

# JEFFERS STUDIES



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# JEFFERS STUDIES

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## JIM BAIRD

### EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Jeffers Studies* contains articles with new information about the poet's life and works; it also includes accounts of works which Jeffers abandoned, but which are nonetheless full of poetry and ideas which are of great interest to Jeffers readers and scholars.

The first article is Tim Hunt's analysis of when Jeffers wrote "Shine, Perishing Republic" (1921–22) and why he delayed including it in his breakthrough collection, *Tamar and Other Poems* (1924), instead publishing it in *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (1925). The reasons Hunt finds for this delay extend beyond this one poem to include the larger issue of context. He points out that in the wake of the dominant critical approach that many of us absorbed years ago, New Criticism, context is irrelevant because each poem is an independent language event to be understood only in terms of itself. Instead of adopting this approach, Hunt describes several contexts in which "Shine, Perishing Republic" might have been read by early readers. If the poem had been included in *Tamar and Other Poems*, which we know he considered doing from a preliminary table of contents he made for that work, they might have thought that the decay he described could have as its source the disillusionment following World War I and the subsequent frenzied hysteria of the Jazz Age. The poem also appeared in an anthology of American poetry collected by Louis Untermeyer in 1935, which gave many readers (including me) their introduction to Jeffers' work. Unfortunately, Untermeyer did not include the original publication date in his collection, so a reader of that volume might have thought that the poem was written in 1935 and that the strife it notes came from the great depression, the dust bowl, and other problems which the country had difficulty facing.

But Hunt maintains that the context in which Jeffers placed the poem was far more important than topical concerns, a wider context

of his own definition. Hunt points out that Tamar and some of the other female characters in the poems in the *Tamar* collection and others from that time who were not included could be considered “daughters of violence.” After the carnage and chaos of World War I, Tamar could have considered her transgressions not only justified but tame. But by the time of the *Roan Stallion* collection, Jeffers had moved to the recognition that nature itself is part of a transformative process which involves but transcends humanity. *Roan Stallion* contains the famous breakthrough statement, “I say / Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire, / The atom to be split.” In this collection, Jeffers establishes the point that humanity is only part of a continuous, often violent process which includes all nature and is divine. This view is both liberating and frightening, and it shows that in the context of this collection, such characters as Tamar could be considered “daughters of nature,” part of a larger process. “Shine, Perishing Republic” placed in the *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* collection can be understood in a much larger context which Jeffers continued to refine and enlarge throughout the rest of his life.

This may seem a heavy load for one poem to bear, but Hunt also describes the organization and choice of poems for *The Double Axe* to show that Jeffers used the placing of his shorter poems as a way to sharpen the focus and define the intent of collections. Hunt’s essay explains not just one poem but a process which added to the richness of his work. Date of composition and placement in collections do matter as critical concerns.

The second article of the issue, by James Karman, the person who has spent the most time chronicling the life of the poet, describes the attempts of both Jeffers and his friend, actress Judith Anderson, to mount a dramatic production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*. The first attempt was with the Theatre Guild in the late 1930s. This plan gathered attention briefly, but the Guild lost interest. Anderson’s star, however, began to rise in Hollywood films, attracting interest in her plans. In the summer of 1941, Anderson performed as Clytemnestra in a production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* at the Forest Theater in Carmel. That production received strong reviews from critics in Carmel, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Finally, in 1947–48 Anderson played the lead role of Medea in the highly successful drama which Jeffers had written for her. She played the role over two hundred times, and *Medea* would have run longer had Anderson not

asked for more money. She asked Jeffers to write an English version of Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, and Jeffers worked on this project for some time but lost interest.

Anderson returned to the idea of appearing on Broadway in 1949 in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, this time with the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA). Anderson asked Jeffers for permission to make her own changes in the play, and this was a mistake. Characters including Aeschylus as a narrator were added, and, as Jeffers said, "most of the poetry was cut." There were thirty-two performances of this version, and apparently after that even Anderson lost interest. Karman then describes how a copy of the play was found, and it appears in facsimile form following his essay.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Jeffers' involvement in these late projects is that while he was working on them, his beloved Una was dying. Although he was constantly nursing Una, perhaps working on the manuscripts was a release from his pain. This period also shows his great respect for Judith Anderson; she asked him to fly to New York to help with the ANTA production, and he did, something that is difficult to imagine him doing alone.

In 2021, *The Point Alma Venus Manuscripts*, an entirely new collection of Jeffers' poetry, was published. This volume has a long and mostly hidden history. In 1926, Jeffers had written to his publisher, Donald Friede, that he had enough new material for a new poem which he planned to call "Point Alma Venus," a nod to one of his favorite poets, Lucretius. Six days later, he wrote to Friede again and stated that he had decided to abandon the poetry he had written and start over. That new beginning became *The Women at Point Sur*. Rob Kafka wondered what had happened to the rejected work and found some of it written on the backs of other discarded manuscripts. For decades, Kafka and Tim Hunt found and transcribed from Jeffers' crabbed handwriting page after page of the abandoned material. They grouped what they found into four manuscripts.

There is enough in these manuscripts to keep Jeffers scholars busy for years. In my review of this volume, I concentrate on the key issue of why Jeffers decided to jettison these poems and start over. There can be no firm conclusion about this change, because Jeffers never explained why he did this, but there are clues in the manuscripts themselves, which teem with a variety of characters, far more than appear in any of his prior works. *The Women at Point Sur* is about Arthur Barclay, his spiritual quest and his collapse into egotism and

insanity. In the fragments, Barclay sometimes seems a peripheral character. Jeffers circles around him but seems to be trying to get to his story through the milieu he establishes. I think that finally he realized he had written a series of verse narratives that resembled novels rather than poems. *The Women at Point Sur*, despite its length, contains fewer characters than any of the fragments.

There seems to be enough evidence for this conclusion in the fragments themselves, but I think there is another reason. Jeffers saw that in order to tell Barclay's story, he himself had to plunge into the mind of a person whose thoughts intersected with his own in many ways and yet was insane. That is a very tough imaginative project. The intensity of *The Women at Point Sur* and the confusion it generated in the minds of its first readers testify to that difficulty.

Most Jeffers readers know that when the Jefferses traveled, they kept a diary to which all members of the family contributed. Deborah Whittlesey Sharp, former trustee of the Tor House Foundation, has edited the first volume of that journal, *Robinson Jeffers Family Travel Diaries, Volume One: British Isles, 1929*, which was published by Tor House Press. Deborah Fleming, whose other main interest is Yeats, reviews this book. There are many comments on the beauty of Ireland and Scotland. The family missed meeting Yeats by a few minutes and found George Moore's home in ruins, but they did get to meet Leonard and Virginia Woolf in London. Although everyone in the family contributed notes, the majority were by the irrepressible Una.

Geneva Gano, author of *The Little Art Colony and US Modernism: Carmel, Provincetown, Taos*, continues to mine this vein with her reviews of Catherine Prendergast's *The Gilded Edge: Two Audacious Women and the Cyanide Love Triangle That Shook America* and Sherry L. Smith's *Bohemians West: Free Love, Family, and Radicals in Twentieth-Century America*. Both books remind us that the struggle for women's rights has been going on for a very long time, creating many casualties and victims. Prendergast tells the story of Nora May French, a poet who longed for a freer, sexually liberated life, and when she had gone as far as she could go with limited success, ended her life by taking poison, the same fate that claimed her friends George Sterling and his wife Carrie. We know that George Sterling's death had a profound impact on Jeffers. Smith's book concerns Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field, who were friends of the Jefferses. Although they were married to other people when they met, they strived to unite their lives (a point which must have resonated with

Robin and Una), and much of the book is about Charles and Sara's social and political efforts to change American society. Apparently there is little about Jeffers in these studies, but they help us understand the society from which his works appears. Gano admires the extensive research and scholarship of both authors.

There is also a new book about Polish, and reluctantly, American poet Czesław Miłosz, Nobel Laureate, reviewed by Robert Zaller with characteristic thoroughness. Miłosz, born in Lithuania but culturally Polish, was constantly pestered by totalitarian government agents during his academic career in that country. He escaped to the United States, but he continued to be harassed by both Soviet agents and the FBI, which had doubts about his loyalty. That doubt was justified, as he found the United States a country based on superficial values and greed. The freedom of America had produced the freedom to exploit. From our perspective, his most important role was champion of the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Although he split with Jeffers over spiritual values—a Thomist, he could not accept the amoral energy exchange that Jeffers defined as divine—he nonetheless said that Jeffers was a great poet whose works would one day no longer be ignored. Both poets' trenchant attacks on American society united them in spite of their religious differences.

This is my last issue as editor of *Jeffers Studies*, because I have a number of writing projects which now demand my attention. My deepest thanks go to all who have helped produce this journal, particularly former co-editors Rob Kafka and Whitney Hoth and editorial associates Jim Karman, Paula Karman, and Tim Hunt. I also appreciate the work of all the reviewers of works submitted to the journal. The best part of this job is that the intensity which one must employ to do it causes one to learn more about Robinson Jeffers and his poetry. Just as a performer reminds an audience that they are the reason for his or her effort, the readers of *Jeffers Studies* are both the source and end of all the work that goes into it. Knowing that you care deeply about Jeffers and his poetry has caused all of us to strive to make *Jeffers Studies* something which you both enjoy and from which you learn, creating a living memorial to the works of a great poet.





JIM BAIRD  
 REMEMBERING BOB BROPHY  
 1928 – 2021

My connection with Robinson Jeffers was established before I ever read his works. In July 1965, deeply wounded by a personal tragedy, I visited a wilderness beach on the coast of Washington and was swept out of my pity for myself by its fierce beauty and elemental truth. That was half of what I later called “the Jeffers experience.” The second half of the Jeffers experience came in September of that year during my next visit to that beach, when I fell in the waves at a rocky headland and narrowly escaped death. I had empiric proof of nature’s process of destruction and death, its constant violent transformation. The natural world is not benign but uncaring; beautiful and inspiring, but also terrible—and inspiring, too, if you can embrace that. And according to Jeffers and the eastern religions, you must embrace that view in order to be free.

I became a Jeffers reader two summers later, when I lived on a boat in Tacoma harbor, part of Puget Sound. I was living not on land but on water; that same water that had almost killed me now held me up and sustained my life. I was physically reminded of that point every time a big ship entered the harbor and gently rocked my bunk. It was also easy to remember that that water was that same Pacific Ocean. Sometimes the plank from the boat to the dock was straight across; sometimes it was angled. My home’s location was changed by the moon and tides.

I had flown back to the Northwest that summer and had little room in my suitcase for books, so I brought just two with me: the Modern Library edition of Thoreau and “Jeffers’ pick,” the 1938 *Selected Poetry*. I worked my way through both of these writers, each feeding off the other. By the end of the summer, Jeffers was closer to me than many of the flesh and blood people I knew.

My experience of the wilderness coast led me to *Not Man Apart* and that to the poetry. I continued to read and be excited and sustained by Jeffers until 1974, when I met Bob Brophy. A fellow faculty member in the English Department at what was then North Texas State University had become friends with Bob when both were in North Carolina. Bob had just published *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems*, which rescued Jeffers from critical burial, and he was in town to visit his friend and to talk about Jeffers. I was eager to hear him. Most of my colleagues were not, as Bob spoke to an audience of about fifteen from a faculty of forty. I had the same “fit audience, though few” when I gave a report on my own work on Jeffers in the same room twenty years later.

I had a lot of questions for Bob, but after he spoke he had to leave, so I limited myself to just one. I was jolted by “Shiva” when I read it atop the waves and I asked him if Jeffers believed that the universe would die and then start again. He said that Jeffers might have thought this, because the science of his time allowed for this possibility. Current scientific theories do not; this universe will expand for the foreseeable, and even the unforeseeable, future. But, as our anti-intellectual friends remind us daily, science can be wrong. Of course, science is always wrong, because each discovery raises more questions which change or cancel what had been thought right. “I believe in truth as a direction” (not a goal) says the Clarence Darrow character in *Inherit the Wind*. If you are searching for permanent things, as our anti-science friends are, Jeffers has plenty of those, but the anti-science folks won’t like them either.

By 1977, I had studied Jeffers enough that I was ready to teach my first class about him. I went to California to see the places about which he wrote, and, of course, Tor House. I asked Bob how to approach Donnan and Lee Jeffers, whose private residence it still was. He explained to me how to present myself and arrange a visit. Because of Bob’s preparation, the result was a personal tour of the house and tower by Donnan, which was a thrill at the time and grows more cherished as the years have passed.

Later I wrote my first critical essay on Jeffers and submitted it to *The Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*. I told Bob, its editor, that the essay was rough but that I could get it into shape. He said that he also thought it was not good enough for publication but could be saved. One of his corrections was seminal. I had written “Jeffers thought of becoming a doctor and studied medicine at the University of

Southern California.” Bob noted, “He studied medicine. Only Jeffers knew if he wanted to become a doctor.” Good advice for a critic (and an editor): don’t assume anything. I revised the essay but decided it would not fly. Bob told me that on second thought, he had also returned to his first judgment. It wasn’t any good. Both of us got a laugh out of that.

The *Newsletter* became *Jeffers Studies*, and I began writing essays that were publishable. Bob’s suggestion for the improvement of one article was, “You should read this essay.” When I did so, I discovered that it had information that changed what I wrote about an important point. When I became editor of this journal, I remembered how Bob handled gently my omission. I also realized that the editor must not only have all of the Jeffers canon at his or her command, but all of the critical work, too. That is a daunting task, but I have tried to remember that once I have read and evaluated a submission, only part of my work is done. How does it fit into the larger picture?

The Robinson Jeffers Association was founded in 1992 as part of the American Literature Association, again through Bob’s hard work. We had our first meeting in Carmel in 1994, and I, like the rest of you, got to see Bob on a more regular basis, except for such times as the morning he had to miss a session in order to meet with some priests and explain to them how to hold a protest which was non-violent, powerful, and effective. I was reminded of the depth and intensity of his involvement in spiritual and political life as well as literature.

Once Bob and I found ourselves at Carmel Beach some hours before a meeting and he suggested a trip down the coast to visit our favorite places again. This was nice for me because when I go through Big Sur, I have to concentrate on keeping the car on the road rather than enjoying the views. We passed the pool where Tamar made a bad step, the place for no story, to the steep sea-wave of marble, Barclay’s hill, the zebra house, the canyon where the skip used to hang, to Point Sur where the women were. Because of Bob’s advanced age, I thought that I should be driving. Then I corrected myself, thinking, he’s helping you—just as he always does.



TIM HUNT

WHY DID JEFFERS OMIT  
 “SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC”  
 FROM *TAMAR AND OTHER POEMS*  
 AND HOW MIGHT IT MATTER?

The critical reign of the New Critics has come and gone, but a few New Critical biases live on. One is that a poem is so artfully wrought that its meaning is largely independent of context and presentation. The poem on a computer screen and the poem on the page are one and the same—so long as wording, punctuation, and line breaks are the same. Similarly, a poem’s textual history—its initial appearance in a magazine, subsequent publication in authorial collections, and further circulation in anthologies—is irrelevant, again, so long as wording, punctuation, and lineation remain unchanged. “Shine, Perishing Republic,” one of Robinson Jeffers’ best known poems, should, then, be the same *poem* whether we read it in the 1925 collection *Roan Stallion*, *Tamar and Other Poems*, the 1938 *Selected Poetry*, or an anthology. Different readers might interpret it differently, but “Shine, Perishing Republic” is “Shine, Perishing Republic”—no matter where or when we encounter it.

However, the textual history of “Shine, Perishing Republic” suggests that a poem is not always fully independent of where it appears and when it is read. Three reading occasions illustrate this. In the first and most common, a student reads the poem in an anthology where it is dated 1935, because the anthology editor has drawn it from the 1935 Modern Library reissue of *Roan Stallion*, *Tamar and Other Poems*, ignored the original 1925 edition, and carelessly assumed that the copyright date for the reissue’s Introduction is the copyright date for the poems (this misdating occurs, alas, in a widely used anthology from a major publisher.)<sup>1</sup> The student then, quite plausibly, registers the “America” that is “thickening

to empire” as the America of the Great Depression and perhaps even registers the “corruption” that is to be avoided as connected to the Isolationism Jeffers expressed as the 1930s progressed toward the Second World War. And this differs from the second reading occasion: a young, earnest poetry fan encountering the poem in 1925 in a just-published collection that is all the rage. For this reader, part of the original audience for the poem and the collection, the America “heavily thickening to empire” is the Roaring Twenties with a Charleston shimmy and a bathtub gin hangover. And the “corruption” the poem invokes probably registers as the frenetic hedonism of hot jazz, speakeasies, and rumble seat whoopee. Even though the reader encountering the poem today in an anthology and the reader encountering the poem in 1925 in the original collection are reading the same set of words, the *same* poem, a different temporal and textual context frames their reading of “Shine, Perishing Republic,” and this framing can inflect their respective experiences of the poem and thus, to a degree, how they register and understand some of its details.

The third reading occasion is hypothetical, but it underscores that where we encounter a poem can not only matter for our understanding of the poem itself but can also matter for our understanding of the poem’s role in the poet’s body of work. Although Jeffers first published “Shine, Perishing Republic” in 1925 when he expanded *Tamar and Other Poems* into *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*, his papers show that he wrote the poem before “Tamar” and had planned to include it in *Tamar and Other Poems*, then changed his mind. Although no reader could actually have read “Shine, Perishing Republic” in the context of *Tamar and Other Poems*, considering this hypothetical occasion can alter our understanding of the poem, and it helps clarify Jeffers’ intentions for the *Tamar* collection.

Jeffers wrote “Shine, Perishing Republic” no earlier than spring 1921 and no later than the beginning of 1922—before, that is, he began writing the narrative “Tamar” in the spring of 1922 (CP 5: 58–59). He could, then, have included it in *Tamar and Other Poems* when he published the collection in 1924—as he did the other important lyrics (“Salmon Fishing,” “Continent’s End,” and others) that he wrote in the fifteen months or so before writing “Tamar” (5: 56). Instead, he omitted “Shine, Perishing Republic” from *Tamar and Other Poems*, then a little more than a year later placed it in the *Roan Stallion* cluster of otherwise post-“Tamar” work when he prepared

*Roan Stallion*, *Tamar and Other Poems* for its 1925 publication by Boni & Liveright. He then included it in the 1938 *Selected Poetry*, identifying it as “from *Roan Stallion*.”

Jeffers’ decision to include “Shine, Perishing Republic” in *Roan Stallion* and *Selected Poetry* shows that he saw it as publishable, which makes its omission from *Tamar* curious. An early table of contents (from shortly after he finished writing “Tamar”) shows that he had originally planned to include “Shine, Perishing Republic” in *Tamar and Other Poems*, and this makes its eventual absence from the collection as published even more curious. Why did Jeffers initially include the poem in the collection but then drop it? And this leads to two further questions: Does presenting “Shine, Perishing Republic” as part of the *Roan Stallion* material have any impact on how we read it? And what does the decision to omit “Shine, Perishing Republic” from *Tamar and Other Poems* tell us about how Jeffers understood this pivotal collection?

The early table of contents for *Tamar*, an undated typescript, survives because Jeffers later drafted a page of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* on the back of it (CP 5: 1060). The page numbers for the listed poems match the page numbers for various surviving typescripts, which indicates he completed and typed this version of the collection planning to submit it to a publisher. The table of contents lacks the shorter poems (“Point Joe,” “Gale in April,” and others) that he wrote after the title narrative, and their absence suggests the table of contents dates from spring 1923 and documents either Jeffers’ original conception for the collection or an early conception (5: 59–60).

Tamar	1
The Songs of the Dead Men to the Three Dancers	78
Mal Paso Bridge	83
The Dance of the Banner	88
The Murmansk Landing	94
The Beginning of Decadence	95
Shine, Perishing Republic	98
The Cycle	99
Natural Music	101
Divinely Superfluous Beauty	102
Salmon Fishing	103
Not Our Good Luck	104
Suicide’s Stone	106
To the Stonecutters	107
Continent’s End	108



The absence of the shorter poems written after “Tamar” requires no explanation, but the presence of “The Dance of the Banner,” “The Murmansk Landing,” and “The Beginning of Decadence,” three early poems Jeffers did not include in *Tamar and Other Poems*, helps clarify why he included “Shine, Perishing Republic” in this initial or early version of the collection.

From 1918 through spring 1921, Jeffers mapped out several collections that would have gathered his work from World War I and the first years of the peace. The completed tables of contents and related notes and workings for these collections help date the poems he wrote from this period (CP 5: 1055–59). *Tamar and Other Poems*, as published, includes six poems written from 1917 through spring 1920:

The Songs of the Dead Men to the Three Dancers  
Mal Paso Bridge  
Fauna  
To His Father  
The Truce and the Peace  
The Coast-Range Christ

These poems precede Jeffers’ development of his long, cadenced unrhymed lines and distinctive perspective on nature, first fully evident in such late 1920 poems as “Salmon Fishing,” then further developed in his shorter poems across 1921 and early 1922, and then becoming the basis for his narrative poetry in writing “Tamar” (5: 1055–59).<sup>2</sup>

The early table of contents for *Tamar* lacks “Fauna,” “To His Father,” “The Truce and the Peace,” and “The Coast-Range Christ” but includes three other early poems from this same period that Jeffers never published and seems to have regarded as lesser pieces: “The Murmansk Landing” appears in none of the early tables of contents; “The Dance of the Banner” appears only in the 1918 workings; and “The Beginning of Decadence” appears only in the fall 1920 table of contents but not its 1921 revision or the workings leading to it. Jeffers may have omitted the narratives “Fauna” and “The Coast-Range Christ” for aesthetic reasons. They are metrical and rhymed, and he may have thought they would detract from his stylistic breakthrough in “Tamar.” He perhaps omitted “To His Father” as too directly personal or confessional or perhaps because, unlike the others, it has no direct connection to World War I and

the subsequent peace. The omission of “The Truce and Peace” is the hardest to explain. The sonnet sequence is the title poem for the earliest of the pre-*Tamar* collections (it was then titled “God’s Peace in November”), and Jeffers included it in *Selected Poetry*.<sup>3</sup>

The inclusion of “Shine, Perishing Republic” in the early table of contents points to a possible explanation for Jeffers’ decisions about which early poems to include in this early version of *Tamar*. In it, six poems written during World War I or reflecting directly on it follow “Tamar” in chronological order: “The Songs of the Dead Men” written in 1917; “Mal Paso Bridge,” “The Dance of the Banner,” and “The Murmansk Landing” written across 1918 (and probably in that order); “The Beginning of Decadence” from spring 1920; and “Shine, Perishing Republic” written a year or so after that (CP 5: 34–36, 40–42, 52, 59–60). The first four chart Jeffers’ responses to the war as it progresses, and the final two respond to the peace that followed. In the context of this implicit narrative, “Shine, Perishing Republic” derives from and responds to “The Beginning of Decadence.”

Jeffers wrote “The Beginning of Decadence” soon after “The Coast-Range Christ.” In it, the speaker (seemingly Jeffers addressing the reader directly) denounces the “Fools” (implicitly the political leaders of the victorious nations) for giving “the enemy’s throat to France to squeeze for vengeance’ sake, / And the loot of the world to the victors and the heart of the world to break” (CP 4: 365). He adds, “Now we shall grow wealthier, now we shall grow mightier, now freedom is gone,” implying it would have been better to lose the war. The failure of politics and history (and by extension human society) leads Jeffers to declare that he is retreating to “the stone belts of my own house” on “a rock above the sea,” which he characterizes as “a granite ecstasy kept clean” (4: 367).

“The Beginning of Decadence” can be read as “Shine, Perishing Republic” simply writ larger and with its occasion and politics made explicit. But with a crucial difference. The concluding couplet reads: “But I shall not look at flowers now, summer may kill the fragrant copse, / Sun-glare eat the fritillaries, poppy and lupine pass from the slopes” (CP 4: 367). The poem ends, that is, with the speaker, with Jeffers, unwilling to turn to nature, here figured as the beauty of the flowers, because its beauty is too fleeting, too fragile, to serve as an alternative to history and society. In “The Beginning of Decadence” nature’s beauty is decorative. It is not yet essential

and fundamental. Nature can temporarily distract from the meaninglessness of history, but it cannot provide an alternative to it or offer a genuine ground for meaning.

"Shine, Perishing Republic" recapitulates (perhaps it would be more accurate to say abstracts or generalizes) "The Beginning of Decadence," but it also enacts a crucial shift in Jeffers' view of nature and his relationship to it. In "Shine, Perishing Republic," America "thickening into empire" (a phrase that encapsulates "The Beginning of Decadence") occasions (in line three) this response to nature's transitoriness: "I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth" (CP 1: 15). Here, the beauty of actual (not merely figural) flowers is to be embraced, because this seemingly fleeting beauty is an occasion for recognizing nature as the unending cycle of being in which blooming gives way to fading and fading in turn gives way to blooming. In "Shine, Perishing Republic," that is, nature's temporary beauties are moments within natural process, which participate in nature's more comprehensive beauty and function as signs of it. And within this understanding of the order of things and this perspective, "decadence" functions, also, as an aspect of nature and so, also, participates in nature's more comprehensive beauty and expresses it: "Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness and decadence; and home to the mother" (1: 15). In this early construction of *Tamar and Other Poems*, "Shine, Perishing Republic" overwrites "The Beginning of Decadence," replacing its recognition of politics and history as meaningless flux (the speaker's despair occasioned by the war's senseless destruction and the corrupt, cynical peace that followed) with a recognition of nature as ceaseless cyclical process.

In the early *Tamar* table of contents, "Shine, Perishing Republic" concludes the collection's initial sequence of six short poems which chart the poet's responses to World War I and the Versailles Peace. It also leads into a second series of short poems, beginning with "The Cycle" (then continuing with "Natural Music," "Divinely Superfluous Beauty," and "Salmon Fishing"). This second series (primarily poems Jeffers wrote from December 1920 or so through spring 1921 when he began "Tamar") foregrounds nature as process, celebrates its beauty, and projects it as a ground for being and meaning (CP 5: 56). Where "Shine, Perishing Republic" subsumes and recasts "The Beginning of Decadence," "The Cycle," instead, reinforces and extends "Shine, Perishing Republic" by subsuming

the more limited scale of human history and societies into the vast (and seemingly unending) time span of nature's cyclical process. In "The Cycle," for instance, World War I is implicitly reduced to an unnamed instance of "our blood's / Unrest." This casts the war as a moment among other historical moments in an ongoing historical process and juxtaposes the war to the more comprehensive sphere of natural process where "The clapping blackness of the wings of pointed cormorants" precedes historical moments and continues beyond them long into the future (1: 14). In "The Cycle" (at least in the early construction of *Tamar* where it follows "Shine, Perishing Republic" and "The Beginning of Decadence") the war that was to end all wars no longer signifies historical rupture and cultural failure; it is merely a detail in a pattern, a lesser cycle within "The Cycle."

