Jeffers Studies

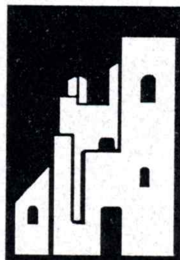
Volume 5 Number 4 Fall 2001

Jointly Sponsored by

Occidental College

California State University Long Beach

Robinson Jeffers Association



Jeffers Studies

Volume 5 Number 4 Fall 2001

CONTENTS

News and Notes 1

In Memoriam 3

Robinson Jeffers's Poetry and Prose and Scientific Theory 5
James Baird

Robinson Jeffers's References to Science or Scientific Theory 11
James Baird

Hawk Tower Revisited 28
Edwin A. Cranston

The Prophet as Confessionalist: The Place of the Personal in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers 43
Alan Soldofsky

Hardy, Jeffers, and the Hero of Endurance 57
Robert Zaller

News and Notes

MANUSCRIPTS

At the Tor House Foundation: A letter from Shakespearean scholar G. Wilson Knight, dated 29 June 1939, thanking Jeffers for his letter and finding his work "overpoweringly interesting." Three pages of handwritten quotes from the work of Carl Jung. A subscription notice from *U.S. Public Opinion*, on the back of which are written notes and lines of poetry, including the fragment "And whether you call it God or a great animal / Is the same thing." Horace, *Odes II*, edited by T. E. Page, with "J. Robinson Jeffers" inscribed on the first page and, in Jeffers's hand, Latin poems and translations, and textual markings related to meter and scansion.

On the Web: The Gunnar Axberger article, noted in 3.2:8, which reviews psychological, psychiatric, and creative literature "to illuminate the psychological mechanisms underlying arson," using Jeffers's works among others to clarify this fascination with fire, is now available in Adobe Acrobat searchable format at <www.unex.ucla.edu/jeffers/arson>.

PUBLICATIONS

The New York Review of Books for 20 December 2001 offers a richly appreciative review of Czeslaw Milosz and his two recent books, *New and Collected Poems—1931–2001* and *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*. The review, on pages 14, 16, and 18, is written by Charles Simic, Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry in 1990. On pages 16 and 18, Simic quotes Milosz's tribute "To Robinson Jeffers" in its entirety, calling it "one of his greatest poems." He follows with this paragraph:

> Milosz admires Jeffers's stubborn independence, his contempt for the literary fashions of his day, and even his grumpiness. He asks himself in an essay on the poet if he's like him, and answers that he is not. He could not oppose, he says, the terrifying beauty of nature to human chaos. Unmerciful necessity is unacceptable to us. In the poem, he contrasts the simple peasant culture of his homeland with Jeffers's blind cosmic force. For him, as for Simone Weil, nature is neither good nor evil. We crave to understand its purpose and yet it eludes our interpretations. We are torn between admiring some detail in it and wishing to make sense of the whole. In an essay on Lev Shestov, Milosz quotes with approval the Russian thinker's view that, since the Greeks, every philosophy has believed that only the universal is worthy of reflection. The contingent, the particular, and the momentary are the perennial spoilers of the vision of all-embracing Oneness—and that—come to think, is the reason for the age-old quarrel between poets and philosophers . . . .

Fran Vardamis's "Guest in the House" column in the Fall 2001 *Tor House Newsletter* (page 5) quotes from Henry Miller in letters to Anaïs Nin and others and Miller's tribute to Jeffers in *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymous Bosch* (1957).

Jeffers in Braille: For the first time, Jeffers's poetry is available for reading by the blind. "Tor House," "The Shears," "Granddaughter," "The Bed by the Window," "Carmel Point," and "The House Dog's Grave" are available as books at the Tor House Docents' Gift Shop, 831-899-0835.

REVIEWS

Wallace, David Rains. "What Ever Happened to Robinson Jeffers?" Rev. of *The Collected Poetry of*

Robinson Jeffers, 4 vols., ed. Tim Hunt. *Los Angeles Times* 29 Oct. 2000: 1, 6–8.

Puzzling review by an award-winning nature writer. Wallace divides his review into four parts. The first discusses Jeffers's "inhumanism"; the second affirms that Jeffers "succeeded in reclaiming power and reality for poetry"; the third offers biographical background, asserting that Jeffers might have explored more of the world first-hand; and the fourth expands on this theme by arguing that "Jeffers's vision of nature was not as profound as it might have been if he'd experienced more of it." Wallace writes that "it is hard to see how anyone can read Jeffers's best poetry and not perceive greatness." Yet some of the poetry, he laments, is flawed by Jeffers's detachment: "Nature for him was surf, cliffs, redwoods and hawks—not sloughs, soil, coyote bush and wren tits." Wallace seems to feel that Jeffers could be a first-rate poet, despite being a second-rate naturalist.

Leithauser, Brad. "Staring Out to Sea." Rev. of *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Tim Hunt. *N.Y. Times Book Review* 22 July 2001: sec. 7: 14.

Mostly negative review of Jeffers's work by a poet and novelist. Leithauser concedes that "Jeffers is rare among American poets in inspiring what might be called a geographic loyalty: a readership whose devotion is rooted in the appeals of a specific place." But Leithauser feels that Jeffers is "hamstrung" by his "determination to sermonize," and that he is too much a misanthropist in his sermons, comparing him unfavorably to Ambrose Bierce, Evelyn Waugh, even Jonathan Swift. Much of Jeffers's best work, according to Leithauser, was published at about the same time as *Tamar and Other Poems*, a work "of an unignorable urgency." The work that followed, he seems to feel, has now yielded a repetitious *Selected Poetry*.

Cokinos, Christopher. "Images of Inhumanism." Rev. of *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Tim Hunt. *Science* 9 Nov. 2001: 1288–89.

Equivocal review of Jeffers's work in a major scientific journal. Cokinos laments that half the volume is given over to Jeffers's narratives, all of which he apparently finds equally execrable; he does not address the faults of any individually. They are plodding, overwrought, portentous, and one-dimensional in characterization. It is the lyric poems that matter most, in their presentation of Jeffers's "grand perspective on transhuman reality, his nature imagery, and his views on science." Though he faults Jeffers for indulging "in local and unnecessary moments of personification" and excessive romanticism, he admires the reach of his mind when engaged by the natural world and the cosmological time-frame. "No other poet has so emphatically preached the saving graces of nature, from galaxies to granite. . . . Freed from the shackle of his narrative poems, he stands as the preeminent American poet of nature, ecology, and science."

Ralph, Brett. Rev. of *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. *Rain Taxi* 6.4 (Winter 2001/02): 16–17.

Appreciative review noting Jeffers's anti-Modernism and affinity to Lawrence, his rejection of technology and of secular humanism, his pursuit of humility and absorption in nature, his attempt to reconcile evil yet storm with judgment upon his species, his mysticism and religious awe, his isolationism and unrepentant feud with jingoism. Ralph focuses on Jeffers's themes and on his trenchant, oracular voice, with lesser reflection on his art and invention.

Simic, Charles. "Divine, Superfluous Beauty." Rev. of *The Selected Poetry* and *The Collected Poetry*,

Vol. 5. *New York Review of Books* (11 Apr. 2002): 48–50.

Another poet-critic who values Jeffers's short poems more than his narratives (commending Robert Hass's 1987 *Rock & Hawk* selection), Simic, though appreciating Jeffers's use of "epic sweep to investigate complex issues" and his achievement of magnificent dramatic passages, judges the narrative scenes and characters contrived. (Still he savors the early "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion.") He seems startled by the volume of Jeffers's poetry, an unprecedented four thick volumes collected and 750+ pages selected, the latter with the narratives "bound to scare away many readers." Though he pronounces the poet's political poems "soap-box" rhetoric, he finds in Jeffers's nature lyrics a celebration of beauty, whether mankind has a place within it or not, that is the poet's singular triumph.

In Memoriam

JAMES ROBERTSON

James Wishard Robertson died on 23 November 2001 from a massive stroke. Born 66 years ago in Los Angeles County, he spent most of his life in the northern half of the state. He attended both Occidental College and UC Berkeley. While still a student at UC he started his own small design office over a sandal shop. In the early 1960s he co-founded the innovative design firm Robertson/Montgomery. Shifting focus in 1969, he formed a new company with another partner developing "teaming" materials for pre-school children. This new endeavor was called "The Amazing Life Games Co." In 1974 he and his wife Carolyn moved to the mountains of Mendocino County and formed the partnership of the Yolla Bolly Press. For more than ten years they developed books for other trade publishers in New York, San Francisco, and Boston. Since 1983 the Robertsons devoted their skills to selecting classic texts, commissioning art, and designing and printing limited edition books with pressman Aaron Johnson. While their earlier work was in the fields of educational and trade publishing, the focused and handcrafted process of fine press publishing became the most meaningful labor for the Robertsons. The staff of the Yolla Bolly Press continues his work.

Jim was devoted to the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, and enjoyed a long and warm relationship with the Jeffers family. When the definitive bibliography of the Yolla Bolly Press is one day drawn up, it will include six Jeffers-related volumes or pamphlets, each one an exceptional example of Jim's artistry, craftsmanship, and taste:

- 1983 *Robinson Jeffers: A Portrait*, by Louis Adamic, with a foreword by Garth Jeffers. Reprint of monograph first published in 1929.
- 1984 *Cawdor*, with James Houston's "The Necessary Ecstasy: An Afterword to Cawdor."
- 1985 *The Stones of Tor House*, by Donnan Jeffers. First published in 1980 by the Tor House Foundation.
- 1987 *Where Shall I Take You To: The Love Letters of Una and Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Robert Kafka, foreword by Garth Jeffers.
- 1992 *Roan Stallion*, with an essay by Tim Hunt, "Nature, Narrative, and Knowing: Jeffers and the Mode of 'Roan Stallion.'"
- 1993 *The Building of Tor House* by Donnan Jeffers; *Memories of Tor House* by Garth Jeffers, with photographs chosen and captioned by Garth Jeffers. The Donnan Jeffers monograph was first published in 1980 by the Tor House Foundation.

Jim also developed an especially close relationship with Sierra Club Books over the years. One

fruit of that partnership which Jim initiated was an elegant large-format photo-album, *The Wilder Shore,* with sections devoted to eight topographical areas of California. Photographs by Morley Baer (both b/w and color), text by David Rains Wallace, and foreword by Wallace Stegner (1984).

An event titled "Remembering James Robertson" took place on 17 March 2002 at the San Francisco Public Library, featuring the stories of friends and colleagues. Jim will be remembered by many for the sterling address he gave as featured speaker at the annual Jeffers banquet which concluded Jeffers Festival activities in October 2000.

ELLIOT WEISGARBER

Elliot Weisgarber, a life-long devotee of the poetry of Robinson Jeffers and great friend of the Jeffers community, has died at age 82 in Vancouver, B.C. He was a musician and teacher and was best known among Jeffers enthusiasts as the composer of extraordinary musical settings for Jeffers's poetry.

Elliot was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1919 and early exposure to great music led him to his calling. He received his education at the famous Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., where he completed his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Composition and received his Performer's Certificate as a clarinetist. It was at Eastman that he and his future wife Betty (Beth) Setter discovered Jeffers in a poetry class. He was so overwhelmed when he first read the poem "Night" that he made a conscious decision then and there to one day set it to music. Some 40 years later it came to pass, in a massive composition for chorus, baritone, string quartet, and double bass. Among other Jeffers poems he later set to music are "Divinely Superfluous Beauty," "Natural Music," "The Place for No Story," and "Tor House." These were among the nine songs with Jeffers texts featured in a memorable program at the 1997 Tor House Festival, by two of his most dedicated and gifted interpreters, soprano Erica Northcott and pianist Rena Sharon. His late setting of "Continent's End," which developed into a major work, has not yet premiered.

In 1960 Elliot received an opportunity to take up residence on the continent's west coast himself in the form of an offer to join the music faculty at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He had long held a deep interest in Asia which was finally able to flower on the Pacific rim. He was to spend much of the 1960s involved in a profound study of Japanese music which would resound in his own composition for years to come. During the '70s he toured the world giving lecture-recitals on the "shakuhachi" (vertical bamboo flute), the study of which had earned him a mastership in the prestigious Kinko school in Japan.

In later years his composition returned him to his American roots. In 1996/97 he composed "Colloquies for Flute & Orchestra," which consists of two movements, one an homage to the great American composer Howard Hanson, with whom he had studied at Eastman, and the other a fantasia on the folksong "Shenandoah." Elliot passed away on 31 December 2001 after a year-long battle with congestive heart failure.

Robinson Jeffers's Poetry and Prose and Scientific Theory

James Baird

Robinson Jeffers is one of the few twentieth-century poets who include scientific theory as not merely illustrative but a functioning element of their work. Although Jeffers, like many other contemporary thinkers, warns of the mistake of relying too much on scientific explanations or scientific discoveries (e.g., "Science," *CP* 1:113), he uses scientific terminology to bolster his philosophical beliefs and refers to what, at the time he wrote, were advanced theories regarding the nature of the universe and humankind's place in it. Because the science in Jeffers's writing actually does poetic work, it is important to know if it is valid. This essay attempts to locate and classify Jeffers's scientific references and also to evaluate whether what Jeffers understood of scientific theory was correct at the time he wrote it and whether that theory is still valid. I conclude with some critical judgments about Jeffers's use of scientific ideas, particularly about the limitations of the scientific viewpoint, which he adopted at first because it seemed a potent ally in his effort to tell the truth in his poetry.

A scientific reference is either a term common to scientific discourse or a presentation of an idea that can only be understood through the knowledge of scientific evidence or theory, though it may not contain scientific terms. Ancient believers in the Ptolemaic cosmological system, which supported a naive realist view (based on immediate sensory impression) that the Earth was at the center of the universe and that the planets and fixed stars were not far from Earth, provide an example of the latter type of reference. By the nineteenth century, telescopes and better systems of measurement had not only confirmed the vision of Copernicus in a sun-centered planetary system but also made it clear that the distances to the far stars were very great. Antares's red face was known to the ancients, but its diameter was not calculated until Jeffers's own time, so when Jeffers writes that the star ". . . Antares reddens, / The great one, the ancient torch, a lord among lost children, / The earth's orbit doubled would not girdle his greatness" ("Night," *CP* 1:115), he is making a scientific reference.

Hyatt Waggoner investigated this topic in 1938 in an article titled "Science and the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers." Waggoner notes the appearance of specific scientific terms in Jeffers's writing (277), particularly after Jeffers adopted a materialistic philosophy in his mature work, and he analyzes in detail passages that are clearly informed by a scientific view, such as Hood Cawdor's

death. Waggoner thinks that Jeffers's world-view is limited because of this predilection for scientific explanations, leading to the kind of "nihilistic pessimism" expressed in Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Modern Temper*, which, in spite of its title, is an early presentation of Post-Modernism.

This article is the beginning of a thoroughly negative assessment of Jeffers which Waggoner presents at greater length in his *The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern Poetry*, in which he states "Mr. Jeffers' verse seems to me to confirm [Edwin Arlington] Robinson's belief that in a universe of efficient but no final or formal causes, neither poetry nor life itself are finally conceivable" (131). As a result, Jeffers's characters fail to have an emotional impact on the reader because, according to Waggoner in his later *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present*:

> Jeffers . . . seldom writes well when he writes of *people*—never when he writes of ordinary "sane" people—for he starts by assuming that *people* are not ultimately "real." Their actual experience therefore does not interest him, except as it provides the materials for allegorizing his philosophy. When he writes well, his subject is nature, or man's fate viewed from nature's perspective. (471–72)

Such a judgment seems based on an evaluation of Jeffers's presumed philosophical assumptions rather than the "strain" and testing to which he put those assumptions in his poetry and prose. A review of Jeffers's scientific references shows that he often used them as a gateway *out* of the trap into which strict rationality led him, and that, as will be seen below, he undercut these assumptions with reminders that scientific accounts, no matter how closely reasoned, are necessarily flawed accounts of truth.

After locating and categorizing Jeffers's scientific references, I checked the ones about which I had questions with colleagues at the University of North Texas, Professor Donald Smith, a botanist, and Professor Ray Sears, a physicist. Although Jeffers's knowledge of science is at least forty years old, he was wrong in only one instance, and he may have had a poetic reason for writing as he did, as will be seen below. In fact, after I presented a number of passages, Professor Sears, who had never heard of Jeffers, said, "It sounds like this guy has a good idea of what's going on."

An example of Jeffers's scientific sophistication is his treatment of the death of the sun. The naive realist assumes that the sun will use up its energy, give off less heat, the earth will grow cold, and life will end. Physicist Ray Sears affirms that the sun will die as a white dwarf after first going through the "red giant" phase, which Jeffers describes in a number of poems (see quotations below under ***Deaths and Renewals of the Stars***). As the sun uses up its mass in heat, its density will lessen, and it will expand until its diameter swallows the

orbit of the earth, turning a less intense red in color as it loses heat ("red giant"). Thus things will actually get a lot hotter before they become cooler several billion years from now.

