-view than Charles Bukowski and Robinson Jeffers. Yet he was a man dedicated to, indeed almost obsessed by Jeffers. His first major book of verse, *It Catches My Heart in Its Hands*

(1963), takes its title from Jeffers's "Hellenistics." His 1972 *Mocking Bird Wish Me Luck* features prominently "He Wrote in Lonely Blood," a tribute to Jeffers. In the 1981 *Dangling in the Tournefortia* is the lyric, "the poets and the foreman," recording his need to move away from Jeffers; in the 1984 *War All the Time*, reflecting on Jeffers's "Be Angry with the Sun," he tries to say a definitive appreciation in "Goodbye." The 1986 *You Get So Alone at Times That It Just Makes Sense* again gives tribute to Jeffers's influence and centrality by way of conscious distancing but not rejection. In the 1990 *Septuagenarian Stew*, his lyric "nowhere" recognizes Jeffers, among others, as "a natural and beautiful force." The volume also collects Bukowski's ultimate tribute, "Jeffers," previously published in *Poetry LA* (Spring/Summer 1987), which was reprinted with permission in RJN 74:30.

In a 1970 interview, "Looking for Giants," appearing in *The Southern California Literary Scene* (I:1, December), Bukowski identifies Jeffers as a poet who generally influenced him, who "turned him on." "Power, [Jeffers] simply had it." "All of his figures ... finally smashed up against the landscape. Always fascinating—they were very conscious of life. They were blood-filled creatures, and they finally, you know, came to a bad end." "He influenced me a great deal with his simple lines—his simple *long* lines. Using the precise language, you know, not 'pretty language'—just *saying* it. And that's what I've been trying to do."

Bukowski: He was not a Jeffers disciple, we must say, but an admirer. Despairing of the Carmel poet's divine macrocosm, which evidently said nothing to him, he spoke for those caught in the blind, meaningless, desolate, violent, isolate process which to him was life. And thus was, for him, sadly the only subject for poetry.

— BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE —

*The Charles Bukowski Newsletter* #4 in 1992 ran an article by Ted Olson, "Poets Listening to Life: Bukowski and Jeffers" (Edward Smith, Box 1183, Ojai, CA 93024).

RJN 88 notes that *Bukowski's Screams from the Balcony: Selected Letters 1960-1970* contains multiple Jeffers references, its advertising copy citing Jeffers as a "Buk hero."



# ***THE ROBINSON JEFFERS MEDEA***

By Jeff Zorn  
Santa Clara University

■ *Editor's Note:* The following article is taken, with permission, from *Laetaberis: The Journal of the California Classical Association*. New Series No. IX, 1992-93, pages 18-24.

Many teachers of classical language and literature are familiar with the 1982 production of Euripides's *Medea*, starring Zoe Caldwell as Medea and featuring Dame Judith Anderson as the Nurse. Distributed by Films for the Humanities, the production is a valuable resource for its dramatic power, also for the useful classroom discussions it can stimulate on the conventions of ancient and modern theater.

Its words are those of the California poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962), who began his study of Greek at the age of five, his instructor being his father, a Presbyterian minister and professor of Old Testament literature. Jeffers "freely adapted" Euripides's play at the request of Judith Anderson herself. Long an admirer of Anderson, Jeffers had been thrilled when she came to Carmel in 1941 to play Clytaemnestra in a stage production of his poem *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*. Eager to play Medea, but in a translation better suited to stage performance than Gilbert Murray's, Anderson wrote Jeffers to inquire of his interest. Jeffers agreed, and worked on the manuscript between 1944 and 1946.

The play was first produced and performed in New York City in October, 1947, with John Gielgud both directing and playing the part of Jason. Critical reaction to the drama centered on Anderson's "transcendent performance" as Medea. In a Broadway season that featured Helen Hayes in *Happy Birthday*, Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Maurice Evans in *Man and Superman*, and the openings of *Brigadoon* and *Born Yesterday*, the Jeffers/Anderson/Gielgud *Medea*

stood out. In one reviewer's comment: "Even a New York audience, flinging self-consciousness away, shouts 'Bravo!'" The play ran for 214 continuous sold-out performances, then opened in San Francisco to a similarly enthusiastic reception.

Jeffers himself fared well in the early reviews, for his "free and modern" verse, "terse and direct, and what a boon to the theater after the contorted versifications of Gilbert Murray." John Mason Brown noted in *Saturday Review* that Jeffers's language had "at its best, an iron quality that Gilbert Murray's more liquid version cannot claim," while Joseph Wood Krutch wrote in *The Nation* that Jeffers's version, "for stage purposes at least, is vastly superior."<sup>1</sup>

Jeffers's "free adaptation" of *Medea* involved not a word-by-word translation but rather a creative grasping at the psychological meaning of each scene of the drama. To excellent dramatic effect, Jeffers shortened and simplified the speeches of the play, making for a brisker pace and sharper exchanges between the characters. Departing from the norms of classical tragedy, he discarded masks, divided the play into two acts, and truncated the chorus's role: Rather than performing choral odes as a group of 15, chanting the words and dancing to music, the three Corinthian women speak individually, in briefer, less philosophical statements, without chanting or dancing. Both choral song and rhetoric, then, play lesser roles in Jeffers than in Euripides. The story of Jason and Medea squared quite well with Jeffers's sensibilities, accounting in some measure, perhaps, for overall brilliance of his wording. Betrayal of an aging spouse, the arrogance of assumed cultural superiority, the thirst for revenge impelling insanely violent acts: These all had been part of Jeffers's thematic territory since the poems that had won him both critical acclaim and a wide, devoted readership in the 1920's.<sup>2</sup>

In Jeffers, Medea has almost none of the traditional Greek heroism with which Euripides loads her character.<sup>3</sup> She is more crazed, less civilized, more a terrorist than a hero who dominates the stage and inspires fear and pity with the killing of her own children.

In the first scene with the Corinthian women, for example, Euripides shapes Medea's words into a masterpiece of persuasion, leading to the Chorus's assent not to interfere with any plans Medea might devise. She wins them over with her calm, philosophical tone and with an appeal to their common plight as oppressed women. Having heard her off-stage shrieks of rage only moments before, we are impressed by her self-possession and her will to win. In Jeffers's version, these

neighborly women need no such convincing; Medea's words serve no rhetorical purpose but reveal exactly how she is feeling then and there. In addition, Jeffers divides Medea's speech so that the memorable discussion of women's labor pain comes after her scene with King Creon, well after it could serve the persuasive purpose it had in the original.

With the focus on Medea throughout, Euripides has her dominate with her words and her wit the Chorus, two kings (Creon and Aegeus), and then Jason himself. The dramatist also provides as foils for Medea the Chorus, the Nurse and Tutor, all of whom profess moderation and all of whose "small" characters set off Medea's greatness of soul. Her stature is precisely that of Homer's Achilles, that of Sophocles's Ajax, paradigm male heroes. In explaining her gruesome plan, she sounds like no one more than Achilles: "For it is not bearable to be mocked by one's enemies ... Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited, / a stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite, / One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends; / For the lives of such persons are most remembered" (Rex Warner translation). What emerges with the killing of the children is something like a satirical commentary on the heroic code: If this is what it takes to be "heroic," then the code itself needs serious rethinking.<sup>4</sup>

In Jeffers, Medea dominates the stage a great deal less, making the drama itself more of an ensemble piece. More than just her antagonist, Jason is a fuller and more sympathetic character. In Euripides's second Jason-Medea scene, she all too easily convinces him to let her children bring his bride the poisoned gifts. Here Jason is portrayed as no more than a gullible beef-wit, a man who should know better when Medea tells him that she had been silly in a typically female way. In his version of this scene, Jeffers gives Jason strong paternal feelings onstage. He is shown talking with the sons, lovingly, in a scene modeled directly on the tender meeting between the Trojan hero Hektor and his son Astyanax in Book VI of Homer's *Iliad*. If he errs in trusting his ex-wife to give a nice present to his new wife, he now more nearly falls in line with King Creon and King Aegeus in having sincere paternal feelings manipulated by a master in that art.

