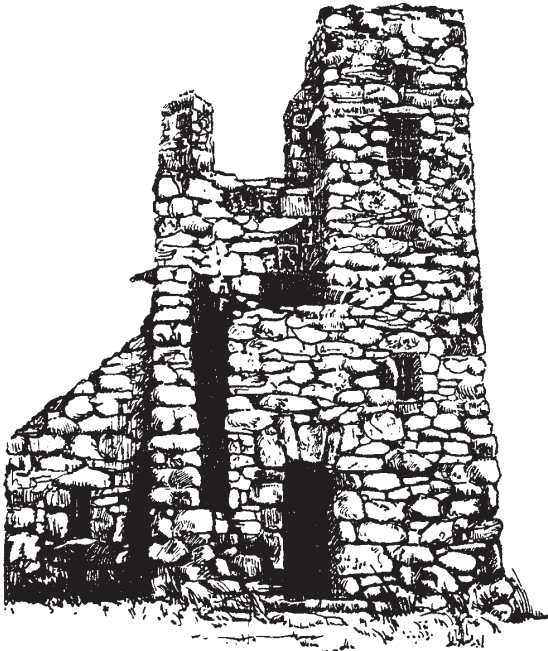


JEFFERS STUDIES

VOLUME 8
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SPRING 2004



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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1 SPRING 2004

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I can't resist the impulse to proclaim that this issue proves that Jeffers rocks. Each of *JS* 8.1's three main articles examines the poet's connection to or vision of the physical world via geology. ShaunAnne Tangney explores the seismic force of geology as it is found in Jeffers's poetry and manifest in his earthquake-prone coast; my article proposes that Jeffers, and some of the Californian poets who follow him, uses intuitions of geological process to ground mystical vision in material nature; and Robert Kafka offers an account of his, and various companions', attempts to find the rock of "Oh Lovely Rock" by trekking up Ventana Creek canyon's "pathless gorge." There is more to be said on Jeffers and geology—a topic that exerts its forces deep below the surface of much of his work—but I hope readers find that these articles provide an entry into understanding one of the poet's touchstone symbols.

If the main concern in this issue is to consider Jeffers in the context of earth science, Ron Olowin's commentary on Jeffers and the Draconids reminds us that he was also a poet who looked to the stars—and did so with a knowledge of astronomy just as accurate and informed as his understanding of geology. In short, *JS* 8.1 represents a fresh contribution to one of the major areas of interest for Jeffers scholars—poetry and science. I hope that this issue will stimulate interest in this topic, and that some readers' response in turn will be to submit a paper to the annual RJA conference, whose theme is the "Social and Natural Forces in Jeffers's Poetry." President-elect Peter Quigley mentions the conference in his message that follows this note, and the CFP can be found online at <www.jeffers.org>. The conference in Reno this past February is detailed in the News and Notes section, and one of its fruits is published in this issue: Shaun T. Griffin's poem "Reading Jeffers in the Rainy January Dawn." Shaun was a keynote speaker at the conference, and, though *JS* does not publish original poetry as a matter of course, we are pleased to present readers with this deep response to Jeffers from a poet of the Great Basin.

Mentioning the conference in Reno, which took place over half a year ago, makes me sensitive to the tardiness of this issue of *JS*. We are trying to get caught up, without making the sacrifice of changing the date of the volume and numbers of *JS*, and I can only offer my good intentions of doing so. On this issue, our editorial staff was increased by one. Noelle Leibic served as editorial assistant on 8.1, compiling the News and Notes and updating the bibliography, as well as writing a review of an ecocritical book of interest to Jeffers readers. Noelle's work has contributed greatly to this issue, and it would have been assembled even more slowly, if one can believe that, without her assistance.

RJA BULLETIN

PETER QUIGLEY, RJA PRESIDENT-ELECT, 2006–2008

PRESIDENT-ELECT'S MESSAGE

Aloha,

While an Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Tromsø, Norway, I came to my first Jeffers Conference. It was 1994. I flew from Norway to Carmel arriving with some severe jetlag and a strong desire to meet a community of scholars devoted to Robinson Jeffers. There are few things in life that measure up to our hopes and our ability to imagine: meeting this group did not disappoint. And after 25 years studying and teaching literature in Europe and the US, I am so grateful to this group for providing me with the best colleagues and intellectual experiences of my career. In the ideal, academic life should be about the mutual fascination with ideas and the encouragement of colleagues. The Jeffers Association has continued to provide this for its members year after year.

This year's conference at the University of Nevada Reno was no exception to this tradition. President Jim Baird and Executive Director ShaunAnne Tangney organized and executed a great conference around the theme of Jeffers as political poet. In addition to the regulars, there were also several new faces at this conference: professors from UNR, as well as students from several states. (Please see the Archive section at www.jeffers.org for pictures from the conference.) The infusion of new voices made for a rich variety of panels. The topic was very timely as well, given current world events. This once again underlined the broad range of issues within Jeffers's work.

At the conference I asked Dr. Ron Olowin to consider serving as Executive Director. A professor of astronomy, Ron represents the kind of readership that makes Jeffers so remarkable. I have always been proud to study a poet who could attract so many readers from outside the field of literary studies. As a scientist, Ron is typical of this interesting readership.

Next year's conference is shaping up quickly. We initially thought of having it in Hawaii given my affiliation with the University of Hawaii. (David Rothman and I thought it would be splendid to get W. S. Merwin, a Maui resident, to speak at that venue.) Instead, we decided to stay with a previous decision to alternate the venue each year between one in the Carmel environs, and one outside of that area. So, Central California it is for 2006. The chosen theme takes advantage of previous conferences by combining science, nature, and political issues in the title "Evolution, Revolution, and Change: Social and Natural Forces in Jeffers's Poetry." (Please see <www.jeffers.org> for CFP and details.)

As each edition of *Jeffers Studies* shows, and as each annual conference demonstrates, Jeffers looms ever so much larger as a significant thinker for the twentieth century as well as the twenty-first. With each passing year, Jeffers's insights on nature, politics, science, and human nature seem more and more nuanced, resilient, and to the point. I am proud to be a part of the fellowship of scholars and others drawn to Jeffers. I look forward to communicating with all of the RJA membership over the next few years regarding conferences, scholarship, and hopefully a new initiative or two.

All Best and Mahalo Nui Loa.

POEM

SHAUN T. GRIFFIN

READING JEFFERS IN THE RAINY JANUARY DAWN

Reading Jeffers in the rainy January dawn,
what is to say that stone and bird and tree cannot—
 because like Whitman before him,
he was a guest of the cliff, the gull, the leaf,
and—worse for us, he wrote
 through the durance of two wars,
 with melancholy to guide from shorebird to stone—
then died, a deer laid down to coast water. And, without
sanctuary, memorized the trinity of flora, fauna
and we, however inhuman—
 raked back to ourselves. Of course he lost faith:

 we strove to divide the words
from the man on the seacoast who stood like Machado,
the ancients, the mothers keening
 under the weight of anguish and light—
a man apart from the abacus of time and state
 that gilded now, could not destroy:
impatient, humbled, sonorous poet, he chose
the stones, the birds, and the trees to venerate
 beauty and truth—the delirious constant
in the new world: no man without them.

ARTICLES

SHAUNANNE TANGNEY

A DIVINE PHYSICAL WORLD

CATASTROPHIC GEOLOGY AND JEFFERS COUNTRY

The poetry of Robinson Jeffers is often described as apocalyptic, perhaps because it is filled with what seem to be dire prophecies of “the end of the world.” I have made this very argument in print, and do not write here to deny it. I have suggested that Jeffers’s apocalypticism is more cultural than Christian,¹ and certainly the social and cultural milieu of the first half of the twentieth century proved inspirational for Jeffers, who worried that humanity was contributing to the demise of the planet. There is plenty of poetic evidence of a socio-cultural apocalypticism in Jeffers’s work; consider “The Day Is a Poem” (dated September 19, 1939):

This morning Hitler spoke in Danzig, we heard his voice.
A man of genius: that is, of amazing
Ability, courage, devotion, cored on a sick child’s soul,
Heard clearly through the dog-wrath, a sick child
Wailing in Danzig; invoking destruction and wailing at it.
Here, the day was extremely hot; about noon
A south wind like a blast from hell’s mouth spilled a slight rain
On the parched land, and at five a light earthquake
Danced the house, no harm done. To-night I have been amusing myself
Watching the blood-red moon droop slowly
Into black sea through bursts of dry lightning and distant thunder.
Well: the day is a poem: but too much
Like one of Jeffers’s, crusted with blood and barbaric omens,
Painful to excess, inhuman as a hawk’s cry. (*CP* 3: 16)

The poem is divided neatly in half: the first half describes Hitler, and the second half describes natural phenomena such as hot weather, an earthquake, and dry lightning; both halves incorporate Biblical imagery of the apocalypse. In the first half of the poem, Hitler functions as an Antichrist figure. The Antichrist is Satan’s representative on Earth, and he comes disguised as good, all his evil hidden—not at all unlike

Jeffers's version of Hitler: "Ability, courage, devotion, cored on a sick child's soul." The earthquakes, blood moons, and destructive natural phenomena of the second half of the poem are right out of the Book of Revelation: "when he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood" (Rev. 6: 12–13); "[when he opened the seventh seal] there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake" (Rev. 8: 5). But the natural phenomena of the second half of the poem—especially earthquakes—were also regular aspects of Jeffers's own landscape—the Central California Coast. It's easy to make the apocalyptic argument by simply pointing out the Biblical allusions, but I want here to explore the idea that the geology of Jeffers Country² reveals something besides apocalypticism in Jeffers's work. There is clearly an emphasis on catastrophe in a significant number of Jeffers's poems, and while catastrophe is a crucial element in apocalypticism, I will argue here that Jeffers uses catastrophe in a decidedly unapocalyptic way.

There are several key tenets of apocalypticism. It is important, first and foremost, to keep in mind that, etymologically speaking, the word apocalypse does not mean catastrophe. The etymology of the word is the Greek *apokalupsis*: to uncover or reveal (the root is *kalupto*, to cover or conceal, plus the *a*, meaning not or un-); the last book of the Bible is often mistakenly called the Apocalypse, but it is actually the *Revelation* to St. John. Secondly, the word apocalypse is eschatological in nature (the root here being *eschatos*, furtherest or uttermost) and so is concerned with last things (death, judgment, heaven, and hell). It is also concerned with the final destiny of the soul of humankind, which is to say it is a doctrine or belief about the coming of the kingdom of God. Implied in this final destiny is Armageddon—a final battle between good and evil. Thus eschatology, and by extension apocalypse, imply not only a catastrophic end, but also a new era to come, paradise regained in the form of the New Earthly Paradise. In other words, apocalypticism is linear: an old (presumably evil) era ends, and a new (presumably good) era begins. There is no sense of the cyclical; finitude is absolute in apocalypticism. Readers often mistake the new beginning identified by the New Earthly Paradise as cyclicity, but the break in time in apocalypticism is complete: the old and sinful world is completely lost, and the new and saintly world is completely separate from the old. Most of us reading the Book of Revelation are most forcefully struck by the catastrophic events in the story: the earthquakes and the rivers of blood, the dragons and the armies, the plagues and the mass murders. In popular parlance, nearly everything catastrophic is described as apocalyptic, and so are many of Jeffers's poems, most likely

because they often do include elements of catastrophe. But it is arguable that Jeffers is using catastrophe in a way other than apocalyptically. While it was the consistent use of earthquakes that first helped me comprehend an apocalypticism in Jeffers's work, it is now those very earthquakes that make me suppose a geological influence at work in the poems.

The difficulty in demonstrating the geological influence in Jeffers's work lies in the fact that over Jeffers's lifetime, geological theory changed radically. Jeffers's poems seem to adhere to geological theories that were advanced by scholars beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, and at the same time to prefigure geological theories that would not come into scholarly acceptance until after his death in 1962. Some explication of these theories, then, is necessary. During the Victorian era, geologists were consumed by the apparent dichotomy between "uniformitarianism" and "catastrophism." Charles Lyell promoted "uniformitarianism," which can be described as the belief that "the earth was a conservative, steady state system without historical directionality," and railed against "catastrophism of any sort," which he "branded as nothing more than prescientific superstition" (Davis 15–16). According to uniformitarianism, "landscape slowly evolves through the action of low-intensity, high-frequency events" (Davis 17), which generally holds true in humid, temperate environments. The exact opposite, however, holds true in Mediterranean and desert environments (such as California), where the theory of catastrophism applies better. "There," as Mike Davis says, "high-intensity, low-frequency events ('disasters') are the ordinary agents of landscape and ecological change" (18). Such "disasters" occur most frequently

at the foot of rugged mountain ranges [which are] areas of "rapid transition for virtually all aspects of habitat—geology and soils, moisture supply, topography, likelihood of inundation, climate, vegetation, and so forth" (Andreas Schimper qtd. in Davis: 18).

The primary geological features of California can be described as a long, flat valley floor surrounded on both sides by mountain ranges; as such it is a likely environment for the "disasters" described above. California's geology, in other words, suggests not a theory of uniformitarianism (read: gentle compression), but rather a theory of catastrophism (read: violent spasms).