The biologist and the physicist disagreed regarding Jeffers's poem "Animals," which suggests that the great explosions seen on the sun are "animals, as we are" (*CP* 3:364). I recalled a report that scientists had found a new kind of microbe in volcanoes, but botanist Smith said that temperatures on the sun are simply too hot to support any kind of life. Physicist Sears at first agreed, but when I suggested that Jeffers might have been an early adherent to the Gaia theory, which maintains that everything on earth, even rocks and water, is part of an interconnected life system, he reconsidered. Perhaps the sun has its form of consciousness, too. Jeffers, with his fondness for the inanimate, would certainly have been interested in this idea. In "Animula," he suggests it obliquely, but in an unpublished fragment addressed to Una, he states directly, "this dark planet / Has its own consciousness" ("Whom shall I write for," *CP* 4:541).

Some quasi-scientific ideas which students of literature can accept as poetry also cause a scientist to balk. In "The Women at Point Sur," Barclay speaks of alternative universes. The idea of alternative universes sounds like science, but to some scholars, it is science fiction or fantasy. My botanist friend, Don Smith, retorted "There is no evidence for alternative universes." Because science can only discuss observed phenomena and we are in this universe, we cannot observe anything about another posited universe. This concept seems beyond the scope of science. But physics is becoming increasingly speculative and philosophical rather than experimental. Ray Sears remarked that researchers into String Theory, which posits as many as eleven dimensions, are working on just such questions and further offered the view that this universe is not the only possible one but is the one that exists in this energy field. Others may exist that we cannot experience because we are components of only this energy field. Just as the air is full of radio and television transmissions to which we have no access without the proper equipment, one must be "tuned" to an energy field to be aware of it.

Jeffers also uses several scientific ideas that were out of favor in his time but which are now accepted. During Jeffers's lifetime, the idea that the continents might have shifted position several times, which he suggests in two poems (see quotations below under ***Continental Drift***), was considered foolish. Now it is the theory that best explains a number of geologic phenomena. In the nineteenth century, there was a conflict between those who thought that natural changes occurred cataclysmically and those like Charles Lyell, author of *Principles of Geology* (three volumes, 1830–33), who thought that they occurred by gradual processes working over millions of years. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (to which Jeffers refers in several poems—see quotations below under ***Evolution***) finally won the day for the gradualists. But in the last cen-

tury, more careful scientific observations indicated that major changes may have occurred because of catastrophic events. The asteroid which crashed into the Yucatan Peninsula in prehistoric times may have sent a dust cloud into the atmosphere which destroyed vegetation and hastened the end of the dinosaurs. So when Jeffers says, "someday the coast will lose patience and dip / And be clean" ("Cawdor," *CP* 1:463), his reference to the predicted big California earthquake is based on scientific values, not Sunday Supplement sensationalism.

Jeffers is also tantalizingly close to describing DNA in a poem in which he comments on the possibility that an egg has within it the structure and organization of the mature organism ("De Rerum Virtute," *CP* 3:401). Perhaps this is not as startling as it appears from hindsight. Everyone knew that the egg did contain some sort of genetic blueprint, but until Watson and Crick discovered the exact mechanism in 1953, no one knew what it was.

The scientists also had difficulty dealing with metaphor and fancy. Jeffers describes death at the cellular level in a number of places, most notably twice in "Cawdor," in which both Old Martial's and Hood Cawdor's deaths are described thus (see quotations below under ***Consciousness***). Jeffers correctly notes that at the time of the death of the central organism, most of the cells in the body are still alive, but after a period of time, receiving no further electrical stimuli or chemical influx from the central nervous and circulatory systems, they begin to separate into individual entities which dream their own dreams. This description stopped the scientists, who professed to know nothing about dreaming, but could only say that chemical activity had ceased. The descriptions in "Cawdor" are notable in other ways as well: three deaths are described in that poem, but while Martial's and Hood Cawdor's deaths are depicted in biological terms, the third death, that of the caged eagle, becomes the occasion for a lengthy vision of and comment on the entire history of the earth from prehistoric times to the death of the main species, a panoply to which the eagle reacts with indifference. In Jeffers's view, a vision such as that is reserved for the noble wild predator, not the human beings who have so misunderstood their place in the order of things.

These references give us a good idea of Jeffers's dual view of science. On the one hand, the scientific view of the natural world is an aid to him. Jeffers sees all nature as interrelated and human beings as only one small part of nature, but the part which has a special kind of consciousness which can not only perceive, plan, and act, but also contemplate and judge. There is a further split in his view of this quality of consciousness; sometimes he states that perhaps the role we play—to act as the eyes, ears, and recorders of all this experience, is a proper one ("Sign-Post," *CP* 2:418). In other works and in other moods, he regards consciousness as a strange aberration, like a disease. For example, in discussing the phenomenon that led to the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe (see quotations below under ***Big Bang***)—confronting the fact

that, viewed from our position, the galaxies all seem to be moving away from us and each other (suggesting that all the matter in the universe came from a common point of origin), Jeffers recognizes the scientific value of this phenomenon, but chooses to interpret it in moral terms; he says that the galaxies are fleeing our part of the universe because we have infected the realm of pure matter and energy with the "contagion of consciousness" ("Margrave," *CP* 2:161).

Science helps Jeffers to spread his message that we are merely biological units, but that, unfortunately, the information that science gives us has been twisted to produce such horrors as the atomic bomb and "the great manners of death dreamed up / In the laboratories" ("Old age hath clawed me with his scaly clutch," *CP* 3:484). A scientist, who regards his or her job as description and explanation, would place the blame for such misuses of scientific theory on engineers and politicians; nevertheless, the consequences have been fearful. Ironically, scientific discoveries, which should humble humankind and make it aware of its impotence in the face of the vast cosmos, led to the mistaken notion that people are powerful. Powerful of course they are, but in the Jeffersian scheme of things, they have the power to destroy but not the power to control their destructive impulses or to understand their proper, smaller role in nature and the universe.

Jeffers seems particularly concerned with science at the beginning of his mature career and again at the end—several lyrics in the volumes that featured "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion" contain such references, and "Cawdor" has a number of scientific descriptions. The protagonist of "The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" also makes scientific arguments to reinforce his debating points. The Inhumanist of that poem, which appeared shortly after the explosion of the first atomic bomb, uses scientific principles to undercut the idea that the postwar world, defined by its scientific achievements, had a morality to match its technological skill. Then at the very end of Jeffers's poetic career, many of the poems posthumously assembled are about scientific subjects. Of course, Jeffers did not see these poems to press, and as there are several poems on the same or similar themes (e.g., three poems on the Russian space dog Laika, two on the Big Bang theory, two on the possibility of a new ice age—see quotations below), it is possible that Jeffers was trying out several ways of looking at a subject. If he had prepared another volume of poetry, he might have discarded some of the poems on science so that the publication would not be top heavy with works on that subject. Still, the scientific interpretation of life and nature was much on his mind when he found his own poetic voice, a voice that would speak for the totality of the universe and not just humanity. Science helped him to reach the conclusion that all is a flux of matter and energy that sometimes forms into a consciousness, a life, but that ultimately returns to that primal flux. At the end of his life, such ideas recurred as he prepared to join that flux once again:

You [Una] are earth and air; you are in the beauty of the ocean
And the great streaming triumphs of sundown; you are alive and well in the tender young grass rejoicing
When soft rain falls all night, and little rosy-fleeced clouds float on the dawn.—I shall be with you presently.
("Hungerfield," *CP* 3:397)

In a number of poems Jeffers describes not just the unity of all things in the physical world but the interconnectedness of all phenomena, including human thought, judgment, and emotion. These are poems in which Jeffers sees that unity without having to use a scientific explanation to justify or make it understandable. Freed from the blind alleys one encounters when treating rationality as an end rather than a means, having given all the reasoned answers to all the terrible questions, he is able to embrace the unity rather than present it with irony and skepticism in an attempt to disassociate himself from humanity, with its poor record of performance. These poems are among the favorites of Jeffers's readers—"Return" (*CP* 2:409), "Love the Wild Swan" (*CP* 2:410), "Sign-Post" (*CP* 2:418), "Gray Weather" (*CP* 2:485), "The Answer" (*CP* 2:536), and "Oh Lovely Rock" (*CP* 2:546)—continually invoked in conversations, meetings, and writings as touchstones.

Finally, in five passages (see quotations below under ***Science and Mathematics as Metaphor***), Jeffers reminds us that even science, with its remarkable discoveries, its explosion of knowledge, is just *a* description, not *the* description: "Science and mathematics/ Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it,/ They never touch it" ("What's the best life for a man?" *CP* 3:425). Jeffers obliquely makes this point in the poem "I walk on my cliff" (*CP* 3:457), in which he makes the one scientific reference which appears to be inaccurate, his description of the formation of the moon from the Pacific Basin as a result of the gravitational tidal pull of a passing star. In an article about this poem, "Truth, Myth, and 'The Great Wound,'" Grant Hier points out that this idea had been discredited in the scientific community long before Jeffers wrote the poem. If a star passed near the earth, it would destroy the planet before it would pull out material to make the moon. Hier comments,

> Research into what the poet knew of the scientific discovery and theories of his day points to the conclusion that Jeffers intentionally created his own mythic scenario, one that was clearly an impossibility. . . . Jeffers tells us outright that he is a mythmaker, and so is science. Neither the poet nor the scientist possesses the "truth"; the best both can hope for is some illumination through myths and hypotheses. (44)

Thus "I walk on my cliff" is scientific satire, a literal "cosmic joke." Jeffers reminds us that no matter how powerful science and mathematics seem, they are metaphors for the real, noumenal world, of which we see glimpses in Jef-

fers's poetry. He warned us in "The Women at Point Sur" that even his account of reality—his life's work—was only an account. His warning was to be felt rather than understood, a perception with which science cannot help us. Jeffers's use of science tells us about a world, but not the world. We cannot get to *the* world through rationality or science, but we can through poetry.

WORKS CITED

Hier, Grant. "Truth, Myth, and 'The Great Wound.'" *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter* 95 & 96 (Summer & Fall 1995): 29–50.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. 5 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2000, 2001.

Waggoner, Hyatt. *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present*. Rev. ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1984.

———. *The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1950.

———. "Science and the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers." *American Literature* 10 (1938): 275–88.

ROBINSON JEFFERS'S REFERENCES TO SCIENCE OR SCIENTIFIC THEORY

All quotations are treated as block quotations; if quotation marks appear, a character is speaking. References are to the first four published volumes of Jeffers's *Collected Poetry*.

Adrenal and Thyroid Glands

He saw clearly in his mind the little
Adrenal glands perched on the red-brown kidneys, as if all his doomed tissues became transparent,
Pouring in these passions their violent secretion
Into his blood-stream, raising the tension unbearably. And the thyroids: tension, tension. ("Margrave" 2:163)

Howard felt a sudden increase of force and life in his mind, like a transfusion
Of strong red blood, he thought "The faithful adrenals
Have just heard how near death I am . . ." ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:575)

. . . the leonine adrenal glands poured their blind fury
Into his blood. . . ("Hungerfield" 3:380)

Alternative Life Forms

. . . I think about the rapid and furious lives in the sun . . .

. . . .

They are animals, as we are. There are many other chemistries of animal life
Besides the slow oxidation of carbohydrates and amino-acids. ("Animals" 3:364)

Alternative Universes

It seemed to Barclay the cloud broke and he saw the stars,
Those of this swarm were many, but beyond them universe past universe
Flared to infinity, no end conceivable. Alien, alien, alien universes. ("The Women at Point Sur" 1:312)

"When have you considered the stars, what have you known of the streams in my soul,
And one lit point lost in the sky's eternity
A universe, millions of many-planeted suns, but another a universe
Of universes: they move in my mind . . . " ("The Women at Point Sur" 1:313)

Astronomy

"Therefore astronomy is the most noble science: is the most useless." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:291)

Man's world puffs up his mind, as a toad
Puffs himself up; the billion light-years cause a serene and wholesome deflation. ("Animula" 3:420)

I strain the mind to imagine distances
That are not in man's mind . . . ("Pleasures" 3:473)

There is nothing like astronomy to pull the stuff out of man,
His stupid dreams and red-rooster importance: let him count the star-swirls. ("The polar ice-caps are melting" 3:476)

We know the stars, hotter and more fatal than earth; we have learned lately the fire-wheel galaxies,
Infinite in number or all but infinite, among which our great sun's galaxy's
Flight is as a gnat's, one grain of sand in the Sahara: it is necessary to stretch our minds
To these dimensions . . . ("Not Solid Earth" 4:538)

Atomic Theory

. . . The atom to be split. (“Roan Stallion” 1:189)

. . . Useless intelligence of far stars, dim knowledge of the spinning demons that make an atom . . . (“Roan Stallion” 1:189)

. . . he that walks lightning-naked on the Pacific, that laces the suns with planets,
The heart of the atom with electrons . . . (“Roan Stallion” 1:189)

The atom bounds-breaking,
Nucleus to sun, electrons to planets . . . (“Roan Stallion” 1:194)

He washes it out with tears and many waters, calcines it with fire in the red crucible,
Deforms it, makes it horrible to itself: the spirit flies out and stands naked, he sees the spirit,
He takes it in the naked ecstasy; it breaks in his hand, the atom is broken, the power that massed it
Cries to the power that moves the stars . . . (“Apology for Bad Dreams” 1:211)

. . . the strain of the spinning
Demons that make an atom, straining to fly asunder,
Straining to rest at the center . . . (“Prelude—The Women at Point Sur” 1:244)

In the north the oil-tanks
Catch from the first, the ring-bound molecules splitting, the atoms dancing apart, marrying the air. (“Prelude—The Women at Point Sur” 1:248)

The grain of sand was the Rock. A speck, an atomic
Center of power clouded in its own smoke
Ran and cried in the crack . . . (“Cawdor” 1:511)

. . . but for this moment
The monsters possess the world. Look: forty thousand men’s labor and a navy of ships, to spring a squib
Over Bikini lagoon. (“What of It?” 3:208)

“True, but we’ve seen. But it is only recently they have the power.” The third answered, “That bomb?” (“The Inquisitors” 3:209)

“There—or thereabout—
Cloaked in thick darkness in his power’s dust-cloud,
There is the hub and heavy nucleus, the ringmaster
Of all this million-shining whirlwind of dancers, the stars of this end of heaven. It is strange, truly,
That great and small, the atoms of a grain of sand and the suns with planets, and all the galactic universes

Are organized on one pattern, the eternal roundabout, the heavy nucleus and whirling electrons, the leashed
And panting runners going nowhere; frustrated flight, unrelieved strain, endless return—all—all—
The eternal firewheel." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:269–70)

There is another nature of fire; not the same fire,
But the fire's father: "Holy, holy, holy,"
Sing the angels of the sun, pouring out power
On the lands and the planets; but it's no holier
Than a fire in a hut, it is another chemistry,
More primitive, more powerful, more universal, power's peak,
The fire of the sun and stars and the pale sheet-fire
Of a far-off nebula, a mist-fleck at midnight
In the infinite sky; a sworl of a million million suns, dragging their satellites
Like dark women by the hair
Through the wild acre.

It is with this kind of fire
Our people are playing tricks and will blast their enemies. ("Fire" 3:367)

. . . and the powers that make the atom put into service . . . ("The World's Wonders" 3:370)

There have been two, there will be a third, to be fought with what weapons? These that we test and stock-pile.
And every test makes the earth
At such and such a place uninhabitable. ("The Beautiful Captive" 3:428)

. . . for now we have taken
The primal powers, creation and annihilation; we make new elements, such as God never saw,
We can explode atoms and annul the fragments, nothing left but pure energy, we shall use it
In peace and war . . . ("Passenger Pigeons" 3:436)

For fifty thousand years man has been dreaming of powers
Unnatural to him: to fly like the eagles—this groundling!—to breathe under the seas, to voyage to the moon,
To launch like the sky-god intolerable thunder-bolts: now he has got them.
How little he looks, how desperately scared and excited, like a poisonous insect and no God pities him. ("For fifty thousand years" 3:482)

The great work in science was done by men working alone:—Copernicus, Leeuwenhoek, Darwin; Newton and Einstein, in youth, when they did their work. The great theorists of atomic structure worked as individuals; only when

their work was to be used for mass murder a tight association became necessary. ("Preface: *The Double Axe and Other Poems"* [original version] 4:420)

[Entire poem on the possibility that an atomic explosion might begin a chain reaction which would destroy the earth.] ("City-Destroyer" 4:529)

Big Bang

[Entire poem on the Big Bang theory.] ("Explosion" 3:413)

[Entire poem on expansion and contraction of the universe.] ("The Great Explosion" 3:471)

"Consider the surface of half-cooled planets." ("Great rough-legged hawks" 4:515)

Catastrophic Change

. . . some day the coast will lose patience and dip
And be clean. ("Cawdor" 1:463)

Consciousness (biological basis)

Our nerves and brain have their own chemic changes,
. . . .
The swift messenger nerves that sting the brain,
The brain itself and the answering strands that start
Explosion in the muscles, the indrinking eye
Of cunning crystal, the hands and feet, the heart
And feeding entrails, and the organs that tie
The generations into one wreath, one strand;
All tangible things or chemical processes
Needs only brain and patience to understand . . . ("Consciousness" 1:7)

Gently with delicate mindless fingers
Decomposition began to pick and caress the unstable chemistry
Of the cells of the brain . . .
Or one might say the brain began to glow . . .
. . . .
. . . But then the interconnections between the groups of the brain
Failing, the dreamer and the dream split into multitude. Soon the altered cells became unfit to express
Any human or at all describable form of consciousness." ("Cawdor" 1:449-51)

The bone vessel where all the nerves had met
For counsel while they were living, and the acts and thoughts
Been formed, was burst open, its gray and white jellies
Flung on the stones like liquor from a broken flask,
Mixed with some streamers of blood.