The ending of Jeffers's play allows for none of the divine intervention of Euripides's, no dragon-chariot sent by Helios to whisk Medea off to Athens. Instead Medea has two snake-lamps placed in the doorway. When Jason comes after her threatening to kill her, Medea scares him off with the fire-snakes: "They'll make you what Creon is,"

she says. Through this device, as in Euripides, Medea is able to escape at the end, after a third major scene with Jason, to "go forth under cold eyes of the weakness-despising stars—not me they scorn."

But strikingly missing from Jeffers's ending is the discordant note on divine justice struck by Euripides; for Helios is Medea's grandfather, and there is no hint of any other motive in his provision of the chariot besides family favoritism. The disorder within Medea's family, and within the state of Corinth, reflects a cosmic disorder. Medea's allegiances all along have been to the older, chthonic gods, not the Olympians, and these gods obviously have retained some powers. As in Homer's theology, Euripides's gods operate on different levels, different dimensions of reality, often in conflict with each other, and so humans suffer a deep insecurity: Who knows what gods might favor or oppress us, for reasons all their own? In placating one god, don't we, necessarily, offend others?

Jeffers shows little interest in Greek cosmology, is much more interested in the psychology of betrayal and revenge. Intimacy has bred contempt on both sides of the Jason-Medea connubial bed. The result, again familiar Jeffers territory, is a family situation out of line with nature and natural processes, culminating, of course, in a mother's murder of her young.<sup>5</sup>

Jeffers's images of nature misaligned are so many and so well ordered that what at first seems poetic embellishment ultimately emerges as theme. Medea acts against family and state, but more so against nature itself. She wins praise from Jeffers for standing above the ritualistic "golden mean" thinking of the Nurse and Chorus, but the direction of her rebellion is way, way off. Crazed by passion, still a stranger to the best of Greek civilization, Medea is tragic but not in the Aristotelian mode. Her child-slaughter and escape evoke not fear and pity, but revulsion and anger, despite our precise understanding of why she did what she did.

In the end, the one intellectual document that Jeffers's Medea brings most closely to mind is Bertrand Russell's ironically titled essay, "The Superior Virtue of the Oppressed."<sup>6</sup> Like Russell, Jeffers understands oppression and sympathizes with its victims, but refuses to romanticize the ugliness of retaliatory violence. At the very least, his words suggest, Medea should have kept the children out of it and used all her pharmacological skill on Jason himself, saving the indirect method for another time and place.

— NOTES —

<sup>1</sup> For reviews of *Medea*, see Joseph Wood Krutch in *The Nation* (8 November 1947, 509510); John Mason Brown in *Saturday Review* (22 November 1947, 2427); *Commonweal* (7 November 1947, 94); *New Republic* (3 November 1947, 36); *New Yorker* (1 November 1947, 44); *Newsweek* (3 November 1947, 76); and *Time* (3 November 1947, 68).

<sup>2</sup> A good -general introduction to the poetry of Robinson Jeffers is given in Frederic I. Carpenter, *Robinson Jeffers* (Twayne, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> In the heroism of Medea, see Elizabeth B. Bongie, "Heroic Elements in the *Medea of Euripides*," TAPA 107 (1977): 2756. For a very different view, see Denys Page, *Euripides' Medea* (Oxford University Press, 1938), especially xiv-xxi.

<sup>4</sup> On Euripides's place as a tragedian critical of tradition, both literary and more broadly cultural, see Ann Norris Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), especially Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>5</sup> Readers interested in Jeffers's harsh treatment of "family values" should read his long poems "Tamar," "Roan Stallion," "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," "Cawdor," and "The Double Axe."

<sup>6</sup> The essay can be found in his *Unpopular Essays* (Simon and Schuster, 1950).

# ***ART & ULTIMATE QUESTIONS:***

## ***EDITOR'S PRE-NOTE***

■ Robinson Jeffers in his mythopoesis seems always to be seeking images to embrace the whole of experience. The cosmos in its brilliance, immensity, and mysterious sacrificial rhythms was especially a center of focus. In Cawdor's eagle's death dream, in California's cosmic stallion, in the Hanged God of "At the Birth of an Age," he projected archetypes of life, expressions of the sacrificial nature of creation. But basic to the poet Jeffers was Jeffers the scientist. Poetic truth must not evade scientific realities; Jeffers needed to meet the cosmic mystery frontally. Over his lifetime he seems to have been in vital pursuit of revelation from the science of physics and astronomy, models which would give authenticity to his imagery. From his brother Hamilton, and from the *Scientific American*, which we are told he for some time subscribed to, he was able to follow the breathtaking epiphanies of the stellar expanses. In the late twenties he was able to discover with Edwin Powell Hubble, who was later to become an acquaintance if not a close friend, the startling truth of galaxies, each with its swirling millions of stars. And then, from the red-shift in their spectra, came an insight as to the speeds with which these galaxies flee each other.

Early on but after Galileo and Copernicus, the model for the universe was a vast stellar expanse, not Earth-centered. Then came galaxies, swirling clusters of star-systems and nebulae. From Hubble's estimate of their speeds from a retro-projected center and from each other came the question: Would the universe as we know it recede, part from part, as it were forever or would the gravity-attraction of the whole's parts finally overcome centrifugal force and become a ruling centripetal pull bringing all back to their starting point, thence perhaps to be sent out again and return again; thus was born the model of the

oscillating universe, tens of billions of years of cycle from big bang to big implosion to big bang, seemingly ad infinitum?

In his poetic vision, Jeffers at different times embraces both models. Neither has been proved or disproved. We know that during the very short lifetime of the Hubble Telescope astronomers have already measured the expected microwaves lingering from the now mythic Big Bang and have claimed evidence for "dark matter," a non-radiant and therefore invisible cosmic ingredient necessary to explain the whole's gravitational forces and to keep still tenable the oscillating paradigm.

In the following essay, Marcus Smith examines Jeffers's fabled lyric, "Night" (first appearing in 1925's *Roan Stallion & Other Poems*), for its exact embodiment of the ever-expanding-universe model. Later the poet may seem to embrace the oscillating hypothesis more, as in "The Great Explosion." But Jeffers would be the first to assert that the mystery is not solved; Night may be the final Word. And, dissipating or oscillating, the cosmos is ever divine, the mysterious, miraculous endurance of God. But Mr. Smith says it better than I.

# *THE COSMOLOGY OF ROBINSON JEFFER'S "NIGHT"*

By Marcus A. J. Smith

"All perceptions as well of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the Universe."