The theory of catastrophism would have seemed plausible to Jeffers. Arguably, the most important elements of the geology of Jeffers Country are the mountains of the Coast Range—more specifically, the Santa Lucia Range. These mountains are a direct result of the San Andreas

fault. The San Andreas is a northwest-running fault, one which apparently lengthened fairly steadily until about 16 million years ago, when its lengthening suddenly accelerated (we can see this as an example of catastrophism). The Coast Range rose concurrently with the lengthening of the San Andreas fault (Alt and Hyndman 124). West of the San Andreas fault, the major geological features are the Salinian block, the Franciscan complex, and the Sur-Nacimiento fault, all of which point to a great deal of geological activity, plate movement, and the inevitable northwestward movement of the entire California Coast (Alt and Hyndman 127). It is also important that we do not ignore the sea. As David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman say, “the coast is a creature of the breakers. They restlessly shape and reshape it, making the shoreline an artistic work in progress. . . . It is a splendid scene that changes considerably more rapidly than most of the many splendid scenes in California” (195). So while the breakers constantly carve the coastline, earthquakes constantly rattle and shift the land just interior of the ocean. Alt and Hyndman remind us that “all of the Coast Range is earthquake country, from one end to the other, mostly because of the San Andreas system of faults” (129). All of Jeffers Country, then, evidences catastrophism, and both theory and so-called catastrophic events are commonplace in Jeffers’s poems.

Consider the frequency of earthquakes in Jeffers Country, which is well documented and easily researched on the California Geological Survey website, especially Map Series 49, by Topozada, *et al.*³ There is evidence of eight significant earthquakes between 1916 and 1962, encompassing the span of years that Jeffers lived in Carmel. All of these earthquakes occurred within 0.5 degrees of longitude and latitude of Carmel. 0.5 degrees translates into about 25 miles east-west and 35 miles north-south, clearly Jeffers Country. The eight earthquakes that happened in the Carmel area during Jeffers’s time there ranged in magnitude (as measured by the Richter Scale) from 5.5 to 6.1, and in intensity (as measured by the Modified Mercalli Scale) between VI and VII.⁴ In addition to the eight measurably destructive earthquakes that occurred in the Carmel area during Jeffers’s time, there were 33 additional earthquakes with magnitudes between 5.5 and 6.4 in the larger surrounding area, making the area between San Jose and Salinas historically the most active earthquake area in the state. These scientific data suggest that Jeffers would have experienced several severe earthquakes in his lifetime; the poetic evidence in “The Day Is a Poem” (“a light earthquake / Danced the house, no harm done”) suggests that he experienced less severe ones, too.

But earthquakes are more than just frequent—perhaps thrilling, perhaps intriguing—events to record in poems for Jeffers. As Steven P.

Schneider reminds us, geology (*geo-logos*) means “earth word,” which “posits an earth that speaks its own language” (139). Jeffers would have no doubt agreed with Schneider’s etymology. If his scientific knowledge was perhaps superficial, garnered from conversations with his astronomer-brother and reading the *Scientific American*, Jeffers’s understanding of language was profound and deep. Geology would have appealed to him on the scientific level, to be sure, but an earth that speaks its own language was his complete poetic and philosophical argument. Consider “Tor House,” a poem without an earthquake, but with definite geological significance. In the poem, Jeffers acknowledges that his house should long outlive him, and that if future generations want to understand him, they might consider that structure. We know that Tor House was hand-hewn from local granite, and that it stands on a granite knoll in the mouth of the Carmel River, but it’s the last lines of the poem that really get down to geology: “My ghost you needn’t look for; it is probably / Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind” (CP 1: 408). Jeffers locates his heritage, his very spirit, in the granite: he locates himself geologically. In other words, he, too, is part of the earth-language. In the original preface to *The Double Axe*, Jeffers tells us of his “new attitude, a new manner of thought and feeling . . . [which is] based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe” (CP 4: 418). The notion of an organic wholeness is familiar to Jeffers scholars and readers, but perhaps the idea that it has geological roots and consequences is a new take on it. If the entire cosmos is his focus, and if his earnest attempt is to butt humanity out of its (perceived) center-place, then of course he would see the planet as having its own language, and his language (his poems, his stones) as only a part of that larger earth-language.

“Grey Weather” also shows Jeffers thinking geologically. In the poem, he speaks of the seeming agelessness of various geological features, and how they force him to consider his own time, and self. “Grey Weather” concludes

The stormy conditions of time and change are all abrogated, the essential
 Violences of survival, pleasure,
 Love, wrath and pain, and the curious desire of knowing, all perfectly suspended.
 In the cloudy light, in the timeless quietness,
 One explores deeper than the nerves or heart of nature, the womb or soul,
 To the bone, the careless white bone, the excellence. (CP 2: 485)

Catastrophism is more evident here than it is in “Tor House”: stormy conditions, violence, time, and change all align with catastrophism. But more importantly, the poem takes the emphasis off human consciousness—“deeper than nerves or heart of nature, the womb or soul”—and places it on what typical Jeffers scholarship would call nature, but I maintain is something deeper. “The bone, the careless white bone” is the utmost interior and can be read as a geological feature. Bones are the interior-most structure of the human being; likewise, geological features such as rock and the faults that run through it are the interior-most structure of the earth. They are essential to its very existence, and its growth and change. And they are, for Jeffers, “the excellence.” It is in the supporting structure where excellence is found.

Catastrophism is again indicated in “Oh Lovely Rock,” which ends:

I shall die, and my boys
 Will live and die, our world will go on through its rapid agonies of change and
 discovery; this age will die
 And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem: this rock will be
 here, grave, earnest, not passive: the energies
 That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain above: and I many
 packed centuries ago
 Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lonely rock. (*CP* 2: 546–47)

It is tempting to read the poem as apocalyptic, with its references to the agonies of the world and a new Bethlehem. But the geological elements in “Oh Lovely Rock” are far more intriguing. In the poem Jeffers seems to move beyond the theory of catastrophism and to presage plate tectonics, a theory that did not take hold until the mid-1960s, after Jeffers’s death. Plate tectonics is a theory that, as John McPhee says, “has assembled numerous disparate phenomena into a single narrative” (121). McPhee provides a neat summary of this narrative:

the earth at present is divided into some twenty crustal segments called plates. . . . The plates are thin and rigid, like pieces of eggshell. . . . [T]he plates move. They all move. They move in varying directions and at different speeds. . . . Where plates separate, they produce oceans. Where they collide, they make mountains. . . . Almost all earthquakes are movements of the boundaries of plates . . . Where a trench [old seafloor which sinks as oceans grow] happens to run along the edge of a continent and subducting seafloor dives under the land, the marginal terrain will rise. The two plates, pressing, will create mountains and volcanoes will appear as well. (120–21)

Plate tectonics, then, attempts to explain how all of the earth works—grows and changes—by a single theory. And curiously enough, Jeffers

seems to have intuited this theory. In “Oh Lovely Rock” he speaks of rock as not passive but energetic. This is exceedingly similar to plate tectonics, which argues that when plates move they relieve stress, resulting in energy which travels. To be sure, the poem locates that energy in the rock’s atoms, but this need not be a sticking point; for Jeffers to have portrayed rock as energetic rather than static clearly evidences an advanced take on geological theory.

It seems implausible, however, that Jeffers could have divined plate tectonics. It is more convincing to argue that plate tectonics is a theory that aligns well with Jeffers’s own philosophy of the interconnectedness of all elements in the cosmos. If plate tectonics is a scientific discovery, like many of the twentieth century, that “substituted the conception of material creation as something solid and fixed with a more dynamic conception of matter that adopted flux and uncertainty as the norm” (Schneider 141), it is clearly in line with Jeffers’s claim that he can say with certainty “that the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered” (*CP* 4: 412), a claim that implies a dynamic universe rather than a static one. Jeffers puts this forth in verse, when the protagonist of “The Inhumanist” addresses the earth directly, saying:

“Dear love. You are so beautiful.
Even this side the stars and below the moon. How can you be . . . all this . . . and
me also?
Be Human also? The yellow puma, the flighty mourning-dove and flecked hawk,
yes and the rattlesnake
Are in the nature of things; they are noble and beautiful
As the rocks and the grass:—not this grim ape
Although it loves you.—Yet two or three times in my life my walls have fallen—
beyond love—no room for love—
I have been you.” (*CP* 3: 289)

Dynamism, interconnectedness, and the notion of energy as the force of the universe, energy that is shared among all beings and elements, are all indicated in the verse above. Jeffers didn’t divine plate tectonics; rather, he had long observed that the universe—and the planet earth especially—simply wasn’t one that adhered to theories that suggested uniform, steady-state systems or catastrophic but infrequent events. It was, rather, one that existed in a state of constant flux, and one better lived on if humans could learn to “watch the wheel slope and turn” (“Be Angry at the Sun” *CP* 3: 24).

The idea of the world being in a constant state of flux, of watching the wheel slope and turn, is one that has similarities with catastrophe, if

not catastrophism. The geological theory of catastrophism suggests high-intensity events that happen infrequently, albeit spectacularly. The word *catastrophe* comes from the Greek, *katastrophe*, which suggests overturning or a sudden turn. Clearly geological catastrophism indicates a sudden turn, but for Jeffers, the fact that geology presents visibly the notion of flux, of one layer of the earth overturning another, is key. Jeffers was more admittedly and purposefully connected to the physical than the abstract. Jeffers believed that “[i]t is the distinction of all the higher sort of poetry that it deals in the manner of reality with real things; not with abstract qualities” (CP 4: 381). Ultimately, the geological features he witnessed around him on the Central California coast may have seemed or even been catastrophic, but they were not necessarily apocalyptic to him. Indeed, the apocalyptic poems seem always to focus more on socio-cultural calamities (like “The Day Is a Poem” does), and while they may include natural elements (what Jeffers poem doesn’t?), their concentration is on human maladroitness. We must be careful not to label every Jeffers poem that contains *catastrophe* as apocalyptic, for clearly, many of them are not. The good and evil, the God and Satan, the Armageddon and New Earthly Paradise of the Bible are abstractions, and as such Jeffers would have been less comfortable with them than he would have been with the rock and shore—the geological features—he inhabited on a daily basis. In an unpublished preface to “Tamar,” he writes that “[r]ecurrence, regular enough to be rhythmic, is the inevitable quality of life, and of life’s environment. . . . [P]oetry cannot speak without remembering the turns of the sun and moon, and the rhythm of the ocean, and the recurrence of human generations, the returning waves of life and death” (qtd. in Hesse: 21). “Returning waves of life and death” are not apocalyptic because they indicate a cyclical version of time, not a linear one. A geological consciousness, however, is indicated in the words “recurrence, regular enough to be rhythmic, is the inevitable quality of life.” Jeffers didn’t need to look to the Bible to see that; he only needed to look out the window of Tor House.

Doubtless, from the windows of Tor House Jeffers witnessed a great deal of “Grey Weather,” and it is to that poem that I would like to return. Earlier I argued that the phrase “the bone, the careless white bone” indicated an interior structure upon which excellence is located. For Jeffers, the physical realm of the cosmos is the exact locus of excellence, and of beauty, and yes, of truth. For Jeffers, truth is to be found in the concrete, not the abstract. Eva Hesse argues that Jeffers maintained a dialectical realism and reminds us that Jeffers alluded to Plato, “who defined beauty as the effulgence—the shining forth—of truth” (qtd. in Hesse: 24). She goes on to suggest that the beauty that Jeffers visualizes

is “closely related to his conception of authentic reality, i.e., to an objective order that he occasionally referred to as ‘God’” (24). She allows that his “theological conditioning by his Calvinist father” (25) was a lasting influence, but suggests as well that it was one he constantly struggled against. “Most of the time,” she says,

Jeffers’ “God” is, of course, only a trope that has very little in common with the humanoid, albeit invisible, God shared by all denominations of Christian teaching. Jeffers’ polymorphic contextual approach actually precludes the reduction of the divinity to a mere specular image. His God is rather a kind of nonpersonal ontological structure. (24–25)

I find this argument very intriguing. It is one that the reader can see at work in “The Inhumanist,” where Jeffers writes:

You have perhaps

heard some false reports
On the subject of God. He is not dead; and he is not a fable. He is not mocked
nor forgotten—
Successfully. God is a lion that comes in the night. God is a hawk gliding among
the stars—
If all the stars and the earth, and the living flesh of the night that flows in
between them, and whatever is beyond them
Were that one bird. (*CP* 3: 292)

Here God is not abstract at all; rather, it is physical, natural, and of the earth indeed. In fact, here God is a system, a structure—the structure of the very universe. According to Hesse, Jeffers’s portrayal of God as a structure is closely akin to the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss, who argued that structure is not directly visible, but is rather the underlying logic by which the apparent order is to be explained (Hesse 25). This seems to me to be an acceptable explanation of God; it is also a good working definition of geology.

If the underlying structure is invisible, its effects upon physical reality are not. Jeffers recognized that the “divine outer universe is after all not at peace with itself, but full of violent strains and conflicts. The physical world is ruled by opposing tensions. The world of living things is formed by perpetual struggle and irreconcilable desires; and pain is an essential part of life” (*CP* 4: 413). Many scholars read this as a commentary on the socio-cultural conflict that was so constant during Jeffers’s lifetime. Others read it as Jeffers’s assertion that humanity’s desires are harmful to earth and self alike. I would not discount those readings, but I would add to them that it is possible to read a geological wisdom in Jeffers’s words. It is possible to interpret the “violent strains and conflicts,”

the “opposing tensions,” and the “perpetual struggle” as the visible signs of the underlying—and, by Jeffers’s reckoning, and by the science of his day—catastrophic geology of Jeffers Country. It is more profound than ironic that Jeffers and his readers alike can find some kind of comfort in the poems that foreground this catastrophism. Like the earthquakes that rumble throughout Jeffers Country, like the crashing waves that constantly undo the California coast, the poems show us how our actions have consequences that oscillate in the cosmos. The poems also show us how our actions can be ones of excellence, of love and wonder, and of intense reality.