The vivid consciousness
That waking or dreaming, its twenty years, infallibly
Felt itself unitary, was now divided:
Like the dispersion of a broken hive: the brain-cells
And rent fragments of cells finding
After their communal festival of life particular deaths.
In their deaths they dreamed a moment, the unspent chemistry
Of life resolving its powers; some in the cold star-gleam,
Some in the cooling darkness in the crushed skull.
But shine and shade were indifferent to them, their dreams
Determined by temperatures, access of air,
Wetness or drying, as the work of the autolytic
Enzymes of the last hunger hasted or failed. ("Cawdor" 1:479-480)

After a time of darkness
The dreams that follow upon death came and subsided, like fibrillar twitchings
Of the nerves unorganizing themselves; and some of the small dreams were delightful and some slight miseries,
But nothing intense; then consciousness wandered home from the cell to the molecule, was utterly dissolved and changed . . . ("Margrave" 2:171)

. . . and under the thick brown hair and under the cunning sutures of the hollow bone the nerve-cells
With locking fibrils made their own world and light, the multitude of small rayed animals of one descent
That make one mind, imagined . . . ("Thurso's Landing" 2:186)

. . .[His mind] shook a filament,
There a dark ganglion faintly glowed for a moment and returned to darkness, a pin-point nexus of brain-cells
Grew phosphorescent and faded and faintly glowed again; little superfluities of meaningless chemistry;
Besides the tidal glowing and paling, and traffic-light rhythms
Of nerves that govern breathing and heart-beat, arteries and viscera.
. . . .
About that time a small constellation
Of nerve-cells began to glow in the sleeper's brain . . .
. . . .
. . . Some gland poured opium into the blood. ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:566–67)

Meanwhile the gentle click of the door-latch and Arab's entrance
Had touched the ears of the old woman dying; and slowly from nerve-complex to nerve-complex
Through the oxygen-starved brain crawled into her mind. ("Hungerfield" 3:381–82)

Continental Drift

That saw you [ocean] soft and violent wear your boundaries down, eat rock, shift places with the continents. ("Continent's End" 1:17)

And the wings torn with old storms remember
The cone that the oldest redwood dropped from, the tilting of continents,
The dinosaur's day, the lift of new sea-lines. ("Pelicans" 1:207)

Copernicus and Darwin

"To whom this monument: Jesus or Caesar or Mother Eve?
"No" he said, "To Copernicus: Nicky Kupernick: who first pushed man
Out of his insane self-importance and the world's navel, and taught him his place.
And the next one to Darwin." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:274)

[Entire poem on Darwin as an artist who produced the theory of evolution.]
("I hear that Darwin grown old lamented" 4:536)

Deaths and Renewals of the Stars

For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart . . . ("To the Stone-Cutters" 1:5)

The oceans we shall have tamed then
Will dream between old rocks having no master, the earth
Forget corn, dreaming her own precious weeds and free
Forests, from the rivers upward; our tributary planets
Tamed like the earth, the morning star and the many-mooned
Three-belted giant, and those red sands of Mars between them,
Rust off the metal links of human conquest, the engines
Rust in the fields, and under that old sun's red waning
Nothing forever remember us.
. . . .
. . . [I]s it unendurable
To know that the huge season and wheel of things
Turns on itself forever, the new stars pass
And the old return and find their old places . . . ("Point Pinos and Point Lobos" 1:94)

. . . the enormous rhythm of the stars' deaths
And fierce renewals. . . ("Point Pinos and Point Lobos" 1:97)

Short-lived as grass the stars quicken in the nebula and dry in their summer, they spiral
Blind up space, scattered black seeds of a future; nothing lives long, the whole sky's
Recurrences tick the seconds of the hours of the ages of the gulf before birth, and the gulf
After death is like dated . . . ("The Treasure" 1:102)

. . . [Y]ou Night will resume
The stars in your time. ("Night" 1:115)

I seem to have stood a long time and watched the stars pass.
They also shall perish I believe.
Here to-day, gone to-morrow, desperate wee galaxies
Scattering themselves and shining their substance away
Like a passionate thought. It is very well ordered. ("Margrave" 2:171)

Time will come no doubt
When the sun too shall die; the planets will freeze, and the air on them; frozen gases, white flakes of air
Will be the dust: which no wind will ever stir: this very dust in dim starlight glistening
Is dead wind, the white corpse of wind.
Also the galaxy will die; the glitter of the Milky Way, our universe, all the stars that have names are dead.
("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:261)

He felt in his mind the vast boiling globes
Of the innumerable stars redden to a deadly starset; their ancient power and glory were darkened . . . ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:293)

The heroic stars spending themselves,
Coining their very flesh into bullets for the lost battle,
They must burn out at length like used candles;
And Mother Night will weep in her triumph, taking home her heroes. ("The Epic Stars" 3:466)

The trance
Was changed again, a reddening wane of sun
Alternated with brighter and chillier stars
About the lessening ocean, men built forts
No longer against each other but against
The invisible invasion and thick frost
From beyond the world. ("Shells" 4:501)

Diameters of the Stars

. . . Antares reddens
The great one, the ancient torch, a lord among lost children,
The earth's orbit doubled would not girdle his greatness, one fire
Globed, out of grasp of the mind enormous; but to you O Night
What? Not a spark? . . . ("Night" 1:115)

Dirac's Equations

He thought it was nearly certain
That nothing like this could be, there was not one needle-point
Of real in it; except his whole body shaking,
His heart bursting its rib-cage: "but as real as Europe's
Rearmament race," a jiggling splinter of his mind laughed, "or Dirac's equations:
Nothing is real this year." ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:593)

Earth's Consciousness

I think it [Una's consciousness] is taken into the great dream of the earth; for this dark planet
Has its own consciousness, from which yours came,
And now returns: as the Earth's consciousness,
Half-separate for a time, will return at length
To the whole galaxy; and when that perishes
To the whole endless universe—that is, to God,
Who will make all things new. ("Whom shall I write for" 4:541)

Evolution

You [Pacific Ocean] were much younger when we crawled out of the womb and lay in the sun's eye on the tideline. ("Continent's End" 1:16)

So death will flatter them at last: what, even the bald ape's by-shot
Was moderately admirable? ("The Broken Balance" 1:375)

And the earth is a particle of dust by a sand-grain sun, lost in a nameless cove of the shores of a continent.
Galaxy on galaxy, innumerable swirls of innumerable stars, endured as it were forever and humanity
Came into being, its two or three million years are a moment, in a moment it will certainly cease out from being
And galaxy on galaxy endure after that as it were forever . . . ("Margrave" 2:160)

It is scene two act four of the tragic farce The Political Animal. Its hero reaches his apogee
And ravages the whole planet; not even the insects, only perhaps bacteria, were ever so powerful. ("Fourth Act" 3:113)

. . . Peeled apes teetering on their back legs . . . ("The Double Axe: The Love and the Hate" 3:238)

. . . an absurd ape drops from a tree
And for a time rules the earth. ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:276)

"I'll be a stone at the bottom of the sea, or any bush on the mountain,
But not this ghost-ridden blood-and-bone-thing, civil war on two legs and the stars' contempt, this walking farce,
This ape, this—denatured ape, this—citizen—" ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:282)

"The yellow puma, the flighty mourning-dove and flecked hawk, yes and the rattlesnake
Are in the nature of things; they are noble and beautiful
As the rocks and the grass:—not this grim ape
Although it loves you." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:289)

Indeed it is hard to see beauty
In any of the acts of man: but that means the acts of a sick microbe
On a satellite of a dust-grain twirled in a whirlwind
In the world of stars. . . . ("De Rerum Virtute" 3:402)

[Scientific account of the development of the universe and life, ending with our mission as the bearer of consciousness—we may yet grow into this role.] ("The unformed volcanic earth, a female thing" 3: 430–34)

Our cells remember the sea-salt of their origin, and the turns of the sea-tides.
("Preface" ["Continent's End"?] 4: 375)

Neither were the sun nor the stars created,
But grew from what grew before. ("Look All Around You" 4: 530)

Expanding Universe

The learned astronomer
Analyzing the light of most remote star-swirls
Has found them—or a trick of distance deludes his prism—
All at incredible speeds fleeing outward from ours.
I thought, no doubt they are fleeing the contagion
Of consciousness that infects this corner of space. ("Margrave" 2:161)

You would be wise, you far stars,
To flee with the speed of light this infection.
. . . .
. . . I believe this hurt will be healed
Some age of time after mankind has died,
Then the sun will say "What ailed me a moment?" and resume
The old soulless triumph, and the iron and stone earth
With confident inorganic glory obliterate
Her ruins and fossils, like that incredible unfading red rose
Of desert in Arizona glowing life to scorn,
And grind the chalky emptied seed-shells of consciousness
The bare skulls of the dead to powder; after some million
Courses around the sun her sadness may pass:
But why should you worlds of the virgin distance
Endure to survive what it were better to escape? ("Margrave" 2:166)

" . . . and the sun that rushes away we don't know where, and all
The fire-maned stars like stallions in a black pasture, each one with his stud of plunging
Planets for mares that he sprays with power; and universe after universe beyond them, all shining, all alive:
Do you think all *that* needs us?" ("Give Your Heart to the Hawks" 2:374)

Genetic Control

. . . for the egg too has a mind,
Doing what our able chemists will never do,
Building the body of a hatchling, choosing among the proteins:
These for the young wing-muscles, these for the great
Crystalline eyes, these for the flighty nerves and brain:
. . . .
I believe the first living cell
Had echoes of the future in it, and felt
Direction and the great animals, the deep green forest
And whale's-track sea; I believe this globed earth
Not all by chance and fortune brings forth her broods,
But feels and chooses. And the Galaxy, the firewheel
On which we are pinned, the whirlwind of stars in which our sun is one dust-grain, one electron, this giant atom of the universe
Is not blind force, but fulfils its life and intends its courses. "All things are full of God.
Winter and summer, day and night, war and peace are God." ("De Rerum Virtute" 3:401–02)

Heavy Water

Leaping is not my life nor flashing my joy.

Heavy water perhaps—that grave and famous
Allotrope—a cubic inch of heavy water,
In all the laughing and shrieking glee, cold and separate. ("Allotropic Man" 4:532)

Ice Age

Or let's observe the shrinkage of glaciers.
From the poles and the peaks:
The poles are thawing—Siberia will soon be all wine and roses.—Yes?—Be advised. Lay in coal and cordwood
For the new ice-age. ("The Urchin" 3:415)

[Poem on melting ice-caps and rising seas.] ("The polar ice-caps are melting" 3:476)

Mendelian Genetic Theory

He smiled in himself
Thinking about the scrap of Mendelian theory
Picked up in high-school: blue eyes recessive, brown dominant:
Therefore blue-eyed parents cannot produce
A dark-eyed child, the dark-eyed-producing element
Is lacking in them. If it were present in either,
That one would be dark-eyed, for dark eyes are dominant. ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:568)

Meteor Shower

It was like the glittering night last October
When the earth swam through a comet's tail, and fiery serpents
Filled half of heaven. ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:283

Moon Formation

[Entire poem about the theory of the formation of the moon from a passing star.] ("I walk on my cliff above the Pacific Ocean" 3:457)

[Entire poem about the theory that the moon was born from the close passage of a star.] ("At the near approach of a star" 3:458)

And we remember the moon,
At high tide when a star passed torn from the earth the huge trough of the Pacific . . . ("Not Solid Earth" 4:539)

Newton

The intellectual strain may be suggested by the well-known words of one of the fathers of the church, Tertullian, I think: "Credo quia absurdum"—"I believe because it is unbelievable." Or it may be suggested by the spectacle of Newton in his later years, turning his mind from the Mystics and mathematics to works of rather chimerical theology . . ." ("Thoughts Contingent to a Poem" 4:397)

Nova

It is likely our moderate
Father the sun will sometime put off his nature for a similar glory. ("Nova" 2:530)

Plutonium

(It is possible this prodigious plutonium
Is our Greek fire once or twice to save us.) ("What is Worthless?" 3:200)

Population Explosion

Have you noticed meanwhile the population explosion
Of man on earth, the torrents of new-born babies, the bursting schools? ("Birth and Death" 3:440)

[Entire poem on explosion of human population and human excesses.] ("Passenger Pigeons" 3: 435–37)

Scant air, though in vast Asia; for they crowd together, and the fields are parcelled small;
And verminlike they die, but daily more are born—how *can* there still be room for all?

Myriads of lives on myriads, like in number to the cells too small for seeing that clot
The culture-tubes of a microscopist—exhaustless life within one whitish dot. ("The Valley" 4:449)

Retention of Vision

. . . the great religions of love and kindness
May conceal that, not change it. They are not primary but reactions
Against the hate: as the eye after feeding on a red sunfall
Will see green suns. ("The unformed volcanic earth, a female thing" 3:433)

Role of Science in Human Life

[Entire poem about humankind's destructiveness and inability to control its knowledge.] ("Science" 1:113)

Science, that makes wheels turn, cities grow,
Moribund people live on, playthings increase,
But has fallen from hope to confusion at her own business
Of understanding the nature of things . . . ("Triad" 2:309)

The immense vulgarities of misapplied science and decaying Christianity. . . ("Prescription of Painful Ends" 3:14)

Radar and rocket-plane, the applications of chemistry, the tricks of physics: new cunning rather
Than new science: but they work. ("Staggering Back Toward Life" 3:135)

Cattle in the slaughter-pens, laboratory dogs
Slowly tortured to death . . . ("The King of Beasts" 3:138)

[Entire poem on science; since morality is running backwards, science would have to be given back to the witch doctors.] ("Curb Science?" 3:199)

"Science is not to serve but to know. Science is for itself its own value, it is not for man . . ." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:291)

"Science is an adoration; a kind of worship." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:292)

You watched the sabre-tooth tigers
Develop those huge fangs, unnecessary as our sciences . . . ("Passenger Pigeons" 3:437)

. . . the human people are only symbolic interpreters—
So let them live or die. They may in fact
Die rather quickly, if the great manners of death dreamed up
In the laboratories work well. ("Old age hath clawed me with his scaly clutch" 3:484)

"Genius is sometimes derived from neurosis; that is, from some irreconcilable strain in the mind, that activates its energies by wounding them; . . . and as we look at *to-day's* scientific achievements and material power—is certainly a genius among ages. And certainly a bewildered genius! ("Themes in My Poems" 4:411}

The happiest and freest man is the scientist investigating nature, or the artist admiring it; the person who is interested in things that are not human. ("Themes in My Poems" 4:412)

Science usually takes things to pieces in order to discover them; it dissects and analyzes; poetry puts things together, producing equally valid discovery, and actual creation. {"Themes in My Poems" 4:416)

Science and Mathematics as Metaphor

"Or as mathematics, a human invention
That parallels but never touches reality, gives the astronomer
Metaphors through which he may comprehend
The powers and the flow of things . . ." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:260)

Science and mathematics
Run parallel to reality, they symbolize it, they squint at it,
They never touch it . . . ("What's the best life for a man?" 3:425)

. . .they work alongside the truth
Never touching it; their equations are false
But the things *work*. ("The mathematicians and physics men" 3:459)

All our knowledge then,
Our opinions, our observations, our science,
Are subjective; are something studying itself
By the light of itself. That is to say all our knowledge is a dreamer dreaming:—say rather a *dream*
Dreaming a dream. ("We see ourselves from within" 4:534)

. . . I wish he [Darwin] could hear
Our all-too-human mathematicians making poems (which work, you know)
Parallel to truth, and produce death. ("I hear that Darwin grown old lamented" 4:536)

Scientific Terminology

Trying to observe whether the beat suspended—"suspended," he thought—in systole or in diastole. ("Margrave" 2:162)

. . . light-gray diorite with two or three slanting seams in it . . . ("Oh Lovely Rock" 2:546)

"Let me tell you a new riddle: Kay Conquers Napoleon.
What does that mean?"

. . . .