Reading "Shine, Perishing Republic" as a pivot point between "The Beginning of Decadence" and "The Cycle" clarifies its occasion and adds specificity to its details. The way it extends, yet transforms, "The Beginning of Decadence" implicitly casts the "molten mass" that "pops and sighs out" as "the mass hardens" in "Shine, Perishing Republic" as the cooling of the lava flow from the war's volcanic eruption of violence, which suggests that the "decay" is the decadent "corruption" of the Versailles Peace (CP 1: 15). As such, "Shine, Perishing Republic" naturalizes (and broadens) the indictment of the politics of the peace in "The Beginning of Decadence," while also anticipating Jeffers' further explorations of nature as being and meaning in the poems that follow it in this iteration of the *Tamar* collection. Moreover, reading "Shine, Perishing Republic" as the culmination of the sequence of six poems following "Tamar" in this early table of contents suggests that it is, in effect, a declaration (as Hemingway might have termed it) of a separate peace. But in "Shine, Perishing Republic" the declaration is a declaration of a separate peace not only from the war but also from the peace itself—or to be more precise, a declaration of a separate peace from the decadence of the Versailles Peace.

When Jeffers added "Shine, Perishing Republic" to the *Roan Stallion* section of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*, he placed it between "Autumn Evening" and "The Treasure," two lyrics written after he had published *Tamar*. The two celebrate nature as beauty and meaning, but in them (and the *Roan Stallion* material more generally) the crisis of World War I and how Jeffers experienced

what he perceived as the decadence of the Versailles Peace as an occasion for depression and anger is absent.<sup>4</sup> This alters, if only slightly, the valence of “Shine, Perishing Republic.” In the context of the early version of *Tamar*, “Shine, Perishing Republic” responds to the twinned disasters of World War I and the Versailles Peace, and these impel the turn away from society and history to nature as a refuge and a sphere of meaning. In *Roan Stallion*, “Shine, Perishing Republic’s” placement emphasizes nature as the poem’s context, and the rejection of “decadence” is more generally social decadence. In both of these contexts, “Shine, Perishing Republic” is a credo that implies, through its imagery, an epistemology and a basis for Jeffers’ poetics, but its placement in *Roan Stallion* obscures the extent to which the poem responds to, and moves beyond, the psychological situation and political critique documented in “The Beginning of Decadence.” In one context, the turn to nature derives from the specific crisis of the war; in the other context, the turn to nature derives from a more general, and abstract, critique of society and history.

Whether “Shine, Perishing Republic” is a *better* or more *significant* or more *Jeffersian* poem as placed in the early version of *Tamar and Other Poems* or as placed in the *Roan Stallion* section of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* is open to debate. One placement brings its originating occasion more fully into view; the other generalizes its occasion. In the former, the speaker turns away from society’s “decadence” and commits to nature’s integrity. In the latter, the speaker comments on society’s decadence from nature’s integrity. What is not, I would suggest, debatable is that these two contexts invite or prioritize slightly different readings of the poem and contribute to slightly different experiences of it. Reading the poem as Jeffers reacting to the destructiveness of World War I while confronting his dismay at the Versailles Peace is different from reading it as a reaction to mid-1920s social ferment. And these are different from reading it as a Depression-era poem, and also different from reading it (as an overly doctrinaire New Critic might) as if its artful making untethers it from mere referentiality, mere contingency, so that it becomes fully and solely its own context. In these various circulations, the poem’s details are constant. But how it functions as an expressive system and, thus, how we experience it varies.

We can, of course, choose to engage “Shine, Perishing Republic” without any regard for how Jeffers did (and did not) deploy it in *Tamar and Other Poems*, in *Roan Stallion*, *Tamar and Other Poems*, and in *Selected Poetry*. We can treat it, that is, as a self-contained linguistic system, but doing so means reading it (paradoxically) as if it bears on our world beyond the poem even as we treat it as if it has no bearing on Jeffers’ own world or referentiality for him within that world. This is neither to suggest that “Shine, Perishing Republic” should be reduced to its context nor to argue for a single, authorized decoding based on a specific context. Rather, it is to suggest that expressive systems (in this instance poems) are entangled in contexts and that being aware of the array of contexts can deepen and enrich—and even to some degree inflect—our experience of an expressive system and thus our understanding of its implications. In this sense, “Shine, Perishing Republic” expresses its contingency and resists it. It enacts its referentiality and transcends it.

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The presence of “Shine, Perishing Republic” in the version of *Tamar* documented by the early table of contents adds to our understanding of its occasion and (perhaps also) its implications. However, this does not explain why Jeffers dropped it from the collection. To address this question requires shifting from considering what the book can tell us about the poem and focusing, instead, on what the poem can tell us about the book. And this requires recognizing that a book of poetry is both a container storing poems for access and a rhetorical structure composed of the poems it holds. In this way, a book of poems is both multiple and singular: it is a gathering of discrete pieces and a purposeful *whole* constructed from discrete pieces. We often access poems in anthologies and often read poetry collections by sampling the poems without regard for their order. These practices obscure how the poet’s decisions about selection and sequencing create a *book* where, as the saying goes, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts—and where the parts may be different within the whole than they are as parts apart.

The difference between how a chapter functions in a novel and how a poem functions in a collection illustrates this. A novel is the result of a single (albeit extended) compositional process; each chapter is a subordinate unit within a larger, unified work; and

chapters, even when excerpted or anthologized, are still understood as drawn from the larger work rather than independent of it. Unlike novelists, who write *books*, poets write poems, then subsequently fashion *books* from them. A poetry *collection* is, then, the result of two separate compositional processes—the writing of the poems themselves followed by the process of structuring them into a book by creating groupings, conceptual patterns, and various frameworks.

For Jeffers this inherent doubleness of poetry collections might seem largely irrelevant. His long narrative and dramatic poems dominate the volumes, and their length often left relatively few short poems to be sequenced. But even so, as the example of “Shine, Perishing Republic” shows, the structures he created for his collections have implications for our readings of individual poems, and these structures are rhetorically purposeful.

For the most part, Jeffers’ trade collections share a similar history. He first wrote the shorter poems, then drafted the long poem or poems the collection would feature. Writing the shorter poems seems often to have been a kind of preliminary musing as Jeffers searched for the hook or occasion or impetus for the long narrative, and he seems typically to have written the shorter poems without a specific plan for how he would later organize them. In this sense they seem to have been *occasional* rather than *programmatic* (the poems for the sequence *Descent to the Dead* written during the 1929 trip to Ireland and England, first published as a separate volume in their own right, then later incorporated into *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*, are an exception to this pattern<sup>5</sup>). Once Jeffers began drafting a major narrative or dramatic poem, he seldom interrupted his work on it to write shorter pieces, and once he had finished the long poem for a volume, he proceeded directly to organizing the collection and typing it for publication.

In structuring the collections Jeffers typically inverted (or ignored) the chronology of composition, placing the primary long poem first, followed by the shorter poems. This casts the shorter poems as further elaborations of the primary long poem rather than preliminaries to it. Similarly, his practice of titling the collections after the primary long poem (*Cawdor and Other Poems*, and so on) foregrounds the long poem as primary and the shorter poems as secondary and supplemental. (The one exception to the pattern is the 1941 collection, published as the United States was edging

toward World War II, which he titled *Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems* rather than *Mara and Other Poems* or *The Bowl of Blood and Other Poems*—an exception that would repay further consideration.)

In structuring the trade collections Jeffers focused, it seems, on rhetorical impact and thematics. In collections such as *Cawdor*, the long narrative is the main course, served without appetizers, and the short poems follow as dessert or perhaps an after-dinner coffee (Irish?). And perhaps because he typically wrote the shorter poems and the long poem in a collection in the same period, there is little aesthetic or thematic dissonance between reading them in their chronology of composition and reading them within the structure of the collection. Still, being aware of the collections as a construction, a subsequent act of composition, can be instructive, as *Cawdor and Other Poems* illustrates.

In *Cawdor*, “Hurt Hawks” is the next to last poem (followed by “Meditation on Saviors”). In it, the hawk’s “fierce rush” of spirit or energy at its death echoes the scene in the narrative “Cawdor,” which Jeffers excerpted in *Selected Poetry* as “The Caged Eagle’s Death Dream.” As sequenced in the collection, the hawk’s death in “Hurt Hawks” is a kind of coda to the more elaborate imagining of the eagle’s death in the narrative. Jeffers, however, wrote “Hurt Hawks” in spring 1927, some months before beginning “Cawdor” in the summer or fall of that year. This chronology places “Hurt Hawks” as a relatively direct response to the emotional trauma of having to kill the injured hawk, and it places the scene in the narrative as a later, more visionary, elaboration within the narrative world of “Cawdor.” Viewed chronologically, “Hurt Hawks” is a preliminary to (and in part a source for) “The Caged Eagle’s Death Dream.” Read in the context of “Cawdor,” “Hurt Hawks” extends and amplifies “The Caged Eagle’s Death Dream”—even as it remains a poem in its own right.

These alternate framings of “Hurt Hawks” and “The Caged Eagle’s Death Dream” complement each other. For most of the trade collections, the implications of the poems as original acts of composition and their implications as units within a collection’s structure are similarly complementary. The two primary exceptions are *Tamar and Other Poems* and *The Double Axe and Other Poems*—the collections that gather the poems Jeffers wrote during and in response to the two world wars. These two collections derive from periods of imaginative crisis that were, arguably, the two pivotal



moments in his career, and in them, the poems as independently composed works and the poems as units participating and inflected by the collection's structure do not completely align.

Various notes and preliminary tables of contents document Jeffers' shifting sense of how to organize *The Double Axe*.<sup>6</sup> The earliest, probably from late 1946 or early 1947, is a note at the bottom of page 16 of the handwritten draft of "The Inhumanist" that reads, "The short poems are called 'Dates to Remember.' Many of them *are* dates." And in what seems the first completed table of contents (from summer or early fall 1947), Jeffers sequences the shorter poems chronologically and titles the section "Mornings in Hell," which casts these pieces and the section as a record of his successive reactions to the war. In reorganizing *The Double Axe* into its published form, Jeffers deleted several shorter poems, resequenced the material, and made various minor edits. These changes undercut the shorter poems as a kind of biographical record of his despair at the war and cast the collection instead as a conceptual demonstration (derived from experience and grounded in experience). As initially compiled, *The Double Axe* was the story of Inhumanism lost and regained. As reshaped for publication, *The Double Axe* is the gospel of Inhumanism, tested in the war's crucible and proven sound.

In *Tamar* and in *The Double Axe* the poems as independent, separately composed works and the poems as units contributing to (and inflected by) the collection's structure do not completely align. As independently composed pieces, the poems in these two collections are, in effect, dramas of experience deriving from and responding to scenes, situations, and events. As units within the collections as published, the poems function in support of the collection's implicit argument or perspective—a perspective Jeffers formulated in part through the writing of the poems but also clarified and extended, even altered, through the process of constructing the collection. Chronologically, the poems document a search. In the context of the collection, the poems enact a conceptual demonstration. Arguably, then, the collections clarify and emphasize the ideological dimension of the poetry, but at the expense of attenuating the existential dimension of the poems, which lessens our sense of how this existential dimension grounds, deepens, and complicates what Jeffers would eventually term Inhumanism.

For both *Tamar and Other Poems* and *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, we have early tables of contents. These show that how Jeffers initially organized these collections differed significantly from the final shape he gave them. For both, chronology governs the initial organization, and for both, concept or argument governs the collection as published. There is, however, a significant difference in the transformation of the two collections. In *The Double Axe*, the reorganization emphasizes the conceptual implications already implicit in the initial organization. With *Tamar*, the reorganization alters (or at least significantly recontextualizes) the conceptual implications of the initial organization. And this conceptual shift helps explain Jeffers' seemingly odd decision to omit "Shine, Perishing Republic" from *Tamar and Other Poems*.

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Jeffers considered at least four different organizations for *Tamar and Other Poems* (if he considered others, the textual evidence has not survived). Each relates to World War I differently, each involves a different logic for the collection, and each, as a result, contextualizes the title narrative differently. The early table of contents which includes "The Beginning of Decadence" and "Shine, Perishing Republic" is the earliest of the four. The unpublished poem "Brides of the South Wind" indicates the character of the second conception. The Preface Jeffers wrote for *Tamar* in August 1923 suggests the third. And the published collection is the final organization. In the first of these, the violence and cultural implosion of World War I (and the failure of the Versailles Peace to give meaning to the slaughter) is the imaginative crucible for the poems. In the collection as published, nature (as Jeffers reimagined it initially in the shorter poems written across 1921 and culminating in "Continent's End") is the crucible. And the two intervening versions document this transition.

In late summer or early fall 1920, Jeffers assembled a collection, usually referred to as *Brides of the South Wind*, featuring five early narrative poems: "Fauna" and "Storm as Deliverer" (both from 1917); "Peacock Ranch" and "Sea-Passions" (both from 1919), and "The Coast-Range Christ" (from late 1919–early 1920) (CP 5: 39–40, 47–50). The collection opens with a short poem Jeffers first titled "To the Girls of the Stories," then (after adding a second section) "Brides of the South Wind." It characterizes "Dove, Myrtle, Peace and Fauna" (the violational heroines of four of these narratives)

as “Daughters of war” and declares that the war is “that tempest” that has “made” them (CP 4: 368). On the typescript, Jeffers later commented in pencil: “Originally intended to preface the book that later was called ‘Tamar and Other Poems,’” and this typescript shows that he at some point altered the list of heroines from “Dove, Myrtle, Peace and Fauna” to “Peace O’Farrell, Tamar and Fauna” so that the poem references “Fauna,” “The Coast-Range Christ,” and “Tamar” instead of “Storm as Deliverer,” “Fauna,” “Peacock Ranch,” and “The Coast-Range Christ.” This comment and revision show that Jeffers planned a version of *Tamar* that would have opened with “Brides of the South Wind” and that would have explicitly identified World War I as the impetus for Tamar’s violational excess. Tamar, like her ironically named precursor Peace, is a daughter not simply of war but The War—the War to End All Wars but which failed to do so.

The August 1923 Preface documents a significantly different conception of the collection. The final paragraph reads:

The two earliest of the longer poems in this volume were written six years ago; the manner and versification of the story about Myrtle Cartwright, and the Theocritan echoes of “Fauna,” do not much please me now; but the latter is retained for a geographical sort of richness that closes it, and the other because it is part of a series and seems useful to the purpose of the series: to make apparent the essential beauty in conditions and events of life that from the ordinary point of view appear merely painful, or wicked, or comical. (CP 4: 381)

The “series” that Jeffers mentions here would have included at minimum “Storm as Deliverer,” “Fauna,” and “Tamar”; probably also “The Coast-Range Christ”; and plausibly “Sea-Passions” and “Peacock Ranch” as well. Whatever its exact contents, Jeffers is, in this Preface, positioning “Tamar” as the culmination of a series of stories that have a shared “purpose”: to “make apparent the essential beauty in conditions and events.” In this conception of *Tamar and Other Poems*, the heroines of the stories are what might be termed “Daughters of nature” instead of “Daughters of war.” Nature is the “tempest” that has made them, and their violational careers enact nature and express its “essential beauty.”

These successive constructions show Jeffers recasting *Tamar* from a collection responding to World War I into a collection

responding to, revealing, and expressing nature's "essential beauty." In the earliest construction, "Tamar" is the only narrative. Its violence is implicitly linked to the violence of the war in the shorter poems that immediately follow it. These in turn lead to "Shine, Perishing Republic," which projects nature and natural process as an alternative to the violence of human societies and history. The shorter poems that follow "Shine, Perishing Republic" then build to the collection's final poem, "Continent's End," where violence is recast and expanded into a vision of God's (and being's) "tides of fire" and God's transcending and comprehensive being as "the eye that watched." It is worth noting that "Continent's End" was apparently the last short poem Jeffers wrote before beginning "Tamar," a narrative that (it might be argued) progresses through "tides of fire" and culminates in a final scene where speaker and reader, in a moment of transcendent awareness, see as if through "the eye that watched." As such, the construction of the initial version of *Tamar* as a collection is implicitly circular: World War I is the initiating trauma; "Tamar" naturalizes and reenacts this trauma; the shorter poems then record the trauma more directly and lead back to the culminating vision of "Continent's End," which immediately preceded the writing of "Tamar."

In the second conception of *Tamar and Other Poems* (as documented by "Brides of the South Wind"), "Tamar" would have been one of three narratives (along with "Fauna" and "Storm as Deliverer")—each with a "Daughter of war" as its heroine. In the first two conceptions, then, World War I is the crisis (imaginatively, emotionally, politically, and religiously) that impels the writing of the poems and governs the collection. The August 1923 conception (documented by the unused Preface) marks a fundamental shift in Jeffers' approach to the collection and seemingly, as well, his understanding of it and his goals for it. In this conception, World War I remains present but has become an aspect of nature's "essential beauty" and secondary to it. In this iteration of the collection the poems, and perhaps especially the narratives, enact a perspective beyond "the ordinary point of view," and "Tamar" is the most recent, distinctive, and comprehensive of these stories expressing this "essential beauty."

In *Tamar* as published, Jeffers pares the narratives back to "Fauna," "The Coast-Range Christ," and "Tamar" and places various short poems between them, which lessens the impression

that they are a series. For instance, "Gale in April," one of the last poems written for the collection, immediately follows "Tamar"—as if "Tamar" leads to it and as if it is a supplement to the narrative or a kind of coda. "Gale in April" opens with the "Intense and terrible beauty" of the storm, describes this violence as emotionally overwhelming, counsels "lean[ing] upon death as on a rock," and ends with "I have passed / From beauty to the other beauty, peace, the night splendor" (CP 1: 91). The poem, that is, encapsulates the dynamism of "essential beauty" and offers a vision of peace beyond the violence of being ("the other beauty"). Jeffers' positioning of "Fauna" also mutes its identity as a war-era poem. Placing "Divinely Superfluous Beauty" and "The Maid's Thought" immediately before "Fauna" invites reading it as a timeless pastoral with the war as a bit of background noise. This leaves "The Coast-Range Christ," with "Mal Paso Bridge" as the poem leading into it, as the only "story" for which World War I remains the primary occasion and focus.

In the initial conception of the *Tamar* collection, the one which includes "Shine, Perishing Republic," the collection as a whole registers and responds to World War I. In the collection as finalized for publication some eight or nine months later, the collection functions as a demonstration of nature's "essential beauty" with nods back to the war as if it is, from the perspective of nature's "essential beauty," a secondary matter. This shift suggests why Jeffers dropped "The Dance of the Banner," "The Murmansk Landing," and "The Beginning of Decadence" from *Tamar and Other Poems*, while adding other World War I era poems such as "Fauna" and "The Truce and the Peace" to it. In the three excised poems, historical contingency and politics are central, and nature as a ground of being or meaning is largely absent. In "Fauna" and "The Truce and Peace," World War I is an occasion for the poems, but they move beyond the political even as they reflect on the political. In the excised poems, the political is both means and end; in "Fauna" and "The Truce and the Peace," the political is in part the means but not the end. And "Shine, Perishing Republic"? Part of its strength is that in it the political and nature are both means, and they are both also ends. But it is this doubling that may well explain why Jeffers deleted it from *Tamar and Other Poems*. In the *Tamar* collection as Jeffers first constructed it, "Tamar" is a poem responding to the war and searching for a vision beyond it, which the doubling of nature and the political in "Shine, Perishing Republic" parallels and reinforces.

In *Tamar* as Jeffers finalized the collection, “Tamar” functions more as a poem exemplifying and elaborating “essential nature,” which the interplay of politics and nature in “Shine, Perishing Republic” implicitly complicates or problematizes.

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Textual history can seem too much ado about barely nothing. Yet Jeffers’ handling of “Shine, Perishing Republic” and his shaping of the *Tamar* collection add to our understanding of their dynamics and implications, and it can add as well to our understanding of this key period in his career. It has become something of a commonplace in Jeffers studies that World War I was a period of psychological turmoil for Jeffers (William Everson has suggested “Mal Paso Bridge” reflects this); that this turmoil contributed to his decisive break with his father’s Christianity (as expressed in “To His Father”); that he experienced some sort of malaise or depression after the war; and that working with stone in constructing Tor House (Una Jeffers has suggested) contributed to a kind of visionary awakening.<sup>7</sup> In this scenario, Jeffers’ visionary awakening occasions his faith in nature’s “essential beauty” (as he termed it in the August 1923 Preface), is the basis of his commitment to “permanent things,” and contributes to his decision to dispense with conventional meter and rhyme and thereby achieve his mature style (CP 4: 379–81).<sup>8</sup>

In this scenario the narrative “Tamar” results from these transformations and marks a decisive break from what came before. This scenario, though, overly simplifies the materials and their textual histories. It fails to explain why Jeffers deleted “Shine, Perishing Republic” from *Tamar and Other Poems*, and it fails to account for his successive transformations of the collection as he recast it from a volume featuring a distinctive new narrative, “Tamar,” as a story responding to the war, into a collection featuring a cluster of narratives with “Daughters of war” as their heroines, and then into a collection where the narratives express “essential beauty,” and finally into a collection where the selection and sequencing of the shorter poems obscure the war as, in part at least, “Tamar’s” occasion. In *Tamar* as Jeffers initially structured it, World War I is central. In *Tamar* as published, “essential beauty” is central.

Constructing a writer’s intentions is always a hypothetical gambit. Strictly speaking, we cannot know why Jeffers deleted

“Shine, Perishing Republic” from *Tamar* or why he explored four different approaches to the collection. But we can recognize that there is a difference between characterizing Tamar as a “Daughter of war” and characterizing her as, implicitly, a “Daughter of nature” within a narrative enacting, expressing, and celebrating “essential nature.” Did Jeffers write the poem imagining one thing, then realize the poem had become the latter? Is one the poem as private experience and the other the poem as public expression? These are unanswerable questions. The textual history does, though, allow us to recover the original centrality of World War I to the collection as a whole, including “Tamar,” and to recognize that Jeffers’ visionary awakening may have been less a decisive moment prior to his transformation into the poet of “Tamar” and may instead have been more a process that continued during and through the writing of “Tamar” and then continued as he explored ways to shape the collection. As such, *Tamar and Other Poems*, even as it remains the advent of the mature career as we have tended to understand it, becomes also the transformational process leading to the mature career.

Knowing that Tamar was in some sense a Daughter of both war and essential nature also has implications for how we understand “Tamar” in the context of American literature in the mid-1920s. When *Tamar and Other Poems* appeared in April 1924, the title poem seemed the antithesis of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* published two years earlier. Where Eliot’s modernist epic seemed a collage of fragments scavenged from the trauma of the Great War, “Tamar,” with its narrative momentum and sexual energy, seemed to have left the war decisively behind. Instead of urban grays and shadows, Jeffers’ poem pulsed with the hues of the central California coast. And while World War I is a background element in Tamar’s story, it barely registers against the intense immediacy of her world and actions.<sup>9</sup> “Tamar” offers a cosmos in which the war, while neither ignored nor trivialized, has become a secondary element in the more comprehensive, immediate, yet also transcendent realm of nature and natural process—as Jeffers’ placement of “Continent’s End” as the collection’s concluding poem underscores. “Continent’s End” places us on the continent’s westernmost limit, the geographical and historical terminus of “sea to shining sea,” and it asks us not only to look beyond this historical moment but also to look beyond human culture and human history.

In *The Waste Land*, the political violence of war is a cultural matter, a failing, that has led to a collapse in belief and meaning (with the poem's despair figuring as tails to, on the opposite side of the coin, the frenetic hedonism of the so-called Jazz Age). In *Tamar and Other Poems* nature, not culture, is the fundamental reality, and violence (or rather the ceaseless flux of destruction and renewal that we register as violence) is a fundamental dynamic of nature. In "Tamar," the war is a manifestation of nature—a phenomenon within the order of things instead of a rupturing of it. In closing *Tamar and Other Poems* with "Continent's End," Jeffers offers the collection as an attempt to envision the epic of nature and cosmos within which culture and history are no longer the ground of being even as they remain aspects of experience.

These characterizations may be overly generalized and insufficient, but they suggest something of why *Tamar and Other Poems* struck reviewers as a mid-1920s work to be read in the context of that moment's current cultural and social flux rather than a work (like *The Waste Land*) related to the trauma of the Great War. And Jeffers reinforced this impression when he placed the *Tamar* material after his newer work in 1925 when he assembled *Roan Stallion*, *Tamar and Other Poems* and when he subsequently omitted most of the pre-1920s material from *Tamar* from his 1938 *Selected Poetry*. Put another way, the three published iterations of the *Tamar* material (as *Tamar and Other Poems*, as the concluding section of the *Roan Stallion* collection, and in pared down form as the opening unit of *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*) treat World War I as a progressively lesser matter, and this has perhaps contributed to a sense that the poems Jeffers wrote during the war and through 1919 at least and probably on into mid-1920 are merely a precursor to his major work—a view that Jeffers seems to endorse in his only comment on his pre-1920 work in the Foreword to *Selected Poetry*, where he notes that he has included "The Songs of the Dead Men to the Three Dancers" (written in 1917) "only as a sample of the metrical experiments that occupied my mind for awhile" (CP 4: 390).

Jeffers, here, is not, I would suggest, claiming that World War I was for him nothing more than an occasion for "metrical experiments." Rather, he is signaling that however he might have experienced the war at the time and whatever its role in his apprentice work from those years might have been, those matters



are irrelevant to his mature practice as he shaped it (first) in such pivotal lyrics as “Salmon Fishing” (probably written December 1920) and subsequently in the narrative “Tamar” once he recognized nature rather than culture as the ground of being—a recognition that occasions the pivot from his apprentice work to his mature work and that figures, as well, into his decisive rejection of the projects of such modernist contemporaries as Pound and Eliot.<sup>10</sup> If we focus only on *Tamar and Other Poems* as published in 1924, recirculated as the concluding section of *Roan Stallion*, and distilled in *Selected Poetry*, there is little reason to question Jeffers’ seeming invitation to view his mature work as a decisive move beyond his work from the World War I period, and similarly there is little or no reason to treat the narrative “Tamar” as anything other than a poem of nature implicitly repudiating the social and cultural froth of the mid-twenties and, as such, neither registering nor reflecting on the general trauma of the Great War. But as I hope this discussion has suggested, *Tamar and Other Poems* as published is not the whole story.

