



Robinson Jeffers

Newsletter

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ON THE COVER:

The Moon separating from the Earth by Auguste Rodin (1898) being the artist's version of Darwin's resonance theory of the origin of the lunar globe.

From The Moon: Our Celestial Neighbour, by Z. Kopal, 1960.

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NEWS & NOTES

■ Apologies, first of all, for the delayed publication. RJN's 1995 winter-spring issues were dedicated to a special *William Everson* booklet of 144 pages, celebrating the career-long dedication of that poet to Robinson Jeffers as father, mentor, and inspiration. Forty-eight poets, critics, and friends were asked to relate their memories and assessments; the two poets were compared and contrasted; and three Everson poems specifically on Jeffers were presented with comments: "Tor House," "The Poet Is Dead," and "The Thing-Death." Several poems illustrating the two poets' common love for the California Central Coast, their concern for the violence of things, their celebration of sacramentality of landscape, and their recognition of geologic time as context within which we must see earth's life were featured, along with Everson's expansive "notes" on the poet's need of a master, his finding of his own voice, his interior transformation, and the struggle for integrity in the face of success. Numbers 95 and 96, here presented, also comprise a double issue and attempt to catch up time lost and to consolidate for the sake of economy of funds.

■ On January 26, 1995, the PBS McNeil-Lehrer News Hour offered a ten-minute segment by Phyllis Theroux on Jeffers's life, times, and impact as poet.

■ In the May 25th issue of *The New York Review of Books* appears an essay (p. 31 ff), "The Scientist as Rebel," in which Freeman Dyson ruminates:

And with this long view of the past goes Robinson Jeffers's even longer view of the future. In the long view, not only European

civilization but the human species itself is transitory. Here is the vision of Robinson Jeffers, expressed in different parts of his long poem, "The Double Axe." [Dyson then quotes two portions of the work.] Robinson Jeffers was no scientist, but he expressed better than any other poet the scientist's vision. Ironic, detached, contemptuous like Einstein of national pride and cultural taboos, he stood in awe of nature alone. He stood alone in uncompromising opposition to the follies of the Second World War. His poems during those years of patriotic frenzy were unpublishable. [Dyson goes on to detail briefly Jeffers's dealings with Random House.]

■ For the fourth consecutive year, the University of California, Davis, and The Twenty-Sixth Annual Squaw Valley Community of Writers co-sponsored "The Art of the Wild"—an eight-day conference inspired by and held on behalf of wilderness, nature, and the environment. The program convened in Squaw Valley, California, on July 14, 1995, and featured daily readings and panels by writers, literary agents, and editors. Jack Hicks, A.O.W Founder and Director, as well as the Director of the Creative Writing Program at UC Davis, invited several attendees to sit on a Participant's Panel held July 16 to discuss their regions and their work. Grant Hier (CSU Long Beach) presented a talk on the theme of "Inhabitation" in his own poetry, as well as in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder. He cited heavily from the thesis by Eric Paul Shaffer, "Inhabitation in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder, and Lew Welch" (RJN 78).

■ On Saturday, September 14, the California State Capitol Museum together with the California State Library sponsored a panel, "Images of California: Contemporary Writers of the Golden State," featuring panelists Gerald Haslam, Forrest Robinson, Robert Brophy, and James Huston, and chaired by State Librarian Kevin Starr. Brophy presented for discussion: "William Everson, Robinson Jeffers, and Archetype West."

■ ASILOMAR 45 Conference "Big Dreams: Many Californias," on September 22-24, sponsored by the Curriculum Study Commission of the Central California Council of Teachers of English and offering forty seminars ranging through such topics as Steinbeck Country, the Literature of War, the San Francisco Renaissance, Wallace Stegner's Lens on Life, Native American Storymaking, the Multicultural Classroom, Asian American Women Authors, and Universal Themes in California

Literature, commissioned "Winged Rock: The Poetry and Place of Robinson Jeffers," a three-day introduction, slide presentation, discussion, and field trip led by Kirk Glaser, joined by David Rothman and Robert Brophy. The course description read: "Jeffers chronicles and mythologizes the Central Coast and its inhabitants through lyric and narrative poems. His poetry speaks with ever greater urgency to our environmental (as well as moral and spiritual) plight. We will discuss Jeffers as ecological and apocalyptic prophet through his representation of the Big Sur coast and his uses of poetic tradition, mythology, and modern science."

■ The 1995 Tor House Robinson Jeffers Festival, October 5-8, centered on Una Jeffers's person and her contribution to the poet's life and work. Richard Tevis, family friend, spoke of boarding briefly with the Jeffers family; James Karman reflected on Una's mystic aura, her values, and her significance in the life of Tor House. Maeve Greenan Hardy recollected her mother's enduring friendship with Una, which led her to write her 1939 encomium *Of Una Jeffers* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie). Rob Kafka assessed and read from Una's essays and reviews published in *Pacific Weekly* and *The Carmel Pine Cone*. This year the Saturday banquet honored Margaret Wentworth Owings for her years of ecological advocacy on behalf of the Big Sur landscape. Her moving presentation was preceded by introductions by historian James Holliday, Congressman Sam Farr, and photographer Morley Baer, along with a tribute from actor-environmentalist Robert Redford read by James Holliday. The festival was concluded by the traditional poetry walk led by John Courtney and Burt Kessenick, featuring readings of Jeffers poems along the way through Mission Trails Park to Stewart Beach; theme: Jeffers and Pantheism.

■ 1995 has seen important new publications. The end of 1994 brought *Take Hold Upon the Future: Letters on Writers and Writing, 1938-1946*, edited by William R. Eshelman for Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey. As could be expected from the participants, Jeffers references go through three columns of the index. The writers mention Jeffers often, sometimes at length.

Four books were released in 1995:

Terry Beers's "... a thousand graceful subtleties": *Rhetoric in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Peter Lang) applies Aristotelian theory of rhetorical poetics to find in Jeffers's work the strategies by which the

poet moves his audience to accept the inhumanist perspective which gives human acts their finite value, using not only powerful negative examples, but also glimpses of endurance, courage, and appreciation for the natural world—representing Jeffers thus as an outstanding epic poet.

James Karman's new edition of *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California* (Brownsville, Oregon: Story Line Press) expands largely on his Chronicle Books critical introduction/biography of 1987, including new photos, an updated bibliography, and an extensive nine-page index.

William Thesing's *Robinson Jeffers and a Galaxy of Writers* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press) offers a smorgasbord of topics by "old and new" Jeffers scholars. The individual chapters are noted elsewhere in the "Annual Bibliography" of this issue. Many topics are informatively comparative: Jeffers and Merwin; Technique in Jeffers, Dickey, Mallarme, and Stevens; Detachment in the Lyrics of Jeffers and Blake; Jeffers, Frost, and the Borders of the Self; Jeffers, Snyder, and the Problem of Civilization; Narrative in Jeffers and Dickey; Women in Jeffers and Eliot; Jeffers, Lawrence, and the "Erotic Sublime." Other essays touch Jeffers's syntax, his place in the Romantic movement, his relation to Christianity, transcendental echoes in his inhumanist philosophy, and his place among Modernist writers.

Robert Brophy's *Robinson Jeffers: Dimensions of a Poet* (New York: Fordham University Press) offers ten chapters, together with a "Review of Jeffers Scholarship" and an annotated bibliography of primary works. "Poet of Carmel-Sur" attempts to capture the earnestness and humanity of Jeffers "In the Poet's Lifetime" examines the unusual misunderstanding that followed his works; "Jeffers's Uses of History" reflects on the human mode of duration within the divine cosmic process; "Telling the Past and Living the Present" addresses the New Critics' hostility and tracks the confluence of narrator and multiple character points of view in the volume which won Jeffers a 1932 *Time* magazine cover; "The Narrative of Nature" contrasts the Modernist claim of the poem as reality-unto-itself with Jeffers's understanding of art as a process of discovering by entering nature's very unfolding; "Versecraft of the Sublime" sees Jeffersian verse as neither traditional metered nor free, drawing from technical innovations to express the inhuman divine. The panel "The Female Archetype" confronts Jeffers's strong woman protagonists; "Pastorals of Apocalypse" looks to Jeffers's focus on desire to be purged, death as a way to God, and domesticity as uniting with landscape as habitat; "The Dialogue between Czeslaw Milosz & Robinson Jeffers" reflects on the dialectic between the humanist and inhumanist views;

"All Flesh Is Grass," the final chapter, insists that Jeffers be seen not as philosopher but as mystic, locating Jeffers's centering in what Rudolph Otto terms the *Mysterium Tremendum* or Totally Other.

■ Stewart Brand's *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Viking Press, 1994, 243 pp.) suggests that a building gains its character by its "high intent, duration of purpose, duration of care, and a steady supply of benevolent dictators." Of Jeffers's dwelling he says: "Made of granite boulders from its beach, Tor House is a poem-like masterpiece. It may express more direct intelligence per square inch than any other house in America" (49). Four photographs of Tor House appear, and the poem "The Bed by the Window."

■ *Firebrand: The Life of Horace Liveright* by Tom Dardis (Random House: reviewed in the Washington Post, July 2, 1995) yields an off-beat description of his visit to Tor House:

Although he had published *Roan Stallion*-the book that made Robinson Jeffers famous--in 1925, Horace had never met the shy, withdrawn poet who continued to produce a series of long narrative poems about violent people and deeds on the rugged Pacific coast around Carmel and Point Sur. Eliot, Pound, Crane, and Cummings all had their partisans at 61 West Forty-eighth Street, but the favorite of Horace, Bennett Cerf, and Donald Friede was always Jeffers.

The text continues:

There had been no invitation from Jeffers: Horace had simply wired the poet from Hollywood, asking if he and Dorothy could pay a visit. The poet was widely known for his love of solitude in the wilderness surrounding his famous stone house, but he responded favorably and waited patiently for the arrival of his ex-publisher. When Dorothy and Horace located the Jeffers place, they were briefly dismayed to find a sign reading "Away for three days," but this announcement proved to be due to Jeffers's absent-mindedness: he had simply forgotten to take the sign down after the family's last motor trip.

And then later:

Horace's magnetism was still effective: although not usually given to talk, Jeffers stayed up conversing with his guests long past midnight. The following day he took them for a two-hour drive along the Pacific coast that he had made famous in *The Women at Point Sur* and *Thurso's Landing*.

The description closes with the enigmatic:

The two days spent with Jeffers and his family filled Horace with a feeling that the thirteen years he had spent in publishing books had been "stultifying."