Howren said, "To hell with Kay."
Howard laughed and said, "How did you know it ionizes?
CN's the works." ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:572)

Howard sighed and strained his head back to ease the ache; it seemed localized
Between the atlas vertebra and the skull,
A factory of pain, distributing its over-production
Along the coronal suture. ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:580)

. . . somatic cells . . . fruit-flies . . . ("Such Counsels You Gave to Me" 2:582)

. . . metastases of cancer
Had found the lungs. ("Hungerfield" 3:379)

Soviet Space Dog

[Three versions of a poem about Laika, the dog the Soviets sent into orbit.]
("The Dog in the Sky" 3:470)

Unity of Matter and Energy

Fish-scales of light? They drew together as they drifted away no path down the wild darkness; he saw
The webs of their rays made them one tissue, their rays that were their very substance and power filled wholly
The space they were in, so that each one touched all, there was no division between them, no emptiness, and each
Changed substance with all the others and became the others. It was dreadful to see
No space between them, no cave of peace nor no night of quietness, no blind spot nor no deaf heart, but the tides
Of power and substance flood every cranny; no annihilation, no escape but change: it must endure itself
Forever. It has the strength to endure itself. We others, being faintly made of the dust of a grain of dust
Have been permitted to fool our patience asleep by inventing death. A poor comfort, he thought,
Yet better than none, the imaginary cavern, how we all come clamoring
To the gates of our great invention after few years.
Though a cheat, it works. ("The Loving Shepherdess" 2:97)

"Does God exist?—No doubt of that," the old man says. "The cells of my old camel of a body,
Because they feel each other and are fitted together,—through nerves and blood feel each other,—all the little animals
Are the one man: there is not an atom in all the universes
But feels every other atom; gravitation, electromagnetism, light, heat, and the other

Flamings, the nerves in the night's black flesh, flow them together; the stars, the winds and the people: one energy,
One existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God: star-fire and rock-strength, the sea's cold flow
And man's dark soul." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:256–57)

"It brings under one rule atoms and galaxies, gravitation and time,
Photons and light-waves." ("The Double Axe: The Inhumanist" 3:291)

We that have the honor and hardship of being human
Are one flesh with the beasts, and the beasts with the plants
One streaming sap, and certainly the plants and algae and the earth they spring from,
Are one flesh with the stars. ("Monument" 3:419)

. . . the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and reverenced; and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it. ("Themes in My Poems" 4:412)

About this time the God of the world
Felt every star and cell and raying electron of his body . . . ("Great rough-legged hawks" 4.515)

God is not the spirit of the universe,
Spirit and body, energy and matter, are all one substance,
And God is all. ("God is not the spirit of the universe" 4:561)

Vaccination

"They take horses
And give them sicknesses through hollow needles, their blood saves babies: I am here on the mountain making
Antitoxin for all the happy towns and farms . . ." ("A Redeemer" 1:407)

James Baird, a frequent contributor of conference papers and articles, is on the English Faculty of the University of North Texas at Denton. He is president-elect of the Robinson Jeffers Association.

Hawk Tower Revisited

Edwin A. Cranston

Houses

House built of stone;
small panes, great heart and flame
listening all night to the moan
of sea, your lichened rock
seems nothing like the same
as hill-dry wood and blazing glass,
but winds will pass
and never mock
passions that sank like ghosts,
hungry and angry, legions of the lost,
into the joists, the beams, the stones
guarding the shore garden and the grass-dry hill of bones.

EAC

A pilgrimage last year to California to attend a sea-cliff wedding and find again the graves of a friend and his wife in Sonoma brought my own wife and me also to Carmel on another journey into the deep past. Carmel is Jeffers country. We went to be in the same place where the poet lived from 1914 to his death in 1962, to visit his home—and to find what making such a pilgrimage might mean. Carmel retains a special character despite the vast changes that have overtaken it since its days as an artist colony in the 1890s,[1] or since Robinson and Una Jeffers arrived there just as the First World War was beginning, or even since my own first trip up the coast in 1954. As many—too many—have discovered, Carmel is a good place to be. Jeffers, who did not love the crowd, and who was a prophet if any poet ever was, lived to see what was happening and suffered accordingly. The forest of pine and eucalypts he planted is mostly gone, most of his property sold off and built up. But Tor House and Hawk Tower have been saved from the wrecker's ball and are preserved under the protection of the U.S. government (what an irony, considering Jeffers's political views) and the Tor House Foundation. The house, tower, and garden are now an enclave of a special past—haunted by the ghosts of a great love and a remorseless power. My wife and I were welcomed to that enclave by Alex and Fran Vardamis of Tor House Foundation, an experience that coincided with the publication of the

fourth volume of the *Collected Poetry* by Stanford University Press to bring Jeffers with all his troubling and passionate demands back from the underlayers of my mind. Whatever others may think, for me the man, this poet, will not rest easy in neglected earth. His voice must be heard.

Although I am an old English major, I long ago abandoned the field and switched to Japanese literature. Therefore my presence in this periodical has a certain implausibility. My only qualification, such as it is, must be my involvement with poetry. I teach poetry, translate poetry, and have written poems since my senior year in high school. Poetry has turned out to be the center of my existence. A life in poetry implies a vision of the world. My own world is, like everyone's, the product of everything read, written, and experienced. Early exposure to Robinson Jeffers, whom I began to read about fifty years ago, has helped create that world. At that time I had never seen the California coast north of San Diego, but fortunately I was living in the Sonoran desert of southern Arizona. I was studying Astronomy in college. Arcturus, Aldebaran, Antares came to me at once from the night sky and from *Tamar* and other poems by Jeffers. I too could step out any winter night and see Orion and the Pleiades in silent, pale parade. The intensities of my own youth resonated with what I discovered in Jeffers, especially that aspect of him which is devoted to the cosmic frame. The passages in his narratives that suddenly break away and invoke the universe came to me as a revelation of what poetry could do. The mountaintop scene in *Roan Stallion* is one example:

> Enormous films of moonlight
> Trailed down from the height. Space, anxious whiteness, vastness. Distant beyond conception the shining ocean
> Lay light like a haze along the ledge and doubtful world's end. Little vapors gleaming, and little
> Darknesses on the far chart underfoot symbolized wood and valley; but the air was the element, the moon-
> Saturate arcs and spires of the air.
>
> Here is solitude, here on the calvary, nothing conscious
> But the possible God and the cropped grass, no witness, no eye but that misformed one, the moon's past fullness.
> Two figures on the shining hill, woman and stallion, she kneeling to him, brokenly adoring. (*CP* 1:193)

Another passage, earlier in the poem, steps aside from narrative altogether to make a statement of belief, of "philosophy," probably the first enunciation of Jeffers's credo that I found:

> Humanity is the start of the race; 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.

Tragedy that breaks a man's face and a white fire flies out of it; vision that fools him
Out of his limits, desire that fools him out of his limits, unnatural crime, inhuman science,
Slit eyes in the mask; wild loves that leap over the walls of nature, the wild fence-vaulter science,
Useless intelligence of far stars, dim knowledge of the spinning demons that make an atom,
These break, these pierce, these deify, praising their God shrilly with fierce voices: not in a man's shape
He approves the praise, he that walks lightning-naked on the Pacific, that laces the suns with planets,
The heart of the atom with electrons: what is humanity in this cosmos? For him, the last
Least taint of a trace in the dregs of the solution; for itself, the mould to break away from, the coal
To break into fire, the atom to be split. (*CP* 1:189–90)

This passage excited and challenged me. It took seriously the implications of science in words that said what I felt all the would-be accommodators of science and religion were avoiding—not to mention those who would reject science itself. But at the same time, I was in the full tide of intoxication with the humanism Jeffers rejects. The worlds of art, literature, and thought were just then opening to me. The conflict has remained unresolved to this day. The violence for which Jeffers's narratives are notorious, the stark dramas played out against the splendors of the cosmos and the majesty of the California coast, resonate with other matter in the great tradition—the unbelievable violence of the *Iliad*, the cruelties and torment of Greek and Elizabethan drama, the remorselessness of old ballads. They in fact become part of that tradition. But that tradition also includes the softer, sweeter, more merely "entertaining" elements Jeffers liked to scorn—the antics of dancers, the music and writing and art that warm the heart to (foolish, he would say) love of one's fellowman. Volume Four of the *Collected Poetry* allows one to see Jeffers leaching out of himself the erotic sweetness of a poem like "Fauna," developing fluency in traditional verse as he began to focus on his themes, and finally abandoning rhymes, sonnets, regular meters for a new style. The California coast from Carmel south through the Big Sur was a world apart in the era before the coast highway, a world that seemed coeval with the elements of nature itself, and Jeffers at first felt it would not change soon. He learned otherwise as the decades passed, and some of his peculiar bitterness stems from anger at spoliation.[2] This fed into his developing creed of humanity as "dregs of the solution." The other formative—or distorting—factor in his mature development was the First World War. There is evidence that Jeffers was torn by patriotic emotions in conflict with his nascent isolationism and "Inhumanism."[3] But by the war's end, Jeffers was already disillusioned, if indeed he had any illusions to lose. And he was embittered by America's involvement in quarrels he consistently maintained were not its own. Jeffers's repetitive insistence on the cold eye and

the stone-like stance can be understood as a quarrel with himself, a not entirely unvexed position. Jeffers had political passions, and they mattered to his poetry. World War One excited and appalled him. He clearly felt it signaled the end of Western civilization—and a good thing too, he seems to say. But previously unpublished poems like "The Dance of the Banner" (*CP* 4:282) and "The Daughter of God in Russia" (*CP* 4:464) show him fascinated with the Bolshevik revolution.[4] Violence always fascinated him, as is only too notorious in his later poems about Hitler, whom he seemed to think of as another of his self-destructive heroes. Wilson was a man with a tragic flaw, but Roosevelt was only a cheap politician, a deceiver. If the war of 1914 contributed to the doom-laden quality of Jeffers's thought, the war of 1939 (as he referred to it) made him shrill, sometimes too angry and frustrated to write well. His reputation has suffered accordingly.[5]

But to me in the early fifties, both the earliest and the late Jeffers were unknown. I wrote poems reaching out to the cosmos, poems about the desert mountains, poems that attempted the Jeffers-style incorporation of science, especially astronomy, into a passionate vision of the world. They came out of me because of the sheer power and impact of Jeffers's own vision. He was sympathetic to me in part because of my own misanthropic tendencies, the pleasure I shared in notions of man's disappearance from the world. But I never managed to follow Jeffers into "Inhumanism" (surely the most unfortunate name for what could better be labeled "transhuman"). I left college still a would-be "humanist." Clearly one with an unresolved contradiction at the heart of his humanism, to be sure.

The years that followed took me to Japan, and in the fullness of time I became a student and translator of Japanese poetry. As one learns about something foreign, one naturally is drawn to difference, to otherness. It would be interesting and useful to examine Jeffers's own notions of East Asian art and civilization, on which we have some fragments of evidence.[6] But I choose not to do that. One reason is that to do so would inevitably involve me in a series of generalizations of the East vs. West variety. Although Robert Frost humorously defended his poems as generalizations,[7] they are the generalizations of a wise, or at least savvy, Yankee on human life. Generalizations of the academic sort I leave to the authors of textbooks. The other reason is that the foreign is not all foreign. Part of the pleasure of studying it is to discover the familiar, to discover ourselves. That means more to me. After all, I am still a humanist. I still believe we all ultimately speak the same language. We just have different dialects.

What did I find in Japanese poetry that is relevant to Robinson Jeffers? Late in his career Jeffers published an essay titled "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years" (1948). I will not defend its opinionated attack on the modern in poetry and art, though I cannot say I completely disagree with it either. What strikes me is Jeffers's insistence that the poet write for the distant future—be

thinking ahead "a thousand years." Thus he should concern himself with the permanent, disdaining the fashions and devices of the moment. I think he believed his own verse qualified to be read long after more popular poets were forgotten. Time will tell—perhaps. But I feel a strange sense of confirmation of this notion when I realize that the Japanese poetry that moves me most was composed over a thousand years ago. In the ancient songs and in the first anthology, the 8th-century *Man'yôshû*, I found a world that Jeffers would recognize and that I recognized as evocative of the world he himself created in his work. Not that it incorporates a scientific vision or a Nietzschean thrust beyond good and evil, but the simpler and I think more fundamental elements of man in nature are there. Japan has its own "Big Sur" seacoast in the province of Iwami, and its wild, remote beauty is rendered in lines by the greatest of Japan's early poets, Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, whose poems come from the end of the 7th century. Like Jeffers at Point Lobos, Hitomaro deems the coast precious for its rugged, untamed quality, and as being the home of a longed-for woman. Waves, seaweed, and sinuous beauty combine to define this world apart. Jeffers first reached me through the stars, the galaxies, and I found the seacoast only when I went to him. Once found, it became something I could find again in Hitomaro and undoubtedly contributed to my fondness for that poet. Let me quote some lines in translation.

Man'yôshû II:131

. . . .

All along this reach
Of the wild, whale-hunting sea,
Bearing down on the rocks
That bristle there on Nikitazu's strand,
Glistening green gems
Of seaweed, seaweed from the offing,
Come driven by the wind
That leaps like wings of morning,
Come carried by the waves
That leap like wings of evening;
And like the jeweled weed
That slips and floats in the waves,
Riding in their embrace,
Was she in soft and yielding sleep
Whom I have left behind,
Helpless as a trace of dew or frost,
And come upon this road.
. . . . (*WA* 1:205)[8]

Man'yôshû II:135
 In the Sea of Iwami,
Where swarming vines crawl on the rocks,
 Under the Cape of Kara,
A name for far lands strange of speech,
 On the sunken reefs
Grows the sea pine in the deep waters,
 On the stony strand
Grows the lovely, gemlike seaweed:
 Yielding as gemweed
Was my young girl when she lay with me,
 She for whom my love
Is deep as the deeply growing sea pine;
 But those nights were few
When we lay thus in our drifting sleep.
 Now we have parted
As the crawling ivy vines do branch and part,
 And I have come away,
Grieving this heart seated amidst
 The vitals in my breast,
Turning in longing to look back again.
.... (*WA* 206)

These lines meet Jeffers's test of needing no footnotes and dealing with permanent aspects of the human condition—man and woman in nature, parting, sadness, longing. The two lovers could have lived on the coast Jeffers knew and loved in that time he perhaps imagined would last forever. Other poems and other poets exalt the mountains, as Jeffers did Pico Blanco. Man is ever seen wandering through an unspoiled land or seascape in this early poetry. The uncrowdedness of it surely would have appealed to Jeffers. And even in a society in which half-siblings could marry, Jeffers's central theme of incest is not unknown. The early chronicles tell the tale of Prince and Princess Karu, full brother and sister, taken in incest. In one version of this 5th-century legend, the prince is sent into exile. The princess follows him, and they die together. The chroniclers employ various songs in the fashion of a poem-tale, and such utterances of the prince as

 That beauty so fine,
If I can bed her, just bed her,
 Like sickled rushes
Let the tangle tangle then,
If I can bed her, just bed her.

are a far cry from the intensities of the scene between Orestes and Electra concluding *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, or what happens to Tamar and Lee Cauldwell. The prince and princess do indeed die in their own tangle, however, having violated Orestes's (and Jeffers's) advice to "fall in love outward."[9]

The savagery of the ballad informs many of the narratives of Jeffers. At the end of his early poem "Storm as Deliverer," a tale of illicit love and murder that later was worked into *The Women at Point Sur*, the guilty wife gets away scot-free with her lover, who has arranged the murder of her husband and then killed the killer. Afterward the pair live as happily, Jeffers would have us believe, as most:

> In filth of peace and brutish fury of war
> Lives beauty which you fail to recognize
> Because you are foolish people and have sick eyes.[10] (*CP* 4:277)

This comment on the tale is typical of Jeffers. Earlier in the story, the wife opens her cabin door to find her husband—whom she loathes—lying dead on the doorstep. After being raped by the murderer and wounding him with her husband's shotgun, she realizes that she should drag the body inside, or the brood sows and young boars will be at it in the morning. This passage speaks with the authentic, unflinching voice of the un-genteel singer of tales. I was reminded of a song from ancient Japan about a similar feud between men over a woman. Shibi, the winner, loses his life to the vengeful loser.

> *Nihonshoki* 98
> Then Kagehime, when she had gathered him up and buried him, and it was finished, and she was about to start home, choking with grief, said, "Woe is me! Today I have lost my beloved husband." And again, pouring out tears of sorrow, with heavy heart, she sang:

Aoni yoshi	In blue-earth
Nara no hasama ni	Nara in a narrow cleft
Shishijimono	Like a wild beast
Mizuku hegomori	In a dripping trench he hides,
Minasosoku	Water-streaming
Shibi no wakugo o	Shibi the young lord—
Asarizu na inoko	Do not root him up, young swine.[11]

The telling detail is there, though the wife in this version is not wicked.

