

JEFFERS STUDIES

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It was with deep regret that the editors of *Jeffers Studies* learned of the death of Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2004). The Nobel Laureate, as *JS* readers and RJA members know, responded intensely to Jeffers's work, so we asked Robert Zaller to write a consideration of Milosz's long dialogue with Jeffers as a tribute to this great poet's memory.

I'm especially glad to offer Albert Gelpi's reading of "Vulture" as the lead article in this issue, not only because he is a major critic who has long been an advocate of Jeffers, but also because he is my teacher and friend. Tim Hunt's essay is the second of an occasional series that the editors have asked him to write from the immense accumulation of fact, insight, and connection that came with his nearly fifteen years of editing *The Collected Poetry*. Furthermore, I hope that readers will be gratified by the inclusion of fresh archival material such as Una Jeffers's diary, ably edited by Robert Kafka, and the return of News and Notes after its absence in the last issue. Two reviews of Jeffers-related books complete the issue: Allan Campo's essay-review of Gelpi's Everson reader and Richard Hughey's notice of an anthology of California poetry.

Such is the diversity of materials that I hope to be able to present in every issue of *JS* in its semi-annual format. The editors of *JS* share RJA President Jim Baird's sanguine outlook, and we encourage our readers to contribute essays, reviews, and items of interest related to Jeffers and his poetry. We hope you will share *JS* with friends, colleagues, and students, letting them know that we are always in search of fresh, insightful, and original work on Jeffers.

RJA BULLETIN

JIM BAIRD, RJA PRESIDENT, 2003–2005

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am happy to report that over the past two years the Robinson Jeffers Association has moved forward in terms of both scholarship and community. The Association has assumed the duties of publishing *Jeffers Studies*, and the editorial board of that journal has been reorganized so that it will continue to present the same high level of scholarship it has offered in the past. We thank Robert Brophy for his work with both the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* and *Jeffers Studies*, and also appreciate the contributions of the new editor of *Jeffers Studies*, George Hart. We have held two lively, informative, and well-attended conferences, at the University of Northern Arizona in 2003, and in Carmel in 2004. At these conferences, as well as in meeting and hearing from old friends of Jeffers's work, we have been joined by new students attracted to Jeffers, many of whom we expect to be part of our dialogue about the poet for years to come. There has been particular interest in Jeffers's impact on environmentalists and science. In 2005, we will meet again in Reno, Nevada, with a conference hosted in part by the University of Nevada, Reno, a school with one of the best programs in environmental writing in the world.

ShaunAnne Tangney has done an excellent job as Executive Director, taking over from the equally efficient David Rothman, setting up these conferences and settling many other matters so that things could run smoothly. Rob Kafka, in addition to his work as Treasurer, year after year serves as the driving wheel of the organization, keeping us on schedule and reminding us of issues to be dealt with and often handling them himself. One of the unique features of the Robinson Jeffers Association is our close association with the Jeffers family. This year Brenda Jeffers, widow of Garth Jeffers, will leave our Advisory Board, and we thank her for her service. She will be replaced by Maeve Jeffers, the poet's granddaughter, who won a place on the board in the most recent election. We also welcome her. In that same election, the membership elected Peter Quigley as the next President. Peter has been with the

organization since its founding and has made many contributions of time, energy, and scholarship, including setting up and operating our website. We look forward to the help he will give us in the future.

The Robinson Jeffers Association is strong and growing.

ARTICLES

ALBERT GELPI

WHAT AN ENSKYMENT / WHAT AN ENWORDMENT ROBINSON JEFFERS'S "VULTURE"

I

Robinson Jeffers's poetic career spanned four decades of the last century, from the twenties to the sixties. Much has been written about his sudden explosive arrival on the literary scene. In the first volumes, California narratives like "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion" were deliberately shocking in their depiction of the human ego driven to destruction and self-destruction by the lust for power and powerful lust, while lyrics about the Carmel coast like "Divinely Superfluous Beauty" and "The Excesses of God" and "Continent's End" combined description and meditation to proclaim the prophetic message underlying the narratives. Jeffers's distinctively Calvinist and scientific revisioning of Romanticism expressed itself religiously in his pantheistic conviction about the divinity of nature, and expressed itself socially in the philosophy he called Inhumanism to dispute Western humanism's apotheosis of the powers of consciousness. By the late thirties Jeffers's vehement opposition to the impending World War and his even shriller denunciation of American participation in the war caused many readers and even his publishers to dissociate themselves from his work. This abrupt reversal of favor and esteem, comparable to the bitter condemnations of Pound in the postwar years, has tended to distract attention from the extraordinary achievement of Jeffers's final decade. However, from the perspective that the recently completed *Collected Poetry* offers we can now see that in these late poems—"Carmel Point," "De Rerum Virtute," "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones," "Birds and Fishes," and, supremely in my view, "Vulture"—Jeffers's pantheism and Inhumanism attain an elevated, even serene clarity of perception and articulation in the face of death that balances and rounds off the kinetic incandescence of his prodigious arrival forty years earlier and brings his life's work to a fitting culmination and resting point.

“Vulture” is about dying back into nature, about death and transfiguration deferred yet anticipated, anticipated yet deferred. The extinction of the conflicted human consciousness and the assimilation of the body into organic process are, for the pantheist, the sublime consummation. In his journal Thoreau posited the pantheist’s creed: that we should live so attuned to the single rhythm of life and death that, like the autumn leaf relinquishing its hold on the branch, we are ready to sink to the compost of earth that will generate the next cycle in life’s round. The little autobiographical narrative of “Vulture,” then, brings Jeffers to the point towards which pantheism and Inhumanism have been directing his whole life and work. Here is the full text of the poem, which first appeared in the posthumous volume *The Beginning and the End* (1963):

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
 Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling high up in
 heaven,
 And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit narrowing, I
 understood then
 That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the flight-feathers
 Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer. I could see the naked
 red head between the great wings
 Beak downward staring. I said “My dear bird we are wasting time here.
 These old bones will still work; they are not for you.” But how beautiful he’d
 looked, gliding down
 On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in the sea-light
 over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
 That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that beak and become
 part of him, to share those wings and those eyes—
 What a sublime end of one’s body, what an enskyment; what a life after death.
 (CP 3: 462)

Emerson defined the poet, particularly the American poet, as a seer and consequently a sayer. In *Nature* he singled out the poet as “he whose eye can integrate all the parts” (9), and in his essay on “The Poet” he says that the seer must also be “the Namer, or Language-maker” to realize his vision: “the other half is his expression” (456–57). The verbs in “Vulture” unobtrusively signal Jeffers assuming, for one of the final times, his vocation as visionary seer and prophetic speaker. “I saw,” “I could see,” supported by the pun on “sea-light” and the running pun on “I” and “eye,” enable “I said,” “I tell you solemnly,” and the saying includes not just the words quoted immediately thereafter but the entire verbal act of the poem. Like the speaker’s hillside meandering, the poem initially unwinds its long free verse lines with no foreseen end in mind, though the implication of the movement from “dawn” to “lay down to rest” in

the first line soon takes on ominous confirmation, "I lay death-still." At this point the pace quickens and intensifies as the speaker imagines himself carrion for the vulture, and the startlingly eager exclamations—"how beautiful," "how beautiful," "to be eaten by that beak," "to share those wings and those eyes"—move in accelerating crescendo to the ecstatic conclusion: "What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a life after death." The grisly meal is the pantheist's communion and immortality: not, as in the Christian sacrament, eating God as spiritual nourishment but being devoured by divine nature; not immortality in heaven but enskyment in the raptor's wings and eyes. The poet's eyes, no longer lidded and half shut, would be consumed and assumed into the wide, far gaze of "those eyes." This little poem presses many other moments of communion in Jeffers's poetry to the penultimate moment before death, and Jeffers could not but have had particularly in mind the eagle's death-flight to the sun that he had imagined at the climax of "Cawdor" more than a quarter-century before.

"Vulture" rises to that sublime enskyment; yet the enskyment does not and cannot happen in the poem. The verbs in the climactic outburst are future: "to be eaten . . . and become," "to share." What the poet tells us solemnly is in fact that, sorry though he may be, he has to defer the vulture's meal for a while; the poem he tells us is his strategy for deferral. No matter how much the pantheist says that he wants to quench consciousness in the flux of nature, and means what he says with passion and conviction, consciousness instinctively recoils from and resists its own extinction, as both Thoreau and Jeffers had to acknowledge. In Jeffers's Calvinist/Darwinian version of human destiny, consciousness is an evolutionary error whose self-awareness divides the human ego from the material world and from itself and condemns alienated humans to the violence of frustrated desires and power-games of dominance. Far from being the crowning glory of God's creation, as Christians and humanists contend, humans are incapacitated by self-consciousness for participation in the divine beauty of things. Language, the medium of consciousness, is the sign and agent of the mind's self-reflexive isolation from nature's God. Why, then, if you are a pantheist, be a poet? Why, indeed, prolong the life of consciousness? These harsh questions resonate at the heart of Jeffers's life and work. The sustaining focus of his poetry is the self-conscious tension between mind and what he called in "Hurt Hawks" "the wild God of the world."

Jeffers's religious and philosophical values remained unchanged from the Tamar volume to the end. At the same time, what does change is his deepening assurance that, halting and even futile as it often seems, the effort to "uncenter our minds from ourselves" ("Carmel Point" [CP 3: 399]) and turn consciousness out to the world can be efficacious and

can make a language of “things and no more thoughts” (“Return” [CP 2: 409]), a language that can express at least something of the divine beauty of brute nature. Thus by the time he wrote “Margrave” in the early thirties he could affirm: “I have projected my spirit / Behind the superb sufficient forehead of nature / To gift the inhuman God with this rankling consciousness” (CP 2: 167). And in “De Rerum Virtute,” from his last years, he turns Lucretius’s disquisition on the nature of things to his own meditation on the virtue of things:

The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.
It is in the beholder’s eye, not the world? Certainly.
It is the human mind’s translation of the transhuman
Intrinsic glory. (CP 3: 403)

The validation of the poet’s lidded seeing and flawed saying lies in his eye’s translation of transhuman glory. That translation is predicated upon the ability to see and say and is itself therefore a necessary strategy for self-preservation. Constructing the poem, like building the stone house on the stone coast, provides a temporary haven with a window on the world. To imagine being “eaten by that beak” and becoming “those wings and those eyes” is an act of consciousness and so of language. The actual and wordless devourment would be beyond the eye’s translation. What Jeffers spells out instead is an extraordinary line of poetry: “What a sublime end of one’s body, what an enskyment; what a life after death.” But at this penultimate point the enskyment is and can only be an enwordment.

2

William Everson, who understood Jeffers more profoundly perhaps than anyone after Una Jeffers, insisted that “the best way to get him in focus is as a native transcendentalist” in the tradition of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and Walt Whitman—“a transcendentalist gone West and turned inside out” (ix). The first part of this essay explicated “Vulture” in the configuration of Jeffers’s life’s work; now, using Everson’s insight, I want to configure Jeffers’s complex place in the visionary-prophetic tradition by reading “Vulture” against a passage from Whitman and a passage from Emerson. Jeffers claimed that he did not know Thoreau’s writings, though he was closer in outlook and temperament to Thoreau than to Emerson and Whitman. But that very fact makes a juxtaposition between them less pointed and revealing than a comparative reading of Jeffers with two titans of American Romanticism.

It is true that Jeffers steadfastly dismissed the influence and example of Whitman and preferred to see as antecedents for his free verse lines the Greek hexameters or the King James verses of the Hebrew prophets or the rhythms of the waves outside his window. This reiterated disclaimer, however, has only spurred critics to substantiate his connection with Whitman by seeing the two of them, in Everson's words, as "the positive and negative poles" of the American transcendentalist tradition (viii). It is easy enough to see how the poet of "Shine, Perishing Republic" and the bitter poems of the Second World War would reject Whitman's drum-rolling for America, and how the poet of Inhumanism would reject Whitman's boisterous, exuberant, celebratory singing of himself as the center and epitome of the cosmos. We might expect Jeffers at least to have taken note of the philosophical assumptions he and Whitman had in common. After all, Whitman stood for a materialist pantheism against Emerson's idealism; he distinguished between himself and Emerson by saying that his word was "the body, including all, including the intellect or soul" where Emerson's word was "mind (or intellect or soul)" (Whitman's letter to W. S. Kennedy, Feb. 25, 1887). But in point of fact the pantheism they shared only served, in Jeffers's mind, to sharpen the irreconcilable opposition between his Calvinist Inhumanism and Whitman's optimistic humanism.

The Whitman poem I want to cite here is not one, like "Song of Myself" or "I Sing the Body Electric," that demonstrates the obvious opposition, but a lesser-known and shorter poem that allows subtler connections and contrasts with "Vulture." "The Dalliance of the Eagles," first published in 1880, is, like "Vulture," an old-age poem in which the poet's walk towards death is suddenly arrested by a "skyward" encounter with the cosmic life-force embodied here in a pair of eagles.

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,)
 Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,
 The rushing amorous contact high in space together,
 The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce, gyrating wheel,
 Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight grappling,
 In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward falling,
 Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a moment's lull,
 A motionless still balance in the air, then parting, talons loosing,
 Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their separate diverse flight,
 She hers, he his, pursuing. (229-30)

The first-person pronoun typically anchors and concentrates Whitman's poems, but is uncharacteristically missing here. There is no "I" as subject of the active verb but only two occurrences of "my" as modifying possessive pronouns in the first line, and even those are submerged in a

parenthetical aside. Jeffers's Inhumanism instructed him to fall "in love outward" ("The Tower Beyond Tragedy" [CP 1: 178]), but in this case Whitman does so more spontaneously and with less resistance than Jeffers. In "Vulture" eight occurrences of "I" foreground the activity of consciousness and locate every sentence there except the final exclamations. Both poems lead to the infusion with brute power and energy as the poets project themselves imaginatively into the magnificent birds, but the pace and pitch of the two encounters are tellingly different. In Whitman's case the poet, aged early by strokes and painfully exercising his crippled limbs beside the river in Camden, is so instantly swept up by the sexual life-force that, for the moment at least, he forgets himself, relegates himself to a parenthesis, and identifies imaginatively with the event out there. Though the prospect of death is implied in the closed parentheses, it is unstated, and the focus is fixed exultantly on the generative sexual act in which four becomes two becomes one becomes two—and so on and on in the eternal, instinctual pursuit of life. The seer-sayer is almost not there and yet is imaginatively everywhere; the event immediately fills his consciousness and the poem. For Jeffers's darker, more dubious and conflicted sensibility, the approach is reserved and tentative and proceeds under the protective cover of ironic humor: "My dear bird we are wasting time here. / These old bones will still work; they are not for you." Up to this point the motion in the poem has been downward: the descending orbit of the vulture above the exposed and supine speaker. But the turn of the poem is marked by the dramatic disappearance of the self-regarding "I." The release that begins immediately after ("But how beautiful he'd looked . . .") and lets the speaker soar on "those wings" is all the more cathartic for being delayed—and earned—through cautious circumspection.

The differences in the two poets' sensibilities are registered poetically in the different movement of the free verse. The long lines of "Dalliance" are all end-stopped; each verse is a syntactical unit that gathers in the many and diverse particulars and holds them in suspension and relation. Each verse evolves and completes itself as a microcosm of one in many and many in one that mirrors the macrocosm of the universe, and as the verses accrete, one upon the next, the parts form more and more complex microcosms until the poem stands whole as an organism of interactive parts. What keeps the compilation of end-stopped lines from being static or halting is the kinetic energy of the language playing within and between the lines. The resonance of repeated consonants and vowels, the rush of adjectives, and especially the succession of active participles and gerunds (seventeen words ending in "-ing," plus "wings," in ten lines) propel the series of phrases forward to the "moment's lull" at mating and conception and then to the separate

ongoing flights of the pair of eagles. The poem begins with a dangling participle and never forms a sentence as this dynamic but integral incident realizes itself as just one instant in the unbroken flow of the life force animating the cosmos.