ENDNOTES

1. See Tangney, “‘Write the things that thou hast seen’: Recognizing the Apocalyptic in Robinson Jeffers.”
2. I use the term here not to refer to the coffee-table book, but to the area shown on Boon Hughey’s excellent map of the same title (“Jeffers Country”).
3. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Dr. Allen Kihm, who is a vertebrate paleontologist and earth scientist (as well as my friend and colleague) at Minot State University, for his help in directing my geological explorations for this article.
4. Most people have a working familiarity with the Richter Scale, but not with the Modified Mercalli Scale. The Modified Mercalli Scale measures intensity, that is, the severity of earthquake effects. The Toppozada map series uses both Richter and Mercalli to indicate the severity of an earthquake’s magnitude and effects. The eight significant earthquakes that Jeffers would have experienced measured on the Richter Scale between 5.5 and 6.1. A magnitude 5 on the Richter Scale might produce effects in the VI–VII range on the Modified Mercalli Scale; VI–VII earthquakes are felt by all and cause minor to moderate damage. A magnitude 6 on the Richter Scale might produce VII–VIII level effects on the modified Mercalli Scale; VII–VIII earthquakes cause people to run outdoors and cause moderate to major damage.

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GEORGE HART

SEEING ROCK FOR THE FIRST TIME
VARIETIES OF GEOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE
IN JEFFERS, REXROTH, AND SNYDER

At a “Reinhabitation Conference” in 1976, Gary Snyder remarked: “The biological-ecological sciences have been laying out (implicitly) a spiritual dimension. We must find our way to seeing the mineral cycles, the water cycles, air cycles, nutrient cycles as sacramental” (*Place* 188). Perhaps the most radical assertion that a pantheistic poet can make is that the inanimate has spirit. It is easy to attribute spirit to animate life, especially mammals, and the pathetic fallacy, regardless of its validity, is often implicit when a poet describes an animal or presents it as a symbol. But in order for one of its core tenets to be expressed—that matter at its “lowest” levels possesses essential value—sacramental nature poetry must find ways to locate spirit in such things as trees, water, and rocks.¹

Robinson Jeffers made geological process, “the mineral cycles” in Snyder’s terms, into one of the profoundest expressions of his pantheism. He developed various strategies for incorporating rocks and stones into his religious view of nature. He often uses rocks emblematically or symbolically, as in “Rock and Hawk,” where he presents the emblem of a hawk’s “fierce consciousness” “Married to the massive / Mysticism of stone” (*CP* 2: 416). By apostrophizing a particular stone, as in “To the Rock That Will Be a Cornerstone of the House,” he evokes the latent power in geological endurance, and ritualistically taps into—and contributes to—it: “Lend me the stone strength of the past and I will lend you / The wings of the future, for I have them. / How dear you will be to me when I too grow old, old comrade” (*CP* 1: 11). As a stonemason himself, he was also able to portray a physical intimacy with rock gained from daily labor extracting boulders from “the wet / Quarry under the shadow of waves” to build additions to his house and three-story Hawk Tower (“To the House,” *CP* 1: 5).

And, most significant, Jeffers represented the intuition of a spirit immanent in stone by revalidating the pathetic fallacy in a touchstone poem written in the mid-thirties. “Oh Lovely Rock” presents a mystical

encounter with rock, a geological experience, in which the mineral cycles are taken for analogues of spirit in various ways. In this excursion poem, as well as in his more numerous stonemasonry poems, the human is subsumed in the vastness of geological time, yet both human and rock mutually enhance each other's existence. Also, I'd like to pun on "geological" explicitly—this is Jeffers's "hard" mystical mode; in "Credo" he calls it his "harder mysticism" (*CP* 1: 239). Although there is no Jeffers tradition *per se*, both Snyder and Kenneth Rexroth exhibit a sacramental impulse that manifests in other versions of geological experience, albeit in reduced and adapted tropes. In "Credo," Jeffers's "harder mysticism" is conceived as a mode of realism in opposition to an orientalized idealism, but the pathetic fallacy is an unacceptable trope for Rexroth, a second generation Modernist, and Snyder, a postwar poet. However, in moments of geological experience, both adapt and revise the pathetic fallacy à la Modernist imperatives against rhetoric, and achieve its effect, the intuited connection between essence and matter, mind and nature.

"Oh Lovely Rock," first published in *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* (1937), develops a lyric strategy that is a hallmark of West Coast nature poetry. The poem operates on three levels, the material, the mystical, and the rhetorical, which combine to manifest a sacramental reality. The lyric strategy represents these three levels through precise, naturalistic description that emphasizes nonhuman nature, a religious or mystical awareness triggered by the natural setting, and an elaborate version of the pathetic fallacy that jumps the gap between material substance and spiritual essence, and thus completes the circuit between mind and nature.

We stayed the night in the pathless gorge of Ventana Creek, up the east fork.
 The rock walls and the mountain ridges hung forest on forest above our heads,
 maple and redwood,
 Laurel, oak, madrone, up to the high and slender Santa Lucian firs that stare up
 the cataracts
 Of slide-rock to the star-color precipices.

We lay on gravel and kept a little
 camp-fire for warmth.

Past midnight only two or three coals glowed red in the cooling darkness; I laid
 a clutch of dead bay-leaves
 On the ember ends and felted dry sticks across them and lay down again. The
 revived flame
 Lighted my sleeping son's face and his companion's, and the vertical face of the
 great gorge-wall

Across the stream. Light leaves overhead danced in the fire's breath, tree-trunks
 were seen: it was the rock wall
 That fascinated my eyes and mind. Nothing strange: light-gray diorite with two
 or three slanting seams in it,
 Smooth-polished by the endless attrition of slides and floods; no fern nor lichen,
 pure naked rock . . . as if I were
 Seeing rock for the first time. As if I were seeing through the flame-lit surface
 into the real and bodily
 And living rock. Nothing strange . . . I cannot
 Tell you how strange: the silent passion, the deep nobility and childlike loveli-
 ness: this fate going on
 Outside our fates. It is here in the mountain like a grave smiling child. I shall die,
 and my boys
 Will live and die, our world will go on through its rapid agonies of change and
 discovery; this age will die
 And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem: this rock will be
 here, grave, earnest, not passive: the energies
 That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain above: and I many
 packed centuries ago
 Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lonely rock. (CP 2: 546-47)

This poem follows a typical pattern for Jeffers's lyrics: a two-part structure, often signalled by a verse paragraph break, of detailed, naturalistic description and moral or philosophical observation. Sometimes he starts with the description and moves into the moral; sometimes he presents the moral first and uses the description as an example or proof. In "Oh Lovely Rock," this two-part structure is emphasized by the parallelism between the opening sentences of each verse paragraph, "We stayed" and "We lay." The first verse paragraph briefly sets the scene through description, and the second, longer paragraph begins with more description and then proceeds to the meditative observations of the final lines. The description is objective, precise, and detailed. The location is specified by name, and the diction includes common names of trees. In turn, such specificity indicates precisely the growth pattern of what the California state guide calls "the transition zone," which includes the Coast Range forests, where this poem is set. The guide points out that "[t]he trees most commonly found in association with the redwood are the broad-leaved maple, madrona, tanbark oak, California laurel, and (usually in separate stands) the somber Douglas fir" (*California* 25). In the second section, the rock is identified by geological type, and its surface appearance is described precisely. Such description not only allows readers to see the setting vividly and exactly, especially if they are familiar with Western flora and geology, but it also places a distinct emphasis on the material substance of the non-

human nature being described. It is not vaguely evoked trees and rocks, but specific trees growing in a specific pattern, and a certain type of rock that has weathered in a certain type of way. The objective and materialistic description will ground the subjective and mystical response to come.

The second verse paragraph introduces the dramatic situation, and the antecedent of the previously indefinite first-person plural pronoun is revealed to be the speaker, his son, and his son's friend.² The shift from the plural to the singular first-person prepares the way for the shift from the material to the mystical content of the poem. Jeffers would use the term "mysticism" carefully, and I use it here advisedly, but the experience he describes in this poem fulfills William James's four criteria of a mystical state: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (380–81). As the point of view becomes singular, the boys themselves become objects in the described scene rather than perceiving subjects. Because of the homonymic denotation of "face," the boys' sleeping countenances and the rock surface are given the same value in their illumination by the "revived flame." This moment is a crux in Jeffers's poetry because he associates love between humans with an incestuous self-love. Here, however, the speaker's love for his son is immediately, or simultaneously, transferred to the rock across the creek. The play of the firelight creates a passive state in the speaker for a moment, revealed by the odd shift to passive voice: "Light leaves overhead danced in the fire's breath, tree-trunks were seen: it was the rock wall / That fascinated my eyes and mind." The speaker's attention is arrested by the rock, the surface of which has been animated by the breathlike light and heat of the fire. It is a moment of noesis, the mind apprehending through the eyes, but the speaker emphasizes the material qualities of that vision: "nothing strange" that is at the same time ineffably strange. Again, the presence of the children colors the speaker's figurative language: "childlike loveliness," "like a grave smiling child." The speaker experiences a vision of the sacred inhabiting material reality—the permanence of the rock both symbolizing and embodying the energy or spirit that inheres even in the inorganic.³

Thus the poem moves from the materialistic to the mystical by means of the rhetorical. The speaker twice invokes the pathetic fallacy in his response to the rock, assigning it passion and nobility in his first realization, and projecting a human loneliness onto it in his sympathetic response at the conclusion. In her study, *Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century*, Josephine Miles traces the rise and fall of the trope, and she finds that before Ruskin coined the term, which of course carries a negative connotation, a high percentage of poems contained "pathetic fallacies." That percentage dropped after Ruskin branded the device

fallacious, and Miles concludes that this decline in usage reflected not only changing poetic conventions but also changing views of the inherent value of nature. In the twentieth century, Miles finds the frequency of the pathetic fallacy to be still diminished from its pre-Ruskin heyday, but she detects a curiously high occurrence of the trope among the Imagists. Her bellwether for the twentieth century is naturally T. S. Eliot, who uses the pathetic fallacy once for every three hundred lines. Most interesting, she pairs Jeffers and Eliot as indicators of the twentieth-century attitude toward the device and the stance toward nature that it implies: "The scantiness in the work of Eliot and Jeffers therefore seems certainly to participate in the fading of a way of thought" (51). Yet, in his most public dismissal of Jeffers, a 1957 review of Radcliffe Squires's *The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers*, Rexroth cited such personification as one of Jeffers's highest offenses: "His lyrics and reveries of the California landscape seem to me to suffer in almost every line from the most childish laboring of the pathetic fallacy, elevated to a very system of response" (30). Indeed, in "Oh Lovely Rock," it is used as a system of response, and Miles's analysis of the trope, which is not concerned with the validity of attributing human emotion to natural objects but rather with the view of nature that sanctions such attribution, reveals how the pathetic fallacy works as a viable, "green" rhetorical device.

It is worthwhile to pause here and consider the implications of Jeffers's pathetic fallacy. His "elevation" of the trope brings a distinctly Romantic lyric strategy into twentieth-century poetics, and thus it has profound meaning for West Coast poetics and sacramental nature poetry in general. Moreover, this is one place where poetry, by its operation in the realm of feeling and affect, contributes a depth to environmental discourse that ecological science itself cannot provide. Environmental philosopher Neil Evernden writes, "once we engage in the extension of the boundary of the self into the 'environment,' then of course we imbue it with life and can quite properly regard it as animate—it is animate because we are a part of it. And, following from this, all the metaphorical properties so favored by poets make perfect sense: the Pathetic Fallacy is a fallacy only to the ego-clencher. Metaphoric language is an indicator of 'place'—an indication that the speaker has a place, feels part of a place" (19).

There are two primary emotions in this poem, love and loneliness. As Ruskin would have it, these are Jeffers's emotions, transferred to the object by a temperament "borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion," which is "more or less a noble state" (qtd. in Miles: 5). Miles uses the term "bestowal" to indicate the pathetic fallacy in its pre-Ruskin, Wordsworthian mode (6). For Miles, the bestowal of emotion upon an object exhibits three emphases that indicate the relation of

speaker to nonhuman object. The pathetic fallacy, defined by Miles as “an object and an attributed feeling,” contains a “face,” a “breath,” and a “pulse” (55), each of which can be found in Jeffers’s use of the trope. “Face” is the object’s “outward representative aspect,” here “the flame-lit surface” of the rock. “Breath” is “the shared sympathy of an increasing number of objects, their spirit,” which can be found in the analogies between the “childlike” qualities of the sleeping boys and the rock, and then the energy of the rock as it supports the rest of the landscape. And “pulse” is the “power of adjective within noun, its own generation of emotion,” which Jeffers’s rock doubly signifies in the one-letter difference between the title and the last phrase. Both its “loneliness” and its “loveliness” hold the key to Jeffers’s mystical insight. “Lovely” carries a trite connotation in contemporary usage, used to signify that something is pleasant or merely appealing. Jeffers, of course, would be aware of the adjective’s more significant denotations (full of love, loving; inspiring love or affection; having beauty that appeals to the emotions as well as to the eye),⁴ which inform the multi-layered emotional experience of the speaker.⁵ He sympathetically identifies with the state of the rock, isolated in the “pathless” canyon, and projects that geographical fact into a historical and geological image. The “power of adjective within noun” is even more profound in the title phrase, “lovely rock.” The “intense reality” of the rock calls forth love from the speaker. The efficacy of the rhetorical device of the pathetic fallacy completes the ego-negating mystical experience.