The men and women who people Jeffers's California poems typically live on isolated farms and homesteads, pursuing their irremediably independent and ornery existences. In their dramas of love and death they may be ennobled by the nature amidst which they live, or made more vile in contrast to it. In ancient,

sparsely populated Japan, there were also country hamlets about whose denizens legends accumulated. Takahashi no Mushimaro, who lived in the early 8th century, was one of a number of poets drawn to their stories. The young woman too well wooed is one stock figure. Unable to choose between two lovers, she drowns herself:

Man'yôshû IX:1813–15
In Ashinoya
Lived the Maiden of Unai:
From a child of eight,
A half-grown girl, until
She tied her hair
To hang short on either side,
She was never seen
In the houses on the street,
But stayed secluded
As in a hollow of bleached cloth:
They fought for air,
The men who would see her;
They formed a fence,
The men who came to call.
Then the Youth of Chinu
And the Youth of Unai
Came at each other,
Black as the soot from torched hovels,
Fierce in their wooing,
Rivals for one woman's love.
Twisting the hilts
Of their swords of tempered steel,
Strapping on their backs
Their quivers and their whitewood bows,
They faced each other,
Ready to plunge into water,
Ready to plunge into flame.
In the midst of their contending,
My young darling went
And to her mother she said this:
"A homespun bracelet,
I am lowly, yet for me
The stalwart men
Fall into strife; when I see it,
I know I could never wed,

Even if I were to live."
Gameflesh on a spit,
In the dark land I'll wait, she whispered,
Keeping this intent
As deep as water in a hidden marsh.
She sighed,
The darling girl, and went her way.
The Youth of Chinu
Saw her that night in a dream,
Clung to her,
Followed her where she went;
And, now left behind,
He, the Youth of Unai,
Gazed up to heaven,
Shouted, shrieked at the sky,
Stamped on the ground,
Gnashed his teeth in defiance,
And swore he'd not
Be bested by no more a man than he.
He slung on his sword,
Belting it tight at his hip,
And went to find them,
Following like a creeper of wild yam.
And so the kinfolk
Came together to decide:
That for long ages
They might stand as monuments,
That in distant years
The tale might still be told,
They raised a tomb
For the maiden in the middle,
And tombs for the youths
One on either side of her.
When I heard of it,
All the story of these graves,
Though I knew nothing
Of those times, I wept aloud,
As in mourning for the newly dead.

When on my travels
I pass by the barrow site
At Ashinoya,

The grave of the Maiden Unai,
I can only weep aloud.

Over one grave
Trailed the branches of a tree:
Just as I had heard,
It was to the Youth of Chinu
That she inclined in her heart. (*WA* 1:319–21)

The villages in these poems also harbor girls for whom too much attention is never enough. Tamana was one such:

Man'yôshû IX:1742–43
By the long-breath-bird
Land of Awa lies the last
Of the villages,
Sue the tip of the catalpa bow:
There dwelt Tamana,
My sweet girl with swelling breasts,
Slender at the waist,
The wasp-maiden of Sue.
Shapely she was and smooth,
All her person soft with sheen,
And when like a flower
She stood smiling at her door,
Men who were bound away,
Traveling down the jewel-spear road,
Gave up their journeys
And went no more along the way,
But reached her gate
And stopped, though she had not called.
Neighbors in houses
Standing lined along the lane,
Heads of households,
Separated from their wives
And without her asking
Offered up their very keys.
Everyone was mad
For her, wandering thus lost,
And so she yielded,
That fair one, and went with them
In the wild ways of desire.

Someone had come,
Was standing by the metal gate:
In the dead of night
With no thought of what she did,
She went and kept her tryst. (*WA* 1:321–22)

Jeffers was drawn to just such simple types, such basic passions, in his most characteristic work. But upon them he exerts an unbearable pressure—the "white fire flies out" when "they are fooled out of their limits." He is out to see what happens when passions work themselves out to conclusions beyond human control, thereby recouping humanity as reenacting cosmic violence. In this drama he finds a beauty like the burning of a billion suns. And yet, he makes the counter-argument as constantly: the viciousness of humans comes from their incestuous obsessions. Orestes in his final speech in *Tower Beyond Tragedy* enunciates the doctrine of casting aside humanity to "enter the earlier fountain" of primal godhead, which is the cosmos itself.[12] It is plain to me that the poet Jeffers was a tormented spirit claiming for himself a stone-like stolidity, but utterly aware of the electron whirl in every atom within. His use of early myth, legend, and history, and his search for primal types in contemporary life, were ways of coping with what clearly were agonizing angers and a prophetic drive to shake the world about him to its foundations. He built a stone tower with his own hands, but he was not above the battle that is our life.

Hawk Tower

Rough stone tower,
you tear my shoulder,
shred my skin to blood
I would give your hawk,
heart-less though it left me
for aught else
save cold-stone
immolation of desire.

Stone-rough tower
inner keep of unicorn
corbelled window chamber
sweetly fancied love
to whom the secret stair
wound in your hawk-wounded
heart . . .

Over the sea-cold
stone turret Orion
striding the same sky
of my desperate
desert youth . . .
Aldebaran, Arcturus, Antares . . .
A mon seul désir
stone syllables,
galaxies of fire.

EAC

ENDNOTES

[1] Carmel's history since its days as the haunt of the Bohemian Club of California writers, artists, and general free spirits is recounted entertainingly by Clint Eastwood (erstwhile mayor of Carmel) in a videotape titled *Don't Pave Main Street* (Carmel Heritage—a Julian Ludwig Production).

[2] Among Jeffers's last poems is one, "Salvage," that begins

It is true that half the glory is gone.
Motors and modernist houses usurp the scene.
There is no eagle soaring, nor a puma
On the Carmel hill highroad . . . (*CP* 3: 421)

"Carmel Point" (*CP* 3:399) speaks for patience, but the anger elsewhere is undeniable: "Oh heavy change. / The world deteriorates like a rotting apple, worms and a skin. / They have built streets around us, new houses . . ." ("The Last Conservative," *CP* 3:418). Even in the 1920s the poet cried out for "[t]he beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city," predicting "my own coast's obscene future" ("The Broken Balance," *CP* 1:375).

[3] James Karman, *Robinson Jeffers, Poet of California* (Story Line Press, 1996), 39–41. Karman, drawing on the letters of Una Jeffers published in Robert Brophy, ed., *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, nos. 47 and 56, recounts the poet's attempts to enlist after the U.S. declaration of war in 1917.

[4] Both poems are from 1918. The political and religious allegory intended by the naked "daughter of God" and her red banner dancing across the vastness of Russia calls for exegesis. "The Murmansk Landing" (*CP* 4:278) makes clear Jeffers's hostility to the Western intervention. The unfinished "Daughter of God in Russia," at least, is explicit in equating its central revolutionary figure with Liberty—and, it would seem, sisterhood with Christ.

[5] On Hitler, see "The Day Is a Poem" (*CP* 3:16) and "The Bowl of Blood" (*CP* 3:81–100); on Wilson, "Woodrow Wilson" (*CP* 1:106–07) and "Wilson in Hell" (*CP* 3:117). The latter has some of Jeffers's most hostile lines on Roosevelt. "What Odd Expedients" (*CP* 43:137) dismisses Roosevelt ("cripple's vanity") along with Jeanne d'Arc ("crackpot dreams"), Hitler (ditto), Mussolini ("bombast"), and Napoleon ("tinsel star"), the point being that the decks must be cleared for the contest between the "two strong bulls"—the U.S. and U.S.S.R. The prophet here clearly does not anticipate the coming "Cold War" being cold. The Liveright edition of *The Double Axe* (1977) includes a version of this "suppressed poem"(*DA* 163) in which the comment on Roosevelt reads "cripple's-power-need." On Roosevelt, see also "Fantasy" (written in June 1941), another of the suppressed poems in *The Double Axe* (1948), where Roosevelt and Hitler are imagined hanged in effigy from the same tree (*CP* 3:109). The invective of the wartime poems is hard for me to bear, especially as it rips in two a reading of the world into a cosmological frame with which I feel at one and a sense of history too determined by race and manifest destiny for me to accept. The dark intensities of the poems in *The Double Axe* are not lacking in the old power, but their obsession with current events, whether or not one is offended by their views, removes them from the grander ranges of the poet's thought. William Everson writes on these matters in his introduction to the Liveright edition of *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1977), and on Jeffers's alleged "fascism," in *Fragments of an Older Fury* (1968). I am still pondering his arguments.

[6] Most notably in "On an Anthology of Chinese Poems" (*CP* 3:449), which finds Chinese landscape painters "far better than ours" in their placement of man in the universe, but leaves the reader to ponder an alleged "moral difference" in a perceived lack of "weight" in Chinese mountains as compared to Wordsworth's. The earlier "Credo" (*CP* 1:239) again prefers the ocean's ocean to the "bone vault's," in a debate between Eastern and Western mysticism. *Jeffers Studies* 2:1 (Winter 1998) summarizes an article on *mushin* ("mindlessness") in Jeffers by his Japanese translator, Miura Tokuhiro. Miura claims to find the Zen concept of mindlessness, which he defines as "mind without illusions," in Jeffers's evocation of a peace that "does not seek joy." A comment from the poet on this notion would have been of interest. A poet who identified himself deeply with stone might have found a resonance in *Shizukesa ya / Iwa ni shimiiru / Semi no koe* (Bashô): Stillness: hear! / Sink into the rocks / Cicada cries.

[7] In a tape of him reading from his work published by Harvard University Press in the album *The Poet's Voice* (1978). He includes the dictum "You mustn't generalize" in prefatory remarks on things he hates, along with being asked if he's writing poetry any more. "Hate," he opines, is needed to "sort of even things up" with love. He goes on to inform his audience that all his poems are generalizations—"every one."

[8] Quotations from early Japanese poetry in the present essay are from Edwin A. Cranston, *A Waka Anthology, Volume One: The Gem-Glistening Cup,* indicated throughout by the letters *WA*. The lines from *Man'yôshû* II:131 are from the translation (*WA* 1:205).

[9] For the Japanese song, which is no. 80 in the ancient chronicle *Kojiki*, see *WA* 1: 48; for the quotation from *Tower Beyond Tragedy*, *CP* 1:178. "I have fallen in love outward" is what Orestes says, to his sister and co-matricide Electra, who would draw him back with the offer of her body to the pit of incestuous desire. Prince Karu's song is likely an ancient love lyric arbitrarily assigned by the chronicler or earlier legend-makers to the amorous and tragic prince, whose fall was not "outward."

[10] Jeffers retells the story of Myrtle and Andrew Cartwright in the "Prelude" to *Point Sur* (*CP* 1:240). Her lover's name, Will Stayne in the earlier poem ("Storm as Deliverer," *CP* 4:256), is changed to Rod Stewart here. Myrtle's wild hegira through storm to forbidden desire is reenacted in Jeffers's powerful new style in "Prelude" interspersed with scenes of Faith Heriot, Onorio Vasquez and his visions, exploding oil tanks at Monterey, the screaming of redwoods in the wind, and the death of a crucified hawk. We see Myrtle in flashes, as if caught in the lightning she invokes. The sexual climax, however, is not followed by the murder tale as in "Storm as Deliverer," and the illicit lovers do not go south to a new, "happy" life. Instead, Myrtle reappears in the Point Sur narrative to become one of the Rev. Dr. Barclay's disciples, indeed one of his last followers (*CP* 4:256-77, 1:243, 245–48,281, 346, 351, 362, 365). The "brutish fury of war" Jeffers has (and always had) in mind is that of the Great War, World War I; another early evocation of "inhuman" acceptance of human vileness is in "Natural Music" (*CP* 1:6), where "eyes" are changed to ears "strong enough to listen without / Divisions of desire and terror / To the storm of the sick nations . . . , / Those voices also would be found / Clean as a child's . . ."

[11] See *A Waka Anthology* (*WA* 1:100–05) for the *Nihonshoki* version of the tale of Kagehime, Shibi no Omi, and Prince Woke. *Nihonshoki* (*The Chronicles of Japan*) is an early official history, submitted to court in 720. *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), the earliest history, submitted in 712, has a different version of the story *(WA* 1: 64–66).

[12] The last line of *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* uses two images for Orestes's refusal of the incestuous enticements of humanity: the other is the climbing of "the tower beyond time" (*CP* 1:178). A visitor to Hawk Tower becomes aware that towers can be complex symbols, tied to the earth while pointing to the stars. At the heart of Hawk Tower, Una's hideaway reminds us of humanity and love.

WORKS CITED

CP *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers.* Ed. Tim Hunt. 5 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2000, 2001.

WA *A Waka Anthology.* Vol. 1: *The Gem-Glistening Cup.* Trans. Edwin A. Cranston. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1993.

Don't Pave Main Street. Written by William Cartwright, Produced by Julian Ludwig. Carmel: Carmel Heritage, ca 1996.

Everson, William. Foreword. *The Double Axe and Other Poems* by Robinson Jeffers. New York: Liveright, 1977.

———. *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury.* Berkeley: Oyez, 1968.

Frost, Robert. Recorded in *The Poet's Voice.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

Jeffers, Robinson. "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years." *New York Times Magazine* 18 Jan. 1948, sec. 6: 16+.

Karman, James. *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California.* Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1996.

Miura, Tokuhiro. "Mushin in Jeffers: An Abstract." *Jeffers Studies* 2.1 (Winter 1998): 12–14.

Edwin A. Cranston is Professor of Japanese Literature at Harvard University and a distinguished translator and editor. The first volume of his monumental four-volume collection of Japanese poetry in the Waka *Tradition,* Waka Anthology: Volume One: The Gem-Glistening Cup *(Stanford University Press), appeared in 1993. He resides in Lexington, Massachusetts.*

The Prophet as Confessionalist: The Place of the Personal in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers

Alan Soldofsky

Like the Modernist poets of his generation, Robinson Jeffers sought to discover an original style in which to write verse. Though he aligned himself with his Romantic predecessors, he rejected what appeared to him to be the solipsism central to the paradox of Romanticism—the desire to escape one's isolated human consciousness and meld with the world's divinity while at the same time writing poetry that extols one's individual selfhood and one's emotions. Such a Romanticism placed the experience of individual human consciousness at the core of one's art, a position which Jeffers in both his prose and his poetry claimed to oppose. The critic Al Gelpi writes: "For Jeffers . . . original sin consisted in a fall into ego consciousness, which sets mind against nature and individuals against one another" (440). In a 1929 letter Jeffers made his position clear: "It seems to me wasteful that almost the whole of human energy is expended inward, on itself, in loving, hating, governing, cajoling . . . It is like a new born babe, conscious almost exclusively of its own processes . . . As the child grows up its attention must be drawn from itself to the more important world outside it" (*SL* 159).

As Jeffers's poetry matured, so did his theory of poetic practice, which evolved into the much-discussed philosophical attitude he called "Inhumanism": "a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence" (*CP* 4:428). Though Jeffers wrote many poems that do live up to his inhumanist credo, it seems to me that his most interesting lyric and narrative works are also deeply personal. That he was moved to write poems rooted in autobiographical experience, poems that failed to transcend the author's self-consciousness, was a problem that impelled Jeffers to do much poetic rationalizing. In section II of "Apology for Bad Dreams," an early *ars poetica* that first appeared in the 1927 *A Miscellany of American Poetry*, Jeffers's authorial speaker warns:

> This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places: and like the passionate spirit of humanity
> Pain for its bread: God's, many victims', the painful deaths, the horrible transfigurements: I said in my
> heart,

"Better invent than suffer: imagine victims
Lest your own flesh be chosen the agonist, or you
Martyr some creature to the beauty of the place." And I said,
"Burn sacrifices once a year to magic
Horror away from the house, this little house here
You have built over the ocean with your own hands
Beside the standing boulders: for what are we,
The beast that walks upright, with speaking lips
And little hair, to think we should always be fed,
Sheltered, intact, and self-controlled? We sooner more liable
Than the other animals. Pain and terror, the insanities of desire; not accidents but essential,
And crowd up from the core": I imagined victims for those wolves, I made them phantoms to follow,
They have hunted the phantoms and missed the house. (*CP* 1:209–10)

In this passage Jeffers seems to suggest that by "imagining victims" he would placate the fates, immunizing himself and his household from the tragedies—the violent emotions—which, given his personal history, might threaten to erupt and once more destabilize his life. How prophetic such lines seem, considering the nearly tragic events that occurred in Taos in the summer of 1938.

The poem conflates literary and divine creation as it moves to distance itself from the merely autobiographical through the ritual devices within its dramatic monologue. The poem is told by an authorial speaker who in the poem's first section observes a woman, with the help of her son, cruelly whipping a horse—one of Jeffers's imaged victims?—while the animal is tied to a tree by its tongue with a rusty chain. The concluding lines of this section suggest that this woman is the authorial speaker's invention: "What said the prophet? 'I create good: and I create evil: I am the Lord'" (*CP* 1:209). According to Robert Brophy, these lines appropriate Isaiah 45:7 ("I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.") In *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in his Narrative Poems*, Brophy argues that the biblical language is "used in the tone . . . of the reverent believer (in Jeffers' creed) who sees that God has made a sacrificial universe where 'good' and 'evil' are to be understood in relation to an endless cycle from suffering to death to rebirth and then to suffering again. Both are part of beauty, are necessary to it" (259). Parallel to this exterior universe is the poet's interior one, where through representing the ritual of suffering the poet/Creator strives to gain an epiphanic perspective whereby the poet can achieve his own peace. The representation of suffering that induces in the poet's consciousness the pain suffered by his "victims" constitutes for the poet the sympathetic magic of ritual sacrifice.