Bacon's *Novum Organum*

■ My purpose is to bring together one of Mr. Jeffers's poems, "Night,"<sup>1</sup> and the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Thermodynamics is that branch of physics concerned with heat as energy and its Second Law can be stated as follows: heat always flows from a hotter to a colder body.<sup>2</sup> There is a close relationship between the Second Law of Thermodynamics and entropy, the amount of usable energy in a thermodynamic system. A simple illustration is mixing hot and cold water in a perfectly insulated container. The water will mingle, the heat will disperse evenly throughout the system, and afterwards there will be no further temperature shift: there is no *potential* for heat flow and therefore no energy available for work within the closed system. Unless the insulation is violated, the system will remain forever unchanged. From an entropic viewpoint the universe itself (whatever its ultimate limits or configurations) appears to be a heat system like the model described above. Furthermore, since the Second Law operates relentlessly, the human mind can imagine an inevitable point at which this law will cease to operate<sup>3</sup> because there will no longer be any heat differences anywhere in the universe. The exact character of this stasis is difficult to visualize, but one image is sheer space, void, emptiness, totally dark, totally "dead," with every twenty miles or so



the quiescent twitching of a solitary gaseous molecule. Only the deepest philosophical meditations on Nothingness (or complex statistical mathematics) can approach an understanding of this situation, which, so physics seems to inform us, must eventually prevail.

Jeffers opens "Night" with a conventional seascape at sunset:

The ebb slips from the rock, the sunken  
Tide-rocks lift streaming shoulders  
Out of the slack, the slow west  
Sombering its torch; a ship's light Shows faintly, far out,  
Over the weight of the prone ocean  
On the low cloud.

The point of view here is terrestrial, sunset as seen by ordinary mortals. The next lines speak with cosmic omniscience, knowing the full significance (symbolic and actual) of the dying light:

Over the dark mountain, over the dark pinewood,  
Down the long dark valley along the shrunken river,  
Returns the splendor without rays, the shining of shadow,  
Peace-bringer, the matrix of all shining and quieter of shining.

In the opening lines, light<sup>4</sup> is vital, the active principle, which is how ordinary man experiences light. But in the second set of lines, darkness is the active, primary agent. Moreover, the darkness is the matrix, womb, source of "all shining"—all light. Jeffers is not writing a creation myth in this poem, but his view of creation is related to his entropic vision. In Jeffers's view, the true and original state of the universe is identical with its eventual one, an image of which I attempted in my introduction.<sup>5</sup>

For Jeffers, what we call creation (the concentrations of mass and energy in the cosmos: stars, planets, etc.) is some awful accident, a mysterious but evil disturbance of and excrescence upon the cold perfection of entropic Nothingness. As he says later (in an apostrophe to Night):

O passionately at peace you being secure will pardon  
The blasphemies of glowworms, the lamp in my tower, the  
fretfulness  
Of cities, the cressets of the planets, the pride of the stars.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to the vast omnipotence of Night, all of creation is hardly "a spark in the faint far glimmer / Of a lost fire dying in the desert, dim coals of a sand-pit the Bedouins / Wandered from at dawn ..." It is commonplace to criticize Jeffers for his bleak pessimism, but those who have stressed this view have ignored his strict and objective adherence to modern cosmological physics, which in his treatment is only apparently less "humanistic" than earlier cosmologies.

In "Night" Jeffers is not merely describing the entropic nature of the universe. His main purpose is to reassure humans of their place and purpose in such an apparently purposeless cosmos. Jeffers's view of humans is essentially Jungian. We are structured into physical, conscious and unconscious elements, and the latter (in a mysterious way) rest on or penetrate into a dynamic collective unconscious. Furthermore, the drive of the unconscious is teleological. Its purpose is identical to the ultimate entropic nature of reality. This idea runs through "Night," and is explicit in the lines: "And life ... remembers deep inward / The calm mother ... the charm of the dark." It is perhaps imaged in the ocean of the opening seven lines. It is made explicit near the end of the poem when Jeffers says:

And Life, the flicker of men and moths and the wolf on the hill,  
Though furious for continuance, passionately feeding, passionately Remaking itself upon  
its mates, remembers deep inward  
The calm mother, the quietness of the womb and the egg,  
The primal and the latter silences ...

If Jeffers had ended here (or even at the end of this section: "And I and my people, we are willing to love the four-score years / Heartily; but as a sailor loves the sea, when the helm is for harbor."), the essential meaning of "Night" could be paraphrased as follows: the order of creation, man included, is the victim of a cosmic deathwish and is bracketed by meaningless Nothing.

Jeffers, however, points to at least two possibilities of meaning, each extremely paradoxical, but each likewise plausible when operating on such a vast conceptual scale. The first of these positive elements is the evolution of human consciousness:

Have men's minds changed,  
Or the rock hidden in the deep of the waters of the soul  
Broken the surface? A few centuries

Gone by, was none dared not to people  
The darkness beyond the stars with harps and habitations.

Without this dimension, "Night" would be incomplete, for the universe is evolutionary as well as entropic-and evolution (insofar as it moves towards the concentration and directed organization of energy rather than its dispersal) is the single basic force opposing entropic dissolution.

The point has been very clearly stated by Mr. Julian Huxley in an essay entitled, "The Emergence of Darwinism": "According to the physicists, [the universe's] overall trend, in accord with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, is entropic, tending towards a decrease in organization and to ultimate frozen immobility." On the other hand, on earth "and probably on a number of other planets" we have "antientropic" evolutionary development "towards an increase in the amount and quality of adaptive organization."<sup>7</sup> Neo-evolutionists such as Huxley and Teilhard de Chardin essentially transcend the stark, circular struggle for survival which Darwin proposed. The human species may not survive, but evolution is not directionless: It moves steadily (though with imperceptible slowness) towards forms of greater complexity and efficiency of organization, and, in Chardin's case, towards greater and greater consciousness. In Jeffers's poem we have the paradox that evolving consciousness means recognizing the unconscious (non-egotistical and non-human) basis of reality. The non-religious, un-supernatural vision has evolved within historical time; though Jeffers's own vision, it is not his exclusively: it is collective. Furthermore, Jeffers finds this apparently nihilistic vision a basis for meaning. True, eternal darkness will swallow humanity, everything ("you Night will resume / The stars in your time."), but if humans accept this "dear" vision (two senses), they will discover that "Life is grown sweeter and lonelier, / And death is no evil."

To understand the closing line we must look again at the second of Jeffers's possibilities of meaning, the dynamism, of Night. In Jeffers's cosmic scheme, heat energy is a less dynamic force than Night. Heat can only resist the inexorable darkness, which cannot ultimately be vanquished or withstood. This means that Night is basic reality—and that upon it everything else is contingent and derived. By recognizing this, as Jeffers does, the "awfulness" of entropy is overcome—its dreadfulness only derives from man failing to see entropy as the basic law. Life—with all its limitation and evils—is suddenly thrown against a

background of cosmic yearning towards inertia. Thus human existence is to be loved, "but as a sailor loves the sea, when the helm is for harbor," knowing that what happens to us (decay, death) is the destiny of the universe as well. Man's fate is sublime because it is identical with the destiny of the cosmos. From this point of view, Jeffers's ending claim ("death is no evil") is difficult to accept only to the extent that we cling to our human scale and resist a cosmic scale of understanding. Humans dread nothingness because they fail to acknowledge that nothingness is the essence of the universe.<sup>8</sup> By recognizing the primacy (and universality) of nothingness, Life with all its limitations and evils is suddenly thrown against a background of cosmic yearning for inertia. The meaning of life is made truer and more poignant when we cease "to people / The darkness beyond the stars with harps and habitations." The death of the individual becomes identical with the basic will of the universe itself. Indeed, individual death is an index of this cosmic design.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, one of the most remarkable things about Jeffers's poetry in general and "Night" in particular is that he has managed, in a century when Western poetry's perspective has steadily shrunk, becoming more and more restricted to personal confession and minimalist imagism, to maintain a grand cosmic scale. From Gilgamesh to Milton, the poet was able to place human heroes and readers in cosmic structures. Human destiny, even if tragic, had a comprehensible framework. The collapse of "common sense" cosmology not only displaced humankind from a sense of cosmic architecture, but also left the poet disconnected. Jeffers struggled to fit his poetical visions within an adequate cosmological framework.<sup>10</sup>

#### — POSTSCRIPT —

These comments were originally written in the late 1960s in Beirut —"I see far fires and dim degradation," Jeffers wrote thirty years earlier. Rereading my comments in the 1990s, they seem with a few adjustments, correct enough about Jeffers's "Night," but also they seem to be touched by a younger man's egotism. So, too, in a curious way, does Jeffers's poem! In both paper and poem I sense a presumptuousness, even an arrogance about the capacity of language to hold vast, inhuman things at bay.