Rexroth’s “Lyell’s Hypothesis Again,” written in the mid-1940s, describes another “geological” experience that is at once material and spiritual. Like Jeffers’s lyric, this poem employs a two-part structure, signalled by a ruler line inserted between the first and second verse paragraphs. Although Rexroth’s scene occurs during the day, the setting resembles Jeffers’s: a coastal mountain location with a creek, waterfall, cliffs, and vegetation. The poem begins with detailed description of the locale: “The mountain road ends here, / Broken away in the chasm where / The bridge washed out years ago. / The first scarlet larkspur glitters / In the first patch of April / Morning sunlight” (*Complete* 278). The description shifts into a meditation on the general theme of the poem, the conflict between the “me” of the soul or ego and the “not me” of body and material universe. The pull of the dual forces of “sympathy and agony” are momentarily relieved as the speaker projects his concerns onto the landscape. As the vernal life of the natural setting flows down the creek “[t]o the sea and death,” the speaker enacts a kind of combination molting and scourging, experiencing a moment of immortality. The larkspur blossoms become “flecks” of “flagellant blood” in the sun, and the mist of the falls images the evaporation of ego. Against

these images of metamorphosis and mutability, the speaker finds a symbol for endurance in the geological strata surrounding him. The ego is “As passionate, as apathetic, / As the lava flow that burned here once; / And stopped here; and said, ‘This far / And no further.’ And spoke thereafter / In the simple diction of stone” (*Complete* 279). As opposed to Jeffers’s granite, Rexroth’s rock is extrusive igneous rock—lava that cooled on the surface—and it becomes a correlative for the personal ego torn between sympathy and detachment.

It is important to note how Rexroth produces the effect of the pathetic fallacy without the trope itself, which he does in a couple of ways. First, the personification of the lava flow and its metamorphosis into rock are distanced from the pathetic fallacy by the use of a “lesser” figure of speech, the simile. By comparing the personal ego to the lava with the preposition “as,” the speaker reduces the prominence of the fact that he is attributing feeling to an inanimate object. Second, the personification itself is almost immediately made self-reflexive—that is, the molten rock “speaks,” but then is metamorphosed into the sign of itself by the metaphor “diction of stone.” Analogizing nature to language is one of Rexroth’s standard strategies, and it places him more directly than Jeffers in the twentieth-century mode. What’s more, Rexroth immunizes his whole poem against Jeffersian excess with the elaborate, but largely implied, scientific metaphor evoked by his title. He is not being obscure—he gives readers a headnote by way of explanation: “An Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth’s Surface by Causes Now in Operation.” However, he does not integrate this reference into the body of the poem itself. The scenes described therein stand as objective examples of the process, as if he were performing an experiment to prove “Lyell’s hypothesis again.” Of course, he presents experiences as subjective as Jeffers’s intuition, but the metaphor derived from Lyell adds the luster of cool objectivity and disinterestedness. Rather than directly addressing his readers, Rexroth delivers them a deeply personal and subjective experience packaged as verifiable “fact.”

In comparison to “Oh Lovely Rock,” the key distinction in the second part of Rexroth’s poem is that it portrays erotic rather than paternal love; otherwise, other significant similarities become apparent. In both, the speaker and his companion(s) recuse themselves from the rest of society, seeking out solitude for recreational purposes. Most important, in both poems geological time and human experience are juxtaposed, mutually informing one another. The first of the two verse paragraphs in the second part reads:

Naked in the warm April air,
We lie under the redwoods,

In the sunny lee of a cliff.
 As you kneel above me I see
 Tiny red marks on your flanks
 Like bites, where the redwood cones
 Have pressed into your flesh.
 You can find just the same marks
 In the lignite in the cliff
 Over our heads. *Sequoia*
Langsdorffii before the ice,
 And *sempervirens* afterwards,
 There is little difference,
 Except for all those years. (*Complete* 279)

Rexroth's explicit eroticism contrasts nicely with Jeffers's implicit Stoicism: Jeffers sees the eternal etched in the rock and human consciousness passing ephemerally over it; Rexroth sees the fossils in the rock mirrored on human flesh, and that moment of erotic intensity achieves immortality by analogy to the rock's sign of geological fortitude. After the speaker again experiences a moment of escape, this time from the complexities of romantic entanglements in his and his lover's past, the poem concludes with an image of the integration of the human and geological: "these ideograms / Printed on the immortal / Hydrocarbons of flesh and stone" (*Complete* 279–80). Rexroth has imported the same effect that Jeffers achieves with the pathetic fallacy, but has avoided using the trope. His modernist diction ("ideograms") and textualizing figure ("printed") disguise it well, but it is present nonetheless. The keynote trope of the "hypothesis" sounds again—in reading the surface of his lover's body as evidence of the geological process that inscribed the earth's surface, the speaker invests the rock with love.

Gary Snyder's geological mysticism is twice-removed, filtered through Rexroth's reduction of the Jeffersian stance, but his poems involving rocks and geology depart from and return to many of his precursors' strategies and insights. In 1955, Snyder worked on a trail crew in Yosemite National Park, and the poems that he wrote based on this experience, published in his first book, *Riprap*, are definitive examples of West Coast nature poetry. Snyder's lyric style combines many influences, primarily the modernist poetics of Pound and Williams, the wilderness lyrics of Rexroth, and classical Chinese and Japanese poetry. Based on these elements, Snyder's poetry appears to have little in common with Jeffers's long-lined, oratorical style. However, his hybrid poetics is often built upon, or anchored in, lyric strategies that can be found in Jeffers's work as well. At times, the modernist-derived style obscures the particularly Western attributes, but at others it mingles productively, extending Jeffers's legacy into the postwar and contem-

porary idiom. Of course, Snyder's grounding, as with Rexroth and Jeffers, is always the sacramental connection to nature.

One of Snyder's best known trail-crew poems, "Piute Creek," presents a nighttime meditation on permanence and flux that simultaneously rejects an overt connection to Jeffers's geological mysticism and adopts some of his lyric strategies.

One granite ridge
 A tree, would be enough
 Or even a rock, a small creek,
 A bark shred in a pool.
 Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted
 Tough trees crammed
 In thin stone fractures
 A huge moon on it all, is too much.
 The mind wanders. A million
 Summers, night air still and the rocks
 Warm. Sky over endless mountains.
 All the junk that goes with being human
 Drops away, hard rock wavers
 Even the heavy present seems to fail
 This bubble of a heart.
 Words and books
 Like a small creek off a high ledge
 Gone in the dry air.

A clear, attentive mind
 Has no meaning but that
 Which sees is truly seen.
 No one loves rock, yet we are here.
 Night chills. A flick
 In the moonlight
 Slips into Juniper shadow:
 Back there unseen
 Cold proud eyes
 Of Cougar or Coyote
 Watch me rise and go. (*No Nature* 6)

The poem's syntax and line breaks are more objectivist, or cubist even, than Rexroth's, and so its grammar is far from Jeffers's cumulative cadences. Yet, it does contain some of the same shifts in perspective, from minute naturalistic description to cosmic vision, that characterize the West Coast stance of Jeffers and Rexroth, and it also follows a two-part structure. What's more, the same passive state is rendered here as in "Oh Lovely Rock," a moment of clarity in which the speaker's response

seems beyond his control. Yet, because of the Sierra Nevada's vastness, and the speaker's solitude, the effect is somewhat different. Instead of "seeing" into the rock, or seeing geological process mirrored on the body of a beloved, Snyder's speaker *feels* the illusion of meaning based on what we think is certain, on physical mass, the "now." The shift from "mind" to "heart" back to "mind" is telling. Even emotion, the more fundamental response, fails to find correspondence at this moment. The flow of meaning, "like a small creek," evaporates. Unlike Jeffers and Rexroth, who find correlatives for the human in the nonhuman, Snyder, in this instance, finds no such reciprocity. It is not until the paragraph break, when the subject returns to his senses, so to speak, that the poem's "moral" can be drawn, and then a connection to the non-human is possible.

Snyder describes a mystical state as does Jeffers, but his syntax and imagery in the first stanza attempt to enact it, whereas Jeffers uses rhetorical language to present it. For the experience to be "processed," Snyder must append an explanatory statement. The "too much" of the mountain range produced a Zen emptiness, the clearness of the mind which is in fact no mind at all, an ineffable state that can only be described indirectly. As Jeffers was "seeing rock for the first time," Snyder's "clear, attentive mind" is seeing by being "truly seen." Empty of thought or emotion, the speaker cannot respond by attributing emotion to the nonhuman; there can be no "bestowal." Thus, "[n]o one loves rock," Jeffers and Rexroth notwithstanding. However, unusual for Snyder, a touch of the pathetic fallacy creeps in when the speaker turns from perceiving subject to perceived object. The "proud eyes / Of Cougar or Coyote" serve as the connective presence, the other, that was lacking in the first stanza. The conclusion is highly literary and allusive—the capitalized animal names, the echo of Yeats's "Lake Isle of Innisfree"—and it is this "lapse" into the rhetorical by which the speaker is naturalized by the beast's watchful presence, making the connection, however fleeting, at last.

A sustained sacramental connection is established when Snyder integrates a Rexrothian eroticism into his poetry. A love poem from *The Back Country*, "Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills, Your Body" (*No Nature* 157–58), presents a moment in which a lover's body and geological fact correspond under the hand and gaze of the male poet. As in Rexroth's poem, the presence of the beloved allows the speaker to escape the bonds of ego and merge with the Other; as in Jeffers's poem, love extends from the human and is returned by nature. The poem begins:

What my hand follows on your body
 Is the line. A stream of love
 of heat, of light, what my
 eye lascivious
 licks
 over, watching
 far snow-dappled Uintah mountains
 Is that stream.

Hand and eye mingle in a synesthesia of touch, taste, and sight, producing a continuum of sense and emotion so that looking with affection at a landscape, as the poet's friend did once, "—Drum Hadley in the Pinacate / took ten minutes more to look again—," becomes an erotic experience that quickens the pulse: "My heart beat faster looking / at the snowy Uintah mountains." Geology incarnates in the beloved,

As my hand feeds on you
 runs down your side and curls beneath your hip.
 oil pool; stratum; water—

and love-making mirrors geological cycles, the lovers learning that the "stream of love / of heat, of light, / . . . / Of power" flows from the earth's core and theirs too:

Beneath this long caress of hand and eye
 "we" learn the flower burning,
 outward, from "below".

Snyder has said that he considers the West's conjoining of "the Muse and Romantic Love" as a replacement for primitive sacramental rites. He writes, "The lovers [sic] bed was the sole place to enact the dances and ritual dramas that link people to their geology and the Milky Way" (124).⁶

In Rexroth's camping and mountaineering poems, the geological processes which inscribe meaning onto the earth's surface are personalized in the body of the beloved, and the sexual bond between lovers is sacramentalized through its participation in and embodiment of the deeper cycles of the earth. In Snyder's backcountry and trail crew poems, rock becomes the means to enlightenment, either by its vastness in the Sierra Nevada range, which pushes the mind to emptiness, or by its capacity to ground the metaphysical in the physical, as in his trail-building with "riprap"—an orientalist aesthetic dominates in these poems, based in part in Rexroth's model but quite distant from Jeffers's Romanticism. However, as in "Beneath My Hand and Eye," Snyder's

eroticism completes the connection to his precursors. Like Jeffers and Rexroth, he finds love incarnated in material nature through the Other. Snyder successfully melds the West Coast strategy to Imagist-Objectivist technique, achieving a sacramental connection to nature by adapting the material, mystical, and rhetorical levels of Jeffers's lyric strategy to modernist poetics. Seeing the varieties of geological experience allows the continuity between these very different West Coast poets to be truly seen.

ENDNOTES

1. The opposite of sacramental nature poetry is the "new nature poetry" described by Robert Langbaum over 40 years ago. Significantly, this type of nature poetry "defines itself precisely by opposing the pathetic fallacy" (326). According to Langbaum, the exemplary poets in this mode are Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore.

2. Robert Kafka reports that Jeffers, his son Garth, and Garth's friend, Lloyd Tevis, made the camping trip in early August 1936. They spent two days and one night in the canyon. See his account of the hike, and the subsequent attempts at retracing it, in this issue.

3. For a revised definition of a mystical state in terms of naturalism, see Kohak (60–66).

4. From *The American Heritage Dictionary* (3rd ed.).

5. Evidence for Jeffers's careful selection of his terms can be found in his correspondence. In a letter from February 1938, not long after "Oh Lovely Rock" was published in *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* (27 Sept. 1937), Jeffers employs similar terms as he explains his use of the pathetic fallacy: "Why else should a quite neutral thing . . . be somehow lovely and lovable"; and, "The feeling of deep earnestness and nobility in natural objects and in the universe: —these are human qualities, not mineral or vegetable, but it seems to me I would not impute them into the objects unless there were something in not-man that corresponds to these qualities in man" (SL 262–63).

6. Altieri makes the connection between this essay, "Poetry and the Primitive," and the poem under discussion here (141).

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l to r: Lloyd Tevis, Jr., Robert Scripture, Garth Jeffers, Bob Horton, Donnan Jeffers, probably on ranch near Gilroy, CA, mid-'30s. (Ident. by Donnan Jeffers.) Lloyd and Garth camped with RJ at Ventana Creek in August 1936. (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, U of TX, Austin.)