The implication is that the poet's self-tormenting act of literary creation produces in the poet an enlarged consciousness of God's own self-tormented, continuous creation and destruction of the universe. Jeffers certainly found

material in the exterior world of the Big Sur coast that he could transform into the ritual figures needed to populate the interior world of his poems. He also introduced his own presence into many poems as an authorial narrator who in effect becomes one of the poem's characters. Jeffers often drew upon his own personal experience for his poetry. Una Jeffers testifies, in a 1932 letter to Lawrence Clark Powell, that the woman in Jeffers's poem was indeed real "and she did just that" [tortured the horse] (*SL* 199). To lend the text the necessary ritualized authority, the authorial speaker in this second section addresses himself as "you" as well as, seemingly, addresses the reader. The tone is that of a warning. "'Better invent than suffer: imagine victims / Lest your own flesh be chosen the agonist, or you / Martyr some creature to the beauty of the place'" (*CP* 1:209). Here Jeffers's strategy is to bifurcate the voice of the authorial speaker, splitting it into first and second person—subject and object—in effect splitting apart the authorial ego to speak the poem's crucial lines.

In the poem's third section, Jeffers encloses the authorial speaker within the realms of both history and the natural world—and at a further remove from the autobiographical self—by invoking the coast's Native American inhabitants, "All the soil is thick with shells, the tide-rock feasts of a dead people" (*CP* 1:210). This version of the self, as Tim Hunt suggests, "is not a personality . . . but a self that struggles to assume the role of a voice in nature that would, by virtue of becoming part of nature, speak with an authority prior to and beyond ego" (98). Thus, Jeffers argues "to forget evils calls down / Sudden reminders from the cloud: remembered deaths be our redeemers; / Imagined victims our salvation" (*CP* 1:210). The epigramatic language and collective voice in these lines recalls Old Testament prophets.

By the fourth and final section, the poem's authorial speaker is reframed in the third person in a further attempt to repress the autobiographical self:

> He brays humanity in a mortar to bring the savor
> From the bruised root: a man having bad dreams, who invents victims, is only the ape of that God.
> He washes it out with tears and many waters, calcines it with fire in the red crucible,
> Deforms it, makes it horrible to itself: the spirit flies out and stands naked, he sees the spirit,
> He takes it in the naked ecstasy; it breaks in his hand, the atom is broken, the power that massed it
> Cries to the power that moves the stars, "I have come home to myself, behold me.
> I bruised myself in the flint mortar and burnt me
> In the red shell, I tortured myself, I flew forth,
> Stood naked of myself and broke me in fragments,
> And here am I moving the stars that are me." (*CP* 1:210–11)

The poem here continues the prophetic arc begun in section two. Brophy offers this reading of the poem:

> The poet's ritual insight seems to be that by his rehearsing in the creative fantasy what happens in the world of reality—by imagining, instead of directly suffering, pain and terror and insane desires, he is able to imitate God, thus participating in reality in a unique but valid way. . . . Thus the internal process of the poet's imagined tragedy is calculated to mirror the external and universal sacrifice (the world we know) which to God is internal self-torment. Imaginary sacrifice then could effect a certain immunity, freeing the artist from the necessity of being drawn into external pain, horror, violence, and the rest. (278)

The authorial speaker as poet/Creator, represented as "a man having bad dreams, who invents victims," also clearly operates as a *Doppelgänger* for the poet's Nietzschean self-construct. Jeffers was strongly influenced, as we know, by his readings of Nietzsche. The deific figure who "brays humanity in a mortar" is not only rehearsing a "creative fantasy" but enacting Jeffers's own poetic project for the reevaluation of values and the will to power: "I flew forth / Stood naked of myself and broke me in fragments, / And here I am moving the stars that are me." Though not an overtly personal poem like those Jeffers wrote in later life, "Apology for Bad Dreams" contains autobiographical elements that Jeffers's poetic stratagems do not fully mask.

One can read in several poems that Jeffers wrote before 1920 the impulse toward the confessional. Two of the most notable, "Fauna" and "Mal Paso Bridge," included in the 1925 edition of *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems*, appear to tell of a love affair the poet may have had with a beautiful "dark woman" when he returned alone to Carmel to find a house in the winter of 1917 while Una was still recovering in Pasadena from the birth their twin sons. James Karman in his biography *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of California* corroborates the suggestion that Jeffers behaved recklessly during this period. Karman writes: "That he was predisposed toward this behavior is suggested by a line in one of his poems. Referring to his early years of manhood in 'The Truce and the Peace,' he admits to 'wasting on women's bodies wealth of love. . . .' In Carmel, it is likely that Jeffers met several women who reinforced his need to live without constraints" (80–81). Though the fact of Jeffers's alleged affair is nearly impossible to verify, William Everson speculates "at the approach of the war [World War I] Jeffers had thrown himself into an extramarital love affair, and in the Mal Paso poem had spelled it out with naked explicitness" (170). Certainly "Mal Paso Bridge" contains lines that would seem ostensibly confessional. In section one, the poem's speaker reports seeing a dark-eyed woman and her three-year-old child standing under the bridge at Mal Paso Creek during a storm. The speaker, after disclosing that he found her body and face beautiful, says:

I trembled when she turned her eyes upon me.
Turbulent loveliness did you know then,
Or only a fortnight later the full storm
Of male desire? You are the shallow creek-mouth
The surf of all my seas converged upon. (*CP* 4:252)

In section two, the speaker alludes to the turbulence not only in his own life but in the lives of draft-age men whose lives are caught up in the uncertainty of war:

This is the year when young men cannot guess
From night to night what bed they'll sleep in.
But I in yours dark beauty of new desire,
Yours under Santa Lucian hills
Near the rough water; but beyond that nor moon
Nor guess candles the remnant nights.
Therefore I swore to drink wine while I could,
Love where I pleased, and feed my eyes
With Santa Lucian sea-beauty, and moreover
To shear the rhyme-tassels from verse. (*CP* 4:253)

Here, the speaker conflates the exuberance of an illicit sexual liaison with artistic freedom. In Jeffers's own life this was a turbulent time. As a poet he was trying to break with the artificial and stilted verse he had been writing and to find an original voice. Also he was getting over the deaths of his father and his first child Maeve who died at birth, and trying to deal with the disturbing passions that the World War stirred up in him. He was also a new father to twins. As William Everson suggests, in "Mal Paso Bridge" both Eros and Thanatos—the life and death instincts—were surging through Jeffers's psyche. Everson writes:

> In the "Mal Paso Bridge" affair he had touched something ruthless in himself never before known, and he was shocked into self-understanding, because it was his reaction to the approach of death. For perhaps the first time he experienced the inflexible sensation that what one finds oneself doing is wrong . . . but is nevertheless, as a deed, unmistakably actual—not right, but incontrovertibly *real*, a truth that is more primal than morality and hence assumes precedence over it, something which cannot be touched without some awful contradiction of the guts, the archetypal force that was to emerge as the source of Jeffers' power. . . . in "Mal Paso Bridge" the poet at last got the message. The struggle between Eros and Thanatos had advanced to an actuality that begins to directly inform the verse (176).

In the seventh and penultimate section of "Mal Paso Bridge" one reads the speaker's regret for his reckless impulsiveness, "the awful contradiction of the guts," that archetype which the speaker's promiscuity seemed to have invoked:

> Dark pearl, rose of the hills, star of the sea,
> Dark star, angel of hell, I am mad for your body,
> I am sick for the smell of your hair, I have burning for heart
> And the sun for my hatred, and you. (*CP* 4:255)

In his more mature work—except after Una's death—Jeffers rarely allows such conflicted personal material to enter the poetry. However in 1937, with the impending conflagration of the Second World War dominating the news from Europe, the tension between Eros and Thanatos once again began building strongly in Jeffers. Several poems in the book he published that year, *Such Counsels You Gave to Me*, speak of his premonitions about war. He writes of "These grand and fatal movements toward death" (*CP* 2:515) in "Rearmament." In "Hellenistics" he writes of the coming new age of barbarism. "The age darkens, Europe mixes her cups of death, all the little Caesars fidget on their thrones, / The old wound opens its clotted mouth to ask for new wounds" (*CP* 2:527). In 1937 Jeffers turned fifty. Random House asked him to put together a volume of *Selected Poems*. And he was having premonitions of death. In April 1938, Jeffers was to take a plane trip with his brother Hamilton to Death Valley and had a dream that he would die on the trip. According to James Karman, "No doubt the destination, Death Valley, and the date, Easter, helped loosen subconscious fears" (124). Karman quotes the letter Jeffers left on his desk for Una: "On account of a dream I had in London—for no one knows what previsions the human mind is capable of—and a 'hunch' I have here, it seems possible that we may crash on the way to Death Valley in spite of Hamilton's flying experience" (*SL* 265).

Jeffers was also having a prevision of another sort. His old wound was opening, the divided self he had so thoroughly disciplined by twenty years of daily writing poetry and laboring to construct Tor House and Hawk Tower was resurfacing. The awful contradiction of Eros and Thanatos was again working its way through him. Jeffers had become restless and despairing. He was having trouble writing, and tourists in Carmel were almost daily impinging on his privacy. Moreover, his psyche seemed to be experiencing the old feelings of ambivalence and rebellion toward the maternal figure that for him Una had become. Those contradictory feelings found their way into the long narrative poem Jeffers was writing, "Such Counsels You Gave to Me." In the poem's penultimate section, Jeffers's protagonist, Howard Howren, chooses to commit suicide after poisoning his brutal father with his mother's complicity. But before he acts, he asks his mother to show him her breasts, a strange final gesture that he says will

allow him to find his life's meaning. She complies and then asks "'Do you want .... all, dearest? Nothing's to hide nor forbidden / Among the dead.' He whispered, 'It's your beauty . . .'" (*CP* 2:598–99). After she offers herself to him, he calls her a whore and refuses the consummation he apparently has sought his whole life.

Though not strictly confessional, the Howard character's narrative arc represents, I would argue, the surfacing of Jeffers's deeply buried erotic longing for the maternal archetype, which he seems to have transferred to Una. In the poem's last section, Howard speaks with his *Doppelgänger*, "the simulacrum of himself / That stands watching the house" (*CP* 2:602). Howard's hallucinatory double replies:

> . . . "My twenty years
> Of watching are at last ending. Why did you not
> Complete your cycle? You returned to the breasts of infancy,
> Not to the womb of birth." Howard said "I loved her.
> I hate all women." It said "You are typical: your fever
> And your failure from the one fountain. You wanted discovery
> And then refused it, desired and yet not-desired, loved and yet hated,
> The tension of the divided mind drove you on
> And brought you down . . ." (*CP* 2:602)

The text here constructs for Jeffers a kind of shadow autobiography. ("Rather invent victims lest your own flesh become the agonist.") After twenty years of writing, Jeffers was afraid he could not complete the cycle; that his own divided mind had brought him down. He also felt he was facing once again the end of Western civilization—as he prophesized—as word of further war preparations in Europe filled the newscasts.

Such was Jeffers's mood in 1938 as he prepared for the family's summer sojourn to Taos. Once again, the Jefferses were to be hosted by Mabel Dodge Luhan, who had hoped Jeffers would replace D. H. Lawrence and produce at her urging a literary monument to Taos. But in the summer of 1938 Jeffers felt empty and exhausted. He was not only unable to write but felt sickened by his work, thinking it had all been a failure. It was the start of the next profound crisis in his life. Mabel Dodge thought she had the cure to what ailed him. To renew Jeffers's energy and inspire him, she decided to facilitate a passionate friendship between Jeffers and an attractive young woman named Hildegarde, a refugee from her marriage to the editor of a university press back east, and another of Mabel Dodge's houseguests. Mabel Dodge, known to be as much a meddler as literary patron, thought that what would revive Jeffers was a new muse. Somehow, she understood instinctively the awful contradiction in him,

and had helped set loose the same reckless erotic energy that Jeffers had to suppress (presumably with Una's help) twenty years earlier.

Una became unhinged when she discovered her husband's infidelity. Jealous by nature, she reacted as much to her perceived loss of her position as Jeffers's muse as she did to her husband's emotional betrayal. Despairing that she could no longer inspire Jeffers's poetry, she climbed into the now-famous bathtub at Mabel Dodge's house and shot herself in the left breast with his .32. The bullet miraculously deflected off her ribcage and exited through her back. Anyone familiar with Jeffers certainly by now knows the story. She lived. Jeffers wrote a short, strangely chastising letter to Una shortly after the incident, which opens with the complaint "Una, *I can't write*" (*SL* 269). In the letter he reminds Una that writing has become one of the conditions of his life and that he expected to resume writing again, it was just a matter of time. He connected his erratic behavior to his inability to write poems, suggesting that Una was insensitive to the pain the crisis in his writing life had caused him:

> I believe I'll have a new birth in course of time—not willing yet to grow old at fifty like Wordsworth, and survive myself—something will happen—and *life through this hell come home to me*—something will change, something will happen.
>
> It is a little like my extravagances of 1917 to '19, except that I was uncritical then, and able to keep myself fairly quiet by not writing a lot of foolishness. (Now I know too much.) After that we began to make Tor House—*and that was worthwhile,*—quite aside from the accidental new birth of my own mind.
>
> Something like that will happen again. You were insensitive in Taos.—You thought too much about yourself,—as I am doing now. Either person of a pair of lovers ought to think of the other—.
>
> (Do you understand?—Our love is something different from the love of people that live in apartments. You might have thought about our own peace here—.) (*SL* 269)

Though there is recent evidence to suggest that this letter in the Ridgeway edition may have been written in 1939, not '38, the reference still indicate Jeffers's narcissistic concern with the health of his own poetic powers as opposed to his sympathy for Una's distress.

When the Jefferses returned home, Karman tells us in his biography, Una's physical wound healed quickly, but she needed several months to recover psychologically:

> She cried frequently and withdrew into herself. But with Robinson's help, she soon recovered her emotional and physical strength. The comforting rhythm

of life at Tor House restored her and signs of trauma quickly disappeared. "As for my wound," she says in a letter written to a friend a few months later, "it's all right. It makes a thrilling scar and gives me no trouble but wasn't that an awkward thing to happen" (*RJN* 51). (Karman 125–126)

Despite the momentousness of these events in their lives, Jeffers never wrote a poem directly referring to Una's attempted suicide or to the events in Taos that precipitated it. Indeed, he wrote few poems that overtly bore any scars he may have carried with him from Taos. However, he did include two poems addressed to Una in his 1941 collection *Be Angry at the Sun*, "My Dear Love" and "For Una," which leave little doubt as to their autobiographical subject.

"My Dear Love," an uncharacteristic formally rhyming poem, represents a dialogue between a female beloved and an autobiographically constructed speaker—her cosmologically minded lover/husband. Read as a confessional poem, it charts the condition of the Jefferses' marriage. The dialogical positions of the two figures are established quickly in the first stanza:

"Look up my dear at the dark
Constellations above."
"Dark stars under green sky.
I lie on my back and harken
To the music of the stars,
My dear love." (*CP* 3:27)

The woman's lines set up her husband/lover's replies by either making a seemingly naive statement or by posing a naively ironic question in the first two lines of each of the poem's five six-line stanzas: "'You and I, my dear love, / Shall never die, never die'" in stanza two. "'Why do you never lie / On my breast, my dear love?'" in stanza three. "'Is that the law of this land, / Each one of us on his own?'" in stanza four. "'What, a law in this land / That breast can never meet breast?'" (*CP* 3:27–28).

The woman's lines and the lover/husband's replies, though not openly confessional, can be read as an oblique reference to the Jefferses' marital crisis. In the second stanza, after the woman asserts that the couple shall never die, the lover/husband curiously answers:

"Not again my dear love.
Lie on your back and hark
The music of moon and stars,
My dear love." (*CP* 3:27)

His answer can be read to imply two things. First, that the couple has already died, though the woman is unaware of it. And second, that their relationship, though troubled, will not die, although it has cooled. The third stanza begins with the cunningly enjambed lines "'Why do you never lie / On my breast, my dear love?'" (*CP* 3:27). The question of lying may seem ironically self-serving for the Jeffers persona. In the Foreword to his 1938 *Selected Poetry* referring to Nietzsche's remark that "the poets lie too much," Jeffers vowed to his readers that he would never lie in his poems (*CP* 4:391–92). But the line could also be read ironically, the woman knowing that the lover/husband has lied to her. Also, the lines constitute a sexual reference, the woman asking why the couple has ceased being intimate. The lover/husband's response is once again figurative and furtive:

"Oh, that was another sky.
Here, each of us on his own,
Each on his own back-bone,
My dear love." (*CP* 3:27)

The stanza foregrounds the separateness of the couple "each of us on our own."

In the fourth stanza, the woman's question, "'Is that the law of this land, / Each one of us on his own?'" (*CP* 3:27), seems sarcastic and carries with it a tone of regret. The husband/lover's reply identifies that the space the couple now occupies is underground, but in an underground of Celtic mythology:

"Oh yes, we are underground
With the elves and fairies: lonely
Is the word in this country,
My dear love." (*CP* 3:27)

Here the reader may be tempted to locate the couple in a dream world of Celtic myth, occupying the same space as the magical figures of the unconscious. Literally, as the final stanza insists, the couple find themselves in the shadow world of the dead. It is a world where intimacy is impossible, a hell of separateness. That is the space, I would argue, where Jeffers found himself in the first months after returning to Carmel from Taos. In the final stanza, Jeffers's husband/lover patronizingly responds to the woman's ironic question:

"What, a law in this land
That breast can never meet breast?"
"After while you will understand.
The mole is our moon, and worms

Are the stars we observe,
My dear love." (*CP* 3:28)

In the text, the husband/lover asserts that the space the couple occupies is the grave.