## NOTES

1. The Modern Library reissue of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* is the most widely available version of the collection. Anthologists frequently use it as source for the poems from this collection. This edition has three copyright dates: 1924 for the Peter Boyle printing of the original *Tamar and Other Poems*; 1925 for the *Roan Stallion* material added for the collection Boni & Liveright published as *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*; and 1935 for the Introduction Jeffers wrote for the Modern Library reissue and for the fifteen poems published originally in 1927 in *A Miscellany of American Poetry, 1927*, an anthology edited by Louis Untermeyer.

2. Jeffers, it should be noted, drafted "Suicide's Stone" in 1919, then later reworked it, altering its implications (CP 5: 292).

3. Even though "The Truce and the Peace" and "The Beginning of Decadence" both respond to the Versailles Peace, they are, in one significant way, antithetical. In the former, the speaker assesses the peace and its failings with a kind of stoic acceptance. In the latter, the speaker addresses the betrayal of the peace with anger. This difference perhaps explains why he opted for "The Beginning of Decadence" in the initial configuration of the collection but chose "The Truce and the Peace," instead, for the collection as published.

4. Jeffers' depression is evident in the shorter poems he was writing in the spring of 1919 (CP 5: 49–50), including the narratives "Peacock Ranch" and "Sea-Passion." It is, I would suggest, telling that Jeffers left the poems of this period mostly unpublished.

5. *Descent to the Dead* was published by Random House in a deluxe, limited edition in 1931. Jeffers then subsequently included the sequence in *Give Your Heart to the Hawks* in 1933.

6. For the various tables of contents and related documents for Jeffers' constructions of *The Double Axe*, see CP 5: 1074–84.

7. See Everson, Introduction to *Brides of the South Wind*, esp. xix–xxii, and Una Jeffers' letter of April 25, 1934, to Lawrence Clark Powell (CL 2: 309–11). For additional detail and analysis, see Karman, *Poet and Prophet*. For a critique of Everson's argument, see McAllister.

8. See also Jeffers' Preface to a collection he assembled while drafting *Tamar* (CP 4: 374–78) and his 1948 *New York Times* article, "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years," (4: 422–27), esp. 423–24.

9. Similarly, the war is central to the plot of "The Coast-Range Christ" and the war and subsequent peace are the occasion for the sonnet sequence "The Truce and the Peace." But these poems, whatever their merit, do not characterize the collection, at least in part because they are more conventional in form and less striking thematically. They are not the poems we remember as we close the volume or later recall it.

10. Jeffers discusses this most explicitly in his Introduction to the 1935 Modern Library reissue of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (CP 4: 384–86).

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JAMES KARMAN

# THE 1950 ANTA PRODUCTION OF THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY

A FACSIMILE EDITION

## I

### INTRODUCTION

One can only imagine how Jeffers felt as he boarded a plane for a flight to New York, Monday, December 11, 1950. Una died only three months before and her absence was still impossible to bear. The “Solitude that unmakes me one of men,” (CP 4: 291) sought by Jeffers throughout his life, was deeper and darker than he ever imagined, now that Una was gone.

Judith Anderson had summoned him. Her new production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* opened November 26, but reviews were mixed, and an extended Broadway run was doubtful. She wanted Jeffers in New York to rewrite portions of the play on the spot. He had previously told her that he didn’t have “any intention of going to N.Y.” and that he “was quite firm on the subject,” (CL 3: 693) but he answered her call nevertheless.

Robinson and Una first met Anderson at a February 1938 party hosted by Noël Sullivan in Carmel. Not long after, Anderson expressed a wish to bring a production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* to the New York stage. With this goal in mind, she asked John Gassner, a writer and producer affiliated with the Theatre Guild in New York, to prepare a script of the play. Plans proceeded far enough for a cast to be considered, with Lilian Gish, Ruth Gordon, Katharine Hepburn, and Jessica Tandy named to play opposite Anderson in one of the two key roles—Clytemnestra or Cassandra

(CL 2: 854n1, 919n3). The Guild's enthusiasm for the project waned, however, and plans were dropped.

Despite this setback, Anderson's own interest in the play never flagged, and when the Forest Theater in Carmel announced a summer 1941 production, she joined the cast as Clytemnestra. Anderson's participation in this community event is noteworthy, given her rising popularity and crowded schedule at the time. In January 1941, Anderson completed work on *Free and Easy*, a Robert Cummings film scheduled for release later in the spring. In February, Academy Awards were announced. Anderson had been nominated in the "Best Actress in a Supporting Role" category for her performance as the diabolical Mrs. Danvers in Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 masterpiece *Rebecca* (filmed, in part, at Point Lobos and other Big Sur locations). She lost to Jane Darwell, who played Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, but *Rebecca* was a major hit and won the Oscar for "Best Picture." Filming for *Lady Scarface*, a film starring Anderson as a Chicago gangster, proceeded through the spring. In June, just prior to the opening of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, she appeared as Mary, mother of Jesus, in a production of *Family Portrait* presented by the Del Monte Summer Theater company in Monterey. Filming for *King's Row*, an acclaimed film (three Academy Award nominations) starring Ronald Reagan and others, began in July. In August, as work on *King's Row* continued, *Lady Scarface* debuted. October found Anderson filming scenes for *All Through the Night*, a film starring Humphrey Bogart. Finally, as 1941 drew to a close, Anderson was back on Broadway, performing as Lady Macbeth opposite Maurice Evans in an acclaimed production of *Macbeth*.

Before *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* began its four-day run (July 2–5), the *Carmel Pine Cone* devoted much of its June 27 issue to celebrating the event. A front-page story by Talbert Josselyn announced that "Robinson Jeffers Will See His Play Open Here July 2," adding in the subhead that "Those Who Attend 'Tower Beyond Tragedy' Will Be Embarking Upon a Joyous Adventure." Eight more stories about the play filled the pages of the issue, including one by Langston Hughes. "In Carmel," Hughes writes, "there lives a great weaver of words and legends, Robinson Jeffers. Fortunate indeed are we to have him here. And fortunate that the city fathers have seen fit to grant the town's lovely outdoor theater to a production for the first time in a professional manner of one of Jeffers' plays with a great actress, Judith Anderson, appearing therein—thus Carmel herself writes a

new page in the mighty history of the theater. And that vital lady, Clytemnestra, comes to life again just off Ocean Avenue."

Reviews of the play were exuberant. "Robinson Jeffers' Play Unqualified Success," states the headline in the July 4 issue of the *Pine Cone*, "'The Tower Beyond Tragedy' Triumphs on Forest Theater Stage." A review by John Hobart in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, titled "'Tower Beyond Tragedy': Robinson Jeffers Has Written Drama Too Magnificent to Languish Between Book Covers," uses words like "hair-raising," "terrifying," and "emotions heated beyond the boiling point" to describe the play's impact. A week later, still thinking about the play, Hobart wrote another article for the *Chronicle* in which he describes the performance as "exhilarating," adding that Clytemnestra's story as Jeffers tells it marches "magnificently forward, with a passionate fierceness that overwhelms the spectator" ("Story").

A review by Richard Sharpe in the Los Angeles journal *Script* (also *Rob Wagner's Script*) reveals more about the experience of being in the audience. Sharpe begins his review with a long complaint about the petty annoyances he endured on his way to Carmel's Forest Theater. "I came unhappy," he exclaims. But then the play began. "I am here to rise in meeting and say without reservation that I have never seen such magnificent acting, such an entirely superlative cast, such language and such an experience in a theater"—since, he adds, he saw the Barrymores perform on Broadway twenty years before. "Judith Anderson as Clytemnestra gives a performance which makes her Mrs. Danvers . . . seem like a child's recitation." The "sheer terror" she unleashed was enough "to crisp the hair." Hilda Vaughn as the "disaster-shrieking" Cassandra was equally transfixing. With the "consummate ability" of a supreme actress, she exuded "death and disaster" and became the "complete embodiment of a malign fate staggering across the stage." The audience was spellbound. "Throughout it all," Sharpe writes, "there were no coughs. There were no sneezes. No one cleared his throat. No restlessness, no twittering and no flapping of programs. The entire audience sat completely cataleptic, struck temporarily into Nirvana by the miracle of superhuman words, magnificently uttered. This was . . . food for the soul." Jeffers attended three out of four of the performances, so he would have felt all that the audience felt, and more.

Jeffers wrote *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* with a specific actress in mind—Hedwiga Reicher, who visited Tor House in 1924. The play, Jeffers explains in his Foreword to *Selected Poetry*, “was suggested to me by the imposing personality of a Jewish actress who was our guest for a day or two. She was less than successful on the stage, being too tall, and tragic in the old-fashioned manner; but when she stood up in our little room under the low ceiling and recited a tragic ballad—“Edward, Edward”—for a few people gathered there, the experience made me want to build a heroic poem to match her formidable voice and rather colossal beauty. I thought these would be absurdly out of place in any contemporary story, so I looked back toward the feet of Aeschylus, and cast this woman for the part of Cassandra in my poem” (CP 4: 393–94). Prior to this, Jeffers told Sydney Alberts that the “rich voice and Amazon stature” of Reicher “suggested Clytemnestra and Cassandra to me” (CL 1: 805–06)—so, in fact, Reicher influenced his conception of both characters.

Jeffers fused their personalities in *Medea: Freely Adapted from the Medea of Euripides*, a play he wrote at Anderson’s request, and with her in mind for the title role. Jeffers was working on *The Double Axe* when Anderson contacted him in early March 1945, at the urging of Broadway producer Jed Harris. Anderson had hoped to interest Harris in a production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, but he suggested a new version of *Medea* instead. Jeffers responded enthusiastically to the idea and immediately set to work, inspired by the notion of a foreign woman in a strange land, endowed with supernatural powers, and driven with wild, jealous rage. By mid-April, when Harris and Anderson met in Carmel to discuss the play with Jeffers, nearly thirty pages—half the projected length—had been completed (CL 3: 336–37). Plans for a full-scale production proceeded, but Jeffers and Harris could not agree on the terms of a contract, so the project fell through. Soon enough a second production company, the Theatre Guild, stepped forward and planning was revived. With a Broadway opening all but certain, Random House referred to it on the jacket when they published *Medea* as a book in April 1946. “The Theatre Guild production of *Medea* in New York, with Judith Anderson in the title role, is a notable event of the 1946 theatrical season,” reads the text. “Followers of Robinson Jeffers thus have an opportunity to see as well as read, his most ambitious drama in a setting and with interpreters worthy of his most eloquent work.” Unfortunately, plans for this production collapsed, too.

Once the Theatre Guild lost its option on the play, other companies looked for ways to produce it. Nothing happened, however, until the novice firm of Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea optioned *Medea* in January 1947 and plans began in earnest. At the end of April, John Gielgud joined the production as both actor (in the role of Jason) and director. Rehearsals began in August and the play opened to great acclaim October 20. "Using a new text by Robinson Jeffers," Brooks Atkinson wrote in the *New York Times*, Anderson "set a landmark in the theatre at the National last evening, where she gave a burning performance in a savage part" ("At Theatre").

*Medea* triumphed on Broadway for nine more months, closing May 15 after 214 performances. The play could have continued longer, but Anderson pulled out due to a salary dispute. When she informed Robinson and Una of her decision in March, she told them that plans for a Broadway production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*—still a driving ambition—were already well underway.

Anderson postponed those plans in favor of a nationwide road tour of *Medea*, produced and managed by Guthrie McClintic. Rehearsals began in late summer, with openings scheduled for Santa Barbara, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in September. From then on, Anderson and company (including Hilda Vaughn as the Nurse) crisscrossed the country for eight more months, returning to New York in May 1949 for a two-week reprise. When the play opened at City Center May 2—once again to great acclaim—Anderson had performed the role 501 times. A cartoon titled "Rest for the Weary" in the October 23, 1949 issue of the *New York Times*, pictures Anderson in a hammock on a beach. "Dan Freeman sketches Judith Anderson as she relaxes on the coast of Serena, Calif.," says the caption, "after two seasons in the taxing 'Medea.' Miss Anderson now seeks a new script, preferably a play in a modern setting."

But Anderson did not rest for long. Soon after the cartoon appeared, she was on location in Arizona filming *The Furies*, a western that starred Barbara Stanwyck, Wendell Corey, and Walter Huston in his last role before he died, and featured Anderson as a gold-digging widow. She was also thinking of an altogether different project. Jeffers received a letter dated October 22, 1949 from Luther Greene, Anderson's second husband and manager, with a request concerning Friedrich Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, a verse drama about the last days of Mary, Queen of Scots, first performed in 1800. "For



some time," Greene writes, "Judith has been considering Schiller's *Maria Stuart* as a possible vehicle for next season. She and I would be most happy if you would again supply her the version of a great play she must have." Una responded on Jeffers' behalf, thanking Greene for sending a typewritten translation of the play, but adding that Jeffers would need to read the German original—a copy of which, she thought, was packed away in Tor House—before he could decide (CL 3: 628–29). Soon enough, Jeffers made up his mind. "Yes, I'll do as well as I can," Jeffers writes in a November 8, 1949 letter to Greene. "The adaptation won't be as free as *Medea*, because both Schiller and the subject are recent history; but free enough. The play is powerful and moving; much better than I remembered; not lyrical, but grand, and goes to its goal like a strong machine. A marvelous idea, for Judith to alternate the Mary and Elizabeth parts; it should create great interest, and make people want to see the play twice at least. And how well she will do it!" (3: 631).

As eager as Jeffers was to immerse himself in a project of this sort, and as much as Una supported and encouraged him, this was not an auspicious time. In the midst of Jeffers' recovery from his near fatal attack of pleurisy in Ireland the year before, Una fell ill with what turned out to be a return of cancer. By November 1949, her pain was unbearable, and it only worsened through December. Surgery in San Francisco in early January 1950 revealed tumors in her spine. Writing from the hospital January 9, 1950, Jeffers told Greene and Anderson that he might have something to show them by February 1, but "the whole play will have to be re-written—not translated and versified—for your purpose" and little could be done until he returned home (CL 3: 642). "Una had a bad relapse yesterday," he reports in a January 30 letter, apologizing for continuing delays, adding that "Una is even sorrier than I am" (3: 649).

After a transition week at the Community Hospital in Monterey, Una returned to Tor House in mid-February, where Lee and Donnan helped Jeffers provide ongoing care. Jeffers worked on the play off and on through March and soon reached a point where he could estimate how much time he would need for completion. "45 days is a safe guess," he writes April 11, "—less than that if I work afternoons as well as mornings. There are 90 pages left of the original, and I see that I have done 2 pages each morning that was devoted to it. So I'll promise the play for June 1<sup>st</sup>—but a little

earlier if necessary" (CL 3: 661). Two weeks later, Jeffers sent an installment. "Here is the end of the first act—approximately half the play," he tells Greene. "I have begun the second (and final) act, but would like to know whether Judith wants me to go ahead—and is June first early enough? Otherwise I'd rather work on a book of my own" (3: 664).

By this point, it seems, Jeffers was beginning to lose interest in the project. He was willing to press on if Greene and Anderson wanted him to, but they, too, had doubts. A few days after they received Jeffers' manuscript, they told him to stop. "Judith and I have had several talks about the play," Greene writes, "and we have come to feel that it is impossible with this progress to have a play that she can study this summer and play next season." Even if the play could be completed by June 1, there was not enough time to revise and fine tune it, interest a production company, and secure a venue for a fall debut. In a letter to Greene dated April 28, Una expresses feelings of regret: "Robin received your letter several days ago. Of course he is disappointed that you do not wish to use the play. He has spent so much time on it & completely laid aside other work he had in progress" (CL 3: 667).

In June 1950, Una told Anderson and Greene that Jeffers had given permission to the University of Georgia for a student production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, scheduled for November. A few weeks later, in a letter dated July 14, she thanks Greene for returning a typed copy of the script in his possession, which she intended to forward to Georgia. Una closes her letter with a reference to her health—which was improving, she says, "at a snail's pace" (CL 3: 675). In fact, she was declining rapidly. She spent most of August in the bed described by Jeffers in "The Bed by the Window" (CP 2: 131) and died September 1.

With no new play by Jeffers to rely on, Anderson had already turned her attention to her longstanding goal: a New York production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*. In August, just as *The Furies* opened in movie theaters nationwide, Anderson finalized negotiations with the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) for a four-week run later in the fall. Rumors of the production reached Sam Zolotow, author of the "News of the Stage" column for the *New York Times*. Nothing was known for certain, he writes September 6, but "a reliable source insisted yesterday that Judith Anderson had agreed to star in 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy,'

Robinson Jeffers' thriller based on King Agamemnon's murder. The American National Theatre and Academy is planning to escort the presentation into the ANTA Playhouse" ("News").

In a September 8 letter to Jeffers, which included an expression of sympathy for Jeffers' loss, Greene confirmed the upcoming production and made some specific requests. Responding September 11, Jeffers agreed to the requests, including one concerning the script. "Judith has my permission to make any changes," he writes; "I trust her judgment. If she would like new words written in connection with any change, I shall be glad to help" (CL 3: 680).

The history of the flawed script that follows this Introduction begins with that response, for once Jeffers allowed Anderson to alter the text as she wished, the drama lost its original integrity and became something altogether different.

In late September, Anderson induced Jeffers to travel to her home in Carpinteria, California—despite his grief—so she could share her ideas about the play in person. Jeffers began work on the play as soon as he returned home. "This is taking an awfully long time," he writes October 10, "though I have been hard at it, morning and afternoon too." "Here is the revised First Act," he adds. "I will send Scene I of the second act in two or three days, and scene II as soon as possible—three or four days later. I have used all your suggestions—and glad to—so far as I noted them down, or can remember them" (CL 3: 685).

Jeffers sent Anderson the rest of the play October 14, and a complete script was then prepared for distribution to the cast and crew. Soon after rehearsals began October 30, Anderson sought additional changes, and she asked Jeffers to come to New York so he could rewrite portions of the play on the spot. Jeffers refused, telling Greene that he would "only be useless or in the way" if he were to come. "The cuts in the manuscript will be all right," he adds, ceding control once again, "if Judith approves of them" (CL 3: 690).

When opening night—November 26—arrived, Jeffers sent Anderson a telegram: "Love and admiration. Wish I were there" (CL 3: 695). He also wrote an essay for the *New York Times*, published the same day, in which he discusses the origin of the play, shares details about its performance history, and expresses confidence in Anderson and the cast—which included Frederic Tozere as Agamemnon, Alfred Ryder as Orestes, Thelma Schnee in the role of Cassandra, Marian Seldes as Electra, and Anderson as Clytem-

nestra; Robert Ross directed. In mentioning some of the differences between the original poem, which was “not intended for the stage,” and the current version, Jeffers credits Anderson for her advice and criticism. “The adaptation has not been difficult, only ruthless,” he explains; “it is almost exclusively a matter of erasure. Particularly Cassandra’s lamentations have been cut to the bone.” He also mentions another major change—“the bitter collapse of Electra,” who hangs herself at the end of the play. “The Greeks themselves were always changing their stories,” he observes, halfheartedly it seems, “and I think we inherit the privilege.”

Eleanor Roosevelt attended the debut and praised the production. “Last night I saw the opening of . . . ‘The Tower Beyond Tragedy’ by Robinson Jeffers,” she writes in *My Day*; “I found this play tense and dramatic the whole way through, written and acted in what might be called the grand manner.” Brooks Atkinson praised it as well. “The Jeffers poem is written in lines of fire that make an ancient theme seem immediate and devastating,” he writes in the November 27 issue of the *New York Times*; “you hardly notice the art, the meaning is so close and overwhelming.” Anderson impressed him as well: “her acting has a passion and also a grandeur that make it unforgettable” (“Two First Nights”).

Other critics were not as enthusiastic. Richard Watts, Jr., writing in the *New York Post*, acknowledged Anderson’s greatness as an actress but said, “I didn’t think she was quite at her best” on opening night; “‘The Tower Beyond Tragedy’ is certainly worth the attention of an experimental theatre, but it is less than completely satisfying as tragic drama.” Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* agreed. “Much as one may wish great success to the bold venture of ANTA, its initial step is not very sturdy.” In his opinion, the drama “has fitful moments of depth and intensity when Miss Anderson is on stage, but it is dramatically wanting.” John McClain, writing in the *New York Journal American*, was more blunt: “one would be obliged to say that it’s a great deal of talk about very little.” One more review is worth noting. “‘The Tower Beyond Tragedy,’ though by a distinguished poet,” writes Robert Coleman in the *Daily Mirror*, “somehow failed to impress, stimulate and move us as much as it might have, last evening. First of a series of 10 productions to be presented by ANTA, it is scheduled to run four weeks. We think it will have a limited appeal” (*New York Theatre*).

Since Anderson hoped the ANTA production would lead to a commercially successful run in a Broadway theater—and be as popular with audiences as *Medea*—Coleman's words were cause for alarm. Desperate for help, she begged Jeffers to come to New York to rescue the play before it was too late. "By next week," according to a December 8 report by Zolotow in the *New York Times*, "Luther Greene, Judith Anderson's husband, should have some intimation about the advisability of moving 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy.'" Meanwhile, "he is keeping close tabs on receipts . . . and is awaiting script revisions from the author, Robinson Jeffers" ("Vanbrugh").

Feeling "compelled" to make the trip, Jeffers left Carmel December 11 (CL 3: 699). Two days later, Zolotow reported that he had arrived in New York, "bringing with him suggested script changes" ("Britten"). Once Jeffers saw the play for himself, he knew it could not be saved, and he returned home after five days, refusing to do anything more. The *Times* carried the story December 16. "The plan to transfer Robinson Jeffers' 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy' to a Broadway Theatre . . . has been abandoned," writes Louis Calta. "The reason given for the change in plans was that the author felt he could not complete in time certain revisions necessary for the commercial run." The play closed a week later, December 22, after thirty-two performances.

Back at Tor House, Jeffers expressed his disappointment with the production in letters to family and friends. "As to the play," he tells Timmie and Maud Clapp, "—I saw it twice, and I liked it less and less. It was cut to the bone, most of the poetry cut out—(I had given permission to cut)—but what annoyed me was the miscasting of the actors, and the softness of their stage. Everything that I had thought of as hard had been made soft. And I had thought of Cassandra as tall and dark—and some dignity. She was little and blonde and unimportant. I had thought of her as Clytemnestra's equal, when I wrote the poem, but most of her lines had been cut—and of course she could not compete with Judith Anderson. All the players were good, and Judith was superb. But perhaps for that reason—for lack of balance—the play looked dull to me" (CL 3: 706).

The history of the theater is filled with failures of this sort and both Jeffers and Anderson moved on. The January 1951 issue of *Poetry* included seven poems by Jeffers—"Fire," "The Beauty of Things," "Animals," "The World's Wonders," "Time of Disturbance," "The Old Stone-Mason," and "To Death"—which,

together, won the magazine's Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize later in the year. In May, Jeffers gave Eva Hesse permission to translate *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* into German, and to adapt the play for radio presentation by the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation (CL 3: 722). Throughout the year, as Jeffers struggled with his loss of Una, he worked on a long poem tentatively titled "Told to a Dead Woman." On impulse, he sent a copy to *Poetry* in November, and was surprised when it was accepted for publication almost immediately. *Poetry* devoted an entire issue to the poem, printed as "Hungerfield," the following May.

Anderson enhanced her reputation as one of America's most widely known stage and film actresses by appearing regularly on television, the newly invented medium just then beginning to change the world. In January 1951 she starred in "The Silver Cord" on the *Pulitzer Prize Playhouse*; in February, she recited "The Gettysburg Address" on the *Ed Sullivan Show*; the *Billy Rose Show* featured her in "Farewell Appearance" in March; and audiences saw her in "Theatre" on the *Somerset Maugham TV Theatre* program in April. After a summer break, she traveled to Berlin to appear in *Medea* at a September 6–30 festival sponsored by the US Department of State. *Oklahoma!* was also on the program. Upon returning home, Anderson began work on a revival of *Come of Age*, a play that received an enthusiastic reception at the City Center in New York a few months later.

And so, the ANTA production of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* was quickly forgotten. The script was forgotten, too—until a Canadian bookseller informed Occidental College that he had a copy for sale. Gere diZerega (Robinson Jeffers Association advisory board member and Tor House Foundation trustee) purchased the manuscript for Occidental, and permission was granted to publish it in *Jeffers Studies*.

A problem soon became apparent, however. The Occidental script has three acts, but Jeffers mentions only two in his October 10, 1950 letter to Anderson. Published reviews of the play also refer to two acts, so the Occidental script could not have been the one used for the actual production. Also, some reviews mention a character named Aeschylus (performed by Robert Harrison) who appears onstage at the outset and comments on the action. Since no such character exists in the Occidental script, that was another reason it could not have been the final version. Aeschylus is not a

character in Jeffers' original poem either, so his presence onstage raised a number of intriguing questions.

Although Jeffers told Eva Hesse in his May 1951 letter that he did not keep a copy of the script, that was not the case. A search of the Jeffers Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, uncovered a copy of an ANTA script that belonged to "E. Gordon" (Edwin Gordon), the stage manager. It is marked "Jeffers cuts" (no apostrophe) and is dated "11/13/50"—placing it less than two weeks before opening night. With that script in hand, a plausible sequence of events became clear.

The Occidental script, printed by ANTA for its own use as plans for the production were getting underway, was probably based on the script Anderson used for her 1941 performance of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* at the Forest Theater in Carmel. As such, it represents a valuable resource for a study of the play's performance history. Jeffers used the Occidental script to prepare a new script for Anderson in September and October 1950—reducing the play from three acts to two, introducing Aeschylus as a character (most likely at Anderson's behest), and incorporating as many of Anderson's suggested changes as he noted or could remember. The resulting script was then retyped by ANTA and distributed to the cast and crew.

Once rehearsals began, Anderson sought additional changes. Rather than traveling to New York to make them, Jeffers gave Anderson permission to alter the script—which she proceeded to do, using the new ANTA script as a base document. The Texas copy contains a record of Anderson's decisions, made with the help of Greene (who produced the play) and with the advice of Robert Ross, the director.