- *Proses: On Poems & Poets*, essays and reviews by Carolyn Kiser (Copper Canyon Press, 1994) provides a generous sprinkling of references to Robinson Jeffers as a favorite poet, Jeffers having been very much in her mother's reading. Her essay "Western Space" compares contemporary poets of the American West (among them preeminently Jeffers) with those of the Tang Dynasty of China, Russian poets of the early 20th century, and those of the Native American tradition.
- The Robinson Jeffers Association, satellite of the American Literature Association, is expanding its membership. It especially fosters Jeffers scholarship, Jeffers conference panels, and an annual conference of its own (this February at Occidental College). Contact Terry Beers, English Department, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053. The email address is <tbeersCa3scuacc.scu.edu>. The RJA's website is at <<http://www-acc.scu.edu/--tbeers/rja.html>>.
- The Tor House Foundation, which cares for the Jeffers home and grounds, conducts weekend tours, sponsors a yearly poetry festival in October, a garden party in May, and poetry workshops, readings, and exhibits, is located at Sunset Center, Carmel (Mission Street between 8th and 10th). It can be reached at PO. Box 2713, Carmel, CA 93921. The office phone number is 408-624-1813, and its email address is <hawktower@aol.com>.
- The Jeffers Listserv, which carries free-flow discussions of literary and biographical concern, notes upcoming events, alerts to media coverage, posts questions, and offers often instant information and advice, can be joined by emailing Steve Adkison at <adkison@unr.edu>.

ROBINSON JEFFERS ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1995

■ **Editor's Note:** Two collections of essays were published in 1995: *Robinson Jeffers and a Galaxy of Writers*, edited by William Thesing (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), and *Robinson Jeffers: Dimensions of a Poet*, edited by Robert Brophy (New York: Fordham University Press). Individual chapter/essays will be noted alphabetically, identified here by short titles "*Galaxy*" or "*Dimensions*." A collection of William Everson's peers commenting on him and his work, especially his relationship to Jeffers, titled *William Everson: Remembrances & Tributes: With Reflections on Robinson Jeffers* (Long Beach: Robinson Jeffers Newsletter, 1995), will be short-titled as "*Everson*." The *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* itself will be indicated by the abbreviation RJN. Following the procedure of the annual bibliography of Western American Literature, articles will be noted from summer or fall of 1994 to fall of 1995.

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Almon, Bert. "Jeanne D'Orge, Carmel, and Point Lobos." *Western American Literature* 29:3 (1994), 239-260.

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- . "The Ecology of a Dwelling: A Note on Habitation vs. Desecration in the Building of Tor House." *RJN* 91 (Summer 1994), 7-8.
- . "Poet and Poems" in *Everson*, 93.
- . "A Review of Jeffers Scholarship" in *Dimensions*, 237-242.
- . "Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Carmel-Sur" in *Dimensions*, 1-8. . "William Everson and Robinson Jeffers" in *Everson*, 1-3.
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- Glaser, Kirk. "Desire, Death, and Domesticity in Jeffers's Pastorals of Apocalypse" in 137-176.
- Gluck, Louise. "Obstinate Humanity: Hass, Milosz, and Jeffers." *RJN* 91 (Fall 1994), 9-15.
- Gioia, Dana. "In Memoriam" in *Everson*, 35-39.
- Hier, Grant. "The Dance of Shiva and Concepts of Hinduism in Robinson Jeffers's Poetry." *RJN* 92 (Fall 1994), 23-41.
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- . "Jeffers and the Modern(ist) Terrain: Competing and/or Complimentary Poetics? A Panel Discussion with Charles Altieri, Terrence Diggory, Albert Glepi, and James E. Miller" in *Galaxy*, 182-202.
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- Wakoski, Diane. Untitled tribute in *Everson*, 84.
- Zaller, Robert, and Panel. "Robinson Jeffers and the Female Archetype" in *Dimensions*, 110-136.

- "Robinson Jeffers and the Uses of History" in *Dimensions*, 30-47.
- "Words for Bill Everson" in *Everson*, 86-88.

UNA JEFFERS'S PUBLISHED REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

By Rob Kafka

■ The bibliography below is a slightly expanded version of one I distributed at the Fall 1995 Tor House Foundation Festival. It is anticipated that texts of the articles will soon be available on the World Wide Web, at the Tor House Foundation page-which has not yet debuted. While I am fairly confident that I have included the majority of Una's significant reviews, I am equally sure that other obituaries and occasional articles will come to light. As I become aware of these, the online bibliography will be updated and the text posted. I will be grateful to readers of the RJN who can bring omissions to my attention.

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"Strange Idyll" (review of *Lorenzo in Taos*, by M. D. Luhan). *The Carmelite*, 3/3/32, p. 9.

"D. H. Lawrence and Mabel Luhan" (extract from an article in *Revue de Paris* by the portrait painter Jacques-Emile Blanche; translated by Una Jeffers). *The Carmelite*, 11/10/32, p. 6.

"The Man of Family" (in Lincoln Steffens Issue). *The Carmel Pine Cone*, 2/16/34, p. 8.

"Wife of a Genius" (review of *Not I, But the Wind*, by Frieda Lawrence). *Controversy*, 11/30/34, pp. 84-84a.

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"How Carmel Won the Hearts of the Jeffers Family." *The Carmel Pine Cone*, 4/19/40, p. 9.

"Shim Kuster" (obituary). *The Carmel Cymbal*, 9/13/40, p. 3.

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JEFFERS AND THE HEIDEGGERIAN NOTION OF "DWELLING"

By Jose Garcia

■ Throughout virtually all of Robinson Jeffers's poetry, in an uncanny way, the Heideggerian notion of "Dwelling" is profoundly enacted. In no way do I mean to suggest that Jeffers was even remotely influenced by Heidegger's ontology—yet, according to Heidegger, all poets (and I would assert particularly poets, like Jeffers, who speak as if the voice of a geographic place) realize this act of dwelling in their work. According to Heidegger, "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling" (Poetry 218). Heidegger's highly mystico-poetic definition of dwelling is rooted in an understood fourfold unity of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. "To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals—this fourfold preserving is the simple essence of dwelling" (Basic 350).

It is through the act of dwelling that humans remember Being and participate in the guardianship of Being. Heidegger equates dwelling with thinking and building (Basic 347-363); and it is interesting dwelling, Tor House. Jeffers with language and with stone took up the guardianship of Being as it was so profoundly unconcealed to him through nature and in the drama of its primal elements along the California coast. The four poems we will examine are involved with the actual building of Jeffers's home and his thinking about it. These poems enact through their imagery the interpenetration of the Heideggerian fourfold unity into the very foundation stones of Tor House.

In the poem, "To The House" (CP I: 5) Jeffers is "heaping the bones of the old mother / To build us a hold against the host of the air." Here

Granite is understood as both earth and pagan divinity. It has been forged and shaped by elemental forces and now is to be shaped again into a dwelling by the poet/builder/thinker to protect him and family from "the host of the air." It is not only Jeffers's physical labor, but his mortal voice that builds and thinks with the construction of the house—unifying the fourfold into one. Heidegger writes "... in thinking, Being comes to language, language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home" (Basic 217).

In "Winged Rock" (CP II: 131), grounded by the house, its "heavy sea-orphaned stone," Jeffers thinks into the sky's presence, seeing birds as "The imagination of the house." From the lines "little clay kits of swallows / Hung in the eaves," the poem follows the flights of birds: rock then, being winged as the title denotes, so that earth and sky merge. The oracular assertions of the poet here are evidence of the act of dwelling. The poem is a record of this act of dwelling where earth, sky, and mortal voice are set against, and in relation to, the divinity which sky discloses at the poem's conclusion. The poet, through the act of the poem, thinking into sky, faces, and tacitly acknowledges the distance between himself and the unnamed divinity described in "To The House" as "the host of the air" (CP I: 5). Here all components of the fourfold are brought into an interdependent relationship. The poem serves as an act of measurement against and alignment with the divinity the sky brings into nearness. According to Heidegger, "Man's dwelling depends on an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension in which the sky belongs just as much as the earth" (Poetry 221). Jeffers ends the poem with what this sky discloses to him most profoundly, the passage of hawks. The hawk throughout Jeffers's oeuvre becomes for him the supreme emblem for Being—its unconcealed presencing. Through this realized unity of the fourfold, the poet's understated discovery is the divinity and otherness of the poet's own imagination—suddenly manifest as the passage of "attentive" hawks. The abruptness of the poem's ending suggests the terror of this insight.

Jeffers dwells so deeply in "Tor House" (CP I: 408) that he is able to "uncenter" his mind from himself (as phrased in "Carmel Point" (CP IV: 399)) and think beyond the poet's domain, using trees he has planted, stone, the river, the bay, "wild sea-fragrance of wind," stars, sun and moon, and birds. Heidegger explains this kind of measure-taking: "To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the

word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being" (Poetry 222).

For Jeffers this measure-taking seemingly begins with the construction of Tor House as described in "To the Rock That Will Be a Cornerstone of the House" (CP I: 11). In the pagan ceremony the poet brings wine, honey, and milk to bless a cornerstone where hawk, stone, the poet's hand, his creative voice, thinking, and the projected act of building merge. The entire fourfold, its enduring power and divinity, is gathered, celebrated, and unified in this poem/ceremony.

I did not dream the taste of wine could bind with granite, Nor honey and milk please you; but sweetly

They mingle down the storm-worn cracks among the mosses, Interpenetrating the silent Wing-prints of ancient weather long at peace, and the older Scars of primal fire, and the stone Endurance that is waiting millions of years to carry A corner of the house, this also destined.

At root in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers is the profound act and articulation of dwelling. Jeffers's poetry serves us as an initiation into the unconcealment of Being's presence experienced in the natural world. The act of dwelling is a kind of guardianship of this unconcealment. It is because of Jeffers's connection to, and guardianship of, Being, that his poetry awakens us into the remembrance of Being.

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Editor's Note: The article's author invites interested readership to consult Heidegger's basic works, especially pertinent being his "Letter on Humanism" and "Dwelling Building Thinking." Concepts like "unconcealment" do not yield an easy definition or unobtrusive footnote but become more and more exciting as we realize how much "concealment"

we come to accept, even expect, in the course of biased, devious, and ignorant human perception and speech. One might say that "unconcealment" describes the thrust of Jeffers's poetic vocation: to see things without blinding preconceptions, to see them whole, and to report them in words that hue to the truth, no matter the consequences. The phrase "pagan divinities" invites us into Heidegger's theology and may approximate something like "epiphanic energies" or Rudolph Otto's the "totally other," or, in its cosmic resonances, it may approximate contemporary "Gaia" insights or Eliade's discussions of "sacred place" or the urge to mystic experience of locale as "axis mundi," place-as-center joining heaven and earth. "Poetry first brings man onto earth" perhaps by making him see and articulate both the connectedness of all and at the same time the discrete singularity of each. The phrase "through dwelling man remembers Being" seems tantalizingly to recall Jeffers's mysterious phrase: "it is memory / Prophecies, prophecy that remembers" ("Night," CP I: 114). By the act of dwelling, each human (poet-guided) "participates in the guardianship of Being" in as much as each, by thinking and knowing, establishes the "True," our link to Being and sanity. The phrase that "Language is the house of Being" suggests that the poet's precise words precipitate this right thinking and knowing, this "discovery" (to use Jeffers's word), this call to accurate recognition, this being at one with the real.