In "Vulture" Jeffers uses alliteration and assonance, repeated final consonants ("lower and nearer," "naked red head . . . said . . . bird"), Whitmanian parallelisms (" . . . how beautiful . . . how beautiful," "To be eaten . . . to share," "What . . . what . . . what"), and participles (six, plus "wings" twice, also in ten lines), and he uses them more deliberately and extensively than he does in many poems. This poem has to rise to a big climax, and the rhetorical resonances give the verses texture, moving them along while stitching them together. Yet in comparison with "The Dalliance of the Eagles" the verse of "Vulture" feels looser, slower, more measured, more exploratory, as it finds its way to the ecstatic revelation. Some of that effect of uncertain movement comes from the fact that six of the ten lines of "Vulture" are enjambed. Heavy enjambment is a characteristic device of modernist verse; Whitman, as noted above, almost never uses run-on lines. William Carlos Williams used it skillfully to fracture the grammatical cohesion of the sentence into short, jagged lines in order to focus with analytic precision on the distinct and fragmented elements of perception. Jeffers's anti-modernist holism, however, has no such purpose in his enjambment. On the contrary, his long, unmeasured lines characteristically seek to open the rhythms of perception and response to the flow of natural process. These run-on lines from "To the House," for example, describe the formation of the granite rocks on the ocean bed that Jeffers brought up from the beach to build his stone outpost (as he constructs his poem); the enjambment holds the evolution almost from the big bang to the present in a sustained continuum:

I am heaping the bones of the old mother
 To build us a hold against the host of the air;
 Granite the blood-heat of her youth
 Held molten in hot darkness against the heart
 Hardened to temper under the feet
 Of the ocean cavalry that are maned with snow
 And march from the remotest west. (CP 1: 5)

The enjambment in "Vulture," however, serves a different purpose, tipping the lines off-balance and giving the poem a lurching movement to its climax.

To demonstrate the point graphically, I have re-arranged the words of "Vulture" in Whitmanian end-stopped lines:

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside above the ocean.
 I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling high up in heaven,
 And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit narrowing,
 I understood then that I was under inspection.
 I lay death-still and heard the flight-feathers whistle above me and make their
 circle and come nearer.
 I could see the naked red head between the great wings beak downward staring.
 I said "My dear bird we are wasting time here. These old bones will still work;
 they are not for you."
 But how beautiful he'd looked, gliding down on those great sails;
 How beautiful he looked, veering away in the sea-light over the precipice.
 I tell you solemnly that I was sorry to have disappointed him.
 To be eaten by that beak and become part of him, to share those wings and those
 eyes—
 What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a life after death.

There are twelve measured and balanced end-stopped lines now instead of Jeffers's off-center and heavily enjambed ten. Moreover, since in poetry the line is the operative unit that supercedes the sentence, the new lineation makes a decisive difference in the reading experience of the same words in the same order—makes, in effect, a different poem. Here only the first and last lines begin the same as in Jeffers's text, and only the last remains entirely the same. Here the poem still moves more slowly than "Dalliance," but now at a smooth pace and with a steadier balance. Jeffers's text is of course truer to his meaning. Whitman's heightened consciousness of life exultantly fills the poem; Jeffers's consciousness edges itself warily but surely to the point of extinction.

On the face of it, we might expect Jeffers to have found Emerson's platonist transcendentalism, combined with optimistic humanism, doubly distasteful, more distasteful than Whitman's robust materialism. Yet Jeffers acknowledges his Romantic roots in the American bardic tradition by honoring Emerson as source and influence—in part perhaps because the Yankee realist in Emerson resisted his idealist inclinations by submitting them, again and again, to the immediacies of the local landscape. The experience that both grounds and launches his manifesto *Nature* (1836)—and, by extension, his life's work—is the famous account of the epiphany that overpowered him one winter evening on the Boston Common and fused in his mind with similar transformative experiences he had had in the Concord woods (24). The passage, one of the touchstones of American writing, was written as prose, but here I have lineated the sentences (almost as end-stopped verses) in order to expose their rhetorical structure more visibly than in a block paragraph of run-on prose:

Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky,
 without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune,
 I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration.
 I am glad to the brink of fear.
 In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what
 period soever of life, is always a child.
 In the woods is perpetual youth.
 Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial
 festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a
 thousand years.
 In the woods, we return to reason and faith.
 There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity
 (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair.
 Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted
 into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes.
 I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the
 Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.

This speaker, unlike the two others, is not an old man. Emerson was around thirty when he wrote the passage and in the fullness of life, but his essential point is that “at what period soever of life” the experience of God in nature makes a man a child, brings not death but restoration: “in the woods is perpetual youth.” Emerson knew, as did Jeffers, the Calvinist account of mankind’s fall bringing sin and death into the world; but, unlike Jeffers, Emerson was no Calvinist. In his exemplum, the Eden story of falling from grace is reversed and undone. Satan sloughs his sinful skin; and “a man casts off his years” and sheds mortality because “nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace . . . which nature cannot repair.” Re-pair makes the broken parts whole again. Emerson’s speaker imagines himself not carrion for a vulture but newborn Adam in paradise regained, an Adam in whom ego-consciousness vanishes in total and clear-eyed vision. The narrative is told in a present tense that extends the immediate moment into timeless suspension.

Emerson crafted his sentences carefully as he re-made them from journal entry to lecture to essay. “Crossing the bare common” begins the account with the speaker already in motion, like Whitman “skirting the river road” or Jeffers walking the bare hills. And, as with Whitman but not Jeffers, Emerson’s ascent is rapid. In the space of the very first sentence a bare and muddy winter scene, the dying light of early dusk muffled in cloud, is opened up and opened out into “infinite space.” The lone speaker is caught up into “a perfect exhilaration” of “reason and faith.” (Reason here is not ratiocination but transcendental reason—intuitive and unmediated cognition of the absolute—and so a synonym of faith.) Each of the sentences rephrases the initial epiphany, trying to

suggest, this way and that, its inexpressible significance so that readers and hearers, especially the dubious or skeptical ones, may be moved—not by logical demonstration but by rhetorical invocation—to the point at which they can receive and accept the ecstatic exclamations of the final sentence. Long and short sentences alternate with the rhythms of comprehension. In a pattern repeated three times, an expansive sentence spins out modifying detail and metaphorical comparison to take in by indirection what has actually happened, and then a brief sentence consolidates and fixes the point in concise and generalized redaction. The insistently parallel openings locate the sentences in ground zero for the progressive circulations: “Crossing a bare common,” “In the woods, too,” “In the woods,” “Within these plantations of God,” “In the woods,” “There.” And finally “Standing on the bare ground” loops back to the point of departure, “Crossing a bare common,” for the oracular intimation of the “perfect exhilaration” announced but unriddled at the start: “I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all: the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.”

Emerson has prepared for this sentence by weaving imagery of eyes and light through the paragraphs leading up to the moment on the common: the poet is “he whose eye can integrate all the parts”; “the sun illuminates only the eye of the man, shines into the eye and the heart of the child.” The pun on “eye” and “I” is repeated earlier in the passage (“me my eyes”), and reaches a climax here: the poet becomes an eye-ball / I-ball, his nothing-ego subsumed, his all-consciousness the magnetic and radiating center of the circulations of God. I become “part” of the Universal Being—but also, in a startling and punning reversal, “parcel” or vessel filled with and containing the Universal Being. His mind and the divine Mind are, for the timeless moment at least, conterminous. For Whitman was fundamentally right in saying that Emerson’s word is not body but “mind (or intellect or soul).” For all his testing of his idealism, Emerson is in the end not a pantheist but a Platonist transcendentalist for whom matter is the secondary and accidental emanation of essential Being. In words from “The Poet,” “the soul makes the body,” and when the individual consciousness transcends the body and becomes the microcosm of God, it rises above material creation: “my head” is “bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space.”

The rush of declarations in the last sentence of Emerson’s passage is similar in effect to the last line of “Vulture.” But Emerson’s humanistic individualism could not be farther from Jeffers’s Inhumanist pantheism. Emerson’s epiphany builds to a resounding chorus of first-person pronouns; his eye is sublimated into God’s eye, the transparency of disembodied vision. Here in Emerson the pronoun “I” multiplies itself, the

several references to “I” in the first half of “Vulture” drop away at the point in which he imagines his body becoming the bone and fiber of the great bird, his lidded mortal eyes becoming “those eyes.” For Jeffers “the eye of God” is the flaring sunset (in “Oysters” [CP 3: 474]) or the vast Pacific (in “The Eye”). But “this bulging / Eyeball of water” knows no transparency; it is “the staring unsleeping / Eye of the earth” (CP 3: 123).

Jeffers’s acknowledgement of Emerson was really the attraction between opposite philosophic poles, and he was in some respects closer to Whitman than he could see or wanted to admit. The triangulation of these three instances of enskyment and enwordment confirms that Emerson, Whitman, and Jeffers were all poets of the sublime, but the sublime has twin aspects. For Jeffers’s nineteenth-century predecessors, the sublime meant the assumption into the transfusing light of the cosmos (Whitman) or the Universal Being (Emerson). Moreover, immortality was here and now; they could experience it and survive. For Jeffers, the sublime presaged the descent to darkness, the extinction of the individual self. The poem “The Low Sky,” from Jeffers’s sequence *Descent to the Dead*, ends:

Among stones and quietness
The mind dissolves without a sound,
The flesh drops into the ground. (CP 2: 111)

But, as “Vulture” intimates, the drop into darkness is, on the other side of human seeing and wording, a soaring into light and air. Then, “what a sublime end of one’s body, what an enskyment; what a life after death”! And till then, the poem’s enwordment in that soaring line.

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TIM HUNT

JEFFERS AND
“THE PALACE” OF TRADITION

In 1935 Random House added Robinson Jeffers's most popular collection, *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (the expanded version of *Tamar* originally published in 1925) to its Modern Library series, which offered general readers inexpensive, widely distributed editions of classics and important contemporary literature. This reissue reflected the company's sense that interest in Jeffers extended beyond those who sought out poetry in literary bookstores, and it amounted to a declaration that Jeffers was a major literary figure, not just a momentarily popular writer. Critical discussions of Jeffers have often drawn on this edition's Introduction, because it is one of the few accounts he offered of his development as a poet, and it is his clearest statement of his rejection of the aesthetic agenda of his modernist contemporaries, especially Pound and Eliot, with their emphasis on poetic collage and formal experimentation. Like much of Jeffers's prose, the piece is so lucid and direct that there seems little reason to try to peek behind the edges of the page, yet Jeffers carefully shaped the story he tells in the Introduction, and recognizing this can deepen our sense of the Introduction and its implications.

In the months leading up to their marriage in August 1913, it is clear that Jeffers and Una Call Kuster were committed to him making his way as a writer. It is less clear that they had decided he should focus on being a poet. In an August 12, 1913, letter to a friend, Una Jeffers reports that “it's prose we're working on *very* hard—short stories and long” since “poetry doesn't feed hungry mouths—leastwise not contemporaneously,” and she adds that Jeffers had written his one published short story, “Mirrors,” “about six months ago” (*RJN* 64: 9). Another letter refers to a novel to be called *Man Maker* (*SL* 9). But by May 1914 (about the time of the episode he would later narrate in the *Roan Stallion* Introduction) Jeffers had switched his allegiance fully and decisively back to poetry. “The Palace,” an unpublished poem dated May 22, 1914, apparently marks the switch:

Let us reenter the ruined palace again.
 Let us clean the weeds from the walls;
 And raise up the fallen columns, and roof against rain
 The large and beautiful halls.

This palace was builded of old; it is comely and great;
 No coward nor slave in the world
 Had a hand in the work, nor has entered the outermost gate,
 Nor has seen the high banner unfurled.

Is the throne-room spacious and wonderful? Shakespeare made it.
 He adorned it with statues of kings.
 And the firm foundation takes root where Wordsworth laid it
 In the permanence of natural things.

The shafts of the columns were carved by no other than Milton,
 Of clear marble from quarries afar;
 And golden at top is the tower Shelley fashioned, and built on,
 Spiring its tip to a star.

But smaller men came; and men are so easily tired;
 And great good is so heavy to hold;
 And, Well for our fathers, they said; but the good they desired
 Was good in its time, but is old.

Let us go forth from the palace; the stair is too long,
 Too steep; and the courts are too broad;
 And our feet grow tired in the hallways, where strengthened with song
 Our fathers of old time trod.

They called in the curlew to cry in the empty rooms;
 The dock and the thistle to dance
 In clefts of the wall; they quarried the marble for tombs;
 They despoiled their inheritance.

Is it not better? they said. The wind in the weeds
 Is a better harp than a harp.
 And too obvious a beauty is common, and the soul needs
 Savors more strange, more sharp.

We find the great beauty grows wearisome. Also a crowd
 Is gathered to praise it. We get
 Small joy out of music too shining and sunlight too loud,
 We lovers of twilight.

And yet?

For surely the palace is comely. And marble is polished
 Though covered with moss or with dirt,
 And life—has that died? Or the beauty of life been abolished?
 Or the girdle of Orion been ungirt?

We have lived in the palace and loved it. We love not in vain.
 Let us stand on the strength of the walls
 To make firm the fine shafts of the columns and roof against rain
 The large and beautiful halls. (CP 4: 440-41)

It would be easy to dismiss this stilted piece as the sort of conventional exercise an anxious novice might write to buck himself up. But Jeffers wrote this poem two weeks after the couple's first child died soon after being born. This suggests "The Palace" is not a mere exercise but a recommitment to the ideal of poetry after the flirtation with the more pragmatic path of fiction. Poetry, not the entertaining diversion of novels and short stories, offers solace. Poetry, not fiction, offers true vocation, and Jeffers here implies that he has been called to "reenter the ruined palace" and "raise up the fallen columns"—and that he is determined to heed the call.

If writing "The Palace" was more than an exercise, as the timing of it suggests, the poem offers important clues to Jeffers's sense of poetry at this point. Most obviously he was still committed to traditional forms (meter, rhyme, regular stanzas), as if the call to make poetry new, the experiments of Imagism and free verse, had not yet reached the provinces of Southern California. But that would be to underestimate the success of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* and the reach of her advocacy of Pound, those Pound advocated, and the Carl Sandburgs and Vachel Lindsays that Pound probably wished would disappear. And too, Jeffers was aware enough of life beyond the provinces that he had planned to move to England—as smart young American poets were then expected to—after the baby was born (the outbreak of the war in Europe, instead, deflected the Jefferses to Carmel). But above all, it would be to miss the implicit critique in "The Palace" of these poetic trends. The palace of the tradition of poetry is in ruins not because it is old or played out because the "smaller men" of the fifth stanza have decided it is "old," have "tired" of their responsibility to it, and have found the great voices of the past too intimidating. These "lovers of twilight" have "despoiled their inheritance" by wandering off to attend to "The wind in the weeds." "The Palace," then, is not just Jeffers's declaration that he will honor the tradition but also a defense of that allegiance and a critique of those who have wandered off.

Equally important is the way "The Palace" suggests how Jeffers then viewed the poetic tradition. While the tradition might, as he then

understood it, demand of the neophyte mastery and use of traditional forms, the tradition was more than obedience to this formalism. It was also the challenge to thematic seriousness, the expectation that poetry be memorable and significant poetic statement, and it was a commitment to the ideal (as different as Milton's and Shelley's visions of that ideal might have been). That there is nothing particularly distinctive about the canon Jeffers projects in the poem, nothing of the radical recasting of the poetic past that Pound and Eliot were pushing for, is true, but this points, I'd suggest, less to Jeffers's more conservative or less adventurous or less independent reading of the canon and more to his conviction or need at this point to commit himself to an established order of value—to commit himself, that is, to a significant, meaning-giving communal enterprise (just as Eliot, that individual talent, would commit himself first to the "tradition" and then subsequently to the Church of England). The poet of "The Palace" is clearly not the poet of *Tamar* and the work that followed it, and one might conclude that the desire to be part of the tradition, to be the poet who continued and extended it, was simply a phase and that this is the constricting skin Jeffers sloughed in order to emerge as the more radical voice he became. But Jeffers's own comments about his development, his various arguments about poetry, and what the various recovered poems from these years suggest is that his development needs to be understood not as an effort to break free of the tradition and literary past but as a series of steps, some productive, some not, as he worked to fashion a viable way to extend the tradition that would be adequate to the challenges of the modern moment as he understood it but would not be, in either Pound's or Eliot's sense of it, modernist.

Jeffers builds the Introduction to the Modern Library *Roan Stallion*, which he says "might be entitled 'Meditations by a Water-main,'" on an anecdote of carrying firewood back from the "farther woods" and stopping to worry over how to "attain" that "originality, without which a writer of verses is only a verse-writer" and not a real poet (CP 4: 384–85). The probable date for this actual or composite moment of "bitter meditation" is fall 1914, shortly after the move to Carmel but before the death of his father that December and the writing of the initial narrative poems in *Californians* early in 1915. (Jeffers notes in the Introduction that he was then "twenty-seven," that this was "twenty-one years ago" and "three or four years" before the earliest of the *Tamar* poems—details that also point to fall 1914.) This moment of anxiety occurs, that is, soon after "The Palace" and his decision to renew the tradition, and in this moment of doubt Jeffers remembers thinking, "I was already a year older than Keats when he died, and I too had written many verses, but they were all worthless. I had imitated and imitated,

and that was all" (*CP* 4: 384). As a mere imitator, the Jeffers of 1914 was failing both the challenge of the past and the challenge of the present:

The more advanced contemporary poets were attaining it [the "originality" that made a "verse-writer" a poet and that he still lacked] by going farther and farther along the way that perhaps Mallarmé's aging dream had shown them, divorcing poetry from reason and ideas, bringing it nearer to music, finally to astonish the world with what would look like pure nonsense and would be pure poetry. No doubt these lucky writers were imitating each other, instead of imitating Shelley and Milton as I had done, . . . but no, not all of them, someone must be setting the pace, going farther than anyone had dared to go before. Ezra Pound perhaps? Whoever it was, was *original*.