ROBERT KAFKA

JEFFERS'S 1936 VENTANA CREEK HIKE A MISCELLANY

Each August from 1997 to 1999, a party of hikers¹ retraced the route that Robinson Jeffers hiked along the Pine Ridge Trail and up the Ventana Creek gorge in August of 1936.² The ultimate objective was to find the rock that Jeffers wrote of in his famous lyric "Oh Lovely Rock," though the experience of the hike and the natural environment we encountered eclipsed the stated objective. Each year there was discussion among the hikers of the evidence available of Jeffers's effort and how it squared with the terrain before us. Afterward there was research to be done in preparation for the next year's hike. What follows is a distillation of those discussions and attendant research.

THE HIKE AND THE TEXTS

That Robinson Jeffers acquainted himself well with the backcountry of the Big Sur through all-day excursions, both on foot and horseback, is self-evident. The poetry and prose witness it, and the letters, both his and Una's, document it. But aside from the hike up Ventana Creek with his son Garth, and Garth's friend, Lloyd Tevis, there is little documentary evidence that Jeffers *overnighted* in the backcountry of the Big Sur. He did camp somewhere between Tassajara and Big Sur in 1938 with Garth and John Evans, Mabel Luhan's son,³ and apparently once overnighted on or near the summit of Pico Blanco with Garth.⁴ That he may have done so a few other times seems likely. In 1924, Una wrote to her close friend Hazel Pinkham that Robinson's brother Hamilton had driven them down the coast to Big Sur, which she says they had not done for six years—it was still an unpaved stage route at that time, and took half a day. During those six years Jeffers must have taken shorter trips, to Garapatas or Mal Paso, for example, or other likely destinations between Carmel and Big Sur, and perhaps he camped overnight in some of those locales, though again there is no record. Later references in the letters document a number of other one-day excursions or "pilgrim-

ages,” as the Jefferses referred to them, which were undertaken on foot or on horseback, but no other overnight camping trips. At least we may be confident that such excursions in the Big Sur backcountry were rare and valued opportunities for Jeffers.

The reason is not far to seek: Una had a strong antipathy to overnight camping. In 1915 she wrote to Hazel concerning her appreciation for J. Smeaton Chase’s *California Coast Trails*:

I usually hate to hear of campings-out.—I immediately image [sic] skilletts filled with scorched bacon, ghastly griddle cakes and unthinkable coffee—to say nothing of dirt all over one’s self and never a drop of hot bath water . . . and sun-burn!

Una wrote Hazel again in 1921, in dismay that their friends the Clapps were camping a month in Carmel: “Camping makes me shudder—it’s *such* hard work. So uncomfortable and untidy compared with stopping at home.”

Some of the details of the August 1936 hike, and the mystical night-time vision that Jeffers experienced at the party’s furthest incursion up the gorge, were memorialized in “Oh Lovely Rock.” But resonances of this outing are apparent in subsequent verses as well. Two poems written shortly afterward allude to it: “The Beaks of Eagles,” originally titled “Ventana Creek” (*CP* 5: 589), and “Night without Sleep.”⁵ The three opening lines of the former, though end-punctuated with a period, lack a main verb, as if Jeffers is conjuring the scene in his mind before he breaks out into the main thrust of the poem:

An eagle’s nest on the head of an old redwood on one of the precipice-footed
ridges
Above Ventana Creek, that jagged country which nothing but a falling meteor
will ever plow; no horseman
Will ever ride there, no hunter cross this ridge but the winged ones, no one will
steal the eggs from this fortress.
The she-eagle is old, her mate was shot long ago, she is now mated with a son of
hers. (*CP* 2: 537)

In “Night without Sleep” Jeffers lies awake at Tor House, 25 miles to the north of Ventana Creek, his mind running on the rearmament of nations and a war which he knew to be imminent, and imagining a contrapuntal natural violence occurring in the creek where he camped the previous summer:

In the Ventana country darkness and rain and the roar of waters fill the deep
mountain-throats.

The creekside shelf of sand where we lay last August under a slip of stars
 And firelight played on the leaning gorge-walls, is drowned and lost. The deer of
 the country huddle on a ridge
 In a close herd under madrone-trees; they tremble when a rock-slide goes down,
 they open great darkness-
 Drinking eyes and press closer.

Cataracts of rock

Rain down the mountain from cliff to cliff and torment the stream-bed. The
 stream deals with them. The laurels are wounded,
 Redwoods go down with their earth and lie thwart the gorge. I hear the torrent
 boulders battering each other,
 I feel the flesh of the mountain move on its bones in the wet darkness. (*CP* 2:
 558–59)

Together with the poem that documents the hike, these poems, composed within a few months of one another, form a triptych whose unifying element is the experience and the imaginative reconstruction of Ventana Creek. That Jeffers conceived of them in this way is suggested by the placement he gave to them in their first trade appearance in *Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems* (1937). The three poems occur together, probably in order of composition, as a coda to the volume. Jeffers preserved all three, and their adjacency in print, in his *Selected Poetry* of 1938. Tim Hunt's edition of the *Collected Poetry* takes chronology for an organizing principle, and so the juxtapositions are lost there, as they are in the Stanford *Selected Poetry* (2001), where other poems are placed amongst them. But the original propinquity is preserved in Albert Gelpi's selection for *The Wild God of the World* (Stanford, 2003)—though, following Hunt, “The Beaks of Eagles” is presented before “Oh Lovely Rock.”⁶

Recollection of the campfire and the creek echoes down through two other poems. In a poem first published in *The Saturday Review*, 28 March 1948, Jeffers despaired of the “monsters” who possessed the world, and had sprung “a squib / Over Bikini lagoon.” Then he turned to his “loved subject,” and cataloged local waterways, with Ventana Creek at the head of the list:

Nobler than man or beast my sea-mountains

Pillar the cloud-sky; the beautiful waters in the deep gorges,
 Ventana Creek and the Sur Rivers, Mal Paso Creek, Soberanes, Garapatas, Palo
 Colorado,
 Flow, and the sacred hawks and the storms go over them. (“What of It?” *CP*
 3: 208)

Finally, in the January 1951 issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Jeffers published an ode titled “Fire,” reprinted in *Hungerfield and Other Poems* (1954). The poem concatenates six vignettes involving fire—a hearth in an ancient hall, a campfire in Ventana Creek, a turf-fire in a hut in Connemarra, forest fire, the fire of the stars, and finally the fire of nuclear holocaust.⁸ The Ventana Creek vignette recalls some of the details from “Oh Lovely Rock,” with the typically Jeffersian device of distancing, this time through a doe’s eyes, implying a moral separation between the non-human witnesses and the unseen human actors:

A campfire in the slit gorge of Ventana Creek
 Flickers on smooth bare rock, the foundation of the mountain. Half a mile higher
 A doe looks down from the brink of the upper forest,
 Her fawn staggering behind her. She smells a little trouble of burning,
 She sees the black of night stuffing the gorge,
 Heavy and solid under the star-gray, black basalt idol
 Stuck in split rock, and under it and right through it
 A small red point twinkles, terribly alone,
 Reddest of stars, deep underneath, deep in the pit.
 She focusses on it her long soft ears, but at that distance
 It has no voice. (CP 3: 366)

These five descriptions—of the hike, the locale, and the campfire—testify to the hold that experience in early August of 1936 had on Jeffers. Soon afterward, the Ventana gorge and the lonely fire in the fastness of the wilderness had become iconic to him, and remained so to the end of his creative life.

WITNESSES

Una Jeffers, Garth Jeffers, and Lloyd Tevis have left accounts of the hike, although they are not wholly congruent. Perhaps if Una Jeffers’s diaries surface, they might be found to contain an additional account. What follows is as complete a record from these principals as can be assembled at this time.

Una Jeffers:

From letter to Blanche Matthias dated “August? 1936” by Mrs. Matthias:

Robin & Garth & Lloyd T. are going Thursday for three days in the mts.

From letter to Mabel Luhan, 10 August 1936:

Robin and Garth and Lloyd Tevis went out again to try to climb that inaccessible Mt. Stayed 3 days & 2 nights, packed their food & blankets on backs. . . . Donnan and I & Haig went to S.F., stayed with Noël & saw Tallulah Bankhead in *Reflected Glory*. I was interested in seeing her but it's a poor play—didn't give her any chance really. Mario was with us & Richard Haliburton [popular novelist] & Noël. Next day we went to a very solemn & grand wedding in Old Saint Mary's church with high Mass and communion.—I had never seen a Catholic wedding before, very impressive & beautiful music. We were also at the wedding breakfast at the house, but Donnan and I stayed long enough only to drink some champagne. It was already two o'clock & we had to meet Robin & Garth & Lloyd down below Big Sur at 6:30. We had a wild ride home; it was a crowded Sat. P.M. on the road. I had such a crowd of men attendants, Donnan, Henri Deering, Ben Lehman, Mario Ramirez, & Dick Haliburton.

I was awfully glad to see my two again—they were just two minutes late and have given up the mt. from this side. The last 2,000 ft are sheer rock—rotten so it breaks at touch & you'd fall hundreds of feet.

From letter to the Clapps, 26 August 1936:

Perhaps I told you Robin & Garth & Lloyd Tevis went on a 2 day walk, packs on back while Donnan & I stayed in town with Noël [Sullivan] & were very gay. They went off again for three days & we went with Noël again. The last time we saw Tallulah Bankhead in *Reflected Glory* pretty poor also an *Impressionist* Exhibit. There were many Renoirs but none of his I like best. Next day we went to a tremendously fashionable wedding in Old St. Marys (Noël's niece) & sat with the family. I had six beaux escorting me counting Donnan all staying at Noël's. Richard Haliburton was one. Henri Deering (the pianist friend of Mrs Gregory—lives in N.Y.) Ben Lehman & the beautiful & really charming Argentine friend of Noël's, Mario Ramirez. . . .

What Robin & Garth & Lloyd were trying to do was to climb Double Ventana Cone [sic] from the sea side. Even getting to its foot is almost impossible. No trails & thick underbrush then at last it rises a thousand feet of rock which is rotten & gives way at a touch. When they were within 200 ft. [sic] of the top Robin made them stop. A fall and death seemed certain. Later when we were down coast near San Simeon we stopped there at a gov't station to get some maps. It happened the man in charge was the very person who had surveyed Ventana region & he assured us that it is impossible of access from the sea side. He surveyed it from the other side & when he got to the top & looked over the edge he made sure it couldn't be done. Robin is still a great walker & loved this journey. Garth is strong as an ox. So they had fun. Donnan is a good walker too but not equal to the others.⁸

Garth Jeffers:

From "Poem-Source Anecdotes: 'Oh, Lovely Rock' & 'Hands'":

Around 1937 or '38 my friend Lloyd Tevis and I decided to attempt to climb Ventana Double Cone mountain from the West. Father may have toyed with the idea too for when the day that we had selected arrived, he suggested that he might go with us. We were not averse to the idea. I no longer remember our route and do not have a map at hand but I fancy we went up the trail along the Big Sur River for a way, then turned off up a creek. The terrain became steeper and more rocky as we proceeded and we were held up a number of times by Lloyd's Irish setter which had to be helped up some of the rock faces. Eventually it became obvious that we could go no farther so we settled down for the night.

After a modest repast Lloyd and I were soon asleep but Father always had trouble sleeping on the ground as long as I remember him (although he was known as the Little Spartan by his friends in school in Europe) and probably spent much of that night sitting close to the dying fire and encouraging it along and possibly scribbling an occasional thought on some scrap of paper he found in his pocket. He was not above using a bit of the paper lining his Prince Albert tobacco tin.

The next day we devoured whatever scraps of food remained and drove home.

Garth Jeffers had a well-deserved family reputation for amazingly accurate and detailed recollections. I reproach myself for not having questioned him closely about this hike. There were dozens of opportunities, but by the time our party made our first attempt, Garth had entered his final illness, and died the next year. Boon Hughey, however, who had earlier attempted to find the rock on his own, did have a few brief words with Garth at the 1996 Tor House Foundation Festival in Carmel. When asked how far up Ventana Creek his party had gotten, Garth replied dismissively (as imitated by Boon) with a voiceless bilabial affricate, adding "Not very far." He also indicated that they were prevented from going very far upstream because of the difficulties that the Irish setter had. This response does little to help pinpoint the campsite; Lloyd and Garth were powerful hikers, and what might have seemed not far to them might seem a considerable distance to others.

Lloyd Tevis:

The Tevis and Jeffers families were quite close. The Jefferses frequently spent Christmas with the Tevises; Lloyd's brother Richard continued his association with Lee and Donnan Jeffers until his death. Lloyd attended Berkeley with Garth, and later became a professor of zoology

there. He is co-author of *California Grizzly* (1955), an exhaustive natural and cultural history of the now-extinct bear, which has been recently reprinted, with a foreword by Rick Bass, by the University of California Press (1996).

In September 1997, after our first Ventana Creek hike, I telephoned Mr. Tevis, who was at that time living in Santa Rosa, California, and asked for his recollection of the hike. He did not recall that his Irish setter was along (see Garth's note, above), but rather vividly recalled some missing details, particularly relating to the situation and environs of the campsite and the rock wall. He agreed to supply answers to written questions; his responses appear here with his permission. His answers to the first submittal are signed and dated 3 October 1997; those to the follow-up questions are not signed and dated, but are postmarked 14 November 1997.