As performed, *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* opens with a speech by Aeschylus, who appears on stage bearing a sword and carrying a scroll (symbols of his life as a warrior poet). He sets the scene with a few introductory comments, using words spoken by an omniscient narrator in Jeffers' original poem and by two citizens in the Occidental script. An additional appearance by Aeschylus was drastically cut, and a speech in the second act was deleted entirely, so he soon vanishes from view. Cassandra remains an important figure in the Texas script, but her lines, already reduced in the Occidental version, are trimmed even further. Her prophecies concerning Rome, Europe, and the United States—a central

feature of the original poem—were deleted. Other flourishes were added, some for sensational effect, apparently. Near the end of the drama, for instance, after Electra says to Orestes, “kiss me,” the word “brother!” is inserted.

The final script is offered here as an historical document, in facsimile form, so readers can assess its significance for themselves. It is safe to say that it represents, at the very least, a lost opportunity. One wonders what the fate of the play would have been had Anderson used the Forest Theater script, or one that more clearly expressed Jeffers’ original intentions. “Our most exciting actress and most distinguished theater poet,” as one critic described the pair (*New York Theatre* 180) with *Medea* fresh in mind, might have struck the New York stage with lightning once again.



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II

FACSIMILE

*THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY*

BY ROBINSON JEFFERS

1950 ANTA PRODUCTION

FACSIMILE EDITION COURTESY OF HARRY RANSOM CENTER,  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

*JEFFERS STUDIES* 22 (2021/2022), 42–94.

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E. GORDON (14c)  
(JEFFERS CUTS)

THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY

Adapted by

ROBINSON JEFFERS

From his poem

THE TOWER BEYOND TRAGEDY

The American National Theatre  
and Academy  
139 West 44 Street  
New York 18, N. Y.

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11/13/50

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PERSONS:

AESCHYLUS

CLYTEMNESTRA

AGAMEMNON

CASSANDRA

A CAPTAIN

AEGISTHUS

ELECTRA

THE PORTER

ORESTES

TOWNSPEOPLE, SOLDIERS, CAPTIVES, SLAVES

*Corinna*

*Lucippe*

SCENE:

In front of the ancient palace at Mycenae. A great door; stone terrace (porch) before it, reached by wide stone steps. Heavy columns uphold the roof. The stage in front of the terrace is natural rock, more or less levelled.

Spearman stand stiffly on guard to right and left of the closed door.

ACT ONE

AESCHYLUS comes in, extreme left of the stage; a powerful erect man with a clipped gray beard. He wears a short sword and holds a parchment scroll--a rolled book.

AESCHYLUS

I am Aeschylus the Athenian, a poet and a warrior.  
Under one hand my sword, (He handles the hilt.) In the other my book.

(He looks down at it.)

I fought at Marathon, where we broke the enormous invasion.  
We hunted the haughty Persians and long-haired Medes into the sea,  
And saved our world. In time of peace I wrote plays.  
I wrote about Agamemnon the king of men in triumph returning  
from conquered Troy, and how lovingly his wife received him.  
That is the theme.

(The stage is filling up. Soldiers are directed into their places by their officers. Civilians, men and women, crowd in below.)

See: they are making ready for the King's homecoming

Those above are the Queen's men, and those below  
are Agamemnon's. Now the great king approaches.

(Agamemnon enters from the right, tall and corpulent, in bronze armor, followed by his guard and his captives. The captives are bound in file, wrist to wrist, with one rope. But Cassandra, who heads them bites through the rope. Her end of it hangs from her wrist.

Trumpets sound from the palace roof. Agamemnon looks up, raising his thick brindled beard and smiles. He stands still, looking thoughtfully up at the palace. The people chant in unison, "Agamemnon. Agamemnon. Agamemnon."



1-2

The great door of the palace opens. Clytemnestra comes out and stands at the stairhead, between the columns. She glances rapidly right and left, then stands without expression, looking straight forward. Agamemnon and his people approach the foot of the rock stair.)

AESCHYLUS

You 'd never have dreamed that the Queen was Helen's sister--Troy's  
burning-flower from Sparta, the beautiful sea-flower  
Cut in clear flame, crowned with the fragrant golden mane, she the age-  
less, the uncontaminable---

This Clytemnestra was her sister; low-statured, fierce-lipped, not dark  
nor blonde, greenish-gray-eyed.

Sinewed with strength, ~~you see~~, under the purple folds of the queen-  
cloak, but craftier than queenly.

Standing between the gilded wooden porch-pillars, ~~great steps of stone~~  
~~above the steep street~~

Awaiting the King.

(Agamemnon comes to the stair-foot; then the queen (officially) sees him. Her face remains cold and masklike, but she raises both arms high in greeting; at that signal the soldiers stamp on the pavement with the butts of their spears and the trumpets cry out. When Agamemnon sets foot on the lowest tread of the stair, the Queen steps down from the highest;

AESCHYLUS (looking at his book)

Now Clytemnestra,

Gathering her robe, setting the golden-sandalled feet, carefully, stone  
by stone, descends

One half the stair. One half. Not a step more.

(The King and Queen meet and embrace. Cassandra suddenly screams; she has seen in her mind some dreadful event.)

1-3

Clytemnestra  
(Jerks back from the King, says fiercely)

WHAT THAT?  
Who was that?

Agamemnon  
(laughing)

She? A piece of our goods out of the snatch of Asia. A daughter of King Priam.

---Yells at odd moments--but treat her kindly, she may come to her wits again. (He looks up at the palace entrance and the soldiers)  
Eh? You keep state here, my queen.  
Well served, well soldiered. I thought I had the army.  
You've not been the poorer for my absence.

Clytemnestra  
(coldly)

Oh, but at heart, dear.

In the widowed chamber. -- What is her name, the slave-girl's?

Agamemnon  
(turning her toward the doorway)

Come up the stair. They tell me my kinsman's  
Lodged himself on you.

Clytemnestra

Your cousin Aegisthus? He was out of refuge, flits  
between here and Tiryns.  
Dear: the girl's name?

Agamemnon

Cassandra. We've a hundred or so other captives; besides  
two hundred  
Rotted in the hulls.-- They tell odd stories about you and  
your guests: eh?  
No matter. The ships  
Ooze pitch and the August road smokes dust. I smell like  
an old shepherd's goatskin: You'll have bathwater?

Clytemnestra

They're making it hot. Come, my lord. My hands will pour it.

(THEY enter the palace. The great door closes behind them)

Cassandra  
(Climbing the stone steps, Swaying drunkenly with weakness)

In the holy city,  
In Troy when the stone was standing walls, and the ashes  
were painted and carved wood, and precious tapestries---



1-4

And those lived that are dead---they had caged a den  
of wolves out of the mountain, and I a maiden  
was led to see them: it stank and snarled:  
The smell was the smell here; the eyes were the eyes  
Of steep Mycenae. Oh God, guardian of wanderers,  
Let me die easily.

AESCHYLUS

(unrolling his scroll seems to read from it)

So cried Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam, treading the steps of  
the palace at Mycenae,  
Swaying like a drunken woman, drunk with the rolling of the ship, and  
with tears, and with prophecy.  
~~That stair may yet be seen, among the old stones that are Mycenae;~~  
tall dark Cassandra, the prophetess,  
The beautiful girl with whom a God bargained for love, high-nurtured,  
captive, shamefully stained  
~~With the ship's filth and the sea's,~~ rolled her dark head upon her  
shoulders like a drunken woman,  
And trod the great stones of the stair.

(An officer silently drives the captives into file at one end of the porch)

The captives, ~~she among them,~~  
were driven into rank.  
On the stone porch, between the parapet and the spearmen. The people  
below shouted for the King,  
King Agamemnon, returned conqueror, after the ten years of battle and  
death in Asia.

The People

Agamemnon, Agamemnon, Agamemnon.

Cassandra

(shrilly to the Queen's soldiers)

Good spearmen: you did not kill my father. Not you  
Violated my mother, with the piercing  
that makes no life in the womb. Not you defiled  
My tall blond brothers with the masculine lust  
That takes its loved one standing,  
And leaves him what no man again nor a girl  
Ever will gaze upon with the eyes of desire:  
Therefore you'll tell me  
Whether it's an old custom in the Greek country,  
the cow goring the bull? Break the inner door back,  
and see in what red water, how cloaked, your King  
bathes:---and my brothers are avenged a little...

KING'S  
One of the Guards

Be quiet, slave.

Cassandra

What have I to be quiet for?---you will not believe me.  
Such wings my heart spreads when the blood runs out of any Greek---  
I must let the bird fly. O soldiers  
He that mishandled me---dies! The first, your brute beast

1-5

Ajax, who threw me backward  
 on the temple flagstones, a hard bride-bed: I enduring him  
 heard the roofs of my city breaking,  
 The roar of the flames and the spearmen: what came to Ajax?  
 Out of a cloud the loud-winged eagle of lightning  
 Came on him shipwrecked, clapped its wings about him, the  
 violent flesh burned, and the bones  
 Broke from each other in that passion: and now this one,  
 safe returned home, this Agamemnon---  
 The Queen is his lightning!

(She points toward the closed door)

(The door is flung open; hushed commotion is heard within.  
 Terrified SLAVES are seen; one darts from the door and runs  
 out of sight. Instantly an officer of Agamemnon's, later cal-  
 led a Captain follows him--and after a few minutes quietly  
 returns, sheathing his sword. Meanwhile CLYTEMNESTRA comes  
 into the doorway. Her hair is dishevelled. The brooch at her  
 left shoulder is broken; she pulls up her cloak and it falls  
 again. But she smiles in calm triumph, then comes forward to  
 the stairhead, and speaks slowly)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Men of Mycenae, Hear me: I have made  
 Sacrifice for the joy this day has brought to us: the King  
 come home, the enemy fallen, fallen,  
 in the ashes of Asia. I have made sacrifices. I made the  
 prayer with my own lips, and I struck the bullock  
 With my own hands.

One of the people

The Queen is not a priestess!

Another

What has she done?

First

The Queen has no right to make sacrifice, she's not a priestess.  
 What wild sayings  
 make wings from the Queen's throat?

Clytemnestra  
 (slowly)

I have something to tell you. Too much joy is a message-  
 bearer of misery.  
 A little is good; but come too much and it devours us, Therefore  
 we give of a great harvest  
 Sheaves to the smiling gods; and therefore out of a full cup  
 we pour the quarter. No man  
 Dare take all the God sends him whom God favors, or destruction  
 Rides into the house in the last basket.  
 (fiercely)

I have been twelve years your shepherdess. I, the Queen  
 have ruled you  
 And I am accountable for you.



1-6

Cassandra

(Shrilly)

Why should a man kill his own mother?  
 The cub of the lion, being grown,  
 Will fight with the lion--but neither lion nor wolf  
 Nor the unclean jackal  
 Bares tooth against the womb that he <sup>CAME FORTH</sup> dropped <sup>A</sup> from--  
 Yet I have seen---

Clytemnestra

(To the guard nearest Cassandra)

Strike that woman with your hand, spearman. And then if  
 the spirit <sup>QUIET</sup>  
 Of the she-wolf in her will not be <sup>STILL</sup> still, strike with the  
 spear-butt.

(But the GUARD glances suspiciously,  
 from the Queen to the captive, and  
 does not obey)

Cassandra

-- I have seen the blade in the child's hand  
 Enter the breast that the child sucked---that woman's--  
 The left breast, ~~that the robe has dropped from, for the~~  
~~breast is broken~~  
 That very hillock of whiteness, and she crying, she kneeling--

(The GUARD covers Cassandra's mouth  
 with his hand)

Clytemnestra

(Slowly, to the people)

My sister's beauty entered Troy with too much gladness. They  
 forgot to make sacrifice.  
 Therefore destruction entered; therefore the daughters of Troy  
 cry out in strange dispersals, and this one  
 Grief has turned mad. I will not have that horror march  
 under the lion-gate of Mycenae  
 That split the citadel of Priam. Therefore I say I have made  
 sacrifice; I have subtracted  
 A fraction from immoderate joy. For consider, my people,  
 How unaccountably God has favored the city and brought home  
 the army. King Agamemnon,  
 My dear, my husband, my lord and yours,  
 Is yet not such a man as the gods love; but arrogant, fierce,  
 overbearing-- whose folly  
 Brought many times many great evils  
 On all the heads and fighting hopes of the Greek force. Why,  
 even before the fleet made sail,  
 While yet it gathered on Boeotian Aulis, this man offended.  
 He killed one of the deer  
 Of the sacred herd of Artemis:--out of pure impudence, hunter's  
 pride, that froths in a young boy  
 Laying notch to string of his first bow!--this man, grown, a  
 grave king, leader of the Greeks.

1-7

## Clytemnestra (cont'd)

The angry Goddess

Blew therefore from the horn of the Trojan shore storm without  
end, no slackening, no turn, no slumber

Of the eagle bound to break the oars of the fleet, and split  
the hulls venturing!--you know what answer

Calchas the priest gave: his flesh must pay whose hand did  
the evil!--his flesh!--mine also. His? My daughter.

They knew that of my three there was one that I loved!

Blameless white maid, my Iphigenia, whose throat the knife--

Whose delicate soft throat the thing that cuts sheep open--was  
drawn across by a priest's hand,

And the soft-colored lips drained bloodless

That had clung here---here--Ah!

(She draws the cloak from her breasts)

These feel soft, townsmen; these are red at the tips, they  
have neither blackened nor turned marble.

King Agamemnon hoped to pillow his black-haired breast upon  
them, my husband, that mighty conqueror,

Come home with glory. He thought they were still a woman's,  
they appear a woman's. I'll tell you something:

Since fawn slaughtered for slaughtered fawn evened the debt,  
these that feel soft and warm are wounding ice,

They ache with their hardness...

Shall I go on and count the other follies of the King? The  
~~That~~ insolences to God and man

~~They~~ brought down plague, and brought Achilles' anger against  
the army? --- Yet God brought home a remnant

Against all hope: therefore rejoice.

But lest too much rejoicing slay us, I have made sacrifice.

A little girl's brought you over the sea.

What could be great enough for safe return? A sheep's death?

A bull's? What thank-offering?

All these captives, battered from the ships, bruised with  
captivity, damaged flesh and forlorn minds?

God requires wholeness in the victim. You dare not think what  
he demands. I dared. I, I,

Dared.

Men of the Argolis: you that went over the sea, and you that  
guarded the home coasts,

And high stone war-belts of the cities: remember how many  
spearmen these twelve years have called me

Queen, and have loved me, and been faithful, and remain  
faithful. What I bring you is accomplished.

Voices of the People

~~King Agamemnon.~~ The King. We will hear the King.

Clytemnestra

(Slowly)

What I bring you is accomplished. Accept it, the cities are  
at peace, the ways are safe between them, the gods  
favor us. Refuse it...

You will not refuse it ...

Voices

The King. We will hear the King. Let us see the King.



1-8

Clytemnestra  
 You will not refuse it. I have my faithful. They would run,  
     the red rivers,  
 From the gate and by the graves through every crooked street  
     of the great city. They would run in the pasture  
 Outside the walls: and on this stair: stemmed at this entrance--

Cassandra  
 Ah, sister, do you also behold visions? I was watching  
 red ~~streams~~ ---  
     RIVERS

*(VOICES: THE KING!)*  
 Clytemnestra  
 Be wise, townsmen. As for the King: slaves will bring him to  
     you when he has bathed; you will see him.  
 The slaves will carry him on a litter; he has learned Asian  
     ways in Asia, too great a ruler  
 To walk, like common spearmen.

Cassandra  
 (Screaming)  
 Who is that, standing behind you, Clytemnestra? What God  
 Dark in the doorway?

Clytemnestra  
 Deal you with your own demons. You know what I have done,  
     captive. You know  
 I am holding lions with my two eyes: if I turn and loose them---

Cassandra  
 It is ... the King! There! There! ~~There!~~

Clytemnestra  
 --Or if I should make any move to increase confusion. If I  
     should say for example, Spearman  
Kill that woman. I cannot say it this moment; so little as  
     from one spear wound in your body  
 A trickle, would loose them on us.

Cassandra  
 Yet he stands behind you! ~~A ah! I can bear it. I have~~  
     seen much lately  
 Worse.

A Captain  
 (Below; standing forward from his men)  
 O Queen, there is no man in the world, but one--if that one  
     lives--may ask you to speak  
 Otherwise than you will. You have spoken in riddles to the  
 people--

Cassandra  
 (Shrilly screaming--to the ghost  
     that she sees)  
 Not me! Why will you choose  
Me? I submitted to you, living; I was forced, you entered me--

1-9

The Captain

~~Also there was a slave here,  
Whose eyes tood out from his chalk face--came fear-driven  
from the door of the palace, whimpering  
A horrible thing. I killed him. But the men have heard it.~~

Cassandra

(Wildly) To the ghost, which she sees quite  
near her now)

You were the King, I was your slave.  
Here, you see, here, I took the black-haired breast of the bull.  
I endured it, I opened my thighs, I suffered  
~~The other thing besides death that you Greeks have to give us--~~

The Captain

~~Though this one raves and you are silent,  
O Queen, terrible-eyed---~~

Cassandra

That was the slave's part; but this time ... dead King...  
I... will ... not submit. Ah! Ah! No!  
If you will steal the body of someone living--take your wife's,  
take that soldier's there---

The Captain

I pray you, Queen, command <sup>the</sup> the captive woman be <sup>KILLED OR</sup> quieted; ~~in a~~  
~~stone cell;~~ she increases confusion.  
~~The soldiers cannot know some terrible thing may not have~~  
~~happened.~~ Your men and the King's grin  
Like wolves over the kill, the whole city totters on a sword-  
edge over sudden---

Cassandra

(Wildly)

Drive him off me! Pity, pity!  
I have no power: I thought when he was dead another man would  
use me--~~your Greek custom---~~  
Not he, he, newly slain.  
He is driving me out, he enters <sup>me</sup> she possesses: this is my  
last defilement. Ah ... Greeks ...  
Pity Cassandra!

(The GHOST takes possession of her;  
SHE falls writhing, like a woman  
taken by force)

Clytemnestra

(Calmly)

Captain: and you, soldiers, wavering unwarlike  
The weapons that ought to be upright, at attention, like stiff  
grass-blades: and you, people of Mycenae:  
While this one maddened: and you muttered, echoing together;  
and you, Captain, with anxious questions  
Increased confusion:--who was it that stood firm, who was it  
that stood silent, who was it that held

1-10

Clytemnestra (cont'd)

With her two eyes the whole city from splitting wide asunder?  
 Your Queen, was it? I am your Queen.  
 And now I will answer what you asked. -- It is true. He has  
 died. -- I am the Queen.  
 My little son Crestes will grow up and govern you.

(CASSANDRA mechanically rises to her  
 feet during what follows. She has  
 become strangely tall)

(To the people)

Be quiet. Stand firm.  
 Listen to me.

All is accomplished: and if you are wise, people of Mycenae;  
 quietness is wisdom.

(The PEOPLE are disorderly, some  
 pressing forward, others holding  
 back, and so forth)

No tumult will call home a dead man out of judgment. The  
 end is the end. Ah, soldiers! Down spears!  
 What, now Troy's fallen you think there's not a foreigner in  
 the world bronze may quench thirst on? Lion-cubs,  
 If you will tear each other in the lair, happy the wolves,  
 happy the hook-nose vultures!  
 Call the eaters of carrion? I am your Queen, I am speaking  
 to you, you will hear me out before you whistle  
 The foul beaks from the mountain nest. I tell you I will  
 forget mercy if one man moves now.

I rule you, I.

The gods have satisfied themselves in this man's death; there  
 shall not one drop of the blood of the city  
 Be shed further. I say the high gods are content; as for the  
 lower,

And the great ghost of the King: my slaves will bring out the  
 King's body decently before you,

And set it here, in the eyes of the city: spices the ships  
 bring from the south will comfort his spirit;

Mycenae and Tiryns and the shores will mourn him aloud; sheep  
 will be slain for him; a hundred beeves

Spill their thick blood into the trenches; captives and slaves  
 go down to serve him; yes, all these captives

Burn in the ten-day fire with him; unmeasured wine quench it;  
 urned in pure gold the gathered ashes

Will ~~rest~~ <sup>rest</sup> forever in the sacred rock; honored; a conquerer...

Slaves, bring the King out of the house.

(Her manner changes to hopeless grief. ←

She tears at her hair)

Alas, my husband! The great stone pillar that held up the  
 state is fallen. You have left me helpless, a woman

Alone among lions. Ah the King's power, ah the King's  
 victories! Weep for me, Mycenae,

Widowed of the King!

\* INSERT  
 FROM 1-11



1-11

(Agamenon's body is brought from the house on a golden bed, and set on the porch, where all can see it. It is washed and calm, royally robed. CLYTEMNESTRA kneels by it and seems to weep. The PEOPLE are completely bewildered)

\* INSERT 1-10

The Captain

O Queen: Before the mourning  
The punishment. Tell us who has done this.

Clytemnestra

JACKAL! (Leaps to her feet)

~~Dog~~ Dog of the army!

Who said Speak, dog, and you dared speak? Justice is mine.

The Body of Cassandra

(Tall and rigid, possessed by the  
King, cries in his deep voice)

Justice! Shall not even the stones of the stair, shall not  
the stones under the columns,  
Speak? and the towers of the great wall of my city come down  
against the murderess? O Mycenae,  
~~I yearned to night and day under the tents by Troy, O Tiryns,~~  
~~O Mycenae, the door~~  
Of death, and the gate before the door!

Clytemnestra

That woman lies: or the spirit of a lie cries from her.

Spearman:

Kill that woman!

(The GUARD draws his short sword and  
is about to strike)

The Body of Cassandra

(Stone-faced and terrible, speaking  
in the King's voice)

Broto. Put it down.

~~The Guard~~

~~(Kneels to her)~~

My King, my leader.

Another Soldier

It is the King! He has entered into her body.

CAPTAIN



1-12

## The Body of Cassandra

Horrible things,  
 Horrible things in the past this house has witnessed: but  
     here's the most vile of all, that hundreds  
 Of spears are idle while the murderess, Clytemnestra the  
     murderess, the snake that came upon me  
 Naked and bathing, the death that lay with me in bed, the  
     death that has borne children to me,  
 Stands there unslain.

## Clytemnestra

Cowards, if the bawling of that bewildered heifer from  
     Troy fields has frightened you,  
 How did you bear the horns of her brothers? Bring her to me.

## The Body of Cassandra

Let no man doubt, men of Mycenae,  
 She has yet the knife hid in her clothes, the very blade that  
     stabbed her husband, and the blood is on it.  
 Look: she handles it now. Look, ~~there~~ <sup>the</sup> hand under  
     the robe. Slay her not easily, that she-wolf!  
 Do her no honor with a spear. Ah! If I could find the word  
     for it, if I could find it,  
 The name of her: to say husband-slayer and bed-defiler, bitch  
     and wolf-bitch, king's assassin,  
 And beast, beast, beast--all in one breath, in one word: spearmen,  
 You would heap your shields over this woman and crush her slowly,  
     slowly, while she choked and screamed---  
 No: you would peel her bare, and on the pavement for a  
     bride-bed with a spear-butt for husband  
 Dig the lewd womb until it burst: this for Agamemnon, this  
     for Aegisthus-- Agh, cowards of the city,  
 Do you stand quiet?

## Clytemnestra

Truly, soldiers,  
 I think it is he. It is Agamemnon himself.  
 No one could invent the abominable voice, the unspeakable  
     gesture,  
 The actual raging insolence of the tyrant. I am the hand that  
     ridded the Argolis of him.  
 I here, I killed him, I, justly.

## The Body of Cassandra

You have heard her, you have heard her: she has made  
     confession.  
 Now if she'll show you the knife too---

## Clytemnestra

Here. I kept it for a trophy.  
 And, as that beast said, his blood's yet on it.  
 Look at it: with so little a key I unlocked the kingdom of  
     destruction. Stand firm, till a God  
 Leads home this ghost to the dark country

1-13

Clytemnestra (cont'd)

So many Greeks have peopled, through his crimes, his arrogance,  
 his violence--- stand firm till that moment,  
 And through the act of this hand and of this point no man  
 shall suffer anything again forever  
 Of Agamemnon.

The Body of Cassandra

I say if you let this woman live, this crime go  
 unpunished, what man among you  
 Will be safe in his bed? The woman ever envies the man, his  
 strength, his freedom, his loves.  
 Her envy is like a snake beside him, ~~all his life through,~~  
~~her envy and hatred: law tames that viper:~~  
~~Law dies if the Queen die not: the viper is free then,~~  
 It will be poison in your meat or a knife to bleed you sleeping.  
 They faw and slaver over us  
 And then we are slain.

Clytemnestra

(To one of the slaves that carried  
 the King's body)

Is my lord Aegisthus  
 Slain on the way? How long? How long?  
 (To the people)  
 He came, fat with his crimes.  
 Greek valor broke down Troy, your valor soldiers, and the  
 brain of Odysseus, the battle-fury of Achilles,  
 The stubborn strength of Menelaus, the excellence of you all:  
 this dead man here, his pride  
 Ruined you a hundred times: he helped nowise, he bought bitter  
 destruction: but he gathered your glory  
 For the cloak of his shoulders. I saw him come up the stair,  
 I saw my child Iphigenia  
 Killed for his crime; I saw his harlot, the captive woman there,  
 crying out behind him, I saw...  
 I saw... I saw... how can I speak what crowd of the dead faces  
 of the faithful Greeks,  
 Your brothers, dead of his crimes; those that perished of  
 plague and those that died in the lost battles  
 After he had soured the help, Achilles--for another harlot---  
 those dead faces of your brothers,  
 Some black with the death-blood, many trampled under the  
 hooves of horses, many spotted with pestilence,  
 Flew all about him, all lamenting, all crying out against him,-  
 horrible-I gave them  
 Vengeance; and you freedom.  
 (To the slave)  
 Go up and look, for God's sake, go up to the parapets,  
 Look toward the mountain. Bring me word quickly, my strength  
 breaks,  
 How can I hold all the Argolis with my eyes forever? I alone?  
 Hell cannot hold her dead men,  
 Keep watch there-send me word by others- go, go!



1-14

## Clytemnestra (cont'd)

(To the people)  
 He came triumphing.  
 Magnificent, abominable, all in bronze.  
 I brought him to the bath: my hands undid the armor;  
 My hands poured out the water;  
 Dead faces like flies buzzed all about us;  
 He stripped himself before me, loathsome, unclean, with laughter;  
 The labors of the Greeks had made him fat, the deaths of  
 the faithful had swelled his belly; ~~he was filled with men's~~  
 I threw a cloak over him for a net and struck, struck, struck, ~~agonies~~;  
 Blindly, in the steam of the bath; he bellowed, netted  
 And bubbled in the water;  
 All the stone vault asweat with steam bellowed;  
 And I undid the net and the beast was dead, and the broad vessel  
 Stank with his blood.