Perhaps this was the means to attain originality: to make a guess which way literature is going, and go there first. Read carefully your contemporaries, chart their line of advance, then hurry and do what they are going to do next year. And if they drew their inspiration from France, I could read French as well as any of them. (*CP* 4: 385)

Jeffers then interrupts his critique to note for "shame's sake" that this was youthful "competitive[ness]" and an inappropriate concern with "trends" and adds:

It seemed to me that Mallarmé and his followers, renouncing intelligibility in order to concentrate the music of poetry, had turned off the road into a narrowing lane. Their successors could only make further renunciations; ideas had gone, now meter had gone, imagery would have to go; then recognizable emotions would have to go; perhaps at last even words might have to go or give up their meaning, nothing be left but musical syllables. Every advance required the elimination of some aspect of reality, and what could it profit me to know the direction of modern poetry if I did not like the direction? It was too much like putting out your eyes to cultivate the sense of hearing, or cutting off the right hand to develop the left. These austerities were not for me; originality by amputation was too painful for me.

But—I thought—everything has been said already; there seems to be only this way to go on. Unless one should do like the Chinese with their heavy past: eliminate one's own words from the poem, use quotations from books as the elder poets used imagery from life and nature, make something new by putting together a mosaic of the old. A more promising kind of amputation; one or two noble things might be done that way, but not more, for the trick would pall on western ears; and not by me, who never could bear the atmosphere of libraries since I escaped from my studious father's control.

. . . I was standing there like a poor God-forsaken man-of-letters, making my final decision not to become a "modern." I did not want to become slight and fantastic, abstract and unintelligible. I was doomed to go on imitating dead men, unless some impossible wind should blow me emotions or ideas, or a point of view, or even mere rhythms, that had not occurred to them. There was nothing to do about it. (*CP* 4: 385–86)

Jeffers's apparent point in this critique masquerading as a story is that he was able to stay the course in spite of his bout of doubt and that this perseverance, this faithfulness to his talent, produced the "originality" that the reader who had purchased *Roan Stallion* was holding. The story also suggests that the path to real and substantial originality is to continue to write within the established models of the tradition until the "new" insight offers itself; the preparation for originality is imitation, not deliberate experiment. But there is more to the story than this. The critique of "Mallarmé and his followers" is so extensive that it overwhelms the telling of the story, and it comes to function not just as a description of Jeffers's apprenticeship (the anxiety he felt as he realized his contemporaries were no longer imitating the past) but also to stand as a defense of the kind of poet he became.

It is clear from the Introduction that Jeffers understood that his work, in spite of the extent of his audience and the praise of some reviewers, was at odds with what the more advanced theorists of the day (taking their cue from the high modernist campaign for image, compression, and collage and against discursiveness and narrative) believed significant modern poetry should be. It is also clear, both from the Introduction and "The Palace," that he did want his poetry to be significant; to be popular was not enough. In the Introduction he uses two strategies to suggest that his work matters: one personal and emotional, the other analytic and argumentative. On the emotional level his story of doubt by the "Water-main," his concern that he would not find his "originality," gently mocks his youthful naiveté; it also (more importantly) implies that his subsequent "originality" is authentic, and if this is so, it not only justifies him in writing differently than his contemporaries and against the critical grain but obligates him to do so. The unfashionableness of his work becomes a sign of its authenticity; it becomes part of the significance of the work. That Pound and Eliot were writing from different principles was simply irrelevant (in spite of the critical cachet of their work). For the story the Introduction presents, this would suffice; there would be no need for Jeffers to go on and analyze the poetic road not taken to validate the one he took. But in the piece he not only critiques the aesthetic principles of those he classes as "followers" of "Mallarmé's aging dream," but asserts that these principles lead to a poetry that is "slight and fantastic, abstract and unintelligible." Such poetry may involve great skill and might become momentarily fashionable, but it lacks real significance, because it is a poetry that "advance[s]" by progressively eliminating "aspect[s] of reality."¹ While both the more emotional anecdote of the "Water-main" and the more analytical critique of "modern" poetic experimentation function to defend Jeffers's practice against the charge of being unfashionable, they are somewhat at odds

with each other. The story itself positions Jeffers as an authentically original poet whose work happens to develop along different (but equally legitimate) lines from his more fashionable contemporaries. The analysis of Pound *et al.* as followers of Mallarmé and their campaign of originality by amputation is polemical and goes farther; it suggests that Jeffers's position is legitimate (even if unfashionable), while the "modern" approach is misguided, lesser, and illegitimate.

Jeffers's claim that he chose not to become a "modern" has typically been read by those who dismiss his work as an indication that he had little understanding of the aesthetic aims behind modernist experiment and that he chose to write in an aesthetic vacuum rather than rise to the modernist challenge (as if he were, in fact, a kind of lesser, misguided Whitman who lacked the true talent to make his aesthetic independence count), but the dissonance between the two levels of the Introduction points to something else. What Jeffers sees in the "modern" is a series of "advance[s]" into greater and greater abstraction (the "austerities" of "originality by amputation") that are actually a series of retreats from the practice of poetry as a significant public art. This part of the Introduction, that is, amounts to a restatement of the critique in "The Palace." In backing away from the responsibility for significant content ("ideas") and the elements of poetic language ("meter," "imagery," "recognizable emotions") that would raise the engagement of those "ideas" to an imaginative pitch that would make them memorable and their exploration significant (even cathartic), the modernists were (in Jeffers's reading of them) not only ignoring their responsibility to engage and extend the tradition but also reducing poetry to an intricate, elegant, accomplished but potentially trivial exercise for a small coterie of admirers.²

Whatever one makes of Jeffers's conclusions about the dangers of high modernism, his critique (if we look beyond the simple declaration about choosing not to be a "modern") suggests he knew what he was rejecting. The critique also suggests that he saw his own experimentation with narrative poetry (though against the tide of contemporary fashion) as experiment within and on behalf of the tradition. For Jeffers, modernism was a well-intentioned but misguided rejection of the substance, ambition, and obligation of the tradition; his goal was originality within the context of the tradition. And by implication at least, his comments in the Introduction suggest that he had sought to develop his own modern approach without amputating ideas or meter or recognizable emotion. But if Jeffers is clear about what poetry should not be ("slight and fantastic, abstract and unintelligible"), he says little in the Introduction about what it should actually be or how poetry in the modern period was to be of the tradition yet original (beyond the implicit

invitation to read the poems of *Roan Stallion* as examples). He does, though, offer a significant clue—at least in the manuscript.

In the Introduction as published, Jeffers names Milton and Shelley as the poets he was still imitating as he worried over his more advanced contemporaries playing leap frog in their imitations of each other. The manuscript, written in thick, smudgy pencil, shows, however, that this sentence first read “instead of imitating Wordsworth as I had done.” “Wordsworth” is crossed out and “Shelley and Milton” added in its place. As Jeffers worried about his lack of originality that fall in 1914, Milton and Shelley were plausibly central to him; the manuscript adjustment could, then, be simply a correction made to improve the accuracy of the account. But Jeffers’s concern in the Introduction was not historical accuracy; it was, instead, how to cast this story of his apprenticeship so it would help validate his work as a significant alternative to the “modern.” To confess to a youthful enthusiasm for Milton and Shelley was a safe move. Even if touches of both can be found in the sense of rhetoric in his mature work, neither seem to account for the direction, character, or style of a narrative like “Tamar” (however much the narrative turns on a kind of revolt against fate and moral order; however much the situation of Shelley’s *The Cenci* hovers in the background). Jeffers could admit to this part of his past without risking that it could be used to explain away or minimize the implicit claim to originality that is key to the authority he seeks to establish in the Introduction. In naming Wordsworth, though, he would have run just this risk. For one thing, Wordsworth became a much more central figure for Jeffers and his development than Milton and Shelley and inviting scrutiny of this could compromise the claim to radical originality. Also, in the mid-1930s Wordsworth was out of fashion, with both the modernists and the New Critics. Wordsworth was, it seemed, too discursive, too repetitious, too rhetorical to be a great poet. Whatever his historical importance for British Romanticism and as Coleridge’s poetic ally, he was, finally, too prosaic and too prone to direct statement to be worthy of emulation. For Jeffers to place his work in the context of Wordsworth (even as a past that he might claim he had outgrown) would be to invite the conclusion that his own discursiveness and willingness to incorporate direct statement, even his use of narrative, was simply a misguided continuation of what those he hoped to influence were apt to see as Wordsworth’s own flaws and limitations.

The *Roan Stallion* Introduction is, I think, typical of Jeffers’s prose comments on his career. The surface is clear and lucid. The sense of anecdote seems generous and genuine. We are, it seems, invited to trust both the tale and its telling—so much so we may be apt to overlook how carefully Jeffers has shaped a piece for its specific occasion and in sup-

port of his aesthetic agenda. If the surface is reminiscence, the undercurrent may well be polemic, and this, I'd suggest, makes them even more important to our efforts to understand his sense of his work and his achievement.

ENDNOTES

1. Even though Jeffers here is recalling his sense of things in 1914, when Imagism was flourishing, his description of modernist poetry and poetics seems to anticipate *The Waste Land* and perhaps as well some of Pound's post-Imagist work. Jeffers's rejection of the logic of modernist experiment is also apparent in "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" from 1948.

2. Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism* explores, among other things, this emphasis of Pound and the modernists on cultivating various elite audiences rather than emphasizing a broader, more general readership.

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ROBERT KAFKA

A NOTE ON UNA JEFFERS'S CLASPED NOTEBOOK

After Garth Jeffers's death in 1998, a clasped notebook, with entries in his mother's hand, was discovered in his collection of Jeffersiana. How the notebook found its way into Garth's collection is not known—perhaps it was given him by Una herself shortly before her death (most of the *Praeterita*, the most important inclusion, was written during her final illness, as indicated by internal evidence), or possibly his brother Donnan wanted him to have it.

The notebook contains three primary documents: occasional diary entries beginning shortly after the couple's removal to Carmel in September, 1914, and ending in early 1916; the *Praeterita* (or *Bygone Things*—a title that deliberately recalls Proust, one of the primary influences on Una's style), an impressionistic, remarkably sensual and vivid account of her girlhood in Mason, Michigan, from 1884 to 1900; and detailed notes on some of the furnishings and artifacts in Tor House, which occasionally expand to reminiscences on people and occasions. Additionally, there are some genealogical notes at the end, which Una herself, in a later notation, indicates are untrustworthy, with a reference to more solid data in another of her writings.

The lined notebook pages are 8.5" × 5.5". Not all of the pages survive, and as would be expected with multiple ongoing projects written in a bound volume, the texts are not paginated continuously. Six pages have been torn out, probably by Una herself, for reasons now unknown. The excised pages occur in the early pages of the *Praeterita*, but the text nonetheless is continuous, indicating that the excisions apparently predated the composition of the *Praeterita*. The contents appear in the following order:

Pages 1–2:	<i>Praeterita</i>
Pages 3–4:	Missing
Pages 5–6:	<i>Praeterita</i> cont'd
Pages 7–10:	Missing

- Pages 11–29: *Praeterita* cont'd
 Page 30: Later additions to *Notes about Tor House*
 Pages 31–59: *Notes about Tor House*
 Page 60: Diary entry for Aug. 25, 1915
 Page 60A: Tipped-in page, continuing *Notes about Tor House*
 Page 61: Tipped-in page, Robin's sketch of the house on Mascagni St.
 Pages 62–63: Diary entry for Aug. 25, 1915, cont'd
 Pages 64–65: Blank
 Pages 66–88: Diary entries, [Oct.?] 1914–Feb. 14, 1916
 Pages 89–131: *Praeterita* cont'd
 Pages 132–149: Blank
 Pages 150–151: Index to *Notes about Tor House*
 Pages 152–155: Blank
 Pages 156–159: *Notes about Tor House* cont'd; Arabic phrases
 Pages 160–162: Blank
 Pages 163–167: Genealogical notes on Una's and Robin's families

Presented here are the diary entries from 1914 to 1916, unabridged. These occasional entries are valuable for their glimpse into the couple's life in the months and years after they first arrived in Carmel, a period that is very scantily documented in the couple's letters. Carmel was no longer the bohemian mecca it had been a few years earlier when Austin and Sterling lived there, but the reader may be surprised at how few references there are to other Carmel denizens. What emerges instead is a sense of the steady rhythm of their lives, and the self-absorption of a couple married just a little over a year at the time of the first entry; their delight in the natural world, and their scavenging walks on the beach; their early attempts to learn the night sky, a lifelong passion for them both; two interesting episodes from separate trips to Southern California to visit Robin's family; and above all, Una's habitual romantic orientation, evident throughout but nowhere more apparent than at the end of the first entry, beginning with the description of the injured bird, then the astonishing mediaeval "procession" they passed on a walk, and finally her sensual delight in the Carmel climate.

A future issue of *Jeffers Studies* may carry the *Praeterita*. The notes on the artifacts and furnishings in Tor House have been transcribed and copies prepared for the Tor House docents. They will not appear in these pages, except perhaps in severely redacted form.

The clasped notebook was recently in the possession of Garth Jeffers's second daughter, Ms. Diana Robinett-Prewitt, of Cedarville, CA. In October 2004, the notebook was donated by Maeve Jeffers, Garth's first daughter, to the Tor House Foundation library. *Jeffers Studies* is

especially grateful to Ms. Robinett-Prewitt for providing a usable copy of the sketch by Robinson of the house on Mascagni St., in present-day Marina Del Rey.

The two sketches by Robinson illustrate his proficiency as a quick-sketch draftsman. The sketch of the house on Mascagni St. was tipped into the clasped notebook and supplements Una's text for Aug. 25, 1915. The second sketch, depicting Una in a rocking chair holding Billie, their English bulldog, is not from the clasped notebook, but from the Jeffers Collection at The Harry Ransom Center. It is included here because it complements the material in the notebook. For permission to include it, the editors are grateful to The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, and to Jeffers Literary Properties.

As has been noted repeatedly elsewhere, Una's punctuation is highly idiosyncratic. Where confusion or ambiguity could result, I have silently amended it for the sake of readability. All ellipses are Una's.

ROBERT KAFKA, EDITOR

UNA JEFFERS'S DIARY, 1914–1916

*At the Log Cabin, Carmel-by-the-Sea, 1914*¹

There is a very lonely-voiced whistling-buoy that we hear at long intervals—perhaps once in six weeks, for a few hours.

We found on the shore up the cliff a little way some very old tools, a hand scythe, a small saw. . . . I know they once belonged to Neptune because there was a very funny old trident amongst them. I brought it home and now it abides honored, in our basket of curious bits of driftwood, and shipwreck “oak and pine,” at the left of the fireplace.

In the late afternoon as we walked toward the river mouth we passed an old withered Chinaman spreading out a mass of brown mucilaginous seaweed over the rocks today. I stopped and spoke to him. He said his people use the seaweed for soups.

“If I had two loaves of bread, I would sell one and buy hyacinths.”²

A few nights ago I felt a strange thrill at seeing a huge black spider weaving a monstrous and intricate web against the moon. It is attached to our roof and an oak tree just outside our back door. Each night we watch him repairing the rents of the day and disentangling his prey.

We found a most curiously shaped piece of driftwood. It has been the root of a tree—very much twisted and inter-twined with about seven

¹ This heading is added in the top margin of the diary—perhaps as an immediate afterthought, perhaps a much later addition. The log cabin where the Jefferses lived from 1914 through 1916 still stands on the east side of Monteverde St., near 5th St.

² Apparently a folk-saying. Una has omitted the ending: “For they would feed my soul.”

feet of the trunk still attached. The root end looked very like the ancient silver charm-against[-]the-Evil-Eye from Sicily which Belle-Mère³ wears. The wood had evidently been tossed about for a long time and worn satiny smooth—then left for years bleaching on the shore. Laboriously, Robin carried it home and fixed it upright in front of our cabin. We call it Priapus, our garden god, and I have made it a necklace of small abalone shells which make a pleasant murmuring together when the wind is blowing.

As we walked home from Pebble Beach in the twilight we saw sitting on the tip-end of a pine branch an animal which seemed to be a huge cat. Looking more closely we saw that it was an owl. Owls are weird and nocturnal-looking. It sat so alone and quiet in the dusk, and when we looked back, it had flown deeper into the forest on noiseless wings.

Robin says I remind him of a slender silver birch tree. I like to have him say that. Birches are charming trees, always swaying a little, delicately eager.