Just as during the time of the First World War, Jeffers found himself experiencing a crisis of the imagination. He was caught again in the grip of the awful contradiction between Thanatos and Eros. The archetypal tensions, which seized Jeffers in 1917 and which seemed then to enlarge his poetry, in 1938 only caused his imagination to seize up. The horror had not been kept away from the house. He could not imagine victims; his own flesh had become the agonist. He could not write. And Una had acted out the drama that Jeffers certainly must have believed represented another sign of humanity's cyclical downward plunge into chaos, war, and darkness—a descent which his poems had predicted. Thanatos energy was everywhere gathering itself around him—in his marriage and in the world.

It would appear that the gloom Jeffers felt over the deteriorating political and military situation in Europe was matched by the gloom he seems to have felt about his marriage and the difficulty he was having writing. Though "My Dear Love" is uncharacteristic of the poems Jeffers published during the war years, he included one other strikingly personal poem, "For Una," in his 1941 collection *Be Angry at the Sun*. In the poem's first section, the autobiographical speaker, in ballad meter, remembers building Hawk Tower for Una and anticipates outliving her:

I built her a tower when I was young—
Sometime she will die—
I built it with my hands, I hung
Stones in the sky.

Old but still strong I climb the stone—
Sometime she will die—
Climb the steep rough steps alone,
And weep in the sky.

Never weep, never weep. (*CP* 3:33)

Curiously, the second line in both the first and second stanzas is "Sometime she will die." Though Jeffers had expected Una would outlive him, the poem foresees Una's death and Jeffers's bereavement. Had Jeffers put the events of Taos behind him? I would argue that even if he had, the possibility of Una dying lin-

gered in his imagination. Jeffers's own sense of both his and his wife's mortality, for whatever reason, certainly seemed to have sharpened after 1938.

It would be reductive to account for Jeffers's morbidity by suggesting he was simply responding to the Thanatos energy released into the world by the world's slide into war. It would be similarly reductive to blame the slowdown in his literary production on the fact that he had reached the age of fifty, had subsequently published his *Selected Poetry*, and felt that the wellsprings of his poetry had gone dry. If one reads "For Una" as a conventionally constructed confessional poem, one can see in the text that the relationship between the speaker's personal distress and his prophetic vision is contingent. Jeffers's autobiographical speaker connects his apprehension (in both senses of the word) of Una's death with his struggle to write the next long poem and his dejection over the war, embodied in the London Blitz. In the poem's second section Jeffers writes:

> The heavy sky over London
> Stallion-hoofed
> Falls on the roofs.
>
> These are the falling years,
> They will go deep,
> Never weep, never weep.
>
> With clear eyes explore the pit.
> Watch the great fall
> With religious awe. (*CP* 3:34)

The poem, addressed to Una, directs her—and the reader—to "explore the pit." But the great fall the text refers to is not only civilization's fall. The poem here also asks to be read as reflexive, the speaker directing himself to examine the personal hell he has come to inhabit. Jeffers's prophetic persona, having forecasted, then witnessed the next stage in civilization's decline, is in the poem's third section clearly witnessing a decline within himself:

> It is not Europe alone that is falling
> Into blood and fire.
> Decline and fall have been dancing in all men's souls
> For a long while.
>
> Sometime at the last gasp comes peace
> To every soul.

Never to mine until I find out and speak
The things that I know. (*CP* 3:34)

Jeffers's own sense of decline, we can only presume, manifested itself in his inability to write, which left him vulnerable to Mabel Dodge Luhan's meddling and to her friend Hildegard's charms. What Jeffers did not foresee, and what in the two poems "My Dear Love" and "For Una" seems to trouble his imagination, was the effect his "decline"—and consequent behavior—had on Una.

The poem's speaker enjoins himself to "speak the things that I know," so that he might at the last gasp have some peace. But apparently he is having difficulty speaking those things. In the fourth and final section of "For Una" he refers to the trouble he is having writing the long poem "Mara," which appears at the end of *Be Angry at the Sun*. Here again, the speaker leaves little doubt to his identity as Jeffers's autobiographical persona: "To-morrow I will take up that heavy poem again / About Ferguson, deceived and jealous man / Who bawled for the truth, the truth, and failed to endure / It's first least gleam. That poem bores me . . . being in some ways / My very self but mostly my antipodes" (*CP* 3:34–35). Readers who were Jeffers's contemporaries would perhaps find such unabashedly confessional address disconcerting. Of the high modernist poets, only the later Williams and occasionally Hart Crane allowed their poems to be so overtly personal. There's only a little distance between Jeffers's lines "To-night, dear, / Let's forget all that, that and the war, / And enisle ourselves a little beyond time, / You with this Irish whiskey, I with red wine / While the stars go over the sleepless ocean" (*CP* 3:35) and Robert Lowell's "Tamed by *Miltown* we lie on Mother's bed; / the rising sun in war paint dyes us red . . . All night I've held your hand, / as if you had / a fourth time faced the kingdom of the mad . . . / Oh my *Petite*, / clearest of all God's creatures, still all air and nerve: / you were in your twenties, and I, / once hand on glass / and heart in mouth, / outdrank the Rahvs in the heat . . ." (*Life Studies* 87).

But the finest examples of Jeffers's confessional poetry are not these. Those works would lie ahead. Through the forties, Jeffers wrote some of his most compelling political poems and translated Greek drama for the stage, as well as further advanced the concept of Inhumanism. The awful contradiction in his imagination between Eros and Thanatos he seems to have once again pushed into a realm where it could be more manageably contained. It would take the actuality of Una's death in 1950 and Jeffers's bereavement to bring the personal again into the foreground in Jeffers's writing. We can read the great text of Jeffers's bereavement in the first 86 lines of "Hungerfield." In writing "Hungerfield," a poem that is unabashedly personal, he seems to have found a way to mourn Una while at the same time presenting a prophetic narrative, framed by a clearly autobiographical monologue, the text in which he works

through his grief to finally accept his wife's loss and reconcile himself to the cycles of life and death in the universe. But that's another essay.

Let me close by saying that the confessional poems Jeffers wrote during and after World War One, as well as the few he allowed himself to compose following the near-tragic events of 1938 in Taos, opened the way for "Hungerfield" and the later confessional lyrics of Jeffers's old age. Those poems, I would assert confidently, represent some of the most compelling personal poetry written by a male American in the anxious years of the mid-twentieth century.

WORKS CITED

CP *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. 5 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2000, 2001.

SL *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, 1897–1962*. Ed. Ann N. Ridgeway. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1968.

Brophy, Robert. *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems*. Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973.

Everson, William. "Robinson Jeffers' Ordeal of Emergence." *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Robert Zaller. Newark, NJ: U of Delaware P, 1991. 123–85.

Gelpi, Albert. *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910–1950*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Hunt, Tim. "The Problematic Nature of *Tamar and Other Poems*." *Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Robert Zaller. Newark, NJ: U of Delaware P, 1991. 85–106.

Karman, James. *Poet of California*. Revised ed. Brownsville, OR: Storyline P, 1995.

Lowell, Robert. *Life Studies*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1956.

Alan Soldofsky is a professor of English and the director of Creative Writing at San Jose State University, where he coordinates the MFA program. Author of two collections of poetry, Kenora Station *and* Staying Home *(Steam Press of Berkeley), his poems have appeared in* Gettysburg Review, Grand Street, Indiana Review, Manoa, Michigan Quarterly Review, *and the* North American Review. *His essay "Nature and the Symbolic Order: The Dialogue Between Czeslaw Milosz and Robinson Jeffers" appears in* Robinson Jeffers: Dimensions of a Poet.

Hardy, Jeffers, and the Hero of Endurance

Robert Zaller

Thomas Hardy was one of the most important formative influences in Robinson Jeffers's aesthetic, a fact often noted but, with the exception of William Everson's groundbreaking work on Jeffers's verse drama, "The Alpine Christ," little explored. Jeffers himself cited *The Woodlanders* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* as particular favorites (*Selected Letters*, 273), but it is the protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard, who has the most specific affinities to the powerful but limited figures whom Jeffers used as a tragic prototype in his verse narratives from "Cawdor" (1928) onward, and whom I have described in other studies as heroes of endurance. Like Henchard, these figures—notably, besides Cawdor himself, Reave Thurso in "Thurso's Landing" and Lance Fraser in "Give Your Heart to the Hawks"—are self-made men of overbearing will but little self-insight, in whom a moral flaw reveals an innate capacity for suffering. It will be the argument of this essay that Henchard, more directly than any other figure in Hardy, served Jeffers as a model for these latter protagonists, and moved him to his own search for wider meaning in a world seemingly devoid of ontological significance.

It is a commonplace of Jeffers criticism that "The Women at Point Sur" marked a caesura, not to say a climacteric, in Jeffers's narrative style. Through "Point Sur," his mature narratives had been characterized by transgressive protagonists who challenged not only moral conventions but the limits of natural process itself. Jeffers offered the master plot of these narratives in the credal assertion of "Roan Stallion":

> Humanity is the start of the race; 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.

> Tragedy that breaks man's face and a white fire flies out of it; vision that fools him
> Out of his limits, desire that fools him out of his limits, unnatural crime, inhuman science,
> Slit eyes in the mask . . . (*CP* 1:189)

At the end of this poem its heroine, California, turns to her daughter "the mask of a woman / Who has killed God" (198). Although California's action is

sacramental rather than wanton or transgressive—she kills the stallion that has personified divinity to her—the reference to the "mask" links her to the transgressive vision. Within a very few years, however, it would be impossible to imagine Jeffers writing lines about "killing God," even metaphorically.[1] With "The Women at Point Sur," he made his final reckoning with the prototypic transgressive hero in the person of Arthur Barclay, whom he characterized in correspondence with his publisher as a "fool or a lunatic" (*Selected Letters*, 116), though he was clearly much more than that for him. In "Cawdor" we are, however, quite suddenly in another dramatic milieu. The earlier, sacramental world of Dionysian sacrifice remains intact—"Cawdor" is a reworking of the Hippolytus legend, and, as Robert Brophy has shown, the notion of holy sacrifice is, if anything, even stronger in the mid-period narratives than in the early ones—but Cawdor himself is as far as possible from Barclay or any previous Jeffers protagonist. Not only is he eminently uninterested in testing limits, he can hardly conceive of doing so. Secure in the self-contained world he has created, he desires no other. If Barclay and his predecessors wish to transcend limits, to confront Godhood directly, Cawdor wants only to perfect the small empire he has so laboriously won, and abide in it for the rest of his days. If there is a God in his world it is himself; but it is a God deluded, a God created not from presumption but through sheer lack of vision.[2] Cawdor has in fact no conception of an external deity, and his successors Reave Thurso and Lance Fraser deal with the notion only by negation. "I'll tell you / What the world's like," says Thurso:

> like a stone for no reason falling in the night from a cliff in the hills, that makes a lonely
> Noise and a spark in the hollow darkness, and nobody sees and nobody cares. There's nothing good in it
> Except the courage in us not to be beaten. (*CP* 2:260–61)

Similarly, Lance Fraser rejects the idea of a just or benevolent deity, brutally hectoring the aged father who had "spooned the gospel" down his throat when he was young, and describing the slow death agony of a buck impaled on barbed wire as evidence of the absurdity of positing any moral order in nature: "For a loving God, a stinking monument" (*CP* 2:350, 352). The only affirmation of divinity in these narratives comes through the intimations of landscape or in Jeffers's occasional authorial asides, and these offer cold comfort: "our inhuman God is too great," as he says in *Thurso's Landing*, and human consciousness too flickering, too dispersed, too "lost," to gain and hold any true conception of him (*CP* 2:242).

Jeffers's own conception of God has not changed in these narratives, although plausibly it has deepened. What is different is that his protagonists (apart, perhaps, from the Jesus of *Dear Judas*) have abandoned their Nietzschean aspiration to the sublime; rather, in their unconscious absorption in

it, they have become the lightning-rods of fate. This notion of an impersonal but all-subsuming fate, which had played so critical a role in such early works as "The Alpine Christ" and "Ode on Human Destinies" and which has clear affinities to Jeffers's first reception of Hardy, returns in a volatilized form in the mid-period narratives as the agent of tragedy. Tragic form, in the classical sense, requires hubris, the assumption of invulnerability to or mastery of fate, conceived as a force inimical to human projects. Hubris, in Greek tragedy, both attracts fate and blinds its victim to its approach. Jeffers rejects so patently anthropomorphized a conception; his is a God who does not stoop to human folly, just as he does not answer such theodicean questions as why a buck must linger in agony on a barbed-wire fence. Yet this splendidly remote divinity is not disconnected from the protagonists of these narratives; they enter through tragic action into a relation with each other, though it is one neither deliberately purposed in any humanly conceivable sense nor accepted as such by the protagonists—indeed, it is in each case quite explicitly rejected. This rejection paradoxically constitutes the relation, for to achieve tragic stature in Jeffers is not to accept deity or Nemesis in the Greek manner but to defy it to the uttermost of human capacity; that is, to endure pain without surcease and without surrender. One might call such a stance Promethean, and in an ultimate sense—the sense disclosed by the self-hanged God of "At the Birth of an Age"—it may be so described. It is not, however, experienced as such by Jeffers's tragic protagonists, who, being self-punished, cannot ascribe their pain to anything beyond themselves, and, being agnostic, cannot imagine their own tragic participation in divinity. They can only suffer to the end, their blindness to the moral significance of their condition the very source of the fleeting but intense illumination they provide:

> No life
> Ought to be thought important in the weave of the world, whatever it may show of courage or endured pain;
> It owns no other manner of shining, in the broad gray eye of the ocean, at the foot of the beauty of the mountains
> And skies, but to bear pain . . . (*CP* 2:242)

All this is far from Hardy, who remains immersed in the praxis of the capitalist lifeworld of the nineteenth century, which he views critically but deterministically and whose dominant Darwinian ideology is sublimated by him as fate. The circumstances that trap and ultimately crush his Jude the Obscure are wholly man-made, although they are presented as if displaying the adamantine character of natural laws. Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is degraded from the condition of independent husbandman to that of casual laborer by what appears to be wholly an accident—the loss of his flock over a

precipice—but is in fact only the *coup de grâce* in the historical destruction of the yeoman class of which he is the final English literary representative. Jeffers notices such characters; old Martial in "Cawdor" is one such, a failed smallholder who is finally ruined by a fire. They lack for him the stature of tragic protagonists, however, who must exhibit a moral flaw irreducible to circumstances. Oak has many of the qualities of the mature Jeffers hero—stout independence, stoic pride and fortitude, and a refusal to submit to misfortune. But he is after all the hero of a romance, and things will turn out well for him. It is instead Michael Henchard, the sometime Mayor of Casterbridge, who finally provides the most adequate prototype for Jeffers's mature tragic vision.

We meet Henchard as a hay-trusser, the lowest class of farm worker, but also one with better prospects in his makeup, for "His measured, springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct from the desultory shamble of the general labourer" (*Mayor*, 3). Henchard has not lost his aspirations, but he feels them weighed down with an unloved wife and infant daughter, and he is correct in this: at his level of subsistence, they are a burden that will not let him rise with even the most heroic effort. He finds, with the help of drink, a rude and brutal solution: he sells them for five guineas at a village fair. Waking the next day from his stupor, he is shamed into a vow of abstinence; but, the deed done, his destiny begins to unfold.

Eighteen years pass; Henchard is now a wealthy grain merchant and the mayor of the substantial market town of Casterbridge. Nothing in his ascent has been easy; like Cawdor, he has learned "that ruling poor men's hands is nothing, / Ruling men's money's a wedge in the world" (*CP* 1:415). Like Cawdor and other self-made men too, he has a certain disdain for prudence, a certain violence in his generosity that is inseparable from command. Thus it is that he woos and conquers the young Scotsman, Donald Farfrae, whom he has determined to have as a manager, and, in his assumed bachelorhood, as a housemate. Without the explicitly sexual element, there is considerable resemblance between Henchard's overbearing pursuit of Farfrae and Cawdor's rough courtship of Fera Martial. Cawdor:

> I am fifty years old, the boys have grown up; and now I'm caught with wanting something and my life is changed.
> I haven't slept for some nights. You'd think I might have been safe at fifty. Oh, I'm still my own master
> And will not beg anything of you. Old blind man your girl's beautiful, I saw her come down the canyon
> Like a fawn out of the fire. If she is willing: if you are willing, Fera, this place is yours. (*CP* 1:415)

Henchard:

> Now I am not the man to let a cause be lost for want of a word. And before ye are gone forever I'll speak. Once more, will ye stay? There it is, flat and plain.