In making minor adjustments to this paper, I returned to Jeffers and read for the first time some of the later work which was not available to me in Beirut.

Of course, I discovered the astonishing "Hungerfield."

"Night" is obviously present in "Hungerfield," for instance in the simile Jeffers uses to characterize Hungerfield's claim after his struggle with Death:

... for his wrath was spent and his blood stilled,  
Like the black ebb of the sea, cold, flat and still: deep-lying rocks,  
    furred with dark weed and slime,  
Rise from the slack.

But my personal discovery—which will be familiar news to more dedicated readers—is that in "Hungerfield" Jeffers restates and reargues his relationship with time, death and eternity that "Night" proposed to resolve.

In "Hungerfield," near the end of his life, devastated by the recent death of his mate, Una, Jeffers as a man and poet is "left waiting for death, like a leafless tree / Waiting for the roots to rot and the trunk to fall." In the framed narrative of the poem, Jeffers once again projects a hero who struggles with elementary forces, including the figure of death himself. But the presumptuous language is gone. Death is now clearly an evil.

In "Hungerfield," the heroic vision and heroic struggle are cast in very different terms. The opening of "Hungerfield," when one comes to it from Jeffers's earlier works (such as "Night") is as powerful and affective as anything I know in English poetry. The opening and closing lines (and the poem they frame) disclose and redefine (once again) the heart and spirit of Robinson Jeffers, our great human poet of cosmic inhumanity.

— NOTES —

<sup>1</sup> "Night" is widely regarded as one of Jeffers's greatest philosophical lyrics. Everson calls it "magnificent," and possibly Jeffers's "finest [poem], his masterpiece in the short form" (44, 99). *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure*. Stanford University Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, there are only varying degrees of heat, all measured relatively from the hypothetical starting point of "absolute" Zero, -278° Centigrade.

<sup>3</sup> My colleague, Prof. Carl Brans, a physicist, questions this phrase ("cease to operate") and adds this note: "[The] static nature of equilibrium (uniform temperature) is a special case of second law, not a violation of it. You might also point out that, at its foundation, thermodynamics is merely statistics.

HOT ↔ DISORDERED ('RANDOM')  
COLD ↔ ORDERED ('UN-RANDOM')

The mechanical state of a gas of 'cold' molecules is like a (mostly) ordered deck of cards, while 'hot' disordered decks. When two such gasses are put in contact, the decks are shuffled, producing less order than the ordered (cold) one, but more than the disordered (hot) one. This is just a matter of counting possibilities. Finally, there is some anthropomorphic relativity in the definition of order/disorder. E.g., the worthless poker hand: 2 of Hearts, 5 of Spades, Jack of Diamonds, 6 of Diamonds, King of Hearts is just as unlikely and hard to get (so, valuable?) as a royal straight flush in Spades!"

<sup>4</sup> Light—all light—is radiant energy produced by heat and thus follows the entropic rule.

<sup>5</sup> A grasp of cosmic time scales is necessary for understanding "Night." Jeffers is aware of the difficulty of perceiving cosmic time and space when he says, "To us the near-hand mountain / Be a measure of height, the tide-worn cliff at the sea-gate a measure of continuance." These lines directly tell us how difficult it is to set aside the intractable Idols of the Tribe including the usual human dimensions of time and space.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffers's use of the term "blasphemies" underscores the fact that his vision consciously embraces the ancient imagery of the Manichean and Gnostic heresies.

<sup>7</sup> *Essays of a Humanist*, London: Penguin, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffers resembles Lucretius in this respect. See the section on Void in *De Rerum Natura*, 1,329-417.

<sup>9</sup> My physicist friend, Carl Brans, again cautions me: "This depends on your definition of evil! I would say this is a value judgment, rather than 'observable fact.'"

<sup>10</sup> Even the elaborate Scholastic cosmologies of Dante and Milton are "commonsensical" in that they are geocentric and geometric. They satisfy human egotism. With the loss of the earth as the center of the universe and the loss of defined dimensions, it becomes impossible to "geometricize" the universe into models graspable by ordinary man and usable by the poet. Jeffers's achievement is to have accepted the amorphous form of modern cosmology, its stupefying and apparently undefinable dimensions, and to have used this successfully in his work. This has been noted and discussed by several scholars including Hyatt H. Waggoner, *The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry*, Norman, OK, 1950, 105-32, and Everson (14ff). Robert Brophy suggests (letter to MAJS, 25 March 1990) that in some later poems ("At the Birth of an Age," for instance), Jeffers imagines an oscillating universe. I agree. My paper is an attempt to describe Jeffers's cosmological imagery in one early philosophical lyric. Scholars need to trace Jeffers's reading about modern cosmology, and to relate his changing understanding

of cosmology (itself an exploding field of discourse in Jeffers's lifetime) to the development of cosmological themes in his poetry. There are several other related critical projects. We need to discuss the difficulties of using a natural language to accurately describe cosmological theory, and the extent to which we can, finally, rely on Jeffers's cosmological visions. The comments by Prof. Brans show how troubling natural language expressions can be for describing something-that scientists most often approach with mathematical symbolism. Cosmologists use metaphors (black holes, red dwarfs, etc.), but often they claim this is only shorthand for other systems of description (mathematics) which they regard as more accurate and less anthropomorphic. Another question, which some post-modernist critics are raising, is whether any master narratives (what Lyotard calls *grands récits*) are trustworthy-and what local conditions they validate. The cosmologies, classical and modern, have, of course, always been fundamentally related to these master narratives and despite his rejection of partial (or false) master narratives of the religious and historical sort, Jeffers's poetry repeatedly evokes (and bases local perceptions and actions upon) the largest imaginable narrative, the story of the universe itself.

# ***UNA JEFFERS, CORRESPONDENT:***

## ***THE LUHAN LETTERS***

### ***EXCERPTS, CONCLUDED, 1940-48***

■ ***Editor's Note:*** There is no handy explanation for the correspondence hiatus of fall and winter 1939-40, but what has been a weekly or bi-weekly habit becomes in the 1940s a one- to four-a-year occurrence, in the later 1940s Una merely detailing Jeffers highlights: the Broadway *Medea*, Red Cross work, the war's end, response to various rumors from Taos, grandchildren, the Bomb, and the near-fatal trip to Ireland. All that remains for the friendship is the final letter, Robinson to Mabel, on Una's death.