There are many Cornish and Devonshire phrases that I like—"have a tell with," "brave and crazy," "gay and proud," "go home-along," "wife-old."

We saw a man riding madly up and down the shore today, guiding his horse down to the waters edge, even out into the breakers as far as the animal would go, then zig-zagging over the sands and up the cliffside by a narrow pedestrian's trail. He came toward us at last and we saw that he was either drunk or drugged or crazy. His eyes were staring and fixed—his face grey and hard like stone. He wavered in his saddle, but kept his seat. He looked like a scholarly man, refined and cultured.⁴

On the summit of one ridge in the line of hills to the south of us is a group of trees looking exactly like a ruined abbey. Going up the hill to the left there seem to be two figures one tall—slightly bent forward with the steepness of the ascent, the other a little [wudge?] at its heels. We

³ Una's pet name for Robinson's mother, Annie Robinson Tuttle Jeffers.

⁴ Probably a description of Jaime d'Angulo, the eminent linguist, anthropologist, writer, and specialist on California's Native Americans. Una recounted a humorous incident to RJ's biographer Melba Bennett that occurred after the Jefferses had met Jaime shortly after this encounter. See *The Stone Mason of Tor House* (n.p.: Ward Ritchie P, 1966), 71–72.

call the figures Robin and Billie.⁵ We always look toward those hills as soon as we go to the shore. They are very like Scotch mountains—there is nearly always a cloud or a wreath of fog floating about them or half-hidden mist in their hollows.

We needed more book-space so Robin made me the most interesting bookshelf out of a curious piece of driftwood worn white and smooth by interminable buffetings. For the supporting brackets we found two slender pieces shaped just right and quaint to look at—then for an end to the shelf—to hold in the books, a curving bit of wood wrought into the very image of a bird's head with a long bill.

The top of our big living-room table (which we also use for a dining table) is a cross section of some giant tree. It isn't altogether level and a tablecloth looks rather funny on it—so we have ceased to use any. It amuses us to fancy ourselves living peasant-wise and we talk of our "huge bowls of oatmeal" and "huge bowls of cabbage soup, eaten on the bare boards."

As we walked along the shore after the storm we saw a beautiful sea bird with a broken wing and a broken leg. It was beyond the waterline and was crawling and twisting painfully toward the sea, in order to be carried out with the waves. Poor maimed thing it hurt me cruelly to see it—its spirit was unbroken though, for when Billie went too close to it it struck out at him with its long neck and bill. I wonder what its fate was, on that bitter waste of lashing waves.

Today as we were walking toward the "Lake" a curious little procession approached us—first a small girl, rather richly dressed, mounted on a cavorting fat, black Shetland pony, attended closely by a tall black dog of no fixed breed, with glowing yellow eyes; behind paced a woman clad in a long cape, high-heeled slippers and white stockings—and a thick white veil over her face. She read steadily as she walked, from a book she held in her hand. We almost brushed against her in the narrow road but she did not lift her head. She led by a leash a tiny fluffy white toy-dog. Robin said she read in a breviary . . . anyway, it was all very mediæval.

I cannot tell whether I love best the grey days or the sunny. I have always been *entranced* by sunlight in a forest—green light and green

⁵ Una's English bulldog.

shade,—but how thrilled I am here when the fog begins to creep wraith-like up from the sea along our gulch . . . and then to walk along the shore with the mist, almost like rain, flicking against one's face!

It pleases me to see just before dark, the blue smoke curling upwards from the houses among the trees and to smell the resinous pine burning as we loiter up the hill toward our house.

Monday October 26, 1914

Our walks home in the evening just after sunset are really the most beautiful parts of all-beautiful days. Last night we sat on the rocky cliffs until the sun set—then we walked on, up the hill to the Standing Stones⁶ and sat for a perfect half-hour. The light was unusually splendid—long rays of many colors shot up from the sea-horizon to the zenith . . . walking home we could not fill our minds enough with the lovely moon—just beyond its first quarter and Venus—Venus—last night larger, more flashing and brilliant than any star I have ever seen. A few nights ago, the moon and Venus were in the closest proximity⁷—a marvelous pair. We are watching now to see whether the moon now rapidly approaching Jupiter, will form another so perfect union. . . . About eleven-thirty we made a wild dash out into the night with sword, bludgeon, bull-dog, and candle-lantern to try to locate the comet (The Star of Bethlehem says the paper—on account of the War!) The moon—bloodred, was just sinking in a veil of mist; we had to go to the dunes to get a view of the northern sky—alas: the Dipper had set—our only sky-mark by which we could locate it.

Today R was dating some work and I said “It is the 26th” and he “of what?—of *October*?” Isn't he adorable!

We brought home the last and the fifteenth piece of the “Bulk.”—This was, when we first saw it a huge reddish mass of wood lying, almost buried in sand near the first large rocks, a half mile along the shore toward the north. Evidently from its shape a piece of wrecked ship. We coveted it. We tried to pry it out of the sand to see just how large it was but we couldn't. One day when we had the axe with us we tried to split it—impossible to make more than a dent. We always said we would get

⁶ Future site of Tor House.

⁷ Here Una has drawn a left-facing crescent moon with Venus near its upper cusp: *)

it sometime—somehow. During the very high seas a fortnight ago, one morning we found it not only lifted out of the sand but carried an eighth of a mile in our direction by the waves. At high tide the water washed over it—we feared to lose our treasure. In the afternoon with ax and wedges we descended to the shore—Billie and I decided to sit halfway up the cliff fearing a chance high wave. R. barefoot, trousers rolled above knees worked desperately to split it up. After some time of vain effort, I descended to inspect. Scarcely had I come alongside than a monstrous wave rushed in and drenched us. I had to go home and change. When I returned in an hour, he was carrying great pieces of it to hide in the shrubbery of the cliffside until we could get it all home. It proved to be a bright red wood with a strong fragrance (*very* like those wild yellow violets we found at La Jolla last year—a blend of peach and apricot.) How picturesque R. was, silhouetted against the sunset and the rushing waves—Sinbad the Sailor he looked like. . . . The sunset that night was the most wonderful I have ever seen—the sun itself seen whole, through the pearly mist [it] was a brilliant copper shedding the strangest light about. The waves, very high and broken, rushed landward in quick succession, their crests of foam flying before them—the extraordinary feature was that the whole scene was like a dream-scene or one gazed at through a filmy veil. How intently we studied it—we said to each other that it could never look like that again! We heard afterward that the veil was composed of misty foam from the breakers and smoke which had drifted down from a forest fire in a cañon some miles away.

Tuesday, October 27, 1914.

We drove to Monterey, then to Pacific Grove, then along the 17-mile drive past Pebble Beach home. Very beautiful through the forest but no place I liked half as well as Pebble Beach and Carmel itself. I think I was most interested in the long stretch of terribly rocky shore and the signs which said “Here the Celia was wrecked 1906” and “Here the St. Paul came ashore 1896”—and to see the mighty spars and masts and other ships’ parts lying about—incredibly high the waves must have been to carry them so far inshore. How thrilled I am at the sight of wreckage! A wrecked ship,—pounding to bits on the rocks spells awesome romance for me. We have often wondered what Billie would do when he actually rode in a buggy behind a horse, he is so insanely fond of horses—now we know! During the whole drive, whenever he was not forcibly restrained he would lean out over the dash board and bite the horse’s tail. He was a trial—but too comical—

Tonight we had a pleasant evening at the Clapp's. I like her—I hope to know her better—and I like him, as always. It was very stimulating to talk to them. They are intensely interested in the War, very bitter against Germany of course. Their housekeeping trials are amusing. I fancy she hasn't much prowess in that line. How we laughed to hear her tell of going to La Playa Hotel to inquire "how to cook a bit of cod"—and how after eating it, she and "Timmie" have had "an indigestion" for ten days. I felt a curious interest in a psychological aspect of certain details she told us about Kodani the Jap who murdered Miss Smith here in Carmel just before we came up here. After days of searching they discovered her body where he had buried it near the Lake by the way the dwarf shrubs and sand-growing vegetation had been arranged at that spot.—fancy that Japanese in the dead of night at his grewsome [sic] work tucking her away—quite deep in the sand, head downwards—safely concealed, then rearranging the plants he had displaced, in a typically Japanese gardening fashion—so strongly do racial characteristics come out, even when one is doing one's utmost to be clever and keen, and to leave no possible clew behind.

Saturday, Oct. 31, 1914.

Many, many times I have watched the sun set and the moon set—tonight for the first time a star [sic]. We stayed on the shore late after sunset—until seven. Venus was the most beautiful thing in the sky—so luminous, and mellow and queenly alone in the Western sky. We sat on the dunes at the last and watched her drop, suddenly into the dark water, her flaming loveliness all quenched before we could draw breath.

Sunday, November 1, 1914

A "fighting night." A windy sunset. We walked along the headland by the standing stones, the wind stinging our faces. It had lashed the sea into great waves that foamed and curled along the shore. It shrilled among the rocks and swished among the tall dry grasses over the hill. It was so exhilarating—we danced and ran and embraced, all full of life and love.

Saturday, Nov. 7, 1914

Tonight we made the great decision.—I wonder whether . . . our child would be born August 8. It is very curious that Robin and I who do not like children, in general, and who feel already as if life were full—to overflowing, for us, with love and joy, should so much desire a child of

our own. It is more necessary for us who are uncertain that we shall ever have any other life than this, to continue ourselves in offspring. How dreadful if we and our love should perish utterly and leave no trace.

[Our wonderful twin-boys were born Nov 9, 1916]⁸

As we walked home from the Standing Stones we looked back, and in the grey twilight, outlined against the dark windy sky, a girl was leading her horse along the ridge bending forward as she pushed her way, against the gale blowing in from the sea.

Tuesday, Nov 10, 1914.

The day that we drove over the 17-mile drive and past the rocky headland where the big boats were wrecked, I saw among the fragments of ships, one piece which lingered so persistently in my mind that I know, at last, that I must have it. So today we drove back to the spot—at least four miles from here and got it—with great difficulty, too, for it is heavy—(weighs almost a hundred pounds) and a difficult shape to handle. It is this shape⁹ seen in profile and driven through it are four bolts of tremendous size—and there are two holes where the bolts have been torn out. It is of some hard wood, very grey now and wave-worn. I cannot tell what its use was, yet the most casual observer would know that it once formed part of a ship. Now it rests at last, by our big fireplace and we dream about it—perhaps it grew in a Norway forest, was hewn into shape and placed, in some ship-building yard in Scotland—came around the Horn only to be torn at last from its accustomed home in the ship by the jagged rocks of Pt. Joe. This I know, that never in its life has it been so honored and cherished as now. After we had brought this home we drove toward Pt Lobos. We did not go through the toll-gate, but past it for several miles until we came to Wild Cat Cañon. A heavy mist hung over all the landscape—we could see only a little way in any direction. Draped and half veiled in the grey fog, every thing wore an air of enchantment. We rode through bits of forest quite as beautiful as the Del Monte Forest, then along a steep, winding road against the hill-side with the sea dashing and raging against rugged scarred rocks two hundred feet below us. All about one the soft feathery curtain of gray—a wonderful symphony in grays, the blue grey of the waves, the white grey of the sands shading into a brown grey by the

⁸ Una's later bracketed insertion.

⁹ Here UJ has drawn a figure that looks like a Christmas stocking.

dunes. One was shut off from all the world there—not *one* but two—Robin and I,—and Billie white little Billie with his black eye (his left eye being surrounded by white doesn't count) weaving in and out of the fog circle, on his funny twinkling short legs—intent on the many businesses he has to attend to on the beach, not the least being to frighten away the curlews who came sometimes from the gray mystery all about us, flying low and uttering their lonely and desolate plaint.

Jan 17, 1915

Yesterday we came back from Los Angeles. Carmel seemed even more beautiful than when we left. Tonight just before we come up from the shore we saw the slender new moon Juppiter [sic] shining just below—seeming to hang from the horn of the moon by a cobweby thread.¹⁰

I had an amusing dream last night—mostly concerned with my adventure of driving a three-horse team over a dangerous bit of road. The leader—a most mischievously spirited animal bore the name Billow. Robin said I must note that down. Billow would be a very proper name for a saddle horse.

Monday Feb 1, 1915

Last night after we had undressed and were crouching over the last glowing bits of our back-log, we fell to talking about people we liked in the world of art, literature, the stage and choosing out whom we would like best to have for a friend. I chose George Moore. I have just finished rereading his "Memoirs of my Dead Life" and "Ave" "Salve" and "Vale." I think he would be an altogether charming and *human* companion—what endless discussions! He is very amiable and above all is able to laugh at himself as well as at his friends and he is still capable of such enthusiasms. Robin chose Maeterlinck. I had to laugh when I picture those two together, remembering Maeterlinck's wife—Georgette Leblanc's description of their life at their lovely Abbey of St. Wandrille—he always so intensely quiet hardly speaking through long days—perfectly content. I think he and Robin might be so simpatici [sic] they would quite forget the art of articulation. I should prefer Georgette—she would be stimulating! . . . Robin took G. K. Chesterton for second choice.

¹⁰ Here UJ has drawn a diagram of a left-facing crescent moon with Jupiter below it:

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One day when we were motoring near Monrovia while we were down in Southern California we caught a tantalizing glimpse, on a very unfrequented road, of a large stone and brick house set back from the road behind a high wall.¹¹ It was very foreign-looking, of a certain French period, high-pitched tiled roofs, narrow windows reaching to the ground, with a look of *baldness*, caused by the lack of any overhang, whether of roof or porch or window cornice. Over the gateway was the nameplate "Polk Place." We were so much interested that we drove back another day to gaze again. When we were in front of the open iron gates (I was driving with Robin and Billie in front and Aunt Mary and Belle-Mère in the back seat) I started to turn around for the road was very heavy and sandy and entirely barren of interest except for "Polk Place." Not being very familiar with the low-powered car I was driving, I killed the engine when half-way around, directly in front of the gateway. Instantly three of the biggest dogs I ever saw bounded out of the yard—all Great Danes one black and two spotted like Dalmatian coach dogs (called Harlequin Great Danes). Billie immediately leaned over the edge of the car and began to challenge them loudly, trying at every moment to leap out and get at them. Belle-Mère and Aunt Mary started continuous dolorous shrieks, imploring Robin not to descend amongst the dogs to crank the car—which had to be done! Neither Robin nor I were the least frightened of the animals but we did fear having Billie down in their midst attacking the three of them! Finally we threw Billie onto the floor of the car and I held him there with the lap robe all over him. While Robin was cranking, the dogs silently, with fiercest aspects weaving around him, and Aunt Mary and Belle-Mère moaning, a dark woman, who looked like a French peasant came running out and began to beat the dogs. Answering Belle-Mère she said they were very cross and unfriendly to strangers. We were all glad to get on our way—I was quite worn out trying to attend the car and hold down and smother Billie at the same time. While we were thus engaged, the others said, (I did not see her) that a Mexican woman holding a baby sat in the dust by the roadway, and throughout the scene laughed hysterically and soundlessly.

¹¹ Construction on Polk Place began in 1912, and was completed in 1914, so Robin and Una saw it just after it was completed. Renamed Chateau Bradbury, it has recently been restored and is used for weddings and events. Pictures of the house before and after the restoration, which appear to be faithful, judging from Una's description, may be seen at <www.chateaubradbury.com>.

Saturday, March 20, 1915

This afternoon the sea was very rough, great breakers continually dashing over the Cormorant Rock. There had been no wind, the moon was in its first quarter, we could not but wonder at the tumult at last, I was delighted with myself! I remembered today is the Vernal Equinox—the equinoctual [sic] storms of course! As we walked home, the dusk overtook us and then we saw the moon and the Pleiades in the most unusual proximity.¹²

Quite far down the shore toward the Standing Stones is an empty house set in a deserted garden in a coign of the cliff! The garden is enclosed with a low stone wall and a cypress hedge and the ground is all ariot with rank growth of fragrant sweet alyssum and fig-marigold. We often linger there, I like it very much, although alas! The house is not as romantic as my desire.

Thursday, March 25, 1915

We walked very far today past the Mission, into the valley very happy because of the multitude of wild flowers carpeting the hills and meadows. With every mile, the flowers vary in arrangement and profusion. The hills just beyond the Mission are all abloom with yellow violets and wild hyacinths. In our walks in the other direction we had found but a few sprays of the hyacinth and the violets in only two or three places. We came home just before twilight through a lovely evening glow,—my arms full to overflowing with wild irises—blue and delicately scented—almost my favorite flower—such sensitively dignified flowers, so classically virginal.