Q: Whose idea was it to climb the Double Cone from the west?

A: Mine. The Double Cone gave an objective to the hike, but the main purpose was to have an overnight hike.

Q: Why did you choose the route you did?

A: Because there was no trail—a challenge, and Ventana Cr. led directly to the Cone. All of us liked the idea of being in the wilderness away from any sign of man, including trails.

Q: Did you encounter other people on the trail?

A: No.—at least not along the [Ventana] creek but possibly on the [Pine Ridge] trail.

Q: Did you ever attempt the Double Cone summit by another route?

A: Garth and I climbed it by the north trail.

Q: What time in the morning did you hit the trail?

A: 8 a.m.

Q: Where did you park?

A: At the Pine Ridge Tr. trailhead.

Q: Pfeiffer's resort?

A: No.

Q: Did RJ drive?

A: I drove.

Q: How were you three outfitted?

A: Nothing high tech!

Q: What kind of packs, equipment did you carry?

A: Packsacs. Light weight camp cooking set for backpacking[.] Canteen or two for use on the final ascent. Garth and I had sleeping bags, Mr. Jeffers did not.

Q: How clothed?

A: Ordinary clothes. Shoes which could be classified as both work shoes and hiking shoes—leather.

Q: What did you bring to eat?

A: Steak

Q: Did you carry maps?

A: Topo map (not the current edition)

Q: Did you use the Pine Ridge Trail, the one that skirts high up the southerly wall of the Big Sur River Canyon before dropping down to Ventana Camp?

A: Yes.

Q: You mentioned scrambling out of the stream-channel with Garth to get your bearings at one point. Do you have any sense of about where that might have occurred? (see enclosed map).⁹

A: Possibly the ridge on the east side immediately south of the possible camp site which I have marked on the map.

Q: Were you successful in getting your bearings?

A: Yes. We could see the Double Cone and the steep “cataracts of rock” guarding it which would make ascent impossible for us. Also we saw cumulus clouds.

Q: When we hiked Ventana Creek last month, there were significant portions that could only be accomplished by wading knee-deep or more. Was that your experience?

A: No.

Q: Was the water high or low that year?

A: I would expect the water to be low in late August. I say "late" because cumulus clouds, if they occur at all, usually show up in September.

Q: Did you have to remove shoes?

A: No.

Q: I never fully appreciated the phrase in the opening line of the poem, "the pathless gorge of Ventana Creek" until last month. How did your party negotiate it?

A: Garth and I were experienced hikers, and Mr. Jeffers was in top physical condition.

Q: The spot where you camped—how far up the East Fork of Ventana Creek was that from the confluence with Doolan's Hole Creek?

A: See map. It may (quite likely) be that we did not get as far as indicated on the map.

Q: Or from the confluence with the Big Sur?

A: See map.

Q: If you don't recall, could you estimate how long you hiked from the confluence with the Big Sur to the campsite?

A: We made camp in the late afternoon after ascending the ridge and seeing that ascending the Double Cone would be impossible. We must have hiked almost all day.

Q: Did you camp on the east (or southeast) side of the creek, or on the west (or northwest) side—i.e., looking upstream, did you camp on the right or left side?

A: Left hand (northwest side). The Rock was on the right hand side (southeast). The stream made a sharp bend at that point, hitting the base of the rock wall.

Q: The rock that RJ wrote about—were you aware of it when you camped there?

A: Very much aware because it towered above us and partly enclosed our campsite.

Q: Can you describe it, or its environs?

A: The northwest side of the gorge had a sand bar on which we camped. The southeast side was a sheer rock wall carved out by the stream. The amount of visible sky was rather limited due to the narrowness of the gorge. The stream flowed against the rock wall.

Q: Do you have any particular recollections of this hike?

A: Everybody, including the irish setter, had a great time.

Q: Any memories of what RJ said or did?

A: Mr. Jeffers was not concerned about whether or not we conquered the Double Cone. For him the overnight hike was a rare opportunity, probably the only one during his married life, for him to get into the wilderness. The Rock, therefore, unsullied by Man, had a special primeval quality for him, different from other rocks which he might contemplate at home or within reach of the automobile. This is my analysis. Mr. Jeffers kept his thoughts to himself and did not talk very much, which was usual.

Q: He was 50 and you and Garth were 20 or 21—was he able to keep up? [This error arose from my initial misdating of the hike. In August 1936 Robinson was 49, and Garth was 19, and Lloyd would have been 19 or 20.]

A: Often we had to keep up with him!

Q: Did you three swim in the Big Sur?

A: No.

Q: Who did the cooking?

A: Garth and I. In this regard Mr. Jeffers was more an observer than a participant.

Q: What was cooked?

A: Steak.

Q: Did you ever hike the Ventana Creek again?

A: No.

Q: Did you hike anywhere else with Garth or Robin?

A: Many places with Garth. The only other hikes I took with Mr. Jeffers were family outings (strolls) at my uncle's ranch near Gilroy.

Q: Was Donnan ever along?

A: Donnan never hiked with Garth and me. He was not a hiker.

Q: Do you have any other recollections of the Jeffers family that you could share?

A: [No response]

Q: Since "Oh Lovely Rock" and "Night without Sleep" were both first published in *Selected Poetry*, which appeared in late 1938, I suppose the hike took place in August (the month mentioned in the latter poem), 1937. Would that square with your recollection? [This is erroneous. These two poems had first appeared in *Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems* in 1937. Following Garth Jeffers, above, I compounded the error by misidentifying the date of the hike, which took place not in 1937, but in 1936. The Jeffers family was in Ireland in August of 1937.]

A: August 1937 seems correct. I would favor early September (because of cumulus clouds) except that Garth and I had to be at school at Berkeley for the opening date.

Additional questions, sent to Lloyd Tevis on 23 October 1997:

Q: UJ says the hike was for three days, two nights. You and Garth both strongly imply that it was a one-nighter—and that is the impression one gets from reading the poem. Can you account for UJ's statement?

A: Absolutely a one-nighter.

In addition to the hiking references, there are other parts of the correspondence which do not ring quite true. Possibly there were exaggerations and embellishments to make the letters more impressive[.]

On the other hand, Mrs. Jeffers wrote about what was going on at the time, while my recollections are of the long ago and therefore may be inaccurate.

Q: UJ says "Robin and Garth and Lloyd went out again to try to climb that inaccessible Mt." I'm wondering about the word "again." The Jeffers family had recently returned from Taos—possibly UJ had told Mabel while there about a prior assault. Can you comment on this? You told me that you hadn't again tried the Double Cone from the west—but now I wonder if you had tried it previously.

A: There had been no previous attempts by any of us to scale the Ventana Double Cone. Neither the three of us together nor Garth and I together or alone ever again hiked Ventana Creek.

Q: UJ says she and Donnan drove down to meet you three below Big Sur—I assume that means at the Pine Ridge Trailhead. But [I] thought you had driven down. Do you remember driving back with her, or any of those men-folk she mentions? Possibly you parted ways with GJ & RJ when you reached the trailhead and drove back on your own?

A: Mrs. Jeffers and Donnan did not meet us. The three hikers drove home in my car, which Garth and I used whenever we hiked together. I never encountered the men attendants. In the crowded Jeffers car, what was done with Haig, who could not tolerate heat or closeness?

Q: UJ says you three emerged at about 6:30 p.m. If you had packed up at the campsite recorded in the poem, at, say, 9 a.m., and hiked back steadily, that would put you much farther upstream than any of us have ventured—very possibly to the point you indicated on the topo I sent you. (We broke camp at 9 a.m., and emerged about 2:15 p.m.) Any comment?

A: I doubt that we set 6:30 as the time we would return to the trailhead. I did not believe in setting a precise time when hiking in the wilds. But if we did set a precise time, I question that we were skillful enough to show up within two minutes of it. [Mr. Tevis here refers to Una's statement that the party emerged "just two minutes late."]

In marking the campsite on the map, I selected what appeared to be the right configuration of the creek, but I am inclined to think that we did not get that far.

Not having come close to the sheer face of VDC, we could not have touched it to determine the nature of the rock.

My recollection is that we broke camp very early and returned to the trailhead late in the afternoon.

Q: I'd like to do a brief article on the poem and the locale for the new journal *Jeffers Studies*. May I quote your answers?

A: Yes, but I am a patient not a doctor.

Of the discrepancies between Una's and Mr. Tevis's accounts, one results from my misunderstanding of one of Una's letters, which I communicated to Mr. Tevis. When Una describes the six men-folk who accompanied her home, I now realize she is speaking of her return trip from San Francisco to Carmel, not the return trip she claims to have made from Big Sur after picking up the three hikers (which should have struck me as grossly improbable). But the other incongruities in the accounts are probably unresolvable. Una says the hike was three days; Mr. Tevis says emphatically it was two days, and Garth appears to agree. Una refers twice to two hikes that seemed to have occurred in close temporal proximity. To one correspondent she says that the three hikers

had taken a two-day hike before embarking on the three-day hike, and to another that they had gone out "again" to attempt the Double Cone; Mr. Tevis says the only other hikes he took with Robinson were day-hikes, and that none of the three, either alone or together, ever hiked Ventana Creek again, nor had they attempted the Double Cone previously (meaning, presumably, from the west, since he states that he and Garth had previously climbed it from the north). Una says she picked up the three hikers and drove them home; Mr. Tevis says she did not meet them, that he drove Garth and Robinson home, and Garth's account seems to support this. The only person who might have been able to resolve or correct the accounts was Garth.

RETRACING THE HIKE

In 1997 and 1998, our party did this hike in two days and one night, but in 1999, intent on reaching the point suggested by Mr. Tevis on the topographical map, we spent three days and two nights, so as to have a full day to explore Ventana Creek.

The Pine Ridge trailhead is reached from the Big Sur Ranger Station, about a half-mile south of the entrance to Pfeiffer-Big Sur State Park, near the bottom of the hill that leads up to the Sycamore Canyon road (which leads to the beach-site of "Give Your Heart to the Hawks") and to the Post homestead at the summit. We set out each year at about 9 a.m. The trail begins at the east side of the parking lot, and climbs moderately about 1,200 feet vertically through riparian redwood and hardwood forest. After a mile or so, it levels out, and passes through patches of coastal scrub. We hear the Big Sur River in its gorge far below on our left as we walk through stands of redwood, buckeyes, and tanbark oak, and a number of common wildflowers—paintbrush, sticky monkey-flower, and bush lupine. Across the gorge to the north, the Manuel Peak Trail can be seen climbing steadily through the shadeless coastal chaparral of the south-facing flank of the peak; we're grateful to be traveling mostly in the shaded protection of the north-facing slope of the gorge, among the redwoods and hardwoods. About half-way to Ventana Camp on the Big Sur River, we cross Bad Gulch, reminding us of the description in "Night without Sleep" even before we reach Ventana Creek. The gulch has been torn out by raging storm waters, pulling shallow-rooted redwoods down in their violent descent into the gorge. Intermittently, Ventana Double Cone, the Window, and Island Mountain are visible across the gorge to the northeast. Four miles from the trailhead, we take a left fork and follow a series of switchbacks down a fairly steep declivity, descending about 600 vertical feet, and arrive at Ventana Camp on the Big Sur River.

This is a good place to stop for lunch and an hour's swim in the Big Sur, which flows over boulders and spreads out into pools of varying depth before descending again. Some are deep enough that we can jump from a ledge 15 feet above the river and not hit bottom. Refreshed, we lift our packs again and head west for a few hundred feet, coming to a cut in the north bank that angles slightly to the northwest. This is all that remains of a diversion channel that was built as part of a century-old scheme to dam the Big Sur. Fortunately, the Ventana Power Company suffered massive financial losses in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the scheme was dropped, and the Big Sur continues to flow free.¹⁰

We follow the diversion channel for a few hundred feet, where it joins Ventana Creek, only a stone's throw above its confluence with the Big Sur. Here we change to wading foot-gear, for though there are narrow rocky banks on either side, there are stretches in which the gorge-walls rise sheer from the rushing waters and progress can only be made by wading sometimes thigh-deep up the defile. I have a new appreciation for Jeffers's description of this as a "pathless gorge."

Soon we come to the point where Doolan's Hole Creek tumbles out of the wilderness on the west bank into Ventana Creek. On the return trip of our final hike in 1999, George St. Clair revisits with Boon an albino redwood some short distance up this creek, which he had first seen many years before. We recall that Jeffers had seen such a prodigy, and had written to Dr. Lyman Stookey about it after he and Una had moved to Carmel (Ridgeway 20).¹¹ I try to follow, but fatigue and the forbidding redwood logjams stuck in the steep gorge dissuade me; I am content to wait for a report. Forty-five minutes later, our friends emerge, with a photo of the albino as a memento.

Another hundred yards or so of wading upstream and we come to a level slip of gravel and earth on the western bank. We haul out and decide to make camp here, although there is no massive rock wall in sight. The first year we discover a colony of ladybugs entirely covering a low bush, thousands of them. Each year we will camp at the same spot; we dub it Ladybug Flats. After dinner and talk by the stream, we roll out our bags and sleep under the "slip of stars" formed by the steep gorge-walls.