It should be reiterated here, as at the end of each series of "Una Jeffers, Correspondent," that the fascination and enlightenment one feels from her letters arises partly from her ability to extend different things to different people: to Phoebe Barkan (RJN 44-47) and Blanche Matthias (RJN 49-55) an enduring, deep friendship and chatty, appreciative closeness, to Hazel Pinkham (RJN 56-59) a relationship almost ab initio (1912 at least) reflecting the intimacy of girlhood friends, to Albert Bender (RJN 60) a wonder and affection at his altruism and devotion, to Ellen O'Sullivan (RJN 63) a simple, intimate care for a beloved neighbor, to Judith Anderson (RJN 65) an admiration and business acumen, to Barth Carpenter (RJN 69) a shared enthusiasm for her sons and for Irish literature, to Rudolph Gilbert (RJN 73) a respectful, informative responsiveness, to Remsen Bird (RJN 76) a respectful and attentive relationship to an Occidental College president. In the remaining series (to be published, at least in part, in the *Collected Letters*) to Timmie and Maud Clapp and to Sara Bard Field and Erskine Scott Wood, Una is just as diversely revealing: to the Clapps showing the enduring devotion and self-disclosure of a life-time friendship, to the Woods an intellectual focus and diversity on social themes that balances warmth and challenge.



— MAY 28, 1940 —

Dearest Mabel: I fear we cannot come to Taos in August although I would love to. The reason is we expect to have to go east [for a (prematurely) scheduled Washington lecture] in the autumn & can't afford time or money to go so far twice, I am afraid. That is disappointing for us. I would put off the decision for a little if it were fair to you, but if you are to have such a full house all summer you will need to plan far ahead. I ought to hear anytime now about the date of our trip east. It is just possible that we need not go until winter—in which case—but no use to speculate for I can't tell yet. Robin is working away like mad on a poem ["Mara" or "Bowl of Blood" for *Be Angry at the Sun?*] —& I too am writing— (but has had to give over the last few days the war news has been so disturbing. Every one of our friends here has a close kinsman in the danger zone & some of my dearest friends & associations in the world are threatened.) Last night after we had gone to bed around midnight Premier [of France, Paul] Reynaud's speech began to come over the radio—the static was terrible,—it alone was frightening—we could make out only an occasional word "le roi",—"Malheur", & a last unquenchable "victoire" very moving then the "Marseillaise—tremendous, soul-tearing! We couldn't imagine what was happening—reckoning it was about 7 in the morning in Paris. When the music was playing Robin said "Its like the Titanic going down with the band playing 'Nearer my God to Thee,'" It was & I wept & shook. Then while we were still wondering, John Gunther from N.Y.C. as commentator began to speak in the wildest most excited voice, he began to comment on the premier's speech—he was as perplexed as we were what it meant, then suddenly he said—"A bulletin—the King of Belgium has surrendered." One's heart was squeezed in a vise. —Well, how can anyone again *make up* drama? We are drenched with it. I wonder whether you—but I guess you are not as involved with England as I am. I feel more at home there than anywhere I know. I love it—& how mad I've been at it so long, too. —Mad as one is with one's own household. How I have loathed & decried their "lost generation" literature & the namby-pamby Oxonions with their "We won't fight" & "The old men made the last war"-fools & dolts & weak kneed aesthetes & filthy pinks. Now they must take it & oh but I am sorry. Do you remember *all* all [sic] the literature was defeatist. Men & women alike; look at [Robert] Graves & [Siegfried] Sassoon & the women Vera Brittain [writer, pacifist, feminist, wrote Testament of Youth] et al

all defeatists. Have you thought how their most important young poet acted in the last war? Rupert Brooke—unhesitating to die at Gallipoli & let a bit of England enrich that soil. Now their most important vociferous poet, Communist [Wystan Hugh] Auden, escapes to America to lecture & begin to take out citizenship papers.

No wonder they are in a fix. Discipline & the resolve to defend your own with your fist is the answer to cowardly indulgence. No, I wouldn't use the word cowardly. I will say bloodless indolence. O dear, I begin to sound wild. Well, I am wild.

Two friends of Mary Oliver's are here & I see a good deal of them. Both charming. Came to visit Noel & took a house. One a painter *Woodruff*—the other George Sebastian who owns that great estate in Tunisia. Africa near Hamamet, the great Moorish house one always sees when a perfect house is pictured in architectural magazines. Perhaps Mary O. wrote you from his place.

Did you see the Matthias[es] in Mexico? They are there. The Clapps arrive here shortly for a holiday. I rather dread to see her. She's all English & must be in a state. She had charge of a hospital in Flanders last war & he was in English Aero Squadron.

Sidney Fish cracked his sacrum. Horse reared & fell back on him.

We have been with Willie Tevis to his great ranch in Northern Calif. Never spent such a wild day. When we got to the place five horses were led out of the stables rearing kicking & backing & with English saddles on them. Lee Tevis is a grand rider but absolutely refused to get on the horse assigned her. I looked at them & thought any of these limbs of Satan can throw me. —The saddles were about the size of postage stamps—so I just got lifted onto mine & clung like a leech. We went up & down mts. The horses sat down on their bottoms & slid down. —Well, it was wild but we stuck in spite of awful leaps, too, over streams when the horses all refused & were *made* to jump which is unpleasant.

Glad Brett is to be in one of your studios. She is real enough to keep around!

— NO DATE —

I had a letter from Brett this morning—I believe she thinks I'm unjust to the "lost generation" in England and that I don't let my imagination picture the horrors. I am not, & I do.

I forgot to ask you in my last letter, I think, whether you rec'd the two photographs of Garth's and Donnan's portraits. They were so good I hope they were not lost. I sent them I think just after you started to Mexico & if they were forwarded perhaps they got lost. I wanted Brett to see them too, I think I talked to her about them in L.A.

Didn't mean to seem mysterious in the black-out at the end of my letter. Asked something about my son's affairs which I realized was no business of mine.

— *SEPTEMBER 3, 1940* —

Dearest Mabel: Thanks so much for the Atlantic. I fear that I did not thank you when it came. *Hook* was beautifully written—also we were glad to see the chapters from the new life of Trelawney [Edward Trelawny, Shelley's friend, present at his drowning, author of *Adventures of a Younger Son*, 1831]. He has always been a great pet of ours.

Garth enjoyed being at your house again. Doesn't he look splendid? He instantly fell into a grand job here (for a stop-gap until he decides about things). He is friend, companion, driver & secretary for George Sebastian. I think I wrote you of him—he owns that marvellous house in Hamamet, Tunisia, Africa. He is very interesting & Garth may get trips thus to Mexico and So. America & later an introduction to \_\_\_\_\_ (Frenchman) who has done the most important anthropological work in Africa. Sebastian is a friend of Mary Oliver. We are seeing a good deal of a very amusing & brilliant Englishman of the older generation—Ellis Roberts lately literary ed. of "The New Statesman." Also here is one of the most utterly charming men I ever met, Sen. Fernley with his wife Sybil who was the widow of Bolitho.

Russell & Blanche depart tomorrow after three months here.

Love from Una.

Martin Flavin has been ardently courting Connie Bell. We've all enjoyed seeing him turn handsprings—the outcome is uncertain. She is coy.

— *DECEMBER 11, 1941* —

Dearest Mabel: A charming little Madonna arrived from you yesterday but as there was a slip inside addressed to Sonja, I don't know whether she is intended for me or should be sent on to Sonja [Levine]. Please send me word.