May 22, 1915

As we drove in the forest today, past Cypress Point we saw a beautiful young deer, standing quietly amongst the pine trees with the airy, utterly charming fairy lanterns everywhere about, swaying gently on their tall slender stems. We drove today out to Pt. Lobos—Belle-Mère, Aunt Mary, Hamilton, Robin, Billie and I. Pt. Lobos is marvelously beautiful and even awesome with the rough sea dashing against its tremendous rocky cliffs. Robin says the scene always puts him in mind of a Japanese

¹² Here Una has sketched a crescent moon facing upward, with the seven stars of the Pleiades to the left of its left cusp.

print, the rocks steep and gray with the gnarled old Cedars of Lebanon clinging and twisting up their sides.¹³ Coming back we stopped at the Abalone Cannery to buy some abalone. Our guests had never eaten any. It is run by Japanese. In this cove we saw the wrecked steam launch which was battered to bits in the recent terrible storms. We've been picking up pieces of it all along our shore, ribs and solid oak rails and enough thin tongue groove oak and mahogany boards to panel the whole boat's cabin.

August 25, 1915

How often I have looked at this house from the window of the Redondo car. It is situated on the by-road which runs from the Venice boulevard to the motordrome. It has never been occupied, to our knowledge. I do not know how long it has stood there ten years at least—it is all very strange. Today Belle-Mère, Robin, Billie and I drove a long way in the little Ford. From Pasadena to Los Angeles, on to Venice, stopping midway to eat our lunch, then to Ocean Park and Santa Monica where we sat for a long time on the Palisades, then back to Venice and along the ocean front to Playa del Rey, a most desolate and unhappy looking place. I persuaded the others to let me drive home by way of the motordrome they declared no road existed between Playa del Rey and there but consented to let me try it. (The road wasn't very good!) I had in mind to investigate this place and we did! There are almost no houses in sight although this property was subdivided years ago. The country all about is very flat and heavy winds sweep in constantly from the sea. This house looks very foreign—it is enclosed by a low stone wall which increases its aspect of detachedness and gives it an air of dignity—like an estate. The house is built of flat gray stone or concrete—one story only, although the flat-roofed tower which encloses the entrance rises to the height of a second story. Just beneath the roof, around the house runs a design—the Greek Key design in verdigris green. The front door is of massive oak, with knocker and door handle of copper streaked with verdigris. Very broad low steps give a stately air to the enclosed porch. The yard has been laid out with very great care but everything now is in ruin and decay—the urns set at intervals around the wall are broken or empty, the Italian cypresses untrained,—some of them bent over to the ground. In the rear at one side is a group of eucalyptuses through which the wind sighs constantly in a most melancholy dirge, at the other side over a trellis is the most luxuriantly vigorous passion-flower vine

¹³ Evidently Una has mistaken Monterey Cypress for Cedars of Lebanon.

that I ever saw. It was in full bloom today, fortunately, and added by its morbid, pallid mien to the mouldering picturesqueness of the whole place. Down the road we found an occupied house and went in to inquire. No one knows, as far as we could discover, who the owner is or anything about the place. The little boy who lived at this house knew where the key to the back door was hidden and returned with us. We went inside and found the house in good condition but unfurnished. The rooms are large with fine windows from which one can see miles of the surrounding country. In the big hall which one enters from the porch is a large fire place. In the center of the ceiling is a skylight—I wonder whether an artist built the house? The only clue we discovered to the owner's identity was the street sign board at the side of the lot. (The street was laid out but never finished). The name painted on the sign was *Mascagni*.¹⁴ Surely named by an Italian. Robin and I think we would love to live there sometime. Well furnished, the place would be most extraordinarily interesting and *different*. One would have to have some kind of a vehicle to go to the nearest store (five miles away at Venice).

Nov. 7, 1915

After long watching and waiting we saw tonight for the first time in many months Venus—as the evening star. For about ten minutes after sunset she hung like a great golden lamp in the lovely rose hued western sky—before she too sank into the waves. Now for many months we can look for her each morning.

Jan 6, 1916

Before sunset tonight we were able to make out Venus and Jupiter. A pale moon was in the sky too.

We have had lately several *bird days*. It is very queer—sometimes for days we will see almost no birds about our cabin—then all in a flash one morning, every tree and bush will be aflutter with them. Very many kinds going about together. We know by sight at least twenty five different kinds—we hope soon to learn their names. I throw out crumbs and oatmeal every day and have a few birdguests who come every day.

¹⁴The sign was a street-sign, not the name of the house. “Mascagni Ave.” and “Mascagni St.” remain today. The house, long since razed, was on Mascagni Ave., a block north of Culver Blvd., the former Pacific Electric right-of-way to which Una refers.

Candlemas day, 1916

Tonight we walked a little after dinner. The stars were very bright. Just as we left our house the most wonderful meteor I ever saw flashed across our vision—low down from south to north—red yellow and green with a glow after it. It seemed to be just beyond the pine trees, we actually listened for a crash. When we had walked as far as the dunes we were able to see four planets in the sky. In the east—Mars magnificently red and fierce just rising above the trees, Saturn golden near the zenith, Jupiter near the western horizon, and Venus incredibly golden and large disappearing in the waves. To make the whole scene perfect for me, three ships all alight, pursued their various ways far out at sea.

Feb 4, 1916

Today we saw on the cliffs and on the sands many little blue birds—the most exquisite little dears. Their wings and the upper parts of their bodies—a lovely azure, their breasts white, except just under their throats where they were all rosy. They are lazuli-buntings.

We have had many days of terrific wind and rain and hail. Huge trees blew down everywhere. One large one we could see from our windows in Mary Austin's yard. We were really in great danger from the two trees which grow up through the porch of our Log Cabin. They swayed so violently, and beat against the house, so that the dishes in the kitchen cupboard were broken. It was almost painfully exhilarating and agitating to watch the eucalyptus trees here in the ravine. Pine trees somehow always manage to be dignified and impressive in the face of the heaviest winds, but eucalyptus writhe and twist and bend convulsively in a delirium of movement. Ninety-five trees were blown over in the eighteen acre Hill estate just beyond Pebble Beach and several of the ancient cypresses along the coast, amongst them the old ostrich tree.

We have several months been studying the stars. Not scientifically—although we have in mind a few general laws about their movements, but what we have wished is to learn the constellations and their relative positions and the time of year when they are best observed,—and all the brightest stars by name. Already I have had so much pleasure from it—and we feel so well acquainted with many stars. It is so pleasant to think that wherever one may be, one can always look up at these same stars and follow the same familiar, friendly paths through the sky, with beautiful familiar landmarks (*sky marks*) on every side. At first I could not

see that the stars were of different hues, but now I can readily distinguish their colors.

Monday, Feb 14, 1916

Just at noon I am sitting with my books on the porch. It is heavenly warm and fresh (my thermometer says 74°). There is a warm wind blowing. It is like organ music in the pine tops. Over the boards of the porch—and over every surface there is a thin film of grayish greenish yellow (lichen color) pollen from the pines. We noticed this pollen last spring too, for a few days. Last night Jupiter and Venus were less than 1° apart—a wonderful sight. About midnight we walked out without any wraps and looked at the stars. There was clear moonlight and a warm wind—the most perfect night. Cf. our pine pollen with Tennyson's smoking yew. "Brother, I have seen this yew tree smoke for fifty years."¹⁵

Evening. Tonight Saturn and the moon are very close—perhaps $2 \frac{1}{3}^\circ$ apart.

It is a good old peasant custom—that of ours—of going out of doors ~~before~~ at night just before bed time and surveying the sky and the weather, getting the feel of the wind listening to the night sounds.

How weird and lonely the howls of the coyotes sound up the cañon so many nights, and the jarring soft notes of the owl long drawn, and repeated at intervals for hours at a time set one's nerves aquiver.

¹⁵ "O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke
 Spring after spring, for half a hundred years;
 For never have I known the world without,
 Nor ever stray'd beyond the pale."
 —Tennyson, "The Holy Grail"

ROBERT ZALLER

“SO BRAVE, IN A VOID”

MIŁOSZ’S DIALOGUE WITH JEFFERS

Some years ago, I tried to get Czeslaw Milosz to address the Robinson Jeffers Association again, for it was clear that his long-running dialogue with Jeffers was still in process. His schedule did not permit it, and the opportunity passed. Now it will not return. Every life is unfinished, of course, and it is posterity’s task to continue its incompleteness, even as it creates its own. I can’t add anything to Milosz’s words, only offer my own words about them. While Milosz was alive, it would have been superfluous to do so, not to say presumptuous. But he is part of the conversation about Robinson Jeffers now, and only we can pursue it.

Milosz described his encounter with Jeffers in an essay called “Carmel,” published in his *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. To this he appended a poem, “To Robinson Jeffers,” as if what he had begun to say in prose could only be finished in verse. “Carmel” itself, however, begins with Jeffers’s own “Continent’s End,” so that one may say that Milosz’s poem was his way of answering Jeffers, or rather of instating his dialogue with him. Literary critics, of course, make free of the living and the dead, their excuse being the guild certification that, they think, entitles them to do so. But Milosz approaches Jeffers as poet to poet; that is, as brother and adversary.

Harold Bloom has famously suggested that literary succession is an Oedipal contest in which the young overthrow the old, assassination being the sincerest form of flattery. Milosz, though, appears to have been about fifty before he discovered Jeffers, at which point his own style was firmly established and his reputation secured. If we follow Bloom’s conceit, the encounter was not so much with a precursor as a contemporary, the generational difference between the two men notwithstanding. We all know we have had a father, even if we have never met him; but, for Milosz, the shock of finding Jeffers was more akin to discovering an unsuspected twin—not an identical or fraternal one, but one antithetical to the very idea he had of himself.

Such shocks should not be experienced at the age of fifty. In acquainting oneself with foreign literatures, one does of course make unexpected and even unsettling discoveries. Usually, however, the principal landmarks are marked out in advance, and the surprises are few and far between. It is rare indeed that a professor of literature should stumble upon the major poet of his time in the world's dominant language without any warning at all. This, at least at some points, is how Milosz would describe his experience. He could do so candidly and without embarrassment, as a European scholar with no professional stake in the American canon wars. But what drew Milosz to Jeffers (while yet repulsing him), was, I suspect, a shared sense of exile. In Milosz's case, exile had brought him across an ocean and two continents to the refuge of Berkeley. Only a few miles south, Jeffers had found his own place of exile in Carmel, one forced upon him not by war and history but, like his great precursors Luther and Calvin, by temperament and vision. And there, in the presence of a spirit at once kindred and opposite, Milosz seems to have found a place of contested repose—perhaps the only peace available to exiles. Like others who missed or avoided meeting Jeffers in the flesh, for example Everson and Stafford, Milosz made his first pilgrimage to Carmel only in 1964, two years after Jeffers's death. “[H]ad we met,” Milosz reflected, “we would not have been able to understand one another” (“Carmel” 93). Yet, pacing the narrow grounds of Tor House and walking the beach below, he began what he describes as a dialogue of the spirit.

The dialogue was an adversarial one, but in the best sense. A true adversary forces one not only to defend but to define oneself, and Jeffers had such an impact on Milosz. “Even during my first visit to Carmel,” he writes, “I asked myself if I was like him, and, perhaps flattering myself, answered no” (“Carmel” 90). What, indeed, could this Catholic humanist have in common with the son of a Protestant clergyman who presented himself, contentiously, as an Inhumanist? Milosz summed up Jeffers's works as dedicated to the proposition that “nature, perfectly beautiful, perfectly cruel, and perfectly innocent, should be held in religious veneration, whereas the human species was a sick excrescence, a contamination of the universal order, and deserved only annihilation” (“Carmel” 88). Not particularly insightful; but he softened the implication of misanthropy by adding that Jeffers's scorn for the human race “stemmed from an excess of compassion,” and that he followed “the massacres of the thirties and the forties” with “a sense of tragedy” (“Carmel” 88–89).

The massacres Milosz alluded to were those both of Stalin and Hitler, which, for a Polish poet, were summed up most succinctly in the cynical division of Poland by the two dictators after the Nazi-Soviet pact. That

Jeffers would wish favor to neither side even as his own country was drawn into war in alliance with one and opposition to the other was a point on his behalf. At a time when other American poets and intellectuals were either succumbing to Popular Front patriotism or resisting it only by doctrinaire pacifism, he was alone in acknowledging the inevitability of the war while refusing it his partisanship. Milosz himself spent the war with the Polish underground, where the opportunities for philosophical reflection were few; but, putting himself in Jeffers's place, he acknowledged his stance to be honorable, and, in a moral sense at least, no less heroic.

At the same time, the wellsprings of Jeffers's attitude seemed suspect to Milosz. While conceding the rigor and integrity of his vision, he could not valorize the cosmos as such, even regarded as an emanation of the divine. Inhuman nature was not, for him, a refuge from the human, and still less a compassionless god. The true difference between the two men, however, lay in Jeffers's wilful rejection of sin, without which Milosz believed human behavior to be incomprehensible, a false, *fin-de-siecle* choice between stoicism and hedonism. The fact of sin defined history, and shaped the unique relation between humans and their creator. Absent it, they could only be viewed as automata succumbing to instinct—the late nineteenth-century view—or as aesthetes fastidiously abstaining from it; in short as dandies. Perhaps the Inhumanist was just such an aesthete, and Jeffers one himself. Milosz put the issue in terms of his and Jeffers's opposed visions of the sea:

The ocean, to him the fullest incarnation of harmony, was, I admit, horrifying for me. I even reproached Jeffers for his descriptive passages, too much those of the amateur painter who sets up his easel on a wild promontory. For me, the ocean was primarily an abyss where the nightmares located in the depths of hell by the medieval imagination came ceaselessly true, with endless variations. My kinship with the billions of monsters devouring each other was threatening because it reminded me who I was and their unconsciousness did not absolve me from sin. (“Carmel” 90)

For Milosz, the Darwinian vision of the deep as a ceaseless cycle of predation was an extension of the medieval vision of hell as a place of perpetual torment, except that the innocence of sea monsters only threw sin into starker relief. This says something about the pre-Reformed cast of Milosz's mind, or at least imagination. For Jeffers, with his inherited Calvinism, the Darwinian revolution challenged the idea of a morally ordered universe.¹ For Milosz, in contrast, the natural world was only an adjunct to the drama of human sin and redemption, and its terrors, however frightening in a creaturely sense, were in the last analysis only a metaphor for human depravity. The Darwinian angst, still

prevalent in Jeffers's youth, struck him as superficial. Was the idea of nature as a continuous round of spawning and feeding so shocking, or even novel? The whale had swallowed Jonah long before, and Milosz's Lithuanian forebears would scarcely have needed to be told that the world was a dangerous and hostile place. Only the Victorian bourgeoisie, the first generation effectively insulated from rude nature by urban culture, would have regarded it as news. Hence Milosz's gibe at Jeffers's scene-painting.

Milosz was wrong, of course, to describe Jeffers's vision of the ocean depths as one of "harmony." To his own casual dismissal of it as "billions of monsters devouring each other," we might oppose Jeffers's far more nuanced and genuinely terrifying description in "Ocean":

There are deeps you will never reach and peaks you will never
explore:
Where the great squids and kraken lie in the gates, in the awful twilight
The whip-armed hungers; and mile under mile below,
Deep under deep, on the deep floor, in the darkness
Under the weight of the world: like lighted galleons the ghost-fish,
With phosphorescent portholes along their flanks,
Sail over and eat each other: the condition of life,
To eat each other: but in the slime below
Prodigious worms as great and as slow as glaciers burrow in the sediment,
Mindless and blind, huge tubes of muddy flesh
Sucking not meat but carrion, drippings and offal
From the upper sea. They move a yard in a year,
Where there are no years, no sun, no seasons, darkness and slime,
They spend nothing on action, all on gross flesh. (*CP* 3: 405)

Here is a vision of hell that yields to none, and is all the more potent for being so thoroughly Darwinian. It is the difference, perhaps, between a Protestant and a Catholic imagination, for the former, having displaced the saints and angels who populated the medieval heaven, had prepared the way for the post-Copernican cosmos with its interstellar wastes. The Darwinian void is not empty but savagely populated; its inhabitants, however, are neither human nor the products of human imagination, but entities that exist solely on their own terms and confront us with their otherness. For that very reason they are appalling, but only to us. Milosz converts his sea monsters into demons with verbal sleight of hand, thereby dismissing them; Jeffers examines them dispassionately, making us feel the irrelevance of our revulsion even as he arouses it. For Milosz, what lacks human relevance is without interest, or (what amounts to the same thing) meaning, while, for Jeffers, it is

precisely the alien which we are bound to attend, for it is the only path out of incestuous self-regard.

Milosz does credit Jeffers with a synoptic religious vision; for him, he writes, all elements of creation "were parts of an organism without beginning or end which eternally renews itself and which he called God." This, however, did not enable him to escape "the mathematical system of cause and effect," for his god "was pure movement pursuing no direction." In rejecting the notion of any distinct and personal relation between man and God, he was left with a divine monster more atrocious than any creature of the deep: "Universes arose and died out in Him, while he, indifferent to good and evil, maintained his round of eternal return, requiring nothing but praise for His continued existence" ("Carmel" 91).