You can see that it isn't selfishness that makes me press 'ee; for my business is not quite so scientific as to require an intellect entirely out of the common. Others would do for the place without doubt. Some selfishness perhaps there is, but there is more; it isn't for me to repeat what. Come bide with me—and name your own terms. I'll agree to 'em willingly and 'ithout a word of gainsaying; for, hang it, Farfrae, I like thee well! (83)

There are, of course, obvious differences between these scenes, and between the two men: Cawdor resents his desire and perceives it as a weakness, while for Henchard, desire is a mode of appropriating the world, and the world itself no more than an extension of desire. Put another way, Cawdor distinguishes between will as conscious control and desire as involuntary appetite, whereas Henchard simply equates them. For both men, however, the wayward affectional choice proves fatal, and in both cases through a tie of blood. Fera falls in love with Cawdor's son Hood, precipitating his murder, while Farfrae becomes Henchard's amatory and commercial rival, and the proximate cause of his downfall. Like Cawdor, Henchard's domineering nature—which often deals injustice, and blindly makes enemies—is checked by a rough rectitude that, however, only compounds offense in trying to make amends for it. He remarries, lovelessly, the woman he had once discarded, and when she exacts her revenge, he has a sudden insight into his fate: "I am to suffer, I perceive." "This much scourging, then, is it for me" (162).

Henchard's pride and essential regality emerge fully only at the moment of disaster, and his protracted fall is the tragedy of a character in whom magnanimity and malevolence duel to the end, as if Othello and Iago had quartered the same man. Henchard's sins are great, but his self-inflicted punishment is greater, and this tragic surplus is what defines him as a Jeffersian prototype. Hardy gives him the grace of a decent death, but only to reveal the unyielding will in which—commanding to the end—he orders that he be neither mourned nor remembered.

Jeffers learned not only character from Hardy, but narrative structure, and the interaction between the two. The much-remarked coincidences in Hardy's plots might almost be read as the snares of a malevolent deity, except that he wants them understood as accidents in a world indifferent to tragedy. As George Levine remarks:

[I]mportant for a full sense of the daring of Hardy's achievement in his challenge of realist conventions is the way he takes pains to call attention to the creaking mechanics of his novel. It is as though, if we had not noticed how remarkable, unlikely or chancy an event has been, Hardy wants to make sure that we do not find it plausible or commonplace. When Farfrae turns up, the narrator remarks, "He might possibly have passed without stopping at all, or

at most for half a minute to glance in at the scene, had not his advent coincided with the discussion on corn and bread; in which event this history had never been enacted." Here Hardy turns what might very well have been taken as a donnée of the plot into a coincidence upon which the whole plot must turn. (Levine, 185–86)

Jeffers's plots are similarly dependent on suspicious coincidence, and his assumption of authorial distance at strategic moments has an effect similar to the asides in Hardy, as for example when he observes Reave Thurso riding up from the shore "in the frown of fortune" (*CP* 2:227). The effect of apparent coincidence is to link it with necessity, but a necessity that is not imposed externally, arising instead from the compulsion of character. Levine notes pithily that character "is the means through which Hardy imposes a structure on the world and animates it." He goes on to observe that "One feels in the plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a mysterious but irresistible power lying behind the beautifully observed quotidian and asserting itself against the will of the protagonist in such a way as to imply a dramatic if uneven contest" (Levine, 180). What would one need to change about this to describe a Jeffers narrative? Even the use of landscape as a signifier has a familiar ring. Levine again: "Henchard moves in a landscape of ancient ruins, cornfields, Egdon Heath, all governed by the inexorable repetitions and transformations of time, all threatening to absorb him: yet in this landscape Henchard asserts his specialness, refusing to acquiesce in or compromise with the forces that require that he diminish his claims and make his peace" (ibid.).

Jeffers's construction of landscape as a divine immanence—that charged, Wordsworthian sense that leaps across the Darwinian divide and that makes his sensibility seem so Romantic and yet, for a modern reader, so contemporary—is surely different from Hardy's depiction of old Wessex, history-haunted and rarely breaking into the sublime. We might even rephrase Levine to say that, for Jeffers, it is landscape that imposes structure on his world and animates it, as he himself suggests in a late poem ("'Old age hath clawed me'" [a.k.a. "My Loved Subject"], *CP* 3:484), and that character emerges in dialectical relation to it. That said, however, the affinities between Hardy's vision and Jeffers's remain strong. What impresses us about Michael Henchard is the enormous power of the life force in him, and the consequent capacity for suffering he exhibits when that force is turned against itself. In the Jeffers gallery, only Arthur Barclay suggests a similar kind of wild energy, yet it is only at the end of his poem that he begins to suffer as Henchard does. After writing "Point Sur," Jeffers described tragedy as "an exhibition of essential elements by the burning away through pain and ruin of inertia and the unessential" (*Selected Letters*, 116), but it was only perhaps with "Cawdor" that he began to fully achieve it, and one is tempted to say that the latter poem begins where the for-

mer one had left off, with the revelation of suffering as the essential human capacity. Michael Henchard's tortured progress may well have suggested a model. Henchard has Barclay's scope without, of course, his intellect and his transgressive ambition, and when Jeffers decided to trim his wick, Hardy's rugged hero was available as a model.

Cawdor—he has no need of a first name, for no one in the narrative ever gets close enough to him to use one—is of all Jeffers's heroes the one who most closely resembles Henchard. He tells his own story simply:

> . . . I was brought up hard. I did a man's work at twelve
> And bossed a gang at eighteen. That gets you nowhere. I learned that ruling poor men's hands is nothing,
> Ruling men's money's a wedge in the world. But after I'd split it open a crack I looked in and saw
> The trick inside it, the filthy nothing, the fooled and rotten faces of rich and successful men.
> And the sons they have. Then I came down from the city.
> I saw this place and I got it. . . .
> A canyon full of redwoods and hills guaranteed not to contain gold. (*CP* 1: 415)

Henchard, too, understands the world's game, and if he continues to play it it is partly because it suits him and partly because his Wessex contains no rural hinterland where he can create his own domain and lord it over those dependent on him. Like Henchard, Cawdor has spent his rages and at least seemingly damped his passion; he is, as Jeffers calls him ironically, the "self-included man," who wants nothing he does not have or cannot get, and knows no one willing to cross him. In this both men are, like all such figures since Oedipus, formed for tragedy, for they have nothing to spend their strength on but misfortune. In both cases, the excess of that strength creates an intolerable if barely comprehended solitude which expresses itself in untoward desire, in Henchard's for the companionship of Farfrae and in Cawdor's for a girl less than half his age. In both, too, destiny lies concealed behind the apparent processes of nature; in Cawdor's case, the fire that opens the poem brings about his fatal encounter with Fera Martial, and in Henchard's the wet harvest that precipitates his fall, though clearly his judgment has already been undermined by then.

Henchard and Cawdor also share what might be described as a certain historical obsolescence of character. Henchard has succeeded less by active wit than native energy and shrewdness; he thoroughly masters the world around him but proves unable to adapt when Farfrae develops a new sowing technique. Cawdor has deliberately withdrawn from the urban milieu, understanding that the power he seeks can only be compromised by it. So competent at achieving the immediate purposes of the will, they lack—or have renounced—the further ambition that would keep them vigilant. Their unexpended strength engenders sloth, and leaves them vulnerable both to those, like Farfrae and Fera, of

lesser but more febrile capacity, and to the one variable of the heart that cannot be anticipated—desire. When Cawdor's son Hood returns home after a year, he notes that "The hills [had] not been hunted" (*CP* 1:419) in his absence, a telling oversight in a ranch bordered by wilderness. The puma he slays and whose skin becomes both the talisman of Fera's desire and the efficient cause of Cawdor's fall epitomizes the disorder in the latter's realm. Henchard faces no such natural emissary of his fate, but his remaining in a vicinity where his past sins may come back to haunt him bespeaks a similar want of prudence, as perhaps a subconscious wish for judgment. Sublimated, too, is his feeling for the young Elizabeth-Jane, which first manifests itself as jealousy of her interest in his rival Farfrae, and then into a starved paternal affection when she is disclosed to him as his daughter. As Cawdor's face, slackening with a lover's ardor, "began to look like an old man's" (416), so Henchard's, "settled into an expression of stolid loneliness," is "gradually modulated into something softer" as he regards Elizabeth-Jane (157). Once again it is solitude—a solitude perhaps native to both Cawdor's and Henchard's characters, but in each case exacerbated by early poverty and the consequent desire for mastery and wealth—that defines both men, makes them vulnerable at just the point when they seem most secure, and finally constitutes their self-inflicted punishment. It is the burden that portends their Promethean tortures and that stamps them as Romantically obsolescent in a thriving world. As with all tragic characters, there is something of excess in their suffering; unlike their classic prototypes, however, their hubris resides not in any act or predisposition, but in their very embrace of that suffering.

Henchard's fall is an accumulation of blows which, finally grasped as fate, he at last ceases to parry or avoid. Sensing its root in his own sin, he accepts it as judgment. Cawdor's crime, the murder of the traduced Hood, is in contrast at once overwhelming in its "hollow unbearable sadness" (477). He turns from this sensation, representing his act as justice and trying to cover his tracks. The attempt fools no one, but stops accusation: Cawdor is still king in his domain. In this security he builds his own hell of guilt and remorse; Fera closes it by revealing the truth about her relations with Hood. Cawdor debates his punishment with himself, rejecting surrender or suicide as an evasion of judgment: "Himself was responsible, / Himself must choose, himself must endure" (515). But the sentence he has imposed on himself—to bear his guilt in silence—is beyond human capacity, and, confessing, he blinds himself. The act is that of Oedipus, but the purpose is to demonstrate self-judgment: Cawdor remains beyond the reach of others even in submitting to the conventional justice of the state, and what we can imagine of his future does not make us eager to contemplate it. Ironically, however, the gesture that places him on a level with the greatest of Greek tragic figures also reduces him to that of the most contemptible figure in the narrative, Fera's blind and querulous father. Our sense

of Cawdor's stature, like that of Henchard's, must embrace the vast moral failure of his life.

Henchard, too, chooses silence: "[His] lips half parted to begin an explanation. But he shut them up like a vice, and uttered not a sound. . . . Among the many hindrances to . . . pleading, not the least was this, that he did not sufficiently value himself to lessen his sufferings by strenuous appeal or elaborate argument" (422). Cawdor's blindness actually loosens his tongue, as if with the renunciation of mastery he had given up at last the burden of his will, and at the end he is quite pitiably voluble. Henchard, in spite of himself, must end too with words, and though he has nothing to bequeathe he leaves behind the terrible will in which he asks that his death be unmourned and his burial unhallowed, "& that no man remember me" (430). The words are a paradox, for in demanding oblivion he insures memory. Yet Elizabeth-Jane honors his instructions as best she can, knowing "that the man who wrote them meant what he said" (431). Self-judgment, both for Cawdor and for Henchard, is the last redoubt of pride.

Lance Fraser bears a burden of moral pain similar to that of Cawdor in "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," the occasion being fratricide rather than filicide, and the precipitating incident once again marital incest. Fraser's pain—like Cawdor's, and like Henchard's, deepened by concealed and inexpiable guilt—gradually expands into a vision of universal torment, exemplified by the dying buck impaled on the barbed-wire fence. Impelled by a desperate need for punishment and partly, perhaps, by a subconscious desire to exchange his Cain-like guilt for the redemptive suffering of Christ, he rakes his palms open on the fence. The substitution of physical for mental pain, like Cawdor's self-blinding, affords no relief. Fraser cannot totalize his pain to include the world's because his own guilt already fills the horizon; his vision, like that of Jeffers's other redeemers, fails because of the "private impurity" ("Theory of Truth," *CP* 2:609) at its root. Unlike his aged father, who projects his Bible-haunted terrors onto a God of judgment, Fraser sees the world's torment as meaningless, since the suffering of the innocent cannot be explained and the suffering of the guilty cannot be expiated. More closely than any other Jeffers hero, he approaches the vision of the self-hanged god of "At the Birth of An Age," but without being able to make the leap from the personal to the universal that would disclose it. His wife Fayne suggests to him the Nietzschean gambit of living beyond sin, but pain and identity have become so fused in him, his sense of guilt with his sense of universal torment, that he has no alternative to despair: what he suffers is, literally, what he knows.

Infidelity, too, is the source of tragedy in "Thurso's Landing," although Reave Thurso's agony is primarily physical, and stems not from the commission of a violent act but, ironically, its avoidance. In this latter poem pain appears as a willed condition of excess, because Reave, however we may judge his conduct,

has no sense of the blow that has felled and paralyzed him as merited. There is no deontological reason for him to suffer; he does so because pain is the only thing left for him to master, and in so doing to maintain his mastery of others. No moral value accrues to it; as Reave himself admits, "There's nothing good in it / Except the courage in us not to be beaten." To live merely by and for suffering, however, seems a strained ideal of courage indeed, and when Reave's wife Helen replies that genuine "Strength would refuse to suffer for nothing, but choose its times/ To live or die," she invokes a Stoic ideal that seems to oppose a free and dignified choice to brute stubbornness (*CP* 2:261). We know, however, that Helen's reasoning is special pleading, because Reave's death is the means to her freedom. It is only when she commits herself to die with him that she gains the moral authority to do for him what he refuses to do for himself.

What appears to unite Cawdor, Thurso, and Fraser, and to link them to Henchard, is that each man seeks to make an essentially involuntary experience of pain into a volitional act. In each case this entails superfluity; Henchard, Cawdor, and Fraser all add self-condemnation to guilt and remorse, while Thurso refuses the opiates that would dull his physical agony. These figures are all contrasted, however, to another mid-period Jeffers protagonist, Walter Margrave. Margrave has committed a far greater offense than any we have considered thus far: the murder of a child as part of a medical "experiment." Since he has done so in the interests of bettering humanity, he believes his act to be praiseworthy and consequently suffers no guilt; rather, it is the state that has condemned him that will be to blame for keeping his work from fruition. His approaching execution fills him with terror and dread, and that in turn produces "shame and anguish," so that his exacerbated consciousness, "lashing like a burnt snake," alternates intolerably between fear and humiliation. Jeffers finally refuses to describe his experience further, for "death now appeared so dreadful to him that to speak of his thoughts and the abject / Horror, would be to insult humanity more than it deserves" (*CP* 2:166, 163, 170).

Margrave surely suffers as greatly as any of the heroes of endurance, without the consolation that his agony is merited or voluntarily assumed. There is nothing interposed between terror and consciousness—the condition of cowardice in its pure state—and without resistance, without superfluity, there is no suffering in the moral sense, and hence no endurance. As Jeffers puts it in "The World's Wonders," "pain *gives* importance" (*CP* 3:371); but only, as one must add, when the hero opposes to it something in turn, even if it is mere obliquity, the sullen stubbornness we call character. When in "At the Birth of an Age" Jeffers explicates the embrace of individual pain in terms of a self-tormenting deity, and at the end of "Thurso's Landing," where Reave's suffering and Helen's sacrifice become a "shining," tragic experience suggests a transcendent dimension of value. But that does not take us beyond the experience itself and

the mystery that not even Jeffers's deity can fully explicate, the moral embrace of suffering.

Hardy gets at the same point when he expresses the difference between the hero of endurance, who must suffer without ever realizing the illumination his self-imposed darkness casts, and quotidian humanity:

> Character is Fate, said Novalis, and Farfrae's character was just the reverse of Henchard's, who might not inaptly be described as Faust has been described—as a vehement gloomy being, who had quitted the ways of vulgar men, without light to guide him on a better way. (148)

This description too might as easily fit Cawdor, Thurso, or Fraser, at least when they have reached their full tragic potential. Like Henchard, they are not molded to understand, but to endure; they go down into their darkness, troubling us with their density, the integrity of their torment, and the strange radiance they emit. In Hardy's great hero, as in certain heroes of Dostoevsky, we can see the beginning of a modern conception of suffering, which Nietzsche tried to transcend in his philosophy but could not escape in his person, and which Freud made the ground of his own poem of value. Dreiser, too, comes to mind, but it is only with the mid-period heroes of Jeffers that the challenge laid down by Hardy is fully engaged. Before his final collapse, Henchard speaks of migrating to America; in Cawdor, Reave Thurso, and Lance Fraser, we may say he has finally completed his voyage.

ENDNOTES

[1] Hawl Hungerfield wrestles Death to a standstill in the poem that bears his name; that is perhaps Jeffers's closest post-"Sur" approach to a theomachy.

[2] Cf. the passage in *Thurso's Landing* in which Reave senses himself as ironically divinized: "Thurso felt for a moment a little laughably godlike, / Above the cloud-stream, hewing an old failure from the face of nature. . ." (*CP* 2:233–34).

WORKS CITED

Brophy, Robert. *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character*. New York: Modern Library, 1950.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Ed. Tim Hunt. 5 vols. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2000, 2001.

Levine, George "Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge:* Reversing the Real." *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels*. Ed. Dale Kramer. New York: G. K. Hall, 1990. 169–90.

Jeffers, Robinson. *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, 1897–1962*. Ed. Ann N. Ridgeway. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1968.

Robert Zaller is a historian with a specialty in British and early modern European history. He is author of The Cliffs of Solitude: A Reading of Robinson Jeffers *(1983), editor of* The Tribute of His Peers: Elegies for Roboinson Jeffers *(1989) and* Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers *(1991), and contributor of numerous Jeffers-related articles and panel presentations. Zaller, an accomplished and published poet, is Professor of History at Drexel University.*