We are having a very interesting time with blackouts & alarms. Most people behave very coolly but enough are hysterical to make plenty of excitement. It is really very thrilling to walk around the Point at night & not see a pinpoint of light anywhere even in Pebble Beach. We have our guns loaded, daggers at hand, and required shovel, rake, pick axe, & sand prepared, & sit cozy & snug inside our shuttered windows. Oh and I have one weapon forbidden by law, a brass knuckles, given me by that wildly exciting woman, Hilda Vaughn who was the extraordinary Cassandra in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*. She is a whole career by herself.

Garth is in a mine 70 miles in the mts. above Bakersfield -a gold mine the Tevises are trying to reopen. Garth has charge of the ore reduction mill. It is very wild & remote country. We were there a month ago. The Tevis family are living at Stockdale, their old family estate (much run down) but they live as gay as larks. We are invited down for Christmas. Haven't decided. For twelve years we have had Christmas dinner at their house with Lee's mother as hostess, and all four of our boys there. Now Dick has left for Africa with an ambulance corps, young Lloyd is working on a Zoological Fellowship. Donnan married & Garth in the mine. I suppose Garth & Lloyd will be in the army before long. I think I sent you a paper with an account of Donnan's wedding. The Clapps, Matthiases, Elsie Arden, Esther Busby of Hampshire House all gave Donnan & bride a whirl in N.Y. Esther met Pat Smith through them & introduced her son Jack to Pat & they seem to have forted a friendship.

Now it's *Sunday Dec. 14*. Terrific rain storm & monstrous waves. We are start ing off up to Noel's. Lloyd & Lee were here yesterday & we promised to go down to Bakersfield Dec. 23. Part of Carmel was evacuated the other night but the order was countermanded before it reached us. It Would be hell for us to abandon our house & bantams & everything. I found a composition by Donnan the other day written in 1925 -with his own fantastic spelling about the first bantams.

All friendly greetings for Christmas & the New Year.

Una.

— *JULY 31, 1942* —

Dearest Mabel: I am afraid it will not be possible to see your friend Pond. Ft. McQuaide is way over by Santa Cruz. Do you think you made

a mistake & that he is at [Fort] Ord? Ord is just a few miles from Monterey toward Watsonville.

How terribly nice for you to have John & family fairly within reach! Donnan wrote that he & Patty saw Claire & Pat & the children in Zanesville en route. I wonder whether they won't find Arizona very hot after Maine.

Garth is in a Military Police Corps in Hawaii. He was sent overseas within ten days after he was taken in to the army. We hadn't the faintest notion where he was for seven weeks. We knew he'd gone out of S.F. in a big convoy but Alaska, Hawaii, the Canal Zone & Australia were all possibilities. He was rather hoping for Australia. He thought he'd like to train with the Australians. But now for some weeks we have been getting letters regularly. They come through in four days via clipper. Unfortunately ours don't get to him very promptly if at all although I try to get them on the clipper. Last Monday I had a cable from him—just love & well but a blessing to hear. He loves to get mail & if you ever have time to send him a line—or Brett either, it would be good. He is, we think from signs, in the Intelligence service but that is not to be mentioned in writing to him. It is all frightfully secret. He says he has no complaints to make except that he gets too little sleep. Once he wrote that in the preceding 48 hrs. he had had just one hour's sleep but of course it isn't often as bad as that. He is a private first class & his address= Pfc. Garth Jeffers 398 375 34, M.P.Co.811. A.P.O 958, c/o *Postmaster* San Francisco. If your letter is not over ½ oz. it will go by clipper for 6c if you write *Soldiers' Mail* by stamp.

Dick Tevis has been with an American Ambulance Field Unit in the English Army for nearly a year. He was in Tobruk three days before it fell & they haven't heard since. The boys' friends are scattered over all the globe. Young Lloyd goes in in a fortnight.

I am surprised that you are in the Two-Story House. Why not Tony house?

Blanche Matthias has been & gone looking very exquisite & chic in Mainbocher outfits [Main Bocher, Paris fashion designer].

The Barkans after years of planning for it, bought a little farm in Marin Co., built a big air-conditioned house with five bedrooms, etc. & a little house close by for the help. Now they can't get any help to go out there. Their Jap couple who relieved them of every care for years had to leave the coast. They had leased their house in town & are looking for an apt. Phoebe says she will have to pay \$150 a mo. for a

maid. \$100 will buy just second girl! Everyone in highly paid defense jobs around the bay.

We find it hard to give up the long pilgrimages we've always taken but do not dare to use up our tires too soon. Robin does sentry duty for some hours one night a week. I've taken advanced Red Cross first aid & am on call if necessary at certain times. I wish I were in some more continuously helpful service.

I went to a cocktail party lately given for Hank Marsman who wrote "Escape from Hong-Kong" in 3 numbers of recent Sat. Ev. Posts. Did you see them? He told me that he hadn't told a half even of the horrors. A lot unprintable.

Had supper at Noel's with Yehudi Menuhin after his concert one P.M. here. A charming person, young & easy but with a nice dignity. An adorable wife.

You have heard of Molly O'Shea's death some months ago?

Love from Una

— *DECEMBER 15, 1944* —

Dearest Mabel: I liked your article on Mary Austin much the best of any in the series. Most of the others were very dull. How come Bynner didn't do one?

Are you liking New York? Garth has just gone out from there to some unknown place. He wrote me he was able to get only a few hours leave which he used to keep an engagement with a girl he'd met when visiting Donnan in Zanesville. He had expected to see you & the Clapps & Mat thiasas but was unable to get away. He has been for some months in Texas & Louisiana training men. (He hated La.) I wish you'd seen him. He is very handsome & cheerful and big.

Donnan and Patty have another little girl, *Judith* Jeffers. I was a wee bit disappointed that she wasn't a boy but Garth said they have set their hearts on a minimum of five children so there is time for sons yet.

Young Lloyd Tevis is stationed in a lovely place down in Dorset near Cranbourne Chase. He is a technician in Hospital Lab. Dick Tevis was with the English Ambulance Corps in Africa for over a year. Now is a Leuit in our Cavalry in Bournemouth at present.

I've worked like a demon all the year as chairman of Staff Assistance Corps Red Cross. I have over forty in my corps—all of them busy. Besides all our regular staff duties here at H.Q. we have at least three of us at Ft. Ord each day. We are stationed in the Hospital &

serve the Ambulatory Cases. Have a booth—we sell them stamps, money orders, send telegrams, insure packages, cash checks and so on, besides taking care of the Information desk, the U.S.A.F.I. work & arranging interviews for patients with their case workers. Ft. Ord is one of the largest in the U.S. and is rather impressive—but horrifying too.

Esther and Lee are my vice-chairmen & are wonderful workers. I had promised myself to resign at the end of my year Dec.31. but don't know. I have to do something toward helping in this damnable (& unnecessary we still say) war—& I don't know of any thing within my range that I could do as well as this executive work.

Esther Fish's son, David Moore, is a bombardier. He is in Italy at present.

Carmel is *full* of officers' families. You remember the tall white house back of us, toward Teddies—that's Stillwells you know. There are heaps of thrilling people here, but we don't see many of the new ones—just a few regulars. I don't feel gay at all & much prefer a little quiet after the daily hubbub.

Robin is finishing a long poem. He has spent lots of time these last months thinning out our trees. We need the wood. Fuel is very scarce. (No one to cut it & no way to haul it). We burned coal most of last winter. Have a big crate that sits in our living room fireplace.