Milosz does allow that the poetic power of this vision is "very impressive," even if finally repugnant. He suggests Jeffers as a penitent unbeliever, whose "hymns of acceptance" were perhaps actually "psalms of penance." In an age of unbelief, agonized for some, indifferent for others, he offered himself as a Promethean sacrifice to evoke the divine:

Above your head, no face, neither the sun's nor the moon's,
only the throbbing of galaxies, the immutable
violence of new beginnings, of new destruction.
.....
Thin-lipped, blue-eyed, without grace or hope,
before God the Terrible, body of the world. ("Carmel" 95-6)

In "To Robinson Jeffers," Milosz opposes two figures: the poem's first-person speaker, whose identity is undeclared but whom we are obviously meant to take for Milosz himself, and a Jeffers who is part Arthur Barclay—the half-demented seer trying to confront an unmediated divinity—and part Saxon warrior ("And you are from . . . heaths / where, burying a warrior, they broke his bones / so he could not haunt the living.")² For Milosz, Jeffers is at war—or, as Jeffers himself described Barclay, "in revolt"³—and, if his battle is fought on the terrain of the imagination, it is no less real for that, and the stakes no less entire. The poem's speaker half admires, half pities Jeffers—"So brave, in a void"—foreseeing that he, too, will lie with his bones broken.

The speaker introduces himself by indirection, while at the same time establishing an unbridgeable distance between himself and his subject: "If you have not read the Slavic poets, / so much the better. There's nothing there / for a Scotch-Irish wanderer to seek." The "poetry" Milosz refers to is not only his own, but the natural imagination of his Lithuanian peasant forebears, who "lived in a childhood / prolonged

from age to age. For them, the sun was a farmer's ruddy face, the moon peeped through a cloud, / and the Milky Way gladdened them like a birch-lined road." These images point to a comforting and at least partly domesticated nature, and their reigning metaphor is light. The Jeffersian cosmos, in contrast, is without sun or moon, a dark night rent by "the screech of Erinyes," and "the terror of dogs / when Hecate with her retinue of the dead draws near."

The speaker recoils from Jeffers's vision, yet at the same time is unaccountably attracted by it. "What have I to do with you?" he asks, and, without answer, proceeds: "I come." The night terrors Jeffers seems to embrace are precisely those the childlike peasants seek to keep at bay, but is one more "real" than the other? In the end, the choice is personal rather than ontological:

Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses
as was done in my district. To birches and firs
give feminine names. To implore protection
against the mute and treacherous night
than to proclaim, as you did, an inhuman thing. ("Carmel" 96)

In a letter to Thomas Merton, Milosz mentions spending an entire year "turning around" (i.e., translating) Jeffers, yet another way of interpreting, assimilating, and distancing him. He described the process further in an essay, revealingly titled "Jeffers: An Attempt at Disclosure" (1962). In deciding to translate Jeffers, Milosz states, he was trying not merely to make the poet more familiar (less alien? less threatening?) by clothing him in his own language, but to interrogate with him the Polish, and, more broadly, the European modernist tradition of his time. This tradition seemed to have tapped itself out into etiolated lyricism and a banal, journalistic commentary. The latter might seem to have had at least the merit of addressing actual events, but it was no less an evasion of reality, for the task of poetry was not to supplement the daily paper but to dwell "at the very limits of . . . human consciousness" ("Disclosure" 190). To fall short of that was to betray the poet's vocation.

The inadequacy of the European tradition was thrown into high relief by the Second World War. "The horror of events," Milosz wrote, "was so enormous that few poets in history have had to face anything like it; it compelled them to either undertake a total reassessment or recognize the meaninglessness of art" ("Disclosure" 191). The stakes, he added, were nothing less than "man's fate," since without a poetry commensurate to the task of understanding and reconstruction, the human project itself might founder.

Milosz looked into Latin-American and even Chinese poetry in search of poetic renewal, and found some hope in younger Polish contemporaries such as Tadeusz Rozewicz and Zbigniew Herbert. It was only in Robinson Jeffers, however, that he discovered someone who not only shared his despairing sense of the irrelevance of modernism, but had been writing verse that met his criterion for poetic aspiration: "the highest threshold that is accessible to the mind at a given time" ("Disclosure" 190). In a time when the world had been reduced to the limits of human subjectivity, Jeffers insisted on the necessity of striving beyond it; i.e., of reinstating the Romantic sublime. This would have seemed old-fashioned, Milosz noted, if it were not the only program available. In it, he continued, "[T]he artist confronts *what is*, armed with his craft He knows that he will never exhaust reality and that his defeat is inevitable, but his work is defined not by the closed systems of verse forms or a canvas's dimensions but by the eye directed at it—it doesn't matter what we call it—the object, being, *être*" ("Disclosure" 194). Jeffers, of course, called it God, as the only entity able to transcend human discourse by definition, and he clothed it in the metaphoric raiment of an entire universe.

Milosz pointed to "Love the Wild Swan," which, he argued, challenged the "ontological choice" concealed in the mystifying aesthetic of modern art. The poet who turned away from the actual world (which included human history) could only fall back on his own contingency and "doubt," which led him to cultivate the ideal objects of his imagination that alone could be mastered. This progressive reduction from the unmasterable world rejected by the ego to a human subjectivity that, in its absence, could only subsist on an increasingly elaborate and impoverished fantasy, was a recipe for disaster. Jeffers, on the other hand, insisted on the world, whose value was only enhanced by the inadequacy of the artist's response to it.

For Milosz, Jeffers's strength and importance lay in his uncompromising rejection of a decadent tradition that had failed the one indispensable test of poetry: to tell the truth. Milosz admitted that he himself had despaired of doing so, at least in verse, and that this had led him to reformulate himself, at least for awhile, in the admittedly lesser medium of prose ("Disclosure" 197). There were, he felt, "completely objective obstacles" in the way of poetic communication in his time, not the least of which was an audience that had "quite lost the habit of concentration" ("Disclosure" 197) necessary to engaging serious verse. To discover unexpectedly someone halfway across the world who shared his belief that poetry had betrayed its vocation was like finding another witness in the cave, one more sighted man in the kingdom of the blind. Milosz was particularly impressed by Jeffers's principled decision to express

himself through poetry alone and to avoid diverting his energies into prose. It was a more resolute commitment than he himself had been willing to make.

Truth that falls on deaf ears, however, exacts its own price: one is obliged to repeat oneself; one's voice becomes hectoring; and one's vision, perhaps, coarse. "Permanent things are what is needful in a poem," Jeffers had written in "Point Joe" (*CP* 1: 90) and Milosz felt that Jeffers's poetry, in its urgent monism, had congealed into a quest for a "Permanent Thing" ("Disclosure" 195). To defend poetry as Jeffers had done was, at least partly, to sacrifice one's portion of it; but the sacrifice was heroic and exemplary, and the achievement, as Milosz wrote to Merton, was "monumental" and "gigantic."

This might be considered a polite way of saying that Jeffers was a great figure but not a great poet. Milosz makes no such facile distinction, however. For him, Jeffers had to sacrifice something of his gift to speak at all, or at least to speak as he wished. He makes this point insistently: "I saw him as an example of all the faults peculiar to prisoners, exiles, and hermits"; "The tasks he set himself no doubt exceeded his strength, and not his alone" (*Visions* 94); "Let us admit that Jeffers disturbs us, forcing us by his practice to reflect on how one loses, on how much one must lose, in order to win" (*Beginning* 197).

What was it that Jeffers "lost," and what did he "win"? Milosz felt that the bleakness of Jeffers's vision, whetted by his alienation from the currents of modern poetry, was "too hopeless to attract anyone" ("Disclosure" 195). Thus, a public thirsting for a unifying sense of social and cosmic order, but at the same time too fragmented and distracted to embrace it, was addressed by a poet who, in his anguished isolation, was bound to repel it. Jeffers's vision, in short, ultimately reflected his solitude instead of transcending it, a conundrum he himself expressed in such poems as "Meditation on Saviors" and "Birth-Dues." In donning the mantle of a prophet, he insisted on the integrity of his vision and his determination to expound it, Jeremiah-like, in the teeth of all resistance; in eschewing that of a "savior," he conceded, from Milosz's point of view, that it would remain fundamentally unacceptable to the very audience it was meant to reshape. In this he resembled his adversarial contemporary and fellow exile, Pound, except that Pound, in his quest for a unifying vision, reflected only the disorder around him.

What Jeffers "won" was the honor due prophets, which is denied them by their contemporaries but owed by those who come after. Such honor does not necessarily mean that their vision will be embraced, for as that vision recedes into its cultural context it becomes, although more comprehensible, less relevant. Already, for Milosz, Jeffers's work seemed "distorted, turn-of-the-century, tainted like that tower of his";

that is, historically conditioned. Future generations, he suggested, would read Jeffers as they did Lucretius and even Dante, for the scope, ambition, and tenacity of his vision rather than for its content.

Milosz seemed to have been emotionally as well as critically conflicted about Jeffers. In one breath he could wonder whether "he may have been just an aesthete" ("Carmel" 90), and in another affirm that "he was truly a great poet" ("Carmel" 92). Similarly, he could judge Jeffers's narrative poems "as a whole . . . to be a failure" ("Disclosure" 197), and yet say that his work would "endure as long as the English language endures" ("Disclosure" 198). We may recall the peculiar question he asked himself in "Carmel," whether he was "like" Jeffers (the sort of question brothers ask of each other), and the answer he gave and then amplified in "To Robinson Jeffers": hopefully, no. Like Jeffers, he was isolated; unlike him, he was not an *isolato*, someone who savored solitude as a badge of distinction: "He needed to see himself as a being elevated above everything alive, contemplating vain passions and vain hopes, thereby rising above time as well. . . . *But I did not like my own regal soarings above the earth*" ("Carmel" 90, emphasis added). Milosz, in short, distrusted his own ego, identified himself, at least rhetorically, with Lithuanian peasants rather than *bienpensant* intellectuals or epic poets, and rejected in (or projected on) Jeffers precisely the flaws he saw in himself. Above all, he wished not to be a Protestant. At the same time, however, he realized how deeply Jeffers suffered his isolation, and with what force he strove to overcome it. In the end, he paid him the ultimate compliment of a younger to an older brother: "Jeffers strengthened me" ("Disclosure" 195); "his spirit . . . gave me courage" ("Carmel" 94).

Milosz's last word on Jeffers, at least in print, came in his *Milosz's ABC's* (2001), under the heading "Carmel." It was odd the first time, and odder still the second, that Milosz chose to address Jeffers through a place name rather than a personal one, as one might say "Lourdes" or "Chernobyl" for the one thing famous about them. He does not have much new to say in this final commentary, although it is startling to hear Jeffers described as a postmodernist *avant la lettre*, a title I feel sure he would have rejected. He mentions, as he had forty years before, Dwight Macdonald's evaluation of Jeffers as the greatest American poet of his age, a point which makes one wonder whether he came to Jeffers from that unlikely source, although he could well have heard of him from Kenneth Rexroth or William Everson, both of whom he knew in the Bay area. (His acquaintance with Macdonald was not casual, and his essay on him, in *Beginning with My Streets*, is still worth reading, as is his comment on Rexroth in the *ABC's*.) "Carmel," he says, "makes me melancholy," both because of the fate of the trees Jeffers planted—cut

down for development when the property was subdivided to pay taxes—and of the fame that once seemed so solidly planted as well. Fame, however, is, like everything else, a market commodity in the modern world (the entry that precedes “Carmel” in the ABC’s is “Capitalism”), and Milosz remarks, in summation, that “It is too soon for a final pronouncement on his work; it will still be weighed on the scales many times.” Should the judgment be negative, though, oblivion would not expunge him, for value is separable from renown even if it shares its destiny, and “even in the defeat of this man, who wrote against everything, there is nobility” (79).

Milosz was a poet and a thinker rather than a critic and a scholar, and his interest in Jeffers was interwoven with the moral, cultural, and philosophical issues that concerned him over a long and deeply meditative life. He found Jeffers at a critical moment in his own development, and was both braced and challenged by him. That he translated him, reflected on him for more than forty years, and dedicated one of his finest poems to him, is sufficient testimony to his contested affinity to a man alien to him in background, temperament, and outlook, yet at one with him in his vision of the grandeur, the possibility, and the necessity of the poet’s art.

ENDNOTES

1. A fuller discussion of this point was presented in “Jeffers’s Darwinian Redemption,” a paper delivered at the 2004 Robinson Jeffers Association Conference in Carmel, CA.

2. Cf. Jeffers’s “Ode to Hengist and Horsa,” *CP* 3: 423.

3. “Theory of Truth,” *CP* 2: 608–10.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Dark God of Eros: A William Everson Reader. Edited with an introduction by Albert Gelpi. A California Legacy Book. Santa Clara, CA: Santa Clara University, and Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2003. 403 pp. \$22.95.

REVIEWED BY ALLAN CAMPO

Browsing through Albert Gelpi's gathering of selected poetry and prose by William Everson, I was reminded of Diane Wakoski's benchmark statement that Everson

is only a neglected poet, not an insignificant one and that, like Whitman, when all the facts are gathered about [him], readers will see that he is one of the most essential and dynamic American poets of the mid-twentieth century. (43)

The situation of Everson's neglect may have improved somewhat over the twenty years since Wakoski's assessment. Certainly his ten years (which ended in 1981) at UC Santa Cruz teaching the meditative "Birth of a Poet" course and his successful Lime Kiln Press workshop there brought him a measure of renown from which there may have been a ripple effect of increased awareness. The same might be said in connection with the Jeffers scholars who have gained familiarity with the poet by way of his critical and editorial work with Jeffers's poetry. As to the gathering of facts—about the man, his life and ideas; about his poetry especially, as well as his other literary and personal achievements—that goes on, its results disseminated, the degree of neglect diminished.

One could speculate as to the reasons for that neglect. For all the honors he did receive, Everson never garnered a Pulitzer, a National Book Award, a MacArthur Fellowship—the sort of boons that go well as jacket blurbs. Perhaps the literary politics involved in the East-West dichotomy, to the extent it exists, has played a part. The fact that in the Rosenthal-Gall comprehensive study, *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, Everson's name appears not at all indicates it still does exist. But certainly one particularly significant reason stems from the dramatic life-

changes that fractured Everson's life and career into three distinct (but not irreconcilable) segments. The most consequential change was his conversion to Catholicism on Christmas Eve, 1948. In effect, it derailed a career that, after fourteen years and eight collections of limited distribution, had brought him to prominence as part of the postwar San Francisco Renaissance (which would overlap with the Beat Generation of the 1950s) and the 1948 *New Directions* publication of *The Residual Years*, a substantial selection of his 1934 to 1946 poetry. After ten years of semi-withdrawal to integrate his new religious orientation and his entry into the Dominican Order, Everson re-emerged as Brother Antoninus with his first Catholic volume, *The Crooked Lines of God*, at the end of 1959 and began blazing the trail of his astounding and unique readings throughout the United States over the course of a decade, during which he also produced *The Hazards of Holiness* (1962) and *The Rose of Solitude* (1967). Then, having fashioned a new presence and gaining a substantial reputation, he left the Order in December 1969 to marry Susanna Rickson, eventually settling just north of Santa Cruz in Big Creek Canyon on a plot Everson dubbed Kingfisher Flat—once again developing a new persona and once again placing upon his public the need (to the extent they were willing) to readjust their sights. Gelpi's volume has the effect of bringing these diverse phases together into the unity that was always present. And the gathering and disseminating of the facts continues.

My own "fact-gathering" began in Los Angeles in 1958, when I attended Everson's first reading outside the Bay Area and, after obtaining the 1948 *The Residual Years* to complement the Catholic poetry I had heard, decided to make his poetry the subject of a Master's thesis. For Al Gelpi, the beginning was an Everson reading at Harvard in 1962 and a subsequent interview with the poet (included among the prose selections in the present volume as "A Conversation with Brother Antoninus"). Since then, there has been a book's worth of essays, reviews, and panel presentations. Everson's high regard for Gelpi was demonstrated not only by their long friendship, but also by the poet's invitations to him to contribute an Afterword for the 1978 *The Veritable Years*, a Foreword to *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure*, and an Afterword for the projected but not published *The Integral Years*. Meanwhile, Gelpi compiled and introduced a generous selection of Everson's poems as *The Blood of the Poet*—fortuitously published early enough in 1994 that the poet had it with him before his death in June. Such has been Gelpi's path to a significant position among the other Everson "fact-gatherers"—most notably Lee Bartlett, Bill Hotchkiss, and Robert Brophy.¹

Now, with *Dark God of Eros*, Gelpi has fashioned an impressive and valuable selection of Everson's poetry and prose (each given an equal number of pages) to reveal the panorama of Everson's creative range as person, poet, critic, and printer. The volume is enhanced by Gelpi's substantive and insightful Introduction and rounded out by a collection of commentary and remembrance from ten of Everson's fellow poets, personal photos of the poet, an especially attractive selection of photos of his handpress work, a helpfully informative chronology of his life and poetry, and a list of his principal publications. Gelpi has also had the good fortune of a publisher, Heyday Books, that knows how to put together a genuinely handsome book.