After a morning repast we leave our heavy packs in camp (we have never encountered anyone else in Ventana Creek) and take only a few items—camera, compass, lunch, water filter—and resume the upstream hike. Boulder-hopping, slippery redwood logjam-scaling, thigh-deep wading with uncertain footing, our progress is slow and deliberate. Each subsequent year we marvel at how the gorge seems to have changed—logjams seem to appear and disappear, stretches of the gorge seem

wholly unfamiliar—or is it just our faulty memories? The route is disorienting even for those with an excellent sense of direction, and we cannot be sure of our exact location; the micro-topography does not correspond well to the USGS topographical map.¹² Boon at one point asks me what direction we are heading. “North,” I reply. He shows me his compass, pointing south. A half-mile later, the compass points north; I am unaware we have changed direction.

Along the way, we come upon an enticing pool in the midst of the creek, only about six feet in diameter, and six feet deep. The limpid water pours over a wide boulder into it, but with such imperturbability that it is invisible. Only the bubbles that well up in the pool indicate the flow. It is getting warmer, and a couple of us slip into the pool to be refreshed. The water is cold, but not achingly so. A 10-minute soak could turn into half an hour, but we have another purpose here. As we continue upstream, we catch glimpses of water ouzels, or American dippers, darting ahead of us just above the surface of the creek, and recall that George Sterling had taken Jeffers to a spot where they could be seen. Occasionally we spot “high and slender Santa Lucian firs” near the ridge-lines far above with their distinctive thin candle-flame outline, and see above them the white scars of “cataracts of slide rock” and the “star-color precipices.” These firs are “the rarest and most narrowly distributed of all fir species” (Elliot 153).

The first year, we are perhaps too hungry for the object of the quest, and settle on a rock face on the northwest side of the creek. None of us expresses disappointment, though we all certainly feel it. This rock face is far from imposing. After Lloyd Tevis suggested a location on a map on the opposite bank, we push further upstream in subsequent years. In 1999, we discover a site that appears to fit Mr. Tevis's description. It is a perfectly vertical rock wall, several hundred feet high, at least half again as high as anything we had seen previously, with an erosion-smoothed face at the bottom. I make a mental note to bring a clinometer and a measured string next time, to calculate its height. The creek at this point flows out of the north, and is deflected by the rock wall to the west, as in Mr. Tevis's description. There is no sand bar on the opposite bank, only a stony and gravelly shingle. With varying water levels and violent winter storm drainage, such minor contours inevitably change from year to year. Enclosed by the high gorge walls and the redwood canopy, the site is quite dark—too dark for a photograph, since we only have a cheap disposable camera. We will have to return some day with better equipment. We push on further, but discover no other likely site. Boon and George go even further, with the same result. With fair confidence that we have found the site, we hike back to Ladybug Flats, and the next morning hike out to the trailhead the same way we came in.

POSTSCRIPT

Boon has packed out a fist-sized dark gray rock that we found in the creek. Wondering whether it is diorite, I show it to Bill Selby, professor of Geography and Earth Science at Santa Monica College. I do not disclose what I think it might be until he makes an initial identification.

WS: "Large crystals indicate it's clearly plutonic igneous rock. From the weight and dark color, I'd say it's somewhere between diorite and gabbro."

RK: "You said the magic word—diorite. Jeffers said he was looking at 'light gray diorite with two or three slanting seams.' But what do you mean by 'between diorite and gabbro'?"

WS: "There's a spectrum that we use to identify igneous rocks. The spectrum applies to plutonic, or intrusive rocks (rocks that formed under the earth's crust, where they cooled very slowly, thus forming large crystals) and volcanic, or extrusive rocks (which formed above the earth's crust, and cooled relatively quickly, thus forming small crystals). It works like this:

Plutonic Rocks:	Granite	Diorite	Gabbro
Volcanic Rocks:	Rhyolite	Andesite	Basalt

"Of course there are many other rocks throughout each spectrum. The rocks on the left side are called 'felsic' and are high in silica—thus making them light in color and weight. Those on the right are called 'mafic' and are high in metals like iron and magnesium, making them heavy and dark-colored.

"The rock we're looking at is on the dark gray and heavy side, so I'd put it somewhere between diorite and gabbro. RJ described his rock as light-gray, which would imply something on the left side of diorite in the spectrum. But look here: the two sides are different. This side shows the true appearance of the rock, which is dark. But the other has been weathered and eroded, and it's much lighter."

RK: "RJ mentioned two or three slanting seams."

WS: "What did he mean by seams? Did he mean veins?"

RK: "I don't know. Maybe."

WS: "Well, if he did, there are white veins in this rock. They're formed in this way. In the subterranean batholithic chamber, as the rock cools and crystallizes, it contracts. This leaves gaps between some of the crystals. As it happens, the heavier rock (on the mafic end of the scale) has a higher melting point, so it crystallizes first. Then the lighter felsic rock, still liquid, rushes in and fills the gaps. That's why the veins are lighter-colored. In this case, white."

There is enough contradiction, speculation, and tantalization in the search for the rock that fascinated Jeffers's "eyes and mind" to keep Jeffersians returning to the creek gorge, to try to eke out some further facts or work through some further implications. Our party has made some progress, and has made a possible identification of the campsite where Jeffers experienced "the flame-lit surface" and gave voice to "the real and bodily and living rock." Others will follow, with determinations and discoveries of their own. It is our hope that this wilderness remains as lonely and pristine for them as it has been for us.

ENDNOTES

1. Participants were Boon Hughey, co-author of the indispensable guide to the Jeffers backcountry *Beauty Without Price: Jeffers Country Revisited* (*Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 98–99), Rob Kafka, and son Gene Kafka. John Courtney (Tor House Foundation Board Member) participated the first two years. In 1997, we were joined by John's son Matt, in 1998 by Lindsay Jeffers and Jeffrey Moore, and in 1999 by George St. Clair.

2. The date of the hike is fixed by a letter from Una to Mabel Dodge Luhan of 10 August 1936. See the following section, "Witnesses."

3. "On May 11 he [John Evans] and Robin & Garth are going into the hills on a walking trip for 2 days. Donnan and I will take them to Tassajara and pick them up two days after at Big Sur" (undated letter [before 11 May 1938], UJ to Mabel Dodge Luhan). "Donnan and I took John, Garth, and Robin to Tassajara this morn. and left them starting away with heavy packs on their backs. Very gay for a 2 day walk. They must be sleeping by their bon-fire now; it's 10:30 pm" (undated [11 May 1938] fragment, UJ to Mabel Dodge Luhan).

4. Robert Brophy mentions another UJ letter in which she refers to this outing, but does not recall the reference (e-mail). John Courtney remembers that Lee Jeffers spoke of this hike to him in the early 1990s (e-mail).

5. Boon Hughey first brought the interrelationship of these poems to my attention.

6. The sequential dating of these three poems presents a problem, but it seems likely that they were written in the order they appeared in *Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems*: "Oh Lovely Rock," "The Beaks of Eagles," and "Night without Sleep." It is clear that the last composed was "Night without Sleep," which documents the Ventana Creek hike as having occurred "last August." As Hunt notes, Jeffers gave December 1936 as the date of composition in his 1941 lecture tour (*CP* 5: 100). Hunt conjectures that the composition of "The Beaks of Eagles" was in late winter or early spring 1936, relying on watermark testimony and on Jeffers's notation at the bottom of the manuscript which suggests that the poem might have been intended as the opening of a narrative (*CP* 5: 99). This evidence is important but not conclusive. Hunt does not consider intertextual evidence, which seems to me more compelling. Nothing written prior to the hike contains a reference to Ventana Creek. In fact, all of the waterways of the Big Sur region that

Jeffers refers to in “What of It?”—and in the rest of his oeuvre, as far as I have been able to determine—are traversed by the coast highway where Jeffers would have encountered them, except for Mill Creek, a tributary of Bixby Creek mentioned in “Thurso’s Landing” and “The Loving Shepherdess,” which is traversed by Palo Colorado Road. Only one other, Juan Higuera Creek, which like the Ventana is tributary to the Big Sur, does not empty directly into the Pacific—and it too is traversed by the coast road in the town of Big Sur. The unbridged tributary creeks of the interior wilderness, except the Ventana, are absent in name from the canon. This suggests that “The Beaks of Eagles” was written after the August 1936 hike, not before. If we accept this logic, we still do not know which of the two—“Oh Lovely Rock” or “The Beaks of Eagles”—was composed first; we are thrown back on our intuition. But the immediacy of “Oh Lovely Rock” strongly argues for its priority. “The Beaks of Eagles” was first printed privately for Albert Bender in a limited edition of 135 copies by the Grabhorn Press in 1936. Bender evidently used the copies for Christmas gifts in 1936. Although the month of issuance is not given, it was probably December, since Heller and McGee, in their definitive bibliography, list it as the penultimate publication of 1936 of the Grabhorn Press, between two other explicitly Christmas-tide publications. Also, Una speaks at least twice of mailing out copies to friends in letters written in December 1936 (unpublished letter to Albert Bender, 21 December 1936; letter to Mabel Luhan, 31 December 1936). This publication history allows sufficient time after the early August hike and the presumed composition of “Oh Lovely Rock” for Jeffers to have composed “The Beaks of Eagles,” to have offered it to his friend and patron Bender, and for Grabhorn to have produced it. All of this leads me to hazard that “Oh Lovely Rock” was written immediately after the hike, in the second or third week of August; “The Beaks of Eagles” sometime after that, but probably (because of the exigencies of the Grabhorn publication schedule) before the end of September, and “Night without Sleep” in December 1936.

7. David Rothman pointed out the connection of “Fire” to the Ventana Creek poems of 1936 (e-mail).

8. Excerpted by permission of Jeffers Literary Properties. I am indebted to Dr. Robert J. Brophy for discovering the relevant reference in this unpublished letter and for providing me with a photocopy of the manuscript.

9. This map and some pictures from the hikes may be viewed at <<http://www.jeffers.org/js/issues/vol8num1/maps/ventanacr2.html>>.

10. For more on this project, and a photo by Steve Chambers of the diversion channel, see Hughey, “Ventana.”

11. For an account of George’s earlier visit to the albino redwood in Doolan’s Hole Creek gorge just before being caught in a rare Ventana snowstorm, and a subsequent climb into and a rappel out of “The Window” (from which Creek and the Wilderness get their Spanish name), see Roberts. Roberts mentions another albino redwood at Fern (i.e., Fernwood) campground on Highway 1 in Big Sur. Yet another may be seen in the gulch that divides the groups of cabins at Deetjen’s Big Sur Inn on Highway 1 south of Big Sur. The latter two resemble large stumps not more than 10 feet high with white foliage springing forth. The one in Doolan’s Hole Creek, however, while short, has a more typical redwood shape. Garth Jeffers,

who had worked as a forest ranger, once remarked that albino redwoods are not as rare as one might suppose.

12. After the 1998 hike, I came across a geological monograph that supports this observation: "The most inaccessible and probably most interesting of the sedimentary areas in the southern half of the quadrangle is the unit exposed in Ventana Creek near the center of sec. 15 . . . The topographic mapping in this area is not accurate and added greatly to the difficulty of delimiting this unit" (Fiedler 222–23). Although this account deals with sedimentary rock, which does not include diorite, the creek cuts through several zones of differing types of rock, including igneous. Boon later wrote: "There are all kinds of sharp bends and doglegs in the creek that don't even show up on the map, and any one of which could be the one which LT [Lloyd Tevis] described as the campsite" (Hughey, e-mail).

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RONALD P. OLOWIN

ROBINSON JEFFERS AND THE
DRACONID METEOR SHOWER
OF OCTOBER 9, 1946

She found her old father
Working the treadle grindstone behind the house, grinding an axe, leaning the
steel on the stone
So that it screamed, and a wild spray of sparks
Jetted on the black air.

.....
He stooped over the stone, the
steel screamed like a horse, and the spark-spray
Spouted from the high hill over land and sea. *It was like the glittering night last
October*
*When the earth swam through a comet's tail, and fiery serpents
Filled half of heaven.* (CP 3: 282–83, emphasis added)

The Jeffers Chronology <www.jeffers.com> reports that Robinson Jeffers finished “The Inhumanist” in the spring of 1947 and by July of that year was nearly finished typing *The Double Axe*, in which the lines above were first published. Jeffers describes a recollection of observing a meteor shower the preceding October, rightly attributing the phenomenon to the interception of a particle stream as the earth passes through the debris trail left in the orbital trajectory of a comet. The passage represents another instance of the poet using actual observations of the sky and celestial phenomena as an element in his work.

As comets are detected, they are traditionally named after their discoverers. The first so done, that of comet Halley, was named after the English astronomer Edmond Halley, the person to identify the periodic return of the comet that bears his name. In 1705 he published his *A Synopsis of the Astronomy of Comets*, which included calculations showing that comets observed in 1531, 1607, and 1682 were really one and the same (Halley). He predicted the comet’s return in 1758 and it was spotted late that year. Halley died in 1742, just 16 years before the comet’s detection, but the comet was named in his honor, which began the astronomical tradition of naming comets after their discoverers.

Another periodic comet, returning nearly every six and a half years, was discovered in 1826 by the Austrian astronomer Wilhelm, Baron von Biela (Kronk). But Biela's comet turned out to be a very unusual comet indeed. It was seen to undergo a series of remarkable transformations; in 1846 it was seen to break into two pieces, and in 1852 the fragments returned as twin comets, never to be seen again. In 1872 and 1885, however, when the Earth slid past the path of the comet's known orbit, bright showers of meteors were seen, lending support to the conjecture that some meteors came from fragments of comet debris that plunge through the Earth's atmosphere.