## The Body of Cassandra

The word! the word! O burning mind of God,  
 if ever I gave you bulls teach me that word, the name for her,  
 the name for her!

## A Slave

(Running from the door; to Clytemnestra)

My lord Aegisthus has come down the mountain, Queen, he  
 approaches the Lion-gate.

## Clytemnestra

It is time. I am tired now.  
 Meet him and tell him to come in the postern doorway.

## The Captain

(On the stair; addressing the soldiers  
 and the people below)

Companions: before God, hating the smell of crimes, crushes  
 the city into gray ashes  
 We must make haste. Judge now and act. For the husband-slayer  
 I say she must die, let her pay forfeit. And for the great  
 ghost of the King, let all these captives,  
 But chiefly the woman Cassandra, the crier in a man's voice  
 there, be slain upon his pyre to quiet him.  
 He will go down to his dark place and God will spare the city.  
 (To the Queen's soldiers)  
 Comrades: Mycenae is greater  
 Than the Queen of Mycenae. The King is dead: let the Queen die:  
 let the city live. Comrades,  
 We suffered something in Asia, on the stranger's coast,  
 laboring for you. We dreamed of home there  
 In the bleak wind and drift of battle; we continued ten years,  
 laboring and dying, we accomplished  
 The task set us; we gathered what will make all the Greek cities  
 glorious, a name forever;  
 We shared the spoil, taking our share to enrich Mycenae. ~~O but~~  
 Our hearts burned then, comrades

1-15

The Captain (cont'd)

But our hearts melted when the great oars moved the ships the  
water carried us, the blue sea-waves  
Slid under the black keel; I could not see them, I was blind  
with tears, thinking of Mycenae.

We have come home. Behold the dear streets of our longing,  
The stones that we desired, the steep ways of the city and  
the ~~spared~~ doorsteps

Reek and steam with pollution, the accursed vessel  
Spills a red flood over the floors.

The fountain of it stands there (POINTING) and calls herself the Queen.

No queen, no queen, that husband-slayer,  
A common murderess. Comrades join us

We will make clean the city and sweeten it before God.

We will mourn together at the King's burning,  
And a good year will come, we shall rejoice together.

Clytemnestra

Dog, you dare something. Fling no spear, soldiers,  
He has a few fools back of him would attempt the stair if the  
dog were slain: I will have no one  
Killed ~~needlessly~~ **OUT OF NEED.**

One of Her Own Men

Not at him: at you,  
Murderess!

(He flings his spear and it misses; the bronze point  
rings on the stones.) (All stand silent and  
motionless for a moment.)

AEGISTHUS (looks down at his scroll) CAPTAIN:

Some unseen God, no lover of justice, turned it aside. The great bronze  
tip, grazing her body.

Orange on the stone beyond: the gong of a change in the dance: now  
Clytemnestra, none to help her.

One against all, sways raging by the King's corpse over the golden bed;  
and her fury like fire

Stands visibly above her head, mixed in the hair, pale flames and radiance.

Clytemnestra

Here am I, thieves, thieves, cowards!

Drunkards, here is my breast, a deep white mark for cowards to aim at:  
kings have lain on it.

No spear yet, heroes, heroes?

See, I have no blemish, the arms are white, the breasts are deep and white,  
the whole body is blemishless:

You are tired of your own brown wives; draw lots for me, rabble, thieves, there  
is loot here, ~~shake the dice, thieves, a game yet!~~

One of you will win the bronze and one the silver,

One the gold, and one me, **(TAKE)**

Me Clytemnestra a spoil worth having:

Kings have kissed me, this dead dog was a king, there is another

King at the gate: thieves, thieves, would not this shining

Breast brighten a sad thief's hut, roll in his bed's filth

Shiningly? You could teach me to draw water at the fountain,

A dirty child on the other hip: where are the dice? Let me throw first,  
if I throw sixes

I choose my masters: closer you rabble, let me smell you.

Don't fear the knife, it has king's blood on it, I keep it for an ornament,  
It has shot its sting.



1-16

## The Body of Cassandra

Fools, fools, strike!  
Are your hands dead?

## Clytemnestra

You would see all of me  
Before you choose whether to kill or dirtily cherish? If what  
the King's used needs commending  
To the eyes of thieves for thieves' use: give me room, give  
me room, ~~Follows~~, you'll see it is faultless.  
The dress...there... ~~SOLDIERS~~,

## The Body of Cassandra

Fools, this wide whore played wife  
When she was going about to murder me, the King: you, will  
you let her trip you  
With the harlot's trick? Strike! Make an end!

## Clytemnestra

I have not my sister's ~~Things~~ <sup>the fire THAT BURNED TROY,</sup> beauty, but I have  
something.  
This arm, round, firm, skin without hair, polished like marble:  
the supple-jointed shoulders:  
Men have praised the smooth neck, too,  
The strong clear throat over the deep wide breasts...

## The Body of Cassandra

She is buying an hour: sheep: it may be Aegisthus  
Is at the Lion-gate.

## Clytemnestra

If he were here, Aegisthus,  
I'd not be the peddler of what trifling charms I have for an  
hour of life yet. You have wolves' eyes:  
Yet there is something kindly about the blue ones there--yours,  
young soldiers, young soldier.... The last,  
The under-garment? You won't buy me yet? This dead dog,  
The King here, never saw me naked: I had the night for nurse:  
turn his head sideways, the eyes  
Are only half shut, If I should touch him, and the blood came,  
you'd say I had killed him. Nobody, nobody,  
Killed him: his pride burst.  
Ah, no one has pity!  
I can serve well, I have always envied your women, the public  
ones.  
Who takes me first? Tip that burnt log onto the flagstones,  
This will be in a King's bed then. Your eyes are wolves' eyes:  
So many, so many, so famishing---  
I will undo it, handle me not yet, I can undo it...  
Or I will tear it.  
And when it is off me then I will be delivered to you beasts

1-17

The Body of Cassandra  
Then strip her and use her to the bones, wear her through,  
kill her with it.

Clytemnestra  
When it is torn  
You'll say I am lovely: ~~no one has seen before...~~  
It won't tear: I'll slit it with this knife-

(AEGISTHUS, with many spearmen,  
issues from the great door.  
CLYTEMNESTRA stabs right and  
left with the knife; the MEN are  
too close to strike her with  
their long spears. ~~Fall back,~~ *They SHRINK BACK TOWARD  
THE STAIR*  
~~they flee already~~)

It's time. Cowards, goats, goats. Here! Aegisthus!

~~I am here.~~ What have <sup>they</sup> done? Aegisthus

Clytemnestra  
Nothing: clear the porch. I have done something. Drive  
them on the stair!  
Three of them I've scarred for life. A rough bridegroom,  
the rabble --- met a fierce bride.  
(She catches up her robe)  
I held them with my eyes, hours, hours. I am not tired...  
My lord, My lover:  
I have killed a twelve-point stag for a present for you:  
with my own hands: look, on the golden litter.  
You arrive timely.

The Body of Cassandra  
Tricked, stabbed, shamed, mocked at, the spoil of a lewed  
woman, despised  
I lie there ready for her back-stairs darling to spit on.  
~~Tricked, stabbed, sunk in the drain~~  
~~And gutter of time. I that thundered the assault, I that~~  
~~mustered the Achaeans. Cast out of my kingdom,~~  
Cast out of time, out of the light.

Clytemnestra  
One of the captives, dear. It left its poor wits  
Over the sea. If it annoys you I'll quiet it. But post  
your sentinels.  
All's not safe yet, though I am burning with joy now.

1-18

## The Body of Cassandra

O single-eyed glare of the sky  
 Flying northwest to the mountain, sun, through a slave's eyes,  
 My own broken, I see you this last day; my own darkened,  
 no dawn forever. The adulterers  
 Will swim in your warm gold, day after day; the eyes of  
 the murderess will possess you;  
 And I have gone away down: knowing that no God in the earth  
 nor sky loves justice; and having tested  
 The toad that serves women for heart. From now on may all  
 bridegrooms  
 Marry them with words. Those that have borne children  
 Their sons rape them with spears.

## Clytemnestra

More yet, more, more, more, while my hand's in? It's  
 not a little  
 You easily living lords of the sky require of who'd be like you,  
 who'd take time in the triumph,  
 And Build joy solid. Do we have to do everything? I have killed  
 what I hated:  
 Kill what I love? The prophetess said it, this dead man says  
 it: my little son, the small soft image  
 That squired in my arms--be an avenger? - Love, from your loins  
 Seeds: I begin new, I will be childless for you. The child my  
 son, the child my daughter!  
 Though I cry I feel nothing.

## Aegisthus

O strongest spirit in the world. We have dared enough, there  
 is an end to it.  
 We may pass nature a little, an arrow-flight,  
 But two shots over the wall you come in a cloud upon the  
 feasting gods, lighting and madness.

## Clytemnestra

Dear: make them safe. They may try to run away, the children.  
 Set spears to watch them. No harm, no harm,  
 But stab the nurse if they go near a door. Watch them, keep  
 the gates, order the sentinels,  
 While I make myself queen over this people again. I can do it.

## The Body of Cassandra

The sun's gone; that glimmer's  
 The moon of the dead. The dark god calls me. Yes, God,  
 I'll come in a moment.

## Clytemnestra

(At the head of the great stairs)  
 Soldiers: townsmen: it seems JACKALS: FOR  
 I am not at the end delivered to you: ~~ago~~, for the lion came:  
 the poor brown and spotted women  
 Will have to suffice you. But is it nothing to have come  
 within handling distance of the clear heaven  
 This dead man knowing when he was young and God endured him?  
 Is it nothing to you?



1-19

Clytemnestra (cont'd)

It is something to me to have felt the fury  
 And concentration of you: ~~I will not say I am grateful:~~  
~~I am not angry:~~ to be desired  
 Is wine even to a queen. You bathed me in it, ~~from brow~~  
~~to foot-sole, I had nearly enough.~~  
 But now remember that the dream is over. ~~I am the Queen:~~  
 Mycenae is my city. If you grin at me  
 I have spears: also Tiryns and all the country people of the  
 Argolis will come against you and swallow you,  
 Empty out these ways and wall, stock them with better subjects.  
 A rock nest for new birds here, townsfolk:  
 You are not essential.

The Body of Cassandra

I hear him calling through the she wolf's noise,  
 Agamemnon, Agamemnon,  
 The Dark god calls. Some old king in a fable is it?

Clytemnestra

So choose. What choices? To reenter my service  
 Unpunished, no thought of things past, free of conditions...  
 Or---dine at this man's table, have new mouths made in you  
 to eat bronze with.

The Body of Cassandra

Who is Agamemnon?

Clytemnestra

You, letting go of the sun: is it dark the land you are  
 running away to?

The Body of Cassandra

It is dark.

Clytemnestra

Is it sorrowful?

The Body of Cassandra

There is nothing but misery.

Clytemnestra

Has any man ever come back thence?  
 Hear me, not the dark God.

The Body of Cassandra

No man has ever.



1-20

Clytemnestra

Go then, go, go down--You will not choose to follow him,  
 people of the rock-city? No one  
 Will choose to follow him. I have killed: it is easy:  
 it may be I shall kill nearer than this yet:  
 But not you, townsfolk, you will give me no cause. I want  
 security; I want service, not blood.  
 I have been desired of the whole city, publicly; I want service,  
 not lust. You will make no sign  
 Of your submission; you will not give up your weapons;  
 neither shall your leaders be slain;  
 And he that flung the spear, I have forgotten his face.

Aegisthus

(Entering)

Dearest, they have gone, the nurse and the children,  
 No one knows where.

Clytemnestra

~~I am taming this people. Send men after them.~~ If any harm  
 come to the children  
 Bring me tokens. I will not be in doubt, I will not have  
 the arch fall on us. I dare  
 What no one dares. ~~I envy a little the dirty mothers of~~  
~~the city.~~ O, ~~oh~~  
 Nothing in me hurts. I have animal waters in my eyes, but  
 the spirit is not wounded. Electra and Orestes  
 Are not to live when they are caught. Bring me ~~such~~ tokens.  
 SORE

Cassandra

(In ~~her~~ own voice)

Who is this woman like a beacon  
 Lit on the stair, who are these men with dogs' heads?  
 I have ranged time and seen no sight like this one.

Clytemnestra

Have you returned, Cassandra?...The dead king has gone down  
 to his place, we may bury his leavings.

ED

Cassandra

I have witness all the wars to be; I am not sorrowful  
 For one drop from the pail of desolation  
 SPILT ~~Spilt~~ on my father's city; they were carrying it forward  
 To water the world under the latter starlight.

Clytemnestra

(To her slaves)

Take up the poles of the bed; reverently; ~~careful on the stair;~~  
 give him to the people.

(To the people)

O soldiers,  
 This was your leader; lay him with honor in the burial-chapel;  
 guard him with the spears of victory;

1-21

Clytemnestra (cont'd)

Mourn him until to-morrow, when the pyre shall be built.  
 Ah! King of men, sleep, sleep, sleep!  
 --But when shall I?

(The stage empties, except THE QUEEN'S GUARDS stiffly  
 on duty, and CLYTEMNESTRA and CASSANDRA)

They are after their corpse, like dogs after the butcher's  
 cart. -- Cleomenes, that captain  
 With the big voice. Neobulus was the boy who flung the  
 spear and missed. I shall not miss  
 When spear-flinging time comes.

(To Cassandra, contemptuously) *TELL ME MY FORTUNE.*  
 Captive woman, you have seen the future: *do you like it?*  
 (AEGISTHUS comes from the doorway)

Aegisthus!  
 Have your hounds got them?

Aegisthus  
 I've covered every escape with men: they'll not slip through  
 me. But commanded  
 To bring them here living.

Clytemnestra  
 That's hard: tigresses don't do it. I have some strength yet:  
 don't speak of it,  
 And I shall do it.

Aegisthus  
 It is a thing not to be done. We'll guard them closely:  
 but mere madness  
 Lies over the wall of too-much.

Clytemnestra  
 King of Mycenae, new-crowned king: who was your mother?

Aegisthus  
 Pelopia.  
 What mark do you aim at?

Clytemnestra  
 And your father?

Aegisthus  
 Thyestes.

Clytemnestra  
 And your mother's father?

1-22

Aegisthus

The same man, Thyestes.

*YOUR MOTHER IS*

Clytemnestra

See, dearest? The gods love what men call crime. They have  
 taken ~~her~~ crime to be the king of Mycenae.  
 Here is the stone garden of the plants that pass nature:  
 there is no too-much here: the monstrous  
 Old rocks want monstrous roots to serpent among them. ---  
 I will have security. I'd burn the standing world  
 Up to this hour, and begin new. You think I am too much used  
 for a new brood? Ah, lover,  
 I have fountains in me. I had a fondness for the brown cheek  
 of that boy, the curl of his lip,  
 The widening blue of his doomed eyes ... I will be spared  
 nothing. Come in, come in: they'll have news for us.

(THEY go into the palace)

Cassandra

If anywhere in the world  
 Were a tower with foundations, or a treasure-chamber  
 That stood on the years, ~~not staggering, not moving~~  
~~As if the mortar were mixed with wine for water~~  
~~And poppy for lime: they reel, they are all drunkards,~~  
 The piled strengths of the world: no pyramid  
 In bitter Egypt in the desert  
 But skips at moonrise; no mountain  
 Over the Black Sea in awful Caucasus  
 But whirls like a young kid, ~~like a bud of the herd,~~  
 Under the hundredth star: I am sick after steadfastness,  
 Watching the world cataractlike  
 Pour screaming onto steep ruins:---for the wings of prophecy,  
 God, once my lover, give me stone sandals  
 Planted on stone! He hates me, the God, he will never  
 Take home the gift of the bridleless horse,  
~~The stallion, the unbitted stallion:--the bed~~  
 Naked to the sky on Mount Ida,  
 The soft clear grass there,  
 Be blackened forever; may vipers and---Greeks  
 In that glen breed,  
~~Twisting together,~~ where the God  
 Gave me for a bride-gift prophecy, and I took it for a treasure:  
 I a fool, I a maiden,  
 I would not let him touch me though love of him maddened me  
 Till he fed me that poison, till he taught me to see the future---  
 The girdle flew loose then.  
 (She ~~gazes~~ about the empty stage)  
 The Queen considered this rock; she gazed on the great stone  
 blocks of Mycenae's acropolis:  
 Monstrous they seemed to her, solid they appeared to her, ~~safe~~  
~~roofope for monstrous deeds: Ah, fierce one,~~



1-23

Cassandra (cont'd)

Who knows who laid them for a snare? What people in the  
 world's dawn breathed on chill air, and the vapor  
 Of their breath seemed stone and has stood, and you dream  
 it is established? These also are a foam on the stream  
 Of the falling of the world: there is nothing to lay hold on:  
 No crime is a crime: the slaying of the King was a meeting  
 of two bubbles on the lip of a cataract:  
 One winked... and the killing of your children would be  
 nothing: I tell you for a marvel that the earth  
 is a dancer,  
 The grave dark earth is less quiet than a fool's fingers;  
 That old one, spinning in the emptiness, blown by no wind  
 in vain circles--- light-witted and a dancer.

Clytemnestra

(Entering)

You are prophesying: prophesy to a purpose, captive woman.  
 My children, the boy and the girl,  
 Have wandered astray: no one can find them.

Cassandra

Shall I tell the lioness  
 Where meat is? Or the she-wolf where the lambs wander astray?

Clytemnestra

But look into the darkness  
 And foam of the world: the boy has great tender blue <sup>E</sup>yes,  
 brown hair, disdainful lips: you'll know him  
 By the gold stripe bordering his garments; the girl's eyes  
 are my color, white her clothing---

Cassandra

Millions  
 Of shining bubbles burst and wander  
 On the stream of the world falling---

Clytemnestra

These are my children!

Cassandra

I see mountains,  
 I see no faces.

Clytemnestra

Tell me and I'll make you free; conceal it from me and a  
 soldier's spear finishes the matter.

1-24

Cassandra  
I am the spear's bride: I have been waiting, waiting for  
that ecstasy---

Clytemnestra  
(Furious)  
Live then. It will not be painless. (She goes in. The  
great door closes behind her.)

CASSANDRA

O fair roads north, where the land narrows,  
Over the mountains between the great gulfs,  
Oh that I too with the Queen's children  
Were wandering northward hand in hand.

~~Mine are worse wanderings:~~

They will shelter on Mount Parnassus,  
For me there is no mountain firm enough!  
But when the children return they will bring a sword.

CURTAIN

ACT TWOScene 1

It is dark night, eight years later. No change of scene. CASSANDRA stands at the head of the stair, alone in the darkness.

CASSANDRA

The years of captivity are endless. It is I, Cassandra,

Eight years the bitter watchdog of this door,

Who now approach to my end. Eight years I have watched the phantoms

Toil up and down this stair; and the rocks groan in the night, the great stones move when no man sees them.

I am not Cassandra,

But a counter of sunrises! permitted to live because I am crying to die: three thousand,

Pale and red, have flowed over the towers of the wall since I was here watching. The deep east widens,

The cold wind blows, the dark earth sighs, the dim gray finger of light plucks at the morning star. (Faint gray of dawn is beginning)

The palace feasted late and sleeps behind bolted doors; the last drunkard from the alleys of the city

Long has reeled home. Whose foot is this then? What phantom

Toils on the stair?

2-1-2

(ELECTRA has entered, a girl of  
eighteen or so, in beggar's rags,  
dimly visible in the twilight)

Electra

Is someone watching above? Good sentinel, I am only a  
girl beggar.

I would sit on the stair and hold my bowl.

Cassandra

Here eight years have begged for a thing and not received it.

Electra

You are not a sentinel? You have been asking some great boon,  
out of all reason.

Cassandra

No: what the meanest  
Beggar disdains to take.

Electra

Beggars disdain nothing: what is it that they refuse you?

Cassandra

What's given  
Even to the sheep and to the cattle.

Electra

Men give them salt, grass they find out for themselves.

Cassandra

Men give them the gift that you have come down from the north to  
give my mistress.

Death. Sudden death.

Electra

You speak riddles.

I am starving, a bread crust is all I want.

Cassandra

Your voice is young though winds have hoarsened it,  
your body appears  
Flexible under the rags: have you some hidden sickness, the  
young men will not give you silver?

Electra

I have a sickness: I will hide it until I am cured, You are  
not a Greek woman?

Cassandra

But you,  
Born in Mycenae, return home. And you bring gifts from Phocis:  
for my once master who's dead  
Vengeance; and for my mistress peace, for my master Aegisthus  
peace, and, by-shot of the doom's day,  
Peace for me also. But I have prayed for it.



2-1-3

Electra

I know you, I knew you before you spoke to me, captive woman,  
And I unarmed will kill you with my hands if you babble  
prophecies.  
That peace you have prayed for--I will bring it to you  
If you speak warning.

Cassandra

To-day I shall have peace, you cannot tempt me, daughter  
of the Queen, Electra.  
Eight years ago I watched you and your brother going north  
to Phocis: the Queen saw knowledge of you  
Move in my eyes: I would not tell her where you were when  
she commanded me: I will not betray you  
To-day either: it is not doleful to me  
To see, before I die, generations of destruction enter the  
doors of Agamemnon.  
Where is your brother?

Electra

Prophetess: you see all: I will tell you nothing.

Cassandra

He has well chosen his ambush,  
It is true Aegisthus passes under that house to-day, to hunt  
in the mountain.

Electra

Now I remember

Your name. Cassandra.

(DAWN GROWS BRIGHTER; DAYLIGHT BEGINS)

Cassandra

Hush: the grey has turned yellow, the standing beacons  
Stream up from the east; they stir there in the palace;  
strange, is it not, the dawn of one's last day's  
Like all the others? -- What will your brother do  
After the killing?

Electra

He will endure his destinies; and Cassandra hers;  
and Electra mine.  
He has been for years like one tortured with fire: this day  
will quench it.

Cassandra

They are opening the gates: beg now.  
To your trade, beggar-woman.

(The great door opens slowly)

The Porter

(Coming out, to Cassandra)

The Porter

The Porter, coming out, to Cassandra

Eh, pillar of miseries,  
You still on guard there? Like a mare in a tight stall,  
never lying down. What's this then?  
A second ragged one? This at least can bend in the middle and  
sit on a stone.

(He sees Electra)



2-1-4  
~~2-1-4~~

Electra

Dear gentleman

I am not used to it, my father is dead and hunger forces  
me to beg, a crust or a penny.

The Porter

This ~~tail~~<sup>old</sup> one's licensed in a manner. I think they'll not  
let two bundles of rags

Camp on the stair: but if you'd come to the back door and  
please me nicely: with a little washing  
You'd ~~like~~ do for pastime.

Electra

I was reared gently: I will sit here, the King will see me,  
And none mishandle me.

The Porter

I bear no blame for you.

I have not seen you: you came after the gates were opened.

(He goes in: *The sun has risen.*)

Cassandra

O rising sun, blossom of fire, bitter to men,  
Watch dog of the woeful days,  
How many sleepers,  
Bathing in peace, dreaming themselves delight,  
All over the city, all over the Argolid plain, all over the  
dark earth,  
Do you, terrible star, star without pity,  
Wolf of the east, waken to misery!  
To the wants unaccomplished, to the aching desires,  
To unanswered love, to hunger, to the hard edges  
And blade of reality, to the whips of their masters.  
They had flown away home ~~into~~<sup>into</sup> happy darkness,  
They were safe until sunrise.

(AEGISTHUS, with his retinue, comes from  
the great door)

Aegisthus

Even here, in the midst of the city, the early day  
Has a clear savor.

(To Electra)

What, are you miserable, holding the bowl out?  
We'll hear the lark to-day in the wide hills, and smell the  
mountain: I'd share happiness with you.  
What's your best wish, girl beggar?

Electra

It is covered, my lord. How should a beggar  
Know what to wish for, beyond a crust and a dark corner and  
a little kindness?

Aegisthus

Why do you tremble?

2-1-5  
~~2-6~~

Electra

I was reared gently; my father is dead.

Aegisthus

Stand up. Will you take service here in the house?

What country

Bred you gently and proved ungentle to you?

Electra

I have wandered north from the Eurotas, my lord,  
Begging at farmsteads.

Aegisthus

The Queen's countrywoman then, she'll use you kindly.

She'll be coming

In a moment, then I'll speak for you.-- Did you bid them

yoke the roans into my chariot, Menalcas?

The two from Orchomenus?

One of the Retinue

Yesterday evening, my lord,  
I sent to the stable.

Aegisthus

They cost a pretty penny, we'll see how they carry it. ---  
She's coming: hold up your head, girl.(CLYTEMNESTRA, with two SERVING  
WOMEN, comes from the door)

Clytemnestra

Good hunting dearest. Here's a long idle day for me to look to.  
Kill early, come home early.

Aegisthus

There's a poor creature on the step who's been reared nicely  
and slipped into misery. I said you'd feed her,  
And maybe find her a ~~service~~. Farewell, sweet one.

PLACE HERE.

Clytemnestra

Where did she come from?

(To Electra)

How long have you been here?

Aegisthus

She says she has begged her way up from Sparta. The horses  
are stamping on the cobbles, good-bye, good-bye.(He goes down the stairs ~~and out~~,  
with his HUNTSMEN)

*GOODBYE, DEAREST.*

2-1 6

Ægisthus! ~~Come back~~

Clytemnestra

Ægisthus

What?

Clytemnestra (holding out her arms to him)  
Let me touch you again. ~~I have the strangest terror.~~ .....

(He has come back reluctantly up the steps They embrace)

Clytemnestra (laughing)

Fond and foolish. ~~Farewell, dear~~ *GOODBYE, DEAREST.*

(He goes down and exits. She gazes after him then turns fiercely on Electra)

You! Let me see your face.

Electra

It is filthy to look at I am ashamed.

Clytemnestra

(To one of her serving women)

Leucippe, do you think this is a gaiety of my lord's, he's not used to be so kindly to beggars?

(To Electra)

Let me see your face

Leucippe

She is very dirty, my lady. It is possible one of the houseboys ...

Clytemnestra

(Fiercely, to Electra)

I say, draw that rag back, let me see your face

(To Leucippe)

I'd have him whipped then.