Yesterday some one gave us a late Sat.Eve.Post. (I believe Dec. 9) in which was an interesting article about some ancient stone towers in New Mexico which have been recently discovered and explored, that is within the last several years, —in Gallina — canyon. Found complete with skeletons & artifacts of all kinds. Very mysterious & interesting. Have you heard of them?

Are John & Clare still in Albuquerque? Is Brett in New York? She'd know Cranbourne Chase & Farnham where Lloyd is.

Love from Una

Crooked page! I'm not dizzy. —but writing in bed having coffee.

Ft. Ord is about 16 miles from Carmel. —over toward Castroville. In your day here I believe it was called Gigling Field. We used to go there at one time of the year to see the marvellous wild flowers, thousands of acres thickly carpeted.

— *NOVEMBER 12, 1945* —

Dear Mabel: I am having a sweet lazy day for once in a way. It is stormy & I am sitting up in bed with letters & sewing & some Irish archaeo-

logical books on the bed. Robin close by -he comes in to turn on the radio for news. (*That*, news, twice a day!) & brings a cup of hot coffee. Tomorrow I have a very heavy day at the Fort & tonight I have to go to a play Teddie is producing—otherwise everything is free! —The black clouds & sea birds & waves are the wonderfulest sight in the world. And a south wind.

Garth was supposed to be home a month ago but is still with tens of thousands of others awaiting transportation huddled in cold leaky huts while our precious dock-strikers play around in New York. Garth was in Germany for the last three weeks or more of the war & has some battle stars. He was in a combat M.P. Bn. & had a lot to do with defense of bridges. Later, after V-E day he went down to Bavaria with Patton's Third Army. He really liked Munich & picked up a lot of German—to judge by his letters.

Young Lloyd Tevis, laboratory technician, was stationed at a big General Hospital in Dorset for over a year, near my friend Peacock who has a country house in Wilts. Now he is discharged & will be home soon. He has been visiting Donnan—was there on the boys' birthday Nov. 9 which is nice St homey. Lloyd wrote me from there that he has never been very fond of babies but lost his heart to Donnan's two—they are so gay & jolly but *Well Behaved!*

For a time it seemed as if we might have Patty & the babies here for a while as Donnan's heart murmur seemed to have disappeared & he went before his Draft Board-however they found it at last & turned him down. I'd wanted his family to stay at Tor House & Robin & I had it all planned. Robin was cutting paths through our woods to walk the babies —& I began rearranging cupboards and closets—queer I Donnan should have not been in it—he is the *only* one of all the dozens of young men I knew who was interested in military affairs. Neither here at home nor at Ft. Ord have I yet met any soldier except the *professional* ones who has any enthusiasm about this war.

I hope to finish up my Red Cross work at the end of the year. But I shall feel like a quitter if I do. Our Surgical Dressings and Motor Corps have folded up but the Nurses Aides, Production, Gray Ladies and Staff Assistants (mine) are as busy as ever. I have put in over 3000 hrs. & wish now to indulge myself—but *someone* will have to do the work! I daresay I have told you we do the Banking & Telegrams & Mail business for the ambulatory cases in the Hospital (Sometimes \$10,000.00 a month.)—



*Medea* will probably be produced in Jan. at least Judith thinks that's the date. The contract the Guild signed set Apr. 20. as the ultimate date for production after which date they would forfeit the advance royalties given us. Under certain circumstances (need for changes, etc.) we will have to go on to N.Y. Robin looks upon the idea with horror except that we could visit Donnan.

Gabrielle says that someone told her that St. Teresa house has been sold & to some person Gabrielle probably knows, but the informer couldn't remember who 'twas. Who is it—do I know? I felt really sad to hear the Big House was up for sale—a lovely place but keeping it up & properly staffed seems a terrible burden. Is it sold yet? Perhaps already easier now—but it's been very difficult here to get any help, & carpenters & plumbers have gotten such a habit of looking down their noses if you asked them to do anything that I can't imagine them performing with alacrity, —ever again. Houses no matter how big or little sell here for enormous prices. The place is filled with army & navy. Generals' wives and Admirals' wives & G.I. Joes' wives. They came to wait, but say, now, they'll never leave. Horrors, but we can't see any of them if we stay in our own place.

We had lunch with the Durhams at Noel's lately. They were staying over the week end—you know Henriette Goodrich. They are so much in love & so congenial and so openly proud of each other that it is heart-warming. He was head of the Eng. Dept. at Berkeley, but has resigned that & goes in only a few times a week to give a few courses he is particularly interested in (Shakespeare & contemporary to Sh. drama). She did a lot of works at the Univ. last year in morbid psychology, —looking toward the Rehabilitation of Soldiers which her daughter is working at & I believe she will soon, also. They sped away in a swank car in the late autumn sunshine wreathed in smiles!

Noel is now in N.Y. for a fortnight. The atomic bomb is fantastic but at present it seems as if people are indulging themselves tossing the ideas & terrors about it around. While they are shocking each other about it they feel rather free of need to help the ulcerous person on their doorsteps[.] How interesting if we could harness the thing for work, but if it is likely to knock the whole world to bits, what of it? We have always been schooled to believe this planet will end somehow—cool off or collide with some meteor—. I can't think this bomb would hurt much more than the other ways.

Greetings to my Taos friends—how are Brett & Frieda & Marina & the Lockwoods & Kikers & Spud & Myron, everyone, & Miriam—did

she marry Arch or did Sister?

Did you read a novel by Harry Sylvester about Taos & folks there & Penitentes. I think the name was "Day Spring" [*Dayspring*, Appleton, 1945]. Who is he? I read it.

Jaime [de Angulo] lives alone down the coast now very drunk & dirty, & often completely demented. Nancy & daughter live in Berkeley. Jaime has gone very native &, I am told, cast all his belongings & kitchen utensils (except one jack-knife) into the canyon. I am told it is a terrible sight to see him out fumbling around among the horses & they push him over. I think certain old settlers there go from time to time to see whether he is lying trampled, or to take him a loaf of bread. Lately Sam Trotter took him a pigeon he had just shot and Jaime grabbed it & tore it apart & ate it raw.

Lots of love.      Una

Van Wyck Brooks & wife are just back here for the winter again. Such unusually nice people, an amusing combination—she especially, of old Bostonese & present day leftist direction. They were married here in Carmel in 1911 & lived first in that wee log cabin that Robin & lived in when we came in 1914.

Hamilton Jeffers flew down & took us a-flying in one (of his 2) planes a few Sundays ago. He was in the Aleutians, then consultation at Boston Tech. & then India for 18 mo. attached to Army. Science. He is black as a negro, hair white as snow, teeth flashing white! We hadn't seen him for 3 yrs. He is back at observatory[.]