An editor's note should not normally elaborate this far, but one is reminded that "inhabitation" (much like Heidegger's "dwelling") is a word that is appearing more and more in studies connecting poetry and place, and that we, as Jeffers readers, are called upon ourselves to discuss it by Kirk Glaser's "Journeys into the Border Country: The Making of Nature and Home in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers and Mary Oliver" (RJN 85: 1), by Eric Schaffer's "Inhabitation in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers" (RJN 78: 28-40), and by David Wyatt's chapter "Jeffers, Snyder, and The Ended World" in his *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California* (RJN 87: 7-8), as also by William Everson's "Archetype West" essay and his critical-mystical work *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure*.

One is reminded too of Aldous Huxley's insight in "The Doors of Perception" that we are all meant to be mystics, but a reductive valve (which our survival mode has developed in us so as to avoid being devoured by sabre-tooth tigers) sadly lowers our expectations of the divine beauty that should come naturally. Jeffers to Frederic Carpenter (Selected Letters, 209) seems to suppose the same mystic call.

SOURCES AND PURPOSES OF ROBINSON JEFFERS'S ANTI-GONGORIST POLEMIC

By David J. Rothman

■ Robinson Jeffers created a prodigious body of poetry, yet published little critical prose of any kind. In fact, aside from a few well-known prefaces, introductions, and forewords to his own creative works—the most important of them appearing decades after he became famous—the majority of Jeffers's thinking on poetry and poetics lies in the poems themselves. At first, this appears surprising, given the range of his critical and analytical training, the scope of his creative project, and the temper of the times. Indeed, one substantial difference between Jeffers and many of his Modernist contemporaries is the extent to which he resisted or avoided explaining his own poetry and writing ambitious works of prose instructing readers how to place it in historical and critical context.

On further reflection, however, Jeffers's actions agree with a conclusion he claimed to have reached early on, "that Poetry—if it was to survive at all—must reclaim some of the power and reality that it was so hastily surrendering to prose" (*Selected Poetry*, "Foreword," xiv). Readers have tended to emphasize Jeffers's subsequent appeal to "physical and psychological reality" in the same passage, but he also calls for "the expression of philosophic and scientific ideas in verse." So, even though publication of a "collected prose" remains a crucial desideratum for anyone interested in Jeffers, we should perhaps take him at his word that many of the ideas are embodied in the verse itself.

At the same time, Jeffers's provocative 1948 essay "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" remains one of the few sustained public statements about his own art, and a puzzling one at that, for it displays his erudition and ideas in ways that are radically different from the poems. In the wake of his 1947 Broadway success with *Medea*, Jeffers published this piece in the *New York Times Book Review* (January 18,

1948), thus making it the most widely circulated piece of prose that he ever wrote, outside of the introductions to his own books mentioned above.

The essay is quite forthright in its call for a poetry of universal, epic ambition and seriousness, a poetry that addresses "the more permanent aspects of things, and subjects that will remain valid" (6). Jeffers argues that "Poetry is less bound by time and circumstance than any other of the arts ... good poetry comes almost directly from a man's mind and senses and bloodstream ... it does not need a school nor an immediate tradition" (3-4). Jeffers criticizes a number of contemporary and modern poets, such as Rimbaud, Eliot, and Hopkins, as ephemeral, decadent, and eccentric, and argues that a "hypothetical great poet" (4)

... would turn away from the self-consciousness and naive learnedness, the undergraduate irony, unnatural metaphors, hiatuses and labored obscurity that are too prevalent in contemporary verse. His poetry would be natural and direct. He would have something new and important to say, and just for that reason he would wish to say it clearly. (5)

This idea, backed by the many 19th and 20th century references Jeffers offers, seems clear enough in and of itself, especially when Jeffers adds the criterion of direct visceral excitement:

Poetry is not a civilizer, rather the reverse, for great poetry appeals to the most primitive instincts. It is not necessarily a moralizer; it does not necessarily improve one's character; it does not even teach good manners. It is a beautiful work of nature, like an eagle or a high sunrise. You owe it no duty. If you like it, listen to it; if not, let it alone. (7-8)

This passage seems to aim to liberate poetry from millennia of moralizing and deadening pedantry.

Yet, intriguingly, Jeffers goes on to select Gongora, a particularly difficult poet three hundred years distant, in another language, and relatively unread in America then as now, to illustrate what he thinks is wrong with most modern art, particularly poetry. He arguably engages in a bit of pedantry himself, to prove that he recognizes that the decadent tendencies he has observed in modern art, and against which he is in reaction, themselves have a pedigree. Unlike the bold philosophical and

prophetic pronouncements of the poems, a substantial piece of the essay is thus devoted to a discursive and highly allusive lecture on literary history and poetic modes, in order to illuminate the present and justify a radical departure from its dominating trends:

There was a seventeenth-century Spanish poet named Gongora, a man of remarkable talents [note the praise], but he invented a strange poetic idiom, a jargon of dislocated constructions and farfetched metaphors, self-conscious singularity, studious obscurity. It is now only grotesque, but for its moment it was admired in the best circles, and it stimulated many imitators. Then fashion changed, Gongorism was named and ridiculed, and its poet is now remembered because his name was given to one of the diseases of literature.

Euphuism in England had a similar vogue and a similar catastrophe. It seems to me that the more extreme tendencies of modernist verse—and shall I say also of painting and sculpture?—are diseases of like nature, later forms of Gongorism; doctrinaire corruptions of instinct. It is not generally a failure of execution but a collapse of taste-of critical and creative instinct—that brings an art to eclipse. The error in the artist, which perhaps was only momentary and experimental, is echoed with approval by his admirers and a shoal of imitators, and gregariousness and snobbery complete the corruption. (6-7)

One observation to keep in mind is that in Jeffers's view, Gongorism and similar movements are historical events, not simply the result of single geniuses. They represent periods of decline in Spenglerian cultural cycles, although individuals may resist them. Indeed, Jeffers argues that great poetry can be written by a defiant, independent artist in any age. "Yet there is no final reason why great poetry should not be written by someone, even today" (4), he writes, which leads him to imagine what such a someone would seek to do.

The puzzle, which most scholars have tended to accept as the product of Jeffers's wide-ranging education, is why an argument about the excesses of Modernism should itself turn on such an unusual and scholarly comparison. While Jeffers's argument surely justifies its own terms, the comparison between Modernism and Gongorism is a rare one—I have never encountered it in any other context, including other modern

poets' critiques of Modernism, or Modernist poets' support for their own poetics.

It was therefore with some surprise that several years ago, in the Fales Library of New York University, I stumbled across *Gongorism and the Golden Age: A Study of Exuberance and Unrestraint in the Arts*, by Elisha K. Kane, published in 1928 by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill. I am unaware of any references to this book in the Jeffers literature—and yet it is the only other work I have ever seen that makes the same arguments that Jeffers does.

According to Kane's "Preface," the book began as a 1926 Ph.D. dissertation in the Division of Modern Languages at Harvard, which he had substantially revised for publication. These revisions must have been extensive, as the book, while erudite, is highly accessible, with a good deal of extremely sharp, entertaining sarcasm and polemic. There are also many fanciful, eccentric, and often grotesque illustrations by Kane, such as the one over the final page of the conclusion, which shows three vultures circling a human skeleton, one of them defecating, while a fourth on the ground nearby vomits—presumably Kane's commentary on Gongorism and other mannerist movements, including its 20th-century cognate, Modernism.

Kane's book makes good reading for anyone interested in Gongorism and similar movements in a wide range of arts, in different epochs and countries, but holds a further interest to readers of Jeffers. For Kane's study denounces Modernist art in terms that, if anything, make Jeffers's polemic pale in comparison. While Kane's is primarily concerned with a historical study of mannerism, focusing on Gongora and Spain, the introduction and other passages make it clear that he sees contemporary art, and the society that has produced it, in terms which Jeffers was to echo in an almost uncanny way twenty years later.

To begin with, in the very first paragraph of his introduction, Kane associates the rise of decadent art with WWI, also a crucial watershed in Jeffers's development and increasingly pessimistic view of modern society. Kane attacks *vers libre* and Imagism, saying that the latter includes "figures of speech so grotesque and revolting that we at times feel justified in believing that instead of witnessing an artistic millennium, we are in the midst of the atrocities of a poetical Armageddon" (4). He goes on to quote Eliot, Bodenheim, and Cummings, and cites Aiken, Stein, Pound, Kreymborg, Donald Evans, Allen Norton, H. D., de Casseres, "and countless others remembered only by the worshippers of the bedlam muse" (5). He then cites and discusses an international roster of

writers, painters, sculptors, and other artists—all this polemic to open a purportedly historical study of the literature of another language in another period in another country.

Those familiar with Jeffers's essay will immediately see striking similarities between Kane's rhetoric and Jeffers's. Also from the introduction:

The motive behind all these bizarre schools of art is the same, whether it operates in poetry, music, architecture, sculpture, or painting. It is, in short, a frantic endeavor to hide the nakedness of imagination under garish and vulgar trappings. As many of the protagonists of these arts lack even the rudiments of talent and technique, there is moreover, much insincerity, always more or less conscious, in the bluster and swagger with which they go about "emancipating" art. We find them excusing crudities as primitivism and nonsense as imagism, and we see them pretending that beneath the only too obvious want of idea there lies a subtle profundity. On the other hand, in spite of the blatant propaganda of this art, there is another cause, much deeper, which makes its various grotesqueries seem inevitable, and that is a sort of artistic destiny which causes fantastic swirls and curious, half-submerged counter currents to be formed in the wake of every creative era of importance. (11)

Kane soon makes the connections between decadent modern art and his own study clear:

It is the plan of the following study to trace the developments of another craze for fantastic art, quite similar in essence to that of the present but in a period three centuries remote, where the distant vantage point of time will permit its freakish productions to be seen in better perspective. (12)

In contrast to the excesses of Gongorism and similar movements, Kane presents the ideas of "universality" and a generous classicism as the grounds of artistic endurance. He argues that the great, individual artist succeeds in discovering a universal vision, whereas lesser ones remain mired in the decadent culture of the times in which they live:

In laying emphasis upon universality, our esthetic standards are classical in the sense that any work which survives the censures of time is to be regarded as a classic. By no means is this classicism to be interpreted as an attempt to regard the classics of Greece and Rome as models to which all works must conform in order to attain universality; that indeed would savor of the most bigoted pedantry, quite inconsistent with our strong insistence upon individuality. Again, in stressing individuality our standards would allow no rules or restrictions of any kind to be placed upon art. This, however, should not be taken as a sanction of wholesale license and unrestraint. Art is essentially an aristocracy, an esthetical abbey of Theleme wherein each lordly genius may do what he wills, obeying no laws save those which, in his own nobility, he imposes upon himself. If any boor should creep into that elect society, and by uncouth bizarreries take advantage of its freedom, time alone will punish him, and punish him she will, with oblivion. (15)

Exactly as in Jeffers, the great artist is defined as someone whose fierce creative independence leads him to discover and represent universal themes, as opposed to pedantry, frivolous language games, fashionable snobbery, and so on. Both Jeffers and Kane are at pains to point out that they think new, great art need not slavishly imitate the past, and is possible in any period.