Electra

It was only in hope that someone would put a crust in the bowl, your majesty, for I am starving I didn't think your majesty would see me.

Clytemnestra

Draw back the rag.

Electra

I am very faint and starving but I will go down; I am ashamed.

Clytemnestra

Stop her, Corinna Fetch the porter, Leucippe. You will not go so easily.

(ELECTRA sinks down on the steps and lies prone, her head covered)

I am aging out of queenship indeed, when even the beggars refuse my bidding.

(LEUCIPPE comes in with the PORTER)

You have a dirty stair, porter How long has this been here?

The Porter

O my lady it crept up since I opened the doors, it was not here when I opened the doors.



2-1-7  
~~2-2~~(A DISTANT  
OUTCRY IS  
HEARD)

Clytemnestra

Lift it up and uncover its face.---/What is that cry in  
the city? Stop: silent: I heard a cry...  
Prophetess, your nostrils move like a dog's, what is that  
shouting?....  
I have grown weak, I am exhausted, things frighten me...  
Tell her to be gone, Leucippe I don't wish to see her, I  
don't wish to see her.

(ELECTRA rises)

Electra

Ah, Queen, I will show you my face.

Clytemnestra

No...no...be gone.

Electra

(Uncovering her face)

Mother: I have come home: I am humbled. This house keeps  
a dark welcome  
For those coming home out of far countries.

Clytemnestra

I won't look: how could I know anyone? I am old and shaking.  
He said, Over the wall beyond nature---  
Lightning, and the laughter of the Gods. I did not cross it,  
I did not kill what I gave life to.  
Whoever you are, go, go, let me grow downward to the grave  
quietly now.

Electra

I cannot  
Go: I have no other refuge. Mother! Will you not kiss me,  
will you not take me into the house,  
Your child once, long a wanderer? Electra my name. I have  
begged my way from Phocis, my brother is dead there,  
Who used to care for me.

Clytemnestra

Who is dead? Who?

Electra

My brother Orestes,  
Killed in a court quarrel.

Clytemnestra

(Weeping)

Oh---you lie! The widening blue blue eyes,  
The little voice of the child...Liar.

2-1-8  
~~2-1-8~~

Electra

It is true. I have wept long, on every mountain, You, mother,  
Have only begun weeping. Far off, in a far country, no fit  
burial...

Clytemnestra

And do you, bringing  
Bitterness...or lies...look for a welcome? I have only loved two:  
The priest killed my daughter for a lamb on a stone and now  
you say the boy too...dead, dead?  
The world's full of it, a shoreless lake of lies and floating  
rumors... ~~pack up your wares, peddler,~~  
~~Too false for a queen.~~ Why, no, if I believed you...Beast, <sup>(LISTENING AGAIN)</sup>  
treacherous beast! that shouting comes nearer,  
What's in the City?

Electra

I am a stranger, I know nothing of the city, I know only  
My mother hates me, and Orestes my brother  
Died pitifully, far off.

Clytemnestra

Too many things, too many things call me, what shall I do?

Electra,

Electra, help me. This comes of living softly, I had a  
lion's strength once.

Electra

Me for help? I am utterly helpless, I had help in my brother  
and he is dead in Phocis.  
Give me refuge: but each of us two must weep for herself,  
one sorrow. If the end of the world were on us  
What would it matter to us weeping? Do you remember him,  
Mother, Mother?

Clytemnestra

I have dared too much: never dare anything, Electra, the  
ache is afterward,  
At the hour it hurts nothing.

(To Cassandra)

Prophetess, you lied.

You said he would come with vengeance on me: but now he is dead,  
this girl says: and because he was lovely, blue-eyed,  
And born in a most unhappy house I will believe it. But the  
world's fogged with the breath of liars,

And if she has laid a net for me...

I'll call up the old lioness lives yet in my body--~~I have dared,~~  
~~I have dared~~---and tooth and talon

Carve a way through. Lie to me?

Electra

Have I endured for months, with feet bleeding, among  
the mountains,  
Between the great gulfs alone and starving, to bring you a  
lie now? I know the worst of you, I looked for the worst,  
Mother, mother, and have expected nothing but to die of this

2-1-9  
~~2-10~~

Electra (cont'd)

home-coming: but Orestes  
 Has entered the cave before; he is gathered up in a lonely  
 mountain quietness, he is guarded from angers  
 In the tough cloud that spears fall back from.

Clytemnestra

Was he still beautiful? The brown mothers down in the city  
 Keep their brats about them: what it is to live high! Oh!  
 Tell them down there, tell them in Tiryns,  
 Tell them in Sparta,  
 That water drips through the Queen's fingers and trickles  
 down her wrists, for the boy, for the boy,  
 Born of her body, whom she, fool, fool, fool,  
 Hunted out of the world. Electra,  
 Make peace with me.  
 Oh, Oh, Oh!

I have labored violently all the days of my life for nothing--  
 nothing--worse than nothing--this death  
 Was a thing I wished. See how they make fools of us  
 Amusement for them, to watch us labor after the thing that  
 will tear us in pieces...Well: strength's good.  
 I am the Queen; I will gather up my fragments  
 And not go mad now.

(FOREIGN SOLDIERS come in quietly and  
 guard the stair-front)

Electra

(Taunting and triumphant)

Mother, what are the men  
 With spears gathering at the stair's foot? Not of Mycenae  
 by their armor, have you mercenaries  
 Wanting pay? Do they serve...Aegisthus?

Clytemnestra

What men? I seem not to know...

(Furiously)

Who has laid a net for me, what fool  
 For me, me? Porter, by me.  
 Leucippe--my guards: Into the house, rouse them.

(LEUCIPPE runs into the house)

I am sorry for him.  
 I am best in storm. You, Electra?  
 The death you'll die, my daughter!---Guards, out! Was it a lie?  
 No matter, ~~no matter, no matter,~~  
 Here's peace. Spears out, out! They bungled the job making  
 me a woman. Here's youth come back to me,  
 And all mornings of gladness.



2-1-10

~~2-1-10~~

Leucippe

(Running back from the door)

O, Queen, strangers...

Orestes

(A sword in his hand, with spearmen  
following, comes from the door)

Where is that woman

The Gods utterly hate?

Electra

Brother: let her not speak, kill quickly. Is the other  
one ~~safe now?~~ **DEAD?**

Orestes

That dog **THE WHEELS OF**~~Roll under his chariot, we made sure of him between the  
wheels and the hooves, squealing. Now this one.~~

Clytemnestra

Wait! I was weeping, Electra will tell you, my hands are  
wet still,For your blue eyes that death had closed, she said, away  
up in Phocis, I die now, justly or not

Is out of the story, before I die I'll tell you

(He lifts the sword against her)

Wait, child, wait--- Did I quiver

Or pale at the blade? --- I say, caught in a net, netted in  
by my enemies, my husband murdered,Myself to die, I am joyful knowing she lied, you live, the  
only creature

Under all the heaven and arch of daylight

That I love, lives.

Electra

The great fangs drawn fear craftiness now, kill quickly.

Clytemnestra

As for her, the wife of a shepherd

Suckled her, but you

These very breasts nourished: ~~let rather one of your northern  
spearmen do what's needful; not you~~Draw blood where you drew milk. The Gods endure much,  
but beware them.

God

Orestes

This, a ~~Good~~ in his temple  
Openly commanded.

Clytemnestra

Ah, child, child, who has mistaught you and <sup>WHO HAS</sup> betrayed  
you? What voice ~~had~~ the God?

How was it different from a man's? and did you see him?

Who sent the priest presents? ~~They fool us,~~

2-1-11

~~2-1-11~~

BUT

Clytemnestra (cont'd)

And the Gods let them. No doubt also the envious King of  
 Phocis has lent you counsel as he lent you  
 Men. Let one of them do it. Life's not jewel enough  
 That I should plead for it: this much I pray, for your sake,  
 Not with your hand, or the memory  
 Will so mother you, so glue to you, so embracing you,  
 That not the deep sea's green day, no cleft of a rock in the  
 bed of the deep sea, no ocean of darkness  
 Out side the stars, will hide nor wash you. What is it to  
 me that I have rejoiced knowing you alive---  
 O child, O precious to me, O alone loved--if now, dying, by  
 my manner of death  
 I make nightmare the heir; nightmare, horror, in all I have of you;  
 And you haunted forever, never to sleep dreamless again,  
 never to see blue cloth  
 But the red runs over it; fugitive of dreams, madman at length,  
 the memory of a scream following you houndlike,  
 Inherit Mycenae? Child, ~~this~~ this has not been done before,  
 there is no old fable, no whisper  
 Out of the foundation, among the people that were before  
 our people, no echo has ever  
 Moved among these most ancient stones, the monsters here,  
 not stirred under any mountain, nor fluttered  
 Under any sky---of a man slaying his mother. Sons have  
 killed fathers---

Orestes

And a woman her son's father---

Clytemnestra

~~O many times:~~ and these old stones have seen horrors: a  
 house of madness and blood  
 I married into: and worse was done on this rock among the  
 older people before: but not this,  
 Not the son his mother; this ~~the old silent ones,~~  
~~The old hard ones,~~ the great bearers of burden have never  
 seen yet,  
 Nor shall, to-day nor yet to-morrow, nor ever in the world.  
 Let her do it, it is not unnatural,  
 The daughter the mother; that little liar there,  
 Electra do it. Lend her the blade.

Electra

Brother, though the great house is silent--hark the city!  
 That buzzes like the hive one has dipped a wand in. End this.  
 Then look to our safety.

(CIVILIANS and SOLDIERS of Mycenae  
 are coming in--excited groups that  
 make a crowd--beyond the foreign  
 spearmen)



2-1-12

~~2-1-12~~

Orestes

(Helplessly)

Dip in my sword  
 Into my fountain? Did I truly, little and helpless,  
 Lie in the arms, feed on the breast there?

Electra

Another, a greater, lay in them, another kissed the  
 breast there---  
 You forget easily--the breaker of Asia, the over-shadower,  
 the great memory, under whose greatness  
 We have hung like hawks under a storm, from the beginning--  
 and he, when this poison destroyed him,  
 Was given no room to plead in.

Orestes

Dip my wand into my fountain?

Clytemnestra

Men do not kill the meanest  
 Without defence heard---

Electra

Him---Agamemnon?

Clytemnestra

But you, O my son, my son,  
 Molded in me, made of my flesh, built with my blood, fed with  
 my milk, my child,  
 Whom I, I and no other, labored to bear, groaning---

Electra

This that makes beastlike lamentation  
 Hunted us to slay us; we starving in the thicket above the  
 stream three days and nights watched always  
 Her hunters with spears beating the field---  
 (To Cassandra)

Prophetess was it for love that she looked after us?

Cassandra

That love  
 The king had tasted; that was her love.

Electra

And mourning for our father on the mountain we judged her;  
 And the God condemned her---what more, what more? Strike!

Orestes

If they'd give me time, the pack there---how can I think,  
 And all the whelps of Mycenae yelling at the stair-foot?  
 ---Decision: a thing to be decided:  
 The arm's lame: dip in, dip in?

(To the people below)

Shut your mouths, rabble.

2-1-13  
~~2-1-13~~

Clytemnestra  
There is one thing no man can do.

Orestes  
What, enter his fountain?

Electra  
O Coward!

Orestes  
I will be passive, I'm blunted.  
(Looks at a spearman)  
She's not this fellow's mother.

Electra  
O ~~spearman~~, Spearman, do it!  
One stroke: it is just

The Spearman  
As for me, my lord...

Clytemnestra  
(Calling loudly)  
Help, help, men of Mycenae! To your Queen! ~~Break them!~~  
Rush the stair, there are only a few hold it. Up! up! kill!

Orestes  
I will kill.

Clytemnestra  
(Falling on her knees)  
Child,  
Spare me, let me live! Child!

(He stabs her)  
Ah!...

Electra  
You have done well.

Orestes  
I have done...I have done...  
Who ever saw such a flow... was I made out of this? ~~I'm not~~  
~~red, am I?~~  
See, father?

(He drops the sword)  
It was someone else did it but I told him to. Drink, drink, dog.  
Drink dog.  
He reaches up a tongue between the stones, lapping it. So  
thirsty old beard--uh?  
Rich and sticky.

2-1-14  
2-15

Clytemnestra

(Raising herself a little)

Sleep...for me...yes

Not you...any more...Orestes...I shall be there.

You will beg death...vainly as I have begged...life.

Ah...beast that I unkennelled!

(She dies)

Orestes

(Crouching by her)

Ooh...ooh...

Electra

The face is lean and terrible. Orestes!

They are fighting on the stair. ~~Man yourself. Come.~~ Pick up the sword.

Let her be. ~~Two of ours are down, they yield on the stair!~~

~~Stand up, speak or fight, speak to the people~~

Or we go where she is.

Orestes

There's a red and sticky sky that you can touch here.  
And though it's unpleasant we are at peace.

Electra

(Catching up the sword)

Agamemnon failed here. Not in me. Here, Mycenans!

I am Agamemnon's daughter, we have avenged him, the crime's paid utterly.

~~You have not forgotten the great King what, in eight years?~~

~~I am Electra, I am his daughter.~~

My brother is Orestes. My brother is your king and has killed the king's murderers. ~~The dog Aegisthus is dead, And the Queen is dead: the city is at peace.~~

(They cease fighting, stand and stare)

Orestes

(Standing up; reaching for the sword)

Must I dip my wand into my fountain? Give it to me.

The male plaything.

(He catches Electra's arm, snatching at the sword)

Electra

For what? Be quiet, they have heard me.

Orestes

You said I must do it, I will do it.

Electra

It is done!

Brother, brother?

(ORESTES takes the sword from her by force)

Oh Mycenae:



2-1-15

Electra (cont'd)

With this sword he did justice, ~~he let it fall, he has taken it again.~~  
He is your King.

Orestes

Whom must I pierce, the girl that plotted with me in the mountain?  
There was someone to kill.....  
You, sweet Electra?

Electra

It is done, it is finished!

Cassandra

The nearest, the most loved, her, truly. Strike! ~~Electra,~~  
~~My father has wanted vengeance longer~~

The People Below (Shouts of warning)

Orestes, Orestes!

Electra

(pointing to Cassandra)

Her- - your mother- - she killed him.

Orestes

(Turning and striking)

How tall you have grown, mother.

Cassandra

(falling)

I ... waited long for it. ...

Orestes

I have killed my mother and my mother---two mothers- -see, there  
they lie. You put it in  
and the flesh yields to it ...  
Now --to find her again  
All through the forest ....

(He goes down the steps, Men shrink away from him)

Electra

Let him pass, Mycenaeans! Avoid his sword  
Let him pass, ~~pass~~. The madness of the house  
Perches on him.

(They make way for ORESTES. He passes, holding high the  
sword, and goes out)

~~A Leader of the Mycenaeans~~ CAPTAIN

Daughter of Agamemnon:

You, with constancy and force

In the issueless thing have found an issue. Now it is for us,  
the kingless city,

To find a ruler, ~~nest in the house. As for the young man~~

2-1 16

CAPTAIN

A Leader of the Mycenaeans (cont'd)

~~Though he has done justice, and no hand in Mycenae is~~  
~~raised against him for him there is no issue~~  
~~We let him go on; and if he does not slay himself with the~~  
~~red sword he will die in the mountain,~~  
With us be peace. Rest in the house, daughter of Agamemnon  
The old Madness, with your brother,  
Go out of our gates.

Electra

A house to rest in'

(She is silent a moment)

Gather up the dead: I will go in; I have learned strength.

(She goes into the house, and the door closes)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

2 2-17

Scene 2

The stage is dark and empty, the great door closed.

~~AESCHYLUS comes in and stands, extreme left, with enough light to be recognized easily. He reads from his scroll.~~

~~Aeschylus~~

~~They carried the dead down the great stair; the slaves with pails of water and sand secured the dark stains.~~

~~The people met in another place to settle their troubled city; the stair was left vacant,~~

~~The porch untrampled, and in the evening one of the great stones~~

~~spoke "The world," it said, "is younger than we are,~~

~~But now it draws to an end, for the seasons falter." Another stone~~

~~said sleepily, "What way do they falter?"~~

~~"Red rain came down," it answered, "in the dry midst of summer~~

~~and then~~

~~Gold rain came down, and sand was rubbed across me as when the~~

~~storms blow. This is not natural in summer "~~

~~"I didn't feel it," the second said sleepily. Then a third spoke:~~

~~"The little and noisy creatures~~

~~Will be quieted long before the world ends " "What creatures?"~~

~~"The active ones, they call themselves men.~~

~~A mongrel race, mixed of soft stone with muddy water " The night~~

~~deepened, the dull old stones~~

~~Droned at each other, the summer stars wheeled over above them.~~

~~Before dawn the son of Agamemnon~~

~~Comes to the stair foot in the darkness~~

2-2-18

(Orestes enters. While he speaks, Aeschylus turns and quietly exits)

Orestes

O stones of the house: I entreat hardness: I did not live with you

Long enough in my youth,

(he hesitates, and slowly goes up the steps)

I will go up to where I killed her. — We must face things down, mother,

Or they'll devour us....Nobody? ... Even the stones have been scrubbed,

~~A keen housekeeper, sweet Electra,~~

...It would be childish to forget it; the woman has certainly been killed, and I think it was I,

Her son, did it. Something not done before in the world.

No, wife of Aggisthus—

why should I mask it?—mother, my mother,

The one soft fiber that went mad yesterday is

Burnt out of me now; there is nothing you could touch if you should come. But you have no power; you dead

Are a weak people. — This is the very spot; I was here, she there: and I walk over it not trembling,

Over the scrubbed stones to the door.

(He knocks loudly)

They sleep well. But my sister, having all her desire, Better than any.

(He knocks again)

The Porter

(Through the door)

Who is there?

Orestes

The owner of the house. Orestes.

~~The Porter~~

~~Go away, drunkard.~~

~~Orestes~~

~~Shall I tell my servants to break in the door and whip the porter?~~

Porter

~~Oh, Oh! You men from Phocis, stand by me while I speak to the door.~~

(Opening the door, holding a torch)

Is it you truly, my lord? We thought, we thought....We pray you to enter the house, my lord Orestes.



2-2-19  
~~3-3~~

Orestes

You are to waken my sister.  
I'll speak with her.

Electra

(At the door)  
Oh! You are safe, you are well! Did you ever think I could  
be sleeping? But it is true,  
I have slept soundly. Come, come in.

Orestes

Voice

A fellow in the forest  
Told me you'd had the stone scrubbed---I mean that you'd  
entered the house, received as Agamemnon's daughter,  
in the honor of the city. So I, free to go, travelling,  
have come with---what's the word, Electra?--Farewell.  
Have come to bid you farewell.

Electra

It means--you are going somewhere? Come into the house,  
Orestes, tell me---

Orestes

The cape's rounded. I have not shipwrecked.

Electra

Around the rock we have passed safely is the hall of  
this house,  
The throne in the hall, the shining lordship of Mycenae.

Orestes

No: the open world, the sea and its wonders.  
You thought the oars raked the headland in the great storm--  
what? for Mycenae?

Electra

Not meanest of the Greek cities:  
Whose king captured the world into Asia. Have you suddenly  
become ... a God, brother, to overvault  
Agamemnon's royalty? Oh, come in, come in. ~~I am cold.~~  
~~I pray you.~~

Orestes

~~Fetch a cloak, porter.~~  
---If I have outgrown the city a little: I have earned it.  
Did you notice, Electra, she caught at the sword  
As the point entered: The palm of her right hand was slashed  
to the bone before the mercy of the point  
Slept in her breast: the laid-open hand it was that  
undermined me---

(The PORTER returns)

Oh, the cloak. It's a blonde night:  
We'll walk on the stones: no chill, the stars are mellow.---  
~~If I dare remember~~  
Yesterday because I have conquered; the soft fiber's burnt out.

2-2-20  
~~8-4~~

Electra

You have conquered; possess: enter the house  
 Take up the royalty.

Orestes

You were in my vision to-night in the forest, Electra.  
 I thought I embraced you  
 More than brotherwise ... possessed, you call it ... entered  
 the fountain---

Electra

Oh, hush! Therefore you would not kill her!

Orestes

I killed. It is foolish to darken things with words. I was  
 here, she there, screaming. Who if not I?

Electra

The hidden reason: the bitter kernel of your mind that has  
 made you mad: I that learned strength  
 Yesterday, I have no fear.

Orestes

Fear? The city is friendly and took you home with  
 honor; ~~they'll pay~~  
~~Phocis his wages;~~ you will be quiet.

Electra

Are you resolved to understand nothing, Orestes,  
I am not Agamemnon, only his daughter. You are Agamemnon.  
 Beggars and the sons of beggars  
 May wander at will over the world, but Agamemnon has his  
 honor, and high Mycenae  
 Is not to be cast.

Orestes

Mycenae---for a ship. Who will buy kingdom  
 And sell me a ship with oars?

Electra

Dear: listen. ~~Come to the parapet where it hangs~~  
~~over the night:~~  
~~The ears at the door hinder me. Now--let the arrow-eyed~~  
~~stars hear: the night, not men: as for the Gods,~~  
~~No one can know them, whether they be angry or pleased,~~  
~~tall and terrible, standing apart,~~  
~~When they make signs out of the darkness... I cannot tell you...~~  
~~You will stay here, brother?~~

Orestes

~~I'll go.~~  
~~To the edge and over it. Sweet sister, if you've got a~~  
~~message for them, the dark ones?~~

2-2-21  
3-5

Electra

~~You do not mean~~~~Death ... but awundering ...~~ What does it matter what you mean?

I know two ways, and one will quiet you.

You shall choose either.

Orestes

But I am quiet. It is more regular than a sleeping  
child's: be untroubled.Yours burns, it is you trembling.

Electra

Should I not tremble? It is only a little to offer.  
But all that I have.

Orestes

To offer?

Electra

It is accomplished: my father is avenged: the fates  
and the body of ElectraAre nothing. But for Agamemnon to rule in Mycenae: that is  
not nothing. O my brother,You are Agamemnon. Rule: take all you will: nothing is  
denied you. The Gods have redressed evil

And clamped the balance.

Orestes

No doubt they have done what they desired.

Electra

And your desire: Yours: I will not suffer her,  
Justly punished, to dog you over the end of the world.Your desire: Speak it openly, Orestes.She must be conquered again; I will make war on her  
With my death, or with my body.

Orestes

What strange martyrdom, Electra, what madness for sacrifice  
Make your eyes burn like two fires on a watch-tower? ~~though~~  
~~the night darkens?~~

Electra

What you want you shall have---

And rule in Mycenae. ---~~You and I were two hawks quartering~~  
~~the field for living flesh, Orestes,~~~~Under the storm of the memory~~~~Of Agamemnon. We struck; we tore the prey; that dog and~~  
~~that woman. Suddenly since yesterday~~~~You have shot up over me and left me.~~You are Agamemnon; you are the storm of the living presence,  
the very King; and I, lost wings

Under the storm, would die for you. ...You do not speak yet?...

Mine to say it all? ... You know me a virgin, Orestes.

~~You have always been with me, no man has even touched my cheek.~~

It is not easy for one unmarried

And chaste, to name both choices. ~~The first is easy.~~ That

\* INSERT FROM 2-2-22



2-2-22

Electra (cont'd)

terrible dream in the forest:--if fear of desire  
 Drives you away: it is easy for me--not to be. I never  
 have known  
 Sweetness in life: all my young days were given--

Orestes

I thought that to be silent was better,  
 And understand you: afterwards I'll speak.

\* INSERT ON 2-2-21

Electra

~~to the noise of blood crying for blood, a crime~~  
~~to be punished,~~  
 A house made clean... ~~These things are done: and now I~~  
~~am lonely: and what becomes of me is not important.~~  
~~There's water to drown in, and there are swords to fall on:~~  
~~pain's only a moment:--I'd do it and not speak,~~  
~~but nobody~~

Knows whether it would give you peace or madden you again:  
~~I'd not be leagued with that bad woman against you:~~  
~~And these great walls sit by the crater, terrible desires~~  
~~blow through them.~~ O brother, I'll never blame you--  
 I share the motherhood and the fatherhood, I can conceive  
 the madness--if you desire too near  
 Your fountain: tell me. ~~I also love you: not that way,~~  
~~but enough to suffer.~~ What needs to be done  
 To make peace for you, tell me. I shall so gladly die to  
 make it for you: or so gladly yield you--  
 What you know is virgin. You are the King: have all your will:  
 only remain in steep Mycenae,  
 In the honor of our father. ---Dearest,  
 It is known that horror unlocks the heart, and shows  
 hidden things:--if that which happened yesterday unmasked  
 A beautiful brother's love and showed more awful eyes in it:--  
 All that our Gods require is courage.  
 Let me see the face, let the eyes pierce me. --- What, dearest?  
 ---Here in the stiff cloth of the sacred darkness,  
 Fold over fold hidden, above the sleeping city,  
 By the great stones of the door, under the little golden  
~~falcons that swarm before dawn up yonder,~~  
~~In silence ---~~ Must I make love to you,  
 I whom man never loved?

(She embraces him)

Oh you will stay! these arms

Making so soft and tender a bond around you ... I also begin  
 to love--~~that way, Orestes, that flaming way ...~~

AH, THE BURNING--YOUR MOUTH--KISS ME, BROTHER!

2-2-23

Orestes

We shall never ascend this mountain.

~~It is sweet: I long for it: the old stones here  
Have seen worse and not stirred. It is a custom of the house.~~

If I were Agamemnon

We'd live happily, sister, and rule Mycenae---be a  
king like the others---royalty and incest

Run both in the stream of the blood. -- Who scrubbed the  
stones there?

Electra

~~Slaves. -- O fire burn me! Enter and lay waste;  
Deflower, trample, break down, pillage my body,  
Make what wound you will, with flesh or a spear, give  
it to the spoiler!~~

I'll run my chances

On the bitter mercies of to-morrow.

Orestes

Bitter they would be. No.

Electra

It's clear that for this reason

You'd sneak out of Mycenae and be lost outward. ~~Taste first,~~

~~bite the apple: once dared and tried~~

~~Desire will not be terrible. We two of all the world, we alone,~~

~~Are fit for each other, we have so wrought... O eyes scorning~~

~~the world, storm-feathered hawk my hands~~

~~Caught out of the air and made you a king over this rock, O~~

~~axe with the gold helve, O star~~

~~Alone over the storm, beacon to men over blown seas--you~~

~~will not flee fate, you will take~~

~~What the Gods give. You will bind the north-star on your~~

~~forehead, you will stand up in Mycenae~~

Stone, and a king.