Interestingly enough, the publication of *Dark God of Eros: A William Everson Reader* in the spring of 2003 coincided with the Stanford University Press publication of Gelpi's *The Wild God of the World: An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers*. Whether by serendipity or by design, the timing could not have been more apropos, for Jeffers's poetry was the catalyst for the true beginning of Everson's career as a poet and remained a life-long and integral part of that career and more besides. The Everson-Jeffers connection deserves at least brief consideration in this review, especially here, in *Jeffers Studies*.

In "Not Without Wisdom," his tribute to Jeffers written shortly after that poet's death and included in this collection, Everson focused on the older poet's powerful and enduring influence on him. Everson's encounter with Jeffers's poetry occurred in October 1934, when he had returned to Fresno State College (now, of course, California State University, Fresno) to resume the academic endeavor he had earlier attempted for a single semester in the fall of 1931, following his graduation from Selma High School in June. By the fall of 1934, he had been attempting to write poetry for nearly five years, but was bogged down in the traditions of rhyme and meter. He did break free of rhyme and exhibited some metrical variation in "First Winter Storm," written in the spring of 1934, but he wrote no further poems until six months later when he found Jeffers.² Meanwhile, his life, just as his poetry, seemed to be getting nowhere. His high school peers, as well as his older sister and younger brother, were well into occupations or in their final year of college. He himself had no occupation, worked in the Libby peach cannery in Selma during the summers, and continued living discontentedly at home until he left for a year's stint in the government's Depression option of the Civilian Conservation Corps. He would later say that by the time he returned to Fresno State, he was beginning to fear for his sanity. Then, in the campus library, from among the books grouped as "New Arrivals," he picked up a Jeffers collection, was thunderstruck in

the reading of it, the emotional impasse was shattered, and he wrote "October Tragedy" to initiate the lifetime work of his true calling.³

In his tribute, Everson specified several strands of the Jeffers influence—a "religious conversion," an "intellectual awakening," the engagement of violence—but they developed and surfaced only later, with the passing of time and the continued writing of his poems. The immediate impact was more visceral, the cracking of an inhibitive shell, the liberating effect of Jeffers's gravity on Everson's capacity to draw upon his own deep seriousness and conflicted psyche as source and the strong rhythms of Jeffers's open line as means. Propelled by that initial encounter, Everson launched the poems of his first printed collection, *These Are the Ravens* (1935). When he embarked on the poetry of his second collection, *San Joaquin* (1939), he needed more than emotional impetus and, as he would later acknowledge, having no ideas of his own, he appropriated Jeffers's. Although Everson became, as he often mentioned, Jeffers's only disciple, he would never actually meet Jeffers, nor have any contact with his Master. At secondhand he learned that Jeffers read *San Joaquin* (a copy having been sent to him by Lawrence Clark Powell upon its publication) and found it praiseworthy. Beyond that, there would be nothing further.

In time, of course, Everson would angle off from the Jeffers influence. In the interview "The Poet as Prophet" (included in this collection), Everson spoke of "the point at which you must jump through your Master's shadow, out of the zone of his protective coloration, and establish your own signature in a work of unmistakable originality." He reached that point in late October 1939 and, following his own particular inclinations, wrote a string of "confessional" poems from which he would cull and shape a six-poem sequence, included in his third collection, *The Masculine Dead* (1942), as "And from Bad Dreams."⁴ During the years ahead he would return again and again to the sequence form, making it his own.

The pantheism he had inherited from Jeffers would not last, for Everson's religious destiny lay elsewhere. And, in any case, why would he attempt to emulate Jeffers's consummately articulated vision: Nature as the Sublime? In "Orion" (included in this collection), he tried to incorporate Jeffers's vast perspectives, but two years and more than 250 pages of manuscript taught him otherwise. No matter, for Everson came to his own vision and, without scanting nature's inestimable and diverse beauty, in fact never ceasing to celebrate it, he would increasingly respond to its revelatory dimensions—whether as the "landscape of the psyche" (to borrow Gelpi's apt phrase) or as the "glyph of God" (Everson's).⁵

Regardless of his divergent course in life and poetry, Everson never left Jeffers behind as a relic of his past. Beyond his inspired elegy, *The*

Poet Is Dead: A Memorial for Robinson Jeffers, there were, of course, the critical writings—most notably the essays collected as *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury* (1968) and the booklength study, *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure* (1988). There were also the editorial labors—a new edition of *Californians* (1971) and the arrangement of collections consisting of unpublished and published poetry, namely, *The Alpine Christ and Other Poems* (1974), *Brides of the South Wind[:] Poems 1917–1922* (1974), and (with Bill Hotchkiss) *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1977). Perhaps most importantly, during a period when Jeffers was disproportionately neglected, a time that Robert Zaller refers to as “the dark days,” there was, in Zaller’s striking image, the fact that “only William Everson walked the critical desert, a prophet trawling for disciples one by one”—witnessing to his own discipleship, as it were (Zaller 13). And always, of course, there was his own poetry to remind him of the Master who showed him the way.

As for Everson’s poetry, which constitutes the first half of the *Dark God of Eros* collection, it is basically a re-gathering of the poems that appeared in Gelpi’s earlier *The Blood of the Poet*. But there are differences. Six of the previous selections have been dropped, unfortunately including “The Answer,” which would have made for an interesting comparison/contrast with Jeffers’s poem of the same title; another, “August,” has been placed into the Introduction; and the significant “What Birds Were There” has been added. The addition is particularly gratifying, not simply because it is a personal favorite, but because it was the poem that, in the summer of 1958, broke a lingering creative doldrums and opened the way for the poems that would comprise the greater part of *The Hazards of Holiness*. In the Table of Contents Gelpi has fleshed out the tripartite division of the poetry as Residual, Veritable, and Integral Years, which titles had been left to suffice for the earlier collection, and has utilized the titles and dates of Everson’s individual collections to designate subsections. This adjustment highlights the cumulative progression of Everson’s poetry.

Moving “August” to his Introduction enables Gelpi to use the poem to illustrate Everson’s serious craftsmanship, as he gives close, if necessarily condensed, consideration to the mechanics of an Everson poem—its sounds, its images and diction, its rhythm. He demonstrates that Everson worked with keen attention to the tactical components of prosody and language in order to give an accurate and effective utterance to the source of a poem’s inception. An examination of Everson’s manuscripts amply reveals that, once the initial draft of a poem was written, he was relentless and open-ended in his labors of revision. In Kevin Hearle’s interview with Everson, included in this volume as “On Robinson Jeffers,” Everson observes that “usually when [Jeffers] typed a

poem, he was satisfied with it, that it had the energy and succinctness to serve the impulse that produced it, which is a convenient way of looking at his own opus" (256). Everson could as well have said the same of himself.

"August" serves a second purpose by its placement, for it, like "Orion," is a harbinger of Everson's later use of what he would term "erotic mysticism." It is worth noting that "August" was inspired by Everson's reading of "Sun," the short story by D. H. Lawrence, who was an important early influence for him. And Gelpi introduces the poem by pointing out that it "shows Everson beginning to adapt Jeffers' pantheism and Lawrence's sexual mysticism into a long Whitmanian line . . ." (xix). Though at this point in his Introduction, Gelpi's concern is Everson's poetic craftsmanship, he will spend nearly the whole of the second half of his Introduction discussing Everson's "erotic mysticism" and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation which is essential to it. Everson's Catholic poems in the "erotic mysticism" vein represent not only a highly accomplished artistic achievement and certainly a unique one in modern Christian poetry, but also one that may easily be problematic for the modern reader. In any event, Everson's exploration and use of "erotic mysticism" and the complex of related considerations it involves is a subject that Gelpi has pursued for a number of years in his Everson writings.⁶ As he sees it, so central is "erotic mysticism" to Everson's poetry, especially during his years as a Dominican, that Gelpi can claim that "the exploration of [this] mystery became the defining purpose of Antoninus' life and poetry."

The poet would agree. In his Afterword to the initial printing of *River-Root* in 1976, Everson addressed the subject directly and specifically. The poem was written in the fall of 1957, when the poet was Brother Antoninus, and, writing of his Dominican self in the third person, he stated that

once having separated from woman and launched on his monastic vocation, it was perhaps inevitable that Antoninus should strive to synthesize the ancient sexual fascination within the new religious quest, an attempt he was to designate as "erotic mysticism." . . . Beginning with "A Canticle to the Christ in the Holy Eucharist" in *The Crooked Lines of God*, his infusion of sexual imagery into the mystical quest was massive. . . . [H]e had to make a synthesis not based on mystical symbolism but on direct physical passion, as man experiences it and as he himself had known it; and do this, furthermore, within the framework of the norms of Catholicism. *River-Root* is the result. (*River-Root* 46; *Earth Poetry* 208)

That was a very tall order. Gelpi is confident that Everson filled it.

Gelpi quotes the three stanzas from *River-Root* that most directly portray the "erotic mysticism," referring to them as the "most explicit state-

ment of the theology of the poem.” And he does not fail to include the lovely “God Germed in Raw Granite,” with its succinct articulation of that same “theology.” Among the prose selections, Gelpi includes the long passage from Everson’s *Prodigious Thrust* wherein the poet passionately describes the sexual act in terms of its potential as the occasion for mystical experience. By recourse to the implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation, Gelpi arrives at the recognition that, “in forsaking transcendence and becoming immanent in material creation . . . God has entered for all time the sexual realm, and so the sexual mystery is an essential aspect of the manifestation and experience of God” (xxviii). By including among the *Veritable Years* selections nearly every poem that bears upon this awesome intimacy between the Divine and the erotic, Gelpi is not only making his case, but exposing the reader to some of Everson’s most powerful poems.

Furthermore, by his discussion and presentation of Everson’s use of “erotic mysticism,” Gelpi has given a prime example (for there are others) of this poet’s determination to encounter and engage the *Real*, thereby making of his poetry a means for the reader to do likewise. This is certainly integral to what makes him, in Wakoski’s words, “one of the most essential and dynamic American poets of the mid-twentieth century.” It may also, at times, contribute to his work being devalued (if not dismissed), as Gelpi illustrates with an example involving the poet-reviewer James Wright.

Gelpi also includes various examples of Everson’s use of what has been called “the crucial genre of modern poetic art: the modern poetic sequence” (Rosenthal vii). I have already mentioned his first attempt at the sequence, “And from Bad Dreams,” which is not included here. Sequences present a particular problem for a collection like this. There isn’t space enough to include an adequate variety of sequences in their entirety, and excerpted segments fail to do justice to the form. Still, with two complete sequences (“In the Fictive Wish” and “Tendrils in the Mesh”), the extraordinary Part Five of “Chronicle of Division,” and snippets from three others, the reader can get a sense of Everson’s achievement in the form. When “the facts are gathered” regarding that achievement, it will not only emerge as an individual accomplishment of a high order, but will be accorded its rightful place in the history of this “crucial genre of modern poetic art.” Sequences are, of course, more than simply a gathering of related poems under a comprehensive title. There is a movement or progression, a dynamic in the form itself, and that dynamic becomes a kind of “second sense” the poet recognizes and follows. Actually, the use of the sequence became so much a part of Everson’s poetic craft that his published collections often create the sense and effect of that form. This is particularly, but not exclusively

true of *The Rose of Solitude* (which does carry the subtitle of “A Love-Poem Sequence” on the jacket, but not on the title page) and *The Masks of Drought* (where Everson abandoned his longstanding custom of arranging poems according to the chronology of their composition and placed them, instead, in the order of their seasonal context).

As to the overall contents of the poetry section, the selections are, in general, nicely apportioned and representative. The *Residual Years* poetry is somewhat shortchanged—necessarily so, I suppose, since in the practical world of publishing, something has to give way. Perhaps the *Veritable Years* poetry is overloaded (possibly as a result of Gelpi’s special interest) and could have been trimmed a bit to allow a little more room for the *Integral Years* poetry, especially some added poems from *Masks of Drought* and *Renegade Christmas*. It has seemed to me that the Santa Cruz poetry became Everson’s most accessible work. And, of course, there are always those individual favorites that, in their absence, we miss and therefore see the glass as half empty, so an editor cannot really win, even when he has done as fine a job of selecting as Gelpi has.

However, there is one omission that should not have happened: “Mexican Standoff.” Written in 1985, it was just too late to be included in Everson’s final collection, *Renegade Christmas*. It is the final poem in that trajectory of poetry that Gelpi traces for us by his selection and arrangement, the exclamation point to the fifty-year poetic statement that began with “October Tragedy.”⁷ The poem’s significance is not merely a matter of chronology. Rather, it is the fact that in this poem, Everson steps beyond the paradigm he sought to, and did, fulfill in the *Years—Residual, Veritable, Integral*: thesis, antithesis, synthesis—and thereby achieve the realization of his poetic prospectus, as he explained it in his Foreword (included among Gelpi’s prose selections) to the 1978 *The Veritable Years*. When, in “Mexican Standoff,” the poet confronts and triumphs over the menacing Thanatos—principle of death and disintegration—he transcends synthesis and touches apotheosis. But this is not the place to explore the matter, nor does one disgruntled opinion offset my sense of the excellence of Gelpi’s selection.

Although the bulwark of Everson’s literary achievement is, of course, the poetry, his work in prose is impressive on its own terms, as well as being a valuable asset as an often enlightening complement to his poetry. Gelpi’s selections of Everson’s prose are arranged in appropriate clusters: Autobiography, Everson and Jeffers, Poets and Poetics, and Printing. The section is a browser’s delight, and by its contents Gelpi encourages the reader to experience Everson as a genuine human being as well as spiritual pilgrim; as critic, thinker, and printer, as well as poet. The specific selections suggest the broader base from which they arise. The “Everson and Jeffers” group points to Everson’s accomplishments as

a critic and editor of Jeffers's poetry and his respected status among Jeffers scholars. "Printer" reminds us that Everson's handpress achievements have been honored since his initial volume, *A Privacy of Speech* (1949), gained an award from the Rounce and Coffin Club. His unfinished printing of the *Psalter* in the early 1950s and his *Granite and Cypress* collection of Jeffers's "stone poems" in 1975 are acknowledged masterpieces. The two substantial segments from *Prodigious Thrust* in "Autobiography" evoke a lifetime of earnest quest and profound spiritual exploration.

Gelpi also includes here two selections from Everson's letters that demonstrate how he frequently, even customarily, used his letter-writing to explore and clarify his personal situation, his creative work, and his ideas as they developed.⁸ The five interviews Gelpi includes are also welcome, for in that ad hoc situation Everson was often self-revealing, not reluctant to show his plain humanness; nor was he rattled by unexpectedly having to think through a new topic or aspect on the spot. It was also a situation where his sense of humor—well enough known among his friends—would flash now and again.

Although the prose section does not, in the present context, invite comment to the extent that the poetry does, its importance here cannot be denied. The crossover relationship between the poetry and the prose is in clear evidence, even within the limitations inherent in a "selected" volume. Combined, then, with the value and substance of Everson's prose work, this interplay between poetry and prose seals the recognition that Gelpi's decision to incorporate the prose decidedly makes *Dark God of Eros* as fine an introductory volume to William Everson as is likely to come our way. And to have accomplished this, including the basic material and the peripheral enhancements I mentioned earlier, and to do it within a volume that is readily manageable both physically and financially, is a distinct achievement by Gelpi and Heyday Books.

ENDNOTES

1. Lee Bartlett has written *William Everson: The Life of Brother Antoninus*; co-edited with me *William Everson: A Descriptive Bibliography, 1934–1976*; edited a collection of criticism regarding Everson, *Benchmark & Blaze: The Emergence of William Everson*; and edited four collections of Everson's work: *Earth Poetry: Selected Essays & Interviews of William Everson, 1950/1977*; *Birth of a Poet: The Santa Cruz Meditations*; *William Everson: On Writing the Waterbirds and Other Presentations, Collected Forewords and Afterwords, 1935–1981*; and a particularly fine selection of Everson's interviews, *Naked Heart: Talking on Poetry, Mysticism, and the Erotic*.

Bill Hotchkiss, I should note, was not only a significant contributor to several important books, but was also the driving force that made them possible. Two of the books are about Everson, his poetry, and aspects of his creative work and per-

sonal presence: Allan Campo, David A. Carpenter, and Bill Hotchkiss, *William Everson: Poet from the San Joaquin*, and *Perspectives on William Everson: A Collection of Essays, Poems, and Reflections in Honor of the Poet in His Eighty-first Year*, edited by James B. Hall, Bill Hotchkiss, and Judith Shears. Hotchkiss and I were co-editors for Everson's *Prodigious Thrust* and *The Collected Poems*.