Of course, this debate is not new, but the Gongorist framing is rare if not unique. Indeed, Kane's Chapter 7, "Meretricious Verse in Other Literatures" is a forty-page discussion of multiple mannerist traditions, all discussed in terms of Gongorism, from Provencal *trobar clus* to Lyly and Crashawe, Old Norse Scaldic poetry, Giambattista Marini, Petrarch, Sannazaro, Bembo, Ronsard, the "Berle filed" school of Celtic poets, passages from Lucan, Ovid, a school of poetry that flourished at Alexandria from the fourth century B.C. to the birth of Christ, and exemplified by the third century poet Lycophron, and on and on, with many of the works quoted and carefully discussed in the original languages.

Kane closes this chapter by asking why such movements arise, and here, again prefiguring Jeffers, he advances a systematic historical thesis. Kane suggests that as cultures develop, their art degenerates, moving away from direct expression into affectation:

... poets, affecting to write for an exclusive circle, attempted to set a premium upon their compositions by making them unintelligible to the simple and the unlettered. This they did by assuming an air of profundity, by obscure references, far-fetched conceits, and garish language. The Provençal literature of the *Trobar clus* especially affords a fine example of this literary snobbery: the poets Gavaudan, Ignaure, Marcabrun, and Peire d'Alvemhe are all very outspoken in avowing that they write obscurely merely so that the vulgar multitude cannot understand them. (163-64)

Jeffers uses the term "snobbery" in a similar critical sense, to describe the corruption of art. According to Kane, the introduction of more and more intricate rules "naturally stifles the spontaneous expression of poetry while it sets a premium upon metrical gymnastics, formalism, and conceptist convolutions" (165). Again, Jeffers's essay takes a virtually identical tack, especially in the passage quoted above in which he defines Gongorism.

In Kane's conclusion, he describes the "decay, degeneracy and gradual falling into impotence" of great artistic movements. With respect to the present (the 1920s), he writes:

The feverish sickness of romanticism with its maundering introspections, sentimental droolery, and childish unrestraints has deceived many into thinking that a decrepit culture was becoming young and strong again. The present witnesses a reaction from that hectic rally, and the present with its spasmodic epilepsies of free verse, jazz, cubism, futurism, post impressionism, and various other ultra "gongorisms," would deceive us into believing that western art was really in its infancy instead of uttering already, and only too plainly, its ugly death rattle. (260)

Shortly after this comes the drawing of the vultures and skeleton described above. Compare Jeffers's rhetoric, in discussing exactly the same subject:

The present is a time of high civilization rapidly declining; it is not a propitious period for any of the arts; men's minds are a little discouraged, and are too much occupied with meeting each day's distractions or catastrophe ... "The Waste Land," though one of the

finest poems of this century and surely the most influential, marks the close of a literary dynasty, not the beginning. (4)

These passages resonate powerfully with each other, especially given the unusual context for the argument.

The question that remains to be answered is, "Why devote so much space to letting the two texts stand next to each other?" After all, despite the powerful similarities, I have found no smoking gun in Jeffers's essay, a quotation or direct paraphrase lifted without acknowledgment, although many of the terms are very close. While it is certainly conceivable that Jeffers knew of Kane's book—it was published by a large university press—and it would be worthwhile to try to discover whether Jeffers had read the book, that is not exactly my point. Even if he did, that would just be a bibliographical footnote, albeit an important one.

More importantly, the existence of Kane's book, whatever Jeffers may have known of it, enriches the historical context of Jeffers's ideas. In his essay, as in so much of his work, Jeffers dissents from the dominant schools of poetry at the time, with an argument that is self-consciously odd, and serves to place him only further outside the mainstream of contemporary high poetic fashion, which he considers effete, trivial, Gongorist. Yet Kane's work, written for a literate but not scholarly audience, shows that Jeffers's ideas were not utterly eccentric; whether he reached them independently or was echoing Kane, the idea of equating Modernism with extreme mannerism has at least this precedent.

Further, and much more importantly, at the deeper level of actually reading Jeffers's poetry, we can use Kane's book to focus again on the question of why Jeffers introduces such manifestly superfluous historical material in this rare prose commentary. Meditating on this has led me to think that the purposes of Jeffers's polemic are not exactly what they have often been taken to be—an uncompromising manifesto for the position that, as Kyle Norwood has recently written, "Beyond the 'ephemeral accretions' of civilization and its historically contingent symbolic systems, the incommensurable is what it always was" (72).⁴

Jeffers is surely the prophet of a cosmos in which humanity is, to its creator, merely "... the last / Least taint of a trace in the dregs of the solution; for itself, the mould to break away from ..." as he puts it in *Roan Stallion*. Yet Jeffers was still a good deal more enmeshed in history—and relied on it in his poetics—than he or his readers usually want to admit. "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" really cannot be read in a

meaningful way without the historical background that Jeffers sketches and Kane elaborates. A careful reading of Jeffers's essay suggests that he was actually quite self-conscious about this historical dimension to his larger project, even if the tendency among his readers (and in his own work) has understandably been to obscure it in favor of the more vatic pronouncements. For Jeffers could have easily made the argument of his essay without any of the Gongorist window-dressing whatsoever. It is clear enough in its own terms. Indeed, it resonates with the less pedantic language of, among other works, Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* in the way that it calls for clear, direct, poetic language in order to create meaningful and lasting works of art.

What Jeffers gets for electing to frame his argument in terms of a larger understanding of cyclical cultural growth, strength, and decay, is the very historicism he supposedly decries. It's worth pointing out that this is a theme very much in evidence in many of the greater poems as well, even lyrics that avoid specific political issues such as "Shine, Perishing Republic," in which the poet apostrophizes the human, urban, political world, imprisoned in historical cycles, from which he would also have his sons, and us, turn away; or "To the Stonecutters," in which the poet could not even represent his vision of sublime "oblivion" without the presence of the historical monument as a backdrop. Similarly, in Jeffers's essay on the timelessness of great art, he chooses not only to frame his argument with idealized abstractions, but also to embed it ineluctably in history: time present, past, and future.

In a recent essay, "Robinson Jeffers and the Uses of History," Robert Zaller rightly points out that:

The essential distinction in Jeffers's verse is ... between the ephemeral and the perdurable rather than between the temporal and the eternal. The ephemeral is the unrepeatable; what succeeds it annuls it and extinguishes all trace of its existence. The sign of the ephemeral is singularity, the sport in nature; novelty, the fashion in culture. It appears in nature as a random flaw in design, an accident; in culture, however, it is an effect of morally deficient intention, of frivolity. (30)

This encourages us to see that Jeffers's terms in "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" do not necessarily devalue the passage of time as much as might first appear, and as many readers have assumed. The "perdurable" is still in history, and bears comparison primarily with that

which is merely "the fashion in culture," e.g., Gongorism. The learning Jeffers wears so easily on his sleeve in this essay and elsewhere therefore serves to emphasize the repeating cycles of civilization in which all great poems, no matter how detached and perdurable, must do their daily work.

I think that seeing Jeffers as making such an acknowledgment can only elevate him. Without weakening the philosophical or theological dimension of his poetry in any way, such an interpretation emphasizes Jeffers's profound awareness of his own historical situation, and of the inevitable fact of being in history generally. Jeffers realized that works of art, no matter how "inhuman" their bearings, are still made by living people, trapped in time. This is the reason that, at its tragic best, art can be a vehicle for the ferocity, disaster, and death that so often direct life itself. In this sense—as in so many others so often overlooked Jeffers understood his place to be as much among the living as among the dead, and that is why the claim he stakes in "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" is as much to the poetry of the present as it is to that of the future.

— NOTES —

¹This essay is a revised version of a paper delivered at the Second Annual Conference of the Robinson Jeffers Association, held at Occidental College, Los Angeles, California, February 17-18, 1996. I would like to thank the scholars in attendance there, especially Michael C. Sutherland, the Special Collections Librarian of the Mary Norton Clapp Library at Occidental, for their suggestions and assistance.

²I am thinking of the "Introduction" Jeffers and *Other Poems*, and the "Foreword" he wrote for the publication of *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, which appeared in 1938. At the times these relatively major statements appeared, Jeffers was approaching 50.

³Ward Ritchie reprinted the essay the following year as a small book, in a run of 200 copies. This book was reissued by Nurwood Editions in a run of 100 copies in 1976 (see "Works Cited"), but has been reprinted elsewhere as well.

⁴The phrase "ephemeral accretions" is from the 1938 foreword to *The Selected Poetry* (xvi).

⁵These are Jeffers's own terms in the essay to describe the content of great artworks like *Medea*.

⁶I am grateful to Michael C. Sutherland for locating a copy of Kane's book and placing it in the Jeffers collection at Occidental College, where other scholars can examine it.

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TRUTH, MYTH, AND "THE GREAT WOUND"

By Grant Hier

■ But now, finally, what would the meaning be of the word "truth" to a modern scientist? Surely not the meaning it would have for a mystic! For the really great and essential fact about the scientific revelation—the most wonderful and most challenging fact—is that science does not and cannot pretend to be "true" in any absolute sense. It does not and cannot pretend to be final. It is a tentative organization of mere "working hypotheses"... that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known.

—Joseph Campbell
"The Impact of Science on Myth"
(Campbell 15-16)

Poetry is a counterfeit creation, and makes things that are not, as though they were.