Orestes

I am stone enough not to be changed by words, nor by the  
sweet and burning flame of you,

Beautiful Electra

Electra

Well then--we've wasted our night. See, there's the  
morning star

I might have draggled into a metaphor of you. A fool, a boy:  
no king.

Orestes

It might have been better

To have parted kinder, for it is likely

We shall have no future meeting

2 2-24

Electra

You will let this crime ~~(which the God commanded)~~  
 that dirtied the old stones here  
 Make division forever?

Orestes

Not the crime: the wakening

Electra

Yet we are divided.

Orestes

Because I have suddenly awakened; I will not waste inward  
 Upon humanity, having found a fairer object.

~~Electra~~

~~Some female beast? I knew this coldness  
 Had a sick root:  
 Tell me clearly, Orestes, what madness  
 Met you in the night and sticks to you?~~

(Dawn has begun, and increases to the end)

~~Orestes~~

I left the madness of the house, to night in the dark:  
 with you it lives yet  
 How can I tell you what I have learned? ~~Your mind is like  
 a hawk's or like a lion's; this knowledge  
 Is out of the order of your mind, a foreign language, to  
 wild beasts and the blood of kings  
 A verse blind in the book~~

Electra

~~At least my eyes can see dawn grayings.~~ Tell, and not  
 mock me: our moment  
 Dies in a moment

Orestes

Here is the last labor  
 To spend on humanity I saw a vision of us move in the dark:  
 All that we did or dreamed of  
 Regarded each other; the man pursued the woman, the woman clung  
 to the man, warriors and kings  
 Strained at each other in the darkness, all loved or fought  
 inward, each one of the lost people  
 Sought the eyes of another that another should praise him;  
 sought never the truth but the people; the net of desire  
 Had every nerve tangled, turned inward; so that they writhed  
 like a full draught of fishes, all matted  
 In the one mesh; when they look backward they see only a man



2-2 25

Orestes (cont'd)

standing at the beginning,  
 Or forward, a man at the end; or if upward, men in the  
 shining bitter sky striding and feasting,  
 Whom you call Gods ...  
 It is all turned inward, all <sup>men's</sup> your desires incestuous,  
 All human ~~men's~~

Electra

You have dreamed wretchedly

Orestes

I have seen the dreams of the people and not dreamed them.  
 As for me, I have slain my mother

Electra  
 (bitterly)

No more?

Orestes

And the gate's open, the gray boils over the mountain,  
 I have greater  
 Kindred than dwell under a roof.  
 Tonight, lying on the hillside,  
 sick with those visions, I remembered  
 The knife in the stalk of my humanity; I drew and it broke;  
 I entered the life of the brown forest,  
 And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone;  
 and I was the stream  
 Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking; and I  
 was the stars,  
 Boiling with light, wandering alone, ~~each one of the lord of~~  
~~his own summit~~; and I was the darkness  
 Outside the stars, I included them, they were a part of me  
 I was mankind also, a moving lichen  
 On the cheek of the round stone... They have not made words  
 for it: to go behind things, beyond hours and ages  
 And be all things in all time, in their returns and passages,  
 in the motionless and timeless center,  
 In the white of the fire!

Electra - - -

Was that your name before this life dawned ---

Electra

Here is mere death. Death like a triumph I'd have paid  
 to keep you  
 A king in high Mycenae: but here is shameful death: to die  
 because I have lost you. They'll say ---  
 "Having done justice Agamemnon's son ran mad and was lost  
 in the mountain; but Agamemnon's daughter  
 Hanged herself from a beam of the house: O bountiful hands  
 of justice!" - - - This horror draws upon me  
 Like stone walking.



2 2-26

Crestes

What fills men's mouths is nothing; and your threat is  
 nothing; I have fallen in love outward.  
~~even if I believed you~~ ~~it is I that am~~ like stone walking.

(He goes down the steps, and high headed into the  
 dawn)

Electra

(moans)

Oh. . . I hate him. (Pleading) Come back Crestes! (She turns away)  
 To-day should have been our triumph. we labor and conquer-- --  
 and triumph.

Here it is. . . we crush our enemies and triumph.  
 Oh dull and painful game, that a fool plays  
 With fools.--- Porter: come here.

The Porter

(comes from within the house)

Here, my lady

Electra

Fetch me a piece of rope, ~~from the harness room.~~ My brother  
 wants me to hang up something - - a charm to bring peace.  
 Ten feet of rope.

The Porter

Yes, my lady.

(He goes in)

Electra

As for the city---let my father's dim ghost  
 rule it and make its laws.

(She laughs shrilly)

waggle, Old beard.

Sit on the high throne and speak judgment--but I'll hang higher.  
 Hush!

(SHE checks her laughter) ~~as the PORTER returns; takes the coiled  
 rope and dismisses him)~~

~~Nothing more. Nothing.~~ HUSH! (SHE BACKS UP STAIRS TO DOOR) HUSH!  
 (She stands, laughing, knotting a noose in the rope, and goes  
 in to the dark palace, ~~CLOSES DOOR.~~)

CURTAIN

## BOOK REVIEWS



Robinson Jeffers. *The Point Alma Venus Manuscripts: Preliminary Versions of The Women at Point Sur*. Edited by Tim Hunt and Robert Kafka, Stanford University Press, 2021. 313 pp.

### REVIEWED BY JIM BAIRD

In the 1970s, Robert Kafka, later co-editor of *Jeffers Studies*, president of the Robinson Jeffers Association and recipient of the Lawrence Clark Powell award, was a scholar interested in the work of the poet and working on his own, as there was then no Association, no standard edition of Jeffers' poetry and only a selection of his letters. He was intrigued by a letter Jeffers wrote in 1926 to his publisher, Donald Friede, in which he stated that he was at work on a long poem called Point Alma Venus which he expected would be his next publication (CL 1: 563–64). But a few days later Jeffers wrote to Friede again and explained that after reviewing that manuscript, he had decided not to publish it but to start over and tell the story anew (1: 566–69). The new version became *The Women at Point Sur*.

Kafka wondered if the abandoned manuscript had survived. While studying Jeffers' papers at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, he found lengthy sections of poetry on the reverse of such items as the typescript of *The Alpine Christ*, which Jeffers also had decided not to publish. Jeffers did all his own typing, as his handwriting was so difficult to decipher that he did not delegate the task of reading it even to his beloved Una. An example of what Kafka encountered is a frontispiece to the volume being reviewed. The typing of the discarded work bleeds through from the obverse, Jeffers wrote the new material in light pencil, and many words are in a sort of personal shorthand that turns words into a few letters and a flat line. Jeffers also wrote notes to himself in the margins.

Kafka shared what he had found with members of the Jeffers family and other Jeffers scholars such as William Everson and Tim Hunt, later editor of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. The final

fragment bears the title *Point Alma Venus*, a version Jeffers had been aiming toward with the other workups. "Point Alma Venus" is a stand-in for Point Sur, with the "alma venus" (fostering love) a nod to one of Jeffers' favorite writers, Lucretius. Kafka and Hunt pieced together the fragments of the discarded *Point Alma Venus* versions from not only old typescripts but such ephemera as the backs of bank statements and advertising fliers. They also found more such material at libraries other than Texas: Occidental College, Harvard, and Yale. The decades they devoted to locating, deciphering, and organizing this scattered and at first unknown or discarded poetry resulted in a stunning work of scholarship. Tim Hunt's final version of these fragments includes the manuscripts themselves and scholarly help for understanding them, including a Preface and an Introduction, an Afterword, a Chronology, Textual Notes and a description of the informing Scholarly Apparatus, and explanations for emendations. Not only readers of Jeffers' volumes but lovers of poetry in general owe the editors respect and thanks.

They found four sets of fragments, each of which has enough cohesion in technique, characters, and content similarity to be grouped together. All are attempts to tell the story of the rebellious pastor, Arthur Barclay, who had enough vision to recognize that religious accounts of the nature of reality and God are symbolic, cloudy, or just plain false, and enough nerve to try to burst out of the mundane concerns of everyday life, but not enough humility to realize that everything is a part of God. Instead, Barclay claimed divine powers for himself. As Jeffers put it, he meant to show what would happen if his own viewpoint that everything is a part of divinity were misunderstood and acted upon by "a fool or a lunatic" (CP 1: 689). But before encountering that story directly, Jeffers tried several approaches which turned into blind alleys. Although Jeffers rejected these fragments, there is plenty of good poetry and exploration of the poet's ideas to warrant their publication. This book should be read by everyone interested in Jeffers' work. A recurring image through several of the fragments is that of the Point Pinos lighthouse, which, when Jeffers was writing the fragments, was situated at the center of concentric circles formed by paths and shrubbery.<sup>1</sup> Barclay had dreamed of such an arrangement, a cup and ring pattern which he thinks is a link with past civilizations. He sees immediately that one reaches the tower of the lighthouse not by following the paths, which only lead one back to the beginning

of the path, but by cutting through the circles to the tower. Circles are universal symbols of wholeness, unity, and order, but following the curve of a circle's circumference gets one only back where one started. The reverend is seeking permanent, unchallenged truth. Barclay suggests through his analysis of this image that all conventional explanations of reality are self-referential and not to be trusted. If Barclay's story had taken a different turn, perhaps he might have realized that sometimes the journey is the reward, not the destination.

There is another spiritual path which is suggested once Barclay enters the lighthouse and which he ignores. The lighthouse keeper asks if he would like to see the light, a question that could be interpreted and answered a number of ways. Of course Barclay wants to see it. When visiting Hawk Tower, one must go to the top. One reaches the room that houses the light by means of what Jeffers, throughout several versions, calls the "worm-drill" staircase, (9, 28, 38) suggesting a repetitive, tedious, and mindless path. That staircase is a spiral that describes a cylinder, topologically a series of circles set atop each other. At the top, which is also the center, one finds a blinding light that illuminates everything within a circle where that light is the center. In terms of Barclay's analysis, one abandons a series of false explanations (the circles outside) to follow an upward circular path to a final destination where the central element is only partially revealed. One must assemble that reality for oneself after seeing parts by means of a literally enlightening system which reveals only bits of it at a time. Instead of adding this image to the others he had examined, Barclay treats the light as a tourist attraction, leaving after a few minutes. He missed understanding the significance of the lighthouse, although he thought he had before he entered it—a failure helps to explain why he tried to assume the powers of God. He thought that he had reached a solution, but his explanation was another one of the circles, a source of more knowledge, but, by his own analysis, not a stopping point. Pleased that he has figured out something, he stops evaluating what he sees. In terms of the worldview he has abandoned, he is brought down by the sin of pride. Actually, as the resultant *The Women at Point Sur* shows, rather than trying to solve puzzles which he himself has defined and constructed, he needs to examine his own life. "The kingdom of God is within you."



Another model that might have helped Barclay understand the lighthouse is Plato's metaphor of the cave, which, as a Christian minister, he must have known. In that tale, those who see the shadows on the walls of the cave think that they are reality; someone looks in the other direction and finds that a central light gives these shadows their existence. This story presents the idea that ordinary life is merely physical and created and informed by a spiritual reality which should be the focus of one's attention. But when Barclay goes to the lighthouse he is a *former* Christian minister. If Barclay had thought of Plato, he might have rejected that story as a path to a religious solution he has rejected. But there is more to Plato's metaphor. One of the cave dwellers reaches the surface and finds that what the cave contains is a construct; there is a far greater reality (still created and informed by light) beyond the cave, and *that* is what one must seek. That full view of the cave story fits Barclay's quest, but Plato's story would be, to him, just one of the abandoned circles of explanation which no longer explain.

In a later fragment, Barclay remembers the lighthouse as a great tower covering a hole in the ground. The light, which is supposed to be a guide, a help for those in need of direction, is actually a kind of fraud. The light at the top of the structure promises safety, the certainty of stable human life. Not noticing how the light fits into his circle and cutting path of the grounds, Barclay skips over the possible positive implications of the light and concludes that what it really leads to is at best, nothing, because a hole can be avoided, but it may become an abyss, which takes over one's mind and draws it in. So Barclay retains the model of the viewer who seeks truth from the advantage of a promontory, discarding the lighthouse in favor of solid ground—the hill from which he issues his rants.

Barclay goes to the lighthouse to meet the lighthouse keeper's wife, a medium who conducts seances. Disillusioned by religious reports of visitations from the dead, Barclay wants to find out if the dead can appear through the medium. Although Jeffers' writings are full of ghosts, walking dead, and strange scenes with no logical explanation, the poet dropped this putative way of reaching the dead after several scenes in the fragments.

Perhaps he did so because of the topical nature of the medium's appeal. During the 1920s, what was then called spiritualism, reaching departed loved ones through those specially endowed was quite the thing, and tables were walking across America. At one

end of the spectrum of belief in this behavior were those such as Mrs. Arthur Conan Doyle, who claimed to be in touch with the next world, and at the other Harry Houdini, who exposed many visits from the departed as based on tricks well known to stage magicians. The seances in the fragments are attended by skeptics. In one version, the lighthouse keeper is irritated by the interest in his wife's behavior; in another, he flatly does not believe in her powers. When the medium brings forth two men who drowned in the sinking of their fishing boat, listeners ask that they provide specific previously unknown information, not that which could have been gleaned from newspaper accounts the medium read. One of them replies to the effect that they were too busy drowning to note the details, a response which shows that the dead are not interested in cross-examinations from the living, whose world they have left behind.

The medium does present a visitor whom Barclay could not explain: the doctor who treated Barclay's first wife during her final illness. He convinces Barclay that he is who he says he is when he describes a distinctive mole on her body. Oddly, the appearance of this apparition suggests that the lighthouse keeper's wife is a genuine medium. She has no control over who will appear. The inhabitants (members?) of the next world have a sense of humor. "Tell the truth, but tell it slant." Barclay would rather have visited with his wife's spirit, but instead he gets her doctor. If Barclay's wife had appeared, she might have had little to tell, because she, and Barclay's memories of her, do not appear in the rest of the material.

The main effect of this visit regarding Barclay's first wife is its impact on Barclay's son, Edward, who appears in most of the fragments. He had never heard of this first wife, and his distrust of his father deepens after this episode. Like the seances, Edward is also cut out of *The Women at Point Sur*, in which the reader learns that he had died in the First World War. Perhaps Jeffers learned from these failed attempts at Edward's development that passive characters are more useful as corpses, the most prominent of which is Houlst Gore. As Edward appears in the fragments, he rarely reacts to the action, although he is motivated by fantasies of personal and military power, comparing himself in his mind to Alexander the Great. For example, although he is stunned by the news that his father had been previously married, he does not confront his father or ask for more information. He either avoids or is unready

for action. In a scene which Jeffers repeated in several versions, a woman tries to seduce Edward during a nighttime swim. At first he demurs that he has no bathing suit, but they use a rocky outcrop as a screen; she strips on one side, he on the other, and they meet in the ocean. In spite of his desire for a breakthrough to a new reality, a goal that might unite him with his father, he cannot embrace what he must regard as the seamier elements of life. His swimming companion, a consenting adult, clearly wants sex, but Edward is frightened and confused. He asks what she wants him to do. She replies, "A man wouldn't ask." Jeffers liked the line so much that he used it in all the versions of this incident (58, 116, 150, 176). In the last account of the seductive swim, his female companion saves him from drowning. Jeffers must have finally decided to kill Edward off in the war and thus make some narrative use of his lameness. A lost child is another burden that drives Barclay to forsake conventional explanations of life.

Another of Edward's plans which are never enacted is his desire to murder his father. Jeffers wrote to Friede that "Point Alma Venus" involved "a weak imaginative boy who kills his father" (CL 1: 564). His antagonism toward Barclay is not given much foundation, so that was another idea that was cut from *The Women at Point Sur*. This desire appears in *Point Sur* through Barclay's daughter, who, driven mad by Barclay's attack on her, imagines herself as her brother, seeking revenge against their father for having blithely sent him to his death. The attack on Barclay does not occur; perhaps Jeffers was just reminding readers that Barclay understood and treated his son no better than he did his wife and daughter.

In *The Women at Point Sur*, Jeffers replaces Edward with a character who does not appear in the fragments, Randal Morhead. He has survived the war with his adolescent fantasies about the uplifting qualities of fighting intact. A real man. There is no evidence that he has seen battle. Although all veterans make sacrifices to fulfill their civic duty, few have been in combat. Morhead thinks that his uniform and war stories will make him more attractive to women, so he tries to romance April Barclay and is rejected. He learns nothing from this dismissal and continues the same behavior. If Barclay is a madman who tries to harness the powers of nature to his own ends, Randal is a fool who notices nature not at all and misunderstands the nature of humanity. He survives while Barclay dies because his plans and goals are trivial. Recall that Jeffers wrote that *The*

*Women at Point Sur* was planned to show what his own philosophy would become in the mind of “a fool or a lunatic.” Randal shows that a fool cannot grasp Jeffers’ philosophy.<sup>2</sup> After all, to do so is to risk not only the false security of conventional certainty but to approach madness.

Edward is present, however, in a scene that appears several times in different fragments. In *The Women at Point Sur*, Audis, Barclay’s wife, is a woman so beaten down by circumstance that she is barely present. In that account, she has also lost her son, an unhealable wound. But in the various *Point Alma Venus* versions, she is twenty-two years younger than Barclay, still full of energy and desire, angry at her husband’s destruction of their previous life and faith, and so she attacks him both directly and through a surrogate. In *The Women at Point Sur*, Barclay tests (or exhibits) his sexual powers with the “Indian” servant Maruca, always described as “brown,” “squat,” or “coarse.” Apparently there is no desire in these unions. A hundred years ago and more, men in charge of servants (often people of a different color or race) raped them as a demonstration of power. Real men don’t ask. In the fragments, Barclay’s tryst with Maruca is not described but strongly implied. Audis, who, Edward thinks, is gripped by “insane fancies” (65) suspects Barclay of a liaison with Maruca and enlists Edward’s aid in luring her to the barn where they tie her up, suspend her from a beam, and whip her as punishment for a sin which is really Barclay’s. Previously, Audis had strung a noose over the beam in order to hang herself, but Barclay surprises her and stops her. Maruca is a substitute victim. In a note, Jeffers suggests that “From this crisis Edward has laid aside his boyhood, desire has become known to him, he goes about seeking its satisfaction” (73). The disgust has become arousal, but Edward never completes the arc that Jeffers describes.

The girl’s punishment is motivated by Audis’s hatred of Barclay, and is so bizarre that it may be what Jeffers meant when he wrote of the characters in *The Women at Point Sur*, “these here have gone mad” (CP 1: 289). Still, it is difficult to accept that Jeffers wrote this scene, even though he chose not to publish it. The details are presented with relish, as ever when Jeffers dived into carnography.

Another reason for Jeffers’ minimizing of Audis may be that while he was testing these fragments, he was creating such strong female characters as California and Clytemnestra. Tim Hunt suggests that the earliest fragments may predate the writing of

*Tamar* (1, 254).<sup>3</sup> Audis is so passionate that she rivals Barclay, and even Tamar, in intensity. Jeffers may have thought that it was time to center a poem on a strong, if ultimately failed, male character.

Jeffers' disappointment with the way these characters behaved also may have caused him to recast the entire narrative with a new and stronger male character. The last fragment but one, "The MacTorald Version," features a more self-possessed protagonist, Alan MacTorald, and this version builds that person's story at some length. MacTorald is wealthy and successful, builds a big house above Carmel and takes his wife there, speaking of the people and places below him. He has visited Asia and can read the minds of others, telling his wife of Barclay and his life, the dream Barclay had of the circles. Presumably Jeffers created MacTorald as a narrator who could tell Barclay's story at a distance, aware of all of it and able to place Barclay's collapse into a larger spiritual context which he also inhabits. Jeffers may have created MacTorald as a narrator in order to exert greater control over the narrative. But what Barclay's pain needs is not coherence but emotional impact. The space devoted to all these other characters shows that Jeffers was searching for a way to avoid dealing directly with Barclay's madness. In the final fragment, which Jeffers thought worthy of the title "Point Alma Venus," he inverts the MacTorald character to give us Old Morhead, another in his group of wounded or aged characters who live in the attic and cast a spiritual shroud over the other characters.

April is another female character whose role in *The Women at Point Sur* is greatly changed. In the fragments, she is someone else's daughter (originally, the daughter of the lighthouse keeper) who sometimes pops into the action, usually with a calming effect. In *Point Sur*, she keeps that gentle disposition but becomes Barclay's daughter, and, in his view, the agent who helps him achieve a new level of awareness through his incestuous rape which breaks the bounds of human decency. And breaks her, too.

The discovery of all this new material explains why, after the beginning of *The Women at Point Sur*, Jeffers as narrator charges his characters, "But stammer the tragedy, you crackled vessels" (CP 1: 289). The narrative has just started, but the author states that his characters have gone mad, fulfilling his description of Barclay as one who has understood Jeffers' viewpoint as a madman would. But he began *The Women at Point Sur* after several years of struggle with these characters. He thought that he was at the end of something,

not the beginning. A vessel is crackled because it has been too long in the fire of the kiln. These were not the characters that he wanted, but the more reliable MacTorald was not, either. If he wanted the passion and energy of his story to be effective, in this case, he had to let it be insane.

In the final fragment, which Jeffers thought worthy of the title "Point Alma Venus," he revisits the hidden beauty he had noted in "The Excesses of God" (CP 1: 4) and says,

... painted rainbows in the domes of sea-shells  
Where only the blind mouth of the flesh touches,  
    deep down out of sunlight,  
Set beauty inside the body, only the surgeon sees it . . .  
And beauty in the crystals of the stone that never is opened;  
    and in the electric changing dances,  
The strain inside the dark heart of the sun's fire . . . (221)

He also uses several new metaphors to explain the concept of breaking out of humanity which he had by that time presented in "Roan Stallion."

Humanity is the bottle to be burst on a rock and the sharp savor  
Remember its wings; the seed to be scattered, the tower  
Built to fall, the gray bird  
Flying to be shot in the air . . . (222)

There is a pregnant marginal note in the fragments on which Jeffers did not act. Jeffers tells himself that at this point the characters begin to speak as "disembodied spirits" (77). Perhaps there was too much action in the fragments to allow the characters to stop and talk. He saved that approach for the explanations of completed actions that appear in the Noh play, *Dear Judas*.

By far the most important concept which Jeffers introduced in the fragments and which takes a central position in not only *The Women at Point Sur* but throughout the rest of his work is "strain," a condition that describes not only tension but tension that must be released by transformation, and often by transformation that seems from the human perspective destruction. *Point Sur* begins with a description of a stormy, lightning-filled night that climaxes with a bolt striking an oil storage tank at Monterey (an actual event that happened in 1924) causing a violent explosion. The strain of



the atoms in the oil held together until their strain is released in, say, the controlled ignition in the cylinders of a car, doing work useful to humans, instead is expressed in a monstrous fireball beyond the control of those who gathered the atoms for use. This event is a perfect metaphor for Jeffers' concept of God as involved in creation (the temporary relationship of the atoms under strain) and the destruction through the disturbing of that strain into eruption, resulting in new creation of God knows what. Two of the fragments are titled "Storm as Deliverer." A storm may wipe out a previous reality as a tornado does a house, "delivering" one to a new existence. It also may, as a doctor delivers a baby, present you with something that you will have to deal with for a long time.

It also is a bit of a jolt to read of oil tanks in a Jeffers poem. The poet switches the description to the atomic level to invoke his power-of-the-universe concept of God, but the twentieth century reality eats at the description's impact. Automobiles are also a surprise in Jeffers. Are they "permanent things"? Perhaps Jeffers often returns to ancient models because the pastoral life he imagined lasting forever when he and Una arrived in Carmel is gone. Cattle are now herded by helicopters, not cowboys.

In quotidian reality, the strain that most people experience because of the pressures of social restraints or their own frustrated desires is released through sex or violence. Jeffers underlines this point by contrasting his description of the oil tank explosion with a tryst between Faith Heriot and Myrtle Cartwright which occurs at the same time. That sort of strain results in a physical, orgasmic explosion, but like the oil fire, it may also result in new life or some other totally unexpected surprise.

In *The Women at Point Sur*, Jeffers tries to limit the action to Barclay as much as possible and sharpens the focus of Barclay's interest, which had been fuzzy throughout the various fragments to three questions he poses: is there a God, is there a life (or existence) after death, and (a question perhaps to be fully considered after answering the first two), how should one live one's life? After Barclay concludes that God is everything, he adds another element, "God thinks through action" (CP 1: 253). Barclay says this many times in *The Women at Point Sur*, usually to justify or explain to himself what he hopes will be his breakthrough to a more perfect reality. Instead, Jeffers shows that his actions grow more bizarre as each transgression of human values leads not to enlightenment but to

another action which takes him more into the psychic abyss which finally becomes a real abyss, the abandoned mine in which he dies. His questions led to a quest to become divine. By his own analysis, he already is a part of divinity, but he fails to realize that God is not one thing or person.

A poet said to me that a poet knows how his or her poem will end, but a novelist does not know where or how a novel may end. An example of such a novelist is Cervantes, often considered the first modern novelist, who began *Don Quixote* as a satire on romantic writing and its victims, and concluded with the Don as the most admirable figure in his world. This view of the novelist as described by a poet is reductive and perhaps ultimately wrong, but useful in making sense of the *Point Alma Venus* manuscripts. In the narrative poems which Jeffers finished while he was writing these fragments, the settings are limited and the cast of characters small. *Tamar* is the story of a transgressive hero who first is angered by her role in life, then discovers that her incestuous breakout is nothing new, and turns the vengeful energy she embodies into an emotional explosion mirroring that of the oil tanks releasing their strain. Tamar's explosion destroys her family and even the house they lived in. In "Roan Stallion," Jeffers' most accessible narrative, the actors are limited to a family of three, four if one includes the horse, and the point, or one of them, is that a character learns to balance a divine and animal nature. In *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, Jeffers is helped to limit the action by the known events of a classical model and by the unities of Greek tragedy. There are only six characters, one of whom is only present long enough to be murdered, but Jeffers does give us Orestes, his only example of a fully enlightened person, a transgressive hero who has "walked in" to a new, redemptive vision. We know that Orestes' transgressive act is killing his mother, but apparently he was enlightened before the matricide, perhaps enabling it. Jeffers spent the rest of his career trying other poetic means of expressing and explaining that breakthrough. In *The Women at Point Sur*, he chose the easier but still daunting task of describing what appeared to be enlightenment but which turned into a blind alley.