Following Everson's death on June 2, 1994, Robert Brophy went to great lengths to gather material from friends and admirers of the poet and photographs of the poet in order to prepare a double issue of the *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, published as Numbers 93 and 94 (Winter and Spring 1995) and entitled *William Everson: Remembrances and Tributes*. Beyond that specific contribution, Brophy is included here because over the years he has fostered the wider awareness and knowledge of Everson and his poetry by making Everson the subject of papers and discussions at various conferences and seminars.

2. Everson accumulated two manuscript collections of his pre-Jeffers poetry, of which "First Winter Storm" was the final poem. He placed it in *These Are the Ravens* as a token of his previous efforts. The manuscripts themselves were eventually lost.

3. The interesting question of which Jeffers collection Everson first read cannot be answered definitively. In later years, Everson acknowledged that he no longer recalled which Jeffers collection it was, for he went on to obtain and read every Jeffers volume he could find, especially during the summer of 1935. In an undated, typed letter from the mid-forties (judging from its contents), he wrote, "The Jeffers work which made its greatest impact upon me was *Descent To The Dead*, poems written in Ireland and Great Britain, (reprinted in *Give Your Heart To The Hawks*.)" The letter cited is among the Everson papers housed at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA. That the Jeffers book was among the "New Arrivals" was mentioned to me a few years ago by Lee Bartlett as having been said by Everson during one of the interviews Bartlett conducted in preparation for writing the poet's biography. Bartlett could not, however, remember that Everson had specified the title.

4. The sequence was never again published as it appears in *The Masculine Dead*. In manuscript, the six poems were collectively titled "Introspections: A Sequence of Adolescence." The published title was taken from a line of a poem by Stephen Spender: "I am your son, and from bad dreams arise." This line is used as epigraph for "And from Bad Dreams." For the 1966 collection of Everson's early poetry, *Single Source*, the sequence was expanded by inclusion of other poems from the same period and entitled "The Sides of a Mind."

5. "Landscape of the psyche" is the title of Gelpi's review of *Masks of Drought*, which I read in typescript a number of years ago. The "glyph of God" appears in the poem "Steelhead" from *Masks*. That Everson also saw it in the comprehensive meaning I indicate is supported by his consideration of the phrase as a title for *Masks*—noted among his manuscripts collected at the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

6. Gelpi's most thoroughgoing exploration of Everson's "erotic mysticism" is the extended essay "I Am Your Woman."

7. The "fifty-year poetic statement" does not include the 1975–1990 writing of the five completed cantos of Everson's projected ten-canto autobiographical epic

poem *Dust Shall Be the Serpent's Food*. However, I consider the epic poem to be outside of the "trajectory" that is my frame of reference.

8. Everson's uses of letter-writing are amply demonstrated in the only published collection of his letters, William R. Eshelman's superbly edited volume of the correspondence between Everson and Lawrence Clark Powell.

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California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present. Edited by Dana Gioia, Chrissy Yost, and Jack Hicks. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2004. 376 pages. \$19.95.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD KOHLMAN HUGHEY

In the May 1991 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, poet and critic Dana Gioia poses the provocative question: "Can Poetry Matter?" Eloquently articulating the concern poetry lovers share about the state of modern verse, Gioia decries the extent to which the academy has co-opted the writing of verse during the second half of the twentieth century and the resulting devolution of the craft to an obscure art form for a poetry subculture. Having diagnosed the condition, Gioia then offers some corrective measures that, if adopted, might work to restore poetry as a literary genre acceptable to a mass audience.

Gioia does not advocate a return to the days of Vagabondia and Bohemia, but thinks that poetry could be restored to a general audience by adopting proposals that were modest and sensible. Poetry, he writes, could be resuscitated to have broad appeal to a cultured middle-class audience if six conditions were met. Poetry should not be isolated from the other literary crafts; it should be seen as an integral part of literature with fiction and nonfiction writing. Dead poets should be featured with contemporary writers at readings and seminars. Media outlets should be more intensely utilized to expand the audience for poetry. Literary criticism should be balanced, objective, and fair. The incestuous, feel-good practice of praising the inferior work of a colleague should be abolished. High school teachers and college professors should spend less time on the analysis of poetry movements and more time on the performance of poetry.

Gioia's article in the *Atlantic Monthly* generated the largest response from readers in the history of that august periodical since its launch in the nineteenth century. However, whether the majordomos of the poetry establishment have embraced his suggestions is arguable. English departments continue to shrink while classes in acting and screenwriting are turning students away. The word on the playground is that the literature of the twenty-first century will be visual.

Gioia continues to lobby for poetry's reemergence if not for its very existence. If poetry remains moribund for the general reader, it is certainly not Gioia's fault. The year after the *Atlantic Monthly* piece, Gioia quit his day job and became a full-time poet, critic, anthologist, lecturer, librettist, and translator. He was successful in all spheres, winning an American Book Award for his last collection of poems, *Interrogations at*

Noon. Last year he assumed the position of Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Gioia has also fulfilled one of the conditions he advocated in 1991 for the return of poetry to a more preeminent status. In "Can Poetry Matter?" Gioia argues that "Poets who compile anthologies . . . should be scrupulously honest in including only poems they genuinely admire." *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* is an anthology of poems by California writers, edited by Gioia, Chrissy Yost, a poet, and Jack Hicks, who teaches literature and creative writing at the University of California, Davis. The work is a recent entry by Heyday Books in its California Legacy series. A review of the poems selected for inclusion suggests that the editors adhered to Gioia's dictum for compiling an anthology.

Gioia writes in the introduction that the book is intended as a "comprehensive historical anthology" of poems by state residents since the Gold Rush. The book is more than a sampler of California poetry since 1849, however. It provides representative poems by 101 poets from Bret Harte to Charles Bukowski and beyond. Detailed biographic profiles are included for each poet represented, which gives the work its historical component. *California Poetry* is a work on west coast literary history as well as a selection of poems representative of that history.

A residence requirement was imposed to ensure the regional character of the book. To be considered for inclusion, a poet had to have been born and raised in California or spent at least half his or her lifetime in the state. The book is representative of the state's best poetry written and published over the last one hundred and fifty years, and includes a wide range of verse, much of it written by poets with national reputations, such as Robinson Jeffers, Kenneth Rexroth, William Everson, Gary Snyder, Robert Hass, and many others.

The book is organized chronologically in four sections. The first three parts cover groups of authors the editors label "Early Poets," "California Modernists," and "Mid-Century Rebels and Traditionalists." Besides the poets mentioned above, other familiar names are encountered, such as Harte, Miller, Winters, Miles, Gunn, and Brautigan. Generally, the coverage is from the Gold Rush to the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance of the 1960s.

Robinson Jeffers is positioned in the "California Modernists" section. The average poem-per-poet ratio throughout the book is about three to one, but the editors have chosen seven of Jeffers's poems to exhibit: "Shine, Perishing Republic," "November Surf," "Hands," "Rock and Hawk," "Fire on the Hills," and "Carmel Point." "Continent's End" leads off the section of Jeffers's poetry, which seems appropriate. The ode was the title poem and frontispiece of the Book Club of California's

anthology of California poetry in 1925. Jeffers's biographic profile is accurate and comprehensive.

Two other poets of Carmel's literary tradition are showcased in the book. The editors selected three poems by George Sterling, who founded that tradition when he moved to the little hamlet on the coast in 1905. Selections include Sterling's "The Black Vulture," the poet's most anthologized poem. Readers of "The Black Vulture" are reminded of Jeffers's "Vulture," though Sterling's poem suffers by comparison.

For readers who are disappointed in the exclusion of Ernest Thayer's "Casey at the Bat" because of the editors' residence requirement, some consolation can be found in reading Sterling's "Ballad of the Grapes," which is an entertaining example of the Carmel poet's sparkling wit and imaginative verse-making.

The other Carmel poet represented in *California Poetry* is Nora May French, who committed suicide in Sterling's Carmel bungalow in 1907. The anthology presents "Ave Atque Vale," which the press characterized as her suicide note. The poem had been published some time before her death, however. Her last poem was "The Mourner," which is also included in the anthology. It contains the hauntingly beautiful line, "I am become beloved of the night."

Part Four, which takes up almost half the book, is reserved for "Contemporary Poets" and includes more than half the poets in the anthology, among them Ishmael Reed, Robert Hass, Kim Addonizio, Francisco X. Alarcón, and Gioia, though most of the names will not be familiar except to readers who are poetry aficionados and who have stayed current with the craft. The section may be the most valuable to the general reader, however. Literary merit was one of the criteria the editors employed to select poems for the book and, for readers hungry for a good book of modern poetry, sampling the verse in Part Four might disclose the work of a poet with whom they resonate.

Most of the poets represented in Part Four have established reputations in modern poetry. The great majority are in their fifties and sixties, and, while the forms of poems include the traditional, such as rhymed quatrains and haiku, the verse is predominantly free and often confessional. Themes vary from the pedestrian to the exalted, but the verse is generally accessible. The idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of postmodernist poetry have been avoided in the selection of contemporary poets for the compilation.

NEWS AND NOTES

ROBERT BROPHY

CONFERENCES 2003

The American Literature Association conference 2003 was held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 22–25, where the RJA panel title was: “Poetics, Ritual, and Deep Ecology in Robinson Jeffers,” featuring “Voicing the Page: Inflection in Jeffers’s Poetics” by Tim Hunt; “‘Carrying the Weight’: Jeffers’s Influence on Deep Ecology” by Peter Quigley; and “Rituals of Cycle in Jeffers’s ‘At the Fall of an Age’” by Robert Brophy.

The Western American Literature conference 2003, convened in Houston, Texas, October 29 to November 1, 2003, included the panel “Robinson Jeffers: Inveterate Prophet of Change and Ecological Wholeness.” Presenters were Dirk Aardsma with “Toward a ‘Poetics of Place,’” John Cusatis with “Destined for the West: The Jungian Aspect in Cather and Jeffers,” Pierre Lagayette with “Jeffers’s California as a Paradigm of US Hegemonic Worldview,” and Robert Brophy with “Jeffers’s West as Metaphor for the 21st Century.”

CONFERENCES 2004

The Tenth Annual RJA conference, Carmel, California, February 13–15, titled “Jeffers, Science, and the Natural and Cultural History of the Big Sur Region,” began its sessions with an informal field trip to Point Lobos State Reserve. During this tour, participants examined (as its organizers wrote) “outcrops of Cretaceous granite, sixty-million-year old submarine gravity-slide deposits, marine terraces tilted by recent earthquake faults, and other geological features that represent the bedrock of Tor House and Jeffers’s poetry.” Everything there on Lobos was clear evidence for Jeffers’s thesis that nature is ever dynamic and cyclical. In addition to geology, discussion ranged through ecology, anthropology, biology, zoology, and the cultural history of both Point Lobos and the Central Coast region. The nature walk leaders and guide-

commentators were Jeff Norman, Jean Grace, and Aaron Yoshinobu. It was to be remarked all through the conference that science was a major means of “discovery” for Jeffers, his subject, and in many ways his muse. The hike was planned for three miles but truncated to perhaps a half-mile due to a stiff South Wind, made famous by the poet, which buffeted the hikers and modulated breath and voices as though the famous spirits of Lobos were powerfully making known their presence. Carmel’s Sunset Center’s Carpenter Hall was site of the formal presentations of the conference, opening at 9:00 Saturday morning with a keynote address by Jeff Norman, Big Sur historian, titled “The Historical Model of Some of Jeffers’s Characters.” Jeff utilized a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted a rich collection of photos and maps, many unpublished, to supplement and illustrate his comments on Jeffers’s verse, based on twenty-five years of study and local research. Panel One, 10:30–12:00, titled “Sacred Science,” featured “Rock, Bark, and Blood: Jeffers’s Sacramental Natural History” by George Hart and “Jeffers’s Redemptive Darwinism” by Robert Zaller. Panel Two, 1:30–3:00, titled “When Mind Meets Nature,” presented papers “November Surf, Winter Storm: ‘The Vast Unconsciousness of Nature’ in Robinson Jeffers’s Poetry” by Rebecca Raglon; “Harbinger of Biocentricism: Robinson Jeffers at his Deepest” by Petr Kopecky; and “The Curious Desire of Knowing: Robinson Jeffers and the Poetry of Science” by John Cusatis. Panel Three, 3:00–4:30, titled “Jeffers and Other ‘Nature Writers,’” heard “Robinson Jeffers and Thomas Hardy: Poet-Priests of Science” by Ian Roberts; “Bly, Abbey, and the Gospel of Consciousness: A Meditation on the ‘Good’ Use of Robinson Jeffers” by Susan Lucas; and “Jeffers and ‘Nature Poetry’” by David J. Rothman. On Saturday evening from 5:00 to 7:00, a reception and poetry reading was held at Il Fornaio in Carmel’s Pine Inn on Ocean Avenue, featuring poets Jackie Kogan, Jim Dwyer, Patricia Monaghan, and Elliott Ruchowitz-Roberts. Following the annual RJA Business Meeting from 8:30 to 9:30, the Sunday program began with Panel One, 10:30–12:00, titled “Hard Science and Good Poetry,” presenting “Robinson Jeffers: Poetic Responses to a Cosmological Revolution,” a slide-lecture by Ron Olwin; “Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Earth Scientist” by Aaron Yoshinobu; and “The Neurobiological Sublime in Jeffers’s Poetry” by Justin Eichenlaub. Following lunch, Panel Two, 1:30–3:00, titled “Considerations of Natural History,” began with “These Decent Birds: Primitive Birds and Inhumanism in Jeffers’s Lyric Poetry” by Karen Lawson; “What’s the Sixteenth Century Got to do With it? Exploring the History of Natural History and the Rejection of Anthropomorphism” by ShaunAnne Tangney; and “Big Sur, The Final Frontier: Robinson Jeffers and the Last Bastion of Possibility” by Joshua Nettinga. Panel Three, titled “Conversations

with ‘Other Sciences,’” concluded the conference with three papers: “The Crafting of ‘Cawdor’” by Dirk Aardsma; “‘Scraps and metaphors will serve’: Jeffers and the *Scientific American*” by Robert Brophy; and “The Natural Science That Isn’t: Robinson Jeffers and the Photographers” by Jim Baird.

The American Literature Association’s 2004 conference met in San Francisco, May 27–30, headlining a Jeffers panel and a roundtable on Jeffers and California poet William Everson (Brother Antoninus). The panel, “Robinson Jeffers and Contemporaries,” presented “On the Backs of Stallions: Jeffers’s Inhumanism and the Poetry of Charles Bukowski” by Adam Tavel; “Jeffers, Frost, and Astronomy: A Matter of Cosmic Perspective” by Robert Brophy; and “‘Apology’ Accepted: John Steinbeck and Robinson Jeffers” by Terry Beers. The roundtable, titled “‘Dark God of Eros’ and ‘Wild God of the World’: William Everson and Robinson Jeffers,” heard discussants Albert Gelpi, Allan Campo, Robert Brophy, and audience participants focus on the interrelationship between the two poets, especially the influence of Jeffers on Everson. In a panel on “Modernist American Poetry and Its Romantic Discontents,” Alan Soldofsky presented “The Pathology of the Sublime in Robinson Jeffers and Hart Crane.”

The National Poetry Foundation, meeting at the University of Maine, Orono, June 23–27, carried the thematic title “Poetries of the 1940s: American and International.” Three panels offered papers on Jeffers. The first, titled “The Second World War: Pound, Jeffers, Everson,” listed “Jeffers, Inhumanism, and a War-Driven World” by Robert Brophy, discussing Jeffers’s protest and fatalism. The second panel, titled “American Poets and World War II,” highlighting, along with Jeffers, the poetry of Harvey Shapiro and Edna St. Vincent Millay, looked at “Condition Thyself: Robinson Jeffers Confronting World War II” by Andrew Rosen. The third panel, titled “The Northern California Poetry Scene in the 1940s,” offered “Jaime de Angulo: Shaman of Big Sur” by Richard Seddon, tracing the influence of de Angulo in Robert Duncan and Robinson Jeffers. Two other panelists referred to Jeffers in their discussion: Timothy Gray in “Pacific Pacifism: Morris Graves and the New American Poets” and Philip Metres in “From Utopian Hopes to a Chronicle of Division: William Everson, the Fine Arts Camp, and Pacifist Poetry During World War II.” Another panel, “Literary History in/of the 1940s,” promised an interesting discussion of the Jeffers critical reception in “New Critics as New Gatekeepers: Yvor Winters and the Canon in the 1940s” by Robert Archambeau, but the presentation was cancelled.

CONTRIBUTORS

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