—John Donne
Sermons, No. 13
Tripp 479)

In late May of 1995, the lunar-research satellite "Clementine" completed its mission of mapping some ninety-three percent of the lunar surface. The geochemical data gathered by Clementine's remote sensors was then tested against actual soil samples collected during the Apollo missions. The findings of this study have forced researchers to revise their theories regarding the formation of the moon.

At the time of Clementine's launch, there were four scenarios most commonly held by scientists regarding the moon's origin. The first, known as the "fission theory," proposed that an asteroid slammed into

our planet, breaking loose a huge slab of the earth's mantle. This massive divot of earth then sailed away with enough momentum to exceed the escape velocity of our planet and swing into orbit. One variation on this "fission theory" offered that the colliding asteroid lifted away not a singular mass, but a cloud of earthly dust and debris which eventually gathered, perhaps even into rings, before coagulating into a solid moon orbiting around the larger body it was once part of. The second, an impact-and-capture scenario dubbed the "giant impact theory," began with the same collision scenario, but held that the alien "rock" itself, as opposed to a part of the earth, became the moon: "The moon was a Mars-size rock that hit the Earth; a large part, perhaps in the form of molten rock, ricocheted into an orbit about the planet" (Recer). The third, a simple "capture theory," suggested that the alien "rock" never actually collided with our planet, but came close enough to be captured by the earth's gravitational pull. Lastly, some have embraced the far different "co-accretion" theory, which claimed that a molten mass of celestial goo, composed of the same materials as the crude earth at the time, formed directly alongside our mother planet, forever held close by her gravitational pull. While scientists may differ in their speculations as to how the moon was formed, they have nevertheless remained in agreement regarding the approximate time frame involved: sometime around four-and-a-half to five billion years ago.

The new information gathered from Clementine, however, indicates that the moon is compositionally less like the earth than scientists thought. Of particular significance is the fact that the moon has far less iron than was previously believed. Scientists now agree that these findings would seem to exclude the "co-accretion theory," for the composition of the earth and moon are much too different to have been made from the same batch of molten mass. Furthermore, although it might have been only the top layer of the earth's mantle that was chipped away in the fission theories—nothing deep enough to include any of the earth's iron core—that mantle material still should have contained more iron than the amounts that Clementine found on the moon. This fact would therefore seem to eliminate both of the "fission theory" variations. Only a small percentage of the scientific community had favored the "capture theory" in the first place; furthermore, recent computer simulations have shown such a capture of the moon to be a highly unlikely scenario. What remains, then, is a new and strong consensus among scientists that the moon is indeed simply an alien body that col-

lided with our planet before ricocheting off into orbit, as the "giant impact theory" suggested)

Some forty years prior, Robinson Jeffers offered a poet's myth concerning the formation of the earth's moon in his poem "The Great Wound" (the ellipsis is Jeffers's):

At the near approach of a star ... huge tides Agitated the molten surface of the earth. The tides grew
higher as it passed. It tore from the earth
The top of one great wave:-the moon was torn
Out of the Pacific basin: the cold white stone that lights us at
night
Left that great ditch in the earth, the Pacific Ocean
With all its islands and navies. I can stand on the cliff here
And hear the half-molten basalt and granite tearing apart and see
that huge bird
Leaping up to her star. But the star passed,
The moon remained, circling her ancient home. Dragging the sea-tides after her, haggard with
loneliness.

(CP III: 458)

Jeffers the poet is much like the scientist, creating his own fanciful stories as he looks out in wonder at the universe, and nowhere is Jeffers's continual mythmaking more apparent than in "The Great Wound." More than in any other single volume, Jeffers's last writings as compiled in *The Beginning and the End* represent dense mythologies—seemingly grounded in science-based "fact," but prophetic and timeless stories, nonetheless—no less in search of the "truth" than the scientists.

Jeffers, however, remained intent throughout his later writings to stress the same sentiments as Joseph Campbell in "The Impact of Science on Myth"—that "Truth" is a continually changing concept, not a universal concrete. Moreover, Jeffers's poetry in *The Beginning and the End* repeatedly warns against those who believe they have grasped "truth" and looked it in the eye—be they political leaders, scientists, or poets (although it would seem that Jeffers believes that the poet's myths come as close, if not closer, to "truth" than anyone else's). We can glean a good sense of Jeffers's views regarding the poet vs. the scientist and their mutual quests for "truth" in the poem "The Silent Shepherds" from *The Beginning and the End*:

And I'll have lunatics
For my poets, strolling from farm to farm, wild liars distorting
The county news into supernaturalism....
That would be a good world, free and out-doors.
But the vast hungry spirit of the time
Cries to his chosen that there is nothing good
Except discovery, experiment and experience and discovery: To
 look truth in the eyes,
To strip truth naked....

 It is a fine ambition,
But the wrong tools. Science and mathematics
Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it, They never touch it: consider what an
 explosion
Would rock the bones of men into little white fragments and
 unsky the world
If any mind should for a moment touch truth.

(CP 111: 472)²

Thus, absolute "truth" remains unattainable, not just for scientists and poets, but for all men, according to Jeffers.

This being established, we can use the poet's admitted "non-truth" of "The Great Wound" as a touchstone, then, striking both old and new scientific theories against Jeffers's to spark several important questions to life. First of all, we know that Jeffers possessed a broad background of knowledge in the fields of science and nature, but how much did the poet know of the leading moon-origin theories of his day? Did he choose to ignore, incorporate, or combine any of those scenarios into his own "Great Wound" myth? And if so, why? What, in fact, were the existing theories within the scientific community at the time that Jeffers composed his poem, and did any of them come close to the poet's explanation? The answers to these questions could prove invaluable in shedding light on Jeffers's poetic process and role as mythmaker.

To begin with, if it had turned out that the variation on the fission theory had indeed been correct—that the moon had consolidated into the familiar face we know today from several smaller fragments thrown out by its remote parent—then "The Great Wound" would be one of the most wonderful poetic coincidences in all of literature; for the familiar "poem" we know today was likewise assembled from several separate poetic fragments that the remote poet had penned. According to the research of Tim Hunt (RJN 79), it was Melba Berry Bennett, Jeffers's

"secretary" at the time and eventual biographer, who took Jeffers's last manuscripts on loan from his family and "selected which poems to use, chose the order for them, and prepared the transcriptions that Random House used" to set the copy for *The Beginning and the End* (RJN 79: 18). As Hunt points out, the level of her decision-making in determining what text composed each "poem" placed Bennett as much in the role of co-author as that of editor:

Although Jeffers did type a few late poems (likely those written shortly after Hungerfield), he left most of his late work in handwritten working drafts.... Many are also untitled, and the way Jeffers often mixed notes and passages from seemingly different poems on a single sheet (or spread a single poem across several sheets) makes it difficult to determine which units are "poems" and which are fragments.

... Bennett assembled "The Great Wound" from material on six manuscript sheets that likely date from 1957.... Unfortunately the various manuscript pieces neither prove nor disprove that this material should be viewed as a single poem. (RJN 79: 18, 20)

Thus, it remains uncertain whether all of the lines included in "The Great Wound" were meant to be read together as one poem.

Nevertheless, the section of "The Great Wound" that is the focus of our discussion—the first stanza which details the specifics of the moon's origin—existed complete and intact, and was not an assembly of Bennett's. We know this because Jeffers actually penned two versions of the passage that was used as the poem's first stanza. The alternate version that Bennett decided against has been published in only a few sources, but it parallels the first in its description of cosmogonical events:

I walk on my cliff above the Pacific Ocean and feel the tides Moon-led call in the waters, or drive them west
And the shore's bare: I think of the prodigious tides
An alien star raised when it shot by our orbits,
Challenged the sun and passed. The earth was young then,
Her seas were not blue water but molten rock
And a huge wave of fire followed the star.
Higher the wave rose and higher like a bat's wing fluttering,
Trembling with love, against the cataract sky,
Until it broke away from the planet. I stand on the cliff here

And hear the flesh of the earth tearing apart, and watch that huge
bird
Lofting up toward her star. The enormous gouge
She tore from the earth smoulders below my feet, the fire-torn, moon-forsaken
Basin of the Pacific. But the star had passed, that wild wave was
left,
Hanging between earth and heaven. She globed herself and
became the moon,
Howled at by wolves, mistress of women and maniacs,
Weeping in heaven, circling her ancient home, dragging the sea
tides after her, haggard with loneliness.

(CP III: 457)

Jeffers's moon origin story remains consistent, then, in both versions. What is germane is the fact that it doesn't correspond exactly to any of the four major scientific theories previously discussed. What it does do, however, is simultaneously combine partial elements of three of the four: capture, in that a passing star sailed close to the earth³; fission, in that a chunk of the earth was pulled away in its wake; and co-accretion, for both the earth and moon are said to be of molten material, forming alongside of one another. Jeffers's convincing tone and use of scientifically accepted scenarios is a strong indication that the poet had familiarized himself with the current theories of the day regarding the moon's origin.

The fact that Jeffers wrote the text of "The Great Wound" in 1957 might also prove significant. From July of 1957 and continuing through December of 1958, the now historic International Geophysical Year (IGY) was under way—a one-time collaborative research effort of 66 countries to study the earth and its local environment in the cosmos. The IGY led to the first space shots, which subsequently led to what we have dubbed the "space age" and the eventual exploration of the moon. As the IGY and its findings were major news stories for nearly two years running, it seems certain that Jeffers would have been at least somewhat familiar with the project. It is plausible, therefore, that the IGY's research could have specifically been the inspiration for Jeffers's writing of "The Great Wound." Indeed, the IGY might very well have provided the fodder for this cosmogonical mythmaking and overt cosmological truth-seeking evident throughout the entire collection, *The Beginning and the End*.

Just how prominent a topic was the IGY in its day? Newspapers from around the world ran stories about the IGY throughout the 18 months of its existence, and beyond—and there is little doubt that radio and television broadcasts did the same. We can't be sure of how much of this Jeffers was exposed to, but we do know for certain that he remained intellectually curious about the news of the day up until the end of his life, and clearly there was quite a buzz going on at the time about the IGY. There was even an extensive special section, titled "Preview of the International Geophysical Year," in *The American Peoples Encyclopedia Yearbook—1957*. An essay therein titled "Rockets and Satellites," by Joseph Kaplan, provides additional evidence as to the excitement and expectations generated by the IGY studies at the time:

The earth satellite program is ... revolutionary.... Nothing like the satellite program ... has ever been done before. The initial step that it represents is a historic event without parallel in terms of man's relationship to his cosmic environment. The fact that man can make a satellite and set it in orbit about the earth is a monumental step forward in his continuing search for knowledge of his physical environment. (48)

When space shuttles are launched every few months without fanfare, it becomes easy to forget how far we've come in so little time concerning rocketry and the exploration of outer space. Back in the 1950s, however, the excitement over the discovery of what seems today like rather elementary information regarding the earth reveals all the more how much less was understood about the moon at the time of Jeffers's writing.