These meteoroids enter the Earth's atmosphere at approximately the same time, and appear by perspective to emerge from a common place in the sky, called the "radiant." Typically, the radiant is identified by its location in a constellation. The debris from Biela's comet is hence known as the Andromedids (or sometimes, Bielids, after the astronomer) because they are seen to radiate from the direction of the constellation Andromeda. Some showers return annually, like the familiar August Perseids, seen emanating from the Constellation Perseus, while others occur at greater intervals, irregularly, or not at all, depending on the relative positions of the shower orbits and Earth's orbit. Some meteor showers are notable for their remarkable intensity. On November 12, 1833, the great Leonid meteor storm occurred, and tens of thousands of meteors were observed in a single night. The staggering display was seen in the early morning all over North America, over sea and land, and initiated the first serious study of meteor showers. Reactions to the display spanned from superstitious hysterics exclaiming Armageddon was at hand to the excited awe of those fortunate to witness a thousand meteors a minute that emanated from the region of Leo. Newspapers of that day suggested that hardly anyone was unaware of the spectacle, for, if they were not awakened by the excited cries of their neighbors, they were usually awakened by flashes of light made by the larger fireballs. On the "Winter Night of the Falling Stars," the Kiowa Indians "were awakened by a night turned into day with something awful going on." They regarded it as ominous and watched the dreadful sight till dawn (Momaday). Soon after, the Leonids were also found to be periodic, recurring every 33 years, and records of their appearance go back as far as the 10th century (Hogg 215-21).

Enter comet Giacobini-Zinner. On December 20, 1900, the comet that was to become Giacobini-Zinner was discovered by Michel Giacobini in France (Pickering). Having quite an elongated orbit some 3.5 times as wide as the Earth's and tilted nearly 32 degrees to the plane of the solar system, the period of the comet is a mere 6.6

years. The name Zinner was attached to it when its orbital properties were correlated with a comet observed on October 23, 1913, by Ernst Zinner in Germany. Though a small periodic comet, Giacobini-Zinner caused one of the largest meteor shower events ever seen. On the night of Monday, October 9, 1933, a meteor blizzard exploded from the direction of the constellation Draco, and for a short time the event produced nearly 100 meteors per minute, or about 6,000 per hour (King)! Now called the Draconids, the shower's return was eagerly awaited by meteor observers. Meteor activity was virtually absent during the 1940 and 1945 seasons, but astronomers made predictions for the very favorable 1946 return. In that year, the comet swung closest to the sun on September 18, and just 15 days later the Earth crossed the comet's orbit right behind it.

Astronomers the world over were eager to observe a repeat performance at the comet's 1946 appearance, and the Editor of the *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (PASP)* "Comet Notes," an astronomer from Lick Observatory, one Hamilton S. Jeffers, was no exception. Robinson's younger brother wrote in the September 1946 issue of *PASP* that

On July 27 Comet Giacobini-Zinner, which was of magnitude 9.5, appeared as a small round cone with a trace of tail. During October it will move rapidly southward, and the brightness will slowly diminish.... It will be most interesting, on October 9-10, to see whether the anticipated meteor shower, mentioned in the Comet Notes of the August issue, actually occurs, and whether or not it is spectacular. (Note Added in Proof: The shower, on October 9, was one of the most spectacular ever seen on the Pacific Coast. Further details will be given in the December issue.) (319)

On the night of Wednesday, October 9, 1946, despite the bright Moon which would wax to fullness the next day (Espenak), observers reported visual rates that were nearly 4,000 meteors per hour, with newly devised radar detection rates reaching over 10,000 per hour! All throughout the evening, west of the Mississippi, the display was awesome. At the University of Oklahoma Observatory, Professor Balfour S. Whitney and his team of students estimated hourly rates of nearly 3,000 (Oliver 29-30), and from Southern California, blistering counts were tabulated at Griffith Observatory near Los Angeles, with meteors streaming in at the rate of several every second. The grand finale for the California observers was the appearance of a bolide, an electric blue-white fireball, that left a persistent luminous yellow train in the sky for several minutes, which drifted, became diffuse, and finally contorted itself into the shape of a horseshoe before disappearing into the night sky (Clemenshaw 362).

From the Carmel shores the radiant in Draco was over half way to the zenith and was likewise visible from the Santa Cruz hills. The moon was low in Pisces, and, though it blocked the fainter members of the celestial pyrotechnic display with its brilliance, the brothers Jeffers reported in their own ways the heavenly events that touched and moved them. Whether they communicated the details and expectations of the Draconids directly to each other, we do not know. Both were astute observers in their own right and reported the event as they “saw” it: in poetry or in scientific prose. One wonders, though, if Robinson’s choice of words describing the meteors as “fiery serpents” is a reference to the comet’s tail or a subtle allusion to the serpentine figure of the constellation Draco that harbors the Giacobini-Zinner meteor shower radiant.

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BOOK REVIEW

Back From the Far Field: American Nature Poetry in the Late Twentieth Century. By Bernard W. Quetchenbach. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000. 189 pp. \$19.50.

REVIEWED BY N. M. LEIBLIC

As the planet spins and the rainforests shrink, and the ozone thins and the coastlands sink under ever-rising waters, Bernard W. Quetchenbach rightly examines a poetics that matters. In *Back From the Far Field*, he campaigns for the unique position of contemporary nature poets, who, he says, find themselves in the aesthetic quandary of attempting to speak authoritatively for nature, with a publicly accessible voice, and at the same time appeal to an audience increasingly interested in the personal voice of private experience. Robert Bly, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry comprise the focus of the discussion and demonstrate the characteristically American “self-consciousness” (to use Peter Fritzell’s terms, as Quetchenbach often does) that is required of the effective contemporary nature writer. According to Quetchenbach, Fritzell defines this self-consciousness as vacillation between the opposing needs to employ objectivity and concurrently portray the individual as a part of nature, requiring both a scientific or distant perspective and a personal subject matter and voice. *Back From the Far Field* presents effectual American nature writing as the balanced interplay between these viewpoints.

What Quetchenbach continually refers to as “self-consciousness” appears in light of his textual evidence as not so much the poet’s admitted perspective tension but a divulgence of the poet’s personal life in the first-person narrative voice. Quetchenbach places Robinson Jeffers as the Modern forerunner to Contemporary nature poetry but says that Jeffers lacks the necessary self-consciousness. The problem with Jeffers, Quetchenbach observes, is that his poetry cannot achieve an authoritative yet personal voice because he does not write from an autobiographical perspective and fails to acknowledge himself as a human being and member of the very community he criticizes. But Jeffers readers will soon notice that Quetchenbach’s claims are based

on only a minimum selection of texts. He focuses on “The Purse-Seine,” “Oh Lovely Rock,” “Boats in a Fog,” and “Love the Wild Swan” (which he claims is the most self-conscious of Jeffers’s poems). He does not mention “Apology for Bad Dreams,” “The Blood-Guilt,” “De Rerum Virtute,” or the Una poems, which are just a few of those offering the self-acknowledgement by which Quetchenbach distinguishes the successful contemporary voice. He later admits his reasons for including Jeffers in this study: Jeffers’s evident environmental “message” and his significance to contemporary environmentalists—reasons that seem badly superficial considering the scope of Jeffers’s work. Readers may have a difficult time evaluating the Jeffers discussion, for Quetchenbach does not include volume or page references with the textual citations.

Theodore Roethke, Quetchenbach says, is the first to exhibit the deep inward vision and self-consciousness that characterize the contemporary period. Whereas Jeffers provides sweeping panoramic views observed from an elevated distance, Roethke invites the reader to be a voyeur, offering a look into his personal history. Quetchenbach considers Roethke’s use of the first-person point of view, together with the apparent connections of his subjects to his own life events, sufficient to distinguish him as revolutionarily “self-conscious,” the pivotal shift from Modern to Contemporary.

Readers more interested in Bly or Berry may be disappointed by the slighter examination and textual support these authors receive in comparison to Snyder, who is by far the shining star of the book. Bly’s significant contribution to nature writing, Quetchenbach observes, is his recognition of the psychological dissociation at the root of human disregard for nature; his poems deal in the wildness of the human psyche, and his prose poems more effectively utilize the public voice. But even in the section “Bly and the Public Voice” Quetchenbach does not explain the particular qualities, aside from celebrity, that make Bly’s voice successfully public. Berry’s voice succeeds publicly and privately, according to Quetchenbach’s standards, because it offers the reader insight to the peculiar rural communities that Berry knows as home. At the same time, however, Quetchenbach expresses concern that Berry’s rural tendencies may exclude most poetry readers, who live in cities. Quetchenbach provides a relatively thorough aesthetic history for Snyder and supports him above all others as having achieved the sought-for hybrid voice—publicly effective and privately intriguing—through a multitude of faculties: spokesperson, naturalist, and shaman. *Back From the Far Field* pays a proper tribute to the committed activism and humanitarian efforts that extend Snyder’s poetic vision. Of course, celebrity appears to be a significant factor in Snyder’s suc-

cess as a spokesperson. Clearly, his achievements as a poet are behind this, but his fame is also a product of his quirky lifestyle. Although Quetchenbach doesn't directly admit such, his claims about Bly and Snyder in particular suggest that celebrity may be a requirement for "self-consciousness." Contemporary audiences, it seems, demand an interesting real life behind interesting poetry.

Teachers of nature poetry or American Literature may find *Back From the Far Field* useful for its introductory examination of some of the major trends and topics in twentieth-century poetics. Nature poets and writers might interpret in Quetchenbach's consideration of public voice an urgent call for purpose in their writing. In this panoramic view of contemporary nature poetry, also including William Everson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dana Gioia, Mary Oliver, and Aldo Leopold, readers will find a varied amalgam attempting to solidify the place of poetry in wild nature.

NEWS AND NOTES

The Western Literature Association hosted its annual conference at Big Sky, Montana, September 29–October 4, 2004. Here, Robert Brophy presented “Beyond the ‘Big Sky’: The Cosmic Vision of Robinson Jeffers.”

The October 2004 Tor House Foundation Fall Festival—“Nature and Landscape”—was held at the Brazil Ranch on the Big Sur coast. The morning session offered seminar papers: “The History of the Brazil Ranch,” by Richard B. Tobin; “Terror/Terroir: Jeffers and the Dark, Wild, Beautiful and Terrifying Spirit of Big Sur,” by James Karman; and “Pico Blanco and the Watchers on the Ridges,” by Sandy Lydon. In the afternoon, Ronald Olowin presented “Verse and Universe,” and David B. Goldwin presented “Lawrence Clark Powell and Robinson Jeffers: The Bookman and The Poet.”

The 11th Annual RJA Conference was held at the University of Nevada, Reno, February 18–20, 2005: “Strong Music and Hard-Edged Wisdom: Robinson Jeffers as Political Poet.” Festivities began with the Friday evening poetry reading at the Record Street Café.

The Conference Program opened Saturday morning with remarks from President Jim Baird. The first panel—“Inheritance and Legacy: Identifying Jeffers’s Politics”—offered “Jeffers, Son of Jefferson: A Poet’s Politics,” by Robert Zaller; “Mapping Jeffers’s Political Trajectories,” by Peter Quigley; “‘Sacred Madness’: Robinson Jeffers’s ‘Dear Judas’ and the Politics of Cultural Fundamentalism,” by Adam B. Tavel; and “‘Old Violence Is Not Too Old to Beget New Values: Robinson Jeffers as Public Poet” by ShaunAnne Tangney.

The early afternoon audience enjoyed “Jeffers’s Responses to War,” a panel featuring Rob Kafka’s “War, Idealism, and the Young Jeffers: Newly Discovered Juvenilia,” Jim Baird’s “Pearl Harbor: Why Fly the Flag?” and George Hart’s “To Keep One’s Own Integrity: Jeffers, Emerson, and the Crisis of World War II.”

The late afternoon panel included Noelle Leiblic, Corey Lewis, and C. Travis Webb in “Hopelessly Fatalist? A Panel Discussion on Jeffers, Service Learning, and Activism.”

Conference attendees concluded Saturday evening with a lovely reception at the Sienna Hotel.

Sunday morning commenced with the RJA Business Meeting, which was effectively businesslike. Conference discussion began with Shaun Griffin and Christopher Cokinos, reading “Jeffers and Contemporary Political Poets,” followed by the first panel, “Disorderly Politics, Disquiet Poetics.” Here, C. Travis Webb spoke on “The Long Dying: Jeffers, Spengler, and the Fallacy of Progress.” Matthew Murray presented “Through the Strained Fabric.” Aaron K. DiFranco discussed “Chivying the Deep: *The Double Axe* as Transgressive Pastoral,” and Karen Lawson presented “If It Would Make You Happy: The Politics of Gender in ‘The Loving Shepherdess.’”

The Sunday afternoon panel—“Influences and Intersections”—featured “On a Hawk: Robinson Jeffers and Jibanananda Das” by Abhijeet Paul; “Bukowski’s Only Hero” by David Johansson; and “Two Genres: Jeffers as Seer and Prophet” by Robert Brophy.

The conference program concluded with the final panel, “The Role of Science in Jeffers’s Politics,” including Stuart Noble-Goodman’s “Jeffers and the Politics of Discovery,” Ronald Olowin’s “Cosmic and Political Landscapes of Robinson Jeffers,” and David Copland Morris’s “‘Sadly Smiling’: The Double Edge of Jeffers’s Environmental Politics.”

Attendees regretfully departed from yet another successful RJA Conference.

On August 14, 2004, the art print of the April 4, 1932 *Time Magazine* cover, picturing Robinson Jeffers, first became available for purchase on Amazon.com (\$92.72 framed).

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