Between the two letters to Donald Friede, Jeffers must have reread all that he had produced about Arthur Barclay and may have found himself writing a novel rather than a poem. There is nothing unusual about that—the first verse novelist may have been

Homer, and such works as Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and a number of long stories by Jeffers' contemporary, Edwin Arlington Robinson, were admired during Jeffers' most productive period (although not today, with its emphasis on shattered worldviews). But when he looked at what he had written so far, he found that in his attempt to make Barclay's world solid and believable, he had produced over a score of other characters who had been conceived for what they might reveal about the minister, and would have to be fleshed out themselves in order to be substantial enough to have an impact on him or the reader. There are even scenes featuring local liquor smugglers. These people would have also rooted the story in a particular time (Prohibition) and their world is not an example of "permanent things" and their concerns not those of Barclay. He came close to writing the kind of novel which is called an "anatomy," which describes a whole society by not focusing on one or two characters but on their interactions with each other and their suppositions about the place and people they live with. Larry McMurtry's *The Last Picture Show* is a recent example. All of this is an evasion of confronting Barclay's madness directly.

A simple explanation of why the fragments were discarded is that they generated too many plotlines and characters to be properly developed. Even with these tassels stripped, *The Women at Point Sur* is Jeffers' longest poem. As an artist who came to his themes, technique, and conclusions early, Jeffers had no patience with side shows. Most of his long poems are elaborately disguised fables of the Brothers Grimm, not the fairy tale, variety. The long poems gather together characters who have flawed assumptions about life; during the course of these poems, these characters are driven by passions and pulled by strains making tragic conclusions inevitable. As in the sorts of fables mentioned, the message is "Reader, beware (or at least, be alert)!" His emphasis on and apparent fondness for gross, disgusting, or shocking details may have been sand thrown in the eyes of his readers of myth-based works whose outcome was inevitable that all this is not just fantasy. Imaginary gardens with real toads. To attempt the novel's presentation or explanation of the mess of quotidian reality was not a task for which he was equipped, nor did he finally want to attempt. *The Women at Point Sur* retains the length and complexity of a novel, but attempts to salvage what he learned about Barclay from his patchwork of what he deemed to be failures. But what interesting failures they are.

## NOTES

1. Robert Kafka, in his essay “The Lighthouse-Keeper’s Daughter,” includes a photograph of the Point Pinos lighthouse which shows this pattern. The essay also contains another example of a page from *The Point Alma Venus Manuscripts* and an account of Kafka’s study of those manuscripts. Anyone interested in the volume reviewed here should also consult this article.

2. For more on Randal Morhead’s role as a fool, see Baird.

3. In addition to Hunt’s discussion of the dating of the fragments in the Afterword and Chronology to *The Point Alma Venus Manuscripts* (251–89), see also Hunt’s “Tho This Is My Last Tale.”

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Deborah Whittlesey Sharp, editor. *Robinson Jeffers Family Travel Diaries, Volume One: British Isles, 1929*. Tor House Press, 2022. 202 pp.

## REVIEWED BY DEBORAH FLEMING

Unlike most travelers who write personal diaries, the Jeffers family kept a community diary throughout their trip to Ireland and Great Britain in 1929, with each member contributing to the same lined pages in a copybook and citing their own entries with initials. Deborah Whittlesey Sharp, a former Tor House docent and trustee of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation, has carefully edited the family's diaries into an entertaining and readable account for those interested in the Jeffers family history as well as scholars seeking biographical details or insight into Jeffers' composing process or sources. Sharp provides a glossary of terms, index, explanation of transcripts, and intriguing photographs courtesy of the Tor House Foundation Archives, including one of a diary page.

Also reprinted in this volume is Jeffers' "Foreword" to *Visits to Ireland: Travel Diaries of Una Jeffers* (1954), where he explains that "It was Una's invincible energy that lighted our course, like a torch and like a scourge." Una wanted to visit Ireland because she loved the ruins, landscape, and poetry, mostly that of W. B. Yeats. Robinson tells us that "Una had introductory letters to Yeats and others, but the letters were never delivered. The landscape was what she desired; we had read the poems" (167, 168).

In 1929, Ireland had been independent from Great Britain for only eight years, the Treaty creating the Irish Free State having been signed in 1921. The Civil War (1922–23), fought between Free Staters and Republicans, had ended only about six years earlier. W. B. Yeats (1865–1939), Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), George Moore (1852–1933), and Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) were still alive. Ruins of monasteries the family visited, such as those at Clonmacnoise and the Rock of Cashel, had not yet been restored. Lady Gregory's Coole Park manor house still stood.

Although each writer's style is easily recognizable, it is Una's voice we hear most often and most brightly. She marvels at the Donegal coastline (31), one of the most dramatic in the country, and remarks that Glendalough in County Wicklow, famous for its seven churches, is "much more beautiful than Killarney" (41), the county most often cited by travelers as the most appealing.

Not everything was pleasant. Early in their visit, Una describes her impression of poverty in Achill as "Bare, bleak, meager peasants, miserable & wretched lives." She also mentions the "hedgers—people always sitting on or by the hedges," who may have been itinerant tinkers (28, 29).

Ancient history being of greater interest, the family wrote little about recent events, but Donnan and Una record bullet holes in signs and walls: "Everywhere we find these bullet holes got during the trouble" (43)—probably referring to the Civil War. While staying in Ballinrobe, she describes a gentleman "gone a bit seedy" who talked of "the ruined manor houses and the desolation through the country." He had known George Moore, a famous novelist associated with the Irish Literary Revival, and "never expected Moore Hall would be touched because of all Moore's father had done for Ireland." He speculated that the destruction was caused by "small farmers who wanted the estate to be divided into small rentable farms" (45). The manor house near Lough Carra in County Mayo had been burned in 1923 by anti-Treaty fighters, possibly because of the pro-Treaty politics of George's brother Maurice. Their father, George Henry Moore, who had sold land and donated much of his fortune to relieve hunger during the Great Famine of 1845–52, was reputed a fair landlord who never evicted a tenant for nonpayment of rent. The Irish land issue—still being debated in 1929—involved the division of large estates into smaller farms by the Land Law Act (1881) and the Land Purchase Act (1903). In spite of the vandalism, Una wrote that the Jeffers family was able to wander through the house and take pictures.

In July, the family narrowly missed seeing Yeats who had reportedly passed ten minutes earlier on his way to see Lady Gregory (19). Una wrote in a letter that "Yeats was there" (CL 1: 836), yet neither she nor Robinson seemed to have any desire to meet him even though Robinson identified Yeats as a major influence on his work. The same day they visited Yeats's Thoor Ballylee, also called Ballylee Castle, the Norman tower that may have inspired Jeffers'



Hawk Tower. Una records the stony hills, winding stream, walled garden, peasant woman watering her cows, and another filling a tub on a donkey cart with water who reported that Mrs. Yeats and the children had visited the previous year (19–20). The Jefferses also visited Edward Martyns' Tillyra Castle near Kinvarra. In August Una recorded a longer visit to Thoor Ballylee and Lady Gregory's residence at Coole Park which she described as a "large rectangular white house" (43–44). Yeats's most celebrated collection, *The Tower*, had been published in 1928, and by September of 1929 he was composing one of his most famous poems that would appear in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1931), "Coole Park, 1929." Yeats visited Ballylee in July of 1929, although he stayed at Coole, not Ballylee, throughout July and August, when the Jefferses were in western Ireland. Yeats was also working on the second edition of *A Vision*. Interestingly, he had been writing the first edition in 1920 when he was travelling in California. The Yeats family had not actually lived at Ballylee since October 1928.

In Drumcliff, in County Sligo, Donnan describes the round tower near the churchyard which was to be the site of Yeats's grave as "a stump about 30 feet high" (29). The family viewed the building in Sligo that housed the Pollexfen shipping business, owned by Yeats's maternal grandfather, and counted the many swans on the Garavogue River in Sligo town (30).

By early September the family took ship for Stranraer. Robinson describes Scotland as "a happier looking country than Ireland, and landscapes and shores as beautiful" (63). Una writes about Fingal's Cave and the Hebrides which had always "enchanted" her (65). Una and Robinson succeeded in meeting Leonard and Virginia Woolf in October at their "big old fashioned house" in Tavistock Square, London. They had "fine sensitive faces," according to Una, and were "very friendly." The Hogarth Press was located "beneath the house in the big *old* wine cellars" (90).

The sense the reader has of the diaries, as expected in travel journals, is movement together with information (mostly from Una) about where they traveled and stayed, what they ate, and people they met. Robinson's entries are notably few but detailed, and often contain noteworthy observations. An October entry, for instance, records his view of England as a declining nation, vulnerable as never before to attack by air, and destined to "go down and down." On November 15 he writes of Silbury Hill: "Enormous earth-work

and ditch around the stones . . . what a labor for wooden shovels carved with flint knives! Earth-works last longer than stone works. The stones are said to be sarsen sand-stone, but they don't look like the ones at Stonehenge, but like limestone" (129). On November 30 he adds, "Walked through the village [Bourton] at end of twilight . . . dark streets full of mysterious movement and secret voices . . . villagers all come out like bats in the evening and move to and fro" (142). On December 2 at Conway Castle in North Wales he describes an old gate "between two round turrets" containing four stone tablets inscribed with the battles fought there (144).

The reader finds some origins of Jeffers' cycle *Descent to the Dead: Poems Written in Ireland and Great Britain*, first published in 1931 and included in the volume *Give Your Heart to the Hawks* (1933). Una records the visit to the cairn near Ballycastle (33) which inspired "Shane O'Neill's Cairn." Robinson's short notes mention stones (109, 129, 149), battles (144), and "mounds of the dead" (67), but the poems' origins are more clearly revealed in their epigraphs and titles: "Ossian's Grave" seen near Cushendall, "The Broadstone" near Finvoy, "The Giant's Ring" near Ballylesson, and "Antrim," the farthest northeastern county. "In the Hill at Newgrange" was inspired by burial mounds in County Meath, while "Delusion of Saints" mentions many places the family visited, such as Clonmacnoise, Cong, Glendalough, Monasterboice, and Kilmacduagh. "Iona: The Graves of the Kings" and "Shooting Season" found their sources in Scotland, while English landscapes inform "Ghosts in England," "Inscription for a Gravestone," "Shakespeare's Grave," and "The Dead to Clemenceau: November 1929." Robinson writes that Una was "imparadised" at an old hotel in Stow-on-the-Wold (80), while he is impressed by the "soft subdued earth" (86) that finds its way into his poems "Subjected Earth" and "The Low Sky." His famous poem "An Irish Headland," containing the line "the beauty of the earth is too great to weep for" is not in *Descent to the Dead* but follows in *Thurso's Landing* (1932).

"Now Returned Home," a poem included in the 1938 *Selected Poetry*, recounts an incident when the Jefferses meet, on a steamer heading toward Barra in the Inner Hebrides, a girl who was bringing her dead sister's child from Glasgow to a tiny island with just one house. The incident occurred during the family's second visit to Scotland in 1937, so we will have to wait for Volume II of the *Travel Diaries* for the details of this poignant story.

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Sherry L. Smith. *Bohemians West: Free Love, Family, and Radicals in Twentieth-Century America*. Heyday, 2020. 399 pp.

### REVIEWED BY GENEVA M. GANO

When Robinson and Una Jeffers moved to Carmel in 1914, the little art colony's "carnival time" of its fabled early years had already passed; Jeffers had a sense of coming belatedly to a place still "full of music" and "misted with gold" that had been left behind by his wine- and song-filled predecessors.<sup>1</sup> Catherine Prendergast's unconventional triple biography, *The Gilded Edge*, returns us to this period by way of Carmel's first poet laureate, George Sterling, a figure familiar to this journal's readers through the research of former RJA Executive Director, John Cusatis.<sup>2</sup> Sterling was an impressive figure who lived a life of Dionysian excess, but he hardly dominates Prendergast's story: he relinquishes equal space to his more conventional wife, Carrie, and his lover, the poet Nora May French. It is their combined, almost unfathomably sordid story of sex, money, betrayal, suicide, and—of course—poetry that drives this book's gripping narrative.

Prendergast's research on Nora May French, a notorious, legendary figure in Carmel's history whose life has been only obscurely known, required scholarly sleuthing in the well-preserved archives of her wealthier male lovers. Prendergast's excavation reveals an ambitious young woman who sought a life of poetry along Baudelairean lines but had no financial means of support to fund her endeavors. Writing poems in her spare time, she toiled for grueling hours in a Los Angeles mitten factory, crossed union picket lines as a telephone girl, accompanied married and unmarried men of varying savor, starved and skimped, living precariously close to the edge but keeping her dream of poetry alive until virtually no

pathways toward the future were left for her. When she swallowed a fatal dose of cyanide in Sterling's Carmel home in late 1907, she was the first of a string of suicides (Carrie and George Sterling among them) that were associated with the village's bohemian crowd of the early years.

Prendergast's book is a page-turner. Her voice enters the narrative in the role of a detective-researcher regularly, as she relates finding key financial documents, fragments of poetry, and incriminating letters that serve as evidence of the complicated social and economic motivations behind the formation of the little art colony. The quest to uncover the full truth of these lives and their relationship to Carmel's development is captivating, but Prendergast does not offer a deep and wide cultural contextualization that might help us better understand why all three of her subjects' lives ended so horrifically tragically.

Like Prendergast, historian Sherry L. Smith has composed a multi-subject biography from archival sources based on some larger-than-life figures who will be familiar to Jeffersians: Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field. Wood and Field, both poets, became close friends of Robinson and Una Jeffers when they moved to "The Cats," their estate and vineyard in Los Gatos, in the 1920s. The couples shared friendships with other Carmelites as well, including Noël Sullivan, Lincoln Steffens, and Ella Winter. Smith does not dwell substantially on these close-knit, neighborly and comradely friendships, however, but oscillates between the daily, intimate details of her protagonists' family lives and the broader historical contexts and currents in which they participated, including the rise of the militant leftist labor movement; the fight for women's suffrage, birth control, and abortion; anti-imperialist, anti-war activism; and the practice of free love.

Smith masterfully shows how these contexts and currents are expressed in and through the couple's personal encounters and transformations. Wood and Field acted as each other's greatest supporters in their political and creative lives, creating a voluminous correspondence of hundreds of letters detailing their great passion for each other and for the causes in which they believed. Putting their political faith in free love into humane and workable practice was the most challenging of the projects they took on together. Smith devotes most of the book to the long interregnum in which Wood and Field struggled to join their lives (both were married

to others when they met) while remaining true to their free love principles and a strongly shared desire to minimize the pain they were certain to cause their spouses and children, a period of almost twenty years. During this period, between 1910 and 1918, the world underwent massive, revolutionary changes, not least of which were the First World War and the sudden-feeling advent of modernity.

Smith's steady hand and judicious approach to what must have been an overwhelmingly large archive of materials make this book both deeply compelling and enrichingly informative. Smith is a wonderful storyteller whose book is substantial and satisfying.

## NOTES

1. From "George Sterling," *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 1, edited by Tim Hunt (Stanford UP, 1988), 236.

2. See John Cusatis, "Kindred Poets of Carmel: The Philosophical and Aesthetic Affinities of George Sterling and Robinson Jeffers," *Jeffers Studies*, vol. 12, nos. 1–2, spring–fall 2008 (published 2010), 1–11.



Cynthia L. Haven. *Czesław Miłosz: A California Life*. Heyday, 2021. 243 pp.

## REVIEWED BY ROBERT ZALLER

Czesław Miłosz led what may in certain respects be considered an exemplary twentieth-century life. Born to Polish-speaking Lithuanian gentry in 1911, he began his literary career in Warsaw, survived the Nazi occupation of the city (where he wrote the first memorable poem about the Holocaust by a Gentile, “A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto”), and entered the postwar Polish diplomatic corps as a cultural attaché, where he made his first acquaintance with the United States. In a residence otherwise characterized as “back-breaking, unbelievable, illogical, immoral, indescribable” (38), he nonetheless managed to establish the Adam Mickiewicz Chair in Polish Culture at Columbia University and to forge acquaintances in American literary circles. Posted to Paris by the now-Communist Polish government, he found himself more desperate than ever, under constant surveillance as a likely defector of, by this point, a certain literary prominence. Finally making his escape in February 1951, he spent months in hiding—among the worst moments of his life, as his wife Janka, still in America, was gravely ill following the birth of their second son. In a compulsive burst of work—“one long exhalation of grief and denunciation,” as his present biographer, Cynthia Haven, puts it (51)—he produced *The Captive Mind*, a book part confession, part justification, part outrage, that is to this day a classic of Cold War literature and still Miłosz’s best-known single volume.

It had taken Miłosz six years to decamp, and it would take him nine more to reach America and fully reunite with his family. The FBI had tracked him as assiduously as the KGB, and his politics were suspect on all sides: even a friend and protector, Jerzy Giedroyc, described him as unable to “shake off his attraction towards Stalinism, like a rabbit toward a snake” (51). One would like to know more about this comment, since Miłosz’s break with

Communism was clear in *The Captive Mind*, but perhaps it was that, like many exiles, he carried all his baggage with him wherever he went. A companion of those Paris years, Albert Camus, and like him a future Nobel prize winner in literature, had a not dissimilar experience, first for breaking with the Parisian intelligentsia over Stalin's crimes and then for defending the French *colons* during the civil war in his native Algeria.

Miłosz's mind, though, was set upon a return to America; on the very day following his escape from the Polish embassy he wrote to Albert Einstein, with whom he had become acquainted, asking his assistance in seeking asylum. Einstein replied that he himself was a suspect figure, and so the man who had persuaded Franklin D. Roosevelt to build the atomic bomb was unable to accommodate a political refugee.

The intervention of a dean at the University of California, Berkeley, himself a Polish scholar, finally brought Miłosz to America in 1960. This was the beginning of what Haven calls his "California life," one that lasted until his very last years. It was the choice of a lesser evil. Einstein, who knew about unhappy choices, had advised Miłosz to return to Poland, but that was a bridge Miłosz had burned, at least as long as Communism prevailed. Western Europe was unappealing, a dominion of America whose intellectual life had been reduced to the bitter café politics he had seen in Paris. America itself alone remained, a society whose seeming openness and bonhomie belied the hard power and division that lay behind it. In his first postwar year there, he had been appalled by Hollywood, which from magnates to flunkies seemed to him as falsely and obsequiously contentious as "party bureaucrats in an authoritarian state" (39). If Communism crushed the spirit, capitalism ground it under no less. Among the alternatives, however, America offered the least bad choice.

Materially, Miłosz's life would now be secure, even privileged. Freedom, American-style, was now his too, although it often seemed indistinguishable to him from indifference. He had admirers in the poetry community of California and wide contacts elsewhere, but what he encountered in America appeared to him a void in which words were not the basis of moral experience but, practical utility aside, a "hobby" at best for most. Recognition in America was a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a thing to be trodden, and what

Miłosz sought for his own words was not merely gratified ambition but redemptive power:

So I won't have power, won't save the world?  
 Fame will pass me by, no tiara, no crown?  
 Did I then train myself, myself the Unique,  
 To compose stanzas for gulls and sea haze,  
 To listen to the foghorns blaring down below?  
 Until it passed. What passed? Life.

(“A Magic Mountain”)

The tone of these lines is self-deprecating if not self-mocking—a not infrequent trope in Miłosz—but the sense of vocation in the highest sense unmistakable too. In his gilded American exile he was isolated as nowhere else, “a distinguished poet,” as he put it, “satisfied with a dozen or so readers” (78). This was not so; colleagues had begun to translate him, as he himself introduced his fellow countrymen to the English-speaking world in an important volume, *Postwar Polish Poetry*. But his sensibility remained, as he said, entirely European, and America would remain finally alien to him even after four decades.

The accident of his academic invitation had brought Miłosz back to California, and he would find his eyrie in the hills outside Berkeley, contemplating a landscape he regarded as primeval if not otherworldly. In fact, it was the landscape of America generally but of California in particular that simultaneously attracted and repelled him, a nature that was both beauty and (his own word) “horror,” the Otherness that pressed in on him on all sides the inhuman.

The friends and colleagues who admired and translated Miłosz, even the occasional one like Thomas Merton with whom he felt genuine spiritual kinship, did not satisfy what this quintessentially self-defined exile most required: a truly challenging antagonist. He did not necessarily need a contemporary; Jonathan Swift was one such figure for him. It was even preferable that he should not know such an individual in person. As it happened, he found him at close range, a hundred miles to the south, and still living. Thus did the disillusioned Polish humanist discover the one American he could neither embrace nor reject, but against whom he found himself truly sized: Robinson Jeffers.

Jeffers, to our knowledge, knew nothing of Miłosz; they neither met nor communicated during the two years in which their lives overlapped in California. This was Miłosz's choice, though after Jeffers died he visited Tor House periodically. Miłosz's explanation for this was lapidary: we would not, he said, have understood each other. It was a way of saying, perhaps, that they would not have empathized, because their visions of life seemed to Miłosz so incompatible: the heir of Thomist Catholicism and the bearer of an uncompromising post-Calvinism; the man of the plain and the man of the mountain; the European humanist and the self-proclaimed inhumanist. Yet they shared something deeply in common: alienation. For Miłosz, this meant the circumstances that kept him until the very last years of his life from the place which he regarded as home; for Jeffers, it was a country of the sublime where his difficult divinity, fully manifest, was never finally revealed.

Of course, Miłosz's alienation was one of the exile, while Jeffers' was that of a native. Miłosz found no essential civilization in America, where Washington was a "machine," Los Angeles a hustle, and Berkeley, where as he conceded his material circumstances were all he could wish, perhaps the worst of all, a world typified by superficial attraction and ease. In contrast, Jeffers never willingly left Carmel once settled there, although the roots he put down were in sea, stone, and sky.

For both men, then, California was both a place and a state of mind. To Miłosz, as for Jeffers, it was both the endpoint of a continent and the promise of a new beginning, exile and utopia in one. At the same time, it was also something seemingly perdurable, an unstable Eden of vaulting, majestic ranges and the faultlines that underwrote them. Its natural splendor defined it, yet it was also deeply artificial, the product of the great rivers harnessed to support a vast population that magnified all the excesses of American life. For both men, its ultimate significance lay in a grandeur refractory toward the human enterprise foisted on it.

Much, then, was in accord between the two men. Yet their approach to the natural world was vastly different. For Jeffers, nature, both pre- and transhuman—and perhaps posthuman as well—embodied value itself, defined by dimension, diversity, and (relative) permanence in the existential flux of things, containing but eclipsing humanity. For Miłosz, however, that same world, though deeply impressive and offering quietude to a troubled spirit,

was ultimately alien, a play of forces that, while offering material sustenance, excluded the spirit as such.

Haven is good at describing the uniqueness of California in her opening chapter ("California Considered as an Island"), and in subsequent ones at Miłosz's conflicted relation to it. But she stretches the point by subtitling her biography "A California Life." It is true that, chronologically, Miłosz lived more of his days in California than anywhere else, and wrote much of his work there. But to call him a California poet, as she does, is a little like calling Ovid a Scythian one.

There are relatively few pages here devoted to Miłosz's dialogue with Jeffers, his necessary antagonist, and there is little to be gleaned for the student. Haven accepts the conventional view of Jeffers as a misanthrope, obsessive in his "tirades" against humanity and its works. This does not take us far in explaining Miłosz's attraction to him. Haven describes Miłosz as "thrilled and appalled" by Jeffers (155), while at the same time "invigorated" by his "chutzpah" (156)—a quality not, as far as I know, previously attributed to him. Miłosz himself expressed his response to Jeffers in ways that suggest not only ambivalence but an unaccommodated challenge. On the one hand, he wondered whether Jeffers was not partly the pose of an "aesthete" raising himself above the mob and partly that of "the amateur painter who sets up his easel on a wild promontory" (Miłosz 90), ultimately "tainted" by a turn-of-the-century decadence (93); on the other, he flatly asserted as well that he was "truly a great poet" (92), indeed, the greatest English-language poet of the twentieth century and one whose works, though all but forgotten in their own time, would endure as long as the language itself. These attitudes seem scarcely reconcilable, yet an honest confession, too; for while Miłosz was clearly repelled by many things in Jeffers, he found himself drawn at the same time to the man who expressed them, and who seemed at once prisoner, exile, and hermit (94)—the very portrait of Czesław Miłosz himself.

Yet there was perhaps another ground for Miłosz's abiding fascination, whether or not it was fully clear to him. As Haven points out, Miłosz had long pondered the ontological relation between the poles of *être* and *devenir*, being and becoming. For him, the ultimate postulant of *être*, the primal source, was divinity, as that of *devenir* was its material manifestation in the world of change and flux. The mystery of existence was in their interaction. Miłosz seems to have

thought of these elements as contrasting absolutes, but Jeffers, in his mature verse, conceived them as an inseparable whole in which divinity was the actual substance of the cosmos, simultaneously the essence and embodiment of creation. Such a conception, now denoted as panentheism, is found in various forms in all the world's major religions, and, notably in Heraclitus, Plotinus, and Spinoza, through the course of the Western philosophical tradition. Haven describes it in Jeffers as "a loose sort of deism" (155), but, although he never pretended to a systematic theology, it hardly suggests the poetic force and intensity of his religious vision.

What challenged Miłosz in this vision, I would suggest, was its implied rejection of eschatology. That Jeffers' cosmos seemed to have no humanly relatable purpose offended Miłosz's Thomistic premise, often shaken but never abandoned, of the fundamentally rational and moral basis of the world. At the same time, Miłosz could never overcome his horror at the world of process revealed by Jeffers and embraced by him in such poems as "De Rerum Virtute" and "Ocean," even as he both acknowledged Jeffers' courage in facing it and giving him, as Haven notes, courage on a certain level as well. Thus Jeffers would remain for him, as no one else did, a force to be grappled with, never to be accepted but never repudiated.

Haven's biography is an episodic one, valuable for the material it provides from Miłosz's Berkeley friends and colleagues but skirting many of the issues of his personal life. To be sure, her study is above all an intellectual one. But there's a body that needs its due too, and for that one will have to look elsewhere.

Just as there is no complete Miłosz without Jeffers, so one may say that Miłosz adds something to the historical estimation of Jeffers. For all the praise heaped on him at the time of his first discovery, few but Miłosz attested his greatness in the decades of his obscurity and dismissal, and no one else asserted, as he did, that Jeffers would be as imperishable as the language he wrote in. However that may be, it is one conclusion on which the present reviewer has no competence to differ.

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