Astronomy college textbooks from the late 1950s prove to be a most accurate yardstick in reminding of the level of knowledge that the scientific community possessed at the time. It is rather telling that the most encompassing photograph of the earth found in the 1959 book *Elementary Astronomy* by Otto Struve is one taken from a Navy Viking rocket at an altitude of 143 miles. This photograph reveals some 600,000 square miles of our planet, the horizon at a distance of about 1,000 miles—barely enough to reveal an astonishing visual: the actual curve of the earth! The text from the introduction explains:

The first photographs of the earth as seen from space were taken with cameras mounted in rockets. They show the curvature of the earth and the extent of its atmosphere, but they are not sufficient

to provide information about its size, shape and motion. All fundamental data concerning the earth have come from observations made on its surface. (17)

Another college textbook from the same year, *Astronomy*, by Theodore G. Mehlín, actually mentions a theory similar to "The Great Wound"—as well the fact that it had been rejected, and why:

Another suggestion is that the moon may have been a part of the earth at one time.... As evidence, though not proof, of this idea, its proponents point out that the mean density of the moon, 3.3, is very similar to the density of the surface material of the earth, 2.7; that the volume of the moon is not too different from the volume of the Pacific Ocean Basin; and that the outline of the eastern coast of North and South America would fit rather neatly into the western coast of Europe and Africa, with Greenland filling in some needed area in the north. They suggest that as the material left the Pacific Basin to form the moon, the re-adjustment of the earth's size caused the crust to split, creating the Atlantic Ocean Basin. Unfortunately for those who are intrigued by this theory, the current geological evidence all seems to indicate that the continental distribution could not have been formed in this way. (315-16)

This theory, in fact, was originally proposed by the British astronomer Sir George Howard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin. Known as the "resonance theory," Darwin claimed that the earth and moon were indeed once one body, which he called "Earthoon" or "Moorth," and which rotated so fast its day was only five hours long. "This rapid rotation produced unstable equilibrium, and the Moon broke off"—although not from the gravity of a passing star, as Jeffers expounds in "The Great Wound," but "due to the solar tidal forces of our own sun" (Struve 35).⁴ By the time Jeffers was writing "The Great Wound," however, the idea that the moon had come from the Pacific Ocean Basin had already been conclusively disproved by scientific evidence and discounted, as Mehlín indicates.

No theory can be found that exactly matches the one that Jeffers describes in "The Great Wound," but the "resonance theory" certainly comes the closest. What is crucial to note is the fact that Jeffers seemed to incorporate selectively only certain elements of the theory in "The Great Wound." Could it be that Jeffers the mythmaker deliberately cut-

and-pasted certain elements of differing theories in order to make his own? It seems entirely possible. Jeffers, for instance, excludes the part of the "resonance theory" that holds that the moon was torn away due to the solar tidal forces of our own sun. Instead, he claims a second sun swung past the earth—"the near approach of a star"—which then drew the moon out of the earth and into her orbit.

It appears that Jeffers piecemealed "the near approach of a star" into the "resonance theory" from an earlier myth still. In fact, there were several "passing star" theories which followed in the wake of one "planetesimal hypothesis," originally brought forth by astronomer Forest Ray Moulton and geologist T C. Chamberlin circa 1900—about the time the young Jeffers was studying in boarding schools in Switzerland. Moulton and Chamberlin's hypothesis would prove to be short-lived in its acceptance. The 1959 edition is the last *Encyclopedia Americana* to include the "planetesimal hypothesis," and it does so under the larger heading of "Cosmogony":

In the remote past two stars, one of which was the Sun and the other we will call X, approached one another moving in orbits which were certainly hyperbolic. Just how close their passage was is uncertain, but from 5 to 10 solar radii may be correct.... Each body produced tides upon the other, which grew to greater heights the nearer the bodies came. (35)

The "planetesimal hypothesis," of course, was strictly an attempt to account for the formation of the planets of our solar system out of material pulled away from our sun—quite a different proposition than Jeffers's theory of the formation of the moon out of material pulled away from the earth. What is of relevance, however, is that the theory introduced the idea of a second star approaching and drawing matter *out* of a larger body, which subsequently spawned several other "passing star" theories. It is quite conceivable that one or more of these "passing star" theories intrigued Jeffers enough for him to incorporate it into his own mythmaking—if, indeed, he was familiar with them at all.

It is important to keep in mind throughout such speculation that Jeffers's brother, Hamilton, was an astronomer at Lick Observatory (coincidentally located on Mt. Hamilton) in San Jose, only a few hours north of Jeffers's home in Carmel. Robinson Jeffers's voracious reading habits and access to books of all genres should in no way be discounted either—although it remains unclear how much he actually read in his

later years as both his eyesight and his health faded. Jeffers's library at the Tor House reveals but a small glimpse into his reading habits. Robinson and Una Jeffers never amassed a large library; instead, they elected to continually give away the books they read as new ones came in. As a result, other than the relatively few books on the Tor House shelves and some rather fragmented allusions in personal letters and missives, there remains no extant evidence as to what the poet had specifically read. Nevertheless, it is undisputed that Jeffers remained intellectually curious as to the latest news of the day up until the end of his life, and he certainly could have learned of the leading hypotheses of the day in any number of ways.

By the 1950s—the time that Jeffers would have been formulating the text of "The Great Wound"—the "resonance theory" had long been rejected by scientists and theoreticians. Dr. Fred L. Whipple, then chairman of the department of astronomy at Harvard, and Dr. Wernher von Braun, technical director of the U.S. Army Ordnance Guided Missiles Development, co-authored an article dated October 25, 1952, titled "Man on the Moon—The Exploration." In it, they discuss not only the details and purposes of a manned moon mission—something they correctly claimed would happen "in the next 25 years" (39)—but also the rejection of the idea that the moon came from the Pacific Basin:

... the principal aim of our expedition during this first lunar exploration will be strictly scientific—and very important. Our investigations will help us unravel the secret of the universe: how the moons and planets were born and what they're made of.... We know that the moon didn't form in the Pacific Ocean and get hurled into space, as was generally believed 50 years ago. It is possible that it was an independent planet which came from outer space, fell into the earth's gravitational field, smashed into the Pacific and then ricocheted back into its present orbit. But the most likely explanation is that the moon originally consisted of a belt of gasses and minerals that girdled the earth—much as Saturn's ring surrounds that planet today—and eventually fused into a solid mass. (43)

Certainly if Jeffers had kept himself informed on issues of science and astronomy well enough to incorporate several of the familiar theories on the moon's origin into his text, then it follows that he also would have been familiar with those theories that had been rejected—especially

ones that had, at the time, been considered obsolete for more than half a century.

All of this points to the strong possibility that the poet deliberately selected elements of differing theories which had already degenerated from scientific possibilities down to cosmogonic myths and consciously assembled them into an equally impossible scenario of his own. John Mosley, Program Director of Los Angeles's Griffith Observatory, in an interview with the author, maintained that Jeffers undoubtedly fabricated "The Great Wound" myth by himself, as opposed to gleaning it from any single existing theory. The reason for this conclusion is clear: even amateur astronomers would recognize that such a scenario as described in "The Great Wound" would be physically impossible. Since long before the 1950s it has been known that any sun would completely vaporize a planet such as the earth long before it could get close enough to pull off a chunk as big as the moon. The "passing star" theories, of course, only deal with the idea that one star might be able to pull off matter from another star in close passing. It would be impossible for "the near approach of a star" to pull a large moon from a planet. Jeffers surely knew this as well. The chance that Jeffers somehow remained unaware of these facts and unknowingly blended together an amalgam of theories that he had encountered along the way and believed as true seems extremely unlikely—especially considering the amount and degree of detail of the existing theories which he did include in his text.

This raises the most intriguing question posed thus far: By choosing elements of obsolete theories of science and fabricating them into a new and knowingly impossible myth, what could the poet be implying about the nature of "truth" and mankind's knowledge?

A look back at the articles being published in the leading scientific journals in the 1950s might direct us to an answer to that question, for much of what was being reported and speculated upon by the best minds of science only forty years ago now appears to us, in retrospect, as being way off the mark. In April of 1951, for instance, Isabel M. Lewis wrote in her article "The Earth-Moon System" for *Nature Magazine*: "One hesitates to write off the moon as a completely dead world. Close to its surface ... certain low forms of vegetation may exist. Snow, hoar frost and ice may be present on the lunar surface ..." (212). Similarly, a *Popular Science* article, "Moon's Mysteries Challenge Spacemen," from 1953⁵ reported that "astronomers no longer consider the moon, as they once did, a totally dead and changeless world" (128), and proceeded to describe a variety of enigmas observed on the moon which indicated life,

including: a six-mile-wide crater, Linni, that suddenly turned into a white patch; a "dense fog which filled a whole crater with a whitish mist"; and "a tiny brilliant flash of orange-yellow light" observed "just within the crater Plato" (129). A 1953 article on selenography (the study of the surface of the moon) in *Scientific American* documented repeated sightings of a remarkably perfect square on the moon, "65. miles on a side with walls one mile thick" (R6). The following year an article in *Sky and Telescope*, titled "Is There a Bridge on the Moon" reported that the science editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, John J. O'Neill, observed what he interpreted as a "great natural bridge" (205) on Mare Crisium, and that press reports confirmed two subsequent independent sightings by other individuals. Finally, an article in the *Science News Letter* for July 31, 1954, titled "Martian 'Canals' Seen," announced that Dr. H. Percy Wilkins, fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and world authority on the moon, told Science Service "that there might be large numbers of valuable crystals on the lunar surface" because "the specific gravity of the lunar crust is about equal to that of a diamond" (205).

Just as these reports from leading scientists seem unbelievable to us now, likewise then, wouldn't the "truths" of science which Jeffers was taught as a boy seem equally as absurd to Jeffers the man at the end of his life? Is it so difficult to imagine Jeffers standing at the constantly changing shoreline, nodding at "The Great Wound" of the Pacific as the "truths" of science, one by one, were likewise eroded and discarded like so much "green cheese." If the poet then deliberately chooses to weave disparate and obsolete scientific theories into a new and impossible myth, is Jeffers attempting to stress that there are no absolutes? In "The Great Wound" it seems that he is.