— *MARCH 26, 1948* —

Dearest Mabel: I wish we could stop in Taos—I often think fondly of all the lovely times we had with you—but I can't see any possibility very soon. We have plane tickets to Ireland June 11. & I don't see a minute of leisure before that time. We expect to return the last of September after some time in Eng, Scotland & the Outer Hebrides. If Brett has gotten back to Taos she will have told you of our busy—& *fruitful* household! Donnan and wife Lee & baby son Lindsay (nearly 6 mos. old), Garth & Lotte (Lieslotte) & baby girl Maeve (3 mos.) are here. The house is bursting its seams with life. I love it & only wish I had twice the energy I have. We have very carefully worked out the division of space & work—we all work & all manage to have some privacy. The dining room is in constant use—when the kitchen door is

shut it is completely shut off—Robin works there, and evenings when the young have guests we shut them out there. My tower room also comes into constant use. Upstairs we have divided into two rooms. Garth & Lotte's end looks very Bavarian with all the pictures of Munich—& pressed Edelweiss & gentians & a gay peasant clock with long pendulum on a chain swaying back & forth along the chimney. We painted that red brick chimney white & the end stone walls white. With the fire glowing in the Franklin fireplace—& two cradles full of babies it is very cheerful! I am utterly mad about these babies. I don't see how I can ever part with them. Garth is going back to college to take some forestry work. He feels he can't attempt to do anything with his anthropology, which would either confine him in a museum (he is horrified at that) or take him on long expeditions away from Lotte & Maeve. We believe forestry will be right for him.

I didn't see much of Brett—There was a horrid flu going around[.] Robin got it & followed up with a bad bronchitis while she was here.

I am sorry you didn't see Medea in New York. Judith is magnificent: I doubt if greater tragic acting has ever been seen in America. We flew east for the *opening*—Robin reluctant, but the producers sent us return tickets & there seemed no excuse. It was a great experience! really and to have it a smash hit was very very nice indeed!

So many interesting people come & go (and stay) here, we are dizzy. I would like to be quiet & free from people for a little. That may happen in Ireland.

The Harwood Foundation sounds fine! I often think of your beautiful Santos there.

I am roasting a turkey & must give my mind to it. It was a present for Easter & this is only Good Friday but the creature was so big it took all the room in the ice box.

Lotte is a Catholic (of sorts) & has just returned from the old Mission Tres horas services. They have for some years revived here the old Spanish ritual of taking the corpus down from the cross & laying it in a tomb (side chapel) until Easter. Very solemn.

Now I must run. Lots of love from us all. Una

The babies both came home from the hospital at 8 days (so crowded there) & I learned a lot I didn't know about tending to wee babies! My boys were 6 weeks before I had charge of them.

Robin had an extremely interesting article in Magazine Section of N.Y. Times. He has rec'd letters from all over U.S. about it. I hope you saw it. "Poetry, Gongorism & a Thousand Years."

— JUNE 10 [1948] —

New York [Hotel Wellington stationery, 7th Ave. at 55th St.]

Dearest Mabel: We are flying to Ireland tomorrow. Here are pictures of my precious Maeve. We took Lotte & Maeve up to Garth in Oregon over a month ago. He had been there 2 wks. He is in the Forestry Service & *likes* it. We did hate to break up our big family at Tor House.

Donnan, Lee & brave little Lindsay are at Tor House.

I asked Donnan to send you snap shots of them. I cried when I left & wondered why I'd ever thought of leaving but I am excited to be going to Ireland. A drive-yourself car from Dublin meets us at Shannon Field. Love from Una.

— AUGUST 13, 1948 —

2.5 Northumberland Road: Dublin. Eire

Dearest Mabel: Yes, Robin has been ill, *desperately* but is recovering steadily. Barrels of penicillin were pumped into Robin intra-muscular every 3 hrs. & many deep injections into pleural cavity. He was struck down with pleurisy, a strep infection in Kilkenny. A good doctor there & a little hospital. The doctor called down an "eminent" Dublin specialist who said he was *gravely* ill—ordered him brought to Dublin in ambulance, put him in hospital where two specialists worked over him faithfully, coming 3 & 4 times a day. There were 3 days when they gave me little hope, then he began to improve. It is five weeks day after tomorrow since he got sick. He suffered much from pain at first & for 3 weeks couldn't lie down, was propped up in bed[.] I had a ghastly time of anxiety & coping with everything but found people so kind & helpful I have a whole new set of friends! Now he has to get back his strength, is up 2 hrs. a day & can walk back and forth in his room a little. I have an apt close to hospital to sit with him all day. Before he got sick we had 5 wks of constant motoring & saw many old familiar places besides some enchanting new ones. The weather has been abominable, only a few days even reasonably warm. & almost constant rain & no house properly warm. Of course the rest of our trip to Scotland & England is cancelled. Robin is coming over to my apt. Aug 30 & our plane tickets home are for Sept. 20. Before then we will walk & motor a bit each day & I hope he will quickly get strong. I left the

Shelbourne a few days after we got here & had the great good fortune to get a big [word unclear] room with a wonderful woman in a private house. She gives me my meals served & cooked beautifully, in my room & will take care of Robin's build-up too. I am going to fly to Edinburgh Aug 20 to the opening of *Medea* Aug 23. John Gielgud is directing. He writes that Eileen Herlie who is playing *Medea* is beautiful, magnetic, powerful but will not equal Judith in the ["]tigerish parts." I suppose you know Judith starts her American road tour in S.F. Sept. 6. I don't know yet which company will do Canada.

I have two very dear daughters-in-law & I adore the babies. Each came home from the hospital to Tor House on the 8th day & I took care of them. They are like my very own & strangely enough the daughters fall in with complete acquiescence to my Hitler-ish methods & never have a cross word. We had a wonderful time when we were all there at Tor House together 5 1/2 mos. Garth loves his forestry & I have fine reports of him from various people up in Oregon. He had to leave his job & take a year at Oregon State for some technical forestry work. Charlotte is just the girl for him —strong & resourceful & madly in love with him. Donnan is doing awfully well too & Lee is a beautiful yellow-haired creature. I am very eager to see your Ms. We must pry it out of the doctor's clutches. Love to Frieda & Brett & all my friends there. Do write again.

Love from           Una.

## Guidelines for Submissions to *RJN*

The *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* will print short notes, notifications of work-in-progress, announcements requests for information, inquiries from collectors, bibliographic findings, etc. It especially welcomes short anecdotes relating to the poet and his works.

It has not been RJN policy to publish unsolicited poem tributes. Photos relating to Robinson Jeffers and family are most welcome and may be printed if not restricted by copyright.

Significant letters from or about the Jeffers family are equally welcome, as are drawings, maps, family-tree annotations, and reports on cultural allusions to the poet, use of his poems, and difficult-to-access articles.

### SUBMISSIONS

Whenever possible, please make submissions by computer disk. IBM and Macintosh programs are both acceptable—identify software and version number used. Along with the disk, submit two typescripts of the piece, double-spaced on 8 ½" x 11" standard white typing paper. To have disk and copy returned, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Address correspondence to Robert J. Brophy, editor, *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, Department of English, California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840; (310)985-4235.

#### Essays:

Place the title one inch below the top of the page, the author's name one inch below the title, the text two inches below the author's name. Affiliation of the contributor should appear at the end of the essay.

#### Notes, Book Reviews, and Bibliographies:

Follow the form for essays, except that the author's name (and affiliation) should appear at the end of the text.

#### Citations and Notes:

Consult the *MLA Style Sheet* Second Edition. Mark references in the text with raised footnote number (not author-year citations in parentheses). Double-space endnotes following the essay on a new page headed "Notes."

#### Quoting and Citing Robinson Jeffers:

The standard edition of Jeffers' work is now *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Stanford University Press, Vols. I, II, 111: 1988, 1989, 1991), abbreviated CP. Of course, for peculiar purposes, the original printings may be referred to, in which case the title in full or (when repeated) appropriately abbreviated, should be cited, along with an explanatory note. Until *The Collected Letters of Robinson and Una Jeffers* (Stanford) is available, references should be to *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Ann Ridgeway (Johns Hopkins, 1968), or to the appropriate number of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*.