For Jeffers there is no absolute, no singular definable "truth" to be discovered or assembled by man, not even a God as "Truth." The only "truth" Jeffers might concede is the general "truth" that the universe's unfolding and evolving is a divine process—is God's act of self-discovery. The universe is divine despite, not because of, the fact that man is a part of it. Indeed, Jeffers admits and maintains throughout his writings that man is divine only in as much as he is a momentary phenomenon which is witness to an ongoing divine universe. So when it comes to the issue of human-designed scientific or religious "absolutes," Jeffers the prophet delights in shouting them down.

Jeffers realized that the conclusions reached by humans as they observe and seek the "truth" have always been tainted by imagination, emotion, and countless other non-scientific factors.
Leland S. Cop-

land, in his article "Illusions That Trap Lunar Observers," similarly reminds us of Shakespeare's Hamlet as he speaks of the appearance of things, using clouds to make his point. In Act III, Scene II, Hamlet observes that a cloud looks like a camel. When Polonius agrees, Hamlet immediately says, "Methinks it is like a weasel." Polonius agrees to that just as quickly. "Or like a whale?" the prince asks, and Polonius responds, "Very like a whale." "In the night," Shakespeare writes, "how easy is a bush supposed a bear."

George Mann, in *Science Digest*, offers other examples of how imagination can turn the concrete into myth:

Yet-the cratered, gouged, shadowed, and almost changeless surface of the moon still presents more questions than it answers.... Australian aborigines saw a giant cat's eye shining ominously from the sky. American Indians studied the shadows, pointed out the figure of a duck, an eagle, or even a horned toad that hopped to this haven to escape a wolf. More poetically, the Samoans described an old woman who sat forever weaving the stuff that clouds are made of from her perch on the moon's surface. Hindu mothers soothed their babies with stories that a long-eared rabbit was peering out of the moon at them.

Sometimes, as in Ireland, the Man in the Moon offered the dim features of a husband to the unmarried girls. Or in Puritan New England, the Man in the Moon was changed into a menacing goblin with a wart on his nose, who lurked there waiting to snip off the tongues of children who sassed their parents. And French peasants cringed at the markings on the moon which outlined the cursed face of Judas Iscariot. (59)

Remembering Jeffers's comments on man's ability to "touch truth" from "The Silent Shepherds" as cited earlier, the poet might have deliberately meant for us to view the "truth" in the same way that Hamlet looks at clouds, or in the same light as the colorful myths regarding the shapes seen in the moon. If Jeffers intentionally used obsolete creation stories to fabricate clearly impossible scenarios in "The Great Wound" and elsewhere, readers would then be left asking the very questions Jeffers no doubt wants us to: In the long run, does it really make a difference which of the scientific theories, if any, are correct? Aside from presumably aiding in our understanding of things within the mystery, can such classifications—indeed, any classifications—help us in the

day-to-day struggle of being human? Does it matter if our mother planet's heart is more of iron and the moon more of ash? What of it if the classifications say we are composed of different matter, arising from a different source? Are we really to believe we are not connected, then?

Jeffers offers an opinion in "Monument," also from *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*:

Erase the lines: I pray you not to love classifications:
The thing is like a river, from source to sea mouth
One flowing life. We that have the honor and hardship of being
 human
Are one flesh with the beasts, and the beasts with the plants
One streaming sap, and certainly the plants and algae and the earth
 they spring from
Are one flesh with the stars. The classifications
Are mostly a kind of memoria technica, use it but don't be fooled.
It is all truly one life, red blood and tree sap,
Animal, mineral, sidereal, one stream, one organism, one God.
(CP III: 419)

Where the mythmaking poet is able to abandon his love for distinctions, mythmaking scientists often cannot. As a result, Jeffers implies that too many scientists cling to the literal and embrace their theories as absolutes, the quest for continued enlightenment being eclipsed by error, the air of open discussion filling with mushrooming contradictions. Therein lies the danger. In yet another poem from *The Beginning and the End*, appropriately titled "Full Moon," Jeffers sends out a plea to such scientists:

 You would be amazed what the moon does to us.
Our women come in heat once a month
Following the moon, remembering their outlaw joys in the forest;
Our maniacs lift up their heads and howl
And beat their cell-doors, they cannot sleep at full moon, they are
 moon struck.
Nor can the astronomer see his moon-dazzled
Constellations: let him give one night in the month to earth and
 the moon,
Women and games.

(CP III: 453)

Even with their most powerful of telescopes and microscopes, we can see how short-sighted scientists can be on both a large and small scale—at times giving mankind too much credit, at others underestimating how much he is capable of—often erring equally in both their backward—looking speculations on cosmogonic history as well as in their predictions for the future. Isabel M. Lewis's 1951 article "The Earth-Moon System," cited earlier, opens with this telling paragraph:

In these days of great scientific achievements there are some who like to play with the idea of a rocket trip to the moon, although there seems to be scant prospect of the development of a sky ship capable of making this trip, or of obtaining a crew so skilled in celestial navigation that they could land it on our satellite and later return to our own planet. (211)

"The great enemy of the truth," John E Kennedy claimed in the commencement address to Yale University on June 11, 1962, "is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic" (Tripp 421). One wonders what Jeffers, about one year from death at the time, thought about Kennedy's bold prediction in 1961 of landing men safely on the moon and returning them home before the end of the decade. The line "Shooting missiles to the moon—childish romance put into action" (CP III: 463), from the poem "To Kill in War Is Not Murder," might hint at the poet's sentiment regarding moon missions, but "Unnatural Powers"⁶ offers a condemnation outright:

For fifty thousand years man has been dreaming of powers
Unnatural to him: to fly like the eagles—this groundling! —to
breathe under the seas, to voyage to the moon,
To launch like the sky-god intolerable thunder-bolts: now he has
got them.
How little he looks, how desperately scared and excited, like a
poisonous insect, and no God pities him.

(CP III: 482)

The answers to the questions posed earlier now seem clear. Yes, Jeffers echoed theories of science in "The Great Wound," but they were mixed and matched, assembled from diverse and disparate speculations, many of which had been long-since disproved at the time of the poet's writing.

Research into what the poet probably knew of the scientific discovery and theories of his day points to the conclusion that Jeffers intentionally created his own mythic scenario, one that was clearly an impossibility. To what end? The message implied remains consistent with his other writings: Jeffers tells us outright that he is a mythmaker, and so is science. Neither the poet nor the scientist possesses the "truth"; the best both can hope for is some illumination through myths and hypotheses.

It becomes clear, then, that often not much difference lies between the scientist who creates scenarios out of his or her own imagination, and the poet constructing his or her own private mythologies; most, if not all, are proven wrong, eventually. This is certainly one of Jeffers's key themes. More importantly for Jeffers, however, is that we remain aware of the danger that exists when we begin to accept the metaphor as literal: heaven as a locus, or God as a man—or when we extend the theory into the concrete: relativity into the atomic bomb. As Albert Einstein stated, "the tools of science can become as dangerous as a razor in the hands of a child" (Nathan 312). This is precisely Jeffers's main theme in "The Great Wound," as the remainder of the poem makes clear:

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

The poet also

Has his mythology. He tells you the moon arose
Out of the Pacific basin. He tells you that Troy was burned for a
vagrant
Beautiful woman, whose face launched a thousand ships.
It is unlikely: it might be true: but church and state
Depend on more peculiarly impossible myths:
That all men are born free and equal: consider that!
And that a wandering Hebrew poet named Jesus
Is the God of the universe. Consider that!

(CP III: 459)

Jeffers knows that neither the verisimilitudes of science nor the verses of poetry can possibly represent absolute "truth"—they are mere reflections in "cracked and twilight mirrors" (CP II: 410). Perhaps, then, what makes "The Great Wound" so timeless is the fact that Jeffers simultaneously addresses: a) the seeking of "truth"; b) the nature of "truth"; c) the scientists' representations of "truth"; and d) the poet's mythical "truth"—the very processes in which he himself is involved—a wonderful combination of *ars artium* and *ars poetica* unfolding within a single poem on a number of levels.

If "truth" is not containable or absolute, as "The Great Wound" makes clear, what does that imply about our seeking of "truth"? Is Jeffers's own seeking of "truth," therefore, self-critical? Not necessarily, for the "truth" is still attainable—but at a price. To repeat the quote cited earlier from "The Silent Shepherds": "consider what an explosion / Would rock the bones of men into little white fragments and unsky the world / If any mind should for a moment touch truth." So when Arthur Barclay, the priest in revolt in Chapter II of *The Women at Point Sur* (as cited in "Theory of Truth") sought answers to the "large time-worn questions," he was able to find them, but "presently lost them again in the glimmer of insanity" (CP II: 608). Jeffers elaborates that although many have sought the "truth,"

... most have despaired and accepted doctrine; the greatest have
achieved answers, but always
With aching strands of insanity in them.
... Why does insanity always twist the great answers? Because only
tormented persons want truth.

(CP II: 608)

Jeffers includes Arthur Barclay, Lao-tse, Jesus, and Buddha in that list. We would have to include Robinson Jeffers, as well.

What could be the nature of "truth," then, if the achievement of the great answers necessarily carries with it the distorting filter of insanity? Perhaps it is that the "truth" is not susceptible to reason, to logic that humans invariably attempt to impose upon nature, upon the universe, upon God. "I have seen these ways of God," Jeffers writes in "Apology for Bad Dreams" (CP I: 211). "I know of no reason / For fire and change and torture and the old returnings" (211). Nevertheless, man "is only the ape of that God" when his thought "burns darkly / Smothered with its own smoke in the human brain-vault" (210, 211). The nature of

"truth," therefore, is that it is intuitive and not logical. The nature of "truth" is that it is natural to God yet elusive to man. God unveils "the fountains of the boiling stars, the flowers on the foreland, the ever-returning roses of dawn" (211), and man poorly imitates, endlessly seeking and discovering through both science and art.

The scientist's representation of "truth," then, is a poor imitation of the way things are, ordered out to shadow nature via formulae and theories. It is a series of inductive experiments working toward a hypothesis. At its most honest, it floats before us as a sort of "best guess," fluctuating with the currents of new discovery, ever evolving toward a better explanation yet to be discovered; as Joseph Campbell said, it is a "tentative organization of mere 'working hypotheses' ... that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known." Whenever science remains humble enough to recognize such limitations (as with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle recognizing the physical limits of our perceptions), then we move closer to discerning the nature of things as best we can, understanding as much as is humanly possible—which is not necessarily the way things truly are, or appear to God, as the nature of truth dictates. At its worst, on the other hand, science stops seeking and claims "Truth"—at which point it becomes dogma and, as Jeffers warns, a kind of blasphemy. It is at this point that the razor falls into the hands of the child, "the atom is broken" (CP II: 211), and the equations bomb Hiroshima.

Finally, there is the poet's representation of "truth," often best realized through myth and metaphor. Although human beings can only poorly imitate God's natural "truth," the poets and prophets among our species somehow manage to do it better than the rest, Jeffers believes. From his perspective as a remarkable visionary, then, Jeffers himself comes as close to the "truth" as humanly possible, and he accomplishes this through invented narratives and deliberate myths, as can be found in "The Great Wound." "Myths" have been defined as invented stories, "ostensibly historical but usually such as to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon" (*Webster's*). "Myth" by definition is not the "truth," merely an attempt at understanding what is true. Jeffers's mythologies are but beautifully woven strategies for better understanding what the "truth" might be: myths to probe the nature of God and of the human condition.

Throughout his writings, Jeffers's one "truth" seems to be that "the world's God is treacherous and full of unreason; a torturer, but also / The only foundation and the only fountain" (CP I: 371), as his poem "Birth-

Dues" insists. "I torture myself / To discover myself," Jeffers has God exclaim in "The Hanged God" section of "At the Birth of an Age" (CP II: 482). For Jeffers, it is this self-torturing God that is synonymous with the excruciatingly beautiful universe. In 1956-about the same time Jeffers was writing "The Great Wound"-the Book Club of California published a thin volume titled *Themes in My Poems* (edited from a rare 1941 lecture that Jeffers gave before the Library of Congress) in which Jeffers elaborates upon his own writings in general, and the "truth" of a self-torturing God in particular. Whether it be the Greek Prometheus, the Christian Jesus, or the Scandinavian Odin, Jeffers insists that "there is a tortured God in every mythology; and this seemed to me the fittest symbol to express something that is most beautiful, and painful, and true" (Themes 32).

When it comes to "truth," then, the poet says it best. Later in that same lecture, Jeffers summarizes the whole process eloquently:

Now let me stop talking about my own verses, and speak for one moment of poetry at its best. It seems to me that great poetry gathers and expresses the whole of things, as prose never can. Its business is to contain a whole world at once, the physical and the sensuous, the intellectual, the spiritual, the imaginative, all in one passionate solution. Thus it becomes a means of discovery, as well as a means of expression. Science usually takes things to pieces in order to discover them; it dissects and analyzes; poetry puts things together, producing equally valid discovery, and actual creation. Something new is found out, something that the author himself did not know before he wrote it; and something new is made." (Themes 46)

There can be little doubt remaining as to whether Jeffers deliberately manufactured an impossible scenario in "The Great Wound," and the poet himself has provided the reason for so doing. In this light, lines 19-23 of "The Great Wound" now read like an admission of such: "The poet also / Has his mythology. He tells you the moon arose / Out of the Pacific basin.... / It is unlikely: it might be true...."

The beauty and relevance of "The Great Wound" survives. No subsequent scientific discoveries or future mythmaking will be able to shatter the most accurate mirror of all, which belongs to the poet as he reflects on the "truth." As William Carlos Williams wrote: "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of

what is found there" (Tripp 483). Perhaps Jeffers's most poignant reflection on the seeking of "truth," especially in terms of poetry, can be found in "Love the Wild Swan." The first eight lines of the sonnet reveal the persona of the self-doubting man: a poet "speaking" (the words contained, literally, within quotation marks) of how he hates his own words—an individual in search of "truth," yet frustrated at the ineffectiveness of "pale and brittle pencils" to catch "the splendor of things" such as "the wild-swan wings" (CP II: 410). The final quatrain and couplet, however, represent the persona of the poet responding (in writing, without quotation marks). Here Jeffers speaks as the universal philosopher, the prophet, offering hope and perspective—revealing the most that we as human beings can hope to come to terms with in this life regarding our ability to capture "truth" (the ellipsis is Jeffers's):

-This wild swan of a world is no hunter's game.
Better bullets than yours would miss the white breast,
Better mirrors than yours would crack in the flame.
Does it matter whether you hate your ... self? At least
Love your eyes that you can see, your mind that can
Hear the music, the thunder of the wings.
Love the wild swan.

(CP II: 410)

— FOOTNOTES —

¹According to Lucey, Taylor, and Malaret, in their study of the data gathered by Clementine as published in *Science*:

The determined iron content of the lunar highlands crust (-3 percent iron by weight) supports the hypothesis that much of the lunar crust was derived from a magma ocean.... The data also suggests that the bulk composition of the moon differs from that of the Earth's mantle. This difference excludes models for lunar origin that require the earth and moon to have the same compositions, such as fission and co-accretion, and favors giant impact and capture.... Dynamical considerations strongly favor the giant impact hypothesis.... Thus, only the giant impact hypothesis is consistent both with dynamical constraints and with these new compositional data. (Lucey 1150, 1153)

As to why dynamical considerations strongly favor the giant impact hypothesis and exclude a strict capture theory, the authors refer to articles by S. R. Taylor and M. J Drake: S. R. Taylor, *Geochim. Cosmochim. Acta* 51, 1297 (1987); M. J. Drake in *Origin of the Moon*, W K. Hartmann et al., Eds. (Lunar and Planetary Institute, Houston, TX, 1986), pp. 105-124; S. R. Taylor, in *ibid.*, pp. 125-143.

²The text quoted here is actually from pages 47-48 of the 1963 Random House publication, *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*, the whole of which is not retained in the version of "The Silent Shepherds" found on page 472 of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Tim Hunt.

³It could be argued, at this point, that in both versions of the stanza Jeffers's use of "star" could be read as a poetical reference to a meteor (or, more properly, meteoroid) rather than a literal sun—the same way that a "shooting star" refers not to an actual star, but to the effect that a meteor has as it burns upon contact with the earth's atmosphere. In light of the "passing star" theories discussed later, however, it is clear that Jeffers is referring to an actual sun swinging past the earth. Furthermore, the "passing star" theories were intended to address only the origin of planets within a solar system, never the formulation of a specific planet's moon; the idea of a passing sun drawing the moon from our earth had been regarded as an impossibility since long before Jeffers's writing of "The Great Wound."

⁴The photograph appearing on the front cover is the frontispiece to the book *The Moon*, by Zdenek Kopal. It is of Auguste Rodin's sculpture, "The moon separating from the Earth" (1898), "being the artist's version of [Sir George Howard] Darwin's resonance theory of the origin of the lunar globe" (Kopal: frontispiece).

⁵The article "Moon's Mysteries Challenge Spacemen" was originally published in *Popular Science* in November of 1953. Amazingly enough, the research and technological advances made over the next five years apparently shed little additional light upon the issue: The same article was reprinted verbatim in the April, 1958 issue of *Popular Science* under a new title: "What We Know About the Moon So Far."

⁶As it appears in *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*, this passage stands complete as the poem "Unnatural Powers." In *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, however, it remains untitled.

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A COMPANION TO THE BEGINNING AND THE END AND CP' S "LAST POEMS"

By Robert Brophy

The following schema intends to provide a means of quickly matching Jeffers poems loosely edited and titled by Melba Bennett in *The Beginning and the End* with their restoration and gathering in Tim Hunt's *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Watch for mis-editing by Random House (see "A Textual Note on Robinson Jeffers's *The Beginning and the End*." *Publications of the Biographical Society of America*, 60 (Fall 1966): 344-48) and, of course, changes and interpretation, selection and "correction" by Melba Bennett.

	<i>B & E</i>	<i>Last Poems</i>
	36	411 To The Story-Tellers
	72	412 The Shears
Great Explosion (part)	3	413 Explosion; "There are astonomers..."
		415 The Urchin; "Prophet beware, there is..."
		417 Metamorphosis; "The beauty of the earth..."
		418 The Last Conservative; "Against the outcrop"
	25	419 Monument
	11	420 Animula
	63	421 Salvage
	55	422 Patronymic
	17	423 Ode to Hengist and Horsa
Silent Shepherds	47	424 "What's the best life"
	73	426 Birds and Fishes
	35	427 Let Them Alone
	31	428 The Beautiful Captive
The Beginning & the End	5	430 "The unformed volcanic earth"
	13	435 Passenger Pigeon
	—	438 An Extinct Vertebrate; "Whatever we do ..."
	—	439 The Ocean's Tribute; "Yesterday's sundown ..."
	30	440 Birth and Death
	20	441 End of the World

<i>B & E</i>	<i>Last Poems</i>
—	442 Birthday; "Seventy years ago my mother ..."
—	443 Seventieth Birthday; "There was rain ..."
Tear Life 39	445 "Eagle and hawk with their great claws"
—	446 "It was good for my father"
But I Am Growing Old	
and Indolent 64	447 "I have been warned"
61	448 Nighthniece
39	449 On an Anthology of Chinese Poems
How Beautiful It Is 29	450 "It flows out of mystery"
—	451 Carmel; "Not house-proud"
My Burial Place 59	452 "I have told you in another poem"
Full Moon 41	453 "Our eyes by day are good enough"
He Is All 51	454 "There is no God but God"
Look, How Beautiful 52	455 "There is this infinite energy"
Storm-Dance of Sea Gulls 49	456 "The storm blowing up"
—	457 "I walk on my cliff"
The Great Wound (part) 11	458 "At the near approach of a star"
The Great Wound (part) 11	459 "The mathematicians and physics men"
Savagely Individual 46	460 "Heavy and yellow with the clay wrack"
—	457 "I walk on my cliff"
62	462 Vulture
29	463 To Kill in War Is Not Murder
60	464 Granddaughter
68	465 Ghost
24	466 The Epic Stars
—	467 The Old Wolf My Father; "I have a little..."
Eager to be Praised 57	468 "Goethe, they say, was a great poet"
65	469 Hand
42	470 The Dog in the Sky
3	471 The Great Explosion
47	472 The Silent Shepards
—	473 Pleasures; "In youth In thought I could..."
44	474 Oysters
Star-Swirls 18	476 "The polar ice-caps are melting"
Harder Than Granite 58	477 "It is a pity the shock-waves"
Do You Still Make War 23	478 "I saw a regiment of soldiers"
See the Human figure 66	479 "As the eye fails"
Cremation 59	480 "It nearly cancels my fear of death"
Fierce Music 57	481 "All night long"
Unnatural Powers 19	482 "For fifty thousand years"
—	483 "The old half blinded hawk"
My Loved Subject 50	484 "Old age has clawed me"
—	"I am seventy-four years old"

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 1/2" 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 be included.

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. Citations should be to author and page number in parentheses within the text, referring to an attached bibliography, "Works Cited." Double-space endnotes (explanatory, not citations) following the essay on a new page headed "Notes."

Quoting and Citing Robinson Jeffers:

The standard edition of Jeffers's work is *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (Stanford University Press, Vols. I, II, III: 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, in the case of Una's letters, to the appropriate number of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*.